



12-1999

Stressors and resources among African-American working class single mothers

Javiette VaShann Samuel

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Javiette VaShann Samuel entitled "Stressors and resources among African-American working class single mothers." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Priscilla Blanton, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Eric Haley, Julia Malia

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Javiette VaShann Samuel entitled "Stressors and Resources Among African-American Working Class Single Mothers." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Priscilla Blanton

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We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Eric Haley

Eric Haley

Julia Malia

Julia A. Malia

Accepted for the Council:

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Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

Stressors and Resources Among African-American Working Class
Single Mothers

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Javiette VaShann Samuel
December, 1999

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all of the beautiful Black women that have kept the family woven tighter than the most delicate silk fabrics. It is for all the single women that have bore productive members of society- doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Those who polished that creative side of their timid child. And for those who never gave up hope when their children became troubled youth and later hardened criminals. Finally, it is for the generations of women in my family that have encountered the tenacious cycles of poverty and single parenthood. You are the most precious and priceless jewels ever formed. God has blessed Black women with the strength, endurance, and perseverance to sustain and retain a sense of courage and integrity while pursuing motherhood, grandparenthood, careers, and all other walks of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for blessing me with the academic and professional abilities to pursue this endeavor.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my graduate committee for their support- Dr. Priscilla Blanton, Dr. Eric Haley, and Dr. Julia Malia. Special thanks and gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Blanton. Thank you for your patience and faith while waiting for my ideas to formalize. And thanks for your continued encouragement once my thoughts were crystallized.

I would also like to thank my family and friends, without you this never would have been possible. A very special thanks goes out to Jr, Jack & Nadine, Mama, Gwen, Bryan & Alice. Thank you for never doubting my ability and for always believing in me. Thanks Tamara, Darlene, Kesha, & Kavonna for your continued words of encouragement. Thank you Lord for Goldie Simpkins who showed me that you dwell within me. This has proven to be the most valuable realization that I ever could have received.

Pam thanks for your diligence in transcribing the interviews.

Finally, thanks to all of the women who participated in this study, sharing their most intimate and personal life experiences with me, without you, this never would have been possible.

ABSTRACT

The present study investigated stressors, resources, stress management techniques, and well-being among African-American, working class, single mothers ages 23-29. In-depth interviews were conducted to yield a qualitative analysis. Twelve single mothers shared their life narratives and described their experience as a working class single parent.

The participants exemplified resiliency characteristics that symbolized successful management of stressors, despite adversity and hardships. The results of this study emphasized the importance of personality characteristics, familial resources, and friends as contributors to a sense of well-being and successful family functioning. Mother's repeatedly disclosed how they could orchestrate events and activities in an effort to minimize stress and maximize individual and familial resources.

Of the techniques employed to reduce stress, all of them were positive. Not a single participant reported using alcohol, narcotics, or drugs to deal with stressors. In fact, repeatedly it was reported that facing and overcoming daily struggles could

serve to enhance and strengthen individual and familial personality characteristics.

Contrary to the concern that extended family and fictive kin may cause boundary ambiguity, symbolic and physical boundaries appeared to be healthy and adaptive. Participants clearly articulated their roles as parents even when intergenerational relationships were central to optimal family functioning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 doubled from 3.8 million in 1970 to 9.4 million in 1988 (United States Bureau of Census, 1992). Single-parent families now account for 27% of all families with children and 60% of African-American families.

African-American mothers are of primary importance to this topic because, in the African-American community, nonmarital childbearing remains everpresent, teenage childbearing is continuing, and marriage rates are declining. Hence, the proportion of single-parent families is increasing. There is some evidence that suggests that African-American women benefit less from marriage than any other. The high rate of maternal employment even in marriages is one of the primary reasons that this relational arrangement is less beneficial. The alarmingly high unemployment rate and unstable work history of African-American fathers also contribute to the absence of marriage in many families (Steil, 1997). The lower marriage rate means that these mothers can rely less on fathers for emotional and financial support than divorced mothers. These realities are part of the context for the many single-parent families among African-Americans.

Single Parenthood: A Strengths Rather Than Deficits Model

Mothers who parent alone are confronted with financial burdens, living arrangements/housing issues, time and role demands, and childrearing and childcare concerns. Despite various stressors and the lack of a parental echelon, single parents frequently provide the structure, values, and nurturance that their children need (Anderson, 1998). Feelings of role overload do not hinder many single parents from successfully transmitting values, a strong work ethic, determination, and fostering resilience.

In spite of obvious strengths in many single-parent families, researchers, politicians, educators, and practitioners continue to view single-parent families in general, and African-American families in particular, through the lens of a deficit model (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993). The overwhelming majority of research on single parent families compares single-parents with married couples. Most of the studies have emerged from a pathology paradigm, seeking to examine the damage of divorce (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The overt message clearly says that two-parent families are preferable (Morrison, 1995). This deficit model, held by both the public and some researchers, has prevented the expansion of comprehensive knowledge about single-parent families.

In an effort to counter the deficit model, scholars have begun examining the strengths and successes of single-parent

families. Morrison (1995) examined successful European-American single-parent families. Several positive themes emerged from this qualitative analysis. The definitions of success fell into two categories: relationships and accomplishments. Eleven of the 12 mothers identified primary strengths that were grouped under relationships. Olson and Haynes (1993) explored the dynamics of successful single parenting among European Americans, and several dominant themes emerged. They included: (a) acceptance of responsibilities and challenges of single parenthood, (b) prioritization of the parental role, (c) consistent, nonpunitive discipline, (d) emphasis on open communication, (e) ability to foster individuality within a supportive family unit, (f) recognition of need for self-nurturance, and (g) dedication to rituals and tradition.

Rationale

Scholarly work on minority families is quite limited. When an examination is conducted, many investigators study the black family with predetermined attitudes, often stereotyped and inflexible. Additionally, the African-American family suffers as an area of inquiry because it is problematic to facilitate scholarly investigations when researchers will not view this social institution on its own terms (Willie, 1988).

Researchers have examined single mothers living in poverty. Frequently, their goal is to provide statistical data for local

and federally funded programs. Others have examined the consequences of divorce. Few, however, have investigated the lives of working-class, never-married single mothers for the purpose of understanding the challenges and resources of their daily lives. If a diversified population is vital in social action endeavors among minorities, then a one-sided analysis whose focal point is only on the poor (Willie, 1988) or divorced women is a peripheral angle that is too restricted for aiding in the creation of satisfactory programs, policies, and guidelines for enhancing well-being.

The present study is one of the first attempts to explore the dynamics of the African-American family on its own terms and to observe stresses as well as successes among the family unit.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers continue to offer guidelines for the definition, appraisal, and management of stress; however, few studies have considered what stressors and managing stress mean to those being investigated. It is important to examine what stressors mean to single-parent mothers and how these meanings affect family functioning and well-being. This clarity of meaning not only will aid practitioners in adequately identifying and assessing stressors in single-parent families; it also will aid in understanding the impact on children residing with single mothers.

Objectives

This study sought to understand stressors, resources, stress management strategies, and well-being among African-American, working-class single mothers in young adulthood. The primary goal was to understand events/situations that are stressful. A closely related objective was the investigation of the appraisal process of the stressor and the role of resources employed to manage stressful events.

While there is a wealth of information on stressors, management strategies, and well-being, numerous unanswered questions still remain. One reason for this may be that past research relied heavily on quantitative measures. Scholars less frequently allowed individuals to describe their experience in their own words. Therefore, these empirical works could not fully reveal respondents' perceptions of stressors, stress management, and well-being.

This study sought to add to the family research literature new information regarding stresses and successes experienced by single-parent families of African-American descent. Because minority families may adhere to rules and meanings that deviate from the dominant culture, the focus was on their perceptions and the meanings associated with those perceptions. The guiding questions for this objective were as follows:

1. What are the primary stressors for African-American working single mothers?
2. What resources do single mothers have to aid in managing stressors?
3. What stress management techniques do single mothers use?
4. What is single mothers' overall evaluation of their lives?

Definitions

Single-Parent Family

Because the very definition of family is an issue (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993), single-parent family is a term that remains ambiguous. Single parenthood can be the result of divorce or separation, death of a spouse, or births to never-married women. For the purpose of this study, single-parent family was defined as a parent-child subsystem where the mother was the head of the household and at least one child under age 18 resided in the home.

Working-Class

The less fortunate among the middle-class can be best described as the working-class. Employment traditions are divided into white-, blue-, and more recently pink-collar workers. The distinctions become hazy as service positions and skilled technical work replace factory jobs. Education and economic stability provide the best description between the upper

and lower echelons of the working class. Although the latter are more vulnerable to low wages, no benefits, and underemployment, the work ethic is greatly valued (Kliman & Madsen, 1998).

Stressor

A stressor is an event or situation potent enough to provoke change in the family system. What is defined as a stressor event is highly contextual and greatly influenced by culture, ethnicity, family structure, and other external forces. Stressors create change and the perceived changes will vary greatly in quality and quantity. The variability can be attributed largely to family members' perceptions and meanings of the stressor. This aspect has been the least examined by family stress researchers. The family's beliefs, perceptions, and meanings are the most crucial aspect to investigate if variations in family stress are to be more clearly described and understood (Boss, 1988).

Crisis

It is important to make the distinction between stressor and crisis. Stressor is not synonymous with a crisis, although conceptual clarity regarding these terms is lacking in the scholarly literature. Crisis is categorical (Boss, 1988), meaning that the family system is either in crisis or not and

represents change that is so demanding and overwhelming that the family is immobilized by it for a period of time.

Stress

Stress is "the state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all of the nonspecifically-induced changes within a biological system" (Selye, 1978). Stress is neither good nor bad; its valence depends on how the organism reacts to it.

Coping and Management

The terms stress and coping lack conceptual clarity, are characterized by methods, and evolve from overlapping theoretical bases (Altmaier, 1995). After 40 years of studying stress and coping, we know both more and less (Lazarus, 1993). While the terms coping, adaptation, and management carry distinct meanings, they frequently are used to describe similar processes used to decrease or alleviate stress and promote well-being.

Lazarus (1976) offered as a definition of coping, a cognitive activity incorporating an assessment of impending harm and an assessment of the consequences. These coping techniques can be either direct action behaviors employed to alter a stressed relationship with the environment or intrapsychic forms of managing used to reduce emotional arousal. For the purpose of this study, I decided to have participants appraise individual

and family stress management because their perception was vital to understanding their life experiences and their meaning of stress management. Well-being was defined as the subjective, self-reported assessment of personal and life satisfaction.

Theoretical Perspectives

Two theoretical perspectives were employed. The first was Hill's Stress theory model. The second was the Family Life Cycle approach. Both were central to understanding the stressors that individual's face as they routinely pass through the various stages of life.

Stress Theory: ABC-X & Double ABC-X Model

Reuben Hill's (1958) family stress framework is of vital importance to this study. Hill's ABC-X model focuses on three variables: A-- the provoking event or stressor, B-- the family's resources or strengths at the time of the event, C-- the meaning attached to the event by the family (individually and collectively), and X the degree of adaptation. While all of the variables are instrumental in a valid assessment, the C variable is the most crucial in understanding the meaning of the event. Because the C variable is difficult to measure, it has been the least investigated variable in the model (Boss, 1988).

Hill's ABC-X model was expanded to the Double ABC-X model. The original three variables were expanded to: Aa-- a pile-up of

stressors; Bb-- existing and new resources; Cc-- perception of Aa and Bb and Xx-- bonadaptation, adaptation, or maladaptation. Family adaptation is the central concept of the expanded model.

Neither of the frameworks emerged from data involving minority families. However, it embraces the notion of diversity by allowing the individual or family to assess and appraise the stressor. Hence, families, not researchers, define the significance of the event.

Family Life Cycle

The family-life cycle approach maintains that individuals and families develop in distinct stages (Winton, 1995). Many of these stages are marked by a significant event such as a wedding. An individual is expected to progress from being a single young adult to of a married young adult to being half of a married couple with children. While the ordering of these stages remain similar cultural variations do exist (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). In ethnically diverse groups and minority families, a truncated cycle often is present (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). Stages are frequently shortened because of events that occur out of the standard sequence (ie., majority culture's). For example, childbearing typically precedes marriage in African-American families. If a woman has chosen to have children prior to a marital relationship, she may be faced with individual and

familial processes requiring her to complete tasks that may create a great degree of stress.

Carter and McGoldrick have offered explanations for the stressful transitions that can occur. They employ a model that views the flow of anxiety in a family as being both vertical and horizontal (Carter and Helms, 1978). The vertical flow in a system includes family patterns, myths, secrets, and legacies that are transmitted down through the generations of a family. The horizontal flow in the system includes the anxiety produced by developmental and unpredictable stresses on the family as it proceeds through time, managing the changes and transitions associated with the family life cycle. The degree of anxiety engendered by stress on the vertical and horizontal axes at the points where they converge is the key determinant of how well families will manage stage-critical changes through life. Vertical stressors often are pervasive for individuals and families. Frequently a legacy of poverty, abuse, and neglect strongly influences individual orientations toward mastery. The mastery-oriented individual believes that he or she can solve any problem. They view themselves as survivors as opposed to victims. The continuation of deprivation and alienation many times pre-dates individual family members' current experiences. Often, families are dealing with a chronic pile-up of stressors rather than single stressors (Boss, 1988). This reality makes societal and familial managing more difficult to achieve.

Conceptual Framework

Symbolic Interactionism

Mothers' perception of an event was central to this study. Therefore, similar to Boss' (1988) work on family stress, in this study the conceptual framework employed was symbolic interactionism. The basic tenet of this conceptual approach is that individuals construct their reality based on both personal and shared meanings of symbols. Symbolic interactionism focuses on interactions within the family and on symbols of interaction in the larger context (Mead, 1934).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Economic/Employment Status of Single-Parent Families

It is well documented that one of the most monumental stressors for single-parent families is financial strain/economic hardship. Single-parent families headed by mothers generally have the lowest income of all family groups. According to (United States Bureau of Census, 1992), the average before-tax family income for single mothers with children under 18 was \$17,747; for single fathers \$30,445; and for married couples with children \$48,737. A vast majority of single-parent families drop below the U.S. poverty line because of their family size. When compared to married mothers, single mothers have reported a lower income status, higher stress levels, and lack of time (McClanahan & Booth, 1989).

Economics is an essential factor relating to divorce and singlehood. Many women choose to remain in less than optimal relationships in an effort to avoid the dramatic decrease in finances often experienced in single-parent households. The financial burden faced by many single parents can be both challenging and overwhelming.

Women's participation in the workforce is frequently stressful because they: (a) earn lower wages than their male counterparts, (b) often do not advance, (c) do not feel a sense

of belonging and community, and (d) operate in less than optimal working environments. While informal support plays an important role in explaining men's sense of community, formal sources of support are more important for explaining women's sense of community (Lambert & Hopkins, 1995). Findings suggest that African Americans, especially women, have a more difficult time experiencing a sense of community at work. Implications also suggest that more formal sources of support must be offered from the corporate culture if women are to feel accepted and supported. Indeed, Jackson (1993) discovered that when respondents' employment status was consistent with employment preference, role strain was lower and overall life satisfaction was higher. Based on organizational experiences, women have reported feeling excluded by management from participation in informal development activities (Cianni & Romberger, 1997). Supportive workplace relationships, well-designed jobs, and policies that are important to workers' sense of community are all salient to understanding working conditions.

In addition to the obvious pay gap and infrequent promotions, African Americans in general, and women in particular, continue to face the residue of a historically racist society. A racist environment changes and intensifies the meaning and impact of normative and catastrophic sources of stress (McAdoo, 1983). Racism's variation and intensification is exponentially stressful because it is often extreme and also

occurs so often that it comes to seem mundane. It is not simply the grand events of life that perpetuate and exacerbate the stressors associated with racism, but the day-to-day demands of dealing with injustices, unequal opportunities, and the constant and pervasive nature of racism.

Living Arrangements Among Single-Parent Families

Because of economic hardships, many times single mothers must live in shared housing in an effort to maximize financial resources. In a study on single mothers in various living arrangements, Folk's (1996) analysis supported the notion that subfamilies, living within another household, are more likely to have greater economic and time resources. It was discovered that white mothers living alone and those in shared arrangements had the highest individual earnings, but those who cohabited had total household incomes about twice the size of those who lived alone. Conversely, African-American mothers who cohabitated had household incomes only one-third higher than those of black mothers who lived alone. It also was found that similar mothers who were employed work similar hours regardless of living arrangements. Time spent in household work averaged about 30 hours per week for all employed mothers. Children of white mothers contributed on average 6 hours of household time, whereas black children contributed 8 hours and both white and black

children who lived in independent single- mother households contributed about 1 hour more per week.

Parent-Child Relations

Parenting is a crucial process in the family. However, what is known about parenting is based primarily on studies conducted on Euro-American, middle-class families. When racial diversity is explored, members of minority groups are then compared to those of the majority. Hence, parents' creation of unique and individualized strategies based on the family's culture often are overlooked or misunderstood. Many researchers have argued that the style of African-American parents is highly controlling, low in warmth, and not very democratic. However, these characterizations are drawn by evaluating parenting in African-American families using perspectives and measures that have evolved from parenting as constructed by the dominant culture.

Baumrind (1971) described three basic parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. The authoritarian parent is highly controlling, values obedience, and lacks warm interaction. Permissive parents are noncontrolling, allowing children to have freedom, and abdicating direct responsibility for the child's development. While the authoritative parent is demanding, he/she also directs the child's activities in a warm, rational manner and encourages verbal give and take.

Baumrind (1972) found two other patterns that seem to have beneficial effects. A quasi-authoritarian mode of control emerged from the study of African-American girls in the sample. African-American girls, when compared to European-American girls, were significantly more independent and dominant. The socialization process that characterized these African-American families, while authoritarian by white standards, reflected traditional values within the black culture and appeared to be beneficial in terms of child outcomes (Baumrind, 1978). While this classic work offered a broad delineation of parenting styles, in a cultural context, it is well documented that a host of other variables contribute to parenting styles.

Most scholarly work on parenting assumes that influences on parent-child relations are comparable across both children and contexts. Many investigations are notably limited by the fact that they examine between-group variation involving comparisons of single-parent and two-parent families. The lower educational level and increased demands of lower income status that characterize many ethnic and single-parent families are often assumed to mean that they have a lower capacity to provide supportive, sensitive, and involved parenting (McLoyd, 1990).

There may be far more similarities than differences in parenting when socioeconomic status is controlled for (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994), meaning that variations in parenting may be minimized when socioeconomic status is controlled for

(Brooks, 1991, Jaramillo & Zapata, 1987). Indeed, Wilson (1995) reported that mothers' perceived the level of the mothers' education, the number of children in the household, and the amount of financial resources available affect performance of parenting. In addition to investigating racial/cultural issues, there needs to be a greater attention given to socioeconomic influences. A perspective also is needed that focuses on within-group differences if we are to accurately describe parenting.

Flexibility of Roles and Relationships

A primary challenge to families around the world is the incongruity between perceived family needs and resources and how both change over time. Families in general, and single-parent families in particular, move in and out of positions, enabling them to mobilize resources and meet needs in the face of internal and external threat (Moen & Firebaugh, 1994). Today, more than ever before, processes of expansion, contraction, and the resultant realignment of family-systems often are required in order for families to function effectively. The focus on flexibility means a focus on process rather than outcome. A focus on process encourages parents to learn communication skills applicable to difficult family situations that will inevitably present themselves when predictability and control is lacking (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993).

Unlike the traditional nuclear family in which the division of labor often is based on traditional sex roles in which both males and females learn and perform what have been traditionally dichotomized as the instrumental and expressive functions (Crosbie-Burnett, 1993), single parents may have to perform tasks that are outside their usual gendered parental role. Because of the various roles that must be performed, role overload, the feeling that the demands of roles outweigh the resources of the individual to deal effectively with the demands frequently is apparent in single-parent families. Role strain is a term frequently associated with role overload. However, with role strain there is a sense of being pulled between competing demands. Both role overload and role strain frequently are present in adult member single-parent households or any other households where the female is required to overfunction. Role strain is related to life satisfaction (McCullough, 1992). Indeed, Morrison's (1995) results supported the conclusion that the most frequently reported difficulty was the constant pressure of multiple adult responsibilities with no immediate relief from another adult in the home.

Support Systems

Social support can buffer families from stress and promote well-being as families marshal their resources to manage stress. Interpersonal relationships, especially for women, offer a sense

of competence and reassurance. Reciprocal assistance is quite common among African-American families. Women often survive by relying on family (both biological and fictive), friends, co-workers, and even children for emotional and psychological support.

While there are community services offered to single parents, African-American women rely much more heavily on kin and fictive kin (informal supports) than they do on the social services available (formal supports). Women tend to seek social support and use emotion-focused coping strategies to a greater extent than men. Conversely, men employ more problem-focused coping (Smith & Dodge, 1994), seeking support from family, friends, church members, and work associates. It has been argued that gender differences in the quality of relationships, not gender per se, may account for previously reported differences in coping style. It is possible that men and women do not actually differ in how they cope but rather appear to differ because men and women are faced with different life stressors and have different resources available from social networks in terms of the nature of the social offered.

Religious institutions also have been identified as a means of support for single parents. McAdoo (1995) reported that 76% of mothers she had surveyed felt that the church had helped African Americans function in this society. This positive

evaluation included churches giving strong support to the family, as well as providing a system of beliefs.

Well-Being

Resiliency, mastery, and hardiness are concepts related to the belief that an individual and a family can conquer any obstacle placed before them. These perspectives encourage action. Both unconscious and cognitive components are present (Boss, 1988).

Gender, race, social class, and self-identity all will greatly affect perceived well-being. The triple class citizenship hierarchy of subordination-- that is, being African-American, female, and at a lower economic status-- can potentially create a great degree of stress. Class is a variable that is directly related to how individuals experience, appraise, and manage stress. Much of the focus on classism, and other forms of oppression, typically is on the external manifestations of oppression (Russell, 1996). However, with respect to classism, much of the process that takes place is internal. This internalized process has implications for individuals' self-esteem and self-efficacy. There is often a pervasive sense of being stressed out or stretched too thin while facing too many obstacles.

It is important to understand gender issues as they relate to internal processes. Moran and Eckenrode (1991) and Allgood-

Merton et al. (1990) found that females reported higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem than males. Evidence reported by Munford (1994) found that self-esteem was significantly negatively correlated with depression. As would be expected, lower self-esteem scores were associated with higher levels of depression. However, these findings could reflect the fact that men and women generally deal with different issues and stressors that affect self-esteem. Frequently, men acquire self-esteem through identity with their work context while women focus more on relational contexts.

Race also can influence attitudes related to predicting well-being, self-esteem, and depression in African-American women, according to the study of female students and nonstudents conducted by Plant and Yanico (1991). Yet, Fine et al. (1992) documented no significant differences in depression, health, and life satisfaction when comparing African-American and European-American divorced mothers. In fact, after controlling for socioeconomic status and time since divorce, African-American mothers reported being more satisfied with parenthood than did European-American parents.

The high-risk status of low-income, single mothers can play a role in depressive symptomatology (Hall et al., 1990). In terms of adaptation, African-American and European-American families exhibit similar overt responses to similar situations (Willie, 1998). Willie, however, asserted that this conclusion

does not suggest that there are no differences in adaptation by race. He further argued that similar problems probably have different meanings for dominant and subcultural populations.

Developmental issues also must be considered. Women who are older and more experienced (in terms of the demands of their lives) who had time to work out their living arrangements, who had children who were older and less physically demanding, who were educated enough to have stable jobs, and who were responsible for fewer persons in their homes perceived their lives as less stressful (McAdoo, 1995).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Research Perspective

A close examination of the literature suggested that many social scientists continue to employ quantitative methods, even when the ultimate goal is an understanding of perception, definition, and meaning. In an effort to gain rich, detailed insight into participants' lives, a qualitative approach was selected for this study. Qualitative research involves methods that carefully gather empirical evidence in the form of words, symbols, pictures, tapes, or other sources that generally have not been reduced to survey questions (Maxwell, 1996). It is a holistic approach. In-depth and detailed information about interactions, perceptions, understandings, and meanings are vital. Hence, the central issue is understanding the intrinsic meanings of phenomena. These methods rely largely on interpretation by both the actor/participant and the researcher. Although qualitative research is descriptive in nature, it also addresses the interrelationships that exist between phenomena that a statistical test could not examine in the same manner.

Research Method/Design

Qualitative research methodologies rely greatly on fieldwork, including both participant observation and intensive

interviewing approaches (Blumer, 1969). The in-depth interview was selected as the primary method of data collection for the present study. The interview is one of the most forceful methods of qualitative research. For unique descriptive and analytic purposes, no other method of inquiry is more revealing (McCracken, 1996). The method delves into the perceptions of individuals by allowing them to share their experiences and life narratives.

The ability to receive firsthand a respondent's viewpoint of a specific phenomenon is by far the most valuable asset of the in-depth interview. It is impossible to understand a phenomenon without directly consulting the individual experiencing it. In this study, the interview technique sought understanding as experienced by the participant. This method drew on how individuals perceived themselves and their experience in the context of the larger society.

Additionally, the interview embraced diversity and culture, not assuming that everyone reacts similarly to the same situation. Allowing an individual to share their narrative has obvious advantages, particularly for participants who are not of the dominant race, culture, or sex. The in-depth interview allows the researcher to appreciate the richness and depth of individual and shared meanings that exist within particular contexts and cultures. In this study, the strategy gave voice to phenomena experienced by members of a group who otherwise may

have been overlooked. Furthermore, because the phenomena were not reduced to researcher-constructed variables, the participants richly and fully described in their own words, their experiences and meanings that have contributed to their current reality. Finally, the interview approach was chosen because it aided in creating an understanding of statistical numbers in their fuller social and cultural context (McCracken, 1996).

Despite the fact that there is a narrow usage of qualitative methods in the family science field, this approach can be both descriptive and telling. In reviewing the literature, I found it surprising to witness the uneven distribution of quantitative and qualitative research methods employed. The body of empirical knowledge on minority families was equally disheartening in this regard. The present study was an attempt to address some of these gaps in scholarly work.

Research Instrument

An interview guide was the primary research instrument used in this study (see Appendix C). The primary purpose of the tool was to ensure that the researcher covered the same content for each participant. While the instrument was not mandatory, the interview guide did not detract from the responses that participants gave. In fact, the emergent design was flexible enough to address new themes or topics that emerged from the responses of participants.

Methodological Procedures

Sampling Procedure

The snowball sampling technique was the sampling procedure employed. Snowball sampling-- also known as network, chain referral, or reputational sampling is a method for identifying and sampling or selecting cases in a network (Neuman, 1997). This does not mean that each individual directly knew, interacted with, or was influenced by every other individual in the network. Rather, it refers to the interconnected web of linkages frequently based from one person.

The initial sampling procedure was to include using professionals from various state and local organizations to identify potential participants for the study. Because of the extensive time constraints at the state level, another route was pursued. As a former state employee, I witnessed first hand the single parents that received or were rejected services and appeared to remain resilient in the state of adversity. Hence, I identified the first participant based on demographics and my professional perception of family functioning. At the conclusion of this and each subsequent interview, the researcher asked the participant to "suggest another single-parent mother of your social class, age, and background who might be willing to talk with me." Thus I networked among actual participants in an

effort to recruit further participants. The procedure was used until 12 interviewees were recruited.

Recruitment Procedure

I contacted potential participants based on a referral from actual participants. They were given a brief description of the project and asked if they would agree to be a participant. Upon receiving verbal agreement to participate, participants were asked where they felt most comfortable being interviewed. Everyone who inquired about the study or who was approached by the researcher did agree to participate, yielding a 100% participation rate. Interviews were conducted in accordance with individual participant preferences as to time and location.

Sample

The research method greatly influenced the sample size. The number was small enough to obtain life narratives, yet large enough to paint a picture of the lives of African-American single mothers under varying conditions and experiences. Because the focus was on rich and in-depth data, the sample was limited to 12 single mothers. Eight respondents generally are deemed sufficient to identify recurrent themes (McCracken, 1996) if the sample is homogenous. The sample was chosen not to represent a section of the larger world but rather to gain an understanding of what an event means to a specific population. The primary

purpose of qualitative research is not to determine how many and what kind but instead to gain access into a culture (McCracken, 1996). Information saturation and redundancy (Weiss, 1994) was the formal means of calling completion to the study. Information redundancy appeared by the third interview.

There was a demographic similarity among the women in the study in years of schooling (12+), number of children (one child with the exception of two families where there were two children), age of children (8 and under), marital status (continuously single, with the exception of one who was divorced), employment status (employed at least 40 hours per week with some variation in schedules). Eight worked one full-time job, 4 worked two jobs (3 of which also held full-time jobs), and 2 were part-time employees and full-time students. Annual salaries ranged from income brackets of less than \$10,000 to \$20,001-25,000. All of the participants reported being moderately religious with the exception of one, who reported being strongly religious. The majority of the participants reported attending church at various intervals, from several times per week to once a year.

Bracketing Interviews

Bracketing interviews were conducted with two women approximately nine months before this study began. This process gave the researcher the opportunity to clarify objectives and goals, to identify leading or ambiguous questions, and to establish rapport building strategies.

Data Collection

I conducted face-to-face interviews in the participants' homes, with the exception of one that was conducted at the participant's work place during the spring of 1999 in a midsize southeastern city. The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour.

Data Analysis

The data were approached inductively. Inductive analysis refers to the building of emergent patterns, themes, and categories as they were produced by the data. Glaser and Strauss (1965) noted that the researcher should expect the nature and definition of analytic categories to change during the course of a project. Thus, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously.

Because of the large amount of data received when conducting qualitative research, the data was managed by the QSR NUD*IST program. QSR is the acronym for Qualitative Solutions and Research, and NUD*IST is the acronym for Non-Numerical

Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing. The software offers the ability to browse within and between documents, explore coding, and import and export tables. The software aided in creating, managing, and exploring ideas and categories (Bazeley, 1997). Although the data was managed by QSR NUD*IST, I discovered the themes that emerged. Additionally, I coded and entered the data.

Several dominant themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. All of the results are presented categorically and the findings are supported by quotations from the in-depth interviews.

Representation of Data

The data were represented in two ways. First, I used words and categories articulated by the participants to organize themes and patterns. I also represented categories and themes that did not have labels or terms. These terms and concepts have their roots in the social science and research literature (Patton, 1980).

Validity/Accuracy

Qualitative researchers rarely have the benefit of formal comparisons, sampling strategies, or statistical manipulations to rule out the effect of certain variables. Hence qualitative researchers refer to validity as the correctness, or credibility

of a description, conclusion, interpretation, or other sort of account (Maxwell, 1996).

A primary threat when a researcher is conducting fieldwork is inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data. In an effort to alleviate this problem, I recorded each interview and verbatim transcriptions were created. An individual independent of the study conducted the transcriptions. After the transcriptions were complete, the researcher read every transcript three times to ensure that the data was accurate. If ambiguous words or comments were present, the researcher re-listened to the actual interview tapes in an effort to clarify areas of concern.

Additionally, a peer editor and the co-principal investigator read transcripts and reviewed coding to ensure that the themes and categories that emerged were conspicuous to individuals other than myself. The process was used as one attempt to control for researcher bias.

Finally, once the data were collected and analyzed, a member check was conducted. The strategy known as the member check gives the researcher the opportunity to consult with participants to see if they can fit their life experiences under the broad categories and themes that have emerged from the data. Themes were identified, typed, and hand-delivered to the participants. They were asked to read the results and see if they could fit their life experiences into the themes that emerged. Follow-up phone calls were conducted to obtain the

participants' responses. This important check on validity was an attempt to learn how the participants in the study made sense of the results, rather than simply pigeonholing participants' words and experiences in a researcher-constructed framework (Maxwell, 1996).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Before reporting the results, I will present a brief description of each of the participants. The sketch of the mothers is provided to help the reader gain a sense of who each participant was in the context of a larger picture. I sought to capture the uniqueness of each woman's life and, at the same time, to define and describe principles that seem to shape African-American single mothers lives generally. Names and other information have been changed to protect each participant's and child's anonymity.

Participants

Tiffany

The only previously married mom was 28-year-old Tiffany. Her marriage to her 5 year-old son's father ended after only 2 years. Although Tiffany's alcoholic father was in her life, her son had no contact with his father. She had a high school education and some college. She also had been in the military. She has worked full-time for 2 years as a lab processor assistant. On the day of her interview with me, she was coming from a job interview in hopes of attaining part-time employment in addition to her full-time position. She ultimately was hired and thus began both full-time and part-time employment. Although

Tiffany had been awarded child support, its payment was inconsistent, and she could not heavily rely upon it.

Hope

Although 24 year-old Hope resided in a well-kept apartment with her 17-month-old daughter, she was in the process of buying her first home. Her daughter appeared to be her pride and joy. Hope was a recent college graduate working in her field of study as a case manager. She had been on her job 9 months. It was symbolic that she chose the name Hope as her pseudonym. Despite the fact that her partner and father of her child was incarcerated, her hope of reuniting was evident by the family portraits that laced the walls of her living room.

Jane

Jane was a 29-year-old childcare assistant. She had held her current full-time position for one year. She also had a part-time job, selling personal items for a large multimillion-dollar conglomerate. Although she had never been married, she had cohabited with her daughter's father for 2 years. Their recent break up made him suspicious about who his daughter was going to be around. He frequently called or dropped by unannounced. She resided in an apartment with her daughter. Her 4-year-old daughter was in local preschool near her place of employment. This service helped tremendously, since Jane's

mother also worked full-time, she had no one else to rely on to pick the child up. She was receiving governmental subsidies for housing, childcare, and food. However, she had not been awarded child support. At the time of the interview, she was in individual therapy. She felt that she had made great progress. She was down to one session per week versus the three sessions that she initially attended.

Sarah

Sarah, a 26-six year-old mother of two, had been recently terminated from her job. She had been with the company only 7 months before her duties abruptly ceased. Sarah obtained a full-time temporary position only 2 ½ weeks later. Because Sarah resided in subsidized housing, the new position that she obtained caused her rent to escalate beyond a point that she felt was realistic for her to pay. At the time of the interview, she also was bothered by the fact that her children's fathers were "taking care of white women and their kids" and disregarding their responsibilities to their black children. The uncertainty of her future and the issues with the noncustodial fathers of her children seemed to be both consuming and stressful.

Diane

Diane, a 28-year-old counselor in a residential program, had a 2-year-old daughter. She had a Bachelor's degree and

worked full-time in her field of study. Diane lived in an apartment not far from her place of employment. She relied greatly on her mother for childcare. This heavy reliance was due in part to her work schedule. She frequently worked 12-hour shifts, from early morning until midnight. Her schedule also included traveling out of the city to visit her child's father. He was incarcerated in a facility several hundred miles from her home.

Sandi

Twenty-seven-year-old Sandi, a social services employee, received her Master's degree from a large southeastern university. Sandi went to the military after receiving her degree. She was medically discharged after learning that she was pregnant and having complications with the pregnancy. She has held her full-time position for 7 months. Although Sandi had been awarded child support, payments were unpredictable and inconsistent. She had been in and out of the courts with her 15-month-old daughter's father. Although Sandi reported being only moderately religious, she spoke frequently of the spiritual guidance that she had received from God. She frequently referred to religious concepts and principles when describing her life narrative.

Lucy

Twenty-five-year-old Lucy was a transit operator. She lived in a house with her 6-year-old son and her 3-year-old daughter. She was a high school graduate and had been to college for two years. She had been on her job for 1 ½ years and worked on average 50 plus hours per week. Her daily schedule consisted of getting up at 4:00 a.m., taking her children to her mother's, going to work for 4 hours, taking a break for 3 hours, and going back to work for 5 hours. Although she was given the option by me to disclose whether or not she received child support, she did not indicate whether an award had been made. She reported that, although church was what she needed, she still didn't go.

Anne-Marie

Anne-Marie was the 28-year-old mother of a 7-year-old daughter. She lived in a subsidized apartment complex where a murder had taken place only 2 days before her interview for this study. She reported that "it's not the best when you're depending on the government but it's o.k." Ann-Marie was a full-time student graduating from a large southeastern university approximately 1 week after the interview. She also worked part-time. She was excited about the opportunities that lay ahead for her. Anne-Marie was planning to obtain full-time employment in the social services field. She also planned to obtain her Master's degree within the next year. She did not receive child

support. However, an invested interest in her well-being was demonstrated through support from family and friends.

Louella

Louella was a 23-year-old, single mom. Although her daughter's father was incarcerated, he proved to a great influence on the child's attitude and behavior. At the time of the interview, she had some concerns with her daughter's paternal side of the extended family. Louella was the youngest participant in the study, however she had proved herself through her accomplishments. She resided in a recently built new home. She received the chance to own a new home through an international organization that helps low-income individuals attain their dream of becoming home owners. She worked two part-time jobs, one as a customer service representative and the other as a sales associate for a local department store. She was a high school graduate and had received training through an area Urban League program. Her Urban League counselor took great interest in her well-being, calling her periodically to ensure that she was still employed and to give her hope and inspiration.

Michelle

Twenty-nine-year-old Michelle was a full-time administrative assistant. She also held a part-time position as a pharmacy technician. The combination of both jobs frequently

meant 60-hour work weeks. Michelle lived in an apartment with her 7 year-old son. She had recently moved from a drug- infested apartment complex where "fussing and gun shots" occurred on a daily basis.

Dominique

Dominique was a full-time student and employed part-time. She was a 24-year-old mother residing in a house with her 4-year-old. Recently, her sons father had become "missing." His whereabouts were unsure, and foul play was not being ruled out. This unexpected tragedy had been a challenge for Dominique because she is unsure what to tell her son when he asked about his father. Due to the circumstances, she did not receive child support.

Rebecca

Twenty-five-year-old Rebecca resided in a house with her 8-year-old daughter. Although she never had married, she had resided with her daughter's father in the local housing projects during her pregnancy and for the first 2 years of Christy's life. Despite the 6 years that have passed, she said her daughter frequently inquired about her dad and "why he's not here." Rebecca recently began a new full-time position with the local Department of Health and Human Services. She had been on her previous job almost 2 years.

A number of themes emerged from the interviews conducted with these women. In order to describe these themes from the perspective of the single mothers, I selected quotes from the interviews that reflect the essence of the thematic context. It was hoped that the use of the mother's own words would capture best the meanings that they conveyed in the interviews.

Stressors

Themes associated with stressors that emerged from the qualitative analysis focused around issues of: (a) sole financial responsibility and financial strain, (b) sole familial and household responsibility, (c) time constraints, and (d) noncustodial fathers issues.

Sole Financial Responsibility and Financial Strain: I Don't Go Down, but I Don't Go Up Either

Single-parent families headed by mothers have the lowest average income of all family groups. In 1991, the average before-tax family income for single mothers with children under 18 was \$17,747; for single fathers \$30,445; and for married couples with children \$48,737 (United States Bureau of Census, 1992). The economic challenges that faced these single mothers were voiced with ease, simplicity, and clarity.

Jane:

It's just not enough money out here-- as far as the jobs... to make enough to really support yourself if you're single.

Sometimes-- under certain circumstances like maybe the car breaking down-- and its hard to save money and you may have to take from this bill, take from that bill, and that's when I say you are always behind or you're never caught up. I'm not talking about material things. Just the basics-- your rent, your utilities, food, clothes, car. You've got to have a car. Some people say that it's not a necessity, but I think it is. And doctors bills? You got those bills, those bills are the main ones. I never hit rock bottom. I don't go down, but I don't go up either. I stay pretty much at one level. Sometimes I may stop a little bit lower but I never hit rock bottom. My definition of rock bottom is just buck out as far as foodless, homeless, or just utilities-- my lights have never been cut off, nothing like that. I would look at that... that would be rock bottom for me.

The metaphoric notion of hitting a brick wall was echoed by Rebecca, Sandi, and Hope.

Rebecca:

Yes, money is a big problem because without money the world don't go around. Financial situations-- you feel like you're hitting a big brick wall. You get frustrated with not being able to do this and not being able to do that. Working paycheck to paycheck, monthly trying to stretch your bills here, stretch your bills there... oh I'll pay it on the next payday, or I'll buy Christy the shoes the next payday.

Sandi:

Finances are major, major [laughs]. There is nothing small about finances. That is major. I pay childcare, food, clothes, every cent come from me. I'm supposed to be getting child support. That is something I can't never count on. I don't count that as far as money that I always have. I just seem to never have-- just enough. I have to go buy clothes. She's growing so fast. I mean her feet grows every three weeks [laughs]. I kid you not. Finances are the reality. I'm just struggling. I could be getting some help but it's not available for me-- just being a little bit over the hump and not at the bottom. I wouldn't want to go to the bottom just to get help. I just stay where I'm at.

Hope:

I make enough to make the ends meet, but you want more to do a little more than what you're already doing. That can be stressful at times too-- the financial situation. It may be stressful at times because I want to do a lot on my own and not have to ask for help. On the other hand, I know its okay to ask for help. I know when my mother was young she needed help. She don't mind helping me because she knows that I'm trying and she wants to help me because I am trying. I always know that I can ask her, but sometimes I just don't want to, but I do, I just go ahead and do it.

Michelle, who held both full-time and part-time employment at the time of the interview, shared her financial experiences with the constant demands of providing for her child.

I think the biggest thing is finances. He is so expensive. Kids are expensive period. You know every week or every month you think I have this aside but something comes up, and you're like that is \$50 gone. I have two jobs and we're making it. You know occasionally I may need \$5 or \$10 here or there- my mom and my aunts and my grandmother are there.

Twenty-three-year-old Louella disclosed her financial situation and the fact that she had to make payment arrangements from time to time.

What's stressful is making sure everything is okay. Making sure that I've got bill money. Even though I don't have all the money, I know how to make the arrangements to pay the other half of it next week.

Contrary to the fact that education frequently has been deemed the single most important variable for upward mobility in terms of economic/earning potential, the 4 participants in this study with Bachelor's degrees and higher also identified

financial strain as their most pervasive stressor. The mothers reported that their annual income was enough to make "ends meet." However, the desire for more discretionary income was quite prevalent. While many of the individuals received some economic support from family and friends, only 4 participants had been awarded child support from the noncustodial fathers. Of those who had been awarded child support, payments were inconsistent and unpredictable.

Sole Familial and Household Responsibility: I'm Having to Do It All by Myself

All of the mothers worked at least 40 hours per week with some variation in schedules. Eight worked one full-time job, 4 worked two jobs (3 of which also held full-time jobs), and 2 were part-time employees and full-time students. Indeed, to come home and perform a second shift (Hochschild, 1989) is tiring and demanding. The salience and significance of this issue was clearly vocalized.

Anne-Marie:

The most stressful thing for me is me having to do it all by myself. It's just a big, big burden on me. I'm trying to finish school. And things just come up. For instance we've been having problems with her in school. It's always something. It just seems like it's always something. My car is broke down so we are having to depend on people for transportation-- family and friends they've been there for me. It's just everything-- school, Joy, transportation. I'm having to do it all by myself. It's just things--it's just so overwhelming-- it's just everything. Having to take her here and there because I

try to keep her involved in stuff as much as I can and it's just hard having to do it all by yourself.

Jane:

What's stressful is just having total responsibility. I let my guards down or I quit, then what? Sometimes you know you feel like you just want to... you just want to throw your hands up and say I'm through with it. But I can't do that. Even though I feel like that a lot, I can't do it. That is why I said sometimes I get stressed out. I look at it if... if something happened-- if I broke a leg or something, I look at what would I do? There's nobody else here. When I say I can't quit, I can't quit. It would have to be my leg's broke, my neck's broke, or something like that. If it's a common cold or back hurting, I'm still going. If I'm able, I'm still going. There is no help, just me.

Even the seemingly routine day-to-day tasks were stressful for Diane when no aid with the continuous demands of parenting was available.

One thing I found about my daughter being 2 years old grocery shopping is very difficult. I have to take her to the grocery store. It's like she's got 10 hands. I'm trying to stop her from getting my stuff. And then trying to watch her and chasing her around the grocery store. It's just like washing clothes and having to go to the laundry mat and watching her and things of that nature. Of course if I had that second person to step in and help, I think it would-- the daily tasks-- routines would be a lot easier.

Mothers in the study clearly described the on-going demands of parenting, particularly their children's needs for adult attention.

Sandi:

A major thing is being one parent in a home. Everything she needs I have to provide. If she's sick I have to be there, if I'm sick I have to be there. It's never someone else here to take care of her. I have to do everything.

Basically everything is on me. I'm the only one here. I don't have any-- I have family support, but having someone else in the household-- to help me out. I don't have that. Her needs are so great... just playing with her. She enjoys that. She doesn't like sitting by herself. She always wants to interact.

Hope:

It's stressful being a parent sometimes. I guess from being tired from going to work and she wants to play or wants attention. Sometimes I just want to lie down. It's stressful being a single parent and having to take care of a household.

The physical and psychic demands of solo parenting created stress for mothers who did not have time for respite.

Tiffany:

What's stressful is... the idea of knowing that its not just me. It's two. I try not to think that I'm by myself, because that takes me to another level as far as being depressed or whatever.

Sarah:

It's stressful doing it all alone. Doing it all by yourself. I wish I had somebody to come in and say "put your feet up." I'll take care of it.

Time Constraints: You're Thinking About All of That Stuff and You're Like How Am I Going To Do All of That

The theme of time constraints, also conceptualized by Hochschild (1997) as the time bind, was everpresent throughout the study. Repeatedly, it was reported that daily tasks and routines limit the overall amount of time that must be divided appropriately for instrumental as well as expressive needs, individual versus familial requirements, and leisure activities.

Many of the mothers' workdays began at 5:00 a.m. and were not over until 11:00 p.m. or midnight. Despite the fact that all of the mothers worked at least 40 hours per week, schedules still had to be orchestrated around leisure and nonwork scheduled activities and school. The participants articulated the time constraints imposed on single parents in the following vignettes.

Two of the mothers spoke about their feelings of not having enough time to spend with their children in day-to-day activities.

Dominique:

More than anything that is taking a toll on me right now is not spending that much time with Marcus. That's bothering me more than anything. I feel like if I don't do it nobody's going to. Especially with him not having his father around. I'm trying to take up the slack for both of us. And it's very, very stressful.

Jane:

Maybe an event at school, just the fact that he [my child's father] may be there, he may not be. I'm going to try. But I can't be there for everything. I see it coming... if I'm not there, who would be? It shows. She talks about it, so therefore she's thinking about it. It may be even worrying her, I don't know. I'm facing that now.

Three of the mothers described trying to juggle all of the responsibilities they hold with limited time. They were very aware of the time crunch with no other adult consistently available to negotiate with about time demands.

Rebecca:

It is stressful at times when I have to work and Christy has a doctor's appointment. It's hard to have your relatives take their time out and take her to the doctor. Even with a school event-- when Christy has a program at school and I can't get off of work to go, that frustrates me. I know my child wants my support and I know sometimes she may see her peers' parents there. It may be two people in their household, but its only me and her. What they can do, sometimes I can't do. That can be very stressful at times. I know she was wondering why I was not there. I will explain it to her and had probably explained it to her previously that-- well, maybe I won't be able to be there, if I can't get off of work. I can't be there. She may say, "okay Mommy, it's okay," but I know she thinks about it.

Michelle:

He needs shoes. He needs clothes. You've got to figure out what time to get them and try to budget time and money into your work week, and its hard, just everything. Church-- you've got work, you've got school. Sunday nights you're thinking about all that stuff... and you're like, how am I going to do all that?

Sandi:

I have a lot of stressors as far as job, money, time, and just being one person there for my child.

Time is one of the most precious resources available.

Despite the yearning to spend more time with their children, many of the women were spread so thin by the end of the day that the children were asked to vacate the room so the mothers could collect some peace of mind. Indeed, McAdoo (1995) discovered that older and more experienced women (in terms of the demands of their lives) who had time to work out their living arrangements perceived their lives as less stressful. She also found that women whose children were older and less physically demanding had less stressful lives. All of the women in the present study had

children who were age 8 and under; several were age 3 and under. This could explain some of the stressors associated with the time constraints.

Noncustodial Fathers Issues: He Needs To Be a Man and Step Up to The Plate-- Do What's Right

Noncustodial father issues were identified as both stressful and consuming. These issues ranged from inconsistent caregiving in the paternal side of the family to day-to-day questioning of "where's my daddy?" This issue was particularly salient for those mothers whose children were in the developmental stage where questions of concern were both appropriate and necessary. The children ages 4 and up inquired the most about the absent father. Even when the children were not at an age where appropriate questions could be formed, the mothers frequently spoke on their children's behalf in terms of the fathers being unavailable and future social and developmental implications for the children.

Sandi:

We've been in the courts as far as child support. It's just been so rough. I'm like, "Buddy you need to do your part. Stop being macho." He does what he wants to do as far as being there. I'm telling you, I can go there, as far as diapers, you know everyday stuff. He's like, "What does she need?" What do you mean what does she need? He's talking about what does she need? What do you think she needs? What do you think a 15-month-old needs? You know, just little small stuff. This not being his first child-- I think he would definitely know what a child needs. Where do you come off? His mother does more for her than he does. She makes sure she has everything she needs

because her daddy isn't going to do it. Well, I'm like he should do it, you know, it's good to have support from her, but still he needs to be a man and step up to the plate. Do what's right.

Conflicts with the extended side of the family also created difficulties in some situations, such as the one exemplified below.

Louella:

I'm having family problems-- her daddy's side of the family. I'm having problems with two of her cousins. They are older so they know more and they are more grown. She's following in their footsteps and she's too young for that right now. When she goes over her daddy's house, she has two different attitudes. She goes over there acting grown and try to bring it home and I straighten her out... "okay, you're at home now this is your attitude here." The attention that she gets from her daddy is totally different. I told her she is confused. I think she is a little confused. I may get on her for something she does wrong, but if I do it in front them it's wrong for me. If they catch it before I do, they get on her. But it's totally different because we're two different people. If I don't agree with what they do and I bring it back to their attention-- her grandmom's attention, they get mad. I guess they feel like I don't know enough to even speak my mind. That is my child. I have to correct her.

Several mothers described the questions and concerns their children voiced about their absent fathers.

Rebecca:

Her personality when me and her father split up-- I had problems out of her behavior because she was transitioning. She had been around her father all this time and she couldn't understand why we were splitting up. She was just a child. It wasn't for her to figure out because she was a child. She asks for a lot-- for a lot of my attention. Her being a 8-year-old, she wants... sometimes you can sense the wanting of her father. I've explained to her that "I can't make your father do things that he don't want to do." I

find myself trying to do more than I should just to cover up or make her feel not so bad about the situation.

Michelle:

Day-to-day things are him asking about his dad. His dad is not involved in his life-- that is the hardest part. He's a boy. He's 7. He's asking all these questions and you're like, how do you take this? Or do I answer the questions? "Who told you that? Why are you telling me this at 7 years old?" Those are kind of the hard things, if he had his dad around more it would be easier because he could ask him.

Anne-Marie:

I think it's been hard for her to know that it's just her and myself. A lot of other people that she goes to school with and she knows have their mother and father in the home. I think she's dealing with it really well actually. She has her moments where, "I miss my daddy. I want see my daddy. Or can I call my daddy?" I think that by bringing her with me it worked out for the best. It wasn't a very healthy environment for us to be in. Like I said she has her moments-- where she doesn't want to be bothered or whatever and then with other children talking about their daddy or what their daddy did, she kind of gets down. I just try to let her know that I love her and so does her daddy. It just didn't work out that way for us. I just try to keep her-- you know, the outlook on that positive.

Mothers themselves also voiced concerns about both short- and long-term effects of the fathers' absence on their children.

Lucy:

The other stressful thing for me would probably be missing the male figure-- the father figure, especially for my little boy. As far as a male not being present... my little boy is six and he's off the hook. He hangs around nothing but me and his sister and his grandmother and cousins, its wild!

Jane:

She is starting to notice her absent father... as in seeing other kids that have both parents present. She questions it. You know I'm wondering about the days to come.

One third of the fathers of the children in this study were incarcerated at the time of the interviews. Certainly this can account for the physical absence of those men. With the exception of one father, the other men resided in the same state and still did not phone or visit regularly.

The overall time that fathers spend with their children is especially low for those who were never married to the child's mother. One explanation may be that some fathers feel that they have a peripheral role because they never resided in the home. Whatever the explanation, it was apparent in this study that both male and female children inquired about their absent fathers and in fact had a desire to understand why the father was not present.

Managing Stressors

For the purpose of organizing and classifying strategies to manage stressors, categories were established based on the three dominant themes that emerged: (a) individual/internal (self-help), (b) social/external (others help), and (c) spiritual guidance.

Individual/Internal Techniques: Go and Do Something Else to Get
Your Mind Off of It

Internal, self-help techniques were defined as things that could be done alone. Exemplified below are several strategies participants reported employing to minimize stress.

Diane, Hope, and Dominique clarified the importance of engaging in stress-free activities when under pressure.

Diane:

A lot of times I will take time out and get in a quiet place and just breathe and relax. Maybe read a book.

Hope:

A lot of times when I get stressed I try to do something I enjoy doing. I like watching movies-- funny movies. Or take a drive.

Dominique:

Just stop whatever you're doing if something is stressing you out. You know you have to just stop it for a little while. Go and do something else to get your mind off of it. Relax and focus and then go back to it.

Louella and Sandi described the significance of processing and planning in an effort to reduce stress.

Louella:

I just sit down and think about it first. I write down what I need to do, how I'm going to do it, how I'm going to figure it out and I just go over it. I just sit down and think about it and go from there.

Sandi:

To me being able to manage is to make sure things are done in a timely manner as far as if I have bills to pay. I know what to subtract from my check. I have everything

down. And I manage pretty well. I just have to set a standard. I do it step by step.

Metacommunication: I Try to Identify Where My Stress Is Coming
From and I'll Try to Problem Solve Some Kind of Way

Another strategy used was metacommunication. This included taking deep breaths, identifying where the stress was coming from, modifying inappropriate strategies, and dealing with stress before the child(ren) gets home.

Hope spoke about compartmentalizing stress to keep it from washing over in her parenting.

If I get stressed out at work or a situation not dealing with her, I usually try to deal with it before I get with her. I did have a problem-- when I was getting stressed out I was really getting frustrated with her. She could do something and I snapped at her and she have only been in my presence 30 minutes and she haven't did nothing. I'm working on that a lot. I've gotten a way from that a lot as far as taking it out on her. I try to identify where my stress is coming from and I'll try to problem solve some kind of way.

Diane pointed out the importance of reflection on experience to learn more effective ways to manage stress.

I think about how I can deal with situations in a different manner... to help in the future. These same situations are taking place on a daily basis. I try to think about how I can manage the stress in a better way.

Michelle and Tiffany used techniques to help them calm themselves when they felt emotionally stressed and were likely to express their stress in interactions with their children. Both

mothers were aware of the difficulty this could create for their children.

Michelle:

I use counting, walking away, 1,2,3, and breathing. Kind of walking away from it. When you calm down-- I think you can handle it a little bit better-- without screaming. I used to do that a lot. I learned that it makes him [my son] upset and I'm upset and we don't get anywhere. You have to kind of count and then go back to it and deal with it.

Tiffany:

When I'm on edge, I find myself like... maybe I'm just stressed out because I had a rough day at work. I'm thinking about this, and thinking about that... and when Kevin comes to me, you know you find yourself getting short at them-- and hollering. You can't be like that to them. I put myself in his shoes. When I'm short or something, I make sure that I'm disciplining him because he's wrong, not because it aggravates me or works my nerves.

While many of the women reported using superficial strategies to alleviate or minimize stress by doing physical behaviors such as reading, watching movies, or driving' there were also more action-oriented techniques employed. Many of the women spoke of their ability to identify stress, process the scenario, and problem solve. This is vital to the overall well-being of both the mothers and the children because most of the stressors were a part of everyday life.

Social/External Methods: Talking to Other People Helps

External methods were defined as managerial approaches that involved others. Included were talking to: (a) family and friends, and (b) in one case, individual therapy.

Jane:

I go to therapy [laughs]. I used to go to therapy 3 times a week. I'm down to 1 day a week now. I have good days and I have bad days. Sometimes I have worse days than others. But it never made me want to give up or quit going. You know if anything-- it's like you've got to do that! You've got to work that much harder. I can't say that I've had real crisis. I look at other people and there is always somebody worse off than me. So right now I'm one of the lucky ones.

Talking to friends and family seemed to offer mothers understanding, and a chance to externalize feelings.

Michelle:

Talking to other people, that helps. You can see what they are going through, and you know that you are not by yourself. Lately, I've been going and sitting over my girlfriend's house, and we play cards or whatever and he [my son] can play with her kids and ride their bicycles and stuff. That's been helpful a lot. You just don't realize how good it is to talk another adult about the same stuff that they may be going through. We've been doing that a lot. That has helped a whole lot.

Dominique:

Sometimes it helps to talk with friends-- that kind of gets your mind off of it. People you can call... make you laugh and make you forget about things. Yeah, friends and family. I talk to my mom, I call her and just talk with her about anything just to get my mind off of it. I have friends that don't live here so it makes me feel so much better anytime I talk to them. I call and have a normal conversation with them, and I feel better.

Hope:

I talk to my mom a lot. It's helpful for me to get it off my chest and talk about it. And hear other people's opinions about it.

The importance of supportive relationships was repeatedly reported. Many of the women actively sought out compassion and empathy from family and friends. These reports are consistent with the literature. Women are much more likely to rely on informal sources of support from extended family, fictive kin, and friends than men.

Spiritual Guidance: If It Wasn't for That Spiritual Part of Me, I Don't Think I Could Have Made It to Where I Am

Spiritual guidance was also a salient theme. This included praying, reading the Bible, keeping the faith, believing that God won't put more on you than you can bear, and believing in having a predestined life. This theme is consistent with the level of religion and religious activities that many of the subjects were involved in. Here Rebecca articulated the practical side of her spirituality.

You know, sometimes those storms will make you stronger. Well, all of the times the storms will make you stronger. I know that in situations that I've been through I can always say that it's made me stronger. It has me where I'm at today. Keep your spiritual side very open for growth, for maturity. If wasn't for that spiritual part of me, I don't think I could have made it to where I am. And where I'm going.

Sandi also testified to the need for openness to spiritual guidance.

I'm just going to tell you, God has really helped me. I don't know where I would be right now. I'm serious. I've really been going through some tough times too. I think spiritually I'm going to have to trust... trust the Lord. I feel like if I don't pay this bill, how can I... you know, as far as rent, KUB, all of that, that's like bills that have to be paid. How can I not give the Lord what's His off of the top [tithing]? I have so many bills and I'm trying to get back into tithing. I don't tithe like I need to. I think He's testing my faith as far as doing the right thing. "I'm going to take care of you. I've never failed you." Basically I need to do right. I know I have the support from the Lord. He's going to take care of me. I know that.

Several mothers reported finding some solace and help in rituals of prayer, reading the Bible, and sacred music.

Jane:

It's the Lord that helps me. It has to be. I don't know how I manage sometimes, but I do... I do manage.

Tiffany:

I read the Word... things in the Bible. And pray.

Sarah:

I put my praise music on and just praise the Lord.

Religious institutions have long been identified as a means of social support. McAdoo (1995) reported that 76% of mothers in her survey felt that the church had helped African-Americans function in this society. This positive evaluation included churches giving strong support to the family, as well as

providing a system of beliefs. These findings were consistent with the data reported by the participants in this study.

Resources and Support Systems

Not suprisingly, and consistent with the literature, family and friends respectively were the most important support systems reported by the participants. Social support many times can buffer families from stress and promote resilience as families organize their resources to manage stress. Supportive relationships offer a sense of competence and reassurance. Reciprocal assistance is quite common in African-American families. Women often survive by relying on family (both biological and fictive), friends, co-workers, and even children for emotional and psychological support. Rebecca shared the central role that her mother plays in her life.

Rebecca:

Oh, my mother helps me out. If it wasn't for my mother sometimes I think I would be crazed. She is my backbone. She helps me out with my housework or something. My, mother she helps me out a lot.

The reliance on family members for both instrumental and expressive support was described by several mothers.

Diane:

Nana, [laughs], in the words of my 2 year old. That is my mother. A lot of times she will step in when she knows that I'm having a bad day or if I need some time alone.

Nana helps out a great deal. I have friends who will come and take my daughter. They have kids of their own and they will take her-- take a day in the park, or whatever. I can have that minute alone-- just to ease my mind.

Anne-Marie:

I have four brothers that live here. Whenever I need them they're there. And of course, my grandparents. They have really been my rock. They've helped me through everything. I have a couple of other good friends, I can depend on when I need them.

Tiffany:

My mom and dad, they help a lot. Friends and my family-- that's really it. As far as the system, stamps and stuff, I don't qualify for that, from the system. I don't have resources from that. It's mainly family and friends.

Friends, along with family, also were described as an important part of social networks.

Louella:

Lord yes, I have friends and families. If I can't get it from my family, I have one friend... probably one or two friends I may go to (if I'm in a financial situation). I have a friend Stacy that is one of my best friends. She helps me out a lot. We go back and forth to each other if we need some help. And then Sarah, if I really, really need it... If not then I get it some kind of way. I get it done some kind of way.

Sandi:

My mom, oh God, she's the best, and friends, and her godparents.

The majority of the participants attested to the crucial role that grandparents played in their families. In addition, African-American families' communities have long used fictive kin

to establish a broad base for support, monetary help, and the exchange of goods and services where biological or marital families could not provide these (Stack, 1974; Collins, 1990). Immediate and extended family can help buffer families from stresses and be an important resource when stressors are experienced.

Church also was reported as a support system in the community. Additionally, 3 of the women also received some governmental subsidies. These included food stamps, childcare grants, and section 8 housing.

Unavailable Resources

Unavailable resources that were reported included: (a) periodic eligibility for governmental subsidies, (b) single-parent support groups, and (c) fathers (and other positive male role models). The need for periodic eligibility for governmental subsidies is described by Sandra and Tiffany.

Sandi:

I think it all needs to be changed. Someone needs to look at the big picture. Here we are-- we have these single parents out here that are trying. I'm in a situation where I teach participants who are on Families First, so I know how it is to be having a hard time and trying to make it. I also see people who are not trying. Here I am stuck. I'm like, "if you can see where I am, you have it made." You get child care, free rent, everything just free. I'm like, here I am struggling, wishing somebody would help and all this help is for them. Most of them do want to do things. But there is a lot that just don't do anything. I think government needs to look at the big picture and help those that really need help-- that are trying do something. I

think it starts with the government. I don't have any control. Basically the government has a lot of control over what's going and how they distribute the money.

Tiffany:

I think honestly when it comes a time when you're short-- some of things from the system you should be able to get-- stamps every now and then. But they don't do that.

Two mothers expressed the need for support groups for single mothers.

Michelle:

I think that [support groups] would help if you had mature people that take it seriously. Especially with black people these days. We can't see each other get ahead. If we had somebody like-- say you, you're going to college and all that stuff that would be good. If you have somebody who just don't care... you do have females out there that are just not trying... You want somebody to be able-- to sit down and talk about the same thing that I'm going through. You might handle a situation different than I do. But if you have somebody's here that's going to have this attitude about well, she can't tell me how to may raise my child and this is not going to help me, it's not going to go anywhere.

Jane:

I think more support groups for single mothers. As far as mothers that's real, not for the ones that its so easy or ones that have their cake and are eating it too by getting resources from men or other things.

Rebecca articulated the desire for more concrete opportunities for community involvement.

We need more projects with single parents. More projects that single parents are made more aware of. A lot of people say that there are a lot of projects out there for single parents. I'm not aware of them.

Successful Parenting Despite Stressful Situations

Parenting is probably the most important role that a woman will ever have. Though the role is demanding and challenging, most mothers reported retaining and sustaining a sense of identity through their parenting skills. All of the women in this study appeared to have been influenced by the parent-child relationship. In fact, the importance of providing for the child(ren) reportedly made many of the women stronger. Paradoxically, the area that caused the largest degree of stress also was the area that contributed to the greatest area of success.

In spite of unavailable resources, several positive themes and characteristics emerged for the meaning of successful parenting. Many of the themes that emerged were comparable to Olson and Haynes (1993) findings. In the following study, I divided successful parenting into 5 categories: (a) acceptance of challenges and responsibilities of parenthood, (b) prioritization of the parental role, (c) dedication to values and tradition, (d) consistent and nurturing discipline, and (e) fostering individuality and autonomous behaviors.

Acceptance of Challenges and Responsibilities of Parenthood:

Never Give Up

Accepting the parental role appeared to be an internal process. The women made a conscious decision to accept their parental position and accommodate accordingly.

Many of the mothers explained that it was their duty to provide for their offspring. They also discussed the importance of spending quality time, giving unconditional love, and working two jobs if necessary. Providing for instrumental and expressive needs of their children was repeatedly reported.

The mothers acknowledged the difficulty of their role. However, they maintained an optimistic view of life. For instance, two mothers spoke of the positive aspects of their single-parent family situation for their children.

Tiffany:

I know that they say that your child should be raised in a two-parent home, but they are not always positive either. They don't always spend time with their kids, as far as homework, and this and that. He [my son] can be just as strong with me letting him know that he can do anything he wants do... be all he can be. Whatever he wants to be-- and me being on him as far as his grades and stuff-- I can do just as well as two people. We spend time together even if it's me reading to him or doing other things. I try to spend quality time because I'm not able to be with him all of the time.

Hope:

It may not always be healthy for a child to be in a two-parent home. It may not be a happy household. I do think it is healthy if two parents are together and everything is good. It's healthier for the child. I'm constantly trying to improve my parenting skills with my daughter. To me to be a successful parent... is to love her unconditionally and always be there for her, support her in anything she wants

to do, provide the things she needs, food, clothes, shelter, and make sure she's safe.

Three mothers discussed their commitment to making their families work without the presence of the father.

Dominique:

I don't mean to stereotype, but I find that there's a lot of them [women] dependent on that child's father. Don't ever do that. The ultimate goal is to take care of you and your child by yourself. You may need that man, but try your best not to let him know that because they take advantage of that. You can do it by yourself. It's hard but you can do it by yourself. Like I said, you sacrifice for a little while, but before it's over with, it all pays off. Get out of that... you have to have that man there in order to be somebody or get somewhere. It's all temporary. You don't know if he's going to be here today or tomorrow. You don't know if he's going to leave you or if he's going to be killed. You don't know any of that. So you don't want to become dependent on that person-- once you do you're lost-- you don't know what to do once they're gone. I said it before-- just the ultimate goal... you have to get to the point where you can take care of yourself. It don't matter whether or not that man is there. If he's there, that's wonderful. If he's not, it don't matter. I'm doing this by myself. Black women need to get off that. Forget that man. If he don't want to take time out with his child, if he don't want to pay child support, just forget him. I will say this about the child support... he helped you make that baby, he needs to help pay for it. If he don't want to take time out with the child that's fine, but you're going to help me support the child. The child support is fine, but don't get to the point where you have to have him around-- he has to take care of you and he has take care of this child. You never get anywhere and you won't advance with that attitude.

Sandi:

I want to be there for my daughter. I know that being a single mom I have to be there both emotionally, physically, financially, I have to do everything. I have to be there for my daughter as far as taking care of her, just being a good mother basically. I'm having a tough time with it right now. I'm trying. I need a better job... more money. I'm satisfied with being a single mom. I don't know if

I'll ever get married. I'm not really looking right now. I'm trying to really enjoy me right now. I'm just trying to get my life right. I don't want any obstacles in my way. I'm trying to make it to the top. I want the best for my daughter. I want to be able to have a college fund set up for her and everything. I want to do it, and I know I'm going to make it.

Louella:

The first thing I would say... a lot of parents always want to have a daddy living with you-- which is fine. I'll say, "just be there for your child. Let your child know, you're going to school, mama has to go to work." As far as being successful you have to be at work everyday. You have to show your child, "okay, I've got my part, you have your part." Just going to work everyday, trying, doing the best you can. That is basically the only thing you can do. Don't quit. Let that be your last source. Never quit. Just keep going. Just keep trying to better yourself. Stay at your job. Let them know that you're trying hard... so you can build up, promote yourself in your workplace. Always keep going.

The importance of being able to maintain one's perseverance, even in the face of adversity, was articulated by two mothers.

Jane:

Just being able to survive out here in this world... in this cruel, cruel world. Keeping a job. Staying on my feet. Taking care of my daughter. Just being successful, like I said I don't consider successful having a certain career. Successful to me is just being able to make it. And like I say, and I say again that is as far as the basics-- being able to provide for as food, shelter, and clothes for yourself. That is about all I can say as far as being successful. I don't want for a lot. Just keeping my head up. Keeping a job. Just maintaining. Just trying to keep my mind open and trying to keep it clear with everything that is going on. Sometimes it's hard to stay clear minded and opened minded, but to make it, you have to. I guess you know you need the Lord to be with you. My advice to them [other single parents]-- keep an open mind. Have a positive attitude. Work. Don't give up. If you can do

all that, you know you will make it. I won't say you'll be on top of things, but you'll make it.

Rebecca:

Never give up. I couldn't give up because I always had to look at Christy and know that I was who she depended on-- and if I didn't do it, who would? No matter what comes your way, if you keep your faith within the Almighty, He will work it out for you. Don't settle for less. Let nobody tell you that you can't do it. I've come in contact with jobs to where people say, how did you get that? I knew that I could do it. No matter if I had the trade or I had the skill, I knew that I could do it. I had faith within myself. If they [other single parents] have faith within themselves and they don't let nobody tell them they can't do it, they can do it to.

As witnessed by the testimonies of these women, single parenthood is a challenge. However, inner strength and personality resources aided in accepting the challenges and obstacles that these single parents were faced with. This deep-rooted attribute has been long-lived in the Black community.

Prioritization of the Parental Role: When You Have Kids They Should Come First

From the moment a child is born, they are solely dependent upon their mother. As time progresses, most mothers continue to provide primary care for their young child. Because of the dependent nature of children, mothers in this study frequently reported prioritizing both personal and professional lives to revolve around the child's needs and schedule. Although they found motherhood to be challenging and demanding, all of the

women reported retaining and sustaining a sense of esteem and pride from the exceptional mother-child bond. They also spoke of the need to mature into the challenges of parenting. Michelle verbalized the importance of avoiding immature and irrational behaviors despite the difficulties associated with single parenthood.

If the father is not there... quit going around shooting up people and tearing up people's cars-- calling and harassing people. Do what you have to do to take care of your kids and yourself, and go on. You do what makes you happy. You do what you know is right. I would say pray a lot.

Louella echoed the value of prioritizing the parental role with the absence of petty and childlike behaviors.

I had a situation like 2 weeks ago, where two girls were trying to find out about one of my friends-- who her babies were by. My friend is the type person, if she feels like it's none of your business, she's going to tell you straight out. They're still at this little silly stage trying to find out other people's information. Don't want to be in their own business, but trying to find something about you. I used to do that in high school and middle school-- I had a silly time period at that time. When you grow up-- you graduate-- especially when you have kids, that should be the first thing you should think of: "Okay grow up, you have a baby now, it's time for you to show some responsibility." I was like okay leave the silliness alone. No more of this and that-- of he say or she say. That should have been the first thing they should have done.

Rebecca described the task of giving up activities and behaviors that were not conducive to effective child rearing.

I was a young single parent. I had to see myself growing up faster than other people my age. I had to leave things behind that other people my age didn't.

Hope voiced her continuous efforts to promote healthy physical development by ensuring that she takes her daughter to scheduled and unplanned doctor's appointments.

Whenever she's sick, I'm always taking her to the doctor. I'm quick about going to the doctor. My mom says, "You don't care about going to the doctor?" No, I don't. I feel like I do everything that I'm supposed to do as far as her needs. Whatever she needs, I'm always trying to do it.

Jane explained the importance of company locale and employment schedule as they related to her role as a single-parent.

When I look for a job, I make sure it rotates around my daughter's schedule. It has to or I just can't do it.

While attributes that contributed to prioritizing the parental role appeared similar to the attributes that described accepting the challenges and responsibilities of single parenthood, many of the aspects were distinctly different. The variation in meaning had to do external processes (e.g., taking the child to scheduled doctors appointments). The ultimate aim was to be the best parent, subsequently that meant putting the child first.

Dedication to Values and Tradition: You Try Your Best to Bring Your Kid Up Right

Instilling values was expressed to be a salient aspect of successful parenting. This included teaching the child right

from wrong and good from bad. The mothers explained that the early years were a time of "education and structuring" and how their children turn out will be based largely on their upbringing now. Many of the values were reported to have been instilled in the mothers themselves as they were growing up. These values included but were not limited to: (a) the importance of education, (b) the significance of spirituality, (c) the value of a strong work ethic, and (d) the importance of being a good citizen. Diane gave a report of her role as a parent who had begun the early teaching of values and morals.

The values that were instilled in me by my family, I'm trying to instill in my daughter. Education, responsibility, and being a hard worker, those things are important to me. I'm teaching her and structuring her in a way that she should go in. At times it gets hard being a single mom, but I'm still doing things that are required of me to raise my daughter in the right way. I think spending quality time with my daughter is really important and trying to instill values in her that I know will stay with her in the long run.

Sandi echoed the desire to pass on the values she felt her parents had instilled in her.

I want to be able to take her places and show her morals and values that my mother taught me. I want to be a good mother. I want my child to grow up and know right from wrong. Have morals and values in life and to know the Lord. I take her to church. I want her to know who God is. I want to do like my mother did. She instilled good values in me. I want her to be stable and do the right thing. I don't want her to stray off somewhere and get lost. I want her to be an independent woman. I don't want her to depend on anyone. I want her to make it on her own. One thing I want her to do different from me is to get married, if she find someone she loves. I want her to do the right thing. I know I didn't do the right thing by having a baby and not being married. I know that was

wrong. And it was instilled in me being young that was not the right thing to do-- I had a hard time when I had to tell my mom, "Hey I'm pregnant." Are you married? No. You know-- did you miss a step in life or what? No. My mom she raised me good. I really feel that what she did I want to instill in my child. I wouldn't change anything that my mother did. She was a single mother for a time-- after my mother and father got divorced, but all she's done-- being there for me-- I want to be there for my daughter.

Mothers were quite aware of the temptations and dangers their children were exposed to and had to respond to as they grew up.

Louella:

With the way things are going these days it means a lot [to be a successful parent]. I've seen situations where in elementary-- kids bring guns to school. I don't want my daughter to follow in those footsteps. I told her instead of doing all of this fighting and fussing, just talk it out. Don't be a tattletale. Talk it out. If you can't handle it on your own-- then you go to the teacher. I try to teach her... you know, it's not all about the fighting and the guns, and all this and that. You talk it out the best way you can. The way kids are growing up now, that is all they know is a gun. I teach her to just talk it out. You don't have to be mean to this person. You try to be their friend. That is the best way I can do it. I take it day by day. I give her examples and why it is best to do things this way and not that way. For a 4 year old, she knows a lot about the street, which in a situation it's good and it's not good because she may grow up thinking, "Okay, I'm supposed to do it this way instead of what my mama's taught me."

Dominique:

You try your best to bring your kid up right. Sometimes it doesn't help. They may still go astray and do wrong-- so to say. I feel like, if you come from a strong family background and I say that don't have to be two parents... they may go astray but that is always in them. I stay on Marcus constantly about doing things-- always telling him "Don't do that" or "That's not right." You instill these things in your child now and keep doing it until they get older, and that will never leave them.

Lucy:

I want them [the children] to be raised in a good household whether it's with or without a male figure. Most definitely. I want them to have a spiritual background. I want them to be well educated. I don't want them to be out there in the streets. I'm trying to keep them active and stuff, especially my little boy.

Despite the high number of fathers that had apparently chosen the wrong track, the mothers were adamant on raising their children as upright law-abiding citizens. The intense desire to instill values was quite conspicuous by the intense concern and protection of their children they expressed.

Consistent and Nurturing Discipline: I Believe In Discipline-

Discipline is Education

Discipline was frequently mentioned in the mothers description of successful parenting. The mothers emphasized the importance of "minding me" particularly because there were no other adults in the household.

All of the parents had an authoritative parenting style. While the authoritative parent is demanding, she also directs the child's activities in a warm rational manner and encourages verbal give and take. Repeatedly, the mothers described the process of explaining to the child the consequences for a particular behavior. These consequences included time-outs, taking away favorite toys and bicycles, and occasional spankings. The parenting style revealed in this study is contrary to what

was once believed about African-American mothers. Many scholars once envisioned black women as strict disciplinarians, high on control, and low on warmth. While the parents in the present study reported being highly controlling, they were also high on warmth and support. For example, Louella, Diane, and Jane described the processes that occur when disciplining their children.

Louella:

Discipline-- I will tell her once and give her a verbal warning. If she keeps doing it, then I put her in time out about 10 or 15 minutes. As far as time out, I mean in her room, no t.v., no music, she can't play on her computer. She just have to sit there. I may let her read a book, but as far as any playtime-- nothing like that. If she keeps doing it [misbehaving] I will spank her. Her grandmother don't agree when I spank her. I have a ruler with her name on it... two little rulers that is broken in half. One is in the living room. And the one that I keep in my room-- I'll spank her with that one. Her grandmother doesn't agree with that. She says I need to use a switch. I want something that she's going to feel. That is to let her know that I'm not playing. "I'm the mama and you're the child. You do what I say." I say one out of ten times she learned after I've spanked her. She won't do it again. When I put her in time out, she will ask me why, and I say, "Okay, you need to listen to what I'm saying and then she keeps asking Why? Why?" and I try to explain to her--"I'm the mama and you're the child. You have to learn this way." What I say goes. She will come back to me after she gets out of time out and she'll say "Okay I'll start doing what you say or I 'll listen to you." I'll give her a hug and send her back to her room and she can finish playing or whatever she wants to do.

Diane:

Whenever she does something wrong, I try to explain to her why it's wrong- the discipline on the spot. I think being a disciplinary... a lot of times single moms don't discipline their child because they may not have that time to spend with them.

Jane:

I believe in discipline. I take things away as far as her favorite things. I will punish her as far as time out. I talk to her. I don't treat her like a baby. I talk to her as if I'm talking to a young child... not a toddler, not necessarily a teenager.

Sandi reported the value of starting discipline "early."

She's only 15 months but she gets disciplined. When I say, "No Christian that's not right, you're not supposed to be doing that... don't touch that--" she knows. She will test me in a minute-- in a heartbeat. She thinks she's going look and touch it anyway and try to bring me something even when I say "No, don't bring it to me-- just don't touch it." So as far as discipline I try to explain to her. She is at a young age. I know she's not going to understand everything. But I think starting at a young age is the best. I don't want to wait until she get big and bulk down at me. Because I will knock her out. So I'm trying. I want to start early.

Lucy and Michelle disclosed the importance of taking away favorite items to "straighten him up."

Lucy:

Right now physically it don't work. I take away whatever he likes to do the most. He's into his cars and his t.v. "You mess up, it's gone." I was spanked all the time. I tried that-- it don't work. I resorted to taking things away. Hey, I know what he likes-- that'll straighten him up. That seems to work better for us. I think she's at that stage-- she doesn't have anything she likes in particular. You'll take one thing away from her and she'll find something else. I have to clean the whole room out-- right now, I'm trying to figure that out with her.

Michelle:

If you take his bicycle away, it's like you've cut off his leg. He has to ride that bicycle. He has to ride it down the street. "Mommy, you don't understand, my friends are out here and I have to ride the bicycle." It helps a lot. He straightens up immediately-- for 2 or 3 weeks and then I have to take it again for a couple of days [laughs].

While infrequently, several of the mothers attested to the effectiveness of periodic spankings to discipline their child(ren).

Jane:

I spank. I will spank. I believe in it, as long it's not abuse, or leaving a bruise on her [my daughter]. Right now with her, discipline is not really a problem. I don't have to do it as much... I need to knock on some wood as far as being a single parent, it's okay right now.

Michelle:

He gets a spanking sometimes. But it's not like taking his Sega. The Sega probably comes last to the bicycle.

Rebecca verbalized using reasoning with her daughter, however, she also highlighted the importance of Biblical upbringing as it relates to discipline.

I handle discipline the old fashion way. I was raised on it. I believe in not sparing the rod and not spoiling the child. Christy gets a lot of hands-on discipline when she needs it. I talk to her in situations-- where I can talk I will talk. But if she needs that hand-on discipline, she gets it.

By the dominant culture's standard, these mothers may be viewed as authoritarian. Indeed, Baumrind (1972) found two other parenting patterns that seemed to have beneficial effects. A quasi-authoritarian mode of control emerged from the study of African-American girls in the sample. African-American girls, when compared to European-American girls, were significantly more independent and dominant. The socialization process that characterized these African-American families, while

authoritarian by white standards, reflected traditional values within the black culture and appeared to be beneficial in terms of child outcomes (Baumrind, 1978).

Fostering Individuality and Promoting Autonomous Behaviors: I
Want to Let Him See that He Can Be Whatever He Wants to Be

All of the mother's reported fostering individuality and promoting autonomous behaviors in their child(ren). This included encouraging children to pursue life-long goals that the child develops (as opposed to thrusting career ideas on the child) and supporting their children as they pursued their dreams. Tiffany described her attempt to offer her son the assistance that he needed immediately to pursue goals for later.

He says he wants to be a veterinarian-- work with animals. Just start to pursue that now. Let him see that he can be that. That's for him to be what he wants to be-- without knocking him-- no negativity. Just let him see whatever he wants to be, he can be. It starts when he's little.

Hope and Michelle described the absence of identity foreclosure as it relates to their children's career choices.

Hope:

I want her [my daughter] to be happy with her life. I want her to be what she wants to be. Do what she wants to do. Not be something because she thinks I want her to do it... or you know, pressuring her to. I want her to succeed, but I want her to do what she wants to and be what she wants to be.

Michelle:

I want him [my son] to grow up and get a job that he likes, where he can make good money. Just getting a job making

good money doesn't matter if you don't like it-- is pointless. Making money... but also doing something that he likes to do. I can tell him the mistakes that I made-- that don't necessarily mean that he won't go to college. If he has a job making good money and he likes it, then that is fine. I'm not going to push him to do it--"Oh you have to go to college." I don't want him out here flipping hamburgers... not saying that it is wrong to do that but he can do something better than that.

All of the mothers reported being satisfied with the parent-child relationship. Some were very satisfied. And not one reported dissatisfaction. Several factors may have influenced the mothers' appraisals. First, the evaluation may have been positive because all of the children were described as not a "problem" child. In fact, most described their children as usually well-mannered and well-behaved. Second, all of the children were age 8 and under. This would suggest that the influence of peers and peer pressure may have been less important, if not absent. Third, the overwhelming support from family and friends could aid in negating the factors that may potentially have an adverse effect on the parent-child dyad. Furthermore, many of the mothers actively employed metacommunication strategies. They were able to recognize that dealing with problems before the child came home aided in better communication. Finally, the mothers respected their children and showed a genuine concern for empathy and open communication.

There was one negative case in the sample. A negative case occurs when the information, topics, themes, or categories go in the opposite direction from the majority data. All of the women

with the exception of one used positive and constructive techniques to manage their stress. Lucy, however, explained how this was a "rough" time for her. The report of employing behavioral defense mechanisms such as avoidance and withdrawal proved to be congruent with her psychological position.

For a long time I've had a problem with dealing with things... as far as talking. Me and my mom have just now started coming around-- just coming around to talk. We are still not really "open open." It's a lot better than it was in high school. Before then, I really never did get close to anyone as far as having best friends. I didn't talk to anyone. It's just me. It's all in my head. I don't know what's going to make me click. Or when I'm going to click. All I know is... what I do... it ain't healthy. Don't being having, no psychiatrist calling (laughs). I'm very, very, unstable. Just go with the knuckle heads, that is where I'm kind of at right now. I'm trying to find myself right now. Trying to let all of that go. Stop worrying about. Spirituality, that is what I need. All the way up until '93-'94, I was right there everyday. Church everyday-- Sunday school-- very spiritual. I've probably been in church maybe two or three times and its '99. It kind of all make sense once you think about. I stop that [going to church] and then all of this started. It's like I know what I need to do, but just doing it.

This final quote is a compilation of statements from the interviews despite the negative case. It exemplifies the overall tone and persona of the women in this study.

It's a challenge. It's a struggle. I do the best that I can do. I don't hold my head down as far as being a single parent. It's what you make of it, not what statistics say, or not what critics say. Single mothers have always been around, always. They always been around. They [the public] want to blame single parents. It's actually t.v. and everything else. You have to set your limits and look at yourself. You can't be a successful single parent and you still partying and throwing your child off. You have to settle down and be that mother. Be positive. Stay head strong. And be disciplined. If you see something you'd like to do, go for it. Don't sit back and go "I wish I could do

that." I think to attempt anything is good. If you feel like you can do it. Do it. Strive for the best. Anybody can do anything they want to do, if you set your mind to it you can do it. I don't know where everybody is as far as their religion, but if you have God in your life you can conquer the world.

Strengths and Limitations

By far, the most notable strength of this study was the discovery of data from the subjective perceptions of the individuals interviewed. The life narratives of participants described as only they have experienced it, was rewarding and at times frustrating. Allowing an individual to share her narrative has obvious advantages, particularly for those who are not of the dominant race, culture, and sex. The in-depth interview appreciated the richness and depth of individual and shared meanings that exist within particular contexts and cultures. The strategy gave participants the chance to voice phenomena experienced by members of a group who otherwise may have been overlooked. Furthermore, because the phenomena were not reduced to predefined researcher-constructed variables, the participants richly and fully described their experiences and meanings that contributed to their current reality.

One limitation to the study includes the homogeneity of the family units. With the exception of two families, the family consisted of only one child. Results may have been different if more and older children were present. This limitation was a direct effect of the methodological/recruitment procedure. The

smaller family could account for some of the hope and ambition articulated by the women in the study. Finally, social desirability is always a concern when face-to-face encounters take place.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Single parents have to manage an array of tasks in their lives. Both internal and external resources help them address tasks and achieve a sense of personal well-being. The results of this study emphasize the importance of inner resources, familial resources, and friends as contributors to a sense of well-being and successful family functioning. Though individual hardiness was evidenced, the findings suggest that social assets and family support aided mothers in important ways to meet the challenge and maintain their strong commitment to single parenthood.

The women who participated in this study were mastery oriented. They did not view themselves as victims but as survivors. They believed that they could actively employ strategies to solve problems. Ironically, the mastery orientation is used more frequently among the middle and upper classes rather than the poor and males as opposed to females (Boss, 1988). However, the mothers in the present study demonstrated that working class women also can adopt this approach to the demands of life.

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) offered two main styles of coping: emotion-focused and problem-focused. Contrary to the fact that much of the existing scholarly work associates emotion-

focused coping with women and problem-focused coping with men, the women in this study actively employed the latter as well as the former. One explanation may be that among single-parent family heads, the higher their education, the less focused their coping is on emotion (Cohen, 1996).

The notion of a crisis or family immobilization was not mentioned by one single participant. Conversely, mothers repeatedly disclosed how they could orchestrate events and activities in an effort to minimize stress and maximize individual and familial resources.

Of the techniques the participants reported employing to reduce stress, all of them were of a positive nature. No one reported using alcohol, narcotics, or other drugs to deal with stressors. On the contrary, repeatedly it was reported that facing and overcoming daily struggles can serve to enhance and strengthen individual and familial characteristics.

Furthermore, contrary to the concern that involvement of extended family and fictive kin may cause boundary ambiguity, symbolic and physical boundaries appeared to be drawn and maintained in healthy and adaptive ways in these women's lives. The women clearly articulated their roles as parents even when intergenerational relationships were central to family functioning. Many of the women encouraged autonomous, self-directed behaviors from their children. This was quite evident by the lack of parentification, enmeshment, or overprotection

indicated in participant's descriptions of the parent-child relationship. The relationships were characterized by well-balanced interdependence. Both separation and connection greatly rely on clear boundaries that surround relationships.

All of the mothers except two held traditional female-dominated positions. The national median income for women ages 25-29 with some college, but no degree is \$23,738; an Associates degree \$27,020; and a Bachelors degree or more, \$34,132 (United States Bureau of Census, 1997).

In spite of stereotypes from the media and corporate cultures that portray African-American women as major recipients of Affirmative Action programs, African-American women's levels of pay and promotion, especially in entry-level positions, continue to lag behind those of other racial/ethnic and gender groups. Persons in key positions to make hiring, firing, promotion, and pay decisions frequently hold systematic and negative stereotypes about gender and racial groups (Kennelly, 1996).

Despite the incongruence between educational attainment and annual salary, all of the mothers in the study reported the desire for advanced training, education, and degrees.

All of the mothers except one were involved in some type of activity in the community. These included church positions, school offices, and other social action positions. Additionally, all of the children two and older were involved in some type of

extracurricular activity. This consistent involvement in activities outside of the home was a resource for both mothers and their children.

Individual and familial accomplishments were the highlight that minimized stress and maximized success. The women reported current accomplishments and future endeavors that they aspired to attain. The ultimate goal for the women was self-sufficiency. This included everything from internal attributes to being able to pay bills.

For many of the women, the meaning of being successful was far more than tangible and physical things. The notion of having pride, determination, good moral and social character, and internal happiness and peace and maintaining optimism were all reported in addition to the materialistic aspects of life.

Attaining the American Dream was not the "end all be all." These women realized that there were others to follow who may not have the inner strength, ambition, hope, and resources that was possessed by the participants themselves. Hence, they saw that the importance of "giving back" to the family and community was vital to success.

Implications for African-American Single Mothers

Families are increasingly experiencing nontraditional family structures. The marriage rate is declining and the divorce rate remains high. Additionally, many women choose the

option of beginning a family having never been married. As a result of these internal and external circumstances, single-parent families are on the rise. These parents are faced with juggling various demands. They frequently provide instrumental as well as expressive needs. Despite multiple task performances, many single mothers clearly face dual and triple duties, even though they are the only parent in the household.

In spite of the second shifts that were worked by many of the women, in general their subjective appraisal of their health and well-being was at least comparable to that of other women their age. Self-evaluation of health and well-being is a powerful measure of health. Research has shown that these items are a strong indicator of an individual's health. Scholars as well as medical professionals suggest that a subjective optimistic evaluation can predict fatality more accurately than predictions based on actual health, biological, physical, and lifestyle factors (Acock & Demo, 1994). For all but one of these women, the absence of defense mechanisms such as avoidance and withdrawal was seen as vital to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Attributes that supported the level of satisfaction were frequently linked with accomplishments. Those included education, full-time employment, and providing instrumental and expressive needs to child(ren).

Implications for African-American Children Residing in Single-Parent Homes

The number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 doubled from 1970 to 1988 (United States Bureau of Census, 1992). Single-parent families now account for 27% of all of American families with children and 60% of African-American families. Because of the large population of children who reside in single-parent families, there is well-documented research on the health and well-being of children in single-parent families. Repeatedly, it has been found that parents who are psychologically healthy and mature are more likely to provide the types of care that promote healthy well-being in their children.

Resilient children find ways to cope functionally with poverty, low social status, racism, and inadequate psychological stimulation. They have adaptable personality traits, are competent, have high self-esteem, are independent, tend to be more creative and resourceful, and generally have good problem-solving skills (Papalia & Olds, 1998). Additionally, a supportive environment (such as school) can help make up for a less than optimal home life.

Many of the characteristics of resilient children are internal. However, identifying coping strategies and displaying an internal locus of control in children also may be based on the direct observation of others, generally older women. Older adults are "testimony to the fact that one can not only survive,

but even transcend difficult circumstances" (Himes et al., 1998, p.72). They serve as models for self-sacrifice, personal strength, and integrity. By example, they show that, although suffering is inevitable, one can grow from hardships and adversity (Himes et al., 1998). Anne-Marie exemplifies this.

It means everything to me to be a successful black woman. There's so many obstacles as a woman to overcome because they don't think it can be done and being a black woman. It's a double hex. It's important that I succeed because there's going be more behind. I want them to know that, even though it's taking me so long to do whatever I wanted to do. By me staying focused and by me being steadfast. and wanting to do and being determined to do it that it can be done and that they can do that also and everything comes up and obstacles are going to come. I want them to know that they can overcome it. They can accomplish whatever it is that they want to do in life also. It's important to me, especially for my daughter and my nieces to see that they can do that and to see me do it, "My mother's done it." I think that by being an example they have something to model after. I want to know that I contributed to that.

All of the participants were optimistic about their children's early childhood development and growth. However, some questioned the long-term effects from the absence of the father. Internal factors that helped the child's progress included observation and modeling and support from family and friends.

Implications for Practitioners

Professionals who work with children and families must realize that there are many positive self-help strategies that individuals employ to manage stressful situations. This coupled with the notion of social service agents being perceived as

"meddling" could be a reason for the lack of participation in individual and family counseling in minority families.

Even though minority families rely heavily on extended and fictive kin, it was evident from the women in this study that more support groups and projects for single mothers are need to be established or marketed well.

Implications for Social Policy

The idealized model of the nuclear family is no longer the norm. This traditional model included a man (husband and provider), a woman (wife and homemaker), and biological children in an intact, evermarried family. The policies and programs evolving from such a view of families can cause a great deal of guilt and anxiety for those in other family forms. It is impossible to find a workable model when this rigid, monolithic perspective is viewed as optimal. All too often, the outcomes are directed at proving an ideological point rather than genuinely increasing our understanding of why some individuals are capable of responding well to the unique problems, needs, and tasks of single parenthood (Anderson, 1998). Ultimately, how families function is as important as their structure, although the two variables are interrelated.

Social policies must be established and legislated if women and children are to receive the economic payments of consistent child support. Based on the current population survey of the

U.S. Bureau of Census, the base data for the percent distribution of all custodial parents awards and recipient status in 1991 was too small to meet statistical standards for reliability (United States Bureau of the Census, 1997). Across the U.S., laws, rules, collection methods, and policies conflict. These inconsistencies punish millions of women and children of the nation and allow absent fathers to neglect their parental responsibilities.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Stress in African-American families in general, and single-parent families in particular, has been long-lived. However, the black family has survived and grown stronger over the years (Willie, 1988). Centuries of adversity witnessed and experienced by African-American women have seemingly made some of them only more tenacious and determined. "The history of the black family in the United States must be viewed as a miraculous movement from more or less nothing to something" (Willie, 1988, p. 8). While slavery has been formally extinct for 19 decades, many families continue to feel the lingering aftereffects of bondage. Frequently, external resources are scarce. These include money, assets, time, and status. The lack of external resources, status, and prestige can put individuals at a disadvantage in terms of having a sense of self-efficacy, as well as in terms of their access to opportunities.

As we rapidly approach the new millenium, imprints remain from historical, social, cultural, societal, and technological advances. Expeditious changes are everpresent. Communities at the local, state, and national level continue to modify their images to adjust to significant changes that have accumulated over the past decades. Just as communities have struggled to recreate and clarify their boundaries, contemporary families are

also rewriting meanings for the definition of family.

Contemporary families have been exposed to high rates of change and instability during the past generations. As a direct result of societal changes, dramatic shifts in American families have occurred. Change, and moreover adaptability, have been major processes facing families. Subsequently, roles, rules, relationships, rituals, and resources vary significantly across various family structures, social class, and ethnicity.

One cannot ignore the social, economic, and political context and its impact on families moving through different phases of life at each point in history (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Structure alone does not create unique challenges. The feminization of poverty, father-absence, economic deprivation, racism and oppression, and a host of other variables and circumstances influence perceived well-being and successful family functioning. Changes in family structure and dysfunction are not necessarily linked as inevitable cause and effect (Boss, 1988). Further, it is difficult to determine whether structural changes precipitate or facilitate change and, hence, dysfunction. It is an oversimplification to indicate that all family dysfunction has to do with structural changes (Elkind, 1994).

There is no one family form that is the keystone of American society and if that form changes all of society will deteriorate (Boss, 1988). On the contrary, change is both necessary and inevitable. Coontz (1992) also argued that many

times, what we refer to as our true family history is more a montage of images, ideas, and myths. Families have never uniformly exemplified intactness and togetherness. Family violence has been part of the family throughout its history, not only in American families, but also in England, Western Europe, and many other countries around the globe (Gelles, 1994). Neither parents, children, siblings, nor the elderly have ever been fully protected in their homes. There has been no family form that has ever uniformly protected individuals from poverty, abuse, neglect, and social disruption. Additionally, myths that suggest dominant values will aid current families and eliminate social problems do nothing more than create unrealistic expectations about what families could or should do, hence causing a greater degree of ambiguity for contemporary families. Not only are these ideas fictional, they are middle-class myths that fail to incorporate families from diverse backgrounds.

A sense of discontinuity adds to daily stressors that all families are faced with. Race, ethnicity, and social class further add to the complexities of the families' demands. Individuals of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds continue to struggle for a voice in the social, economic, and political arena. Contemporary disruptions to the family are not unique. Despite the numerous challenges faced by contemporary families, many individuals and families continue to thrive in the face of adversity.

The perceptions of and meanings attributed to stressors and family resources greatly affect how families react to stressors, their process of managing stress, and their quality of well-being. Perceived available resources can hinder or facilitate the coping process. Important resources include economic, psychological, socio-emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal assets. A relatively new social psychological concept labeled hardiness is also a vital resource. Based on existential personality theory, Kobasa, Maddi, and Kahn (1982) defined hardiness as "a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful life events" (p. 169). The three main components of the personality construct they identified are control, challenge, and commitment.

Resilience, hardiness, mastery, and other related concepts are influenced by society but can only be developed by individuals. It is impossible to make a family adaptable, healthy, and functional by merely prescribing a specific familial structure. It is equally as challenging to avoid thrusting one's orientations and beliefs on individuals who are culturally different from researchers and policy makers (McAdoo, 1995). Family quality can be seen on a continuum, with a few healthy or unhealthy families at either end and the rest distributed somewhere in between (Strong & Devault, 1993). A crucial variable in terms of family quality may be the developmental

phase of the life cycle. Developmental transitions are, in general, very demanding processes for families. In the context of social change, families can display remarkable adaptability, resilience, and inherent strength (Skolnick, 1994). To further strengthen families, the combined efforts of researchers, policy makers, and families themselves are needed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Javiette Samuel. I am a graduate student in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting research on stressful events, resources, and well-being.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this study you have several rights. Your decision to participate in this project will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any questions at any time. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and to have the taped materials erased. Finally, this interview will be kept strictly confidential. Excerpts of the interview may be part of the final research project, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the paper.

Any risks to participants of this research project would be minimal. As stated earlier, confidentiality will be protected. Interviews will be completely anonymous, with the exception of demographic information, absolutely no identifying aspects of the participants will be provided. Although the topic of interest is stressors, resources, and well-being the principal investigator does not anticipate creating a stressful environment for participants. In fact, participating in the project should be an asset.

Identifying the most salient aspects of life that create stress for single mothers is very important. A greater understanding of single mothers life experiences with these issues will help professionals that serve families identify important stressful events

and resources (or lack of) for single-parent families. Additionally, the resources that participants of this project use to maintain resilience and self-sufficiency can be shared with other single parents that may have experienced similar situations.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would sign this form to show that you have read the contents. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project.

Signed

Printed

Dated

Please send me a report on the results of this research study. (Circle One)

Yes

No

Address for those requesting a copy of research results

APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIBERS' CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

TRANSCRIBERS' CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Project Title: Stresors and Resources Among African-American
Working Class Single Mothers: A Qualitative Inquiry

I _____, understand that the
transcriptions of the interviews that I will undertake are to be
kept confidential. These transcriptions are only to be discussed with
the researcher for clarification purposes. I will keep all information
seen through these transcriptions confidential including identities of
participants and information given.

I have read the above statement and agree with the conditions of my
services.

Name (Please Print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Thank You,

Javiette V. Samuel

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grand Tour Questions:

Tell me what you think are some of the most important things for me to know about you and being a single mother.

Tell me about a typical work day from the time you get up until the time that you go to bed.

Questions:

1. What situations are stressful for you as a single parent?
2. How do you determine the magnitude of the event?
3. How have you learned to manage stressful situations?
4. What does it mean to manage?
5. What specific resources do you have to manage stress?
6. What other resources would be helpful?
7. What support system(s) do you have?
8. How satisfied are you with your personal life?
9. How satisfied are you with your family life?
10. How satisfied are you with your neighborhood?
11. Give an overall evaluation of you and your life.
12. Compared with other people your age, how would you describe your health?
13. How would you describe the progress of your child growing up in a single-parent family?

14. Are there any circumstances internal to the family that help the progress of your child(ren)?
15. Are there any circumstances external to your family that help the progress of your child(ren)?
16. Are there any circumstances internal to the family that hinder the progress of your child(ren)?
17. Are there any circumstances external to the family that hinder the progress of your child(ren)?
18. What does it mean to be a successful parent?
19. How do/have you accomplished that?
20. How do you handle discipline?
21. What is the ultimate goal you have for your child?
22. What does it mean to be a successful woman?
23. How do/have you accomplish(ed) that?
24. What is your ultimate goal?
25. If you had to give advice to other single parents about having a successful family life, what would it be?

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC/BIOGRAPHICAL SHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC/BIOGRAPHICAL SHEET

Date: _____
Place: _____
Time: _____
Interviewer's Name: _____

Participant's Name (Pseudonym): _____
Birth Date: _____
Age: _____
Birth Place: _____

Residence Pattern: Please circle one of the following living situations that best describe your home.

House _____
Apartment _____
Duplex _____
Condo _____
Townhouse _____
Other _____

Number of Brothers: _____ Number of Sisters: _____

Birth Order: Please circle the place you hold among your brothers and sisters.

1st _____
2nd _____
3rd _____
4th _____
5th _____

Parents:

Mother's Age: _____ Mother's Occupation: _____

Father's Age: _____ Fathers' Occupation: _____

Marital Status: Please circle the one that best describes you

Divorced _____
Never Married _____
Widowed _____
Other (Please explain) _____

Marital History:

Married what year _____
Divorced what year _____
Remarried what year _____
Remarried what year _____
Never married _____

Education:

Highest Grade/Degree completed _____

Current Occupation: _____

Number of Years with Current Employer: _____

Number of Hours Worked per Week: _____

Annual Income: _____

Children: (Ages and Gender)

Age: _____	Gender: _____
Age: _____	Gender: _____
Age: _____	Gender: _____
Age: _____	Gender: _____
Age: _____	Gender: _____
Age: _____	Gender: _____

Religion: Please circle the one best answer of these questions

How religious are you?

Strong
Moderate
Inactive
Indifferent
Nonreligious

How often do you worship?

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Several times a year
Once every several years

APPENIX E
ANNUAL INCOME

ANNUAL INCOME

The categories were as follows:

Under 10,000
10,001-15,000
15,001-20,000
20,001-25,000
25,0001-30,000
30,001-35,000
35,0001 or more

Under 10,000	1
10,001-15,000	5
15,001-20,000	3
20,001-25,000	3
25,001-30,000	0
30,001-35,000	0
35,001 or more	0

APPENDIX F
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The categories were as follows:

High School Graduate

Technical Training (* emerged from the data and it was also included)

College 1 2 3 4

Degree_____

Graduate Work

Degree_____

Educational Attainment

High School Graduate

12

Technical Training

3

Some college but no degree

2

College degree (Associates)

1

College Degree (Bachelors)

4

Graduate Degree (Masters)

1

VITA

Javiette VaShann Samuel was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on May 8, 1973. She graduated from Austin-East High School in Knoxville, Tennessee, in May of 1991. She attended The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in May 1996. After working with Child and Family Services for 9 months, she entered the graduate program in Child and Family Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Throughout her two years in the program, she worked as a graduate teaching assistant and as a counselor with Child and Family Services. After completing her Master of Science degree in December 1999, she will go directly into the Doctoral program.