

The Phenomenon of Blacks Emerging Out of Poverty into Prominent Leadership Positions

by

Afarah Board

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ABSTRACT

A disproportionate number of Blacks live in poverty, experience trauma and adversity as children, and face more challenges to achieve success than non-Blacks. Yet still some rise. Why is that? This phenomenological study explores answers. The researcher examined the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty, scored high adverse childhood experiences (ACE) levels, and underwent other traumatic experiences. The participants completed the ACE questionnaire, and the researcher conducted interviews, evaluated scores, and captured the essence of their stories. Responses to research questions focused on what motivated the participants to emerge from poverty and adversity to become prominent leaders, the advice they would give to their younger selves, and the leadership traits and principles they practice as leaders today. The study established that all participants lived in poverty, experienced adversity and trauma as a child but were able to emerge into successful positions. A significant finding is that participants in this study defied the odds by overcoming their poverty, adversity, and trauma to emerge into success and give hope to other Black children. Participants were motivated by self-determination, support of their family, extended family—or “the village”—and strong belief in Christ. The experiences of resiliency and the strong personal will to succeed led them to form natural leadership characteristics at a young age, transform their circumstances and environments, and develop a desire to serve others. These leaders operationalize a variety of leadership principles in their current positions. Hear their life-stories and view the research results within the study.

DEDICATION

This academic accomplishment is dedicated first to my grandparents, Curtis and Ruby Bernice McGee. Their life story inspired this research, study, and dissertation. My grandparents lived in severe poverty and were sharecroppers in Mississippi. I was born in their house, which was on the White man's land. Neither were allowed to complete high school because they were required to work in the fields. They were able to defy the odds with less than sixth-grade educations to become homeowners. My grandparents were an important part of my formative years and instilled the strength in me that helped me to stand strong and have a strong will to be successful in my endeavors. I also dedicate this accomplishment to my mother, Beulah Faye Belcher, who made sacrifices for me to have a better life; she always had confidence in me.

Additionally, I dedicate this study and dissertation to all the Black prominent leaders who were able to rise, beat the odds and emerge out of poverty, childhood adversity, and severe trauma; those Black leaders who continue to live with post-traumatic stress and the lifelong effects; and the Black leaders who are silently carrying the weight of their childhood trauma daily as they lead large organizations and make consequential decisions in the boardrooms. I see you; I hear you; I understand you. You are not alone.

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Accomplishing this dissertation was a personal endeavor after three decades of practicing leadership in a large corporation. But, without the support, guidance, wisdom, sacrifice, and encouragement of others, its completion would have been impossible. Because of this, I would like to acknowledge and thank the people who were integral in completing my academic journey.

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PART 1

The Nature of the Research Problem

Part 1 The Nature of the Research Problem	Chapter 1 Introduction/Problem Statement
	Chapter 2 Literature Review
Part 2 Research Methodology & Procedures	Chapter 3 Research Methodology
Part 3 Findings	Chapter 4 Research Results and Analysis
Part 4 Conclusion	Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is a tragedy that leaders in prominent positions are under-represented by Blacks or African Americans¹. A disproportionate number of Blacks live in poverty, face higher levels of adversities while growing up, and as a result, have far more significant challenges in achieving, sustaining, and being successful in prominent leadership positions. For this research, a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making. For those who can garner those positions, the adversities they experienced while living in poverty could influence their leadership perspectives. This researcher's proposal aims to explore the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty and experienced high adverse childhood experience (ACE) levels but were able to emerge into prominent leadership positions.

Since President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty Initiative in 1964, Blacks have held the unfortunate status of having the most citizens living in poverty in the United States (Health and Human Services, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, they unequally have 19% living in poverty. Overall, using the official poverty measure, about one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018).

¹ Black or African American: those having origins in any of the native peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. As of the 2000 Census, this classification was also applied to people who wrote in Haitian, Jamaican, and Barbadian. The description "Blacks" will be referred to in this proposal.

Table 1 – U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Data, The Black Population: 2020

	White Alone	Black/AA
US Population	61.6%	13.6%
Poverty Rate/Percent	9.1%	19.5%
Number of Family Members in Household	2.60	4.5
Median Household Income	\$72,204	\$45,438
US Poverty Threshold	\$26,496	\$26,496
California State Population	71.1%	6.5%
Poverty Rate/Percent	12.3%	17.4%
Number of Family Members in Household	2.94	4
Median Household Income	\$82,157	\$54,976
US Poverty Threshold	\$26,496	\$26,496

US Census, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Data, The Black Population: 2020

Public Policy Institute of California, 2019

Health and Human Services, 2019

The Census Bureau follows the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive and uses a set of money versus income thresholds to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered in poverty. As defined by the OMB, that threshold, using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) weighted average for a family of four, in 2020 was \$26,496. The formula for the average Blacks income of \$45,438 / Threshold of \$26,496 = 1.71, and the average White alone income of \$72,204 / Threshold of \$26,496 = 2.73.

The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps) (U.S. Census, 2020). The median income is based on the distribution of the total number of households and families, including those with no income. The median income for individuals is based on individuals 15 years old and over with income. The median income for households, families, and individuals is computed based on a standard distribution (U.S. Census, 2010). Additionally, three-in-ten Blacks alone households were female

householders, no-spouse-present families. Three times as high as White alone households (U.S. Census, 2010).

Background:

Poverty is an influential factor that can alter lifetime development trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes (Evans & Kim, 2013). The authors state that children who live in poverty are more likely than their wealthier peers to confront a wide array of physical stressors (2013). Additionally, while different factors and different geographic locations have various forms of poverty, the negative commonalities attributed to residing in poverty are important contributors to success or failure in life (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999; Corcoran & Chaudry, 1997; Fisher, 2000).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) align with these stressors. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can adversely affect health and well-being (Sacks V. et al. Child Trends, 2014). There is a correlation between ACEs resulting from living in poverty and negative outcomes in adulthood (Hughes & Tucker, 2018). Those living in poverty are more at risk of ACEs that have long-lasting effects on their lives (Goicolea et al., 2009), and with disproportionately more Blacks living in poverty than others, they are more at risk of the experiences. The research of Lacey et al. (2020) supports this argument that poverty was strongly related to ACEs. Their findings show that poverty is strongly associated with clustering multiple ACEs. There are many types of childhood trauma. Some that are measured, studied, and included in ACE scales for research and literature are maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, a mother who was a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death, or abandonment.

Additionally, descriptive results reveal that ACEs may be even more prevalent than typical estimates suggest. They reinforce research indicating that low-income groups are at an increased risk of ACEs (Mersky et al., 2013; Slopen et al., 2016). Researchers have uncovered a third factor with observed items that signify probable exposure to extreme poverty (adversities of frequent family financial problems, food insecurity, and homelessness). Additionally, poverty and ACE of child neglect tend to be correlated (Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bolger, 2004). Given the known consequences of childhood poverty (Evans & Kim, 2013), scholars consider ACEs more prevalent among the poor.

These experiences also range from ACEs of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian (Sacks et al., 2014). Direct negativity can lead to additional adversities for Black individuals.

According to the U.S. Census (2010), Blacks are incarcerated five times more than Whites or other nationalities. They continue to lead in high school dropout rates in the U.S. Although teen pregnancy rates among Black women aged 15–19 fell between 1990 and 2010, it remains more than twice the rate of Whites (Henshaw & Kost, 2014). These adversities affect the ability to become successful citizens and to garner prominent leadership positions.

Table 2 – 2020 Incarceration, High School Dropout, and Teen Pregnancy Rates

	Whites Alone %	Blacks/A.A. %
U.S. Population	61.1%	13%
Incarceration Rates	.005% (261 for every 100,000)	2% (1240 for every 100,000)
High School Dropout Rates	6.5%	8.6%
Teen Pregnancy Rates (15-19 years of age)	10.4 for every 1000	24 for every 1,000

California	71.1%	6.5%
Incarceration Rates	.005% (453 for every 100,000)	3% (3,036 for every 100,000)
High School Dropout Rates	12%	23.1%
Teen Pregnancy Rates (15-19 years of age)	11 for every 1,000	16 for every 1,000

U.S. Census (2010), Center for Disease Control (CDC), NCHS, 2020

Problem Statement:

The general problem is that negative ACEs resulting from poverty present obstacles to a higher number of Blacks than other races or non-impooverished communities (Taylor, 2014). Those from impoverished communities with negative ACEs may bring with them lived experiences that may be difficult to overcome as they advance to adulthood.

Typical poverty-related ACEs directly correlate to long-term negative life results (Evans & Kim, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). These include chronic stress, unstable environment, substance abuse, criminal activity, and mental illness in the home. Issues also include coping, such as challenges with self-regulation and a lack of a positive network of friends and mentors. Physical effects can include stressors such as substandard and unsustainable housing, chaotic environments, domestic violence, gang violence, drug-infected environment, child abuse, and physical neglect. Psychosocial stressors include family turmoil, separation from adult caregivers, divorce or separation, intimate partner (at a young age), loss of family members and emotional neglect, and teen pregnancy (Evans & Kim, 2013; Wade et al., 2014).

The experiences and obstacles often lead to elevated levels of high school dropout rates and teen pregnancies, increased incarceration rates, advanced levels of unemployed or underemployed, early death rates, depression, and negative emotional behaviors as adults. The problem is a high rate of Black adolescents from poverty with high ACE scores fail to overcome

these critical adversities and are less likely to emerge into prominent leadership positions. For instance, according to the Goicolea et al. (2009) study, the poverty cycle contributes to teen pregnancy, and one crucial factor linked to early pregnancy in the study was poverty. The study further stated that 20% of women pregnant before age 20 experienced inequalities and factors related to poverty, such as education levels, geography, and income. Payne (1996) and Cook (2021) maintain that a problem is youth raised in poverty are unlikely to leave poverty.

Purpose Statement:

Yet still some rise. Why is that? The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty with high scores of ACE levels and were able to emerge into successful, prominent leadership positions. The essence of their experiences and common themes will help to identify factors that played a crucial role in their journey and proposed to 1) contribute to additional studies; 2) highlight potential contributions in the development of youth intervention programs; or 3) have the participants' leadership experiences and approaches currently being used that were influenced by their lived experiences contribute to the creation of youth and adult leadership development programs.

Using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the theoretical framework in this study, the researcher will examine the psychological factors of motivation in terms of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Through the lens of SDT, the researcher will focus on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influenced the participants as a child. Analysis and literature review of the theory will assess and evaluate the thematic responses.

The following research questions will guide the interview process and will later help to translate into themes, essence, findings, recommendations, and potential contributions to the literature:

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?

Research Question #3: What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?

See Appendix A for draft interview questions used during the data collection process and Appendix B for research questions connected to the interview questions. The connection between research and interview questions confirms that the interview questions are appropriately being asked and will translate into the desired outcome.

Definition of Key Terms

The researcher used several terms within this phenomenological research study that may appear ambiguous and not easily understood or recognized. As a result, each of the following terms and words was used operationally in this study.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being (Sacks et al., Child Trends, 2014).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Scale: An ACE scale is a self-report questionnaire that includes detailed information on adverse childhood experiences (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The scale measures and scores the maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, a mother who was a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death, or abandonment. In the ACE scale and

questionnaire adapted for this study (Appendix C), the participant gets one point for each adversity. The higher the participant's ACE score, the higher the likelihood that the adverse experience leads to severe adversity.

Black or African American: Those having origins in any of the native peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. As of the 2000 Census, this classification was also applied to people who wrote in Haitian, Jamaican, and Barbadian. The description "Blacks" is referred to in this study.

Extreme Poverty: Researchers have uncovered a third factor with observed items that signify probable exposure to extreme poverty, e.g., adversities of frequent family financial problems, food insecurity, and homelessness. The Children's Defense Fund describes extreme poverty as lacking the necessities, e.g., going without food, electricity, or shelter. An individual's or family's annual income is less than half of the poverty level (2013).

Generational Poverty: Payne (2003) defines generational poverty as a family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations.

Jim Crow: Jim Crow means the "system of Jim Crow segregation" that once defined a "social world" (Jarrett, 2013, p. 388). This social order, created by local and statewide laws, statutes, and policies, received constitutional sanction in 1896 with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. It was finally dismantled, at least judicially and legally, in the 1950s and 1960s, specifically with the 1954 ruling by the court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, overturning *Plessy* (Jarrett, 2013).

Low-Income Poverty: Addy et al. (2013) explained low-income families as needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; families within this poverty level of two times the national poverty level are considered low-income.

Natural Leadership: Hughbank and Horn (2013) contend that leadership is both a natural phenomenon and a learned attribute that is planted, nurtured, developed, and tested over time. They argue that specific leadership approaches are formal, only succeeding in traditional settings and environments, while others depend on the leader's conditioning. Dennis (2014) argues that natural leadership traits are developed capacities of self-confidence, autonomy, trust, and resilience. In most cases, natural leaders will not be trying to lead, they are just being themselves and following their vision, others choose to go along with them (Brady, 2017). It is not very common that a natural leader will see themselves as such until they grow a bit older. When someone is young, they may just assume that this is how people are and that they are the same as everyone else. However, as they grow older and learn more about the world, they will become more aware of their talents in leading others (Brady, 2017). Natural leadership is a gift that not many have, and it can be of great use to those who embrace it and learn how to polish that skill. In the end, leadership is a skill. Those born with the natural traits of a good leader can go on to be great leaders with knowledge and practice, but others can also learn to be good leaders by embracing the right training and acquiring the necessary knowledge (Brady, 2017).

Phenomenology: Edmund Husserl is widely regarded as the principal founder of phenomenology. Husserl's early thought conceived of phenomenology, the general study of what appears to be conscience experience, in a relatively narrow way, mainly about problems in logic and the theory of knowledge. Husserl argued that phenomenology was the study of the very nature of what it is to think, "the science of the essence of consciousness" itself (Husserl and Moran, 2012, p. 432). Phenomenology has evolved into descriptions such as a qualitative research method used to describe "the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.13). Phenomenology relies on

participant observations and interviews to gather information about how individuals experience a specific phenomenon. In this study, phenomenology is the lived experiences of Blacks who emerged out of poverty and who experienced childhood adversity into prominent leadership positions.

Poverty: The Census Bureau follows the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive and uses a set of money versus income thresholds to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered in poverty. Poverty can come in various forms and at different times in a child's life ranging from extreme, generational, situational, low-income, rural, and urban.

Prominent Leaders: For this study, a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making.

Resiliency: The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands (2022).

Segregation. Segregation means "not just the exclusion of people, but also the limitation of their opportunities and economic resources. It creates and maintains a culture of racial hierarchy and subjugation" (Powell, 1996).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT): Self-determination is a theory of motivation, development, and wellness and includes psychological types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1985).

In psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to people's ability to make choices and manages their own lives (Cherry, J. (2021). Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically derived theory of human motivation and personality in a social context that differentiates motivation between autonomous (intrinsically making their own decisions rather than being influenced by someone) and controlled (extrinsically).

Servant Leader: The term "servant leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970 essay "The Servant as a Leader." Greenleaf spent his forty-year career at AT&T working in management, research, development, and education. In his essay, he describes servant leadership: "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first..." According to Greenleaf, servant leaders intend to help followers "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977:13-14).

It is a service first style of leadership that uniquely challenges leaders to prioritize the development of others above all else, advocate on their behalf, and improve outcomes for all stakeholders (Bragger et al., 2021; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). Servant leadership has been successfully practiced by Black business leaders throughout U.S. history (Prieto & Phipps, 2019). Popularized in the last century, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders considered agapao love fundamental to the civil rights movements (Selig, 2016).

Situational Poverty: Payne (2003) defined situational poverty as a family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to lack resources for an extended time.

Sharecropping: Even though slavery was abolished after the Civil War, a sharecropping system quickly emerged that kept Blacks in a condition much like slavery. Sharecropping was a

labor system of agriculture instituted in the American South during Reconstruction after the Civil War and lasted well into the 1960s and early 1970s. A report on Durham food history from the World Food Policy Center (2022) shows that cash was scarce for farmers, and the sharecropping system arose to meet the need of White landowners for labor for land cultivation and the needs of poor farmers of all races for physical and economic survival. With a sharecropping contract, poor farmers were granted access to small farm plots of land (World Food Policy Center, 2022). Black farmers often sharecropped land owned by Whites to make a living through compensation for a share of the crops and to acquire land. As a rule, the landowner provided land, and the tenant provided labor (Cheung, 1968). Sharecropping was thus sharing contracting, defined as two or more parties combining privately owned resources to produce certain mutually agreed outputs.

Transformational Leadership: James McGregor Burns states that transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. The leader and followers' purposes become fused (Burns, 1978). Various names are used for such leadership, some are elevating, mobilizing, inspiring, uplifting. According to Burns, the best leaders are those who inspire others to come together toward the achievement of higher aims. The participants in this study were successful in transforming their own circumstances and environments, transforming the lives of others and prefer transformational leadership in leading followers to higher aims. As its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2016). It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals, and include satisfying followers' needs and treating them as human beings. According to Northouse (2016), transformational leadership

involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them.

Whoopins (also referred to as whippings, whoopings and whupins): Whoopins are the act of receiving discipline through a beating, usually administered to a miscreant by a person in authority, such as a parent or other capable adult. Some may refer to this discipline as spankings (Afifi et al., 2017; Gershoff, 2013). The term may also be referred in other studies as whoopings, whippings or whupins (Urban Dictionary, 2006); whoopins will be used during this current study.

Whoopins have been a common form of discipline in the Black culture since slavery and is used to describe what happens to kids when they get into trouble. Getting a whoopin was experienced by the participants in this study. It is a physical punishment inflicted by an adult on a child's body ranging in severity from a hit with a belt, a small switch from a tree branch, an extension cord, or a shoe to a spanking with bare hands. Black parents are more than twice as likely than White or Latino parents to use violence as discipline in the home (Cummings, 2021). Also, years ago, in Black neighborhoods, you could get your ass whooped by any adult on your street who saw you doing something wrong. Many older Black folks firmly believe in whoopin kids' asses (Urban Dictionary, 2006).

Black people did not bring this kind of punishment over from Africa; Black people learned it here (DeBerry, 2014). During slavery, those who performed unsatisfactory labor, left the plantation without permission, or in any other way challenged the master's authority were whipped with lashes, in a public display of the consequences of refusal to comply with the master's will (Faust, 1982). The whoopins caused severe and horrific injuries such as torn skin, bruises, blood loss and permanent scars. Slavery left a legacy of corporal punish on Black

communities (Cummings, 2021). This form of corporal punishment from the slavery period has carried on to the Black culture today. The belief is that Black people began whipping their children out of fear that the overseers and masters would whip them worse (DeBerry, 2014). The term translates to whoopins in the Black culture and community.

Rural Poverty: Rural is non-urban and can be a farm area, agriculture, low density, long commuting patterns, and a place where there is less access to services and an opportunity for quality living Valley (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020; Duncan, 1992; Lombard, 2018). Rural poverty often stems from low wages or income, limited access to markets, education, quality infrastructure, no access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, lack of education, and poor public works (Duncan, 1992).

Urban Poverty: Dimensions of urban poverty include income which includes lack of access to job opportunities (urban poor often have to trade-off between the distance to a job and the cost of housing); health which includes the environments of overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions, become prone to industrial and traffic pollution, and exposure to disease due to poor quality air and water and lack of sanitation; education, personal safety/security risks deterring school attendance; insufficient school capacity in rapidly growing cities; security, that includes drug, alcohol abuse, violence, crime, gangs, empowerment, involves not having the rights and responsibilities of other citizens, insufficient channels of information for obtaining jobs, learning of legal rights and services (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004).

Chapter Summary

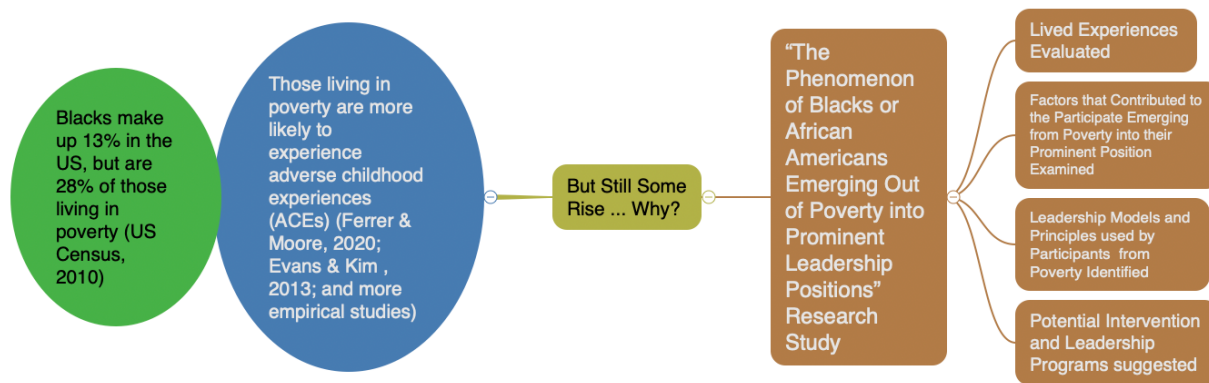
Chapter One summarized the background and history of Blacks living in poverty for decades and provided 2010 and 2020 Census Bureau data showing that Blacks continue to live disproportionately in poverty.

The researcher explained the problem that leads to the question of why some can overcome poverty, adversity, and trauma and emerge into prominent leadership positions while a significant number do not. Additionally, Chapter One presented the dynamic of examining the leadership practices and principles those leaders now rely on that may directly connect to their childhood experiences. The researcher introduced the research questions to guide the interviews and help in the examination.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature and empirical studies that unpack each of the areas introduced in Chapter One. The researcher offers literature and empirical studies to guide the reader's understanding and establish a connection between Blacks in poverty, the adversities they may have experienced, and the motivation for them to emerge into prominent leadership positions. The researcher introduces the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT) and resiliency as possible factors helping the participants to obtain prominent leadership positions. Chapter Two offers leadership principles and practices to assist in defining prominent leadership and the ACE scale and questionnaire.

Figure 1 depicts the approach for the study. The Literature Review in Chapter Two provides empirical studies for each area shown.

Figure 1 – High-Level Mind-Map of Research Study



PART 1

Nature of the Research Problem

Part 1 The Nature of the Research Problem	Chapter 1 Introduction/Problem Statement
	Chapter 2 Literature Review
Part 2 Research Methodology & Procedures	Chapter 3 Research Methodology
Part 3 Findings	Chapter 4 Research Results and Analysis
Part 4 Conclusion	Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings
	Chapter 6 Implications and Conclusions

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

This literature review provides specific topics that will support the exploration of Blacks who lived in poverty and, as a result, experienced high ACE scores but were able to reach success and emerge into prominent leadership positions. The researcher investigated primary areas: 1) Blacks living in poverty at a disproportionate rate; 2) adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) high scores as a result; 3) factors that influenced their successful emergence; and 4) their preferred leadership approach used once in their leadership positions.

The research addresses the experiences that may lead to primary adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of high-school dropouts, teen pregnancies, and incarcerations of Blacks to gain empirical research knowledge as we proceed with the exploration. Literature is provided related to ACE questionnaires and scales adapted and used within this study during the screening and interview process. The study also unpacks the various levels of poverty that may add to the experienced adversities. Empirical research also includes factors contributing to the person's success in emerging out of poverty and adversity into prominent leadership positions, such as resiliency, motivation through self-determination, and other factors that may contribute to the participant's success.

Poverty

This Chapter first provides in-depth empirical studies and definitions of poverty in general and then unpacks it in more detail. Poverty comes in various forms and at different times in a child's life. In 2019, 26% of Black children were impoverished, and Black children are still about three times as likely as other children living in poverty: Asians at 7% and Whites at 8% (Thomas and Fry, 2020). In the U.S., median household income rose from 48.5 thousand U.S.

dollars in 1967 to 67.5 thousand dollars in 2019. Regarding broad ethnic groups, Blacks have consistently had the lowest median income in the given years (O'Neill, 2022).

Smith (2014) explained that the government sets a definition of poverty based on the number of members in the household and the amount of income generated in the household to determine the percentage of the population that needs assistance to maintain a basic level of comfort (Smith, 2014; Fisher, 2000). The United States Census Bureau (2013) established that if a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty (Smith, 2004). The Children's Defense Fund (2013) defines extreme poverty as an individual's or family's annual income that is less than half the poverty level.

Despite a voluminous literature on poverty stretching over many centuries, there is little agreement about the definition, measurement, causes, and solutions (Cook, 2021). Far from simple, poverty is multidimensional in its symptoms, multivariate in its causes, dynamic in its trajectory, and quite complex in its relation to health. Concepts of poverty are based on societal values and norms (Cook, 2021). In this study, we introduce multiple forms of poverty.

Payne (2003) defines generational poverty as a family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations. Addy et al. (2013) explained low-income families as needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; as such, families within this level of poverty of two times the national poverty level are considered low-income. Payne (2003) defined situational poverty as a family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to lack resources for an extended time. Dimensions of urban poverty include income which includes lack of access to job opportunities (urban poor often have to trade-off between the distance to a job and the cost of housing); *health* which includes the environments of overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions, becoming prone to industrial and traffic

pollution, and exposure to disease due to poor quality air and water and lack of sanitation; *education*, personal safety/security risks deterring school attendance; *insufficient school capacity* in rapidly growing cities; *security*, that includes drug, alcohol abuse, violence, crime, gangs, *empowerment*, involves not having the rights and responsibilities of other citizens, insufficient channels of information for obtaining jobs, learning of legal rights and services (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, there are 28% living in poverty. About one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018).

The war on poverty continues. Since Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty began in 1968, Blacks living in poverty have tragically increased annually. Poverty, in general, is on the rise in the improvised and low-income communities where Blacks primarily reside. Growing numbers of public school students in the United States are identified as low-income or living in poverty, as determined by their eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (Washington et al., 2012). Black students in many communities disproportionately represent this number. In his study, Evans (2013) emphasizes poverty is an influential factor that can alter lifetime developmental trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes. Most explanatory work on the underlying psychological processes of how poverty affects development has focused on parental investment and parenting practices, principally responsiveness.

Evans states that exposure to multiple stressors may be a signature feature of childhood poverty with far-reaching consequences (2013). Not only are poor children likely to be exposed to higher levels of each of the many individual psychosocial and physical stressors listed

previously, but they are also especially likely to be exposed to a confluence of multiple stressors. This argument is important because exposure to numerous risk factors outweighs the adverse developmental sequelae of being exposed to a single risk (Evans, 2013).

According to Washington, Hughes, and Cosgriff (2011), growing up in an impoverished home or blighted neighborhood can have profound influences on youth, including poor academic performance, school dropout, unemployment, substance abuse, and incarceration (Sharkey, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Stressors associated with concentrated poverty (presence of crime, persistent joblessness, limited health care and transportation, and inadequate housing and recreation options) affect youth and family members' mental and physical health, producing anxiety, hypertension, fear, and depression (Barton & Coley, 2010; Shipler, 2004).

Blacks have been marginalized and rendered voiceless through the dominant culture's educational, political, and public policies levied against them (Tenniel, 2008). From 1899 to the present, generational poverty continues to exist. They had been immersed in generational poverty, including low income, lack of education access, public policy setting, and housing for six consecutive generations (Tenniel, 2008). As of today's generation, Blacks, when they come of age, are still living in poverty, thus aligning with what is defined as generational poverty in this study (Tennial, 2008).

Tennial (2008) provides a demission of generational poverty by five generations from 1899 to the present. The first generation, the Lost Generation of 1899-1930, included the Great Depression and when the Negro Promise was halted with Plessy v. Ferguson (Tennial, 2008). The second generation was the Sharecropper's Generation (1930-1940) and continued through the 60s. The third generation was described as the Interchange Generation, including the Civil Rights Movement and Brown v. Board of Education of the 1940s and 70s. The fourth generation

was the Welfare Generation 1970-1990, dealing with public policy and education policies that influenced the growing dependence on welfare. The fifth generation is characterized as The Stagnation Generation: 1990 to present, where the generation continues to experience higher levels of poverty than others (although 13% of the population, Blacks are 28% in poverty, U.S. Census).

Evans (2013) outlines in his study that poverty and other markers of disadvantage are influential variables that can alter developmental trajectories, including cognitive development (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Heckman, 2006), socioemotional development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Grant et al., 2003), and physical health (Chen, Matthews, & Boyce, 2002; Evans, Chen, Miller, & Seeman, 2012; Miller, Chen, & Parker, 2011), throughout life. It is tragic that Blacks disproportionately live in improvised communities and are at risk of experiencing higher levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that can influence their opportunities to succeed. ACEs related to poverty can be maltreatment and physical neglect, such as not having enough to eat, wearing dirty clothes, or not having a place to sleep. The third factor with observed items signifies potential exposure to extreme poverty (i.e., frequent family financial problems, food insecurity, and homelessness). Poverty and child neglect tend to be correlated (Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bolger, 2004). Given the known consequences of childhood poverty (Evans & Kim, 2013), it bears repeating that scholars may want to consider not only whether ACEs are more prevalent among the poor but also whether poverty itself should be defined as an ACE (Mersky et al., 2013; Sloan et al., 2016). A longitudinal study by Rebecca Lacey et al. (2020) aimed to identify ACEs' relationship to poverty aligns with the research. They found that poverty was strongly related to both individual ACEs. Their findings also demonstrate that ACEs cluster in specific patterns and that

poverty is strongly associated with them. Therefore, reducing child poverty might be one strategy for lowering ACEs (Lacey et al., 2020). The study by Ferrer and Moore (2020) also found that ACEs are far more common in poor urban communities.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The following provide in-depth empirical studies and definitions of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that can have adverse, lasting effects on health and wellbeing (Sacks, V. et al., Child Trends, 2014). An ACE scale is a self-report questionnaire that includes detailed information on adverse childhood experiences (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). In the ACE scale and questionnaire adapted for this study (Appendix C), the participant gets one point for each adversity. The higher the participant's ACE score, the higher the likelihood that the adverse experience leads to severe adversity. In 1998 a seminal study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention mentioned that higher ACE scores correspond with social problems like higher rates of drug use, teen pregnancy, smoking, being a victim of rape, and perpetuating domestic violence (2017). A study by Grasso et al. (2015) suggested that children and adolescents exposed to multiple types of adverse experiences have higher rates of subsequent problem behaviors, including juvenile justice involvement. In the article and study "The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) in the lives of juvenile offenders," Baglivio et al. (2014) found that juveniles had roughly three times more ACEs than the population reported by Felitti and Anda (1998). Those with higher ACE scores had more substance abuse, self-harm behaviors, and school-related problems such as disruptive behaviors, substandard performance, and truancy.

The ACE questionnaire and scale measure several types of childhood trauma. Some questions measure maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual and physical

abuse, a mother who was a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death, or abandonment. Each adverse experience counts as one, and emotional and physical neglect. Other types of adversity and trauma exist that could contribute to an ACE score and the ACEs, so it is conceivable that people could have ACE scores higher than those shown on the scale; however, this ACE questionnaire measured only the ten ACEs listed (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The researcher added additional questions directly related to measuring adversity for this study. These additional questions relate to the participant, household incarceration, and teen pregnancy.

Poverty and ACEs

The definition, examples, and experiences are presented across various cultures, environments, and communities. Recently, crucial noneconomic research has revealed the growing prevalence of ACEs among young children and their role in impairing their brain functioning and contributing to later physical and mental ailments. Accordingly, this literature review explores the role of ACEs in understanding poverty and the growth of inequality of both income and academic achievement (Tomer, J.F., 2014).

First related to ACEs and the effect on youth development, Wade et al. (2014) conducted a study that involved focus groups with young adults who grew up in low-income Philadelphia neighborhoods. Using the nominal group technique, participants generated a list of ACEs and then identified the five most stressful experiences on the group list. The researcher grouped and ranked the list of domains and sub-domains of the most stressful experiences identified by participants. The ACE questionnaire and scale are similar to the self-administered questionnaire

and scale developed by Green (2008) that other studies have adopted (Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998).

Current assessments of ACEs may not adequately encompass the breadth of adversity to which low-income urban children are exposed (Balistreri & Alvira-Hammond, 2016). Their study aimed to identify and characterize the range of ACEs faced by young adults who grew up in a low-income urban area. They used the method of focus groups with young adults who grew up in low-income Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Emerging research found an enduring influence of childhood experiences on long-term economic hardship, family disruption, or violence during childhood (Balistreri & Alvira-Hammond, 2016). These have been consistently linked to various health problems in adulthood, such as depression and suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, and may cause premature mortality. According to empirical research studies, these are adversities that can lead to ACEs. The authors also state that recently released data from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) allows an opportunity to address this shortcoming and uncover the relationship between ACE and wellbeing using a population-based sample and a comprehensive measure of wellbeing. This newly developed index of child wellbeing focuses on positive aspects of child development, covering four domains: physical health, psychological health, social health, educational achievement, and cognitive development (2016). Extensive prior research has examined the relationship between individual ACE factors such as parental violence, family disruption, poverty, and neighborhood violence and children's negative outcomes. The authors document that less attention is paid to assessing the whole child's wellbeing in the face of adversity or uncovering factors that might help diminish the negative impact of ACEs on children (Balistreri & Alvira-Hammond, 2016).

Additional empirical research supporting the topic of ACEs and their relationship to other adversities defined in this study includes Hillis et al. (2004), which examined whether adolescent pregnancy increased as types of adverse childhood experiences (ACE score) increased. "Sixty-six percent ($n = 6015$) of women reported ≥ 1 ACE. Teen pregnancy occurred in 16%, 21%, 26%, 29%, 32%, 40%, 43%, and 53% of those with 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 to 8 ACEs. As the ACE score rose from zero to 1 to 2, 3 to 4, and ≥ 5 , odds ratios for each adult consequence increased". The longitudinal study concluded that the relationship between ACEs and adolescent pregnancy is strong and graded. As it relates to ACEs related to incarcerations or juvenile delinquency, a study by Basto-Pereira, et al. (2016) contributes toward a better understanding of the relationship between childhood/adolescent adverse experiences and juvenile delinquent acts and incarcerations. Their study indicates that early adversity is significantly related to juvenile justice involvement and criminal persistence. The Morrow and Villodas (2017) study explored the direct and indirect pathways between ACEs and school dropout and confirmed previous findings that ACEs independently increased the risk for dropout. They found that a substantial proportion of adolescents had experienced each ACE as outlined on the ACE scale, with an average of 3.58 ACEs by the age 14 interview and approximately 19.8% of adolescents reported dropping out of school by the age 18 interview (Morrow & Villodas, 2017).

The Balistreri and Alvira-Hammond (2016) study included variables and definitions of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) that stem from research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. In those studies, researchers surveyed adults on various events occurring when they were seventeen and younger, including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. For the 2011/12 NSCH, staff developed a modified version in which a parent/guardian responded to questions about their

child. This study included five original items from the CDC adult ACE survey indicating whether the child has experienced the divorce or separation of a parent; a parent serving time in jail; witnessed domestic violence; lived with someone who was mentally ill or suicidal; or lived with someone with an alcohol or drug problem (NSCH, 2012). This CDC study is consistent with the ACE scale and questionnaire provided by Green (2008).

The Balistereri and Alvira-Hammond (2016) study connects with this researcher's proposed study that examines ACEs activated because living in poverty negatively impacts adult leaders. Although previous studies have narrowly focused on negative health affect, this researcher's study proposes to focus on factors that may help those who lived in poverty, who experienced high levels of ACEs as a result but were able to emerge into prominent leadership positions. The following section unpacks the ACEs that are the focus of this study: high school dropouts, incarcerations, and teen pregnancies which are the primary ACEs of which empirical studies and research indicate results from the ACEs outlined in the ACE scale and questionnaire (Appendix C). Descriptive results also reveal that ACEs may be even more prevalent than typical estimates suggest. They reinforce research indicating that low-income groups are at an increased risk of ACEs (Mersky et al., 2013; Slopen et al., 2016).

Redditt (2005) also reports that over one million students drop out of high school each year. Many of the students who drop out of school prematurely are identified as students at-risk and are Black. Unfortunately, these students who terminate their education prematurely are at an increased risk for various problems later in life. Redditt (2005), and Nowicki, Duke, Sisney, Stricker, and Tyler (2004) contend that dropouts are not distributed evenly across the population in the United States. In their study, Nowicki et al. (2004) provide data that dropping out appears to be associated with five major demographic indicators:

1. Poverty
2. Race or ethnicity
3. Family configuration
4. Parental education
5. Limited proficiency in English

These observations and the five major demographic indicators align with the core of this researcher's proposed study of poverty being one of the high levels of ACEs that negatively influence Blacks to garner successful, prominent leadership positions. The Duke et al. (2009) study *Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Associations with multiple adverse childhood experiences* identified relationships between various types of adverse events and distinct categories of adolescent violence perpetration. Linear and logistic regression models were used to determine if six types of adverse experiences (including physical abuse, sexual abuse by family or other persons, witnessing abuse, and household dysfunction caused by family alcohol and drug use) are significantly associated with the risk of adolescent violence perpetration after adjustment for demographic covariates. The study concluded that a relationship exists between adolescents' experiences of ACEs and their criminal history. Kerig and Becker (2015) summarize that a wealth of cross-sectional and prospective longitudinal research supports the idea that early abuse and neglect significantly increase the likelihood of criminal and antisocial behavior (CAB) in childhood and adulthood support this fact.

The ACE scale and questionnaire designed by Green (2008), adapted by this study (Appendix C), confirms the finding. Basto-Pereria et al. (2016) indicate that early adversity is significantly related to juvenile involvement and criminal persistence, leading to incarceration. That study conducted showed that a child who experienced child abuse or neglect is 59% more

likely to be arrested during adolescence (Basto-Pereria et al., 2016, pg. 64). But, emotional neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, household substance abuse, exposure to domestic violence and incarcerated household members during first 18 years of life predicted incarceration (Basto-Pereria et al., 2016). These are part of the ten questions on the ACE self-report questionnaire.

ACE: High School Dropouts

Based on the Redditt (2005) study, the Manhattan Institute and the Black Alliance for Educational Options (Greene, 2001) revealed an alarming disparity in the graduation rates between White and minority students. According to the study, 44% of Black students drop out of high school compared to 22% of White students (Greene, 2001), and approximately 21% of Black males have no high-school diploma in the United States (*Black Issues in Higher Education*, 2004). Black males deprive themselves of the most incredible instrument of personal advancement by dropping out of high school. Lawrence (2001) asserts that a lack of education equals a racial achievement gap, a lack of socioeconomic integration, and equals ugly stereotypes about how minorities are lazy and unintelligent. The fundamental cause of dropouts is the "failure to teach students basic skills in early grades" (Lawrence, 2001; The Manhattan Institute; Greene, 2001). Researchers concluded that students often reach high school and cannot read and understand the material. As a result, they see little reason to complete school (Lawrence, 2001). Additionally, according to Washington, Hughes, and Cosgriff (2011), almost 50% of Blacks as compared with only 11% of White students, attend high schools with dropout rates of 50% or more and with classmates living below the poverty line (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Orfield, 2009).

In a recent Baltimore City Public Schools (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabanni, 2001) study focusing on students at risk of dropping out of high school, researchers found that:

1. Poverty is the strongest dropout predictor.
2. Students from low socioeconomic families are four times more likely to drop out.
3. Family change, single-parent families, teenage mothers, and unemployed mothers contributed to the dropout rate.

These findings are consistent with the (ACEs) that are an essential part of this researcher's proposed study and with the ACE scale adapted for this study (Appendix C). Additionally, epidemiological studies have revealed that nearly two-thirds of youth in the nation has had at least one ACE, and more than one-third have had two or more (Morrow & Villodas, 2017). ACEs are linked to school dropout and criminality. Childhood maltreatment (a poverty-related ACE), emotional behavior, and depression were significantly associated with the likelihood of dropping out. According to research from the Washington State University Area Health Education Center, children with an ACE score of 3 are more than twice as likely to be suspended from school, six times more likely to experience behavioral problems, and five times more likely to have severe attendance issues. They also have reduced reading ability and lower grade point averages. (Paull, 2015). Research demonstrates that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are a barrier to academic success for millions of children, especially those in underserved communities with poverty rates (Paull, 2015).

ACE: Juvenile Delinquency and Incarcerations

Over the past decade, much has been written and discussed on the disproportionate number of Blacks in United States social systems. Honore-Collins (2005) provides a study highlighting the increasing numbers of incarcerated Blacks and the impact on out-of-home

placement for Black children. The Honore-Collins paper presents literature that explores and describes the history of this trend (2005).

During the 1990s, arguments over racial disparity in the criminal justice system attained a renewed vigor. Of course, this debate is not new. Criminologists have long debated racial disparity in various criminal justice systems (Harris, 2003). Harris mentions the Sentencing Project that published a report in 1990 based on government data showing almost one-in-four Black men in the United States aged twenty to twenty-nine were then under the control of the criminal justice system, in prison or jail, on probation or parole (2003).

The purpose of the qualitative case study by Desai and Abeita (2017) was to examine the question of how the Juvenile Justice System (JJS) impacts the life experiences of Black males. Specifically, the article presents a case study of Malcolm, a multiracial (Black, Latino, and Native American) male who has been a part of the JJS for the last five years. Desai and Abeita make a case that regardless of age or grade level, Black students have been disproportionately impacted regarding school arrests, suspensions/expulsions, and office referrals (2017). These events push Black males, in particular, out of the education system and into the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2011; Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Dancy, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Howard, 2013; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Stevenson, 2014).

According to Redditt (2005), from the perspective of Williams, Hill, and Wilson (2003), the Black male prison population has increased by 500% in the past twenty years. The researchers noted that there are more Black males incarcerated than there are in American colleges and universities (Williams, Hill, & Wilson, 2003).

ACE: Teen Pregnancies

Hulbert (1990) discusses a spirit of revisionism that has surfaced in social research about teenage pregnancy in the U.S. Hubert asserts in the study that more than a quarter of Black babies are born to teenagers, most unmarried. There is much opposition and discussion about the widespread belief that the offspring of teenage mothers are destined to become adolescent parents, and those young mothers routinely drop out of school.

According to Nandi et al. (2019), the difference in birth and repeat birth rates between Black and White teens decreased fourfold during this period. In contrast, the declines in these rates for teens living in rural versus urban counties and inadequate versus adequate obstetric care were less pronounced. The authors conclude that while remarkable reductions in teen birth and repeat birth rates have occurred since 2008, these declines have not been equally experienced by all groups of teens. Their analysis suggests persistent disparities in teen birth and repeats birth rates exist (2019).

Watkins (2010) reported that a teen woman living below the poverty line is nearly four times more likely to have an unintended pregnancy than a teen living above the poverty line. Brooks-Gunn, Britto, and Brady (1999) supported this concern citing that the likelihood of a teenager giving birth out-of-wedlock declined as the family income levels rose above the poverty threshold. Watkin's (2010) data emphasized that bearing a child as a teenage mother did not hurt the mother's prospectus for advancement in education, employment, or marriage. This statement is an essential factor to note due to the evidence that "children born to teenage mothers tend to perform less well than peers on measures of cognitive competence during the preschool years, and by the elementary grades, they tend to score lower on achievement tests" (Luster, Bates, Fitzgerald, & Vandenbelt, 2000, p. 133). The key factor between success and failure is poverty.

Watkins (2010) noted that authors Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2005), in their book *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*, determined through interviewing women in poverty that children were viewed as a necessity and an essential part of a young woman's life, and the chief source of identity and meaning" (p. 6). They concluded that teenage girls from a poverty background feel they have nothing and are less careful in getting pregnant because they wish for a child to fill the gap left by poverty.

Adversities that contribute to the primary teen pregnancy ACEs are emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence (battered mother), parental separation or divorce, single-family household, having household members who were substance abusers or mentally ill, or criminals in the household; child maltreatment (Pediatrics, 2010). According to the Goicolea et al. (2009) study, the most important factors linked to early pregnancy are sexual abuse, parental absence, and poverty; if these factors exist, 20% of women get pregnant before age twenty. Empirical research and the longitudinal study examined whether adolescent pregnancy increased as types of adverse childhood experiences (ACE score) increased and whether ACEs. In that study, sixty-six percent ($n = 6015$) of women reported ≥ 1 ACE. Teen pregnancy occurred in 16%, 21%, 26%, 29%, 32%, 40%, 43%, and 53% of those with 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 to 8 ACEs. As the ACE score rose from zero to 1 to 2, 3 to 4, and ≥ 5 , odds ratios for each adult consequence increased. It was concluded that the relationship between ACEs and adolescent pregnancy is strong and graded (Hillis et al., 2004).

The empirical studies and commentaries provided are well within the scope of this researcher's proposed study. They will help strengthen the discussion on how some emerged out of poverty and out of their adverse conditions to succeed in prominent leadership positions. Although we have outlined adversities that may negatively impact Blacks, some still do rise to

success. What factors influence their success; were they internally motivated? The following section provides empirical studies related to self-determination and resiliency.

Self-Determination (Theoretical Framework)

Despite living in poverty and facing severe childhood adversities, some still emerge into prominent leadership positions. This study proceeded to examine the motivation factors of the participants through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT). Self-determination may be one of the most significant influences. In psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manages their own life (Cherry, J. (2021). Deci and Ryan (2017) are cofounders of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) on concepts of intrinsic motivation derived from the work of de Charms (1968). The theory is underpinned by the idea of psychological need satisfaction (Hove, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Deci, 1971, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, Maslow, 1943; White, 1959).

Self-determination is a theory of motivation, development, and wellness and includes psychological types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1985). It has a meta-theory composed of five sub-theories (Deci & Ryan, 2008c; Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010). The five sub-theories are cognitive evaluation theory (CET), organismic integration theory (OIT), causality orientation theory (COT), basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), and goal content theory (GCT). The causality orientation theory addresses the different orientations of motivation that includes three basic psychological needs theory, introduced by Deci and Ryan (1987) of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in reaching self-determination satisfaction. This study will specifically use the framework of the causality orientation theory in the examination.

Causality Orientation Theory

Causality orientation theory (COT) is a construct that is the interconnection between an individual's stored life experiences and the current social environment (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The interconnections function as behavioral modifiers within the individual as antecedents to personality orientation. Vansteenkiste et al. (2010) defined these personality orientations as autonomy, control, and impersonal.

Autonomy – Autonomous motivation – is what you do when you feel the full admission of choice. Whatever the activity is, you're doing it with a real sense of interest, enjoyment, and value. Autonomous orientation relates to behavior or motivation, which reflects internal causation. An individual with an autonomous orientation is self-determining, initiates action, and sustains this motivation through personal interest in an activity. Autonomous orientation can be augmented through social environment support (Ryan & Deci, 2000c; Vansteenkiste et al., 2010).

Controlled – Controlled motivation, in contrast, is to do something to get some reward or avoid punishment. Meaning you are doing it to avoid punishment or negative consequences. This psychological-needs orientation is behavior motivated by the individual's external environment. In contrast to autonomy orientation, the external environment in a controlled orientation produces forces of reaction to an event, thus pressuring the individual to respond in a controlled manner.

The *impersonal* orientation of an individual is evident in the behavior of self-derogation, low self-esteem, and depression (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Individuals who feel trapped in their circumstances, and perceive the situation as having no viable solution, have an impersonal

orientation. Due to the context of an impersonal oriented individual, being amotivated is associated with this individual's character (Ryan & Deci, 2000c).

Empirical research, and the dichotomy of controlling versus autonomous motivation, have led to the current theoretical framework of SDT (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Deci & Stone, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000b, 2008). Researchers have utilized SDT to examine the effects of controlling and autonomous motivation within institutions, organizations, individuals, and environments while advancing these concepts in the areas of wellbeing and sustainability (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Koestner, Losier, Vallerand, & Carducci, 1996; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Levesque, Copeland, & Sutcliffe, 2008). The interest inspired the research and advancements in SDT in determining the control of extrinsic reward in intrinsic motivation (Hove, 2017; Deci, 1971).

According to multiple researchers of self-determination, autonomous motivation is essential. While people are often motivated to act by external rewards such as money, prizes, and acclaim (extrinsic motivation), self-determination theory focuses primarily on internal sources of motivation, such as a need to gain knowledge or independence (intrinsic motivation). According to self-determination theory, people must feel the following to achieve psychological growth.

- **Autonomy:** People need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals. This sense of being able to take direct action that will result in real change plays a major part in helping people feel self-determined.
- **Competence:** People need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When people feel they have the skills required for success, they are more likely to take action to help them achieve their goals.

- Connection or relatedness: People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to others and a sense of caring.

When people feel autonomous, they feel autonomously motivated; when they feel competence and a sense of relatedness, they will be motivated, and positive consequences will follow. Extrinsic motivators can sometimes lower self-determination. According to Deci (1985), giving people extrinsic rewards for intrinsically motivated behavior can undermine autonomy. As the behavior becomes increasingly controlled by external rewards, people begin to feel less in control of their behavior which diminishes intrinsic motivation.

Positive feedback can boost self-determination. Deci (1985) also suggests that offering unexpected positive encouragement and feedback on a person's task performance can increase intrinsic motivation. This type of feedback helps people feel more competent, which is a crucial need for personal growth.

Deci and Ryan (2017) researched SDT for decades and have published their latest volume representing the culmination of self-determination theories by a community of SDT scholars. The primary thesis links personality, human motivation, and optimal functioning with a direct argument that there are two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. They are both powerful forces of who we are and how we behave.

One of Deci and Ryan's earlier books was *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (1985). In that book, the authors argue that human beings actively engage in their environments; they explore and are curious and assimilate information without external pressure or reward. They also have input from other scholars on this topic as secondary research data points and have views on the evolution of the concept of intrinsic motivation beginning with theories that predated behaviorism and ending with a current picture of that construct (Deci &

Ryan, 2000). The intrinsic motivation theory is intriguing as it connects with the individual's personal will. There can be a connection with the Blacks who have lived in poverty, experienced trauma, and ACEs but were able to rise. This study will help examine whether the influence was pure will or intrinsic motivation.

Washington et al. (2012) compared involvement in educational planning and the use of self-determination strategies reported by two groups of students attending a high-poverty, predominately Black high school. Self-determination skills, such as setting goals, problem-solving, and self-advocating, may be instrumental in addressing the challenges of under-resourced, high-poverty schools and neighborhoods. However, under-resourced environments may hinder the development of self-determination skills because of scarce opportunities to make choices, exercise preferences, and consistently experience stimulating and varied educational events (Washington et al., 2012). As Blacks disproportionately live in poverty communities, they are more likely to experience under-sourced complications.

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation

In a 1943 paper titled "*A Theory of Human Motivation*," American psychologist Abraham Maslow theorized that a hierarchy of psychological needs undergirds human decision-making. In his initial paper and a subsequent 1954 book titled *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow proposed that five core needs form the basis for human behavioral motivation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory of motivation that states that five categories of human needs dictate an individual's behavior. Those needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Master Class, June 2021 article).

Maslow's theory presents his hierarchy of needs in a pyramid shape, with basic needs at the bottom of the pyramid and more high-level, intangible needs at the top. Only after a person fulfills the basic needs they can move on to addressing the higher-level needs.

1. **Physiological needs:** The first id-driven lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy are physiological needs. These most basic human survival needs include food and water, sufficient rest, clothing and shelter, overall health, and reproduction. Maslow states that these basic physiological needs must be addressed before humans move on to the next level of fulfillment.
2. **Safety needs:** Next among the lower-level needs is safety. Safety needs include protection from violence and theft, emotional stability and wellbeing, health security, and financial security.
3. **Love and belonging needs:** The social needs on the third level of Maslow's hierarchy relate to human interaction and are the last of the so-called lower needs. Among these needs are friendships and family bonds—both with biological family (parents, siblings, children) and chosen family (spouses and partners). Physical and emotional intimacy, from sexual relationships to intimate emotional bonds, is important to achieving a feeling of elevated kinship. Additionally, membership in social groups contributes to meeting this need, from belonging to a team of coworkers to forging an identity in a union, club, or group of hobbyists.
4. **Esteem needs:** The higher needs, beginning with esteem, are ego-driven needs. The primary elements of esteem are self-respect (the belief that you are valuable and deserving of dignity) and self-esteem (confidence in your potential for personal growth and accomplishments). Maslow notes that self-esteem can be broken into two types:

esteem, which is based on respect and acknowledgment from others, and esteem, which is based on self-assessment. Self-confidence and independence stem from this latter type of self-esteem.

5. **Self-actualization needs:** Self-actualization describes the fulfillment of your full potential as a person. Sometimes called self-fulfillment needs, self-actualization needs occupy the highest spot on Maslow's pyramid. Self-actualization needs include education, skill development—refining talents in areas such as music, athletics, design, cooking, and gardening—caring for others, and broader goals like learning a new language, traveling to new places, and winning awards.

Other Motivating Research Studies

World-renowned Stanford University psychologist Dweck (2006) discovered a simple but groundbreaking idea: the power of mindset. In her book, *Mindset* (Dweck, 2006), focusing on how we can learn to fulfill our potential, the author shows how success in school, work, sports, the arts, and almost every area of human endeavor can be dramatically influenced by how we think about our talents and abilities (2006). She states that people with a fixed mindset and who believe their abilities are fixed are less likely to flourish than those with a growth mindset or who believe their abilities can be developed (2006).

Duckworth (2016) provides a psychological examination of the concept of grit as being a combination of passion and perseverance in her book *Grit* (2016). She discusses how effort is often ignored and outshined by "talent." When really, what is more, important in life is effort. The thesis of the need for passion and perseverance is relevant to any success. Duckworth's assertion that persistence and passion are needed to overcome setbacks and that hard work and finishing things rather than giving up are key (2016). The starting point, such as the community

environment, the multiple disadvantages of so many, the challenges, and roadblocks all play vital roles in the adversity Blacks experience more than Whites. The impetus of this research proposal is to explore factors that may influence the participants to overcome adversities and rise to prominent leadership positions.

Resiliency

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to complex or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands (2022). A combination of factors contributes to resilience. Many studies show that an essential factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family (Green, 2008). Relationships that create love and trust provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance to help bolster a person's resilience. Several additional factors are associated with resilience, including:

1. The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
2. A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
3. Skills in communication and problem-solving.
4. The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

All of these are factoring that people can develop themselves. However, if a child experiences the ACEs outlined in the questionnaire and scale (see Appendix C), it may be difficult for them to garner factors listed above that are associated with resilience. The What's Your Resilience Score? (Green, 2008) was developed by early childhood health advocates, psychologists, and pediatricians. They came up with the 14 statements, and the scoring system was modeled after literature over the past 40 years, including that of Emmy Werner and others

(Green, 2008). This resilience questionnaire may be adapted to measure the level of resilience of the participants in this study.

Prominent Leadership Positions for Blacks

Wos (2014) states that defining success is based on a person's personal life experiences is about skills, tools, and setting your brain up to succeed (2014). But it is also about looking at life from a new perspective. It captures moments when transitions occur so the individual can see and understand that it is possible to make transitional decisions in life with ease. This definition can relate to those who emerged from poverty as the description includes variables such as money, goals, health, business, and happiness. The researcher's study and experiences collected from the participants will help confirm whether these variables are important to them.

The study by Weatherspoon-Robinson (2013) added to the body of research in this area by exploring the elements of barriers, success strategies, and resilience of Black leaders. This study specifically assessed leadership and resilience in Blacks who hold higher-level leadership positions in traditionally White, male-dominated industries. The research aimed to identify factors that increase achievement, advancement, and success in high-ranking positions despite the documented adversities associated with Black women. The goal was to guide women who aspire to enter a particular field and hold similar leadership positions to outline their success to offer a blueprint for organizational strategies to promote diversity and advancement for women (2013). Although the Weatherspoon-Robinson study focuses on Black females, the content and results can also apply to Blacks overall.

Some of today's best urban leaders don't work for the government; they are found in nonprofit organizations that serve the working class and poor populations. Based on interviews conducted in major cities, including Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Washington

D.C., & New York (Ladner, 2001), exceptional leaders have developed effective solutions to the complex problems of our inner cities, including education, economic development, and community safety. The New Urban Leadership investigates how and why expert problem solvers choose their career paths, what qualities make them incredibly successful in their work, and the methods they use to train the next generation of urban leaders. Ladner's research focuses on the characteristics that make successful leaders: courage, a commitment to excellence, and a willingness to sacrifice. The literature provided aligns well with this researcher's proposed study to explore the leadership perspectives of those who emerged from poverty.

Although the literature outlined here is substantial and describes success in leadership positions, they do not directly describe prominent leadership positions. For this research study, a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making processes.

Chapter Summary

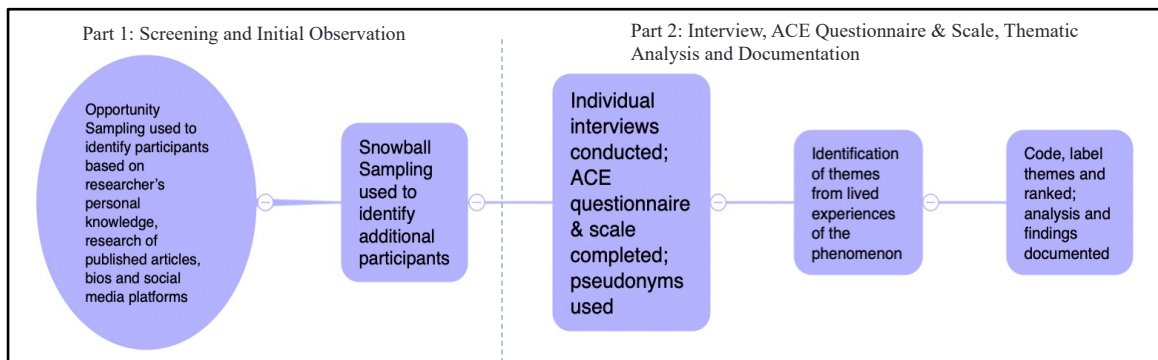
Poverty was defined in general, focusing on elements relevant to this proposal. The literature review established the definition of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). It highlighted in detail the three that are the primary focus of this proposal: incarcerations, high school dropouts, and teen pregnancies. The researcher introduced the ACEs, the questionnaire, and the scale that can lead to ACEs. The researcher provides literature to help examine the self-determination theory (SDT) factors that may lead to success. These factors are autonomous competence, connection, and relatedness regarding intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. The researcher also explores resiliency and other factors that may influence Blacks to emerge from

poverty into prominent leadership positions. The researcher provided a specific description of a prominent leadership position, including competencies and criteria used in cross-business industry standards.

In Chapter Three, the researcher will describe the methodology selected based on the purpose and the problem explained in Chapter One. The methodology used for this study is the qualitative phenomenological approach to describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences. Through interviews and focus groups, this form of inquiry will introspectively examine the lives of participants who lived in poverty, experienced adversities as a result, and currently hold prominent leadership positions. Chapter Three begins with an overview of the phenomenological approach and introduces the two-part data collection process: 1) screening and observation and 2) the interview and thematic analysis process. The Chapter also provides tools to document and track poverty levels; incorporates the ACE questionnaire and scale into the assessment and interview process; and the researcher documents and explains the coding and labeling process.

Figure 2 describes and depicts the methodology process used in Chapter Three.

Figure 2 – High-Level Mind Map of Methodology Process



PART 2

Research Methodology & Procedures

Part 1

The Nature of the
Research Problem

Chapter 1

Introduction/Problem Statement

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Part 2

Research Methodology &
Procedures

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Part 3

Findings

Chapter 4

Research Results and Analysis

Part 4

Conclusion

Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

Chapter 6

Implications and Conclusions

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

In Chapter Three, the researcher presents the methodology used in the study. The qualitative research method was used by interviewing individual adult participants holding prominent leadership positions. To this study, prominent leaders are those currently responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, are well regarded as measured by the perception of others, have leadership roles on boards, and have broad authority in consequential decision-making. The aim was to listen to their stories to learn about social phenomena and their lived experiences and to make patterns of themes to garner an essence and meaning (Tracy, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018, 2013). The process directly connects to the definition of the qualitative phenomenological approach used to describe the meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is widely regarded as the principal founder of phenomenology. Husserl's early thought conceived of phenomenology, the general study of what appears to be conscience experience, in a relatively narrow way, mainly about problems in logic and the theory of knowledge. Husserl argued that phenomenology was the study of the very nature of what it is to think, "the science of the essence of consciousness" itself (Husserl and Moran, 2012, p. 432). Phenomenology has evolved into descriptions such as a qualitative research method used to describe "the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.13). The method relies on participant observations and interviews to gather information about how individuals experience a specific phenomenon.

A phenomenological research design method is appropriate when seeking to understand an individual's lived experiences and perceptions of reality for a more in-depth understanding of phenomena (Harris, 2018; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Moustakas (1994) noted that a participant's voice is extremely significant to a phenomenological design when recounting lived experiences. The qualitative phenomenological design methodology effectively recognizes the significance of a participant's thoughts and feelings by asking robust open-ended questions. The detailed responses collected throughout the interview process are essential when examining a construct in which there is very little empirical evidence (Moustakas, 1994).

The essential purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to describe the universal essence. That was the case in this researcher's study, to ultimately collect and assess the essence of those who lived in poverty, have experiences of adversities, but who have been successful in prominent leadership positions.

Qualitative research interviews aim to highlight the research topic from the interviewee's perspective and understand how and why they acquired this perspective (Laverty, 2003). Empirical research provides the following circumstances in which a research interview is best suited:

1. A study focuses on the meaning of phenomena to the participants.
2. Individual perceptions of processes within a social unit are to be studied prospectively.
3. Individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed.
4. Exploratory work is needed, and qualitative data are required to validate measures or clarify and illustrate the meaning of the findings (Peters, Abus-Saad, Vydelingum, & Murphy, 2002).

Neuman (2003) advocated a need for an introduction portion of an interview to familiarize the participants with the topic and purpose of the study. This research interviews began with the researcher getting acquainted with the participants by discussing and recording their backgrounds and experiences of being raised in poverty, experiencing adversities, and rising to prominent leadership positions. This approach aimed to begin on a personal level, build rapport, and create a trusting relationship. The introduction also allows the participants to understand why they were selected and the significance of the study. Appendix A lists the interview questions for this study.

The researcher used a blend of the narrative interview approach by asking open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to tell their stories (Tracy, 2013), with the life-story approach where the researcher elicited stories, the researcher asking the participants to discuss their life as children, their memories, and what they want others to know (2013).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative interviews are open-ended, relatively unstructured interviews that encourage the participant to tell stories rather than just answer questions (Tracy, 2013). Stories might relate to the participants' experiences or the events they witnessed. The narrative might be the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in stories of lived experiences. This study used open-ended questions, as shown in Appendix A.

The researcher of this study used the narrative inquiry with the use of individual interviews to gather stories and experiences as a fundamental to human experience (Tracy, 2013; Clandinin, 2007). People reveal how they interpret their identities and experiences through their stories (Tracy, 2013). We all tell stories about our lives, both to ourselves and others, and

through such stories, we make sense of the world, our relationship to the world, and the relationship between ourselves and other selves. Through such stories, we produce identities (Tracy, 2013; Lawler, 2002).

This type of narrative inquiry is rooted in the phenomenological methodology of qualitative research. It provides a multifaceted role that seeks to bring forth voice and spirit within personal narratives in this study (Atkinson, 1998). This narrative inquiry approach allowed the researcher to step inside the personal world of the storyteller.

Additionally, narrative inquirers should attend to the sociality of the participants in the study. This study desires to do such that. Sociality refers to the personal and social conditions experienced by participants. Our identities are inextricably linked with our experiences within a particular social condition or place. These experiences may help construct our identities (Harris, 2018; Walker, 2005). Narrative stories tell of individual experiences and may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Details in the stories may include descriptions of the physical, emotional, and social situations. Realizing that some of the interview questions might trigger some thoughts and memories as they tell their stories and reflect on their lived adverse experiences, the researcher advised the participants that they have the right to stop the interview at any time and were provided with contact information of local behavioral health organizations (see Appendix E).

Chapter Four of this study lists the profiles of each of the thirteen participants. The researcher gathered the lived experiences through interviews that provided a glimpse into the lives and experiences that shaped the identities of the participants today who experienced adversity in childhood and were able to overcome those and garner successful, prominent leaders. The participant stories provide an in-depth picture of the adversities they experienced.

The researcher gathered motivations the participants used that influenced them not to follow the crowd. Regarding leadership, the participants discussed their actions or those attributed to their overcoming adversity and when they recognized their leadership abilities and preferred leadership principles used in their current role.

Life Stories

Life stories can fulfill essential functions for us, connect people to their roots, provide direction and validation of personal experience, and restore value to lives (Harris, 2018; Atkinson, 1998). The life story through interviews in this study provided a practical and holistic methodological approach for the sensitive collection of personal narratives that revealed how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story.

The researcher elicited stories and asked participants to discuss their adolescent life, memories, and what they wanted others to know. The life-story approach asks interviewees to discuss their life, memories, and what they want others to know (Tracy, 2013).

Atkinson provides a solid representation of the importance of life stories in qualitative research. The life story is the essence of what has happened to a person – it is the story they choose to talk about their lived experience (Atkinson, 1998). Life stories can focus on the entire life or a specific period in a person's life.

This phenomenological study allowed the researcher to hear and feel the spirit of the participants as they told their stories of living in poverty and experiencing other adverse childhood experiences. This methodology focused on the lived experience of the participants' childhood experiences and the motivation that led them to success. By examining, through life story interviews, the entire experiences provided the opportunity to gain insight into the type and

severity of the adversity, who and what motivated them to overcome it, and what helped them succeed.

Additionally, this methodological approach allowed participants in this study to share their life stories and reflect on advice for future adolescents with similar experiences and life stories.

Worthiness of Topic

A worthy topic is considered one that adds value to the available research in the area. Such topics do not have to be completely new. Instead, they may consider commonly accepted practices from a different angle or examine a commonly studied issue and its application to a different group (Tracy, 2013).

This study examined the phenomenon of Blacks who emerged from poverty and adversity to achieve prominent leadership positions. The researcher selected Black leaders for this study because 1) although Blacks make up 13% of the population, 19% live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020); 2) Blacks in prominent leadership positions make up 1% of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (McGlaufflin, 2022); 3) emerging out of poverty into leadership positions for any race or community is difficult, but for Blacks, it is at a disproportionate level. Blacks live substantially more in all forms of poverty, including generational, low-income, and urban.

The essence of participant experiences and common themes will help to identify factors that played a crucial role in their journey and are proposed to 1) contribute to additional studies; 2) highlight potential contributions in the development of youth intervention programs; or 3) have the participants' leadership experiences and approaches currently being used their lived experiences influenced that contribute to the creation of youth and adult leadership development programs.

Although this study focuses on the Black community because that community disproportionately live in poverty and experiences ACEs and trauma, the findings and recommendations are transferrable to non-Black communities.

Bracketing and Reflexivity

In this study, the researcher used bracketing and reflexivity throughout the process to reflect on her own background. While bracketing in a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher brackets themselves out of the study by discussing personal experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth). Bracketing does not take the researcher entirely out of the study. Still, it serves to identify personal experiences with the phenomenon and partly set them aside so that the researcher can focus on the participants' experiences in the study (2018). Realizing that it may be impossible to remove the researcher's own bias and experiences, it is valuable for them to reflect on the experiences to gain a richer understanding of the participants' perspectives. Reflexivity occurs when researchers "position themselves" in a qualitative research study. Reflexivity means that researchers convey their background, how it informs their interpretation of the information in the study, and what they may gain from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44).

During this research endeavor, the researcher had a special interest in the participants' stories, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), motivations and success to be prominent leaders, and personal experiences with it. As participants shared their life stories with childhood adversity and were successful in the recorded interviews, the researcher's own experience provided more profound insight into their narratives and lived experiences. The participants were more comfortable during the interview process as it was easier to develop a rapport with participants based on sharing some of my own experiences. The researcher did not expose her personal

experience to not hinder or taint the study participants from openly sharing their own individual narratives about their own experiences.

A lengthy research endeavor on an emotionally challenging topic can infuse the researcher with its inherent challenges, render continuing research an arduous endeavor, and, in turn, skew the results and interpretations (Tufford & Newman, 2020). The researcher used bracketing to help mitigate the adverse effects of the research process, which helped to reach deeper levels of reflection across all stages of qualitative research, from selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings. The researcher found that bracketing helped reach in-depth reflection that enhanced the sensitivity of the lived experiences and sharpness of the research and added value to the multifaceted analysis and results.

Sample and Approach

There were thirteen participants in this phenomenological study. The screening process involved: the researcher used personal knowledge of individuals; a search of social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook; reading newspaper articles and YouTube videos of participants; reviewing personal bios, searching, and identifying related studies, articles, and books.

The researcher selected the participants with the following criterion: 1) those currently holding a prominent leadership position. To this study, prominent leadership positions are those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, have leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making; 2) lived in poverty; and 3) experienced a form of adverse childhood experience (ACE) based on the ACE questionnaire and scale (Appendix C). This method is the opportunity and convenience sample designs (Tracy, 2013; Creswell, 2018).

The researcher used the snowball or rhizomatic sampling approach to expand the number of potential participants. The researcher sought the existing participants' feedback of others who may meet the criteria outlined (Tracy, 2013).

Participants who met the criterion were invited to participate in the study's interview process. During this process, the researcher used the script outlined in Appendix D and the Informed Consent in Appendix E. These documents informed the participants that their participation was voluntary, and that confidentiality and privacy efforts would occur. There were thirteen participants, pseudonyms were assigned, and the researcher removed all identifying features. The participants were then advanced to the interview process.

Procedures

Interview Method

Individual interviews were conducted with participants who were confirmed to be prominent leaders and had signed the Informed Consent form (see Appendix E). Personal interviews were held to gain individual lived experiences of those who lived with adversity and ultimately were able to be successful, prominent leaders. The researcher conducted the interviews virtually using the Zoom conferencing software. The researcher gave the participants notice of the virtual format and the recording as outlined in the Informed Consent form (see Appendix E). The virtual method was beneficial as the participants lived across the United States. The interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed using the Rev Meeting Assist software application integrated with Zoom recordings. The validation process included the researcher manually transcribing and confirming transcriptions. Once the recordings were transcribed, the transcriptions were shared with the participants for validation for member checks. Specifically, in three cases, the participants made revisions, and those revised transcripts

were used in the analysis process; another five participants responded they had no revisions; the reminding five participants had no changes or revisions.

The following research questions helped to guide the interview process and later helped to translate into themes, essence, findings, recommendations, and potential contributions to further literature:

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?

Research Question #3: What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?

See Appendix A for the interview questions used during the data collection process and Appendix B for research questions connected to the interview questions. The connection of research questions to interview questions confirmed that the interview questions are appropriately being asked and will translate into the desired outcome.

During the interview process (using the interview questions in Appendix A), the researcher listened for responses related to the study variables of poverty, adverse childhood experiences, the advice they would give to their younger selves, prominent leadership positions, and preferred leadership styles. Collection criteria variables were assessed more thoroughly during the interview.

Prominent Leadership Positions

For this research study, a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is

well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making.

Wos (2014) states that defining success is based on a person's personal life experiences is about skills, tools, and setting your brain up to succeed (2014). But it is also about looking at life from a new perspective. It captures moments when transitions occur so the individual can see and understand that it is possible to make transitional decisions in life with ease. This definition can relate to those who emerged from poverty as the description includes variables such as money, goals, health, business, and happiness. The researcher's study and experiences collected from the participants will help confirm whether these variables are important to the participants' success.

Poverty

Poverty can come in various forms and at different times in a child's life. The United States Census Bureau (2013) established that if a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty (Smith, 2004). The Children's Defense Fund (2013) defines extreme poverty as an individual's or family's annual income that is less than half the poverty level.

Payne (2003) defines generational poverty as a family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations. Tennial (2008) elaborates on generational poverty definition. These participants have now been successful in becoming prominent leaders and using their education, experience, and leadership in a substantive way to break the cycle of generational poverty (Tennial, 2008). Blacks have been marginalized and rendered voiceless through the dominant culture's educational, political, and public policies levied against them (Tenniel, 2008). From 1899 to the present, generational poverty continues to exist. They had been immersed in

generational poverty, including low income, lack of education access, public policy setting, and housing for five consecutive generations (Tenniel, 2008). As of today's generation, and the generation of the participants, Blacks, when they came of age, were still living in poverty, and thus aligns with generational poverty (Tenniel, 2008). Tenniel (2008) describes the five generations. The first generation of The Lost Generation or 1899-1930 of the Great Depression and where the Negro Promise was halted Plessy v. Ferguson. The second generation was the Sharecropper's Generation (1930-1940) and continued through the 60s. The third generation is the Interchange Generation, which included the Civil Rights Movement and Brown v. Board of Education of the 1940s and 70s. The fourth generation was the Welfare Generation 1970-1990, dealing with public policy and education policies that influenced the growing dependence on welfare. The fifth generation is characterized as The Stagnation Generation: 1990 to the present, where the generation continues to experience higher levels of poverty than others (although 13% of the population, Blacks are 28% in poverty, U.S. Census, 2020).

Addy et al. (2013) explained low-income families as needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; as such, families within this level of poverty of two times the national poverty level are considered low-income. Payne (2003) defined situational poverty as a family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to lack resources for an extended time.

A combined definition of rural from the U.S. Census Bureau, The Office of Management Budgets, and the Rural-Urban Community Area codes is a farm area, agriculture, density, commuting patterns (Lombard, 2018). Rural poverty often stems from low wages or income, limited access to markets, education, quality infrastructure, no access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, lack of education, and poor public works (Duncan, 1992). Rural poverty occurs in

non-metropolitan areas with populations below 50,000. Families have less access to services, support for disabilities, and quality education. Rural workers are twice as likely to make only minimum wage and more likely to be working, yet still poor (Cook, 2021).

Across all races and ethnicities, U.S. Poverty rates in 2019 were higher at 15.4 percent in rural areas than in metro or urban areas at 11.9 percent (USDA, 2019). Rural Black residents had the highest incidence of poverty in 2019 compared to others. Groups substantially suffer from rural poverty, including Blacks (Duncan, 1992). Half a century after *The People Left Behind's* report on poverty in 1967, Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) and the Rural Policy Research Institute held a conference to reexamine rural poverty (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020). The research presented at the conference indicated that although rural poverty had declined sharply in the 1960s, it has remained steady since the mid-1970s. (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020). Currently, rural poverty is three percentage points higher than urban poverty (wisc.edu, 2016). Rural poverty is not confined to one section of the country; it is a national problem (Duncan, 1992). Persistently high-poverty counties are disproportionately rural and continue to be geographically concentrated in the Southern States of the "Black Belt," the Mississippi Delta, and the Rio Grande Valley (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020).

Dimensions of urban poverty include income which includes lack of access to job opportunities (urban poor often have to trade-off between the distance to a job and the cost of housing); *health* which includes the environments of overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions, become prone to industrial and traffic pollution, and exposure to disease due to poor quality air and water and lack of sanitation; *education*, personal safety/security risks deterring school attendance; insufficient school capacity in rapidly growing cities; *security*, that includes drug, alcohol abuse, violence, crime, gangs; *empowerment*, involves not having the rights and

responsibilities of other citizens, insufficient channels of information for obtaining jobs, learning of legal rights and services. The effects are tough on children who face an increased level of stress that can lead to emotional and behavioral problems (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Cook, 2021).

The researcher listened for the various forms of poverty during the interview and identified them during the thematic analysis process. The form of poverty is specified in the participant summary in Table 4 and the participant profiles in Chapter Four.

Table 3: Definitions of Various Forms of Poverty

The researcher Marked all that applied for each participant. See Table 8 summary for results.

Poverty ID	Poverty Categories	Descriptions
1	Extreme poverty	Researchers have uncovered a third factor with observed items that signify probable exposure to extreme poverty (adversities of frequent family financial problems, food insecurity, and homelessness). Lacked the necessities, e.g., going without food, electricity, or shelter. <i>An individual's or family's annual income that is less than half of the poverty level. The Children's Defense Fund (2013)</i>
2	Generational Poverty	Grandparents and their grandparents lived in poverty. <i>A family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations (Payne, 2003).</i>
3	Low-income	Parents lived on governmental assistance such as welfare food or housing assistance; but some basic necessities were provided. These are families needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; as such, families within this level of poverty to two times the national poverty level are considered low-income (Addy, et al. 2013)
4	Situational Poverty	Caused by a situation such as parents' loss of job, loss of a caregiver for multiple reasons (incarcerated, divorce, tragic event). A family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to have a lack of resources for an extended time (Payne, 2003)
5	Rural Poverty	Rural is non-urban and can be defined as farm area, agriculture, low density, long commuting patterns, and an

		area where there are less access to services and an opportunity for quality living Valley (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020; Duncan, 1992; Lombard, 2018). Rural poverty often stems from low wages or income, limited access to markets, education, quality infrastructure, no access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, lack of education, and poor public works (Duncan, 1992; Cook, 2021).
6	Urban Poverty	High-density population area, unhealthy environment, violence, crime, gang, inadequate housing, and little or no social protection (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Lombard, 2018; Cook, 2021)

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

The researcher asked the participants to complete the self-report adverse childhood experiences (ACE) questionnaire before the interview. The adverse childhood experience (ACE) questionnaire is a specific scale to measure several negative traumatic experiences in childhood. See Appendix C for the ACE questionnaire and scale used in this study. ACE is often used interchangeably with childhood trauma or childhood maltreatment, and several scales in the literature measure various components and types of adversity. The "What's *Your ACE Score*?" (Green, 2008) questionnaire and scale were adapted for use in this study to understand the level of the participant adversity that may have contributed to challenges as adolescents. The self-administered ACE questionnaire adapted from ACE questionnaires and scales by Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998, includes detailed information on ten adverse childhood experiences, organized into two areas: children's experiences and household dysfunction which, according to substantial empirical and longitudinal studies can be characterized as severe ACEs in this study (Ferrer & Moore, 2020; Baglivio et al., 2014; Hillis et al., 2004; Fox et al., 2015; Morrow & Villodas, 2017; Duke et al., 2009). The ACE study is one of the most extensive investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood trauma and maltreatment

and later-life health and well-being. The study is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego (Green, 2008).

The five categories of children's experiences included emotional abuse, defined by three items (how often did a parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home swear at you, insult you, or put you down?); physical abuse, evaluated with four items (during the first 18 years of life, did a parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home push, grab or slap you, or throw something at you?); and sexual abuse, assessed with four items (e.g., during the first 18 years of life, did an adult, relative, family friend, or stranger, at least five years older, ever touch or fondle your body in a sexual way?). The evaluation of emotional neglect was based on four reverse items (e.g., my family was a source of strength and support), and five additional items evaluated physical neglect (e.g., I did not have enough to eat). The response choices included never, once, twice, sometimes, often, or very often, except for sexual abuse, for which a dichotomous response (yes or no) was given (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE scale and the initial ten questions were adapted for this study; two additional questions were added related to teen incarceration and teen pregnancy. These two specific ACEs have been identified as having high levels of adversity in Blacks, as indicated in the 2020 U.S. Census. The researcher added these two variables to examine their effects on the participants' childhood adversity.

The evaluation of household dysfunction included questions about how their mother was treated violently and was assessed with three items (e.g., during the first 18 years of life, how often did your father, stepfather, or mother's boyfriend do any of these things to your mother or stepmother: push, grab, slap, or throw something at her?). The responses for mothers treated violently were the same as the five categories of children's experiences, ranging from never to

very often. Two items evaluated household substance abuse (e.g., during the first 18 years of life, did you live with anyone who used drugs?). Two items assessed the category of mental illness or suicide in the family (e.g., was a household member depressed or mentally ill?). The ACE questionnaire evaluated the other two types of household dysfunction (parental separation or divorce and incarcerated household members) with one item each (did a household member go to prison?). The responses for these last four categories were dichotomous (yes or no), and an affirmative answer to these questions indicated childhood exposure to each category of household dysfunction (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The two additional questions related to teen incarceration and pregnancy are included in this category.

The participant gets one point for each ACE they experienced in the questionnaire. The higher the participant's ACE score, the higher the likelihood of severe adversity experienced and greater obstacles to overcome. Some prominent experiences that lead to severe adversities include teen pregnancy, high school dropout, and juvenile delinquency or incarceration (Scoby, 2017; Goicolea et al. 1, xxxx; Fox et al., 2015; Duke et al., 2009; Boden et al., 2007; Duchesne et al., 2008; Giovanelli et al., 2016; Ferrer, 2020; Baglivio et al., 2014; Hillis et al., 2004; Moore & Villodas, 2017).

Other types of adversity and trauma exist that could contribute to an ACE score and the primary ACEs, so it is conceivable that people could have ACE scores higher than those on the ACE scale; however, this ACE questionnaire measured only those ACEs listed. The most important thing to remember is that the ACE score is a guideline. If an adolescent experienced other types of toxic stress over months or years, then those would likely increase the risk of not achieving a prominent leadership position.

Participants add the "yes" answers by placing one next to each ACE question relevant to their childhood experience - this is their ACE score. The higher the ACE score, the more likelihood that the adversity contributed to their challenges (Scoby, 2017; Goicolea et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2015; Duke et al., 2009; Boden et al., 2007; Duchesne et al., 2008; Giovanelli et al., 2016; Ferrer, 2020; Baglivi et al., 2014; Hillis, et al., 2004; Moore & Villodas, 2017). As the ACE score increases to four or more, so does the risk of more serious, lifelong adverse childhood experiences, according to Drs. Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda, co-founders of the ACE Study.

The problem is a high rate of Black adolescents from poverty with high ACE scores fail to overcome these critical adversities and are less likely to emerge into prominent leadership positions. Consequently, the road to a prominent leadership position is substantively more difficult for those who have experienced higher levels of adversity as a child than others, as illustrated in Chapter one.

This study aimed to contribute to literature identifying the participant's poverty level (as described in Table 4), the self-report ACE scale (Appendix C), factors that helped participants succeed, and the leadership principle they use in their prominent positions as garnered from the individual interviews. The personal interviews captured each response's thematic experiences, which were coded and labeled.

The responses combined with their ACE score are summarized into a matrix that shows themes based on the scores. This will help the researcher to develop contributions to the literature regarding specific themes between poverty I.D.s, ACE scores, opportunities, and the effective use of leadership models as prominent leaders.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher used internal and external precautions and made efforts to conduct valid and reliable examinations. Internal reliability refers to whether responses are consistent and stable across the constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used codebooks and re-reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy and consistency across all constructs with all participants.

Interviews were held virtually after obtaining permission of the participants to use the Zoom recording feature. The researcher informed the participants that the Rev Meeting Software Application would be active during the Zoom recording for transcription purposes. As external reliability efforts, the respective software companies certified the two technology features' reliability.

The Zoom software provides the ability to enable a variety of security options, including the use of an individual passcode; the waiting room feature that restricts access to only the authenticated users and participants to enter the waiting room; only the host can share content; and locking a meeting once the participant had joined so no others can join (Zoom.us, 2022; tectarget.com, 2022).

The Rev Meeting Assist software application is a feature offered by Zoom for transcribing Zoom recordings. This app proved an excellent option for transcribing Zoom recordings into files, producing highly accurate transcripts (Moore, 2021). This feature proved to be an efficient, effective, exact, and secure process for this study. The researcher manually reviewed each transcription and compared it to the recording as an added validation. The Zoom recording, Rev transcription, combined with the researcher's internal validation of personally re-reading the transcripts, and the external validation using the NVivo software ensured the data

collection process was reliable and valid. This study deployed additional strategies for validation. The participants' data were validated with member checks ensuring the transcripts were reliable. The researcher shared the transcripts with the participant's asking them to validate and confirm that the essence of the interview had been captured. Triangulation of comparing and confirming answers from multiple perspectives; and with the saturation of asking the same question repeatedly, ensuring the same answer, or until no additional information is obtained. Coding and analysis then occurred, including the number of times a term or word may have been used as part of the saturation validation process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The external use of the NVivo software also helped in the coding validation process.

Strategic principles represent the researcher's perspectives, the participants' lens, and the reader's or reviewer's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher's lens is to check the accuracy of a qualitative account and some of the following strategies described in more details. The researcher used the proven principles and strategies during this study:

1. In corroborating evidence through triangulation, the researcher must use multiple sources, methods, and investigations to support evidence. Examples may include various sources by gender and different sources geographically (to incorporate the evidence from numerous perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Triangulation was noted in many aspects in this study. One explicit example is the triangulation with: the use of transcripts; the ACE scores; and the use of NVivo reading the transcripts; another example is with the participants being from various geographical locations across the United States; the diverse in gender makeup, and with the participants holding various prominent leadership positions.

2. Discovering negative case analysis or disconfirming evidence. The description of this is to develop a working hypothesis as the inquiry advances, considering negative or rival evidence. The researcher must report a negative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016).
Negative analysis, in this case, might be identifying participants who have not experienced significant negative ACE experiences. This was confirmed in the ACE scale and scoring process. As outlined in Table 4, the summary of participants, the ACE scores ranged from negative to positive -- from zero to twelve out of a possible thirteen.
3. Clarifying research biases or engaging in reflexivity will include the researcher disclosing any biases they may bring to the research study ensuring the readers and participants understand the researcher's position. The researcher will need to expose her own experiences through a section of the study identified as bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher disclosed her reflexivity in Chapters One and Three.
4. Participants can play an essential role in various validation strategies, such as member checking or seeking participant feedback. This technique involves taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher conducted member checks. The individual participant's transcription was provided to them, seeking confirmation and validation that the essence of the interview was captured.
5. Collaborating with participants involves the researcher ensuring that participants are actively engaged in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this study, collaboration was infused through the interviews by building trust, and relationships, seeking authentic and sincere stories, and ensuring that time is allocated for prolonged discussions.

6. Readers' or reviewers' lenses include others beyond the researcher. Those involved in the research contribute to the validation strategies, such as enabling external audits to track the process and all critical decisions made, when, and by whom (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The chair of the study performed this role. Frequent interaction, guidance, and oversight were provided from the readers' and reviewers' lenses.
7. Generating rich, thick descriptions by providing details when describing the cases when writing the themes. A description is rich if it provides great, interconnected details, using strong verbs and quotes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher devoted time to revisiting the raw data soon after the connection with participants and reflected on further descriptions and themes that were helpful during the analysis.
8. Having a peer review or debriefing of the data and research process by someone familiar with the research or the phenomenon explored to play the devil's advocate to keep the researcher honest, who asks hard questions about the method, the meanings, and the interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The committee chair and committee members contributed to this study's peer review.

ACE Questionnaire Reliability

Another method of external reliability was through the use of the ACE questionnaire. The reliability of the ACE Study Questionnaire was tested by Dube et al. (2004) using a kappa statistic for variables coded dichotomously, including emotional abuse .66 (95 % CI, .55–.76), physical abuse .55 (95 % CI, .47–.63), and sexual abuse .69 (95 % CI, .61–.77). The kappa coefficients for each category of the household dysfunction were as follows: mother treated violently .77 (95 % CI, .68–.85), household substance abuse .75 (95 % CI, .68–.81), mental illness in household .51 (95 % CI, .42–.61), incarcerated household members .46 (95 % CI, .27–

.65), and parental separation or divorce .86 (95 % CI, .81–.91) (Pinto et al., 2014); Felitti et al., 1998).

The researcher asked the participants to take the self-report ACE questionnaire before the interview. The ACE questionnaire was used in this study to gather the participant scores, which were used to guide the interview. The ACE scores were confirmed and validated with the participants during the interview process. In some cases, the participants elected to change their scores after clarification.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this proposal was separated into two parts: Part 1 is the initial observation and screening to identify the participants who fall within scope by meeting the criteria; Part 2 is the completion of the ACE questionnaire, the interview, coding analysis, and documenting of findings. The steps for Part 1 are as follows:

1. Initial screening ensures participants meet the criteria that will take place. The researcher identified the participants through personal knowledge, a search of social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, reading newspaper articles and YouTube videos of participants, reviewing personal bios, searching, and identifying related studies, articles, and books.
2. Participants identified to meet the criteria were invited to participate; invitation communication was sent to them (see script on Appendix D).
3. The researcher applied the snowball or rhizomatic sampling approach to expand the number of participants by seeking existing participants' feedback on others who may fall within the scope.

The first screening point aimed to confirm that the prospective participant currently holds a prominent leadership position and that they have lived in poverty and experienced adverse childhood experiences. Once the prospective participant was confirmed to meet the requirements and criteria, the researcher invited the participants to participate in the study (see Appendix D for script). The participant was then advanced to the interview process—the researcher scheduled and conducted the interviews using pseudonyms for privacy and confidentiality.

1. The participants were asked to complete the ACE questionnaire/scale (Appendix C) to identify the ACEs and measure the participants' adversity level.
2. Interviews were held via Zoom and recorded after permission from the participant.
3. Interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were provided to the participant for member checks as validation (Creswell & Poth, 2016).
4. The researcher identified themes from lived experiences to garner the essence and meaning of the phenomenon.
5. Coding, labeling, and analysis were performed, and findings were documented.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved developing a general understanding of the data and constructing theories and themes about the central phenomenon (Harris, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The process of discovering theories and themes is commonly known as data mining. This process consists of taking the full set of extracted data (interview responses) and combining it into a complete data set. The researcher then categorizes and interprets the data set to build upon or form a theoretical basis to support or oppose stated research questions (Neuman, 2016).

Further, data analysis is not off-the-shelf; instead, it is custom-built, revised, and "choreographed" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185). One of the challenges is making the data

analysis process explicit because qualitative research is largely intuitive, soft, and relativistic. The researcher used the data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as guidance for this study: data collection, managing and organizing the data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into themes, developing, and assessing interpretations, and representing and visualizing the data. As the readers will see, the researcher has developed the analysis to align with the data analysis spiral.

The researcher recorded all interviews using the Zoom software, and recorded interviews were transcribed using the Zoom companion Rev Meeting Assist software application as the data collection process. The researcher created a codebook in preparation for identifying themes of the lived experiences (See Appendix F). The transcriptions and interview notes were analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative research data analysis software. Specifically, this software provided a platform for the researcher to manage the transcription data through coding and to help identify qualitative data themes. The researcher uploaded each transcript into NVivo and coded it into the codebook created. The data analysis feature in NVivo helped to chart and graph the findings. The NVivo software and codebook allowed the researcher to view themes that occurred in each interview. The NVivo program provided a layer of organization for the researcher to examine and evaluate the data; the researcher created a thematic plot. Polkinghorne (1995) states, "the analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to an emerging thematic plot" (p. 16). The researcher determined if the research questions were answered through the emergence of themes or key findings in the data by utilizing the results of the data from NVivo. The software allowed the researcher to analyze the data more efficiently. Findings of the NVivo are outlined in Chapter Four and Chapter Five Discussions.

This qualitative research study aimed to examine the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty and with childhood adversity but were able to achieve a prominent leadership position to provide insight into their lives. To this study, a prominent leader is defined as those currently in a role responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making. The research questions presented in previous chapters were designed to guide the individual interviews.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three outlined the qualitative phenomenological approach that the researcher used in the research study, including an outline of the high-level data collection process: 1) screening and observation; 2) interview transcripts; 3) thematic analysis; 4) the level of poverty; 5) the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) scale and scoring process, and 6) details regarding reliability and validity processes outlining how the researcher ensured the integrity and efficacy of the research.

The methodology outlined in this chapter revealed a great deal about the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty, the various descriptions of poverty, adverse childhood experience scales and scores, motivation factors, and leadership principles used. See the data collection codebook template in Appendix F that provides the codes used in the thematic analysis and the summary of the details and narratives in Chapter Four.

Table 4 – Overview of Participants (page 1)

Participants	Poverty ID (see Table 4)	ACE Score # of "Yes" out of 13	Childhood Community	Extended Severe Trauma	Motivation to Succeed Intrinsic or Extrinsic	Prominent Position/Title	Preferred Leadership Style
Esther	2 - Generational 3 - Low Income, Parents Lived on a form of welfare 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	6	Urban - Compton, CA	Teen pregnancy Witnessed violence and crime Raised by a single parent	<i>Intrinsic</i> - determined and driven <i>Extrinsic</i> - Family	Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of a \$500m community nonprofit.	"Definitely I'm a servant leader" where giving back is a priority.
Joseph	1 - Extreme poverty; lacked necessities 2 - Generational 3 - Low Income, Parents Lived on a form of welfare 4 - Situational, lived in poverty caused by a situation 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	12	Urban - Pomona, CA	Incarcerated as a teen for attempted murder Was the head of a violent gang Dad died when he was two years old of heroin Stepdad abused everyone in the household Lived in a family of drug dealers and gang members Witnessed and participated in violence and crime	<i>Intrinsic</i> - learned to cope <i>Extrinsic</i> - community leader	Founder and President & CEO of a multi-million dollar nonprofit	So for leadership skills I always had that charisma to like, kind of get in there and see where you are and talk to people where we need to lead people. Left or right. And things like that. And just trying to be very, influential, basically.
Sarah	2 - Generational 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	3	Urban, South Central LA	Brother was murdered	<i>Intrinsic</i> - an adventurer <i>Extrinsic</i> - grandmother role model and "The Village"	Founder and President & CEO of a multi-million dollar nation-wide business	"I am just an independent thinker". And so in my ability to lead, not want to be influenced by other people.
Martha	2 - Generational 4 - Situational, lived in poverty caused by a situation 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	4	Urban - Harlem, NY Small Town - Connecticut	"My brother, sister and I probably made up 1/3 of the black community in my school's student population. So I do believe that was trauma, but a different kind of trauma."	<i>Intrinsic</i> - personality <i>Extrinsic</i> - mother as role model, very active	President of a \$4.5m nonprofit organization	"I believe wholly in servant leadership. I actually think that servant leadership is even more important in business than for nonprofits. It's the way that I interface with my team, it's the way that I talk about being a leader with my board."
Ruth	2 - Generational 3 - Low Income, Parents Lived on a form of welfare 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	5	Urban - Southside Chicago	Abandoned by mother and father. Raised in severely violent and gang infested community. Struck in the head by a bat in gang fight. "Pretty bad neighborhood, it's worse now. Often times, if we heard shooting outside, we had to get down in the living room, or the bedroom until it stops."	<i>Intrinsic</i> - morals and values <i>Extrinsic</i> - grandparents Relationship with God, very active	Litigation attorney at a law firm. Work in commercial cases, so clients are large corporations.	"I would like to say a collaborative approach."
Rachel	2 - Generational 3 - Low Income, Parents Lived on a form of welfare 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	4	Urban - Compton, CA	A boy tried to take her virginity at age 6; witnessed drive-bys; saw a friend get shot in the head; had an abusive boyfriend where she ended up in the hospital.	<i>Intrinsic</i> - didn't give up, kept going <i>Extrinsic</i> - Church and God, Family, very active	Founder and CEO of a multi-million dollar national nonprofit youth organization	Servant leadership "So, I think that really understanding too the people that you are serving the people you are trying to help. But the people who are part of your team, and understanding that they have needs too, just like the people that you serve".
David	2 - Generational 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	1	Urban - Queens, NY	Trauma as an African American - "Even if they don't have things checked off on this scale, they have a significant amount of adversity just by being black."	<i>Intrinsic</i> - Wanting to Succeed, and Resiliency <i>Extrinsic</i> - "The Village"	Chief Executive and Leader of a major company and regional leader for a major retail store	"Well, participatory. I like to include people in the decision-making, I like to get the buy-in; with occasional authoritarian leadership."

Table 4 – Overview of Participants (page 2)

Participants	Poverty ID (see Table 4)	ACE Score # of "Yes" out of 13	Childhood Community	Extended Severe Trauma	Motivation to Succeed Intrinsic or Extrinsic	Prominent Position/Title	Preferred Leadership Style
Paul	2 - Generational 3 - Low Income, Parents Lived on a form of welfare 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	7	Urban - Philadelphia, PN	Abandoned by mother and father; raised in Foster Care; Was reminded by foster parents, that no one wanted them, "so when you spend your childhood thinking that – we looked at it like prison". Was severely beat with switches, hoses, extension cords.	<i>Intrinsic</i> - The will to succeed <i>Extrinsic</i> - Church as sanctuary, academics	Vice President of a multi-million dollar natinal nonprofit	For me it's consultative. I think that anytime you have teams, it's important to hear those opinions and its important to get buy-in. So what I'll do, is I like consultative decisions.
John	2 - Generational 4 - Situational, lived in poverty caused by a situation	4	Small Town - Ohio	"It was my brother, he was 17 when he got incarcerated. My dad took me to the penitentiary that he was staying at. I will never forget that. That was the hardest experience I've ever had in my life at that time". And witness the drowning of a friend at age.	<i>Intrinsic</i> - Social Skills <i>Extrinsic</i> - Religious Convictions and grandmother	Regional Manager of a large corporation	"Inspiratoional leader"
Joshua	2 - Generational 4 - Situational, lived in poverty caused by a situation 6 - Urban, violent and unhealthy environment	6	Urban - South LA, CA	Trauma from dad being incarcerated My sister ran away from home several times. And ultimately to the point of being physically ill in 11th grade, I was diagnosed with an auto immune that I still deal with today.	<i>Intrinsic</i> - Believed early on he was meant to do something special <i>Extrinsic</i> - a healthy fear of God	Litigation attorney at a law firm.	"I make it very collaborative; give people the tools to do what they need to do and then hands-off".
Hannah	1 - Extreme poverty; lacked necessities 2 - Generational 5 - Rural Poverty	5	Rural - Oxford, MS	Lived through desegregation. "So, growing up in the South being dark, was not any fun, kids used to tease me".	<i>Intrinsic</i> - "I pushed myself" <i>Extrinsic</i> - People in church	State of Prosecutor and Municipal Court Judge	Servant Leadership
Naomi	2 - Generational	2	Small Town - Georgia	Raised by grandparents and felt displaced as a child (parents passed). After a while felt like an "ugly duckling".	<i>Intrinsic</i> - Strong-willed and resiliency <i>Extrinsic</i> - The church & God, grandparents	President and CEO \$25m nonprofit	Collaborative
Deborah	2 - Generational	1	Small Town - MS	"My dad would whop us but wasn't severe".	<i>Intrinsic</i> - Questioned Authority <i>Extrinsic</i> - The Village	State Court of Appeals Judge	"I'm kind of like the peace maker. I'm more of compromising person. Bring everybody together."

PART 3

Findings

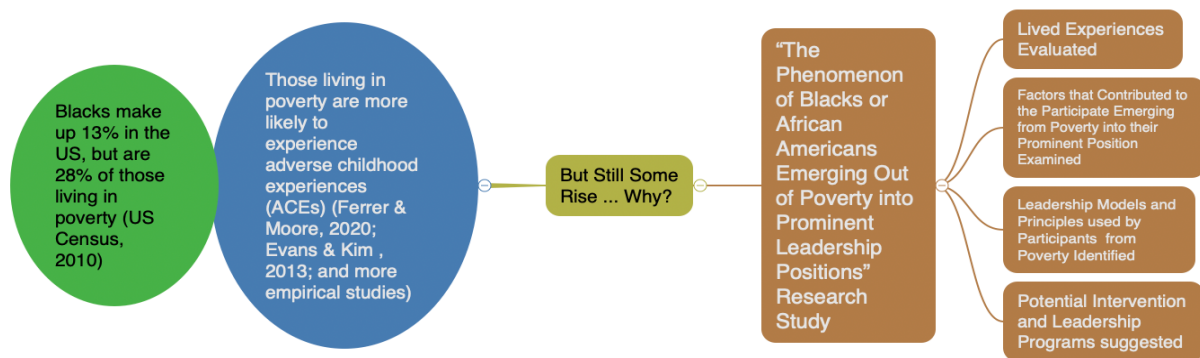
Part 1 The Nature of the Research Problem	Chapter 1 Introduction/Problem Statement
	Chapter 2 Literature Review
Part 2 Research Methodology & Procedures	Chapter 3 Research Methodology
Part 3 Findings	Chapter 4 Research Results and Analysis
Part 4 Conclusion	Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings
	Chapter 6 Implications and Conclusions

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Chapter Overview

In a phenomenological study, individuals who have experience with the phenomenon being studied must be those selected to be participants (Harris, 2018). Chapter Four presents results in each area, outlined in Figure 1, that help meet the necessary phenomenon concept requirements.

Figure 1 – High-Level Mind-Map of Research Study



The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of Blacks who have experienced poverty, trauma, and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) based on the ACE Scale in Appendix C. Still, they were able to overcome those adversities and garner prominent leadership positions. To this research study, a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making. This chapter reveals each participant's story. There were thirteen participants. Pseudonyms were assigned; the researcher removed all identifying features to protect their privacy.

This chapter outlines the results of the interview examination of the thirteen prominent leaders who participated in the study. The researcher presents findings related to the type of poverty the participants lived in, adverse childhood experiences (ACE) questionnaire scores and themes, other trauma identified and not captured on the ACE questionnaire, and how the adversities present obstacles to success. The researcher also provides themes based on the interview questions supporting each research question.

The chapter is first organized to discuss and highlight the participants' adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), establish their poverty level, and align their experiences to the study's research questions. The researcher offers limitations and interpretations of each topic discussed.

Problem Statement:

The problem is a high rate of Black adolescents from poverty with high ACE scores fail to overcome these critical adversities and are less likely to emerge into prominent leadership positions. ACEs resulting from poverty and other traumatic experiences present obstacles to a higher number of Blacks than other races or non-impooverished communities (Taylor, 2014). Consequently, the road to a prominent leadership position is substantively more difficult for those who have experienced higher levels of adversity as a child than others, as illustrated in Chapter one. Those from impoverished communities with ACEs may bring with them lived experiences that may be difficult to overcome as they advance to adulthood.

Typical poverty-related ACEs directly correlate to long-term negative life results (Evans & Kim, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). These include chronic stress, unstable environment, substance abuse, criminal activity, and mental illness in the home. Issues also include coping, such as challenges with self-regulation and a lack of a positive network of friends and mentors. Physical effects can include stressors such as substandard and unsustainable housing, chaotic

environments, domestic violence, gang violence, drug-infected environment, child abuse, and physical neglect. Psychosocial stressors include family turmoil, separation from adult caregivers, divorce or separation, intimate partner (at a young age), loss of family members and emotional neglect, and teen pregnancy (Evans & Kim, 2013; Wade et al., 2014).

Purpose Statement:

Yet still some rise. Why is that? The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Blacks who lived in poverty, scored high ACE levels, experienced other traumatic experiences, and was able to emerge into successful, prominent leadership positions. The essence of their experiences and common themes will help to identify factors that played a crucial role in their journey and proposed to 1) contribute to additional studies; 2) highlight potential contributions in the development of youth intervention programs; or 3) have the participants' leadership experiences and approaches currently being used that were influenced by their lived experiences contribute to the creation of youth and adult leadership development programs—providing the detailed experiences of the participants in this chapter help to examine and discover findings and insights that surface from the interviews presented in Chapter Four.

The following research questions were used as a guide in the interview process and will later help to translate into themes, essence, findings, recommendations, and potential contributions to the literature:

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?

Research Question #3: What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop

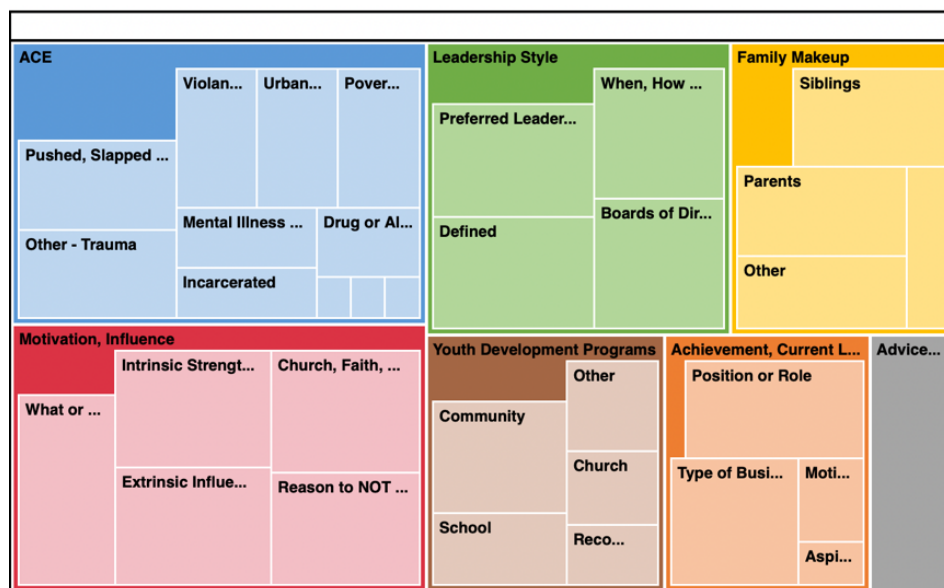
and use to achieve prominent positions?

Analysis of Data

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the interview data for themes related to each research question. The researcher developed a codebook to help capture the thematic data for analysis. To allow more focus, efficiency, and effectiveness, the researcher would be wise to develop a systematic codebook (Tracy, 2013), which is a data display that lists key codes, definitions, and examples used in the analysis. Codebooks are like legends for the data, helping the researcher meet the challenge of getting their head around pages of transcripts, highlighting, and scrawling (Tracy, 2013). The researcher used the data collection and codebook outlined in Appendix F.

The researcher used the NIVio software in the analysis process based on the codebook and participant transcript responses. Recorded transcripts were uploaded to NVivo and coded based on the codebook. NVivo allowed the researcher to visualize the responses by questions within the codebook, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – NVivo Codebook Analysis



Presentation of Results

Participants and Population

Table 4 at the end of the previous chapter provides a detailed overview of the participants and can serve as a guide for each participant's narrative. Each participant's story is told and portrayed. The stories detail their lived experience as a child, their classification of poverty, and other adversities they experienced. Other experiences include motivations that helped them to either not follow the crowd, and that influenced their success in garnering a prominent leadership position. Their stories also discuss when they first recognized they had leadership abilities and their preferred leadership style as a prominent leader. They describe the advice they would give to their younger selves.

Listed below is a glimpse of each participant's life stories and profiles by pseudonym.

Esther

Esther is a participant who grew up in the urban community of Compton, California, and experienced generational, low-income, and urban poverty. She experienced teen pregnancy and other adversities. Esther scored six out of thirteen on the ACE scale, classifying her as experiencing severe adversity. She emerged from adversity and poverty and currently holds the prominent leadership position of Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of a \$500 million community nonprofit. As part of her leadership role, Esther is passionate about giving back to the community as frequently as possible and has served on several local and national community boards. Esther's current and past leadership positions align with this study's definition of a prominent leader.

“I was a mom by the age of 16. But it didn't stop me. I was so determined and so driven when the world tells you what you can't be, you're going to be. The only person that can challenge that is you” (Esther, 2022).

Joseph

Joseph experienced extreme poverty and severe childhood adversity; his ACE score was twelve out of thirteen, the highest ACE score of the thirteen participants. He recalls that they lived in poverty, going without food, being on low-income assistance, and lived in urban communities that presented poverty-related circumstances. Joseph was incarcerated as a teenager for the attempted murder of a police officer, a major street gang leader, and family members as drug dealers and street crime. He dropped out of high school because he was in juvenile hall – California Youth Authority; but later received his GED (which hangs on his office wall today for all to see). Joseph experienced a family life of verbal and physical abuse. His relative often would swear at him, push him or harm him physically, where marks and left marks on his body, and he was sexually abused. Some trauma Joseph experienced were:

“My dad died when I was two. He overdosed on heroin. My mother remarried when I was about six. But he (stepdad) was verbally, emotionally, physically abusive to everybody in the house. I grew up in a very abusive home” (Joseph, 2022).

“I was getting arrested all the time. I remember my first encounter with law, I was ten years old. I had a lot of negative interactions with law enforcement growing up. When I went to California youth authority, I was at 14 years or 15 years. At that time was for the actually attempted murder of a law enforcement officer. I did ten years for that” (Joseph, 2022).

Despite the trauma and adversity, Joseph rose to a prominent leadership position; he now is the founder, Chief Executive Officer, and President of a multi-million-dollar gang intervention nonprofit. Joseph thought no one would hire me, so I needed to start something myself. Joseph leads a dynamic team of employees, and part of his role includes participating in and leading community boards.

Sarah

Sarah grew up in an urban community where gang violence and crime were prevalent. Her ACE score was three out of a total of thirteen. This score can be characterized as severe, primarily due to the urban community where she lived. Although she lived in generational and urban poverty, she had both parents in the household who instilled good family values and who had good working jobs.

“I was the adventurer, always trying things, getting into things, the rabble-rouser. I was always out there trying something, but I wasn't a bad kid” (Sarah, 2022).

Sarah states this family dynamic and “the village” helped her to succeed, and “so that kind of was my circle” (Sarah, 2022). There were from time-to-time shootings in the neighborhood by neighbors or gangs.

Sarah applies her leadership in the multi-million-dollar business she founded and is the Chief Executive Officer and President. She leads the significant decision-making processes and has led the company to be successful in expanding from a small business to one that is nationwide. Sarah is active in the community and serves on several boards of directors and other factors that align with this study’s prominent leadership position.

Martha

Martha grew up splitting her time between an urban community in New York with violence and crime and a small town in Connecticut where she and her siblings were one-third of Blacks in the high school. Martha recalls being black in a White community was a trauma and states she was “dropped into a situation with no Black people” (2022). Martha grew up in generational, situational, and urban poverty; she experienced childhood adversity scoring four out of thirteen on the ACE scale. Martha emerged from poverty and adversity into the position she now holds, president of a \$4.5m nonprofit organization, providing leadership to multiple employees and boards of directors. She is responsible for consequential cross-functional decisions.

Ruth

Her mother and father abandoned Ruth at an early age. She was raised in multiple forms of poverty by her grandparents, who had experienced poverty for generations in an extremely violent and gang-infested community in the Southside of Chicago. Martha recalls she was struck in the head by a bat in a gang fight and still has the scare today. She remembers her community as:

"Pretty bad neighborhood; often, if we heard shooting outside, we had to get down in the living room or the bedroom until it stops" (2022).

Ruth emerged from poverty and adversity through Christ, with strong family values, strict grandparents, and church.

“I was very independent at a very young age. I was self-motivated, independent, knew what I wanted to do, and went after it. Even at 5, 6, 7 years old. And I also think discernment at a very young age. I knew who and who not to be around. And it just

worked out. I would say my spiritual relationship with God has always been a strength of mine” (2022).

Ruth contributes attending a magnet school, being involved in extra-curricular activities, and having a very faithful relationship with God to her not following the crowd. Ruth is now a litigation attorney at a law firm; she has worked closely with the community in civil rights cases and whose clients are large corporations in commercial cases.

Rachel

Rachel experienced substantial trauma in her childhood. She lived in an urban community in Southern California, where she experienced urban-related, low-income, and generational poverty. She scored four out of thirteen on the ACE scale. Rachel described experiencing severe trauma:

“A boy tried to take her virginity at age 6; I witnessed drive-by shootings; I saw a friend get shot in the head; I was part of the gang myself; my cousin was murdered in the neighborhood; and I had an abusive boyfriend where I ended up in the hospital” (2022).

Yet, Rachel was still able to rise into the prominent leadership position of the founder, CEO, and president of a multi-million-dollar national non-profit organization. She provides national leadership to employees and several boards of directors. Rachel contributes her success to strong family support and values and, with their help, a focus on education, but primarily her internal will, pushing and not giving up.

David

David scored the least of the participants on the ACE scale, scoring one out of thirteen, classifying as little to no adversity. David grew up in the urban area of Queens and experienced urban-related and generational poverty. David’s response to not scoring high on the ACE scale

and living with little or no adversity was firm belief that being Black does not mean growing up in a broken home or poverty. However, David responded that growing up Black in America is a traumatic experience. He suggested this study should contribute to further literature to create another ACE scale relevant specifically to a Black child growing up. He elaborated:

“Even if they (Blacks) don’t have things checked off on this ACE scale, they have a significant amount of adversity just by being Black.” (2022)

David provided prominent leadership as a chief executive and leader of a major national company and regional leader for a major retail store. He attributed his success to “wanting to succeed, resiliency, and ‘the village’” (David, 2022).

Paul

Paul grew up in the foster care system in the urban community of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and saw his biological parents maybe six times between six to eighteen years of age.

“I grew up in foster care. I have three brothers, and we were separated in our early years. My older brother and I were in one home, and two younger brothers – who I don’t remember from their early years – were in another”.

Paul scored seven out of thirteen on the ACE scale, defined as severe adversity. While living with foster parents, Paul experienced all forms of poverty and physical and emotional abuse. He states,

“I lost my faith in adults because our parents would always say they would come to get us and never did, and our foster parents would remind us frequently that we were abandoned or not wanted. So, when you spend your childhood thinking that, we looked at it like a prison” (2022).

He further stated he and his brothers would count the days when they were going to be old enough to be “emancipated” from that situation. Paul attributes emerging from adversity and poverty to just true will to succeed, academics (as he calls himself a “nerd”), and believing in the Lord and church. Paul is now Vice President of a major national nonprofit, where he leads teams and boards of directors.

John

John grew up in a small town in rural Ohio, raised by both mom and dad in the home. He scored four out of thirteen on the ACE scale and suffered generational and situational poverty. He experienced some trauma as a child of his older brother being incarcerated and witnessing a friend drown. John’s motivation, without a doubt, was his relationship with his grandmother, praying a lot, and his exceptional belief in the Lord and Jesus Christ.

John currently provides leadership as a regional manager at a large corporation, serves on several national and local boards, and provides mentorship to young men.

Joshua

Joshua grew up with severe childhood adversity, scoring six out of thirteen on the ACE scale, and lived in generational, situational, and urban-related poverty. He grew up in South Central LA, with crime and violence, with his mother and father. Joshua’s father was incarcerated from time to time. When his father was incarcerated, they lived in a converted garage. In Joshua’s community, he described:

“... things that were out there, you know, gangs, drugs, that type of thing. I mean, my parents kept me really busy, like with coaches and Church and that stuff. But there were still elements out there” (2022).

Joshua states that what kept him from following the crowd and going along with the community was:

“... it was one of my teachers who instilled in me early on that I had a gift and that was God-given, and I was supposed to do things that were great” (2022).

The trauma and childhood adversities had substantial long-term impacts on Joshua; he was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease in his early teens and continues to be treated. Joshua is now a litigation attorney in a prominent law firm, making consequential decisions and providing leadership in the community and on several community boards.

Hannah

Hannah spent her childhood years in rural Mississippi. She lived in a sharecropping and segregated family environment. She mentioned that,

“Up until I was about six or seven years old, we would work the fields, and then the proceeds would go to the ‘White man’ who would pay her family part of the money” (2022).

Living as sharecroppers on a farm in her early years, Hannah and her family experienced extreme poverty; from generational, situational and low-income. Hannah's childhood adversity was severe between living through segregation and extreme poverty. She scored five out of thirteen on the ACE scale. These experiences were traumatic for Hannah. Additionally, she recalls her school initially being segregated and was all black; the schools were then integrated, where she and her siblings were bused to the white school. Integration brought on more trauma, being placed in an all-white environment. She recalls:

“I am a very dark-complexed person. So, growing up in the south, being dark, was not any fun. Kids used to tease me. I was a very quiet and insecure person while growing up.

As a matter of fact, I don't remember getting to be secure – growing up, I was really insecure" (2022).

She mentions that the things she went through are adversity, and it is not on this ACE questionnaire. Yet, Hannah was able to rise to the prominent position of State Prosecutor and Municipal Court Judge, which requires consequential decision-making and leadership.

Naomi

Naomi grew up in generational poverty in a small town in rural Georgia with her grandparents; her parents passed away when she was very young. Although her grandparents were loving, Naomi recalls feeling alone and displaced. She remembers feeling "disconnected and displaced because I was an only child, especially around those with whole families" (Naomi, 2022). Naomi's grandparents were heavy into the church and kept Naomi in church as well.

"I was raised Pentecostal. Because if you were raised the way I was, where you were kind of like laughed at or kind of picked on because you were the odd guy out, I felt like an ugly duckling. So, there were certain things that I couldn't do and was not accepted in a certain group" (2022).

Despite Naomi believing that this trauma is buried and forgotten, there are certain critical moments in her life that will stay with her forever. She has been able to overcome the trauma and has excelled to prominent leadership positions. She has held multiple senior-level positions that, include college provost and dean. Naomi is currently President and CEO \$25 million-dollar nonprofit.

Deborah

Deborah grew up in a small town in rural Mississippi with both parents. She experienced generational poverty and scored only one out of thirteen on the ACE scale. She states she is

successful because she “questioned authority” and contributes her success to “the village.” She mentioned that everyone looked out for each other in her community. Deborah described her childhood years without severe adversity and trauma. She is now a State Court of Appeals Judge.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire Results

Once the participants advanced to the interview process, the researcher asked them to complete the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire (Appendix C) before the interview. The questionnaire results helped guide the interview questions and allowed the researcher to ask supporting and retrospective questions related to the research questions. The questionnaire allowed for more detailed examinations and deeper lived experiences to materialize. The scores of the participants ranged from one to twelve. The higher the ACE score, the more severe the childhood adversity and the obstacle to success (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE scores of the thirteen participants are in Table 5.

Table 5 – ACE Score Summary by Participant

	ACE Questions	Esther	Joseph	Sarah	Martha	Ruth	Rachael	David	Paul	John	Joshua	Hannah	Naomi	Deborah	Yes Total	No Total	Total % Yes
1	Did the immediate community you lived in have a significant amount of crime, gangs, drug use, or violence?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	8	5	0.62
2	Did you live in a low-income household where you lacked resources for necessities such as electricity, clean water, food, shelter or clothes?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	8	5	0.62
3	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	3	10	0.23
4	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	3	0.77
5	Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ... touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or attempt to actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	2	11	0.15
6	Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were not important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	3	10	0.23
7	Did you often or very often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if needed it? Or no place to sleep?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	2	11	0.15
8	Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	6	7	0.46
9	Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	2	11	0.15
10	Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	5	8	0.38
11	Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	5	8	0.38
12	Were you or a household member incarcerated?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	6	7	0.46
13	Did you have a child or father a child?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	1	12	0.08
		Yes = 6	Yes = 12	Yes = 3	Yes = 4	Yes = 5	Yes = 4	Yes = 1	Yes = 7	Yes = 4	Yes = 6	Yes = 5	Yes = 2	Yes = 1			

Table 6 – ACE Total “Yes” Scores

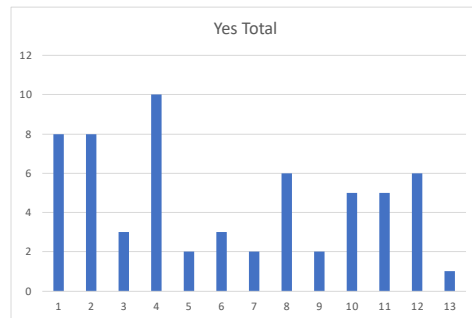


Table 7 – ACE Question with Highest Score

ACE Question	% Yes
1	62%
2	62%
3	23%
4	77%
5	15%
6	23%
7	15%
8	46%
9	15%
10	38%
11	38%
12	46%
13	8%

Tables 6 and 7 show that ACE Question 4 has the highest number of participants scoring “yes.” This question is, “*Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?*” The researcher observed that ten of the thirteen participants scored “yes” on this question. As the researcher questioned the participant deeper on this, a theme emerged that indicated the participants were disciplined with “whoopins.” These whoopins left visible whelps on their bodies. These whoopins would take place using anything from the hands, belts, tree branches, extension cords, or hoses (Urban Dictionary, 2006). Paul recalled, “They (Foster parents) were really strict and heavy into corporal punishment, discipline; there were electric cords, rubber hoses, things like that. Yeah – whatever was in the household, you could get a whoopin with it” (2022). Martha stated that “I do remember getting some bad whoopins. I have very clear memories of that” (2022).

Limitations of ACE Questionnaire:

The researcher observed some limitations of the ACE questionnaire. One limitation observed was the absence of the opportunity for participants to identify whoopins as adversity.

Many participants grew up where a whoopin was part of child discipline. Whoopins may be referred to as spankings in other cultures (Afifi et al., 2017; Gershoff, 2013). First, violence promotes violence. If you discipline a child by spankings, whippings or whoopins -- whether with a hand, switch, or belt - the message is that when you do something, bad violence and pain are appropriate punishments (Archer, 2014). What you learn as a child sets your "normal" thermostat for the rest of your life. If physical violence is part of that normal, then this often becomes your solution for many problems as an adolescent and onward. Spankings and whoopins could promote youthful violence, anti-social behavior, drug use, and mental health problems. Child abuse is repeated in each generation. Participants in this current study highlighted whoopins.

As mentioned by some participants, they received whoopins as a child, and most believe that they were disciplined as a child, their parents, guardians, or support system were preparing them for the real world. When you whip those you love, it's not about abuse. It's about love. You want to make them understand that they did wrong. (Archer, 2014). Most participants experienced whoopins as a child that left whelps on their bodies, each stating that it was conducted as a form of discipline. The researcher observed that the whoopin discipline was clearly an acceptable form of discipline for this culture of participants. However, it is adversity as it is corporal punishment.

The American Academy of Pediatrics strengthened its advice against corporal punishment in updated guidelines, saying it makes kids more aggressive and raises the risk of mental health issues (Sege et al., 2018; Fox, 2018). "Parents, other caregivers, and adults interacting with children and adolescents should not use corporal punishment (including hitting and spanking), either in anger or as a punishment for or consequence of misbehavior, nor should

they use any disciplinary strategy, including verbal abuse, that causes shame or humiliation,” (Fox, 2018; Sege et al., 2018)

The participants mentioned that they didn’t initially think Question 4 of the questionnaire would be scored a “yes” because the whoopins were a form of discipline and their parents, or guardians, didn’t mean any harm. Hannah explained discipline for her as a child, and the essence of her response is that it was a normally accepted form of discipline: “now we were disciplined. I remember my dad pulled an extension cord on me; in his mind, it was discipline. And I’m sure it left marks on us. And they always whipped us with those tree branches, so, at one point, they would leave whelps, yes, but they would go away.” Question 4 could very well have been scored by all participants at a 100% versus the 77% shown in Table 7. Whoopins as a discipline is a cultural and social act. The researcher observed this theme's emergence after the third participant's interview. You had some adversities, not only the whoopins but the mental anticipation and anxieties of knowing you would get a whipping. This act of discipline is a form of short-term physical and long-term psychological effects.

Another limitation of the ACE questionnaire is that it does not consider social and cultural differences and other biases. The questionnaire is not explicitly addressing some of the adversities that Blacks experience. Whoopins is one example, but Martha gives an excellent example: “I grew up in New York in a Black family and a Black community. There was one White family on my block. And then we moved to Connecticut to an entirely White community. There were three Black families in the town. And in my high school graduating class, there were two other Black students. My brother and sister, and I probably made up one-third of the Black community in my school’s student population. So, I do believe that was trauma, but a different kind of trauma. It was a lot to be with people you knew and had much in common while I lived

in New York; although there are diverse places, I lived in a Black neighborhood and went to Black churches all the time. And then I was dumped into a situation where no Black people existed. And so, for me, that was awful and traumatic” (Martha, 2022).

David gives another example. He only scored a one on the ACE scale and almost seemed disappointed that he had not scored higher in childhood adversity. He had a very powerful reflection that illuminates a limitation of the ACE questionnaire: “... so the assumptions are Blacks will always have a dysfunctional household. But you can have cultural and social dysfunctions even if you didn’t grow up in a dysfunctional household. Because being Black in America is not a comfortable position to be in” (David, 2022).

Hannah grew up in the Jim Crow era of segregation and desegregation, a traumatic experience for Blacks from that era but would be overlooked by the current ACE Questionnaire. Her parents were sharecroppers. Sharecropping is when Black farmers often sharecropped land owned by Whites to make a living by compensating for a share of the crops and acquiring land. The landowner provides the land, and the tenant provides the labor (Cheung, 1968). Hannah’s family picked cotton and had to share the profits with the White man. Hannah recalled desegregation and having to be bused to the White school. She recalls how a White boy was afraid for the teacher to leave him in the classroom with her there: “... once they integrated us, we were fully integrated. When we got in the classroom, we sat in alphabetical order. I remember I sat in front of this little White boy, and the teacher went into the hallway, and she told the little boy, ‘Don’t’ worry, don’t worry,’ she won’t do anything to you” (2022).

Another limitation is that the ACE questionnaire instructions identify “yes” answers for occurrences before eighteen. The researcher observed that some participants experienced some “yes” answers at the age of eighteen. Sarah recalled being married at eighteen as a traumatic

lived experience, being married with children and an abusive husband: "...The other thing I should tell you that was probably, you know, the most traumatic thing to happen, I ended up getting married a very early age of 18" (Sarah, 2022). The researcher also observed that the ACE questionnaire does not align with how the U.S. Census Bureau defines teens. When providing data on teens, the U.S. Census Bureau states teens are 15-19 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

An additional limitation of the ACE questionnaire is the lack of identification of expanded trauma experienced by living in poverty and urban communities with significant crime and violence. Question 1 asked, "*Did the immediate community you lived in have a significant amount of crime, gangs, drug use, or violence?*" Eight of the thirteen participants scored this question a "yes," which was 62%. The researcher observed a theme of expanded trauma that the participants experienced connected to their communities and to this question. These traumatic lived experiences had life-long impacts on some participants. Ruth remembered, "I actually wish I could show you this mark on my head here from the time I did go outside, and there must have been a gang initiation of something. I happened to be outside on my roller skates on Saturday with some friends. And a guy came by with three or four other people, and he was maybe 14 or 15, and he just started swinging at us with a bat. And I was the one on skates, so I was behind everybody. He swung at us, and I ducked, and then he came back with the bat and hit me a knocked me out. So, you know this is a wound/mark from when I was 12 years old" (Ruth, 2022).

Rachael cited several traumatic experiences that were because by the urban community, including gangs and violence. The researcher would have missed the experiences if the researcher did not dig deeper into Question #2. Rachael recalls: "I had a guy who tried to take

my virginity, yes, when I was in the 6th grade. Around the corner from my house. I cried and got away on my little purple bike. I will never forget it. He was in the Bloods gang, too” (Rachael, 2022). Rachael recalls how she witnessed one of her friends get shot in the head and killed: “I was up in it now. I saw a guy die right in front of me and get shot in the head. So, I was right there; I’ve seen some traumatic stuff. I’ve been chased by the police, all that” (Rachael, 2022).

Poverty:

It is tragic that Blacks disproportionately live in improvised communities and are at risk of experiencing higher levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that can influence their opportunities to succeed. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, they unequally have 28% living in poverty. About one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018).

Poverty can come in various forms and at different times in a child's life (Thomas and Fry, 2020; O’Neill, 2022; US Census Bureau, 2013; Payne, 2003; Smith, 2004; Children’s Defense Fund, 2013; Addy et al., 2013). The researcher listened to the participants' lived experiences and developed themes related to extreme, generational, low-income, situational, rural, and urban poverty.

Table 8 documents the participants’ poverty experiences.

Table 8 – Poverty ID Matrix by Participant Results

Poverty ID	Categories	Esther	Joseph	Sarah	Martha	Ruth	Rachael	David	Paul	John	Joshua	Hannah	Naomi	Deborah
1	Extreme		X									X		
2	Generational	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	Low Income	X	X			X	X		X					
4	Situational		X		X					X	X			
5	Rural									X		X		X
6	Urban	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			

As the information in Table 8 shows, each participant experienced some form of poverty. The Children's Defense Fund (2013) defines **extreme poverty** as an individual's or family's annual income that is less than half the poverty level. Joseph experienced extreme poverty as a child. He and his family lacked the necessities to live; poverty was generational, on low income, his mom lived on welfare, in some cases situational as his mom worked from time to time and lived in an urban community infused with violence, crime, drugs and gang activity, and lived in a family of mentally ill and criminal activity. Joseph explained, "We always lived in poverty, even if my mother worked from time to time" (Joseph, 2022).

Payne (2003) defines **generational poverty** as a family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations. Tennial (2008) provides a detailed description of six generations spanning from 1899 to the present. The participants in this study all provided lived experiences of living that align with generational poverty. Notably, each participant experienced generational poverty where their families had resided in poverty for at least two generations. However, these participants in their current state are changing that experience for the next generation. As of today's generation, Blacks, when they come of age, are still living in poverty, thus aligning with what is defined as generational poverty in this study (Tennial, 2008). Most participants experienced each dimension of poverty described in Table 4, from generation to generation since 1899. Generational poverty has its own culture, and unfortunately, it is often part of generational poverty: instability, violence, food insecurities, addictions, crowded housing, and incarcerations (Cook, 2021).

Addy et al. (2013) explained **low-income** families as needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; as such, families within this level of poverty of two times the national poverty level are considered low-income. Esther

further described her experience in poverty “... we were low income; our income, pretty much came from within our household. My mother was a single mother of five children, so we were on welfare, AFD, section eight, commodity cheese, and any type of government assistance (Esther, 2022).

Payne (2003) defined **situational** poverty as a family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to lack resources for an extended time. John describes his family being in situational poverty “my family was on food stamps for a short period of time when the factory where my dad worked was on strike” (John, 2022). Joshua mentioned that “they lived in low income when dad was incarcerated from time to time” (Joshua, 2022); and Martha discussed how they lived in urban poverty from time to time: “lived in Harlem and violence and crime from time to time as a child” (Martha, 2022).

The essence of the experience from some participants who lived in **rural** poverty, which is non-urban of less than 50,000 in population, and is defined as a farm area, agriculture, low density, long commuting patterns, and an area where there is less access to services and an opportunity for a quality living (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2020; Duncan, 1992; Lombard, 2018; Cook 2021). Those living in rural poverty are more likely to make minimum wage and work but still are poor. Hannah lived in rural poverty in Mississippi. Her family was sharecroppers when she grew up. Her experience aligns with the definition of rural poverty as they experienced a lack of access to services, were in a low-density agriculture area, family was on a farm, picked cotton, and were bused to an all-White school during desegregation. Hannah explains: “We never really didn’t have to go without a lot of food. But I can say we didn’t have a lot of clean water for some times. I don’t know if you did. Sometimes we had to go to the well and get water from the well for the house” (Hannah, 2022). She further explained, “In the first

house we lived in, we had a system, that we had to clean the dirty water. And I do remember at one time we lived in the house that we had to get our water from the spring, yes. And so yes, in that sense, yes. I probably was about 12, like I said, when we got inside running water” (Hannah, 2022). Her family, also in her early years had to cook on a wood-burning stove and was without proper sustainable gas, electricity, and running water to the home.

Many participants grew up in **urban poverty**, described as a high-density populated city with significant challenges such as limited health and education services, inadequate housing, a violent and unhealthy environment, and little or no social protection. Dimensions of urban communities are unhealthy environments, violence, crime, gang, inadequate housing, and little or no social protection. The effects are particularly hard on children, who face increased stress levels that can lead to emotional and behavioral problems (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Lombard, 2018; Cook, 2021). The participants shared their life stories and stated living in urban poverty, including gang violence. The crime was an everyday occurrence.

Esther described her experience of living in urban poverty, “I grew up in a more urban area of LA County -- straight out of Compton. The time I grew up in Compton was around the eighties, and that is when there was the big crack cocaine pandemic. I was in middle and high school, so I watched many of our neighbors and our community transition from a neighborhood of people, helping people, to a neighborhood of drug dealers, gang members and unfortunately drug addicts” (Esther, 2022). Sarah grew up in the urban communities of Inglewood and South Central where gang violence and crime were prevalent. It was in South Central Los Angeles, with the nearby city of Watts. According to Sarah, there were drugs and gangs. Although Sarah grew up in an urban community, she had both parents in the household who instilled good family

values and who had good working jobs. The family was not classified as low-income and had all the necessities. Sarah's parents were homeowners and good citizens of the urban community.

Living in urban poverty severely impacted Rachael, who lived in the urban cities of Southern California. She states: "I had a guy who tried to take my virginity, yes, when I was in the 6th grade, around the corner from my house. I cried and got away on my little purple bike. I will never forget it. He was in the Bloods gang too." And "I saw a lot of drive-by shootings, and the guy just got killed right in front of me, got shot in the head, I knew him, I never will forget that." "I had an abusive boyfriend too. I don't know if his father was abusive, but he was abusive. And that was a traumatic relationship, he pulled a gun on me, and I finally got out of the relationship. But I was with him seven years, a traumatic seven years." (Rachel, 2022).

Ruth's experience was growing up in Washington Heights, South Side of Chicago, which had a significant amount of crime and violence. She recalled being unable to play down the street or walk to the neighborhood store due to the gang violence. She stated, "pretty bad neighborhood. Often, we had to get down. If we heard shooting outside, we had to get down in the living room or the bedroom until it stopped. I can't tell you if I have ever heard of a worse neighborhood. Hum, people would run through our yard like gang activity was really heavy. Gang activity was so heavy that I lived in the second house from the corner, and I couldn't go to the corner. Drug trades, gangs, and lots of shootings would happen on that corner. So, my house was the farthest I could go if I even went outside. And that was the norm. That's the way it was" (Ruth, 2022).

Interpretation of Living in Poverty:

The researcher constructed that the Black participants lived in poverty based on their experiences and life stories. As noted in Table 8, all thirteen participants lived in some form of

poverty; some were more severe experiences than others. Living in poverty can have life-long impacts. Poverty is a powerful factor that can alter lifetime development trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes (Evans & Kim, 2013). The authors state that children who live in poverty are more likely than their wealthier peers to confront a wide array of physical stressors (2013). Additionally, while different factors and different geographic locations have different forms of poverty, the negative commonalities attributed to residing in poverty are important contributors to success or failure in life (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999; Corcoran & Chaudry, 1997; Fisher, 2000).

Being Black in America and understanding that, based on the US Census (2020) and empirical studies, Blacks disproportionately live in poverty, can create obstacles to achieving success. These participants that lived in poverty had negative impacts, some showing life-long socioemotional, physical, and health impacts. The researcher also demonstrated that each participant emerged from poverty into prominent leadership positions.

The study's impetus is to determine the motivations for emerging from poverty. The question related to advice the participants would give to their younger selves and the leadership principles they apply in their prominent leadership positions. The interview questions align with the research questions in Appendix A and B. Some life stories of the participants are outlined below.

Research Questions

The three research questions helped guide the interview and capture the participants' lived experiences.

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?

Research Question #3: What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?

Appendix B lists the interview questions that align with each research question. The responses, themes, and essences of meanings garnered through the participants' life stories follow.

Research Question One: Motivation

Various themes resulted from the first question of what factors influenced and motivated the participant to emerge from poverty and adversity into prominent positions. Because several participants lived in communities with crime and violence and had the opportunity to go the other way, the secondary question was, "*what stopped you from following the crowd.*" Table 9 shows the participants' thematic responses.

Table 9 – Thematic Responses to Research Question One: Motivation

Participants	Determined, Driven, Resiliency	Community and "The Village"	Education and Academics	Family Values, Strict Parents	Extra Curricula Activities	Faith, Religion and Church	Affirmation from others
Esther	X			X	X	X	X
Joseph	X	X					
Sarah		X		X		X	X
Martha	X			X	X	X	
Ruth	X		X		X	X	X
Rachel	X			X	X	X	
David	X	X			X	X	
Paul	X	X	X	X	X	X	
John	X			X		X	
Joshua	X	X	X		X	X	X
Hannah	X	X				X	X
Naomi	X	X		X	X	X	
Deborah	X	X			X		

Interpretation of Research Question One:

Research Question One was examined and interpreted through the self-determination theory (SDT) lens. Self-determination theory is the psychology of individuals having the right to make decisions to handle their own lives; it is a theory of motivation, development, and wellness and includes psychological types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1985). According to research, those who have proper levels of self-determination can lead to success. This theory may be one of the most substantial influences illuminated by the lived experiences of this study.

According to SDT, three basic and universal psychological requirements propel humans to grow and evolve (Deci & Ryan, 2008c; Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010); individuals can become self-determined if they meet demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and connections. When people feel autonomous, they feel autonomously motivated; when they feel competent and feel a sense of relatedness, they will be motivated, and positive consequences will follow. Thus, to obtain psychological progress, humans must feel the following:

- **Autonomy:** People need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals. This sense of being able to take direct action that will result in real change plays a significant part in helping people feel self-determined. The participants eventually demonstrated autonomy when they realized they needed to take control of their own lives. For example, Joseph mentioned realizing that he needed to take control of his life and get out of the gangs to succeed; and Esther stated she had to take control of her life after a teen pregnancy. Others showed that they needed to “own” their life circumstances, thus showing autonomy; no one else would do it; they had to.

- Competence: People need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When people feel they have the skills required for success, they are more likely to take action to help them achieve their goals. Each participant mastered the skills to succeed, responding that they developed leadership skills as teenagers. Each participant developed the competence to navigate the challenges of their lives, trauma, and adversity. They also responded that they developed leadership competence early in their various sports, teams, church, and student body activities.
- Connection or relatedness: People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to others and a sense of caring. The participants each touched on this psychological need. If the participants did not have it initially, once they identified someone who cared about them, they developed a connection and a relationship, that made a tremendous difference in their road to success. This also came in the form of “the village,” the family, extended family members such as teachers, coaches, and others in the community who showed they cared. This connection and relatedness were essential in most participants’ lives and factors to their success.

Positive feedback can boost self-determination. Deci (1985) also suggests that offering unexpected positive encouragement and feedback on a person's task performance can increase intrinsic motivation. This type of feedback helps people feel more competent, which is a crucial need for personal growth. An example of this was Joshua, who had special teachers and family members who gave him possible feedback at a young age and instilled in him that he was meant to be something special. He states he believed that, and that encouragement increased his intrinsic motivation.

Another example is Martha, who had a similar experience. In her case, teachers encouraged her to run for student positions. She had doubts, but with positive feedback and encouragement, she ran for the position; it gave her confidence, and she held higher positions after that. These are only two examples, but other participants have similar experiences of positive feedback that boosted their self-esteem and confidence; once they had a taste of success and confidence, they owned it, were autonomously motivated, wanted more, and went after more.

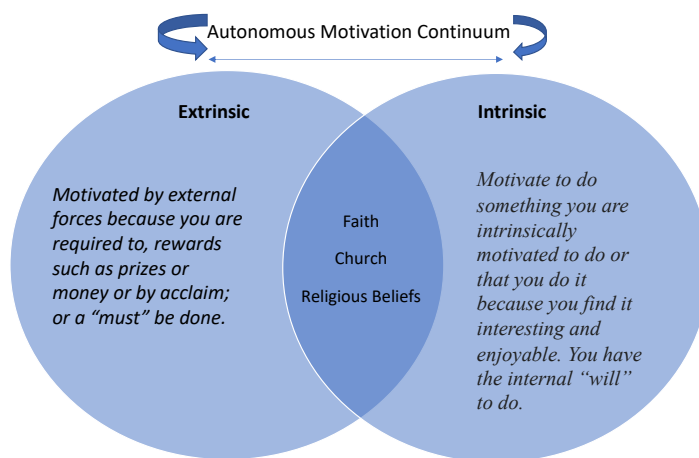
According to multiple researchers of self-determination, autonomous motivation is important. While people are often motivated to act by external rewards such as money, prizes, and acclaim (known as extrinsic motivation), self-determination theory focuses primarily on internal sources of motivation, such as a need to gain knowledge or independence (intrinsic motivation). However, extrinsic motivators can sometimes lower self-determination. According to Deci (1985) and Cherry (2021), giving people extrinsic rewards for intrinsically motivated behavior can undermine autonomy. As the behavior becomes increasingly controlled by external rewards, people begin to feel less in control of their behavior, and intrinsic motivation diminishes.

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of autonomous motivation: 1) intrinsic, which is to do something you are intrinsically motivated to do or that you do it because you find it interesting and enjoyable; and 2) extrinsic, which is if you do it because it leads to some separable consequence. Rather than thinking of motivation as being driven by either extrinsic or intrinsic rewards, it is often helpful to view it as a continuum between self-determined and non-self-determined behaviors. On one end of the continuum are purely self-determined behaviors that tend to be intrinsically driven and done for the enjoyment of, interest in, and inherent

satisfaction for the action itself; on the other end are non-self-determined behaviors, which are performed only because they *must* be done. There is a complete lack of control on this extreme end of the scale (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Cherry, 2022). Cherry (2022) provides a practical example: if you are training to compete in a marathon, you might be extrinsically motivated by a desire to gain approval from others. At the same time, you may also be intrinsically motivated by the satisfaction you gain from the activity. In most cases, behaviors tend to lie in the middle of the continuum.

Figure 4 shows a concept of the continuum between extrinsic and intrinsic autonomous motivation.

Figure 4 – Autonomous Motivation Continuum between Extrinsic and Intrinsic Factors



Intrinsic:

Some responses that fall into the definition of intrinsic are where Esther explained her intrinsic motivation “I was so determined and so driven when the world tells you what you can't be. You're going to be. The only person that can challenge that as you, the only” (Esther, 2022). Rachel stated, “I think that was family; I just believed that I could do it. If someone told me you couldn't do it, I was like, huh, I will show you” (2022). David stated, “I would think resiliency –

because I can't sit here and tell you I was always successful. Particularly between late childhood and early adulthood. You know, I had a lot of growth through trial and error. It wasn't always positive results, but I never quit. I was always able to say, okay, that didn't go well, dust myself off and try something else" (2022). Joshua, whose father was incarcerated from time to time and who lived near gangs and crime, stated, "I really did believe early on I was meant to do something special. I didn't know what it was going to look like; I really didn't. Um, and not having seen drugs and some of that stuff up close, it's not necessarily something I desired" (2022).

Sarah explained that she excelled in leadership in a large corporation because she "never let them knock her down" (Sarah, 2022), showing her intrinsic will.

Extrinsic:

Related to being involved in extra-curricular activities, Ruth stated she didn't have time to get into trouble. She lived in the South Side of Chicago, infused with violence, drugs, and gangs. So, her grandparents, who raised her, kept her busy. They were intentional in ensuring she didn't follow the crowd the wrong way. Ruth said, "yea, so the things that kept me out of streets, I would say, even at 8-9-10-11-12-13-14 I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. So, if I wasn't in church, which we were there often, I was playing instruments; played many instruments" (2022). Sarah mentioned, "Yea, parents who kept me super busy. There wasn't downtime" (2022).

Regarding academics and education as a motivating factor and influence, Paul mentioned, "I guess for me; fortunately, we look at education. I was always a nerd; that's probably number one. I excelled in school from an early age. I remember being from elementary school, I was valedictorian in my elementary school. No one talks about that nerdy guy. Teachers

recognized that” (2022). John also stated education and focusing on school helped to motivate him “I was a real nerd growing up in high school” (2022). Rachel, who lived in an urban community where she witnessed murders, was part of a gang herself, states what motivated her was her family’s focus on education. She recalls that her siblings were several years older than her, and it was ingrained in her from an early age that she was going to college. She mentions that “it wasn’t if, but when and where I was going to college, they weren’t letting me fail” (Rachel, 2022). Joshua was concrete on this as well “I consumed everything that I could academically. Sometimes my mom would buy me boxes of math problems from different organizations, and I would do them at home” (2022).

The village and the community Noemi state, “Everybody watched out for everyone because it just depended on the neighborhood” (2022). Deborah and Sarah confirmed: “It was the Village; everybody watched out for everyone” (2022). Extrinsically related influenced by community and role models “We grew up that closely together. However, it was during the times of the Civil Rights Movement. Watching – or I saw early on the outcomes of individuals who failed academically. And realizing that being an African American growing up in the sixties, you had to have some degree of academic success to be successful.” (David, 2022).

Religion, Faith, and Church:

The researcher identified a religious theme of believing in God, Christianity, and the church as a motivation to succeed. Related to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), religion can be both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (as shown in Figure 4). First, religion can be an extrinsically motivated behavior and is externally regulated when forced by others as an incentive promise or punishment. Because external forces control the behavior, the reason for enacting the behavior is not internalized at all; the behavior is performed under a sense of

pressure. Adolescents are expected by their parents (Neyrinck et al. 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2017). The researcher identified this as one of the themes of this study. This extrinsic behavior related to religion may have been the initial motivation; this researcher observed that participants' motivation shifted to be intrinsic. An intrinsically oriented person considers religion an ultimate end in itself; it is a master motive in life (Neyrinck et al. 2010). Religious beliefs and values are internalized without reservation. The theme aligns with most participants' responses about religion and faith in God. The researcher observed this repeatedly. The theme supports Cherry's (2022) argument that rather than thinking of motivation as being driven by either extrinsic or intrinsic rewards, it is often helpful to view it as a continuum between self-determined and non-self-determined behaviors.

As responded to in this study, participants mentioned they were required to attend church and be involved in church activities at an early age. Being required to attend church motivated them not to follow the crowd or go the wrong way. But in their adult life, it is more intrinsically motivated. It is internalized that they are where they are today because of God. Some mentioned, "The sanctuary – for me, the church was the sanctuary. So the church was the escape and the network for me. So whatever activities they had in church, that was what we did. And fortunately for us socialization was at church" (Paul, 2022). "I had to go to church. This is not an exaggeration to say Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, but certainly church was a real strong part of my life" (Naoemi, 2022). Although Naomi's parents forced her initially to attend church, she is now intrinsically motivated "I don't care how modern things get, and really deep in my soul, that's how I am. I just believe that way; I believe in the principles of faith and different things like that" (2022). Joshua mentioned that church is now intrinsic: "I did believe early on I was meant to do something special. I didn't know what it

would look like, I really didn't, but I knew I was supposed to be special” (2022); Martha’s response was, “Faith, for sure. Faith is absolutely number one” (2022).

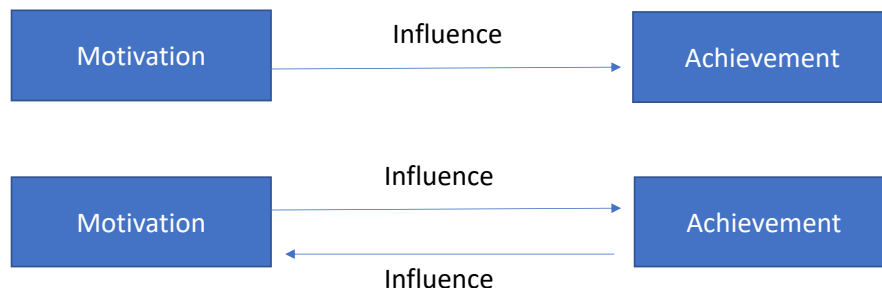
Affirmation from Others:

The researcher identified this concept in some of the participants who were motivated to achieve after affirmations from others. They developed a thirst to succeed. The more they achieved, the more they were motivated to achieve. Ruth mentioned that she was motivated and encouraged after seeing results. She responded to the question of what motivated her, “I think that I started seeing results. Seemed like things that I set my mind on, I would see the exact conclusion or resolution that I wanted” (2022). Joshua recalled, “So by sixth grade, I'd already been considered the best at what I was doing. I'd already won a championship, scoring 15 points in the last 14 minutes of the game and overtime after not scoring for two games. I really had the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat when you really feel like a champion—really been made to feel that way. And I internalized that. And sought eventually through the struggles to return to that kind of moment” (2022). Sarah mentioned that she didn’t recognize her leadership abilities until after she began “moving up” in the large corporation and others started asking her for leadership guidance. That gave her confidence in herself and her leadership abilities (2022).

Theorists have demonstrated the relationship between motivation and the accomplishments of an individual in two distinct causal concepts (Figure 5). The first causal concept is unidirectional, indicating motivation influences a successful outcome (Hove, 2017; Weiner, 1995). The second causal concept describes motivation as a cyclical relationship. The individual motivated by these relationships is encouraged to continue their success with multiple successful outcomes; thus, each previous achievement intrinsically motivates the individual toward future achievements (Hove, 2017; Dweck, 2007, 2010). Research incorporating an SDT

framework has identified antecedents of psychological need satisfaction (PNS) in human motivation.

Figure 5 – Relationship of Motivation to Achievement (Hove, 2017)



Research Question Two: Advice to Younger Selves

Research question two was related to *how do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?* To answer this question, the researcher asked the participants what advice they would give their younger selves. The purpose of this question is to capture experiences used in creating youth development programs for Blacks who may face similar adversities.

Research on children and childhood experiences commonly focuses on the results of the experiences. But, according to Philo (2003), it is important that we also access the worlds of children and childhood through the memories or recollections of adults. Realizing that all adults have once been children, research question two of this present study proposes to capture the memories and recollections of the participants. The question hopes to garner understanding from the participants of the advice they would give to their younger selves as they reflect on their childhood.

Childhood scholars suggest that we might assess past experiences of childhood by reflecting on our experiences (Harris & Valentine, 2017). Adults can remember and interpret their childhood memories and the role of shaping attitudes and values that lead to the formation

of an adult’s narrative. As adults, sharing our memories with others modulates how we think about our experiences (Harris & Valentine, 2017). Many childhood scholars successfully frame and analyze adult memories of childhood this way. For instance, Rhodes (Harris & Valentine, 2017) use prisoners’ memory narratives of their childhoods to make claims about their adult understandings of trauma and willingness to participate in prison rehabilitation programs. The thoughts connected to this study, where participants experienced moderate to severe adversity and trauma as a child. The researcher in this study uses the responses to Research Question Two to be used in part to help understand the culture and socialism of Blacks in poverty who experienced adversity and include that understanding in youth development programs. Research Question Two further explored adults' narratives reflecting on their childhood experiences and the advice they would give to their younger selves. We adopt Philo’s idea of looking backward using the adult respondents reflecting on their childhood to identify advice to their younger selves (Philo, 2003; Harris & Gill, 2017).

The participant responses in this study varied; the themes can be grouped into four primary domains, as shown in Table 10. Significant themes illuminating the participants' advice to their younger selves are quoted to give a deeper meaning to their responses.

Table 10 – Thematic Responses to Research Question Two: Advice to Younger Self

Domains		
	Self-Care	"Be kind to yourself" “You don’t always have to be right.” “Show yourself grace, everything will be alright” “Encourage yourself because no one else will” “And remind her to just go to sleep and wake up tomorrow. Just keep doing that, and it's going to be okay” “Everything will be all right” “I think I would tell my younger self to be a little bit more vocal about my feelings.” “I would say be more aware of your influence at a younger age.”

		<p>“... to build a relaxation period.”</p> <p>“To be more assertive about certain things. There was a passivity that was on me that was rooted in the fear.”</p> <p>“I would recognize that beauty is within”</p> <p>“there's beauty in you, and you just got to believe that you can, and it'll happen.”</p> <p>“Don't stress about things too much. Find a relaxation time.”</p>
	Get Involved	<p>“Yes, and I would encourage kids to get involved in things they think they are going to hate. That tends to be the stuff you learn the most from”</p> <p>“... young girls is really to get involved in the arts; the fine arts things, the singing, playing the instruments.”</p>
	Religion	<p>“Listen to God more. He's with you all times, you just need to listen.”</p> <p>“Use good discernment.”</p> <p>“... not believing that when I was doing something that it was me doing it, that it was God speaking through me and it was meant to happen the way that it was happening.”</p>
	Education	<p>“Stay in School”</p> <p>“... study harder, be more serious.”</p> <p>“School and academics were my saving grace”</p> <p>“I was a nerd, it saved me.</p>

Interpretation of Research Question Two

The researcher observed that the thematic domains resulting from the participant's responses connect to the motivation themes from Research Question One. The researcher observed that the participants got emotional when asked the question of advice to their younger selves that required them to reflect on pivotal periods in their childhood. The researcher observed that the question surprised some participants; they had not thought of it before. The researcher observed that if the participants had more time to reflect, they would have answered differently or more thoughtfully.

The participants' advice connected to the adversity and trauma experienced as a child; some advice stemmed from what the participants had identified and helped them succeed, as

answered in Research Question One. What worked best for them was what they would give advice to their younger selves to do more of.

An interpretation of the four primary domains follows.

Self-Care

Overwhelmingly the participants advise that their younger selves be conscious of taking care of themselves. The interpretation of this researcher is the essence of the responses on self-care can be related to intrinsic care, taking care of themselves since, in some cases, no one else was around to fulfill that role. Some participants mentioned not stressing too much. It is the researcher's interpretation that this is due to some of the long-term negative effects of adversity on some participants. The researcher interprets that some participants tried so hard to make it or to be part of the group that it stressed them out, they wanted to fit in, to be part of the group, and they felt like an “ugly duckling” (Naomi, 2022); or they were “teased because of their dark-complexed” in the segregated South (Hannah, 2022); was hospitalized for weeks due to their childhood emotional trauma (Esther and Rachel, 2022) and are continuing to have long-term health and physical challenges (Joshua and Esther, 2022).

Get Involved

Participants clearly suggest that young people get involved more. As quoted by several, being involved kept them from the streets. Their parents insisted that they were involved in extra-curricular activities. Some participants gave specifics for Black children of being exposed to the outdoors through the scouts; getting involved in the arts, musical instruments for girls, and being involved in church activities were where most participants spent their spare time. Martha mentioned, “Yes, and I would encourage kids to get involved in things they think they are going

to hate. That tends to be the stuff that you learn the most out of, and you end up enjoying” (2022). Yea, parents who kept me super busy. There wasn’t downtime (Martha, 2022).

The researcher interprets that being involved contributed substantially to the success of many participants. It is observed that one participant who did not state he would advise his younger self to get involved in activities was Joseph, the gang leader and who was in Youth Authority for the attempted murder of a police officer. Joseph states because of his lifestyle of leading a gang in the streets and crime, “he wasn’t thinking of going to the YMCA” (2022). Still, Joseph recommends more outreach by the community youth development programs and more available. For him, the YMCA was too far to travel as a child in his urban community. He states it would have been great to have a place available to play basketball and having a community leader to look up to would be valuable.

Additionally, some participants responded that they don’t get too involved; it is part of the stress they endured during childhood.

Religion

The researcher identified a theme related to faith and religion. The participants appeared to reflect on their motivations of faith and religion and want to ensure their younger selves stay faithful and lean on the Lord. The participants firmly believe in the Lord, and their faith is a primary factor in making it through the adversities.

The researcher observed that, without a doubt, religion, faith, and having to go to church were factors keeping the participants from going the wrong way or getting involved in gangs and crime. As responded to in Research Question One, religion is a crucial motivating factor. The participants were initially required to go to church, now that they are providing that advice to their younger selves. Religion, faith, and church are, for the most part, ingrained in the

participants' DNA. Even Joseph, the gang leader arrested for the attempted murder of a police officer, stated, “he looked to religion while in prison, even leading Bible study classes on Wednesday nights” (Joseph, 2022). Esther provides advice “At your darkest moment in life, I don't care if it's Allah, Buddha, Jehovah, or God, you must believe in something higher than yourself to make it out of that valley. And it's going to be through prayer” (Esther, 2022).

Education

It is not surprising to the researcher that education had only two participants responded that they would give that advice to their younger selves. The responses, though, were related to getting an education at an early age from the participants who did not initially graduate from high school or who got married with children at age eighteen.

Education is key to any success, especially those of Black youth. Wright et al. (2010) present an interesting look into the negative educational experiences of Black youth who are excluded from education. They illustrate the experience of excluding Black students from education, how they cope with living in an oppressive society, and how the consequences of these experiences apply to a broader social context. The book seeks to point out that the social conditions for Black youth are different from that of White youth, which the authors argue, should be considered when creating educational policies.

The study participants responded that they would advise their younger selves on the importance of education. In the Kowalski and McCord (2020) study, education was top of the list as advice. In their research, education advice consisted mainly of urges to return to school or finish college.

Joseph, who dropped out of high school, mentioned that he would advise his younger self to “stay in school, focus on the education” (2022). Ruth recalled that she would not have

succeeded if it weren't for the magnet school she attended. Rachel mentioned that education was not a choice in her house; she had older siblings who instilled the importance of education in her from a very young age. "It wasn't if she was going to college but, where?"

Other Responses

For some, the advice offered to a younger self might reflect counterfactual thinking. Counterfactual thinking is thinking about a past that did not happen. Often this is the case "if only ..." situations, where we wish something had or had not happened (Migliore et al. 2014). For example, the advice of "don't marry him" may reflect the counterfactual thought of "If only I had not married him, my life would have turned out so much better." Indeed, counterfactuals such as this that reflect better-imagined alternatives that could have resulted had different choices been made are often associated with the emotion of regret (Kowalski and McCord, 2020). As noted in Table 9, only one participant in this study responded with regret; Sarah responded, "would not have been married with children, at 18 years old" (2022). Other participants may have experienced a form of regret related to some of the other domains earlier in their lives; since they were able to overcome the adversities to make it to successful, prominent positions, they no longer see these as regrets. Some researchers endorse the opportunity principle and believe that people's greatest regrets are tied to negative choices and situations that (a) still have an opportunity for a positive outcome and (b) have a high probability for corrective action (Kowalski & McCord, 2020). For example, even though someone may have missed the opportunity earlier in life to finish school, as participant Joseph did, he overcame that challenge. The advice he would give is to be to "stay in school" (Joseph, 2022). He didn't show regret, and he didn't respond to don't drop out of high school, which is defined as counterfactual.

Research Question Three: Leadership Styles

The participants responded to Research Question Three: *What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?*

Leadership is the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2010). Most leaders prescribe to Northouse's definition theoretically and in practice. Goethals and Sorenson (2006), though, after much debate with other leadership scholars, concluded that there are many different definitions and disciplines of leadership. Leadership is not one-size-fits-all, and there may never be an integrated, general theory. The appropriate leadership style depends upon the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Sample, 2002). Some contexts call for autocratic leadership, some for participative or consultative approaches, and still others call for transformational leadership (Burns, 1978).

When the researcher asked the participants about the leadership styles and behaviors they develop and use to achieve prominent positions, they responded as outlined in Table 11.

Table 11 – Responses to Preferred Leadership Styles by Participants

	Preferred Leadership Style
Esther	"Definitely I'm a servant leader," where giving back is a priority.
Joseph	"For leadership skills I always had that charisma to like, kind of get in there and see where you are and talk to people where we need to lead people. Left or right. And things like that. And just trying to be very, influential, basically."
Sarah	"I am just an independent thinker." "And so, in my ability to lead, I don't want to be influenced by other people."
Martha	"I believe wholly in servant leadership. I actually think that servant leadership is even more important in business than for nonprofits. It's the way that I interface with my team, it's the way that I talk about being a leader with my board."
Ruth	"I would like to say a collaborative approach."

Rachel	Servant leadership: "So, I think that really understanding too the people that you are serving the people you are trying to help. But the people who are part of your team, and understanding that they have needs too, just like the people that you serve."
David	"Well, participatory. I like to include people in the decision-making. I like to get the buy-in, with occasional authoritarian leadership."
Paul	"For me it's consultative. I think that anytime you have teams, it's important to hear those opinions and its important to get buy-in. I like consultative decisions."
John	"Inspirational leader."
Joshua	"I make it very collaborative; give people the tools to do what they need to do, and then hands-off."
Hannah	"Servant leadership."
Naomi	"Collaborative."
Deborah	"I'm kind of like the peacemaker. I'm more of compromising person. Bring everybody together."

Interpretation of Research Question Three:

The researcher's interpretation after assessing the lived experiences and the essence of the responses by the participants is that most of them possess natural leadership abilities, skills, and traits. It was difficult for the researcher to appropriately connect some participants' responses to traditional leadership theories' definitions. After asking the question, *what your preferred leadership trait and ability is while in your prominent position?* Most discussed their actions and behaviors and did not identify an academic trait. Sarah responded, "Oh, is there a name for it? I don't think about it; I just do it" (2022).

It was also apparent that most of the participants preferred servant leadership. Transformational leadership was clearly illuminated throughout the discussion of leadership preference since the participants were inspirational in raising the morality level of others; and have transformed their own lives by changing circumstances and environments and participated

in transforming other lives. It was also evident that all applied situational leadership and general traits and behaviors outlined by scholars are required to be influential leaders.

Natural Leadership Traits

Leadership is an art that is traditionally taught as a science impacted by various psychological concepts. It is both a natural phenomenon and a learned attribute planted, nurtured, developed, and tested over time (Hughbank & Horn, 2013). Specific leadership approaches are formal, only succeeding in formal settings and environments. In contrast, others depend on the leader's conditioning, which the researcher interprets as the case in this study by most of these participants.

The approach to the study of leadership usually has been and perhaps always must be through the analysis of traits. Leadership obviously is not a simple trait but rather a complex of many traits fashioned together as a unity. A good appraisal of leadership would reduce this complexity to its individual units. Any study of leadership as a value should produce a list of traits that go together to make the leader. One of the distinctions is between so-called natural leadership and leadership in specific situations, a distinction used in the specificity of leadership (Cowley, 1928, 2016).

Naturally Selected examines the evolution of leadership over several million years, from birds and bees to apes and humans, and presents a compelling new hypothesis: the slow pace of evolution has resulted in a mismatch between modern leadership and the kind of leadership for which our Stone Age brains are wired (van Vugt & Ahuja, 2011). Their theory is natural leadership abilities are just as effective as formal leadership training; because the birds and bees did not have formal training but demonstrated exceptional leadership.

The researcher observed that some participants demonstrated natural leadership traits as described by Dennis (2014) such as technical aspects of practice applied to develop capacities such as self-confidence, autonomy, trust, resilience and energetic. In most cases, natural leaders will not be trying to lead, they are just being themselves and following their vision, others choose to go along with them (Brady, 2017). It's not very common that a natural leader will see themselves as such until they grow a bit older. When someone is young, they may just assume that this is how people are and that they are the same as everyone else. However, as they grow older and learn more about the world, they will become more aware of their talents in leading others (Brady, 2017). Natural leadership is a gift that not many have, and it can be of great use to those who embrace it and learn how to polish that skill. In the end, leadership is a skill. Those born with the natural traits of a good leader can go on to be great leaders with knowledge and practice, but others can also learn to be good leaders by embracing the right training and acquiring the necessary knowledge (Brady, 2017).

This is the interpretation of the responses from the participants in this study. Participants responded to the secondary question of *when they first recognized their leadership abilities*. The essence of the participants' responses connects with many leadership traits and the natural leadership phenomenon described by Dennis (2014) and Brady (2017).

Joseph, the leader of a gang who was incarcerated as a teen, states, "I think I was probably 9 or 10 or so, and my uncles wouldn't let me join a gang or hang around with them. I was like, well, I'm going to make my own gang. All the kids in the apartments together and started my own gang. I was amazed they actually followed me and did what I said. I remember it's just negotiation skills, you know. And so, with that, just managing these people without really any kind of structured leadership training, I never really been

through any structured leadership training. I always had leadership skills; you know” (2022).

Martha responded that “I didn’t recognize it. My track coach was our class advisor. And he said to me; I think you should run for treasurer of the class. And so, even then, I didn’t realize I had leadership abilities. But people trusted me. So, for that first time, I said, hum? Sometimes people see stuff in you that you don’t see, and you should probably do it just because they see it. And that was one of those experiences” (2022).

Ruth recalled, “I was around 16 when I said I would be school president. Before you knew it, I was captain of everything I was on, the lead for this. I think when I was 16 when I had confidence in myself. And then, I think that I started seeing results. It seemed like things that I set my mind on; I would see the exact conclusion or resolution that I wanted. I realized that any shortcomings that I had, I could change. So, when that happened, I realized how much control I had over my own life; I realized that I’m confident enough now to start looking at being a leader or having a change or impact on the class or school, and not just on me” (2022).

John recalls when he first realized his leadership abilities were “A long time ago. It was just natural for me to step into those roles and engage with people. I think at age 21 I was president of the NAACP in Board County” (2022).

Joshua’s experience was, “So by sixth grade, I’d already been considered the best at what I was doing. I’d already won a championship, scoring 15 points in the last 14 minutes of the game and overtime after not scoring for two games. I had the thrill of victory and the

agony of defeat, and when you feel like a champion. Really been made to feel that way. And I internalized that. And sought eventually, through the struggles to return to that kind of moment; and I finally let myself be THE guy. And I learned that there was something to my judgment that I had good judgment. But more importantly, is that I was a good listener. I realized that I was the leader, and I understood that, and it's a gift - and I give God glory for it- that I connect with people in a way that affects them on the inside, not just on the outside. And that's not something that you teach. The Bible says God's gifts and callings are without repentance” (Joshua, 2022).

“Being a leader in my high school, it was making sure that everything went off as planned; the parade, the student-teacher basketball game, being able to delegate the authority to make sure things get done. It was being able to bring everybody together and being able to meet the mission of that organization” (Deborah, 2022).

The essence of the participants’ responses is that they possess the natural feeling and responsibility to serve as leaders. They naturally demonstrate the desire to serve, to naturally transformed their lives and the lives of others, and naturally possess leadership traits described by leadership scholars.

Servant Leadership Traits

Many of the participants described their style of leadership as servant leadership. The servant leadership concept is one of the most intriguing leadership approaches receiving a great deal of current attention regarding implementation (Boone & Makhani, 2013). For the past four decades, servant leadership has evolved as a reputable leadership theory and construct. Literature and empirical studies describing the characteristics and measures of servant leadership have

started more recently to show the positive impact of servant leadership in individuals, teams, and organizations. (Coetzer, et al, 2017).

The term servant leadership was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970 essay *The Servant as a Leader*. Greenleaf spent his forty-year career at a major corporation working in management, research, development, and education. In his essay, he describes servant leadership: "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first..." According to Greenleaf, servant leaders intend to help followers "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13).

Robert K. Greenleaf introduced the concept of servant leadership in 1970; many successful leaders have adopted this style in various contexts (Boone & Makhani, 2012). According to the authors, servant leadership can be a highly effective style for influencing a group toward the achievement of organizational goals if a leader possesses or can readily adopt attitudes such as 1) believing that visioning isn't everything, but it's the beginning of everything, 2) listening is hard work requiring a significant investment of personal time and effort - and it is worth every ounce of energy expended, 3) committing to the followers' success, 4) giving away your power; and 5) being a community builder (Boone & Makhani, 2013).

Although Greenleaf coined servant leadership, its original principles can be found in the Bible. For example, in Mark 10: 42–45 (*New International Version Bible*, 1978), Jesus said: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave to all. For even

the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Coetzer et al., 2017). Servant leaders recognize the empowerment of their people as an essential goal. If you are going to be a servant leader, you need to start by being a servant (Boone & Makhani, 2013); and as a servant leader, one does not force people to follow but walks among them and moves in a direction that can unite all in a shared vision. The philosophy is “I am a leader. Therefore, I serve” rather than “I am a leader; therefore, I lead” (Boone & Makhani, 2013).

The researcher observed the essence of many of the participants’ leadership practices as servant leadership. Some responses were:

“A leader is somebody that serves people. I’m a servant leader in my current position (Esther, 2022). I like to stay in the background and let people shine. I’d like to teach, mentor, and empower. So that by the time I’m done, I can work myself out of a job every time because people are very empowered to make decisions” (Esther, 2022).

Martha recalls, “I believe wholly in servant leadership. I actually think that servant leadership is even more important in business than for nonprofits. It’s the way I interface with my team, the way I talk about being a leader with my board, and I listen well” (2022).

Rachel reflects, “Being in your truth. This is who I am, having people understand that and letting them be who they are. And how you work together to build success. So, I think that understanding, too, the people that you are serving, the people you are trying to help. But the people who are part of your team, and understanding that they have needs too, just like the people you serve” (2022).

Hannah recalls that she “didn’t care if I got the recognition, team building, or getting the sales up. I was always comfortable with others doing the input as long as it got it.

Because ultimately, if you have a good team, you will look good anyway. Make people feel threatened or threatened by them. It was about serving others because I’m not threatened by the people under me” (2022).

Servant leadership cuts across various leadership theories but is unique in its philanthropic characteristics, leadership intent and focus, and multi-dimensional leadership attributes. It focuses on serving people first (Greenleaf, 1977), aims to achieve an extraordinary vision that creates value for the community, and includes situational, transformational, and personal trait dimensions of leadership. For example, the servant leadership theory shares similarities with transformational leadership in focusing on inspiring, uplifting and motivating people and results. Still, it is different because it concentrates on people and applies a different leadership intent (Coetzer et al. 2017).

Servant leadership also includes the relational aspects of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) to build relationships, uses the principles of situational leadership to develop people, applies the authentic attributes of authentic leadership, supports the collaboration aspects of enterprise leadership, includes some of the components of level 5 leadership, and shares the spirituality traits of spiritual leadership. However, servant leadership is much more comprehensive and has other essential dimensions of leadership that are missing from these leadership theories (Northouse, 2016; Coetzer et al., 2017).

The researcher identified some of the various leadership theories in the participants as it relates to transformational (Burns, 1978; and Bass, 1985), situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Sample, 2002), as well as models such as leader-member exchange (LMX)

(Northouse, 2016), relationship building and traits that make a good leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Transformational Leadership

In terms of this study and the participants emerging from poverty and adversity into prominent leadership positions, the participants have experienced transformation and were transformed since they all made significant changes in their lives and transformed their circumstances and environments. Those transformational behaviors are now being demonstrated in their prominent leadership positions.

Transformational leadership is the single most effective style. Burns (1978) states that leadership is a process of morality to the degree that a leader engages with followers based on shared motives, values, and goals. It outlines a strategy to get to common morals and shared goals. Transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration on both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. Perhaps the best modern example is Gandhi, who aroused and elevated the hopes and demands of millions of Indians and whose life and personality were enhanced in the process. These descriptions align with the essence of the participants' beliefs of behavior attributes.

Researcher Bernard M. Bass later expanded upon Burn's theory. Bass (1985) argued that transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than expected by a) raising followers' levels of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals; b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and c) moving followers to address higher-level needs (Northouse, 2016).

The theory of morality aligns with all four transformational leadership Is: 1.) Idealistic, 2.) Individual Influence, 3.) Inspiring, and 4.) Intellectual (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Thereby

transforming the circumstance and the relationship and building trust in one another; cannot be done overnight. Followers want someone with who they can relate, someone who has things in common with them, a leader with who they can make a connection. This theory can be seen in the participants' responses related to their values, morals, and motives. Burns argues that it is a process because it takes time to transform; it takes trust, a relationship, and collaboration. These attributes can be found in the styles used by the participants. Esther's preferred leadership style aligns with Burn's transformational leadership. Esther recalls that her lived experiences as a child made her the leader she is today.

“And transferred over to being a good leader and having those same characteristics that show up in the workplace.” “Because that's what I learned at an early age. That leadership is something that comes from within and is built on a certain characteristic” (Esther, 2022).

Burns (1978) also describes transformational leadership as occurring when leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transforming leadership involves a deeper, longer-lasting relationship that includes commitments of morality, mutual respect, and shared values. The commitment allows the parties to raise one another up. They need to know that it is a process and doesn't happen overnight. During this process, every good leader should fully comprehend, focus, and champion the needs and motivations of other leaders, followers, and foes (Burns, 1978). And understand the emotions of others as the transformation process evolves, resulting in every good leader feeling a moral connection, a relationship, and a deeper commitment to their followers.

“I think that the big thing with me is I’m always looking at ways to change the status quo. If it’s unfavorable, what can I do? What role can I play to be a piece of that change, to really help that group make that change?” (Ruth, 2022).

I define leadership as being able to impact or affect change within some groups or within some type of environment. To me, leadership does not always have to come from someone who is identified as the leader. I look at leadership as being the one who is part of the change of the organization. To me, that’s leadership because being part of the group is taking the step. It is someone who is part of the change, willing to accept change, and has an impact (Ruth, 2022).

A good leader will continue to study and practice exemplary transformational leadership and raise one another up morally as Gandhi who is an example of transformational leadership when he aroused and elevated the hopes and demands of millions of Indians and whose life and personality were enhanced in the process. The participants in this study transformed their circumstances and environments, thus inspiring and raising the hopes of others in their situation.

This type of leadership practice is needed in any discipline. Transformational leadership transcends all fields, and any good leader should continue to study and practice it. There will always be a need to transform organizations and people and to be change agents. Leaders must study transformational leadership to stay abreast of additional scholarly studies, practices, and principles to apply in changing situations. Practice continuing to gain experience and develop skills. However, transformational leadership will always be needed if there are followers, projects, and changes.

The participants in this study have demonstrated exemplary transformational leadership in their own lives, transforming from adversity to prominent positions. They are giving back and transforming the lives of others and adapting to changing situations that align with situational leadership. With transformational leadership, it takes time; it is not overnight. They needed to adapt to various conditions.

Situational Leadership Traits

Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) situational leadership theory (SLT) model suggests that no single leadership style is better than another. Steven Sample emphasizes that leadership is highly situational and contingent (2002).

This study presented lived experiences of leaders who were required to continuously improve their abilities to respond to the leadership situation when it arises. Some participants were required to respond to the changing environments in their lives, shifting and adjusting from their traumatic experiences in their childhood to prominent leaders. An effective leader needs to be flexible and have transferable skills to meet the needs of the time and their environment. They were faced with unplanned, spur-of-the-moment situations and circumstances at any given time during their leadership journey that required their attention. Whether it was the types of people and the world view of others, their environment, educational level, professional status, language, or vernacular, the participants found the need to adjust their leadership style, approach, and behavior to fit the situation.

Some participants had little or no formal education, going from interfacing with those in their communities as adolescents to those in the board rooms; they had to adjust to leading followers with streetwise decision-making approaches and natural leadership abilities to those with formal education and high-level professional statuses. Joseph, a high school dropout who

received his GED, mentioned that “All the team members who work for me have higher level degrees” (Joseph, 2022).

These leaders need to be able to shift their styles based on situations as part of transformational leadership; if not, they will be unable to respond to the changing environment, organizational challenges, and the needs of their followers. With that, the followers' and constituents' trust and confidence will be diminished. David had to adapt and change his leadership style to the situation when leading various people and leaders. He emphasizes that if you really want to move some things along in a decision-making process, you must adapt your leadership style to the situation.

But when you're dealing with successful people, other than followers, you have to be diplomatic in how you deal with people to move things along and how you lead people who are already leaders in, their own right (David, 2022).

Sarah recalls, “So I think the leadership is really about being confident in who you are as a person. I never saw myself as a leader or even having a leadership style. What I've found myself was a little Black girl at a large corporation” (Sarah, 2022).

In listening to Sarah's story, the essence was the adapting to the change of her style that had been transformed to meet the current situation is situational leadership. Yet she and the other participants apply a variety of leadership traits, characteristics, and what leadership scholars define as effective leadership models.

Leadership Traits, Characteristics, and Models

Whether it is servant, transformational or situational leadership, specific leadership traits, characteristics, and principles need to be applied to be an effective leader. The participants in this

study responded with the essence of possessing and using the appropriate leadership traits and characteristics during their natural leadership experiences at a younger age and in their current prominent positions.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) have the Five Traits Model of what characteristics it takes to be an exemplary leader: 1) Model the Way; 2) Inspire a Shared Vision; 3) Challenge the Process; 4) Enable Others to Act; 5) Encourage the heart. Also, the characteristics most admired in leaders of honesty, forward-looking, inspiration, and competence.

The five traits and characteristics model by Kouzes and Posner can be identified as traits in many of the participants' leadership styles and how they practice leadership. An exemplary leader needs to be self-aware and know their personal characteristics and what it takes to be at their personal best. The authors argue that these are behaviors people admire in leaders. They accurately say that people do not admire "what" (or skills) a person may have but "who" that person is – their behaviors. I have learned that people do not leave bad jobs; they leave bad bosses or leaders with bad behaviors.

Deborah states, "I'm kind of like the peacemaker. I'm more of a compromising person. Bring everybody together. So, I guess I bring the same leadership in dealing with the lawyers – doing more pro-bono work, doing more things that make a difference; people who know me know that I live by the starfish philosophy. Meaning that you see all these starfish washed up on the ocean, and when all the starfish wash up you know that you made a difference in that starfish life, even if it's just one."

Northouse's (2016) Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and model. This theory conceptualizes leadership as a process centered on the interactions between a leader,

subordinates, or followers. Good leaders should be aware of the makeup of groups, some in-group and others out-group, and how they should respond to each. They should strive to develop high-quality exchanges with all followers and should make every effort to make all employees at all levels feel like they are part of the in-group. And they should work to build relationships, trust and respect with both groups. This model can also be characterized as collaborative or participatory.

Ruth “I would like to say a collaborative approach. I’ve held certain positions when I’ve held the top leadership position. I have learned that, even if I’m the one over everything, you all find a way to create a collaborative plan, and you all move forward together” (2022).

David mentions, "Well, participatory. I like to include people in the decision-making; I like to get the buy-in, with occasional authoritarian leadership."

Collaborative and participatory leaders should be conscience that their collaborative behavior may be mistaken as being laissez-faire. Laissez-faire leadership is a hands-off approach to leadership characterized by passive indifference (Singfiel, 2018). The laissez-faire leader abdicates responsibility, fails to implement decisions promptly, and is reluctant to either provide feedback to followers or support them in meaningful ways (Singfiel, 2018; Northouse, 2012). Research in the late 1930s explored laissez-faire leadership empirically, where the leader simply provided the resources necessary for a task without directing, supporting, or stimulating subordinates regarding their task; the outcomes were poor (Singfiel, 2018; Bass, 1990). In the 1980s and 1990s, laissez-faire leadership was included on the far end of the continuum with transformational leadership (Singfiel, 2018; Bass, 1985) and is sometimes referred to as “non-

leadership” (Singfiel, 2018; Northouse, 2012). Scholars conceptualized laissez-faire leadership as part of a group of transactional leadership processes, including management by exception (active and passive) and contingent reward (Singfiel, 2018; Northouse, 2012; Yukl, 2013). Closely related to laissez-faire leadership, leaders who operate by management-by-exception (passive) do not engage in problems until they are forced to do so by circumstances. To followers, laissez-faire leaders fail to show up. Followers are provided with the resources necessary to do a task but not provided with the direction, feedback, or support necessary to perform well. Laissez-faire leadership could generate more conflict among followers as well as increased bullying and workplace stress (Singfiel, 2018).

This theory could be the case in Joshua’s leadership style; he may be perceived as laissez-faire.

Joshua responded, “I use a combination of independence and guidance. So, I don’t want my young attorney, my paralegal to feel stranded, but I do want them to take ownership of their result. So that they build confidence as they do things they’ve never done before. I want to set them up to do things they’ve never done before. I want to set them up to be thinkers as well. I give people the tools to do what they need to do and make them accountable for it. So, my leadership combination is – I’m not so hands-off that they’re stranded, but I’m not so hands-on that they can’t breathe” (2022).

Other vital principles and traits are what Kouzes & Posner (2012) focus on what people look for and want from a leader. People look for and admire some personal qualities, characteristics, and attributes in a person they are willing to follow. Kouzes and Posner’s five practices of exemplary leadership and other characteristics admired by followers in a leader are: honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring (2012). Further, every good leader should

have good morals, values, and beliefs and should *do* what you said you would do (DWYSYWD) to build credibility and trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Every good leader should *feel* empathy and a connection with their followers and be passionate about the values of others.

Goethals and Sorenson (2006) emphasize the human condition and leader-follower relations. Followers need to identify with the leader, make a human connection, and believe and trust in them. Followers need the human condition as it satisfies their need to know the leader is “human.” They can then trust in the vision, feel like they belong, and be open to the leader's direction. Leaders should stay credible, demonstrate fairness and honesty, and be trustworthy to followers to maintain that trust and belief. The leader can then *feel* confident that they satisfy the needs of the followers and that they can sustain the relationship.

In responding to the question about the leadership styles, traits, and principles that the participants feel are important, the participants stated:

John responded, “Inspiring people. There is a difference between managing people and telling them what to do. If you inspire people and motivate them, they are committed, and they also inspire to be like you” (2022).

“So, if I talk about leadership in my work, it’s about consultation with my clients. A lot of times, telling them—you have to say to people who are making millions of dollars a year that that’s not going to work—and confidently saying it. So that confidence that I had to be a leader in high school and college, it transfers over to my position now when I have to tell the millionaires and clients that I have that year, and able to convince them and be able to explain to them why; in turn them trusting in me with that information and their resolution. I think that the big thing, through my confidence in consultation with my clients, that’s leadership, in that aspect” (Ruth, 2022).

Joseph says, “So for leadership skills, I always had that charisma to like, kind of get in there and see where you are and talk to people where we need to lead people—left or right. And things like that. And just trying to be very, influential, basically” (2022).

Paul recalls, “I think that anytime you have teams, it’s important to hear those opinions, and it’s important to get buy-in. Often, that buy-in and their contribution are entered into the final product. I believe in people’s contributions; maybe they haven’t even had a chance to do that. So, I don’t tell people my title. If I tell you my title, there’s something wrong with me” (2022).

“So, for leadership skills, I always had that charisma to like, kind of get in there and see where you are and talk to people where we need to lead people—left or right. And things like that. And just trying to be very, influential, basically” (Joseph, 2022).

These leadership qualities transferred over to Joseph’s preferred leadership style as he led his prominent leadership position. He states it’s the same strategy as “just being good to people” (Joseph, 2022). “... People just want to follow me if they feel like it’s a good idea” (Joseph, 2022). Joseph states he encourages his team to speak up if they have better ideas: Don’t just follow him because he’s the boss.

Chapter Summary

The researcher introduced the population of the thirteen participants and their profiles, their poverty IDs, and ACE scores. The researcher provided an analysis of the interview transcription, codebook analysis, and the connection between the lived experiences and the self-determination theory (SDT). The three research questions presented findings, insights, and interpretations. The researcher identified limitations related to the ACE questionnaire and scale regarding diversity and the Black community, social and cultural differences, and other biases.

The researcher used the snowball or rhizomatic approach to select the participants. This method presented a limitation concerning confirming the participants and their prominent leadership positions. For this study, a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, has leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making. Although all participants are in a leadership position, the limitation is that not all participants' current positions met the definition, which had not been uncovered until the interview process.

Chapter Five will explore and discuss responses to the limitations, essential themes, and sub-themes that emerged and recommendations for further research.

PART 4

Conclusion

Part 1 The Nature of the Research Problem	Chapter 1 Introduction/Problem Statement
	Chapter 2 Literature Review
Part 2 Research Methodology & Procedures	Chapter 3 Research Methodology
Part 3 Findings	Chapter 4 Research Results and Analysis
Part 4 Conclusion	Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings
	Chapter 6 Implications and Conclusions

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

Chapter Overview

This study provides background and extensive literature review to understand better and establish a connection between Blacks in poverty, adversities, the extraordinary trauma they may have experienced as a child, and factors that helped lead them to successful, prominent positions. The researcher used the phenomenological qualitative research method that included interviews to allow the participants to describe their lived experiences. The researcher captured the life stories and narratives of thirteen Blacks. Evident in this study are emergent themes and subthemes from the participants.

Quality and reliable qualitative research methods aim to garner representative samples that clearly answer the question "what is happening here" (Tracy, 2013, p. 40). This current study supports Tracy's argument. The makeup of the thirteen participants was diverse, living in states from across the nation, living in various forms of poverty, and from different types of communities ranging from urban, suburban to small-town rural. This diverse set of participants provides a diverse group of lived experiences and triangulation. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest that corroborating evidence through triangulation, the researcher will need to use multiple and different sources, methods, and investigations to support evidence. Examples include various sources as provided in this study. The findings from the life stories confirmed the diversity of the participants in terms of the types of leadership positions they hold; participants in this study succeeded in achieving a variety type of prominent positions from multi-million-dollar nonprofits, corporate leadership positions, attorneys, and judge positions; the kind of adversity and trauma experienced; the ACE scores were wide-range; the various types of communities, family makeup, and motivating factors experienced.

The three research questions used in the study: 1) What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions? 2) How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?; and 3) What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions? These questions helped to translate the findings into themes, recommendations, and contributions (Scruggs, 2019).

The study was able to construct that a disproportionate number of Blacks live in poverty, face higher levels of adversities while growing up, and, as a result, have far more significant challenges in achieving, sustaining, and being successful in prominent leadership positions than non-Blacks.

Poverty

Fisher (2000) explained that the government sets a definition of poverty based on the number of members in the household and the amount of income generated in the household to determine the percentage of the population that needs assistance to maintain a basic level of comfort. Consistent with much literature on the topic, poverty can come in various forms ranging from generational, low-income, situational, rural, and urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2013; The Children's Defense Fund, 2013; Payne, 2003; Addy et al. 2013; Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Washington et al., 2012; Duncan, 1992; Lombard, 2018). Each of the thirteen participants in this study responded that they lived in some form of poverty as a child; nine of the thirteen identified as living in urban poverty in communities of crime and violence, and others responded in other categories. Some participants experienced extreme poverty, meaning they experienced multiple forms of poverty, they went without food, their family was on low-income assistance,

and they lived in urban communities riddled with crime and violence. Payne (2003) and Cook (2021) maintain that the problem is youth raised in poverty is unlikely to leave poverty.

The findings in this study support literature that shows about one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018); and although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, they unequally have 28% living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; 2020). In this study, each of the thirteen Black participants lived in poverty, which is also in line with studies that show that poverty, in general, is on the rise in the improvised and low-income communities where Blacks primarily reside. In 2019, 26% of Black children were impoverished, and Black children are still about three times as likely as other children to live in poverty: Asians at 7% and Whites at 8% (Thomas and Fry, 2020). This study support literature with findings that 100% of the thirteen participants lived in a form of poverty.

Participants' lived experiences and stressors because of their poverty have long-term effects. Cook explains that children start life on an unequal economic footing, which has important implications for their future wellbeing. Children living in poverty can lack the opportunities of those in the middle or upper class, especially if they are in the cycle of generational poverty (2021). All thirteen participants lived in generational poverty as a child.

Poverty and lifelong psychological consequences – Multiple scholars argue that living in poverty, especially in the Jim Crow era and segregation as in Hannah's case, creates and maintains a culture of racial hierarchy and subjugation (Powell, 1996; Evans & Kim, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). Effects are tough on children who face an increased level of stress that can lead to emotional and behavioral problems (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Cook, 2021).

Examples of stressors associated with concentrated poverty can have far-reaching psychological and physical consequences. Poverty is an influential factor that can alter lifetime developmental trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes (Barton & Coley, 2010; Shipler, 2004; Evans, 2013). Findings from the participant responses of lived experiences support this literature with life stories from Ruth, who still has a scar on her forehead from being hit by a bat while living in a violent urban community; Joshua, who mentioned he still has an auto-immune disease as a result of the anxiety of living in poverty; Rachel who recalled being hospitalized for multiple days due to physical abuse and psychological effects; and Esther who lost a lung at age nineteen.

Poverty and underachievement – Literature from Washington, Hughes, and Cosgriff (2011), maintain that growing up in an impoverished home or blighted neighborhood can have profound influences on youth, including poor academic performance, school dropout, unemployment, substance abuse, and incarceration (Sharkey, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Bass (2019) argues that Black students and students from high-poverty backgrounds often achieve beneath their potential; there is a distinct opportunity gap between the Blacks, and White and Asian peers, especially those who are of higher income. This argument was what Joseph experienced because of living in extreme poverty. He was a high school dropout, gang leader, and incarcerated as a teen; Esther was a teen mom.

Poverty and ACEs – This study was able to confirm that there is a relationship between poverty and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Lacey et al. (2020) argue that there is evidence from a longitudinal study that aimed to identify ACEs' relationship to poverty that includes clusters specific to poverty. Poverty is a solid reinforcing factor in the accumulation of ACEs and subsequent toxic stress correlated with unfavorable health outcomes in adulthood,

childhood poverty, chronic stress, self-regulation, and coping (Cook, 2021; Evans, 2013). Hughes and Tucker (2018) explain that being poor is associated with so many childhood adversities that it may be considered an ACE, more pervasive and persistent than all others. Evidence indicates that poverty is highly related to ACE exposure and that children living in poverty are more likely than their peers to experience frequent and intense adversities (Steele & Steele, 2016). Therefore, Lacy et al. (2020) suggest that reducing child poverty might be one strategy for lowering ACEs.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experience (ACE) questionnaires and scales have been widely used in multiple studies by Kaiser Permanente and by other scholars. Ample research and studies contend that ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can negatively affect health and wellbeing (Sacks, V. et al., Child Trends, 2014; Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE scale is a self-report questionnaire where the participant gets one point for each adversity listed. The higher the participant's ACE score, the higher the likelihood that the adverse experience leads to severe adversity (Felitti et al., 1998).

The ACE questionnaire and scale were adapted in this study (see Appendix C). This questionnaire and scale measure maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, a mother who was a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death, or abandonment, household incarceration, and teen pregnancy. This current study used the ACE scale to measure the adversities of the participants.

ACEs and urban communities – In the study by Ferrer and Moore (2020), their results found that ACEs are far more common in urban, poor communities. These results are supported

by this study's findings, as nine of the thirteen participants responded that they lived in urban communities with urban poverty of violence and crime (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Lombard, 2018). Eight participants who lived in urban poverty scored four or more on the ACE scale, supporting Ferrer and Moore's (2020) findings, and classified as severe adversities. The participants in this study scored three or more as severe adversity, supporting Felitti et al. (1988)'s study. An example of a participant who scored four on the ACE scale and who lived in urban poverty was Rachel. Her trauma and adversity included a boy trying to take her virginity at age six, witnessing drive-by shootings, and seeing a friend get shot in the head.

Whoopins as ACEs - Findings on the ACE scale showed ten of the thirteen participants scored a yes on question four: *did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?* The Urban Dictionary (2006) defines whupins as receiving discipline through a beating, usually administered to a miscreant by a person in authority, such as a parent or other capable adult. The term is used mainly by Black people to describe what happens to kids when they get into trouble. It is a physical punishment inflicted by an adult on a child's body ranging in severity from a hit with a belt, a small switch from a tree branch, an extension cord, or a shoe to a spanking with bare hands. Afifi et al. (2017) argue that spanking (referred to as whoopins in the Black culture) is empirically like physical and emotional abuse and including spanking with abuse adds to our understanding of these mental health problems. Afifi et al. (2017) also argue that spanking should also be considered an ACE and addressed in efforts to prevent violence.

A finding is that participants responded from their cultural worldview of receiving whoopins as discipline as a child that left whelps and marks on their bodies. Paul recalled, "They (Foster parents) were really strict and heavy into corporal punishment, discipline; there were

electric cords, rubber hoses, things like that used in whoopins. Yeah – whatever was in the household, you could get a whoopin with it" (2022).

ACE questionnaire and scale limitations – The findings in this study also illuminated some limitations in using the existing ACE questionnaire and scale. Notable findings and limitation were mentioned by this study's participant, David, who scored only one on the ACE scale, defined as little or no adversity. He responded with wisdom from lived experiences stating, "just because you are Black, does not mean you grew up in a broken home or poverty" (2022). He emphasized that researchers and society should be conscious of using ACE scales and other sources that may further cultural stereotypes.

A theme that emerged is the participants in this study experienced severe adversity of violence, crime, teen pregnancy, high school dropout, and physical and emotional abuse. Yet they were able to rise and emerge into prominent positions; the essence of their responses can fall in the self-determination description.

Research Question One - Motivation

This study demonstrated that even though the participants lived through poverty and severe adversity and trauma, they could successfully garner prominent leadership positions. Following are discussions and findings of Research Question One: *What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?*

Motivation is a multi-dimensional framework because people are usually motivated by a combination of different factors. Multiple motivating theories align with this present study and the participants' lived experiences.

Self-determination theory (SDT) – Ample research and studies exist that maintain that in psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to

make choices and manages their own life (Cherry, J. (2021). As cofounders of the self-determination theory (SDT) concepts, Deci and Ryan (2017) argue that SDT is a human motivation and personality in a social context that differentiates motivation in terms of autonomous (intrinsically making their own decisions, rather than being influenced by someone) and controlled (extrinsically). The SDT theory was supported by the applied researcher using field studies and clinical trials to address significant social issues. This present study supported the SDT theory as the researcher established the relationship between the participants' motivation and the SDT.

According to SDT, three basic and universal psychological requirements propel humans to grow and evolve (Deci & Ryan, 2008c; Vansteenkiste et al, 2010); individuals can become self-determined if they meet the demands for autonomy, competence, relatedness, and connections. When people feel autonomous, they feel autonomously motivated; when they feel competence and a sense of relatedness, they will be motivated, and positive consequences will follow. There are two types of autonomous motivation: 1) intrinsic, which is to do something you are intrinsically motivated to do or that you do it because you find it exciting and enjoyable; and 2) extrinsic, which is if you do it because it leads to some separable consequence.

Intrinsic motivation – The intrinsic motivation concept defined by multiple scholars connects with the individual's personal will and supports the essence of the participants' responses of their personal will to succeed, determination, and resilience. Esther was firm in her internal personal will and determination to succeed after experiencing a teen pregnancy. She didn't let her adversity stop her; she was driven and stated, "the only person that can challenge you is you" (Esther, 2022). Rachel mentioned that she just believed she could do it, and she always kept going; even if someone told her no, she kept going and believed in herself. Hannah

further supported the intrinsic concept when she stated that she pushed herself growing up and didn't have anyone who cared enough about her to push in that regard; she relied on herself. Naomi says she was resilient and she was very much strong-willed, stating: "I'm a I can do all things type of person" (2022). Deborah recalls she was a "questioning of authority" type of child (2022).

Extrinsic motivation – Ryan and Deci argue that extrinsic behaviors are controlled by external forces (2017). The themes of the lived experiences of this current study support the argument that outside factors influence extrinsic motivations. The primary theme was the participants were influenced by their families. Other thematic responses included influences by teachers, pastors, community leaders, extended families, the village, and extra-curricular activities such as sports and church. An example of the participant responses that support the extrinsic concept was from Deborah when she stated, "A village helped her in influence and motivation; everybody watched out for everyone" (2022). She recalled her mom would say after she returned from school, "the teacher called today about you, checking on you and telling of some things you did wrong" (Deborah, 2022). Deborah further explained that extrinsic motivation was just a community of people that just took the time to ensure that you did what you were supposed to do. Regarding the extra-curricular extrinsic theme, several participants mentioned being too busy to get into trouble. Their parents, or guardians, kept them busy, which kept them from following the wrong crowd.

Religion, faith, and church – A notable and somewhat unexpected theme that emerged as a motivating factor was religion, church, faith, and the participants' belief in Christ. According to the study by Neyrinck et al. (2010), religion can be both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The argument is religion can first be an extrinsically motivated behavior and is externally

regulated when others force it as an incentive promise or punishment; the participants responded that initially, they were under pressure to attend church and religion. But most all participants responded their faith, religion, and willingness to attend church shifted to be intrinsic. Their responses support the argument of Neyrichk et al. (2010) that an intrinsically oriented person considers religion as an ultimate end in itself; it is a master motive in life. The participant's responses support the argument that their religious beliefs and values are now internalized without reservation. David's experience supports the argument as he stated, "I never deviated from it (church and religion), although now I understand it more today than I did back then. I went from doing it because I had to, to doing it because I want to" (2022). Other examples of themes are from Ruth, who responded that the values at home were strongly tied to the church and religious affiliation. Sarah mentioned being Black, you know, everybody went to church; and that's just the way we were raised, we grew up in the church, and we didn't get in trouble at school. Martha stated that faith, for sure; faith is absolutely the number one motivating factor, and I feel faith is incredibly important. Rachel recalls, "we had to go to church all the time. All my life, I went to church every Sunday went to church even if my mother didn't go, my neighbor picked me up (Rachel, 2022). Rachel expanded that now I know to listen to God more. He's with you all the time; you just need to listen. He gave us grace in those six days that He made us so we can get through everything. Naomi mentioned that she didn't want to go to church; she had to. But now she believes in the Word of God, period, and a faith walk.

Relationship between motivation and accomplishments – Hove (2017) and Winer (1995) argue there are two causal concepts and a relationship between motivation and accomplishments of an individual. The first causal concept as being unidirectional, indicating motivation influences a successful outcome (Hove, 2017; Weiner, 1995). The second causal concept

describes motivation as a cyclical relationship. The individual motivated by these relationships is encouraged to continue their success with multiple successful outcomes; thus, each previous achievement intrinsically motivates the individual toward future achievements (Hove, 2017; Dweck, 2007, 2010; Weiner, 1995).

Several participants interviewed in this study who lived in poverty, with severe adversity, and experienced trauma support this argument. They responded that they wanted more of it once they experienced achievement and accomplishments. Ruth stated she was motivated when she started seeing results, "seemed like things that I set my mind on, I would see the exact conclusion or resolution that I wanted. So, when I put my mind to something, I can actually acquire that. I realized that any shortcomings that I had, I could change those. So, when that happened, I realized how much control I had over my own life; I realized that I'm confident enough now to start looking at being a leader or having a change or impact on the class or school, and not just on me" (Ruth, 2022).

Education – A sub-theme that emerged as a motivating factor was education. Payne (1996) maintains that it is well-documented that "two things help one move out of poverty: education and relationships" (p. 11). The findings support this statement. The participants in this study have all been successful in emerging out of poverty and have garnered prominent leadership positions. The participant responses shared are consistent with Payne's statement. Joshua mentioned that his mom's focus on education was heavy. Paul recalls that he was a nerd, and education was his saving grace. He wasn't tall, or of a big stature, so he had to rely on education and academics. John also contributed education, and being a nerd helped him to stay focused and out of trouble. For Rachel, education was instilled in her life strongly as a child. She states that she "didn't have a choice, it wasn't if she was going to college, it was where" (Rachel,

2022); and Ruth stated, "if wasn't for the magnet school, I would have gone the other way" (2022).

Maslow's hierarchy – An influential motivating theme is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which maintains that five categories of human needs dictate an individual's behavior. Those needs are physiological, safety, love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Findings in this study show themes from the participants that support Maslow's theory. Participants responded that they relied on the physiological need of their parents or guardians. An example is from Paul, who was in foster care, mentioned that it was devastating and traumatic when he was frequently reminded by his foster parents that they were abandoned and unwanted. Safety needs, argued Maslow, are a lower-level need in his hierarchy.

This study and the response from the participants contradict Maslow's lower level. The participants who lived in urban communities riddled with crime and violence needed protection from drive-by shootings, gang violence, and wellbeing. Some participant responses referenced physical scars they still have due to the violence, the long-term emotional and physical behaviors, and the anxiety that continues to affect them. Maslow's third level is love and belonging need. The findings support this need; all participants responded they desired love and belonging from their parents, guardians, and "the village." Participants responded that their achievements were, in some cases, directly related to the feeling of love and belonging of teachers, coaching, parents, and extended family. John specifically attributed his success to his grandmother's love and his relationship with her. Naomi, who her grandparents raised, states that her grandparents treated her like a princess; but she felt like she didn't fit in and felt like an ugly duckling around others. Other participants who did not directly have love and a sense of belonging contributed to trauma in their lives. An example is Hannah, who was part of the

desegregation process and bused to an all-White school; she felt like she didn't fit in, which added to her childhood trauma.

Esteem is a higher need in Maslow's hierarchy. Maslow's theory suggests that esteem includes self-respect, the belief that you are valuable and deserving of dignity, self-esteem, and confidence. The findings in this study show that esteem is an important factor in motivation and needs. The essence of the participant responses in this study included the need to feel valued and confidence. Martha recalled teachers who gave her confidence and esteem to be active in leadership clubs and school activities. Joshua stated that a special teacher was extremely helpful in his self-esteem and confidence. Esther gained confidence and self-esteem from being the leader of a drill team; she felt valued, which instilled dignity. Without these needs being met, the participants would not have had the confidence and may have followed the wrong crowd.

Maslow's highest level of the need hierarchy is self-actualization or self-fulfillment need (1943). Maslow defines self-actualization including education, skill development, the refining of talents, caring for others, and broader goals. The findings in this study do not support this portion of Maslow's theory. Instead, the participant responses support the affirmation of achievement. Once they achieved a goal or received affirmation from others, they wanted to achieve more.

Research Question Two – Advice to Younger Selves

Research question two asked *how we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions*. To answer this question, the researcher asked the participants what advice they would give their younger selves. The findings of this research question support Philo's (2003) argument that we might access the worlds of children and childhood since they were once children. This present study explored the participants' narratives and their reflections on the advice they would give to their young selves. The findings are closely related to the essence of

the responses to Research Question One regarding motivating factors. This researcher's finding is that the participants would advise their young selves on the same factors that motivated them to succeed. The findings can be categorized into four themes of self-care, getting involved, religion and education.

Self-care – The participants overwhelmingly responded that the advice they would give their younger selves is related to self-care. The findings show the essence of the responses on self-care can be related to intrinsic care, taking care of themselves since, in some cases, no one else was around to fulfill that role. The responses from the participants support this finding were related to being kind to yourself, showing yourselves grace, saying everything will be all right; encouraging yourself because no one else will; finding a relaxation period; don't listen to others; you are great. The researcher repeatedly heard that the participants would tell their younger selves that "everything is going to be all right." These findings align with the Kowalski and McCord (2020) study. In their findings, selfhood was second only to relationships. In the Kowalski and McCord study, advice to one's younger self fell into seventeen categories. Relationships were the most cited category for advice by a large margin (18.2%), followed by education (10.6%), selfhood (10.4%), money (9.5%), and direction/goals (9.5%). The types of advice that people offered to their younger selves in that study were closely related to the responses from the participants in this current study in terms of education, self-care, being kind to yourself, being yourself, don't dwell on the past, just because it was that way doesn't mean it will be that way again. The essence of the participant responses in this study of "everything will be all right" supports the scholar's argument.

Get involved – The second theme that was garnered is getting involved. The findings show that the participants would clearly advise their younger selves to get involved and stay

busy. Several participants credit their involvement in activities as saving them from the streets and trouble. This finding is in line with the extrinsic motivating factor finding within the self-determination theory. Some of the participant responses were specific in terms of what their younger selves should get involved with, such as getting involved in things they think they hate; girls getting involved in arts and music; boys getting involved in nature.

Religion – The theme of religion, faith, and the church continued with the advice the participants would give to their younger selves. This finding is not a surprise since the theme was also illustrated in Research Question Two regarding what motivated the participants to succeed. The findings here show clearly that the participants believe in their religion and faith; and that they would reinforce that to their younger selves. Some responses included the participants advising their younger selves to listen to God more; reminding their younger selves that God is with you all the time; God will speak through you, and continue to believe and have faith.

Education – A theme from the participant responses included the importance of education as advice to their younger selves. Wright et al. (2010) describe the importance of education in the lives of youth, particularly Black youth. Wright et al. (2010) argue that education is essential for communal, societal constraints and social mobility, and there could be negative consequences with the exclusion of education. The participants in this study support the authors' argument with their desire to advise their younger selves of the importance of an education. Joseph, who dropped out of high school and later received his GED, would advise his younger self to stay in school and get an education. Other participants supported the important argument through their personal experiences, stating they didn't have a choice; it was instilled in them that they would go to college. Other participants said they would not have succeeded if it weren't for the magnet school, yet others mentioned that they didn't follow the wrong crowd because of academics and

that they were nerds. Some participants countered the get involved response, stating they would advise their younger selves not to get too busy in activities but to focus on education and self-care.

Research Question Three – Leadership

Themes, findings, and discussions related to Research Question Three are related to leadership: *What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?*

Black people account for about 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) and occupy only 3.2% of the senior leadership roles at large companies in the U.S. and just 1% of all Fortune 500 CEO positions. Black leaders are more likely than any other group to have experienced prejudice in the workplace (CoQUAL Formerly CTI, 2021). An important finding is that the participants in this study defied the odds by overcoming their poverty, adversity, and trauma to emerge into prominent leadership positions. It gives hope to other Blacks who aspire to be in leadership positions.

Ladner argues that some of today's best urban leaders don't work for the government-- they are found in nonprofit organizations that serve the working class & poor populations (2001). Based on the type of prominent leadership positions a substantial number of participants hold, the findings of this study support the argument. This argument can be supported by over half the participants being leaders in nonprofit organizations or positions that serve the community.

Natural leadership – Hughbank and Horn (2013) contend that leadership is both a natural phenomenon and a learned attribute that is planted, nurtured, developed, and tested over time. They argue that specific leadership approaches are formal, only succeeding in traditional settings and environments, while others depend on the leader's conditioning. Dennis (2014) argues that

natural leadership traits are developed capacities of self-confidence, autonomy, trust, and resilience. Some people are aware that they are natural leaders early on, but for most people they don't really know they are inspiring others and leading people right away. Since they are just being themselves and not trying to be the leader, it doesn't necessarily occur to them that they are being leaders. When something comes naturally, we don't always recognize it for what it is until others point it out to us (Brady, 2017).

A finding supports this based on the responses of the participants. All the participants responded that their leadership traits were developed naturally as teens and helped them to overcome adversity and trauma. The theme of their responses was that this occurred during the development of their leadership traits. They never had any formal or structured leadership training. Sarah responded to the question with, "is there a name for it (type of leadership)" (Sarah, 2022). Other themes gleaned were participants realizing others followed them and trusted them and their judgment.

Another theme that others told the participants is that they had leadership traits. Teachers, coaches, community, and church leaders encouraged them to step into leadership roles. Once in the leadership positions, the participants stated they developed self-confidence, took charge, delegated when necessary, and could bring everyone together. A sub-theme illuminated by the participant was they all developed their leadership traits related to natural leadership at a young age. Participants responded that they were as young as ten or in high school when they developed or recognized they had leadership traits.

Servant leadership – Greenleaf (1977, p. 13-14) argues that "the servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader

first..." According to Greenleaf, servant leaders intend to help followers grow healthier, wiser, more accessible, autonomous, and more likely to become servants. Servant leadership cuts across various leadership theories but is unique in its philanthropic characteristics, leadership intent and focus, and multi-dimensional leadership attributes. It focuses on serving people first (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership has been successfully practiced by Black business leaders throughout U.S. history (Prieto & Phipps, 2019). Popularized in the last century, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders considered agapao love fundamental to the civil rights movements (Selig, 2016).

The theme of the participant responses supports these arguments. Over half of the participants hold positions of service in nonprofit organizations and positions that serve the communities. The researcher can describe the essence of the participant responses as them being outright servant leaders. They mentioned possessing traits and behaviors of being servants first, staying in the background, letting people shine, and working themselves out of a job. Other themes were the importance of serving people, not being a leader, and serving for recognition.

Transformational leadership – Burns (1978) argues that transformational leadership is the single most effective style and that leadership is a process of morality to the degree that the leader engages with followers based on shared motives, values, and goals. Burns' theory outlines a process of getting to common morals and shared goals, nurturing relationships, and building trust in one another; this cannot be done overnight. Followers want someone they can relate to, someone who has things in common with them, and a leader they can connect with. Bass (1985) argued that transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than expected, and Burns (1978) further contends that transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers raise each other up. The participant responses align with the transformational leadership traits related

to values, morals, and motives. The researcher identified these attributes in the styles used by the participants' preferred leadership styles. The participants' behavior was uplifting and inspiring, changing and transforming their own circumstances and environment, thus inspiring and uplifting others.

A theme is the participants mentioning that the leadership traits they developed at an early age helped them transform their own individual circumstances and environments into good leaders and demonstrate the same characteristics now in the workplace. The participants further explain that leadership comes from within and is built on specific characteristics. A transformational leader engages employees with enthusiasm to vitalize them and instill a sense of meaning. This act is done through individualized consideration, which from a self-determination theory (SDT) perspective, is likely to support the basic psychological needs (Deci et al., 2017). The participants' responses regarding their self-determination and internal will to succeed, as outlined as findings of the motivating factors, supports the theory.

Palinkas (2013) argues that transformation is different than change, and change is a response to external influences, where modifying day-to-day action achieves results. Transformation is about modifying core beliefs and long-term behaviors, sometimes in profound ways. This latter argument is what aligns with and supports the essence of the participants' life stories. They not only changed their individual lives at that time, but they transformed their circumstances and environments, which led to transforming their life-long opportunities and outcomes. The participants, who stated they always looked at ways to change the status quo and what role they can play to make that change occur, support the argument. They mentioned they wanted to apply leadership to impact change within their organization and the environment.

Best leadership style for Blacks – According to T'Shaka (1989), African leaders have a twin role: first, they lead through following. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are the genuine mouthpieces of their people. Their voice is the people's voice. Great leaders are created by their people and become inspirations to their people (T'Shaka, 1989). A finding is that African Americans or Blacks continue to show attributes from their African heritage regarding leadership traits. The number of participants who are leaders in nonprofits and organizations that service the community and whose preferred leadership style is servant leadership in this study, who place people first, support T'Shaka's theory (1989).

Chapter Summary

The study was able to construct that a disproportionate number of Blacks live in poverty, face higher levels of adversities while growing up, and, as a result, have far more significant challenges in achieving prominent leadership positions than non-Blacks. In Chapter Five, the researcher discussed the findings regarding the essence of the study related to poverty, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), each research of the three research questions, self-determination theories and leadership.

In Chapter Six, the researcher provides conclusions and implications, as well as connections and contributions to literature. The researcher concludes with suggestions for future researcher and next steps.

PART 4

Conclusion

Part 1 The Nature of the Research Problem	Chapter 1 Introduction/Problem Statement
	Chapter 2 Literature Review
Part 2 Research Methodology & Procedures	Chapter 3 Research Methodology
Part 3 Findings	Chapter 4 Research Results and Analysis
Part 4 Conclusion	Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings
	Chapter 6 Implications and Conclusions

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Overview

This study examines the phenomenon of Blacks who lived in poverty as a child and experienced adversity and trauma but were able to emerge into prominent leadership positions. The study builds on prior research, provides a list of literature contributions, and provides suggestions for future research and studies.

Research Question One

Research Question One asks: *What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge from poverty into prominent positions?* Self-determination may be one of the most significant influences illuminated from the lived experiences of the participants who emerged out of poverty into prominent leadership positions, primarily related to their strong intrinsic will to succeed. The participants also expressed extrinsic motivation by "the village," the community leaders, special teachers, family members, affirmation from others, and being involved in extra-curricular activities. Some participants mentioned they were too busy to get in trouble. The participants also highlighted a critical theme related to their spiritual beliefs, God, and church. It was clear that Christ and Church played and continue to play a significant role in their lives, the ability to succeed and to sustain today.

Research Question Two

The second research question asks: *How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to prominent positions?* Advice the participants cited that they would give to their younger selves, for the most part, was connected to what worked best for them to succeed as outlined in research one: stay involved in youth programs and extra-curricular activities, education, mentors, religion, stay in church, and trust in God. Other advice cited can be categorized into domains such as self-care, where the participants encouraged their younger selves to be kind to

themselves, show themselves care, everything will be alright, and encourage themselves because no one else will. Some participants expressed regrets about not staying in high school, having teen pregnancies, and getting married at an early age.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three of this study asks: *What leadership styles and behaviors do Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?* It was clear from the essence of the participant responses that they developed natural leadership traits such as self-confidence, autonomy, trust, and resilience at an early age during their adversity and trauma experiences. Most participants did not have formal leadership training and could not label their specific leadership style. However, the essence of the participants' responses showed they preferred servant leadership. Participant responses illuminated transformational leadership as they transformed their lives by changing their circumstances and environment and transitioned those traits into organizations and the board room where they now uplift and inspire followers. It was also evident that all applied situational leadership and general characteristics and behaviors outlined by scholars are required to be influential leaders.

Connections to Research Literature

The findings of the study support existing literature around adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), Blacks living in poverty, motivating factors to succeed, and leadership styles of Blacks.

ACE Questionnaire and Scale

Chapter Two, Literature Review, introduces studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) used in the present study. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can negatively affect health and well-being (Sacks et al., Child Trends, 2014). An ACE scale is typically used as

a self-report questionnaire that includes detailed information on adverse childhood experiences (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The higher the participant's ACE score, the higher the likelihood that the adverse experience leads to severe adversity. In 1998 a seminal study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention mentioned that higher ACE scores correspond with social problems like higher rates of drug use, teen pregnancy, smoking, being a victim of rape, and perpetuating domestic violence (2017). A study by Grasso et al. (2015) suggested that children and adolescents exposed to multiple types of adverse experiences have higher rates of subsequent problem behaviors, including juvenile justice involvement.

This present study connects with the literature using the questionnaire to identify the adversity of the participants. The ACE scores guided the interview process to garner the essence of the participants' experience. This current study's findings connect to the ACE literature provided. ACE scores, thematic responses, and life stories support the ACE questionnaire. Provided are critiques and recommendations for revisions for cross-cultural purposes; Table 5 shows the culmination of the participant scores.

Poverty

The study connects with literature on Blacks in poverty as outlined in Chapter Two, Literature Review. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, there are 19.5% living in poverty. About one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018). This study connected with this and supported this data with the Black participants' lived experience of living in poverty.

The literature also outlines various forms of poverty. The lived experiences and stories of the participants support the prior studies and definitions of different forms of poverty. Payne

(2003) defines generational poverty as a family that has resided in poverty for at least two generations. Addy et al. (2013) explained low-income families as needing an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs; as such, families within this level of poverty of two times the national poverty level are considered low-income. Payne (2003) defined situational poverty as a family residing in poverty due to an event causing the family to lack resources for an extended time. Dimensions of urban poverty include income which includes lack of access to job opportunities (urban poor often have to trade-off between the distance to a job and the cost of housing); Health which consists of the environments of overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions, become prone to industrial and traffic pollution, and exposure to disease due to poor quality air and water and lack of sanitation; Education, personal safety/security risks deterring school attendance; insufficient school capacity in rapidly growing cities; Security, that includes drug, alcohol abuse, violence, crime, gangs, Empowerment, involves not having the rights and responsibilities of other citizens, insufficient channels of information for obtaining jobs, learning of legal rights and services (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004). The development of the Poverty ID Table (Table 8) supports the connection with the literature.

In terms of underachievement, as cited in Chapter Two, literature from Washington, Hughes, and Cosgriff (2011), maintains that growing up in an impoverished home or blighted neighborhood can have profound influences on youth, including poor academic performance, school dropout, unemployment, substance abuse, and incarceration (Sharkey, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Bass (2019) argues that Black students and students from high-poverty backgrounds often achieve beneath their potential; there is a

distinct opportunity gap between the Black group, White and Asian peers, especially those of higher income. Joseph experienced this because of living in extreme poverty. He was a high school dropout, a gang leader, and incarcerated as a teen; Esther was a teen mom.

High School Drop Out | Incarceration | Teen Pregnancy

This study connects with the literature on high school dropouts, incarceration, and teen pregnancy. The examination of the participants revealed that some had lived experiences in each of these domains that support the literature. Redditt (2005) argues that over one million students drop out of high school each year. Many of the students who drop out of school prematurely are identified as students at-risk and are Black. Unfortunately, these students who terminate their education prematurely are at an increased risk for various problems later in life. Redditt (2005), Nowicki, Duke, Sisney, Stricker, and Tyler (2004) argue that dropouts are not distributed evenly across the population in the United States. In their study, Nowicki et al. (2004) provide data that dropping out appears to be associated with five major demographic indicators: poverty, race, family configuration, and parental education.

This study and the essence of the responses support the literature with all participants living in some form of poverty, they are Black, a family configuration of those who experienced incarceration and high school dropout, as well as teen pregnancy, experienced a form of family dysfunction and their family members' education were absent, incarcerated, or deficient.

The study's examination and observations and the primary demographic indicators further align with the core of this researcher's proposed study of poverty being one of the high levels of ACEs that negatively influence Blacks to garner successful, prominent leadership positions. The Duke et al. (2009) study Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Associations with multiple types of adverse childhood experiences identified relationships between various types of adverse events

and distinct categories of adolescent violence perpetration. Their study indicates that early adversity is significantly related to juvenile justice involvement and criminal persistence. The Morrow and Villodas (2017) study that explored the direct and indirect pathways between ACEs and school dropout confirmed previous findings that ACEs independently increased the risk for dropout. They found that a substantial proportion of adolescents had experienced each ACE as outlined on the ACE scale, with an average of 3.58 ACEs by the age 14 interview and approximately 19.8% of adolescents reported dropping out of school by the age 18 interview (Morrow & Villodas, 2017).

This research study connects with the longitudinal study about ACE scores' relationship with juvenile justice involvement, and criminal persistence. Responses from the participant, Joseph, who was in the juvenile system from a very young age, received the highest score on the ACE scale.

In terms of teen pregnancy, this research supports the literature on teen pregnancy of Blacks who live in poverty. Brooks-Gunn, Britto, and Brady (1999) cited that the likelihood of a teenager giving birth out-of-wedlock declined as the family income levels rose above the poverty threshold. Watkin's (2010) data emphasized that bearing a child as a teenage mother did not hurt the mother's prospectus for advancement in education, employment, or marriage. Participant, Esther, responded that she excelled even after her teen pregnancy; she still rose to a prominent leader.

Self-Determination

The study has ample connections with self-determination by using the self-determination theory (SDT) lens as the theoretical framework. This study sought to examine the motivation of the Blacks who emerged from poverty and adversity into prominent positions. Self-determination

may be one of the most significant influences. The study supports and connects with the literature that in psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manages their own life (Cherry, J. (2021). Deci and Ryan (2017) are cofounders of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) on concepts of intrinsic motivation derived from the work of de Charms (1968). The theory is underpinned by the idea of psychological need satisfaction (Hove, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Deci, 1971, 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, Maslow, 1943; White, 1959). When people feel autonomous, competent, and have a sense of relatedness, they will be autonomously motivated, and positive consequences will follow. The SDT and autonomous motivation theory are connected to this current study. This essence of the participants' responses allowed the researcher to analyze their responses with the self-determination theory related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors.

The present study also connects with Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation theory (Master Class, June 2021 article) as outlined in Chapter Two. The participants' experiences and will to succeed align with the human decision-making hierarchy of psychological needs that Maslow defines. Maslow proposed that five core needs form the basis for human behavioral motivation of physiological needs, safety needs, love, and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The analysis of the participants' experiences connects with these motivational factors.

Resiliency

This study has a connection with the literature related to resiliency. All participants in this study showed resiliency, as defined in the literature. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to complex or challenging life experiences, primarily through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and

adjustment to external and internal demands (2022). Literature also states that a combination of factors contributes to resilience. Many studies show that an essential element of resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family (Green, 2008). Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person's resilience. The participants' lived experiences are within the footprint of the literature definitions.

Prominent Leadership Positions

This study aims to examine what motivated Blacks who lived in poverty and with adversity to emerge out of poverty into prominent leadership positions. This purpose led the researcher to study existing definitions and studies related to prominent positions. The purpose connects with the current literature outlined in Chapter Two. It supports Wos (2014), who argues that defining success based on a person's personal life experiences is about skills, tools, and setting your brain up to succeed (2014). The literature describes capturing moments when transitions occur so the individual can see and understand that it is possible to make transitional decisions in life with ease. This definition connects to those who emerged from poverty as the description includes variables such as money, goals, health, business, and happiness. This present study and experiences connect with the literature.

This present study also connects with the study by Weatherspoon-Robinson (2013) that added to the body of research in this area by exploring the elements of barriers, success strategies, and resilience of Black leaders. This study specifically assessed leadership and resilience in Blacks who hold higher-level leadership positions in traditionally White, male-dominated industries. Although the Weatherspoon-Robinson study focuses on Black females, the content and results connect with those Blacks in this present study.

An additional connection is with the literature that argues that some of today's best urban leaders don't work for the government; they are found in nonprofit organizations that serve the working class and poor populations. Based on interviews conducted in major cities, including Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Washington D.C., & New York (Ladner, 2001), exceptional leaders have developed practical solutions to the complex problems of our inner cities, including education, economic development, and community safety. Responses of several of the participants who are now leading multi-million-dollar nonprofits connect to this argument.

Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to the literature with findings and insights related to poverty, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), self-determination theory (SDT) as motivating factors, the advice we give to our younger selves, and leadership styles used by Blacks.

Poverty

The findings in this study support literature that shows about one in four Blacks live in poverty, far exceeding the national poverty rate (The Leadership Conference Fund Education, 2018), and although Blacks make up only 13% of the population in the United States, they unequally have 28% living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; 2020). In this study, each of the thirteen Black participants lived in a form of poverty which is also in line with studies that show that poverty, in general, is on the rise in the improvised and low-income communities where Blacks primarily reside. In 2019, 26% of Black children were impoverished; and Black children are still about three times as likely as other children to be living in poverty: Asians at 7% and Whites at 8% (Thomas and Fry, 2020). This study support literature with findings that 100% of the thirteen participants lived in a form of poverty.

This study established that poverty is multi-faceted and can occur at different times in a child's life. The forms can range from extreme, generational, situational, low-income, rural, and urban. Each of the thirteen participants responded that they lived in a form of poverty (Table 8). This study contributed to the research by supporting the multi-faceted descriptions and levels of poverty; and by developing Poverty IDs (Table 8) describing each form of poverty.

Research shows that Black students and students from high-poverty backgrounds often achieve beneath their potential (Bass, 2019); there is a distinct opportunity gap between the Black group, White and Asian peers, especially those of higher income (Bass, 2019). This present study contributes to that existing research and recommends more empirical research in this area. It is essential to expand the literature and continue the discussion on understanding the implications for Black children face who live in poverty and identify mitigation strategies. Further research and discussion will help in equally balancing the chances for success.

Cook (2021) argues that a solution to generational poverty, a family that has lived in poverty for two or more generations, is the Whole Family approach that focuses on the family unit. This present research contributes to Cook's literature on the whole family approach. It is supported by the theme of multiple participants who mention they would not have made it without their family and the village of extended family members, the church, and the community.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

The researcher used the ACE questionnaire and scale in this study to score the level of adversity of the participants. The ACE scale is a self-report questionnaire that includes detailed information on adverse childhood experiences (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The Balistreri and Alvira-Hammond (2016) study included variables and definitions of

adverse childhood experiences (ACE) that stem from research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (2016). In those studies, researchers surveyed adults on various events occurring when they were seventeen and younger, including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. This present contributes to the literature on the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scales.

The study's findings suggest that the ACE scale be refined, relabeled, and incorporate a higher consciousness regarding cultures and diversity to fit all cultures better. Participant David firmly stated, "growing up Black in America s a traumatic experience and suggested this study should contribute to further literature to create another ACE scale that is relevant specifically to a Black child growing up" (2022).

This study recommends poverty be included on the ACE questionnaire and scale. The findings of this study also contribute to the existing literature. Lacey et al. (2020) argue that there is evidence from a longitudinal study that aimed to identify ACEs' relationship to poverty that includes clusters specific to poverty. Therefore, reducing child poverty might be one strategy for lowering ACEs.

The research of this study can build on the existing literature related to adding spanking to the ACE questionnaire and scale. Existing literature argue that spanking be included as an adverse childhood experience because of its association with health outcomes; physical and emotional abuse has been shown in previous research to correlate highly and may be similar to spanking (Afifi et al., 2017; Gershoff, 2013). This present study provided great life stories and experiences of participants and whoopins. Participants reference whoopins in this study, a common form of discipline in the Black culture for decades or centuries. Some may refer to this

discipline as spankings. This study contributes to the literature and supports existing research in terms of adding it to the ACE questionnaire and scale.

This study contributes to the literature on the need to assess the whole child. Less attention has been paid to assessing the whole child's well-being in the face of adversity or uncovering factors that might help diminish the negative impact of ACE on children (Basto-Pereria et al., 2016). There is an urgent need to screen, prevent and stop serious adversity. Multiple participants responded that growing up Black in America is a traumatic experience. David suggested this study contribute to further literature to create another ACE scale relevant specifically to the well-being of the whole Black child growing up.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

This study's insights contribute to the literature and theoretical framework related to self-determination theory, autonomous motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. The study resulted in substantial findings through the participants' responses regarding the factors that motivated them to succeed. These factors contribute to self-determination's autonomous motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic. The insights contribute to the literature related to the autonomous continuum between extrinsic and intrinsic; participants supported the theory by showing they were initially motivated because they were told to do, required, or most do something (extrinsic), but shifted to intrinsic in enjoying what they were doing, developed confidence and self-esteem (intrinsic).

The study's findings contributed to the literature on the relationship between intrinsic, strong internal will to achieve, achievement, motivation to achieve more, and natural and transformational leadership traits.

The importance of religion and the church in the Black community is an essential contribution to the literature. All participants in this study expressed religion, faith, and the church as motivating factors that contributed to their success.

Prominent Leadership Positions

This present study contributes to the leadership of defining prominent leadership. The definition used for this current study is a person in a prominent leadership position is defined as those currently in a role that is responsible for strategic outcomes of an institution or organization, is well regarded as measured by the perception of others, have leadership roles on boards, and has broad authority in consequential decision-making. Ladner's (2001) research focuses on the characteristics that make successful leaders: courage, commitment to excellence, and a willingness to sacrifice. Research for this current study was unable to identify substantial studies and research with a direct connection to Blacks in prominent positions.

Leadership: Natural, Servant, and Transformational

This study was able to establish, based on the participant responses, life stories, and narratives, that the participants developed natural and transformational leadership traits at a younger age and that servant leadership is the trait most participants preferred to use during their current positions. Findings can contribute to future research for those who have lived in adversity and trauma, when and how these traits are developed, and what can be done to expand the traits for Blacks who are entering or in leadership positions.

Natural Leadership Traits – The present study can contribute to the literature of solidifying and defining natural leadership traits and the potential connection with development during trauma or adversity. The researcher observed that some participants demonstrated natural leadership traits as described by Dennis (2014): technical aspects of practice have been applied

to develop capacities such as self-confidence, autonomy, trust, and resilience; and the argument of Brady (2017) that some people are aware that they are natural leaders early on, but for most people they don't really know they are inspiring others and leading people right away. Since they are just being themselves and not trying to be the leader, it doesn't necessarily occur to them that they are being leaders. When something comes naturally, we don't always recognize it for what it is until others point it out to us.

The essence of the participants' responses connects with many leadership traits and the natural leadership phenomenon described by Dennis (2014) and of Brady (2017). The researcher observed that some participants developed leadership traits as young as nine or ten; and most were unaware of their leadership abilities until others pointed it out to them. This current study can contribute to the literature on natural leadership, the relationship with adversity, trauma, intrinsic motivation, self-determination, and natural leadership traits.

Transformational Leadership – The study and findings illuminated transformational leadership throughout the leadership preference discussion. The participants all transformed their own lives by changing their circumstances and environments and are active in transforming the lives of others. These transformational traits connected with their natural leadership abilities are used jointly in the participants' current prominent positions. The findings of this study and connections between those emerging from poverty and adversity, transforming their own circumstances, and the transference into the workplace or board room.

Servant Leadership – The essence of all the participant stories and responses indicated they currently apply servant leadership in their prominent positions. In his essay, he describes servant leadership: "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person

is sharply different from one who is leader first..." According to Greenleaf, servant leaders intend to help followers "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1977:13-14). Each participant also responded that they are firm believers in faith, and the church was an essential factor in their success. This finding can also contribute to leadership related to firm believers in faith and servant leadership traits.

Advice to Younger Selves

Through the results of research question two, this study contributes to advice to our younger selves. The findings, because of the essence of the experiences and responses from the participants in this study, connect with and supports Kowelski and McCord (2020) 's research on self-discrepancy theory, regret, counterfactual thinking, and the reminiscence bump. The essence of the participant responses in this current study was related to regrets related to teen pregnancy, getting married at age eighteen and dropping out of high school, and not getting a good education.

This current study also contributes to the literature and arguments of Wright et al. (2010). They present an interesting look into the negative educational experiences of Black youth and illustrate how the consequences of these experiences apply to a wider social context. The book seeks to point out that the social conditions for Black children are different from that of White youth, which the authors argue, should be considered when creating educational policies. Ultimately, the purpose of *Black Youth Matters* (2010) is to advocate for those students who have been excluded from school by advocating for discourse about alternative pathways that youth can take to become successful. As a thematic response from the participants of this current study, continuing education and the importance of education were highlighted as advice to their younger selves. The researcher suggests this study add to the discussion and contribute to the

literature and argument that alternative pathways for Black youth be researched and proposed for implementation.

Implications for Black Americans and Society

This study resulted in significant findings, connections with literature research, and contributions to literature. This study was also able to identify some implications for consideration.

Poverty

Participants' lived experiences and stressors because of their poverty have long-term effects. Cook explains that children start life on an unequal economic footing, which has important implications for their future well-being (2021). Children living in poverty can lack the opportunities of those in the middle or upper class, especially if they are in the cycle of Implications for Black children living in poverty can be an influential factor that alters lifetime development trajectories in cognitive, social, emotional, physical health and psychological well-being (Barton & Coley, 2010; Shipler, 2004; Evans, 2013). Effects are tough on children who face an increased level of stress that can lead to emotional and behavioral problems (Baharoglu & Kessides, 2004; Cook, 2021). Children living in poverty can lack the opportunities of those in middle or upper class, especially if they are in the cycle of generational poverty (Cook, 2021). All thirteen participants lived in some form of poverty as children.

This current study uncovered several examples from participants who lived in poverty and who responded with life-long physical health and emotional outcomes due to living in poverty. Findings from the participant responses of lived experiences support this literature with life stories from Ruth, who still has a scar on her forehead from being hit by a bat while living in a violent urban community; Joshua, who mentioned he still has an auto-immune disease as a

result of the anxiety of living in poverty; Rachel who recalled being hospitalized for multiple days due to physical abuse and psychological effects; Esther who lost a lung at age nineteen.

Since President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty Initiative in 1964, Blacks have held the unfortunate status of having the most citizens living in poverty in the United States (Health and Human Services, 2016). This current study shows this unfortunate trend continues. Economic conditions, legislative policies, and laws that impact the United States continue to affect the Black community more than non-Black communities significantly. While recessions such as that in 2008 rock the world's fiscal foundation, the Black community sector disproportionately took the brunt of the hit (Taylor, 2014).

Trillions of dollars are spent to combat poverty, specifically in the Black community. Studies and analysis are not enough. Tangible methods are needed. If not, the implications are profound, not only for the Black community but for society. Implications such as continued crime and violence in urban communities, homelessness, low-income families, families without basic necessities such as food, clothing, and housing, and generational poverty will continue. With more than one-quarter of America's Black population currently struggling with poverty, this issue requires an immediate and thoughtful response from policymakers (Taylor, 2014). To combat the staggering poverty levels, policymakers need to reevaluate the causes of poverty to determine more effective ways of fighting it. To create a successful strategy for decreasing poverty levels in Black communities, major federal policy initiatives should include two groups whose voices have not been heard in the past: both sides of the political aisle and local community leaders (Taylor, 2014).

Sustained poverty and trauma in the Black community could affect identified leaders. Society and organizations could continue to lose good, thoughtful, and effective Black leaders.

As it is, Blacks are only 1% of Fortune 500 CEOs and executives. Numerical gains by Blacks in the labor market are not indicative of equal participation and obtaining executive positions (Collins, 1989;). Stark contrasts between the Black middle class and those in poverty have raised essential questions among scholars about what influences the status of Blacks.

Black Leaders

Blacks in the corporate C-Suite is roughly 2%; when the data are analyzed in terms of Fortune 500 CEO, the number is at 0.008% (Harper, 2018). This number and data highlight the implications of Blacks in poverty and the need to identify sustained mitigation efforts and solutions. Corporate America is missing out on extraordinary leaders. Fortune 500 refers to Fortune Magazine's annual list of the top 500 public companies in the United States. The first Black Fortune 500 CEO was named in 1999 (Harper, 2018); fifteen other Blacks have held this title since then. This year, six Black CEOs sit atop Fortune's 500 lists (McGlaufflin, 2022). Fortune magazine describes the figure as a noteworthy increase from last year, just five last year.

The results of the demographic data corrections produced an outline of the characteristics of the Black Fortune 500 CEO. The participants in this study demonstrated natural leadership traits at an early age. Nurturing and developing those traits will help develop executives and CEOs in Fortune 500 companies. Harper argued in her study, where she interviewed Black Fortune 500 CEOs, that a Black Fortune 500 CEO must have leadership experience, demonstrated results, exceptional education, and an innate will to succeed (2018). Perseverance is a necessary component in Black CEOs. Without a doubt, the participants in this current study meet the requirements (and more), except for education. The researcher recommends that mentoring and coaching provide a blueprint for the leader to rely on, and a focus on education is needed to develop Black executives and CEOs. Mentoring and coaching are essential in

developing Black leaders in Corporate America. As supported by responses from the participants in this study, while Blacks have been mentored for years in Black communities by ministers, teachers, and service groups, there is still little or no mentoring for Blacks in the top corporate echelon (Harper, 2018). This deficiency is a gap that needs mitigating. Thomas (2001) and Harper (2018) argued that individuals who are coached and mentored toward the necessary jobs and assignments are the ones who end up as top executives in Corporate America.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that can negatively affect health and well-being (Sacks, et al., Child Trends, 2014). An ACE scale is typically used as a self-report questionnaire that includes detailed information on adverse childhood experiences (Greene, 2015; Pinto et al., 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE questionnaire and scale measure several types of childhood trauma. Some questions measure maltreatment, family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, a mother, a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death, or abandonment. Each adverse experience counts as one, and emotional and physical neglect.

However, noticeability missing is whoopins that occur in the Black community. The scale is currently used to identify the trajectory of physical health and psychological effects potentially. Not having whoopins as an option could be an important implication and affect the results. Whoopin is a crucial point missing in that vital puzzle.

Whoopins

The study participants responded that they received whoopins as a discipline during their childhood. Whoopins are the act of receiving discipline through a beating, usually administered

to a miscreant by a person in authority, such as a parent or other capable adult. The term is used mostly by Black people to describe what happens to kids when they get into trouble. It is a physical punishment inflicted by an adult on a child's body ranging in severity from a hit with a belt, a small switch from a tree branch, an extension cord, or a shoe to a spanking with bare hands. Also, years ago, in Black neighborhoods, you could get your ass whipped by any adult on your street who saw you doing something wrong. Many older Black folks firmly believe in whoopin kids' asses (Urban Dictionary, 2006). Some communities refer to this discipline as spankings (Afifi et al., 2017; Gershoff, 2013). The study participants referenced whoopins, a common form of discipline in the Black culture for decades or perhaps centuries.

This study highlighted that whoopins are not scored in the ACE questionnaire and scale. The implications of not having whoopins or spankings as an option of the ACE questionnaire overlooks this critical discipline known to cause trauma and life-long effects.

The participants mentioned that they didn't initially think this would be scored a "yes" because the whoopins were part of their everyday culture as a form of discipline, and their parents, or guardians, didn't mean any harm. Question 4 of the ACE questionnaire could very well have been scored by all participants at a 100% versus the 77% shown in Tables 4 and 4 if whippins or spankings were listed as an option to score.

Advice to Younger Selves

The study findings identified some implications in terms of advice to younger selves. These implications could material if adults did not consider giving advice to younger selves. The implication is the behavior and consequences will continue. This study supports Kowalski and McCord's (2020) findings that regretting prior behavior or life experience can lead to depression, self-doubt, and long-term effects.

Suggestions for Future Research Studies

Leadership

This study supports Ladner's argument that some of today's best urban leaders don't work for the government--they are found in nonprofit organizations that serve the working class & poor populations (2001). In this study, over half the participants are leaders in nonprofit organizations or positions serving the community. The researcher recommends that further research and studies be completed to determine if that is a causal effect between Blacks.

The researcher recommends that further studies be conducted on the best leadership style for Black leaders and determine if it matters. A finding is that African Americans or Blacks continue to show attributes from their African heritage regarding leadership traits. According to T'Shaka (1989), African leaders have a twin role; first, they lead through following. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are the genuine mouthpieces of their people. Their voice is the people's voice. Great leaders are created by their people and become inspirations to their people (T'Shaka, 1989). Sub-Saharan African Leadership profile statement that an ideal leader from this region is modest, compassionate, and sensitive to the people is supported by Northouse (2016). In addition, a leader should be value-based, team-oriented, participative, and self-protective. Moreover, leadership researchers have argued that current frameworks do not suffice the need to develop future leaders who can face the challenging future with courage. This situation necessitates a new form of leadership (Toor et al., 2007).

The researcher acknowledges a gap in the use of Black leadership scholars in this study. For historical purposes, leadership emerged from the Western culture. The word leadership is a relative new addition to the English language; it appeared approximately 200 years ago in writings about political in the British Parliament (Ly, 2020). This is supported by Johnson (2017)

who argues that the earliest theories of leadership were the Great Man Theories, which emerged in the late 1800s. Machiavelli's list of leadership principles, characteristics, and traits of successful leaders date back to the 16th century (1988, 1532). As one can discern, there has been a noticeable gap in Black leadership scholars. It is suggested that further research be conducted to identify and integrate Black leadership scholars into future research.

The researcher also suggests that future researchers review the following books to garner a historical perspective of early African Americans and Black leaders: *Before the Mayflower: A history of the Negro in American 1619-1962* by Lerone Bennett, Jr. (1962). *From Slavery to Freedom*, by John Hope Franklin (2021), and *Leading While Black: Leadership Strategies and Lessons for Today's Professional*, by Drayton (2021).

The researcher was able to identify an implication of Blacks with strong leadership skills being overlooked into large, Fortune 500 leadership positions. A suggestion for future research includes policies that help to promote underrepresented classes into the workplace, such as the Blacks who shared their experiences in this study. This can be completed through diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. DEI is a term used to describe policies that promote the representation and participation of different group of individual and their ages, races and ethnicities, genders, religions and more (Rosencrance, 2022). DEI matters because it helps build a fair society that allows all people to get equal opportunities.

Leadership Development Programs

The researcher suggests further research be conducted to develop leadership development programs targeting Black teens age 15-19 who are living in poverty and young adults entering formal leadership positions. The purpose of the program will be to identify and nurture leadership characteristics the teen has garnered and offer steps to further develop essential

characteristics required in leadership. Suggestions for the young adults emerging into leadership positions, the goal will be to introduce them to formal leadership training and the importance of building relationships through mentors and sponsors.

Advice to Younger Selves

The researcher suggests future research to examine not just the types of advice people offer their younger selves in more detail and directly focus on the topic. Connection with the self-discrepancy and self-determination theory could potentially reap positive benefits to examining the motivating influences, as also suggested by Kowalski and McCord (2020). Cross-cultural research on this topic would also be informative. This initial question of advice to one's younger self raises many exciting research questions, which researchers will hopefully examine in future studies.

Self-Determination

Using the lens of the self-determination theory as a theoretical framework, the researcher analyzed the thematic responses from the participants' responses to Research Question One of *what motivated them to emerge out of poverty into a prominent leadership position*. The researcher identified a possible linkage between human needs psychology, self-determination theory (SDT) autonomous motivating factor, and the development of natural, servant, and transformational leadership traits. The researcher suggests further studies to explore the potential connection between this possible linkage.

Additionally, research suggests studies regarding the connection with Blacks, self-determination theory, psychological needs satisfaction (PNS), and self-actualization. Based on this study, the researcher suggests there may be additional

As previously discussed, the Self-Determination Scales (SDS) highlight discoveries in levels of autonomy intrinsic to the participant. The researcher suggests future research to determine if there is a correlation between high self-determination and Blacks who have emerged from poverty and adversity into success. This study suggests further research to determine if there is a causal relationship between those with high levels of autonomous self-determination and servant leadership. Deci and Ryan argue that those with high levels of autonomous self-determination contribute to psychological wellness (1985); similarly, Greenleaf argues that servant leaders intend to help followers "grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants" (1977).

Some theorists argue the connection between human needs, motivation, and influence, intrinsic and extrinsic, in self-determination. The researcher suggests further to determine if there are any causal effects of the traits developed by Blacks who experienced childhood adversities, severe trauma, and motivations as with their adult working leadership positions. Is there a causal effect with their determination and achievement as a motivating factor with the natural, servant, and transformational leadership development?

The researcher suggests that further research be conducted to compare the lower and higher ACE scores. The comparison analysis may be evaluated through the lens of the self-determination theory (SDT) to determine the maturity of the SDT components of autonomy, competence, and connectedness and may seek to determine if there is a correlation between those with high ACE scores and low levels of SDT.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Scale and Questionnaire

The Balistreri and Alvira-Hammond (2016) study included variables and definitions of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) that stem from research conducted by the Centers for

Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. In those studies, researchers surveyed adults on various events occurring when they were seventeen and younger, including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence.

This study suggests the ACE questionnaire and scale revisit the age limit. Based on the response from the participants in this study, the age limit of nineteen and young would be more appropriate to capture childhood adversities. The researcher also observed that the ACE questionnaire does not align with how the U.S. Census Bureau defines teens. When providing data on teens, the U.S. Census Bureau states teens are 15-19 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The researcher also suggests that the ACE questionnaire be revised to address the limitation of expanded trauma that those who live in extreme poverty may experience. There could be a gap currently of missing out on childhood trauma with the current ACE questionnaire definitions.

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Cultural and Social

The researcher suggests that further research related to a concern mentioned by participant David; he stated that not all Blacks live in poverty and live in adversity. Ranita Ray (2018) argues that stereotypes of economically marginalized Black and brown youth focus on drugs, gangs, violence, and teen parenthood. Families, schools, nonprofit organizations, and institutions in poor urban neighborhoods emphasize preventing such "risk behaviors." In *The Making of a Teenage Service Class*, Ranita Ray uncovers the pernicious consequences of

concentrating on risky behaviors as the key to targeting poverty. Ray compellingly demonstrates how the disproportionate emphasis on risk behaviors reinforces class and race hierarchies and diverts resources that could support marginalized youth's necessities and educational and occupational goals (2018). This research could target dispelling negative stereotypes of certain cultures that may further suppress teens' confidence, motivation, and self-esteem.

Conclusion

With the use of research questions and thematic analysis, this study was able to construct that Blacks disproportionately live in poverty, experienced childhood adversities (ACEs), and severe trauma; thus, they faced a more difficult time overcoming obstacles to achieve success compared to non-Blacks. Yet, some still rise.

The study established that the participants' responses about what motivated them connected with the self-determination theory. Participant responses showed that they developed natural leadership characteristics at a young age and preferred servant and transformational leadership styles.

The researcher interviewed thirteen Black participants in this study with a wide range of lived experiences, life stories, and leadership positions. Qualitative research is based on the belief that there is no singular universal truth (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999); the world is multifaceted and is the outcome of human agents. A critique might be that this study targets Blacks versus non-Blacks. Some might argue that Blacks are not the only culture that experiences poverty and adversity and have difficulty emerging into prominent leadership positions. Although this study established that Blacks disproportionately live in poverty, and experience ACEs and trauma, the findings and recommendations might be transferrable to non-Black communities.

The essence of their experiences and common themes will help to identify factors that played a crucial role in the participants' journey and will: 1) contribute to additional studies; 2) highlight potential contributions in the development of youth intervention programs; or 3) have the participants' leadership experiences and approaches currently being used that were influenced by their lived experiences contribute to the creation of leadership development programs.

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APPENDIX A

Data Gathering Interview Questions

(Cues & Prompts Included)

(Adapted in part from Redditt, 2005)

General Demographic Questions:

1. Describe your experiences while growing up.
 - a. In your description you mentioned . . . , please explain in detail.
2. Describe your neighborhood.
3. What was your home and family life like?
4. Did you complete high school? If not, what led you to drop out of high school?
 - a. In your description you mentioned . . . , please explain in detail.
 - b. Please describe in detail why you dropped out of high school.
 - c. From your description you indicated . . . , please elaborate.
5. Did you have any teen pregnancies?
 - a. If so, please elaborate
6. Have you ever been incarcerated?
 - a. If so, for how long?
 - b. How did that experience impact you then and now?
 - c. From your description you indicated ... please elaborate.

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge out of poverty into prominent positions?

7. Was it an isolated incident or a series of events that led you to succeed?
 - a. In your description you indicated. . . , please elaborate.

8. Describe in detail your strengths growing up.
 - a. You indicated . . . , please elaborate.
9. Who were the most important people in your life?
10. What are the top 3 things that contributed to your success?
 - a. Church? ... Person? ... Education?
11. What behaviors helped them you succeed; or what caused them to not follow the crowd?
12. What is your religious experience?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to the prominent positions?

13. What advice would the participants give their younger self for proactive early intervention?
 - a. Elaborate or describe more.
14. Where you involved in any youth development programs?
 - a. If so, describe them
 - b. Would you recommend other younger Blacks get involved in such a program?
 - c. What worked well?
 - d. What would you improve on in the program?

Research Question #3: What are the leadership styles and behaviors Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?

15. How do you define leadership?
16. When and how did the participant leaders recognize their leadership abilities?
17. Tell me about your current leadership position.
 - a. You discussed. . . please elaborate.
18. In your leadership position, what is your preferred leadership style?

a. You discussed ... please elaborate.

19. Tell me about the boards of directors you serve on

Closing Questions:

- In your opinion, how has any of your experiences growing up impacted you in adulthood?
- In your description you indicated . . . please explain in detail.

Note: Need to frame the stages of your life? Start open ended, then How does the participant growing up in poverty experiences shape their perspectives on leadership practices and principles.

APPENDIX B

Research Questions Connected with Interview Questions

Research Question #1: What factors influenced Black adults with ACE scores to emerge out of poverty into prominent positions?

1. Was it an isolated incident or a series of events that led you to succeed?
2. Describe in detail your strengths growing up.
3. Who were the most important people in your life?
4. What are the top 3 things that contributed to your success?
5. What behaviors helped them you succeed; or what caused them to not follow the crowd?
6. What is your religious experience?

Research Question #2: How do we help our younger selves with ACE scores rise to the prominent positions?

1. What advice would the participants give their younger self for proactive early intervention?
2. Were you involved in any youth development programs?
 - a. Would you recommend other younger Blacks get involved in such a program?
 - b. What worked well?
 - c. What would you improve on in the program?

Research Question #3: What are the leadership styles and behaviors Black leaders develop and use to achieve prominent positions?

1. How do you define leadership?
2. When and how did the participant leaders recognize their leadership abilities?

3. Tell me about your current leadership position.
4. In your leadership position, what is your preferred leadership style?

APPENDIX C

ACE Questionnaire & Scale

Partially Adapted from ACE questionnaires and scales by Greene, 2015; Pinto, et al., 2016;
Felitti, et al., 1998.

The participants are to self-report answers that occurred prior to their 18th birthday:

		No	Yes
1	Did the immediate community you lived in have a significant amount of crime, gangs, drug use, or violence?		
2	Did you live in a low-income household where you lacked resources for necessities such as electricity, clean water, food, shelter or clothes?		
3	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?		
4	Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?		
5	Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ... touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or attempt to actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?		
6	Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were not important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?		
7	Did you often or very often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if needed it? Or no place to sleep?		
8	Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason?		
9	Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?		
10	Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?		
11	Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?		
12	Were you or a household member incarcerated?		
13	Did you have a child or father a child?		
	Total "Yes" Score		

Participant should add up the "yes" answers: This is the ACE score.

All participants will advance to the interview process no matter what score. ACE scores may be segmented later to assess themes and potential results.

APPENDIX D

Script for Inviting Participates to Participate

(Adapted in part from Smith, 2014)

Date:

Dear Mrs./Mr./Dr.

My name is Afarah Board, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Dr. Paul and Anne Kienel Leadership Institute, California Baptist University, Riverside, California. The purpose of this email is to invite your support and participation in my doctoral dissertation research study, *"The Phenomenon of Blacks Americans Emerging From Poverty into Prominent Leadership Positions"*.

A disproportionate number of Blacks live in poverty, face higher levels of adversities while growing up, and as a result have far more significant challenges in achieving, sustaining, and being successful in prominent leadership positions. But still, some do rise to prominent positions. Because you have a rich background and garnered great success, I am seeking your participation in the study that is aimed to examine the lived experiences of people such as yourself. The study results will contribute considerably by adding to further literature and subsequent studies and in developing youth intervention and leadership programs.

If you agree to participate, we will first ask that you complete a self-report Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) questionnaire to identify your ACE score; following that will be a 30–45-minute interview held virtually on Zoom. You will receive a transcript of the recorded interview as validation and confirm the accuracy.

Please provide your consent for us to send you the ACE questionnaire by simply replying to this email. After the questionnaire, we will ask for your full consent before the interview. As a

participant, you will be given the opportunity to withdraw your consent before the beginning of the research or may discontinue your participation in the study at any time.

I look forward to your reply to participation. Questions or concerns regarding this research may be directed to me at 951-316-8142, or through email at aboard@calbaptist.edu. My committee chair, Dr. Mary Ann Pearson, Ed.D., APR, Professor of Communication and Leadership, California Baptist University, can be reached at 951-552-8186 or mpearson@calbaptist.edu. Additional questions and concerns about the research can be directed to the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at irb@calbaptist.edu.

Sincerely,

Afarah Board

Ph.D. Candidate Leadership Studies

Dr Paul & Annie Kienel Leadership Institute

951-316-8142

APPENDIX E

Participant Informed Consent Form

(Adapted in part from CBU Leadership Institute Consent, Shoup 2021; and Smith, 2014)

"The Phenomenon of Blacks or African Americans Emerging Out of Poverty into Prominent Leadership Positions" Research Study

Thank you for completing the ACE questionnaire and for agreeing to share your lived experiences of overcoming adversities and succeeding as a prominent leader through an interview process. The study results will contribute considerably by adding to further literature and subsequent studies and developing youth intervention and leadership programs.

This form acknowledges that a) your participation in this qualitative research study is voluntary; b) information from the interview and subsequent follow-up activities may be included in future literature; and c) any or all content resulting from the interview to be published in the dissertation.

By signing this form, you

- acknowledge that your participation in this study is voluntary, and
- grant permission to quote and cite observations and lessons from the ACE questionnaire, interview, subsequent interviews, and archival data as necessary in the dissertation and subsequent publications.

We realize that some of the interview questions may trigger some thoughts and memories of your childhood adversities. You will have the right to stop the interview at any time. If you experience any emotional reactions or discomforts because of the interview, you can contact the

SAHMSA National Helpline for assistance by calling 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visiting their website at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>.

My signature (Afarah Board) acknowledges that any information or content resulting from this interview will not be published outside the dissertation without your prior approval; and that you have the right to edit such content as you deem appropriate before its final submission to a publisher outside the dissertation.

With much appreciation,

Hereby Signed _____ Date: _____

Afarah Board
Ph.D. Candidate
Dr Paul & Annie Kienel Leadership Institute
Leadership Studies
951-316-814

Printed Name: _____

APPENDIX F

Data Collection Codebook

Template for Documenting and Coding Themes from Interview

Poverty ID (Payne, 2013) Table 4 of Study	
	1 - Extreme Poverty: Lacked the necessities, e.g., going without food, electricity, or shelter.
	2 - Generational Poverty: Grandparents and their grandparents lived in poverty.
	3 - Low Income: Parents lived on welfare or Section 8; but basic necessities were provided.
	4 - Situational Poverty: Caused by a situation such as parents' loss of job, loss of a caregiver for multiple reasons (incarcerated, divorce, tragic event).
	5 - Rural Poverty: Living in an area where there are less job opportunities, less access to services and less opportunity for a quality of education.
	6 - Urban Poverty: There are major challenges such as limited health and education services, inadequate housing, violent and unhealthy environment, and little or no social protection.
ACE Scale Codes	
	Other - Trauma
	Violent, Gang, Crime
	Pushed, Slapped or Hit
	Urban Community
	Incarcerated
	Poverty, Low Income
	Mental Illness in Household
	Drug or Alcohol Abuse in Household
	High School Dropout
	Mother Abused
	Teen Pregnancy
Motivation, Influence	
	Other
	Extrinsic Influences
	Intrinsic Strengths or Will
	Church, Faith, Christianity
	What or Who Contributed to Success
	Reason for NOT following the Crowd
Youth Development Programs	
	Community
	School
	Other
	Church
	Recommended Programs
Advice to Younger Self	
Leadership Style	
	Preferred Leadership Style
	When, How Recognized
	Defined
	Board of Directors
Achievement, Current Position	
	Position or Role
	Type of Business
	Motivation
	Aspirations for Next Steps