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Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers: A Qualitative Study

Danielle Beatrice Massey
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Danielle Beatrice Massey

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Walden University

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Abstract

Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers: A

Qualitative Study

by

Danielle Beatrice Massey

MSW, Temple University, 1989

BA, Pennsylvania State University, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

December 2015

Abstract

Traditionally, research involving single African American mothers (SAAMs) has been conducted using problem-focused or cultural deficit models with the emphases on the disadvantages. Consequently, little is known about how these women view their experiences as single mothers concerning their resilience and maternal self-efficacy. Using a snowball sampling method, 15 SAAMs were recruited to participate in this phenomenological study. This study employed a subject-intensive theoretical framework. Face-to-face interviews (using a questionnaire), participant observation, and a focus group were the methods used to capture the essence of the SAAMs' abilities to thrive despite the challenges associated with single parenting. All encounters were audiotaped and the data were manually transcribed. Theming was used to analyze the data of the study. Twelve themes emerged, along with a set of sub-themes. The findings provided narratives from the SAAMs regarding the unique challenges of culture, parenting styles and skills, and social supports that enabled them to navigate their children through adversities. All of the participants identified God and faith as the heart of successful parenting. This study contributes to the cultivation of positive social change by offering sound literature that dispels the myths and stereotypes traditionally associated with these mothers and their children. The study also reaffirms the necessity of culturally-relevant models of study and qualitative methods of research, as they tend to provide a more positive and holistic perspective of the phenomenon. Moreover, these findings give a voice and encouragement to SAAMs to become stakeholders in the underpinning of support groups for younger SAAMs and their children in the use of resilience and maternal self-efficacy.

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Dedication

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” *Jeremiah 29:11 NIV*

Mothers, Moms, Mommies, Mommas, Nanas, Grammies, Mom Moms,
Aunties.....

These works are dedicated to African American women, past and present, who have sown good seeds, shared their stories, promoted strength and a relationship with GOD, and loved beyond measure. Your children, biological and non-biological, have been blessed with such an awesome gift.... You! Giving unselfishly of your love, time, and talents, making whatever sacrifices necessary to promote a promising and healthy future. You may have just raised one, but what you’ve imparted will touch the lives of millions as it is passed on from generation to generation. You have provided the epitome of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. To each of the 15 single African American mothers who with an awesome level of excitement participated in this study and planted the seed for future endeavors, which will help and support single African American mothers along their journey, I have been honored to make your acquaintances. You are a group of dynamic women and are doing magnificent things. I encourage you all to toot your own horns. Keep being the wonderful women you are, trusting GOD to keep HIS promises. HE has plans for you! To my examples of Proverbs 31:10-31, Sadie Risher (Momma) and Wilhelmina R. Massey (Mommie), two virtuous women. Words cannot begin to express what I feel. I just want you to know that when I was growing up, I watched you both very closely. I listened too. And, because of you, I am the woman I am.

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I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 NIV

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

One of the most significant demographic changes to occur over the past few decades has been the increased rate of single parenthood (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Mother-headed single parent families are the most rapidly growing family structure in the United States, with 56% of these families being headed by single African American mothers with children under the age of 18 (Goodrum, Jones, Kincaid, Cuellar, & Parent, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Numerous studies (Gonzalez, Jones, Kincaid, & Cuellar, 2012; Shook, Jones, Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2010) suggested that being a child raised by a single African American mother will result in the abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, poor self-esteem, poor academic achievement, pregnancy, and crime. Little research has focused on examining ways in which these single mothers overcome the difficulties of rearing children alone; rather, a great deal of previous studies have centered around the causes and adverse effects of single parenthood (Barrett & Turner, 2005; Kincaid, Jones, Cuellar, & Gonzalez, 2011; Robinson & Werblow, 2012). Comparatively, little information is available about what enables some single African American mothers and their children to fare well despite their challenging circumstances (Simons, Chen, Simons, Brody, & Cutrona, 2006; Taylor, 2010; Taylor, Larsen-Rife, Conger, Widaman, & Cutrona, 2010). In various studies, *resiliency* is a term researchers used to describe the occurrences when these single mothers managed to have positive outcomes with their children. Maternal self-efficacy has been identified as another means

used by single mothers to produce positive results in their children despite adversity (Taylor, 2010).

McBride-Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert, and Stephens (2001) explained resilience as an individual's ability to recuperate from negative occurrences and situations. Rutter (1999) defined resilience as the phenomenon of coping with stress or adversity. Resilient individuals are characterized as those individuals deemed "at-risk" who achieve successful outcomes (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000). Single parenting can come with a great deal of hardship. The tribulations single mothers face are diverse and can vary from individual to individual. Financial challenges (e.g., single-handedly juggling bills and other expenses related to the provision for their children), the emotional stigma associated with single parenting, lack of a male role model for the children, and time management are just a few previously mentioned in the literature (Sharp & Ispa, 2009; Taylor et al., 2010; Taylor, 2010). In the literature, there has continued to be an underrepresentation of single African American mothers who are over the age of 18, educated, and affluent (Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow, 2009). Shook et al. (2010) observed a wealth of research available that placed high emphasis on the disadvantages of single African American mothers, while little research examined the resilience of these individuals. There are single mothers who have successfully navigated the course in life past the negative stigmas of society and have demonstrated resilience in the rearing of their children (Taylor, 2010; Ugarriza, 2006). Various factors contribute to the resilience displayed by some single mothers and their children to include protective factors such as social supports, parenting strategies, religion (faith), and culture (Brodsky

& DeVet, 2000; McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Sterrett, Jones, & Kincaid, 2009; Taylor, 2010).

Maternal self-efficacy refers to the mother's beliefs of her parental abilities to produce children with positive results (Taylor, 2010). Children with positive outcomes would be inclusive of those who are successful academically, not substance abusers or criminals. Social supports from other family members, as well as other nonrelated individuals, have been a positive attribute to single mothers (Taylor, 2010). Social supports provide the reinforcements needed to cope with stressful and challenging situations. When single mothers feel supported, more positive, effective behaviors may emerge, giving a greater sense of self-efficacy and help, possibly suppressing the negativity and problematic parenting (Taylor, 2010). According to Parent, Jones, Forehand, Cuellar, and Shoulberg (2013), there is a need for studies that assess the correlations between those individuals who operate in the capacity of nonmarital coparents, the family processes, and the outcomes of children are necessary.

Parent et al. (2013) reported the following:

A principal reason cited for the overrepresentation of negative outcomes among African American youth from single mother families is the compromise in maternal parenting that may occur when mothers must balance the competing demands of both work and family. What this explanation fails to take into account, however, is that single mother status does not mean that the mothers are the only adults involved in child rearing, particularly in African American families. Single mothers who receive more support from and experience less

conflict with nonmarital co-parents about child rearing evidence more optimal parenting behaviors (i.e., higher levels of monitoring and warmth /support), which in turn are associated with lower levels of child maladjustment. (p. 253)

Parental strategies could be described as the set of guidelines and behaviors parents used with their children in order to obtain appropriate and acceptable behaviors. Studies examining positive behavioral adjustments within children have demonstrated a coupling with parents who have exhibited characteristics of structure, warmth, responsiveness, consistent discipline, and monitoring (Masten & Reed, 2002). Using a parallel analysis, Hill and Tyson (2008) examined relationships between variables such as ethnicity, cultural variables, socioeconomic status, and contextual variables of African American mothers. The findings of this study revealed that African American mothers who exhibited more adaptive parenting practices exercised a high level of parental self-efficacy and demonstrated low levels of psychological control.

Robinson and Werblow (2012) pointed out that the past research has demonstrated that mothers who were rooted in faith-based activities had bonded mother-child relationships and were more prone to using strict parenting practices. The religious involvements of African American mothers have been shown to impact the family in several aspects (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). With the church being a significant source of resilience and strength to the members of the African American community, it is often the pillar on which these families depend for support and direction in times of adversities. Throughout history, the church and one's faith in God have been regarded by African Americans as praiseworthy and a conduit for their expression (Smetana & Metzger,

2005). Spicer (2010) reported findings that showed African American parents to be readily able to identify the relationship between their parenting practices, their upbringing and the power of their faith (see Table 1).

Table 1

Influences on Parenting

Parents	Influence of Upbringing	Influence of Faith
African American	61%	49%
Hispanic	49%	35%
White	52%	42%

Note. Adapted from “Cultural Influences on Parenting: A Measure of Parenting Satisfaction and Efficacy,” by P. Spicer, 2010, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 18(2), pp. 167-175.

Self-efficacy and a sense of personal control are important attributes of resilient individuals as well (Meichenbaum, 2005). The term *maternal self-efficacy* is a term consistent with what Johnston and Mash (1989) used to define a mothers’ feelings of competence in their role as parents. Single African American mothers who are more optimistic with high levels of self-esteem tend to use more competence-promoting parenting practices in the rearing of their children (Kim & Brody, 2005).

There have been social policies, clinical applications, and research constructed around long-held stereotypes about African American families headed by single women (Taylor, 2010). In the past studies of families with single African American mothers although informative, led to the perpetuation of common stereotypes and prejudices about these families due to the sampling bias (Gonzalez et al., 2012). In conducting these

studies, a great deal focused on single African American mothers being poor or low-income (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Kincaid et al., 2011; Taylor, 2010) and the families being at risk (Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008). There are single African American mothers raising children who have successfully navigated their role as a parent to produce children who have done well academically, not gone to jail, become substance abusers, or teen parents, and have grown up to become productive members of society (Taylor et al., 2010). McBride et.al (2001) pointed out that efforts to obtain a comprehensive understanding of specific risks, their origins, and means of alleviating them as well as resilience factors that allow these families to thrive must be identified. This very same sentiment was echoed in 2013 by researchers regarding single African American mothers and their children (Gaylord-Harden, Elmore, & Montes de Oca, 2013; Parent et al., 2013; Taylor & Budescu, 2013).

Background

African American mothers in the United States experience a relatively unique social situation, as they are more likely to be single and handling a great deal more of the childrearing responsibilities compared to the average mother in the United States (Mandara, Murray, Telesford, Varner, & Richman, 2012). Researchers of single African American mothers and their families frequently have conducted studies using a cultural deficit model (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006; Kincaid et al., 2011) with negative connotations. Parameters of residency, educational attainment, and income are often set when conducting research on SAAMs and their children. In general, past research conducted concerning African American, female-headed families consisted mainly of

short-term intervention follow-up studies of high-risk families. Inherently, the bias in the sampling leads to the perpetuation of common stereotypes and prejudices about African American families (Hughes et al., 2006; Taylor et. al., 2010). Much of the research pertaining to the children of single African American mothers has pointed to dismal results and unfavorable endings (Brody, Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Kogan & Brody, 2010). In their study, Hughes et al. (2006) reported even with slavery and the Civil Rights Movement so far behind, African American parents still expressed deep concerns about the racial barriers, negative stereotypes, and the impact of such on their children. These African American parents conveyed the importance of preparing their children to face the challenges of bias and racism. High self-esteem, racial pride, and resilience were aspects these parents desired to impart to their children. Historically the research and literature available regarding the resiliency and maternal self- efficacy of the single African American mothers has been limited.

Cuban (1998) cited the importance of culture in relationship to resiliency in individuals, specifically as it pertains to those individuals from minority or oppressed cultures. Resiliency is not demonstrated by the avoidance of the risk but through the actual engagement of the risk with successful outcomes. Research by Utsey, Hook, Fischer, and Belvet, (2008) illustrated that research on the subject of the single African American mothers needs to move from a deficit-focused research to the use of models that recognize the importance of culture and its contributions to healthy functioning. In addition to the element of racial pride, research has found gender, family support, positive personal traits (i.e. social skills, self-esteem, and internal locus of control),

religion/spirituality, and community are all influential factors of resiliency (Gaylord-Harden, Campbell, & Kesselring, 2010; Taylor et al., 2010; Ungar, 2010). Ethnic socialization goals and culture have been attributes demonstrated to impact parenting practices in a positive manner with outcomes of their children benefiting from mothers who have higher levels of warmth and maternal self-efficacy (Hill & Tyson, 2008). The thought processes of the single African American mothers that motivate her to believe that her child or children can have successful outcomes in life would an example of maternal self-efficacy.

Ardlet and Eccles (2001) explained, in a study conducted with single mothers in Philadelphia in 1991, that it was not the African American mothers' promotive strategies, but their own efficacy beliefs that were associated with the children's self-efficacy and academic success. According to Bandura (1997), "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Maternal efficacy is defined as the mother's beliefs in her ability to influence her child or children and their environment to foster a child's development and success. The children of mothers who demonstrate a high sense of efficacy most likely replicate the dispositions of their parent independent of coercion by the parent (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). There is still limited research that addressed how the maternal efficacy of single African American mothers influences their children.

The overall aim of this research project was to begin to fill the gaps that exist in relationship to single African American mothers who have positive parenting outcomes. This study allowed for an insightful look at single African American mothers who have

reared or are raising children who have done or are doing well academically, are not abusing substances, and are not involved with the judicial system. This study provided an opportunity for these women to share how their resilience and maternal self-efficacy has impacted the lives of their children.

Need for the Study

Prior research conducted regarding single African American mothers has given a great deal of information that demonstrated a wide range of adversities that can have an effect on the outcomes of their children. The perpetuation of problem-focused approaches to studying mother-headed families impedes the understanding of their successes (McBride et al., 2001). Frequently, researchers have assumed that mother-headed families are inherently dysfunctional (Moore-Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). Over the years, studies related to single African American mothers families have focused around a cultural deficit model (Bean et al., 2006; Kincaid et al., 2011). There has been an abundance of research where the focus was on the failure and weaknesses of these women and their children. (Fouquier, 2011; Kincaid et al., 2011; Taylor & Budescu, 2013). Few researchers have considered the effects of single parenthood on mothers' psychological and physical well-being (Gonzalez et al., 2012; Taylor, 2010). Prior research provided information to support why the numbers of single African American mothers has been constantly growing (Parent et al., 2013; Sterrett, Jones, Forehand, & Garai, 2010). Literature has provided information regarding how variance on the factors of culture and era concerning parenting methods and desired outcomes in children (Moloney, 2010; Taylor, 2000) has influenced behaviors. There has been limited research

that examined the functioning, rather than the structure of the families headed by single African American mothers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2013; Moore-Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). Studies on this population have focused more on the negative aspects of single African American mothers and their children based on stereotypical expectations rather than the personal experiences and perceptions of these individuals (LeCuyer, Christensen, Kearney, & Kitzman, 2011; Parent et al., 2013).

Quantitative methods of research have been the basis of most studies conducted with regards to resiliency of single African American mothers, (McBride-Murry et al., 2001), producing statistical outcomes. Numerical data are necessary for research and comparison; however, qualitative studies, specifically ones with a phenomenological approach, allow for an intimate awareness and deep understanding of the human experience (Saldana, 2011). A sparse number of studies have focused on the lived experiences of SAAMs regarding resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. Researchers have increased efforts to conduct research that explored how some single African American mothers have managed to parent without negative results for their children (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Simons et al., 2006; Taylor, 2010). Past research has indicated that the choices of parenting styles, maternal self-esteem/efficacy, and the availability of social support have yielded levels of successful child rearing (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005; Jones, Zalot, Foster, Sterrett, & Chester, 2007; Parent et al., 2013). There has been very limited literature telling the story of the resiliency of single African American mothers (Greeff & Human, 2004; Madyun & Lee, 2010; Taylor, 2010). There is a need for research that will divert future research, social policies, and clinical applications from

long-held stereotypes about African American families headed by single women (McBride-Murry et al., 2001) to research that further investigates what characteristics and factors are exhibited by those single mothers of African American families who demonstrate resilience and result in positive outcomes (Taylor et al., 2010). Research that can enhance the strengths and positive outcomes of single African American mothers and their children can serve to educate, support, and encourage those affected by this phenomenon. Rather than repeating the use of quantitative models to gain insight into the lives of these family units, an opportunity should be given to single African American mothers to tell their stories.

This study utilized a qualitative method, exploring the phenomenon of resilience and maternal self-efficacy of the single African American mother raising her children. This study provided the opportunity for the women to share their own experience. Phenomenological research methods challenge structural or normative assumptions about the experiences of research participants in that they elicit the experiences and perceptions of participants from their own personal perspectives (Lester, 1999). Concerning single African American mothers a shift in research is needed from a deficit-focused research to the use of models that recognize cultural relevance and its influence to healthy functioning (Utsey et al., 2008). Many assumptions and stereotypes surrounding single African American mothers and her children currently exist; these areas need clarity and resolution (Fouquier, 2011; Mandara & Murray, 2000). Working to identify which specific factors facilitate resilience in single mothers with regards to adversities will be

an extremely beneficial endeavor as it will allow for improvements by others in similar situations (Taylor et al., 2010).

The data collected in this study of single African American mothers will further serve to educate, support, and encourage others affected by this research gap. Information from this research project will contribute in a significant way to the development of theoretical structures that underlie a more salient and comprehensive understanding of the evolution of experiences of single African American mothers and their children who researchers have traditionally labeled as at risk. The findings will help to determine how the resilience and maternal efficacy of SAAMs helps her to raise her children while navigating them away from negative consequences and hardships.

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological, subject-intensive, qualitative descriptive research method consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews using a prepared interview guide. Open-ended questions and probes were used to elicit responses from the single African American mothers participating in the study. Questions were open-ended to avoid leading participants. Interviews were audio-recorded. They were transcribed using the raw data and included word-for-word quotations of the participants' responses. I used my notes to recall comments and responses that may have been unclear on the audio-recorded encounters and to capture any noteworthy behaviors/expressions that the participant displayed during the interview. The data were analyzed to identify major themes common to all of the participants in the study. Open-ended questions were

used to encourage the women to describe their personal experiences concerning resiliency and maternal self-efficacy.

Research Questions

RQ1: What, if any, are the protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity?

RQ2: What, if any, are the self-efficacy beliefs of single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent?

RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children?

Problem Statement

Research involving single African American mothers and their families has frequently been based on a cultural deficit model (Bean et al., 2006; Kincaid et al., 2011). It has been a common practice to use problem-focused approaches to research mother-headed families. Findings from these studies cloud the understanding of the successes experienced by these families (Fouquier, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2012). Cain and Combs-Orme (2005) proposed that the current research has placed a high emphasis on the disadvantages rather than the resilience and strengths of single African American mothers. In the past studies of single African American mother families, although informative, led to the perpetuation of common stereotypes and prejudices about these families due to the sampling bias (McLoyd, Cauce, & Takeuchi, 2000). In conducting these studies,

researchers have focused on single African American mothers' poverty (Kincaid et al., 2011; Taylor, 2010) and associated risk factors (McBride-Murry et al., 2001). Efforts to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of specific risks, their origins, and potential means of alleviating them must be identified (McBride-Murry et al., 2001). A shift from the use of deficit-focused research paradigms to culturally sensitive methods of research that will examine the resiliency of these mothers and their children is necessary in order to obtain the information needed to identify what factors promote resilience and result in positive outcomes for single African American mothers (Taylor et al., 2010). Current research concerning single African American mothers has primarily been conducted with a sampling drawn from those who reside in the inner city, having low educational attainment, and low incomes. Diversity in terms of demographics, economics, and risk factors need to be considered in regards to future studies concerning families headed by single African American mothers (Ardlet & Eccles, 2001). Consideration of how culture and pride might facilitate positive outcomes is an area that has been limited in research with regards to single African American mothers (Utsey et al., 2008).

Research that can enhance the strengths and positive outcomes of single African American mothers and their children can serve to educate, support, and encourage those affected by this phenomenon, as well as those who service this population. Parent et al., (2013) reported that health care professionals working with African American youth should carefully assess the structure and functioning of each family. The practice in research of defining families according to the traditional measurements of marital status alone may cause other prospective intervention opportunities to be missed. Research that

examines the multiple factors of resilience can provide a better understanding of the situations individuals are facing, allowing for more specific recommendations around intervention or prevention measures (Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008). To a great extent studies pertaining to this population have focused on the single African American mothers overseeing very low-income homes (Jones et al., 2007; Shook et al. 2010); however, there was a growth of single-parent families in the middle class (Le et al., 2008). Although there has been substantial research that assessed how single-parent families are adaptive, competent, and successful in general, these studies have not been inclusive of single African American mothers (Bean et al. 2006; Kincaid et al., 2011). Research that is inclusive of a sampling of single African American mothers formulated without the constraints of age, residency, income, or educational attainment is needed (Jackson, 2000; Shook et al., 2010). Research models need to be more nuanced, taking into consideration the similarities of all mothers, while accounting for the unique cultural features of t single African American mothers (Mandara, Johnston, Murray, & Varner, 2008). This study explored resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers and the impact of such on the outcomes of her children.

Purpose of the Study

Currently, there is a disparity in the existing literature based on data derived from single African American mothers. This study allowed SAAMs to share their insight as to how they have successfully adjusted to parenting alone despite adversity. Self-efficacy beliefs are the evidence of one's ability to determine what it is one desires for oneself and to conduct oneself in a manner that will allow one to reach those goals and standards

(Caprara, Regalia, Scabini, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2004). Using Bandura's (1994) theory of self-efficacy, in which he stated that an individual's belief about his or her capabilities to produce affect their outcome expectancy, this study examined the maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers. This study examined the goals these mothers set for their children and what measures they took to overcome obstacles and their use of resiliency during times of adversity.

Fouquier (2011) pointed out the need for an historical understanding of the African influence on the African American family. In addition to examining how individual beliefs influence their parenting styles and practices, this research allowed the women to share their own capabilities and personal experiences as they relate to the topics of the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. The study examined the phenomena of race, gender, single parenting, and the outcomes of the children while excluding such variables as age, income, educational attainment, and residency.

The overall ambition of the research project was to generate awareness of this phenomenon and to begin to fill the gaps that exist in relationship to single African American mothers who have positive parenting outcomes while demonstrating both resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. In the next section, I have provided a summary of research documents that have examined the unique challenges of culture, parenting style/skills, and social support that influence the maternal parenting of single African American mothers. This study examined the adaptive strengths of single African American mothers and their families with regard to resilience and maternal efficacy.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study incorporated two models, the resiliency model (Rutter, 1999) and self-efficacy model (Bandura, 1994), which stems from the social learning theory. Resiliency theory examines the ability of individuals to have positive outcomes despite the adversities of life that may have been present (Rutter, 1999). In social learning theory, Bandura (1977) stated that it is a combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences that are the catalyst for human functioning. The utilization of phenomenological research methods challenges structural or normative assumptions about the experiences of research participants in that it elicits the experiences and perceptions of participants from their own personal perspectives (Lester, 1999). The approach does not attempt to verify or validate theory. Wilson and Washington (2007) supported that the use of the phenomenological approach will provide an understanding of what it is like to live a particular experience.

Operational Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

African American: A person of African descent who was born and reared in the United States.

Barriers: Obstacles that can prevent or interfere with an individual's growth, prosperity or ability to achieve the desired goal.

Dispositional optimism: The mindset of an individual to have confident expectations regarding positive outcomes (Taylor et al., 2010).

Maternal: Related to the role of a mother.

Maternal self-efficacy: The belief that one's maternal influence has the power to produce outcomes in the life of their child/children

Parenting styles/strategies: Method(s) used in child rearing. Three parenting styles most often referred to in studies are authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (Baumrind, 1978).

Personal attributes: Qualities or characteristic related to an individual.

Positive outcomes: Favorable results

Protective factors: A set of characteristics or circumstances that may help protect individuals from the detrimental effects of the stressors brought on by life situations (Boyd & Bee, 2006).

Resilience: The ability to have a successful outcome despite adversity, negative experiences/situations or stress (McBride et al., 2001; Rutter, 1999).

Self-efficacy: The belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions (Bandura, 1994).

Single mother: A female individual who is parenting a child/children as the primary caregiver, as a result of divorce, death, adoption, choice, out of wedlock, or as assumed responsibility of a child/children.

Assumptions

In conducting this research project, I was aware that there were areas of the research project that I would not be able to control. Given the history of research of this type, I made the following assumptions. It was an assumption that participants would be honest and forthcoming in their responses in the questionnaires and interviews. I also

assumed that if the participants have more than one child, that another one of her children may have some outcomes that are not positive. It was also an assumption that the sample group would be representative of a significant portion of the population of single African American mothers. It was another assumption that all research and reviewed literature had been accurately reported.

Delimitations

Delimitations that define the structure of this study would encompass a few areas. Current researchers have placed a great emphasis on the disadvantages rather than the resilience and strengths of the SAAMs. This research looked specifically at the resilience of single African American mothers and their influence on their children's outcomes. In addition, the impact of the self-efficacy of the single African American mother as it relates to parenting was explored. This study did not include any married African American mothers or those who were raising children in a home with two parents (biological, step, adopted, or cohabitating). Mothers, single or otherwise, who are not African American were not included in this study. The issue of single parenting as a woman is not specific to this ethnic group, however; research that looked at positive outcomes of the children of single African American mothers has been very limited (McBride et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2010). Single African American women who have not have the responsibility of being the primary caregiver for their children were not included. In many cases, there were women had children, but had lost custodial rights for various reasons. These women were not able to participate in the study, as they had not had the responsibility in raising their children.

Limitations

Concerning this research project, there were several limitations. First, the research project was limited to single African American mothers. There were a small number of participants in the sample of this research project. Secondly, the study sample was representative of SAAMs living in the Tri-State area (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware). Lastly, I realized that the results of this research project would not produce definitive conclusions. Projectable outcomes were not the goal and it was important to remember that findings would offer sufficient information to provide support to the population.

In respect of the fact that I also am a single African American mother, I kept a heightened awareness of personal biases at the forefront and required monitoring by an additional researcher, in order to avoid counter transference and bias.

Significance

The phenomenological research method allowed an opportunity for those individuals who are considered expert in this area to share on their lived or living experiences. The phenomena of single women parenting children are cross-cultural experiences; however, research has pointed to a considerable heterogeneity that exists among African American women raising their children alone (McBride-Murry et al., 2001). For this study, the resilience and maternal self-efficacy of the single African American mothers was the focus. The traditional criteria for such studies, which have included the residency, income and, educational attainment of the women, were not used in this study. This research project represented an effort to fill the empirical void in the

literature pertaining to the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of this population and the impact of these factors on the outcomes of their children. Collins, 2000 stated that African American women's perspectives are most likely based on an Afrocentric worldview that incorporates beliefs and values grounded and evident in their heritage and culture. Collins argued that the world-view of African American women is shaped by the complexity of their lives as both African Americans and as women. This study sought to create an understanding of the relationship between the factors of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers and their influences on the short and long-term effect on child rearing.

Summary

In summary, Chapter 1 provided information on past research and identified the need for further examination of the topic of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. Although researchers have documented numerous risk factors and negative outcomes associated with single African American mothers, few have considered the association of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy concerning this population and their children. This research explored, examined, and developed data regarding the experience of the single African American mothers from their perspectives. The findings provided a positive and holistic view of the phenomenon under study, which in turn provided data that allowed for a developmental analysis and will contribute to the understanding of the relationship between resiliency and maternal efficacy of single African American mothers. These findings can serve as a contribution to the existing literature and provide information and understanding to scholars, human service professionals, and humanity in general that may

be essential in the development and enhancement of programs and services for these families. The next chapter will provide insight to the available literature regarding resiliency and maternal efficacy (social learning) in relationship to SAAMs. The literature was acquired from several sources inclusive of a general library database, online internet sites and reference books.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Historically the research and literature available regarding the resiliency of the single African American mother has been limited. Research that focused on single African American mothers traditionally had negative connotations. In past research, when an author used the term *single parent* in relationship to an African American mother, there was an implication that this individual would be a poor, uneducated, highly sexed young mother. A vast amount of the research pertaining to the outcomes of children reared by single African American mothers has pointed to dismal outcomes and unfavorable endings (Brody et al., 2002; Kogan & Brody, 2010; Mandara & Murray, 2000). However, in recent years there has emerged research focused on the single African American mother built on strengths-based and culturally sensitive foundations.

Current literature demonstrated that various groups of professionals including sociologists, economists, and psychologists have conducted research using quantitative methods, exploring the well-being of single African American mothers and their children (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; McBride-Murry et al., 2001). Although the topic of resiliency has been explored and proven positively to impact the development and learning of both children and adults (Neill, 2006), there has been limited research that emphasized the strength and resiliency of the single African American mother and the positive outcomes of her children (Constantine & Sue, 2006). McCubbin and McCubbin (1998) maintained that there is a continued need for knowledge about successful adaptation to stressful situations, which will be important for understanding and possible future interventions.

SAAMs who have been reported to have high self-efficacy, availability of social supports, and managed stressors were shown to demonstrate positive parenting (Rogers, Parcel, & Menaghan, 1991; Teti & Gelfand, 1991).

This research project represented an effort to fill the empirical void in the literature pertaining to the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of the single African American mothers in relation to the outcomes of her children. The resiliency model (Rutter, 1999), self-efficacy model (Bandura, 1997 formulated from social learning theory), and parenting styles/skills model (Baumrind, 1978), were used to frame this study. The literature search strategy is presented first, followed by the conceptual framework. Next, the contextual factors that influence the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers is discussed. Then, I provided a literature review related to key variables and concepts in the current literature related to resiliency and maternal self-efficacy, as it relates to single African American mothers. The challenges of the researchers in defining the concept and current thoughts is reviewed. A review of past studies and what remains controversial regarding the phenomena of resilient single African American mothers is provided. Next, a summarization, with an emphasis on what is known and not known regarding the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers who have raised their children with positive outcomes, is presented. In the last section, I have provided an introduction of the research design and rationale for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

The initial literature search strategy consisted of a general library database search using the Walden University Library EbscoHost to locate documents related to resilience and single African American mothers. The literature obtained from this site consisted of full-text, scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles contained in databases such as PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Academic Search Complete. The literature search strategy was expanded to several online Internet sites including Google Scholar and SAGE Journals. In an attempt to move beyond the limited research on the subject, literature was also obtained from various reference books.

Keywords include *single African American mothers, resiliency, resilient, resiliency model theory, self-efficacy, social learning theory, parenting, maternal parenting, qualitative methods, and African American families.*

Theoretical Orientation

Resiliency Model Theory

The study of resilience started only 40 or 50 years ago. Psychologists conducting research in the 1960s and 1970s studied children growing up in high-risk environments, and those findings indicated that the proportion of these youngsters developed well and achieved positive outcomes despite the adversity they faced in life (Rutter, 1999).

Resiliency theory has been used to address a wide scope of areas in research.

Environmentalists, businesspersons, and those interested in the study of humans, have researched the ability of individuals to overcome adversity and achieve favorable outcomes (Rutter, 1999). Over the past two decades, a substantial portion of research has

been performed by a variety of social workers, scientists, educators, and other human service providers looking at the ability of individuals to achieve positive outcomes despite the adversities of life that may have been present (Rutter, 1999). As a theory, resiliency can be complex. Ungar (2010) believed that due to the integration of various schools of thought that deal with individuals and the principles of development, it is extremely complicated to determine what is and is not positive development under stress. With the construct of the theory of resilience, the focus is now on the strengths of individuals instead of the deficits (Rak & Patterson, 1996). The study of resilience started with research that looked at children who rose above adverse childhood conditions (Van Breda, 2001). Over the years, various studies have been conducted on resilient children and have displayed some common themes, which have been demonstrated to be relevant with the findings of this study. Several researchers have identified specific characteristics associated with resilient people. Findings have pointed out that resilient individuals tended to be female and reared in secure environments that provided an opportunity to bond with a female caregiver (i.e., mother, grandmother, older sister, or aunt) (Benard & Marshall, 1997; Rutter, 1979).. These individuals were most likely to be the oldest child, possessing a high self-esteem, outgoing, social, and cooperative with engaging personalities (Hawley & De Hann, 1996). People found to be resilient reported feeling competent and possessed a deep-seated faith that provided them with an outstanding ability to have a consistently positive outlook on life. Their unwavering belief that God would provide and work things out for them even in the face of adversity has been a great

source of assurance for single African American mothers (Van Breda, 2001). Resilient people were also able to communicate the need for assistance and support from others.

Masten (2001) concluded that the ability to display resilience when faced with adversity is not such an unusual thing. In most cases, the basic human adaptation response would result in an individual being able to navigate positive outcomes successfully from a problematic situation. In times of crisis or chaos, should an individual be able to operate from a healthy state of mind, body, and spirit, the outcomes of these encounters will not have such negative impacts. There is a greater risk of negative outcomes when there is extended exposure to hazards and drama (Masten, 2001). Resilience is used to describe the ability of an individual to do well despite negative occurrences that are present in the environment. Research on resilience has tended to examine what attributes or factors are involved in situations where individuals adapt successfully to the situation, despite challenge or circumstance (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Literature has supported two essential elements of resiliency, which are the risk factors and protective factors.

Risk factors. Risk factors are those aspects of life that can pose negative corollaries (Werner, 1993). For the single African American mothers, these could include, but not be limited to, factors such as economic hardship; low or poor educational attainment; unemployment; and employed with an income below the poverty level. Based on the resilience literature, mitigation of these risk factors that can challenge single African American mothers and their families is often accomplished through means identified as protective factors (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992).

Protective factors. The personal and environmental measures and characteristics, used by individuals in order to circumvent potentially negative situations in order to acquire positive outcomes, are known as protective factors (Garmezy, 1983; Werner, 1993). Individual characteristics include such traits as positive social skills, positive self-esteem, and internal locus of control, while environmental characteristics include factors such as extended family, church, schools, employment, and alternative caregivers (Blum, 1998).

The levels of resiliency can be assessed at various levels according to current research. Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen (1984) presented three models that explore resiliency at different levels, namely the compensatory model, challenge model, and protective factors model.

Models of resilience.

The compensatory model of resilience. The compensatory model looks at neutralizing the risk. Both the risk and compensatory factors contribute to the prediction of outcomes (Masten et al., 1988). This model looks at how an individual utilizes the combined influence of the resources and assets to counteract the effects of adversity. Resources are defined as external factors that tend to lend support, such as churches, organizations, friends, family, etc. Assets are individual characteristics such as competence, coping skills and self-efficacy (Masten et al., 1999).

The challenge model of resilience. The challenge model of resiliency is one where the risk factor presented at a moderate level is treated as a potential enhancer of successful adaptation (Masten et al., 1988). This model looks at the association between a

risk factor and an outcome as being curvilinear exposures, having both low and high levels of risk factors associated with negative outcomes, but moderate levels of the risk factors being geared more towards less negative or positive outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The challenge model offers an opportunity for individuals to develop and utilize problem-solving skills and engage in the use of resources in the face of a low level risk situation (Rutter, 1987).

Personal resilience model. Polk, 1997 identified four patterns of resilience. The dispositional pattern looks at an individual's internal (physical) and external (mental) characteristics that promote resilience. Relational patterns are patterns which center on an individual's relational aspects' both in the world and in relationship with specific others. The situational pattern of resiliency involves those aspects which linking an individual and a stressful situation. And lastly, the philosophical pattern, which references an individual's worldview or beliefs.

The protective factors model of resilience. The protective resilience model assumes that there is a relationship between the protective factors, the risk exposure, and the outcome, with a protective factor showing a benefit from being exposed to the risk (Garmezy et al., 1984). In the protective model, resources or assets actually “*protect*” individuals from negative outcomes by eliminating or decreasing the effects of risks (Richardson, 2002).

Protective factors are broken down into two specific components, individual characteristics and environmental characteristics. Individual characteristics include such traits as positive social skills, positive self-esteem; and internal locus of control. While

environmental characteristics include factors such as extended family, church, schools, employment, and alternative caregivers (Blum, 1998). With the majority of research conducted on resiliency being focused on children, who were able to face adverse childhood conditions with successful outcomes, it can be derived that such children grow up to become adults possessing these same qualities.

VanBreda (2001) identified the several factors as being pertinent to resiliency. Most applicable to this research project is that females were found to be most resilient of the two genders. Other factors included: good early bonding with another female (mother, grandmother, aunt, etc.) high self-esteem; strong perception of competency; strong faith foundation; outgoing/social and ability to ask for assistance. Resilience is not demonstrated by the avoidance of the risk but through the actual engagement of the risk with successful results. The thought processes of the single African American mother that motivate her belief that her child/children can have successfully outcomes in life would be an example of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy comes out of the theory of social learning.

Social Learning Theory

Written in 1941, the original theory of social learning and imitation proposed by Miller and Dollard (as cited by Pajares, 2002) did not consider an individual's ability to be innovative or to evoke a later response to situations. Social learning theory can be described as the unification of the behaviorist and cognitive learning theories, as it draws factors such as attention, memory and motivation, derived from both schools of thought. Bandura's social learning theory stated that people learn through observing others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. The most common practice of

individual learning is first through observation and then modeling that which has been observed. During the observation period, one can observe the behavior and then the reactions of others to the behavior. If the behaviors elicit positive feedback from others observing or evokes a positive feeling from the observer, the behavior is most likely to be replicated by the observer, with the expectation of the same of similar outcomes (Bandura, 1986). In his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) stated that it is a combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences that are the catalyst for human functioning. He further identifies personality as an interaction between the three components. Bandura, later identified that a very significant element; self-beliefs (self-efficacy) had been the missing element from his original theory (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy (maternal). Self-efficacy is an individual's belief about their capabilities to produce outcome expectancy, which exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). All actions and behaviors of individuals come with an outcome expectation. An individual who partakes in behaviors they deem positive, look for positive results. Even in situations where individuals are not initially successful at securing the expected outcome, they will continue to work toward obtaining their original expectation (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate level of faith individuals has within themselves to achieve and maintain their personal goals and values. Individual experiences provide the catalyst for the development of efficacy beliefs, as individuals reflect on what they have learned from experience and use them to guide them to the desired outcomes (Caprara et al., 2004).

Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy usually approach difficult situations head on, with a sense of ease. They set goals that challenge their normal levels of performance. The drive and desire for their expected outcome become the sole driving force behind their actions (Bandura, 1994). Pajares, 2002 stated that an individual will push themselves to whatever lengths and do whatever is necessary to achieve expected outcomes even in the face of adversity. For the purposes of this research project, the topic of self-efficacy was addressed, as maternal efficacy, as the research is directly relevant to this research. The overall aim of this research project was to begin to fill the gaps, which exists in relationship to single African American mothers who have positive parenting outcomes. In the next section of the paper, the author will summarize several research documents that have examined the unique challenges of culture, parenting style/skills, and social support that influence the maternal parenting of single African American mothers.

Parenting Styles/Skills Theory

Parents who are warm and responsive, set guidelines for acceptable behavior, and provides opportunities for cognitive and social stimulation are most likely to have positive outcomes with their children (Baumrind, 1971). According to Abell and Clawson (1996), African Americans, who are frequently raising children in stressful situations, often used authoritative parenting style with energies focused on lowering their children's likelihood of involvement in high-risk behaviors. Baumrind, 1971 found that authoritative parents are more likely to have children who are cooperative, friendly, and focused, possessing a level of social accountability in comparison to those children

whose parents were permissive or authoritarian. Authoritative mothers are trustworthy and consistent with parenting. They tend to not be controlling or too restrictive with their children. Children of authoritative parents tend not to be rebellious or defiant.

Authoritarian parenting, which is described as “strict” presents limited opportunities for children to converse with their parents. This style of parenting is extremely focused with specific rules and regulations established by the parent without room for consideration for change (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). Studies have demonstrated that in the African American community, authoritative parenting styles most often produced children with positive social attributes, good mental health and academic outcomes (Brody & Flor, 1997; Klein & Forehand, 2000; McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Taylor, 2000). Brodsky & DeVet, 2000 conducted a study that proposed that single African American mothers tend to set a clear set of values, morals, and a code of behavior which they use to raise their children. It was also found in this study that these mothers also placed a great deal of thought into the particular parenting approach they employed.

Taylor, Roberts, and Jacobson (1997) suggests that despite economic difficulties, single African American mothers with high self-esteem, had positive mother-child relationships and believed they were good parents. Single African American mothers with a strong sense of self-efficacy emerge as being active, vigilant, and adaptive in their parenting strategies. They appear to demonstrate control when dealing with difficult child behaviors (Jackson, 2000). Research has demonstrated that these mothers parent with the futures of their children in mind, raising them under the directives of specific principles

and standards which they believe are essential to positive results. The mothers then create a parenting strategy to mold their children's behaviors in the context where the values and goals can be obtained (Brodsky, & DeVet, 2000). There is a high level of parental strategies that are formulated by single African American mothers, which are in response to the specific risks that are unique to their families.

Single Parenting

In past research, when the term single parent is used in relationship to African American mothers, there was an inference that this person would be a poor, uneducated, highly sexed young mother. It would be concluded that the children would be the results of a non-marital encounter, without giving account to the other situations that may have created a reason for the parent's single status such as divorce, widowed, or adoption (McLanahan & Casper, 1995). McAdoo, 2003 finds that, in the African American community, divorce is the greatest contributor to single parenting by women, followed by births of young unmarried women and lastly, a small, but growing population of African American women who are older, more stable and are opting to have children out of wedlock. In 2000, an astonishing ninety-two percent of African American single parent households were being governed by females (Madyun & Lee, 2010). A wealth of data has been collected about the demise of the children being raised by single African American mothers, resulting from the absence of a father, and inefficient economic provisions (Arnold & Allen, 1995; Conger, Wallace, Sun, McLoyd, & Brody, 2002). Single parenting can be stressful, as one individual has to juggle and organize various aspects of life (McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Taylor, 2010). Rather than viewing all single-parent

families as stereotypically “at risk,” the specific risks, their origins, and means of alleviating them must be identified. Correcting these limitations can facilitate the development of supportive family policies and prevention efforts (McBride-Murry et al., 2001). Simons et al., 2006 found that family structure was not significant, as their study showed single mothers to providing similar levels of parenting. Past research indicates that parenting styles and skills have a profound impact on children’s outcomes (Baumrind, 1971). The phenomena of single women parenting children are cross-cultural experiences, however, research has pointed to a considerable heterogeneity that exists among single African American mothers (McBride-Murry et al., 2001).

Cultural Theory

Survival beyond the circumstances has been a unique core experience of African American families in general. Allen and James (1998) point out the need to acknowledge how the residual effects passed down generationally of having the trauma of being taken unwillingly from their natural origin, the slave experience, and life in America is lost when comparing Black families to other families. A typical trend during slavery was to separate a father from his wife and children, thus leaving the mother to raise her children alone. Ruggles (1994) believes the disadvantaged nature of African Americans in the country is not a result of single-parent families but rather the cause of them. Ruggles’ suggests that when these basic factors are ignored, a significant lack of understanding/interpretation of the single African American mothers’ quest is created. Constantine and Sue, 2006 pointed out the deficiency of research efforts which examined individuals of color with positive hypothesis. Studies conducted concerning African

American single mother-families have been based on a cultural deficit model (Bean et al., 2006; Kincaid et al., 2011). Efforts are being made to conduct research utilizing culturally relevant models and theories which would acknowledge the contributions of such to healthy functioning (Utsey, et al., 2008).

Constantine and Sue (2006) developed the model of optimal human functioning for people of color, to examine the impact of cultural variables on the human functioning of people of color. This model analyzes how cultural beliefs, values and practices contribute to resiliency. Utsey et al., 2008 used this model to look at cultural variables such as religion, racial pride and time orientation, within the African American community. Their findings produced culturally relevant meanings between well-being and the good life. Findings from this study also support that African Americans who maintain high levels of racial pride were also more resilient, which in turn increased well-being. In addition to the element of racial pride, research has found gender, family support; positive personal traits (i.e. social skills, self-esteem, and internal locus of control), religion/spirituality and community are all influential factors of resiliency (Benard & Marshall, 1997; Hawley & DeHann, 1996). McCubbin & McCubbin, 1998 cited the importance of culture as it relates to resiliency in individuals, specifically pertaining to those individuals from minority or oppressed cultures.

In sum, this Chapter presented a description of theories related to resilience, maternal efficacy (social learning), parenting and the influence of culture with regards to single African American mothers and her children. This chapter offered a foundation for the theoretical framework. The chapter described how risk factors and protective factors

play a part in the development of resiliency. Social learning theory provides the foundation for the self (maternal)-efficacy. Parenting styles/skills theory described how these mothers influence their children through the shaping of values, morals, and a code of behavior. Single parenting was incorporated into this chapter in order to bring to light the impact of societal stereotypes and impressions on African American women raising children alone, as well as the children themselves. Cultural theory demonstrates the need for a closer examination of people of color through the use of culturally relevant models and theories. Such would allow for a demonstration of how cultural values, religion, beliefs and practices influence how single African American mothers raise their children with good outcomes, despite adversities. This chapter examined what research has been conducted and the gaps that are still present with regards to the proposed population of the study. This chapter attempted to make the connection between resilience, maternal efficacy and single African American mothers. The next chapter examined specific methods which allowed for further investigation may occur with the population inherently filling in some of the current gaps that exist.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Many studies have addressed the issues confronting single African American mothers raising their children (Kincaid et al., 2011; McCreary & Dancy, 2004; Taylor, 2010). In addition, it is quite rare to see words such as *successful* or *positive* describe single African American mothers. As a result, people begin to have negative thoughts and poor expectations if these women and their children (Kincaid et al., 2011; Paschall, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 2003). Research studies that have spotlighted the outcomes of children coming from single African American mothers led households are more predisposed to common themes of substance abuse, poor self-esteem, poor academic achievement, crime, and other negative outcomes (Paschall et al., 2003; Shook et al., 2010).

Quite often single African American mothers who display resilience, competence, and successful parenting go unnoticed (Parent et al., 2013; Robinson & Werblow, 2012; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2009). This research study examined the resiliency factors of single African American mothers which contribute to the successful results of their children. It also looked at their individual beliefs regarding their capabilities to raise children with successful outcomes despite raising them as a single parent. The relationship between resilience and maternal self-efficacy was examined during this research project. The study also investigated the influence of the single African American mothers' own views of their abilities to have good results with their children. Unlike past research, the findings helped provide a more positive and holistic perspective of the

phenomenon under study and facilitate the development of supportive family policies and prevention efforts for those affected by this phenomenon.

This chapter is composed of four fundamental areas. These areas include research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. Concerning the research design, the research project employed the qualitative research method. The qualitative research methods allowed for the exploration and increased knowledge regarding the lived experience of single African American mothers from their perspective. Using a phenomenological perspective, this research project focused on the mothers' perceptions regarding the impact of their resiliency and self-efficacy on the rearing of their children. The second area provided a detailed account regarding my role as the researcher working with this study. Thirdly, the section on methodology provided a thoroughly detailed description of the method used to conduct the study, for the purpose of successful replication, if desired. Lastly, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are explored in the section covering trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

RQ1: What, if any, are the protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity?

RQ2: What, if any, are the self-efficacy beliefs of single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent?

RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children?

Research Design

Qualitative research is a term to define a variety of approaches and methods of studying natural social life. The data collected and analyzed were non-quantitative in character, consisting of contextual material and visual materials that tell the stories of human experiences (Saldana, 2011). Qualitative research allows for exploration of the phenomenon, providing an opportunity for participants to tell of their experiences (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Phenomenology is one of the approaches used to conduct qualitative studies. This study brings an awareness of the phenomena of single parenting African American mothers to the forefront, increasing the awareness of the issues faced by this population for other researchers, therefore providing a basis for generating additional questions related to the phenomena. The study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenology research method. It provided a forum and opportunity to the single African American mothers to tell her own story as it relates to her ability to raise her child or children with successful outcomes without the help of the father. The research helped determine what patterns exist among single African American mothers who raise children with successful results, notwithstanding the odds. The study explored the factors of resiliency and the maternal self-efficacy of the single African American mothers as they related to their childrearing practices, measuring the capacity to influence

on the outcomes of their children. The research project provided a venue for individuals who experienced the phenomenon to tell the story.

Sample

A sampling using between 10 and 20 participants has been found to produce credible and trustworthy findings (Saldana, 2011). In an effort to ensure that the results of the completed research contained information from at least 10 participants, I had an additional five candidates signed up to participate. Given that the data collected would still be relevant, the information would be used and the number of candidates could have ranged from 10 to 15 individuals. There were 15 participants in this study. For the traveling convenience of all involved, participants for this study resided in the Tri-State area, which consists of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey.

To identify candidates for this research project, snowball sampling was used. Referrals for potential candidates came from social, professional, and faith-based contacts, which were associated with women known to fit the specified criteria needed for the study. Once these potential individuals self-identified as being interested in participating in the study, I made a follow-up call to the candidate to introduce the study and to determine the appropriateness of fit to the research and to see if there was any interest and availability to participate. A brief screening was conducted via the telephone to all interested participants in order to validate participation criteria.

Participants

Participants for this study were single African American women, who were parenting alone. The SAAMs participating in this research project were either biological

mothers, adopted mothers, or had an assumed maternal position. This study did not include any married African American mothers or those who were raising children in a home with two parents (biological, step, or adopted). Single African American women who had not had the responsibility of being the primary caregiver for their children were not included. In many cases, women have had children, but lost custodial rights for various reasons; these women were not able to participate in the study, as they had not had the responsibility in raising their children. Mothers, single or otherwise, who were not African American were not included in this research. The issue of single parenting as a woman is not specific to this ethnic group, however; research that examines single African American mothers who rear children with positive outcomes has been very limited (McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2010). In short, participants for this study were single African American mothers who had the primary responsibility of raising their children.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative research study, the researcher's role is that not only of an active learner, but the key instrument of data collection in a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998; Ragin, 1987). As it pertains to this research project, my role as a researcher was as an observer-participant. While engaging the participants in the data collection processes, I took into account my observations of their reactions (verbal and nonverbal) as well. I had to be very flexible with regards to the ambiguity that may have been presented by the participants. I also considered the level of sensitivity raised by the issues of single

parenting. Demonstration and use of strong interpersonal and communication skills were essential to this study.

The study was limited to single African American mothers, because I am also an African American single mother; awareness of my own personal biases had to be at the forefront and required monitoring by a peer reviewer (credentialed clinician) in order to avoid counter transference and bias. It was imperative that subjectivity and objectivity be maintained throughout the study.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Informed consent (participant consent letter). To ensure ethical protection of members and to be in compliance with IRB, each participant were provided with a consent form (Appendix B). This form provided a comprehensive outline for the purpose, description, data collection methods and other pertinent information related to the study. Identification and contact information for myself and responsible individuals of Walden University were given. The consent form were given to the members during the face-to-face interview for review and signatures. Each participant were given two copies of the consent; one for them to sign and return to me, the other for them to keep. This form was constructed using the guidelines of the sample provided by the Walden University Research Center.

Confidentiality agreement (licensed clinician). To ensure credibility of the findings from the study, I recruited a Master-leveled, licensed clinician to help corroborate the findings, reduce bias, and ensure objectivity. This individual was required to sign a confidentiality agreement, prior to her involvement with the study.

Data Collection

Methods of data collection. Once interested individual contacted me, I followed up with that individual to introduce study. If individual was still interested in participating; I conducted the initial screening assessment (Criteria Qualifier). This helped determine if the candidate met the qualifications to participate. The Criteria Qualifier was used to screen candidates. If the candidate met criteria, I set up a date and time to meet face-to-face with the candidate to complete the consent form, participant data collection sheet, and the interview protocol questionnaire.

During the face-to-face meeting between myself and the candidate, the letter of consent were reviewed and signed. If the candidate signed the consent form, they were then identified as a participant. A copy of the consent form was kept for my records and the participant also received a copy of the letter of consent. Next, I completed the participant data collection sheet and the interview protocol questionnaire with participant during this encounter. Once all of the participants had completed the interviewing process, I scheduled the focus group. All data collected during the study was obtained and stored using paper and electronic and audio equipment. The data obtained during the study will be managed by and be the property of mine. All paper media and the flash drive will be kept inside a secure file box for a period of three years after the study has been completed (January, 2018).

Open-ended questions interviews (interview protocol questionnaire). I conducted face-to-face interviews with each member individually, using open-ended questions. I produced the interview questions. These interviews were anticipated to run at

least one to one and a half hours each. The interviews were conducted at an agreed upon public location easily accessible and agreeable to participant. The objective of using this method allowed for an understanding of the perspectives of single African American mothers. I audio recorded and subsequently transcribed the interviews.

Focus group. It was requested that the participants attend a two hours focus group. The time allotted also included a 40 minute lunch. I facilitated the focus group. This encounter was audio taped. The individuals who participated in the focus group, were asked ten semi-structured questions. The focus group participants were also given a Participant focus group evaluation. This group provided a forum for the members to share collectively on their experiences as single African American mothers and their experience of their study participation this far. It was opened with introductions and a group ice breaker. I transcribed the data collected during the focus group. A peer reviewer observed and took notes on the overall process of the group. This information was shared with me immediately following the focus group.

Transcription. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. While transcribing the data, I had become intimately familiar with every literal word shared during the research process as a means of ensuring that there would be limited opportunity for inaccurate documentation (Saldana, 2011). Through a review of data obtained through the interviews, an understanding of the participant's thoughts and experiences had been acquired. Emerging patterns and themes were refined through a circular process of analysis to obtain a greater understanding of the data results from the overlapping process of analysis; reflection on the findings and discussion with the

participants. Clarification and validation of analysis and interpretation were provided through this process, as well. Members were afforded an opportunity to review and respond to preliminary and final findings. An audit trail consisting of a reflexive journal and extensive field notes was established to ensure validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reflexive journal. I collected personal notes throughout the process of the research project to use as a data source. Reflective notes were recorded to document personal thoughts, ideas and impressions (Creswell, 2009).

Participant evaluation. I created and provided an evaluation feedback form for each participant to share on their experience of participating in the research project. A half hour was the time allotted for this activity, conducted via the telephone.

Triangulation. Methods triangulation, I used observation, the interviews and the data from the questionnaire for purposes of reliability.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was used for this research project in order to ensure credibility of the findings from the study. In order to corroborate the findings, reduce bias, and ensure objectivity, I recruited a Master-leveled, licensed clinician. This exchange occurred directly preceding the focus group. The clinician who served as the peer reviewer signed a letter of confidentiality (Appendix G).

Compensations. There were no monetary compensations for participation in this research project; however, refreshments and lunch were provided for the participants at no expense.

Instruments for Data Collection

Instruments for data collection included the criteria qualifier form, participant data collection sheet, interview protocol, participant study evaluation, and participant feedback form. The instruments for the research project were used in order to establish validity and reliability. All consideration was given to the ease of usability of the members of such instruments. I made sure necessary accommodations (e.g. reading support, clarity on any areas of ambiguity, writing assistance) were provided to the participants. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection involved in the study of this phenomenon.

Criteria qualifier form. I designed this document in order to obtain initial information during a brief screening to assure individuals meet the criteria for inclusion in the research. (Appendix A). The form was completed via the telephone in a conversation between myself and the interested person. If an individual is found to meet the criteria for participation in the study, I made arrangement to meet face-to-face to review and determine if the candidate would like to consent for participation in the study.

Participant data collection sheet. Once the individual had consented to participating in the study, they were then identified as a participant. Each participant completed a participant data collection sheet (Appendix C), which was used to gather demographic information (name, contact information. Ethnic background), information regarding the number of children each participant has and their level of educational attainment. This document also inquired about the participants' child/children's history of

arrest and substance abuse. Questions were also asked about marital status, participants' educational level and profession.

Interview protocol form. I created and used a questionnaire containing twenty-five open-ended questions and a resiliency factor check list (Appendix D). These documents were used in the face-to-face interviews. Open-ended questions allowed members to contribute as much detailed information as they desired to and to express their viewpoints and experiences fully (Turner, 2010).

Focus group participant evaluation. At the close of the focus group, I provided an evaluation form (Appendix E) to each member, which they used to evaluate their participation in the project, their awareness of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy and providing them with an opportunity to offer comments or suggestions to me. At the close of the focus group, I provided resources and other information to the participants that they may find helpful to them and their children

Participant feedback form. (Appendix F) This document is composed of 13 questions that use a rating scale: NA – *not applicable*, 1 – *strongly disagree*; 2 – *disagree*; 3 – *neither agree nor disagree*; 4 – *agree*; 5 – *strongly agree*, and provided for an opportunity for participants to give feedback on the entire process of the study once they have been given the finding/outcomes.

This chapter provides a full explanation of the research as it relates to the research design, the researcher, instruments to be used, and issues of trustworthiness. Included also in this chapter is a detailed account of the informed consent. This chapter also gives detailed information regarding all aspects of data collection (forms, focus group, and

triangulation). Samples of each form are included in the appendix of this document. In summary, Chapter three presents a comprehensive description of the methods and instruments used to study resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for this study (#09-08-14-0063658) researching resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers. In the following chapter, a complete overview is provided of the settings, interactions with participants throughout the study and the outcomes of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to explore how single African American mothers use resiliency and maternal self-efficacy in the rearing of their children. There is minute literature available that has highlighted the aforementioned elements relating to the single African American mothers who have raised children with positive outcomes. The majority of research and literature currently available on the cited population have focused on their demise and misfortunes. This study was conducted to increase awareness of this phenomenon and to begin to fill in the gaps in relationship to single African American mothers who have positive parenting outcomes while demonstrating both resiliency and maternal self-efficacy.

The research questions that shaped this study were threefold:

RQ1: What, if any, are the protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity?

RQ2: What, if any, are the self-efficacy beliefs of single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent?

RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children?

Chapter 4 presents the information related to the sampling, demographics of the participants, and the data collection and analysis process. Evidence of trustworthiness

with consideration to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirm ability are provided here as well. Finally, the results of the study will be presented, followed by a summarization, with an emphasis on providing answers to the initial research questions.

Settings

Candidates for the study were obtained by creating and posting a flyer at two churches, a daycare, and by snowball sampling. Those individuals who were interested in participating in the study contacted me as the researcher. During a telephone conversation, the purpose of the study was explained, and the criteria qualifier (see Appendix A) was conducted. Of the 17 women who expressed interest in participating in the study, two were not qualified for inclusion based on information provided by the initial screening using the criteria qualifier. After the remaining 15 were deemed eligible, each participant and I scheduled a date, time, and place to meet. During these meetings participants reviewed, signed, and obtained a copy of the participation consent letter (see Appendix B). The Participant Data Collection Sheet (see Appendix C) was completed, and using the Interview Protocol (see Appendix D) the face-to-face interview was conducted. Once the desired number of participants was acquired and each had consummated the face-to-face meeting, the focus group was scheduled. Although 15 women met the criteria and participated in the study, five were unable to attend the focus group. Of these five, all but one were not present due to commitments related to parenting (two working, one attending her daughter's baby shower, and one attending a sporting event, as college scouts were looking at her daughter; the fifth was ill on the day of the focus group).

Demographics

Creswell (2009) recommended using a sample of five to 25 participants for phenomenological studies in order for sufficient data to be provided to address the research questions. Overall, there were 15 study participants. All of the participants met the following criteria for the study: they were single African American mothers having or who had had the primary responsibility of raising their child or children. They also self-identified that their children as minors had not (a) been arrested for felony charges, (b) had issues with substance abuse, or (c) dropped out of school. The participant initials and/or a numerical status were used in place of their names for the purpose of confidentiality. I conducted and transcribed all interviews.

The Participant Data Collection Sheet was used to gather demographic information (name, contact information, ethnic background), information regarding the children (their ages), and participants' maximum level of education completed. Questions were asked about each participant with regard to the following: marital status, educational level, and employment status. The age range of the participants was from 25 to 57 ($M = 44$). Concerning marital status, seven of the women were divorced. Four of the seven women had been married for 5 or more years; the other three were married fewer than 3 years. The remaining eight women were never married. There was one woman who became a mom at 17 years of age; two at the age of 18; one at 19; and the others became mothers after the age of 20. Six of the women parented only one child; five parented two children each; and four parented three each. Eleven had parented just their biological children, while the other four either adopted or raised children of others

coupled with raising their biological child or children. With regard to educational level, two of the women were high school graduates, six had attended college but did not complete, one was currently in college, two had associate's degrees, two had bachelor's degrees, and two had a graduate degree, with one working towards her doctorate. All of the women were gainfully employed at the time of the study. An illustration of the demographics of the participants in the study appears in Appendix K.

Individual Phenomenological Descriptions of Participants

In preparation for presenting the thematic patterns, phrases, experiences, and observed emotions, a phenomenological description for each participant was developed. From the data collected during the face-to-face interviews, using the Interview Protocol document (see Appendix D), I transcribed these phenomenological descriptions. Again, initials and numbers are used to protect anonymity of the participants. Each description includes the date and duration of the interview.

M.M. (001). M.M. is 57 and the mother of two adult children (ages 39 and 35). She was a teen-parent, giving birth to her son when she was 17 years old. She was briefly married to and lived with the father of her daughter. She has been separated for 35 years. Both children have completed high school. She is a high school graduate and has completed several courses at community college. M.M. is currently employed as a customer care representative. Both of her parents, who passed away days apart during her senior year in high school, raised M.M. Being the second oldest and the only girl among her siblings, she had the responsibility of caring not only for her infant son, but also for her three younger brothers as well. She lived for years with a great deal of grief

concerning the loss of her parents. During this interview, she was still very emotional as she talked about the deaths of her parents and its effect on her life. She reported her family supports to have been very limited in raising her children. However, she gave a great deal of credit to God for keeping her and her children through the various trials and tribulations of raising them alone. The fathers of her children have had minimal involvement in their lives. M.M. felt this has been a devastating factor to both children. She believed that her son is not the dad he should be to his children because his father was absent and that her daughter's relationships with men are reflective of her father's lack of involvement. M.M. reported that she takes great pride in being an African American. She felt that having had an opportunity to witness the strength of her relatives through past historical adversities has been an assurance at times that she too could make it. M.M. believed that the love, structure, and discipline she encountered during her childhood were significant contributing factors in her ability to have raised her children independently. M.M. shared that if she could change something about raising her children, it would be to have a less restrictive work schedule and the income that would have allowed her more time to be at home with them, resulting in her son being able to have more time to enjoy his childhood. She also shared that she wished she could have provided a stronger spiritual foundation for her children when they were growing up, but the primary focus at that time was going to work so she could provide for them. Both of her children are independent and caring for themselves. Overall, M.M. felt that her children do okay, but if they had a desire to do more, they could. M.M. has always emphasized to her children that they are responsible for any children that they have

regardless of the connection between them and their partner. Ideally, MM felt a two-parent family would be best. The interview with M.M. took place on September 10, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

I.B. (002). I.B. is a 49-year-old mother of one daughter, who is 18-years old. She became a mother at the age of 30 and shifted to being a single mom at 33 when she divorced her husband. Her daughter recently graduated from high school; she is currently working, and attends school for culinary arts. I.B. is a high school graduate and has completed several college courses. She currently is employed as a private duty caregiver. I.B. reported having been raised by a single mom who worked hard to provide for her and her two brothers. I.B. is the middle child. I.B. attributes her positive outcomes as a parent to watching her mother do what she had to do in order to make sure that she and her siblings were provided for. She believes that this is what has made her work harder during her struggles as a single mom. Whereas her mom worked to get the basics for I.B. and her siblings, I.B. always was inspired to be able to provide some pleasures for her daughter in life as well. She stated that she has a great support system in caring for her daughter, which has consisted of her mother and her daughter's paternal grandmother. I.B. reported that her ex-husband has had inconsistent involvement in the life of their daughter, and this had been a negative impact on the child about how she views men overall. I.B. shared that watching other single African American mothers raise their children during her childhood served as a constant reminder that even when things seemed hard, she had to be strong, and she could make it. She acknowledged that having to juggle a work schedule and her daughter's schedule was often a challenge. Concerning

her faith-based beliefs, I.B. stated that she only wishes that she could have been more active in church with her daughter when she was younger. She credited God with giving her the strength and ability to care and provide for her daughter in addition to being a loving and caring person. I.B. was a little tearful as she expressed her gratitude to God, for what she identified as blessings. I.B. believes that a two-parent family would be best for a child, so she encourages her daughter to be wise and patient in choosing a mate and to keep God first. The interview with I.B. took place on September 11, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

L.B. (003). L.B. is a 46-year-old divorced mother of three children, two sons' ages: 26 and 21, and one daughter, age 23. She had her first son when she was 19-years old and single-parented with the help of her parents until she got married at 24 and had her other two children. L.B. and her husband divorced four years ago; prior to their division he had been an active participant in their upbringing. Although their children were young adults at the time of the divorce, L.B. admitted that not having their father as an active, everyday part of their life has affected them in different ways. She reported that dad tends to dote on their daughter and makes excuses rather than hold her accountable. The relationship between the father and the youngest son is reported to have some issues meaning the son does not see dad as the man he used to be in his sight. L.B.'s eldest son is autistic and lives in a residential facility. Her daughter attended three semesters of college, but due to financial hardship could not return to school. L.B. daughter now has a baby and is back living at home. L.B.'s youngest son is in his second year of college. L.B. is a high school graduate who reported having been incredibly blessed with the

employment opportunities she has had over the years. Even in the absence of a college degree, L.B. considers it a blessing to have good employment opportunities. She credited her natural gift of being a hard worker, loving, caring and intelligence, as the source of being able to get and maintain these jobs. She currently is employed as a residential director and attending college working on an Associate's degree. L.B. was raised by both parents, being the eldest of six children; she reported to having a limited childhood with many adult responsibilities and having to care for her younger siblings. She reported that her dad was a workaholic, and her mom was depressed most of the time. L.B. credited God with filling up the holes in her life. Where one could look and see the spaces left by each parent, L.B. gives a strong testimony that God was there and there was no lack of what was needed, just an opportunity for Him to show up and make a way. L.B. enjoys very meaningful relationships with her parents who remain supportive of both her and her children. L.B. felt that being an African American and having a great deal of knowledge about her history and the struggle of those who have come before her has afforded her an opportunity to know that there will be struggles and hard times, but that she can emerge victoriously if she keeps pressing on. L.B. shared that single parenting is very difficult and should be avoided if possible. L.B. revealed, that despite of all of the information and guidance she has provided, her daughter is now a single parent. Her daughter and granddaughter live with her. L.B. admitted this is a great challenge. She works to advise her daughter on caring for the child, which often times is not so welcomed by her daughter.

L.B. was very animated throughout the interview, smiling, frowning and laughing as she responded to the questions. She consistently praised God during the session. Her sadness regarding her marriage ending and her ex-husbands' involvement with his youngest son, showed on her face and in her tone of voice. However, she demonstrated a sense of hope when speaking of a future mate and her youngest sons' accomplishments. L.B. expressed her gratitude for being able to be a part of such a study and its' importance to society. The interview with L.B. took place on September 21, 2014 and lasted for approximately 2 hours.

B.H. (004). B.H. is a 52-year-old mother of one adult son, age 28. She was married, became a mom at 24 and divorced at the age of 36. Her son completed a year of college and faced some challenges as an adult. However, B.H. is hopeful and reported he is finding his way. She firmly believes some of her sons' issues with his transition from a boy to a man have been impaired by his dad's lack of involvement. She shared how valuable and important her dad was to her as a girl and a woman, and felt her son has been cheated by his father. B.H. is a high school graduate and gainfully employed as a correctional officer. B.H. was raised by both parents. One significant point that B.H. reported she got from her parents was to stick it out even during hard times. Her support system is said to be her family, which she has always found available and willing to help. She has four sisters and is the second youngest. B.H. credited God with giving her the strength and ability to face the adversities of life, parenting her son and encouraging him as an adult. She shared that she is often reminded when she wanted to rush in to make things better that God can do greater things than she could ever do. She stated that being

aware of the struggles of African Americans overall has taught her to be strong, responsible and “village minded” (having care and concern about others, related or not related). B.H. stated she would not recommend being a single parent because it is difficult. In an ideal world, she felt that using the structure God gave in the Bible of a man and a woman being a father and a mother has purpose, and when one parent is missing, there is a lack within the foundation of the family. However, in a case where it cannot be avoided, B.H. felt it is important to play your part with your child and be actively involved.

B.H. was polite, cheery and spoke rapidly throughout the interview. She described herself as a “talker.” Although she appeared very willing to participate, she seemed just as anxious to get to the end of the questions. Researcher had to probe more with her on questions related to her son’s potential and outcomes. The interview with B.H. took place on October 29, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

C.R. (005). C.R. is 41 and has been raising her grandniece (nephews’ daughter) for the past fifteen years as a single parent. She has legal custody. Her grandniece is a 17 and a high school senior. C.R. has a Master’s degree and is currently employed as a social worker. C.R. was raised by both of her parents; she has three older sisters and is the youngest. Her nephew was raised by her parents as well. C.R. shared that she was born when her parents were much older; her siblings were all grown, so she grew up pretty much as an only child. She described her childhood as sheltered and extremely limited. C.R. stated that her parents kept her very close to home and her activities were strictly monitored when she was growing up. C.R. expressed many frustrations about her

family in regards to being a support system. Her dad is deceased, as is her nephew (father of the child), and her mother lives in Florida. She does not feel supported or understood by her family on this journey of caring for her grandniece. It is more complicated for her to grasp, as one of her siblings is the grandmother of the child. She reported it being difficult to ask her family for help for fear of rejection. However, C.R. shared that she has found a support system of her own with friends. C.R. felt that her nephews' death has had a significant impact on her grandniece in many ways. The male role model is missing with him gone, as C.R. has no husband or other males around to provide an example. In addition, the child's birth mother lives in the area and has very little contact or communication with the child. C.R. believed all of these parental issues have a negative impact on the self-esteem of her grandniece. C.R. stated that she depends a great deal on direction from God in raising her grandniece. She identified Him as the other parent. C.R. spends a great amount of time in prayer and devotion, encouraging her grandniece to do the same, as God is the only one she knows who will not desert you. C.R. felt that culture has had an enormous influence on her as a parent. She said that she has been impressed with the strong African American women all of her life working and doing what is necessary to raise and care for their children. She wants her grandniece to grow up seeing that handling the tough times will make you strong. C.R. actively discourages single parenting; she has a great appreciation for the roles of both parents and felt that their involvement helps to cut down on some of the problems children may encounter growing up.

C.R. got tearful as she shared on, not feeling supported by her family. She appeared torn by the fact that her sister, who is the biological grandmother to her niece, has limited involvement with them. Researcher believes C.R. wants to raise her grandniece, but felt dumped on by her family. The interview with C.R. took place on October 30, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Q.L. (006). Q.L. is 38-years-old and the mother of a 16- year-old son. He is a high school junior. She gave birth and became a single parent at 21-years of age. She has no real relationship with the father of the child, whom she met while in college. Q.L. acknowledged that it took some time for her to realize that the father's rejection towards her as a mate was not necessarily meant for her son. She is still saddened by the fathers' refusal to have a relationship with their son. Q.L. has a Bachelor's degree in business administration and management and is currently employed as an applications team manager of a local hospital. Q.L. shared that she was raised by both parents; however, it was a very chaotic situation. Her mother was a drug addict and her dad an alcoholic. There were many psychosocial issues (lack of money, food, and utilities; fighting, strangers in the home, etc.) associated with substance abuse. Q.L. reported that although her dad was an alcoholic, he did work and tried hard to make sure her needs were met to the best of his ability. She and her mother did not have a good relationship during this time, but it improved when Q.L. was an adult. Q.L. has 12 siblings, and she is the youngest. Eleven of the siblings are children of her father. They are much older, and she has little to no relationship with them. Q.L. shared that her dad was much older than her mother. Her mother had one other daughter, now deceased, who was 14 years older than

Q.L. Q.L. reported her and this sibling had a poor relationship as well. Q.L. shared that the greatest influence on what parents should be like came from The Cosby Show a television show (1984-1992). This show was about the Huxtibles, an African American family: husband (gynecologist), wife (lawyer) and their five children. Q.L. reported having a very limited support system for her and her son. With no family support, she had to learn to develop friendships and to trust that people genuinely wanted to help and be there for them. She tries her best to provide independently and care for her son, but acknowledged the good feeling and appreciation of friends when they step in to help. Q.L. shared she often prays to God to strengthen her and to direct her as she parents her son. She uses the Bible as a guide and reference point for parenting and rearing her son to become a man. Q.L. shared that she had learned not to focus on what is missing from her family unit, and concentrate on the positives that she and her son bring to the table. Q.L. shared that she was pleased with the progress that her son is making as he transitions into a young adult. She stated she has very open conversations with her son about sex and children and stresses that marriage should come before first children. Two parents are what God designed for people, but if things don't work, she encourages her son to step up and take responsibility and have a relationship with his children.

Q.L. kept a very strong and positive mood during the interview. She did not get tearful, but her voice was saddened as she talked about her living conditions when her mom was actively using drugs. Although she described her dad as an alcoholic, she spoke of him as her hero. Ironically, shortly after this interview, the male figure in the television series she had identified, as her "ideal family" had become the center of several sexual

assault cases. Researcher wonders what impact this may have on Q.L. The interview with Q.L. took place on October 30, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

S.M. (007). S.M. is a 25-year-old mother of two daughters (ages: 2 and 3). She became a mother at 22-years-old. Both girls have the same father who is involved with their upbringing, but not to the degree, that S.M. felt he needs to be. She gave a lot of credit to the parents and extended family of her children's father for their love and support to the girls. The girls spend every weekend with their paternal grandparents. At one point in their relationship, S.M., the father of her children, and the children lived with the paternal grandparents. This was until the paternal grandparents felt no progress was being made in terms of them getting set up for themselves and their children. S.M. and her daughters currently live with her maternal grandmother. Dad does visit and will help out sometimes by taking the girls to daycare so S.M. can go to work. S.M. completed one semester at Community College and currently works as a daycare assistant. S.M. was raised by her mother and maternal grandparents. She acknowledged that although her involvement with her dad was limited, and he was in and out of jail while she was growing up, she had and still maintains a very close relationship with her paternal family members. Her paternal: great-grandparents, grandparents, and aunts were very active in her life. S.M. stated that during her adolescent years she and her mother had a poor relationship due to her mother's substance abuse; however, over the years things have gotten a lot better between them. S.M. has three sisters (one sister by her mom and two sisters by her dad). She is the oldest and was raised with her sister with whom she shares a mom. She reported having good relationships with her siblings. S.M. stated she has a

great support system. She felt that she is truly blessed to have so many family members (her own and those of her children's father) to help out, however, she shared there is an absolute pride she has when she knows she has accomplished and did something for her children on her own. S.M. stated that she does pray and knows that God has blessed her and her children with a great family who loves them. She doesn't feel that being a single parent is an African American issue because other women of other ethnic backgrounds (White, Hispanic, Asian, etc.) have babies and are not married. She is hopeful that one day if her daughter's father gets himself together, they could get married, but knows he is not ready at this time. As an African American S.M. believes that she may have some issues that she will face in working to get her life together, but she felt nothing will keep her back once she makes up her mind. S.M. admitted that she would not want her daughters to follow her path in terms of having babies before they are ready. It is important to her that her children be established first (get an education, job, car, and house), get themselves together, and then have children. She vows that she will be there for her children to help out whether they are married or not.

S.M. was the youngest participant with the youngest children. This interview was one of the most challenging for me, as S.M. required a great deal of probing. Most of her answers were initially one- word responses. Although S.M. provides daily care for her children a great deal of the responsibilities related to single parenting (managing a household, paying bills, etc.) are handled by her grandmother. S.M. most significant stressors in single parenting appeared to be related to getting material things for her

children. The interview with S.M. took place on November 2, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

C.M. (008). C.M. is a 54-year-old, mother of three adult children (ages: 30, 29, and 26 years old). All of her children have completed high school. Her two daughters are gainfully employed, and her son is disabled due to a gunshot wound he sustained when he was 18-years old. C.M. was 23 when she married and became a mom. She became a single parent when she got divorced at the age of 38. Her ex-husband had very little involvement with the children after the divorce. C.M. stated it was better that way because it became evident that he had some mental health issues, however she believes that it would have been more beneficial to her son if his dad could have been involved in raising him to become a man. C.M. is a high school graduate and is gainfully employed as an administrative assistant. C.M. shared that she was raised by both parents and reported having had a strongly disciplined, but healthy childhood. She described her dad as a hard worker and disciplinarian while her mother was a stay- at- home mom and homemaker. C.M. is the oldest and only girl with two brothers. C.M. acknowledged that she struggled to raise her children after the divorce. Most of the issues centered on finances, but she also missed the shared responsibility of caring for the children. Once divorced, she had to get welfare and depend on her family to help out when they could. Eventually she secured a permanent job with benefits enabling her to get off welfare and provide for her family. C.M. credited the experience of being without money at times when she was raising her children, as her force to become financially perceptive and independent. Although she is not a part of an organized religion, C.M. believes in God

and prays daily. C.M. felt that anyone regardless of culture and race has the potential to make it and to do well if they choose to. She acknowledged that African Americans have unique history and have come a long way in terms of discrimination and opportunity. However, she believes African Americans and everyone else should understand the power they have in terms of directing their outcomes. C.M. felt that her childhood experiences which include being raised in a disciplined atmosphere, combined with the experiences of her marriage made her tough and ready to successfully meet the challenges of being a single parent. Once her children reached 18, C.M. credited herself with being able to step back and let them run their own lives, taking the opportunity to enjoy hers. Her view on being a single parent is: if you have two parents who can work together to make sure the child is taken care of that is what is important, but if you are left alone to care for your children by yourself, then give it the best you have to give.

C.M. appeared to be comfortable during the interview. She was one participant who seemed to be enjoying the “empty nest.” She admitted that her divorce caused her to grow up in many ways as an individual and as a parent. C.M. shared her love of traveling and doing things that are exciting for her and saw this as a reward for the sacrifices she made while parenting. The interview with C.M. took place on November 3, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes.

K.C. (009). K.C. is 51 and a mother of two daughters (ages: 25 and 23). K.C. legally adopted the oldest daughter at birth. The other daughter was an infant of a friend of K.C.’s whom she assumed responsibility for at birth, due to the biological mother’s illicit substance dependency. K.C. reported having had years of going through the legal

system and trying to legally adopt her second daughter, but the biological mom would never cooperate. The biological mom would often start disturbances with K.C. to attempt to get money from her to use for drugs. Both of K.C.'s children completed high school. K.C. has always been a single parent; she adopted her first daughter when she was twenty-five. The biological father of the youngest daughter was involved on a financial basis when he was able to help out. K.C. shared that one of the biggest struggles she had as a parent was having one child whose family had no contact with her and another child whose family was attracted to drama. K.C. has an Associates' Degree in Business Management and Marketing. She is currently employed as a clerk. K.C. was raised by her mother and her maternal grandmother. Her grandmother lived across the street from the house K.C. lived in with her mom and siblings. K.C. shared that she knew her dad, and they had a fair relationship. Her parents were not married. K.C. reported that both her mom and grandmother were very loving, caring and supportive to her. K.C. has ten siblings, of whom one is deceased. K.C. is number eight of her siblings. Coming from such a large family, K.C. reported having financial struggles, but overall stated she had a healthy childhood. K.C. shared that when she was raising her children her family was very supportive and helpful. K.C. says although she is a Christian, she has never tried to push her beliefs on anyone. She believes that she inspires her children and others to seek God for themselves by the way she lives her life. Through the good and the bad times God's light shines in me and I hope this behavior draws others to Him. She says the prayer is the key. It has been what sustained her with the challenges she has had with her children and other people they are connected to. K.C. felt that her cultural history has had

a substantial impact on her as a parent. She enjoys reading literature on African American history and related materials. She also credited having spent time throughout her life with older African American women for her cultural connection. K.C. believes that in order to know who you are and where you can go, you have to know where you come from. K.C. felt that the emphasis shouldn't be on single parenting, because as a parent you should do your best to love, educate, care for, and support your children. Every child deserves to be loved and made to feel special.

K.C. appeared to be very comfortable during the interview. She gave thought to the responses she shared. There was a look of hurt and disappointment on her face as she shared on the problems she faced with the substance-abusing mother of her youngest daughter. K.C. appeared to question herself as to why the love and security she gave this daughter never seemed like enough and how the daughter always seemed to yearn for the mom. Overall, K.C. seemed grateful to be able to share her love and was appreciative of the relationships with her daughters today. The interview with K.C. took place on November 7, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

H.B. (010). H.B. is a 44-year-old, mother of a 27-year-old daughter. She became a single mom at 17-years-old. Her daughter is a high school graduate. While growing up, the daughter and her father had a relationship; however, father passed away when the daughter was 17-years-old. H.B. shared that due to having her daughter while she was still an adolescent; her parents "took over" the responsibilities of raising her daughter. When her daughter was 10-years-old that H.B. assumed full responsibility for her care. H.B. has a Bachelor's degree in Human Services and is currently employed as an

adherence counselor. H.B. shared that her greatest struggles as a single parent began with her disappointment in self for becoming a teen parent. H.B. was raised by both parents. Her dad is a pastor of a church. She reported growing up in a very stern household. H.B. has three brothers and one sister, and she is the youngest sibling. When H.B. took over responsibilities for her daughter, she found that not having the financial support from her daughters' father was an issue for her, but she learned to manage. H.B. shared that as her parents raised her daughter as their own for the first ten years of her life, H.B. did not have the experience of not having a support system. Even as she began to parent alone, she always knew her parents were there to help if needed, but H.B. worked hard to do things independently. H.B. shared that although she does not have an affiliation with any particular church, she is a Christian, who knows the power of prayer and prays often. Her daughter has been raised in a Christian environment and loves God. She felt that her culture has influenced her parenting. As a culturally competent mother she always shared the history with her daughter about the struggles and sacrifices made for African Americans in order for African Americans to get an education and fair opportunities for employment. H.B. believes knowledge is power. H.B. felt her daughter is doing well as an adult. She described her as being well rounded and loving. H.B. stated she encourages her daughter, by all means not to become a single parent. She values the importance of the roles of mothers and fathers and acknowledged the difficulty in doing it alone.

H.B's demeanor during the interview was very straightforward. She was pleasant and cooperative, but answered the questions directly with limited conversation. She showed disappointment in her facial expression and voice tone when she talked about

becoming a teen parent and changing the plans she had for her life. Overall, she expressed a great deal of gratitude towards her parents and for the love and support they gave to her and her daughter. The interview with H.B. took place on November 12, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

E.M. (011). E.M. is a 36 –year- old mother of two sons. Her oldest son is 18-years-old and is her biological child, and she adopted another son, age 4, and a year and a half ago. Her oldest son is currently in the 11th grade and the baby attends medical day care. E.M. gave birth to her first child at 19-years-old. Although she was not married to her sons' father they lived together for eleven years; she began to parent independently when she was 30-years-old. E.M. reported that the father was not actually involved even when he lived in the home. She was the responsible one with anything concerning their child. E.M. completed one semester of college, but had to postpone the completion of her degree due to parenting responsibilities. She is currently employed as a nursing assistant. E.M. stated she was raised by both parents and reported having had a healthy childhood. Her dad was a hard worker. Her mother was a stay at home mom but was often very ill. E.M. is the youngest, with four siblings. She has three older sisters and a younger brother. Her sisters taught her as a child how to cook, clean and take on responsibilities. E.M. described her family as her support system and felt that she does not have to “ask” for help, it just happens naturally; that is, family members pitch in to do what is necessary without solicitation. She credited her mom with being her greatest source of strength and support. E.M. shared that she was raised in a Christian home and attended church as a child regularly. Her focus today is not on formal religion, but on her personal relationship

with God. She reported that she prays daily and felt that gave her a source of strength. E.M. shared that culture has had a great deal of influence on her as a parent. Things that she has learned over the years with regards to the struggles and accomplishments of African Americans push her to want more for her children, self and serves as a reminder that she can achieve anything she puts her mind to. E.M. felt that both of her children are headed in the right direction. She is hopeful that her oldest son will continue to do well in school and go on to college or trade school. Moreover, her youngest, even with his medical challenges related to cystic fibrosis, is blossoming. E.M. stated that she talks to her oldest son about life and relationships. She encourages him not to make someone a single parent or to become one himself. However, should he have a baby, she would expect him to be there and to take care of his child no matter what?

E.M. appeared relaxed and answered the questions without any problems. Her tone of voice became a bit anxious and disturbed when she spoke about her oldest sons' father. However, she managed to smile and express optimism about the men her children will become. E.M. showed a great deal of gratitude for the support from her family. The interview with E.M. took place on November 15, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes.

C.M. (012). This participant is referenced throughout the study as C.M. (012) because she shares the same initials as another participant in the study. C.M. (012) is 47-year-old mother of an 18-year-old son. Her son is currently a senior in high school. C.M. (012) was married and had her son when she was 29-years-old. She divorced and became a single mom at 33. Knowing the importance of male involvement with young men, she

always encouraged her ex-husband to connect and be involved with their son. The ex-husband has been involved in their son's life, even to having the young man stay with him throughout the year at different times. C.M. (012) stated that it has been extremely challenging working with dad around parenting, as they tend to have extreme ideas about what should be going on with their son. Out of respect, she has tried to include father on issues regarding the son, but finds it easier to handle things independently. C.M. (012) reported that the relationship between her son and his father is not good, and that they currently are not communicating with each other. C.M. (012) is currently in her last semester of college, working on a degree in marketing. She is currently employed as a credentialing assistant. C.M. (012) reported having been raised as an only child by her maternal grandmother in a very strict and controlling environment. Although she knew both her mother and father, neither was involved in her upbringing. C.M. (012) reported to having always longed to be a part of a big family. Her mother had no other children, but she had two older sisters by her father, one of which is now deceased. She reported close relationships with her sisters and their children. C.M. (012) reported finding it easy to ask for assistance with her son when needed. She credited her friends and family with being an excellent supportive network. C.M. (012) shared that she was involved with the Islamic faith. She has raised her son to seek God and to pray. C.M. (012) stated she is very active in faith-based activities and realizes the importance of seeking God in all areas of her life. C.M. (012) embraces both her African American and her Native-American heritages. She reported having been profoundly influenced by her culture in terms of parenting. She provides opportunities and experiences that allow her son to see

the rich history and the pride of the outcomes from both cultures. She believes that cultural pride is a positive contributor to each individual. C.M. (012) felt her son has the potential to do or to become anything he desires; however, she is not sure that his level of confidence is there. C.M. (012) felt that his journey may be slower than she would like, but felt he will achieve success. She admitted to struggling to keep an understanding that he is not like her and that he will have to develop into a man. She cannot pick his life or force him to do what she wants him to do. C.M. (012) promoted a two-parent household and believes they provide more balance for a child. However, if the two parents cannot work together for what is best for the child, she believes single parenting may be a better option. Either way, C.M. (012) stresses to her son the importance of being there for his children. That means being there financially, mentally, emotionally, and physically. C.M. (012) believes communication with the children is what is vitally important. C.M.'s (012) interview was interesting in several ways. Based on what C.M. (012) shared about the treatment she received from her grandmother, researcher would classify such as abusive, but not once did C.M. (012) refer to herself as being abused.

C.M. (012) spoke very openly and honestly about growing up in a very strict and confining household. Her facial expressions and voice tones ranged from: happy, excited, sad, frustrated and disappointed. She described always being in awe of her friends who had a lot of siblings and she enjoyed watching the family work together. The interview with C.M. (012) took place on November 17, 2014 and lasted for approximately 2 hours.

L.B. (013). L.B. is a 42-year-old divorced mother of three. She has two biological children (twins) who are 17 and a 19-year-old niece for whom she is the legal guardian.

Her twins are high school seniors, and her niece graduated high school last year. Her ex-husband is not involved with the children at all. L.B. felt this was affecting her son at one point, but her son now has a good rapport with L.B.'s male companion. L.B. gave birth to the twins at the age of 25 and became a single parent at 27. She became the legal guardian of her niece five years ago. L.B. has a Master's degree and is currently pursuing her doctorate. She is employed as a social worker. She shared that she grew up in a two-parent household. L.B. stated her mother ran the home with Christian values, and that family was the priority. L.B. said she has an older half-sister, but was raised as an only child. She reported finding it easy to ask for help with her children when the need arises. L.B. stated she is a Christian and attends church with her children. L.B. shared that growing up in a Christian household gave her a foundation that she uses in all aspects of her life. She felt that the African American culture has had a tremendous influence on her. The community she grew up in was composed of predominately African American families who operated from a village mentality. Everyone looked out for each other and had no problem correcting or encouraging the children around them. L.B. felt her children are headed for great things. The twins are very athletic and have been superb at basketball. They have received college acceptances and are looking forward to the next phase of life. She looks for them to be successful. Her niece plans to go into the military. L.B. felt that her niece may be at an awkward place in her life due to some of the experiences she encountered in her childhood with her birth parents; however, L.B. is hopeful that she too will be successful. L.B.'s advice regarding single parenting is that she encourages her own children, not to have children outside of marriage, nonetheless,

married or not married, each person should be responsible for caring and providing for their children.

L.B. was pleasant and cooperative during the interview. She was focused on the questions and answered, in short, direct answers. The interview with L.B. took place on November 24, 2014 and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

M.R. (014). M.R. is a 38-year-old mother of three children (ages: 19, 16 and 8 years old). Her oldest daughter has completed three semesters of college, the middle child is in the 11th grade, and her son is in the 3rd grade. M.R. became a single mom at 19-years-old. She has never been married, and each child has a different father. Only the father of her son is reported to have some involvement with their son. She felt that every child needs a mom and a dad involved in their life. M.R. pointed out that one person can't truly be successful in the process when there is a piece missing, but you make the best of the situation. M.R. is a high school graduate and gainfully employed as an inpatient clerk at a local hospital. She reported having been raised by her mother and maternal grandparents. Her dad did become an active part of her life at some point when she was growing up, and they maintained a good relationship until he passed away. M.R. shared that during the course of her childhood she was sexually assaulted, which interfered with her childhood and still affects her life in several ways today. M.R. is the oldest of three children and has two younger brothers. She reported that she knows that her family members are there to support her, and her children when the need arises. However, she finds it extremely difficult to ask for help. Asking for help is embarrassing to her, and makes her feel that she was not meeting the needs of her children. M.R. credited God

with being a stable force in her life. She felt that if it were not for her belief in God and her ability to trust the Lord, she would not have made it through life. M.R. admitted that she has some struggles and aims to do better for self. She consults a great deal with her spiritual leader. M.R. stated she has taught her children about the accomplishments and struggles of African Americans so they can have an appreciation of where they have come from and where they can go. "The sky is the limit" is the philosophy she would like for her children to embrace. M.R. stated she is proud of her children's accomplishments so far and felt that they are headed in the right direction. Her advice to the children with regards to single parenting is.... Don't become one!

During the interview, M.R. grew emotional on several occasions. She voluntarily shared that she had been sexually assaulted as a young child and how it has impacted her individually and as a parent. She was able to point out her strengths as a single parent, but also shared her weakness as an individual. Weight is an issue for M.R., and she admitted it is one of her greatest challenges. I offered M.R. further information on resources to address this issue of concern. The interview with M.R. took place on December 9, 2014 and lasted for approximately two hours.

N.S. (015). N.S. is a 37-year-old mother of two sons, who are: 18 and 11 years old. Her older son is in his first year of college, and her younger son is in the 7th grade. She had her first child when she was 20-years-old. Although N.S. never married, both sons have the same dad who is financially supportive, but not so much in any other way. She shared that she puts a lot of effort into keeping the lines of communication open, so he is informed about what is going on with the children. N.S. admitted to over

compensating with her sons because the dad is not involved. She shared that her children are angry and hurt by their dad's behavior. N.S. has an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts and is currently employed as a human resources coordinator. She stated she was raised by both parents and described them as hard workers who have made great sacrifices for their children. N.S. shared that she has five sisters and two brothers; she is the second youngest sibling. While N.S. acknowledged that her family is her greatest source of support, she finds it difficult to ask for help. She felt that since she created her situation, she needs to handle her responsibilities, as they relate to her children. N.S. stated that she is a Christian and uses Biblical principles in her parenting. Although she goes to church for worship on a regular basis, she doesn't force her children to go, because she was made to attend church by her parents when she was growing up. She talks to her children a great deal about the importance of a relationship with God and encourages them to pray and seek God for themselves. N.S. is very optimistic with regards to the outcomes of her children. She expresses great pride towards her older son who is doing very well in college and her younger son who excels in sports. Her advice to her children with regards to single parenting is to avoid it if at all possible. If it is unavoidable, she actively encourages them to be there for the children, not just financially, but physically and emotionally.

N.S. was pleasant and cooperative during the interview. She smiled often and even chuckled when talking about her sons. N.S.'s interview was an outstanding experience for me to for a variety of reasons. N.S. in her discussion of a support system, made it appear that by not reaching out or receiving help from her family and friends was

a self-punishment. She stated that she had to take responsibility for the decision she made to have children out of wedlock. N.S. appeared to be a hard worker and focused on doing what she has to in order to meet her objectives. The interview with N.S. took place on December 8, 2014 and lasted for approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

Data Collection

Approval for this study (#09-08-14-0063658) was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the period of September 7, 2014 – September 7, 2015. Interested individuals either called or emailed me to express their desire to participate in the study. During the initial telephone conversation, the purpose of the study was reviewed and the criteria qualifier (see Appendix A) was applied to ensure that the candidate met criteria for participation. Once an interested individual was identified as having met the criteria for the study, they were given a date and time where we could meet for a face-to-face interview. Interviews were held in a private office within the Charity Baptist Church. All interviews and the focus group were recorded using an MP3 digital recorder. The participation consent letter (see Appendix B) was reviewed and signed, prior to the collection of data for the study. The participant data collection sheet (see Appendix C) was used to gather demographic information (name, contact information, ethnic background), information regarding the children (their ages) and their level of educational attainment. Questions regarding marital status, educational level, and employment status also are asked about each participant. These interviews were conducted between the dates of September 10, 2014 and December 9, 2014, with the duration of each being between one and two hours each. Once a total of 15 single African

American mothers had completed the Interview protocol, a date and time was set for the focus group.

The focus group studying the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers was held on Saturday January 10, 2015 at Charity Baptist Church in the community room. Only those directly involved with the focus group were in the building at the time of the group. Of the 15 participants, ten women participated in the focus group; four participants were unable to attend due to commitments related to parenting (two-working, one-daughter's baby shower and one-college scouts looking at daughter in sporting event) and one participant was ill. The individuals who participated in the focus group, were asked ten semi-structured questions, as stated in Appendix H. The focus group participants were also given a participant focus group evaluation (see Appendix E), which they completed at the end of the focus group. As a single African American mother, it was extremely important to me that counter-transference and bias be avoided during the study. A peer reviewer (credentialed clinician) was present in order to ensure subjectivity and objectivity. This individual was required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix G). During the focus group, the peer reviewer was introduced to the group, but did not directly participate. She observed from a table in the rear of the room, away from the group. She recorded major themes, ideas, and comments and provided me with feedback in order to ensure validity and to enhance credibility. The peer reviewer and researcher met for an hour directly following the focus group to debrief. The peer reviewer supplied a written account of her observations and feedback.

The duration of the focus group was approximately two hours (1 hour of discussion; 40 minutes for lunch and 20 minutes for feedback/evaluation).

After the completion of analyzing the data, each of the 15 participants was provided a copy of their participant description, a summary of the focus group session and a summary of the focus group feedback form. The aforementioned was sent out via email, along with a note of thanks for their participation and the participant feedback form, which consisted of thirteen questions regarding their experience in taking part in the study (see Appendix F).

Data collected during the study was obtained and stored using paper and electronic and audio equipment. All of the data obtained during the study will be managed by me and be my property until it is destroyed. All paper media and the flash drive will be kept inside a secure file box for a period of three years after the study has been completed (January, 2018).

Data Analysis

Phenomenology is most often a research approach that focuses on concepts, events, or the lived experiences of humans (Saldana, 2011). A phenomenological study assumes that what will be reported are the essences and essentials of a phenomenon in a narrative format (Saldana, 2011). The objective of this study was to acquire an understanding of the phenomena concerning the resilience and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers. In this study, I used the data collected from the participants from a face-to-face interview, participant observation, and the focus group to capture the essence and essentials of the lived experiences of the 15 single African

American mothers who participated in this study. The analysis of the data obtained during this study allowed me an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the phenomena as I dialogued face-to-face with each woman, observed their reactions (body language/emotions) to the questions being asked and listened to their interactions with their peers during the focus group. Direct quotes from the SAAMs are used throughout this chapter of the study to ensure that the essences and essential meaning of these women were captured.

Interview Protocol Document

The interview protocol document was created in order to obtain the essence of the relationship between resilience and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers. This document consisted of 25 questions and a check off of resiliency factors. The questions were designed as an opportunity for the participants to look at their individual beliefs regarding their capabilities to raise children with successful outcomes, despite raising them as a single parent. Within a day of completing the face-to-face interview I read the completed interview and listened to the recording of the interview. After a second reading of each interviewed I analyzed data from each interview protocol document (written and recorded) as well as the notes the researcher had documented in the reflexive journal. The researcher then began to pull out words, sentences and statements that were repetitive during the participant's individual interview, to create specific themes and sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were a priori, developed through deductive reasoning. Moustakas (1994) identifies this process as

horizontalization. Direct quotes were used as well to epitomize the lived experience of the participants.

A phenomenological description (see Appendix J) was configured for each participant. The participants were provided with a copy of the phenomenological description to review. Participants were identified by her initials and a number to protect anonymity. The questions asked in the Interview Protocol Document were designed to examine if certain factors were found to be true of resilient individuals. These factors would include: bonding early/effectively with another female (mother, grandmother, aunt, etc.); high self-esteem; strong perception of competency; strong faith foundation; outgoing/social personality and ability to ask for assistance (Benard & Marshall, 1997; Hawley & DeHann, 1996).

Resiliency can be complex. Ungar (2010) stated that due to the integration of various schools of thought that deal with individuals and the principles of development, it is extremely complicated to determine what is and is not positive development under stress. VanBreda (2001) identified several factors that were common to participants in past studies pertaining to resiliency. One factor was that females were found to be the more resilient gender. In order to test the validity of past studies regarding resiliency, I incorporated the following eleven resiliency factors used most frequently and inquired of the women, their use of these factors in relationship to parenting.

- Relationships - Sociability/ability to maintain positive relationships
- Inner Direction - Bases choices/decisions on internal evaluation (internal locus of control)

- Perceptiveness – Insightful understanding of people and situations
- Independence – “Adaptive” distancing from unhealthy people and situations/autonomy
- Positive View of Personal Future – Optimism, expects a positive future
- Flexibility – Can adjust to change; can bend as necessary to cope positively with situations
- Self-motivation – Internal initiative and positive motivation from within
- Competence – Is “good at something”/ personal competence
- Self-Worth – Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence
- Spirituality- Personal faith in something greater
- Perseverance – Keeps on despite difficulty; doesn’t give up

These questions were asked of the 15 single African American mothers participating in the study. Personal faith and competence were traits all of the women identified themselves as possessing. Fourteen of the women reported being in agreement in the areas of relationships, positive view of personal future, and perseverance. Thirteen women described themselves as having inner direction, being independent, and flexible. Twelve of the participants identified as having feelings of self-worth/self-confidence. Eleven members of the study reported themselves as being perceptive. And ten participants reported being self-motivated.

There are two principle theories which framed this study, the resiliency theory and the social learning theory. The resiliency theory examines the ability of individuals to have positive outcomes, despite the adversities of life that may have been present (Rutter,

1999). While Bandura (1977) stated that the social learning theory, is a combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences that are the catalyst for human functioning. Saldana (2011), shared that qualitative data analysis can be intricate, conceptual and abstract. In qualitative research, the data analyzing process occurs throughout the information gathering process and is solidified by reorganization and reflection as one goes along. Qualitative data analysis is concurrent with data collection and management. Theming was the method I chose to interpret the data for this research study. Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) stated that themes are extended phrases (underlying) meanings of the data (as cited by Saldana, 2011). During the data analysis, several emerging themes were identified. Twelve themes were devised, along with a set of sub-themes based on the information acquired from the interview protocol document and the notes from my reflexive journal. Six of these themes were found to be relative to the resiliency theory, while the other six related to the social learning theory.

The six themes/sub-themes relating to the resiliency theory were:

- Childhood experience of the mother.
 - Rearing of mother in her childhood
 - Raised by two parents
 - Raised by single mom with village
 - Raised by another
- Ability to ask for help.
 - Difficult to ask for help
 - Easy to ask for help

- Faith-Based influences on parenting.
- Role models.
 - Both parents were role models
 - Mother as the role model
 - Dad as the role model
 - Mother and grandparent(s) as role models
 - Grandparent(s) as the role model
 - Others
- Most influential people.
- Personality and parenting qualities.

The six themes/sub-themes related to the theory of social learning were:

- Society's impressions of single African American mothers
- Challenges of single parenting.
 - Finances
 - Balancing work and responsibilities with the children
 - Raising a male child without paternal involvement
 - Lack of family support/involvement from the dad
- Mother's view of her childhood.
 - Good childhood
 - Childhood interrupted by parental substance abuse
 - Strict/sheltered childhood
 - Traumatic childhood

- Parentified childhood
- Personality and parenting qualities.
 - Rewards of parenting
 - Outcomes and potential of children
 - Cultural influence

Individual Interpretations

Theme 1: Childhood experience of the mother. Several of the women were able to make direct correlations to their childhood experiences and what would or would not be acceptable in the lives of their children. As I reflected and themed the data obtained during the face-to-face interviews, several examples of the challenge model of resilience and the protective factors model of resilience stood out. It was evident from the research that the single African American mothers referenced from their experiences with risk factors and positive factors as a basis for developing their expectations, both short and long-term, for their children. These women were able to take their unique and individual experiences and pull out aspects (positive factors) that would guide them as they parented.

Raised by both parents. Ten of the participants reported that they were raised with both parents in the household.

- L.B. - “Even with two parents in the household, I had to play the role of parent to my younger siblings. My mom was depressed, and my dad was a workaholic. It was on me to run the home operation, getting everyone what they needed and making it all work. When my dad got home, he usually ate

and went to sleep. I guess that is why my siblings have such a high regard and respect for me today. I was a mother figure to them, even with our mother in the home.”

- C.R. - “I grew up with both of my parents in the home. My parents were older and did not allow much room for me to venture out. My older siblings had their own lives and pretty much were out of the house when I was growing up. My parents were pretty traditional, in that my mom took care of home, and my dad worked.”
- Q.L.-“Yeah, I had two parents at home during my childhood, but it was not a good thing. My mom was an active drug addict. My dad was an older man who had issues with alcohol, but worked. When my dad was at work, it was a mess at home. People coming in and out using drugs, bills weren’t paid and all the other craziness that goes with drug use. There was always a lot of fighting between my parents. I grew up as an only child. I had no one to share my experience with. My dad would give me money to make sure I could get food and other things I needed. Eventually things got better, but going through it was a hell I will never forget.”
- H.B.-“My parents were extremely strict. My dad was a pastor and my mom was determined that my siblings and I were doing what we were supposed to. When I got pregnant at 17, needless to say, this shook things up for them. They raised my daughter just like she was their own and encouraged me to do the right things with my life.”

- E.M.-“My mom and dad both raised me. My dad worked and my mom was home, but she was sickly. My older sisters ran the house and laid the rules for us.”
- M.M.-“I was raised with both of my parents in the home. My dad worked and my mom ran the house. She showed me how to be a woman. My mom cooked, cleaned and took care of the children. My dad went to work and was the financial provider and the disciplinarian for the house. I still feel cheated and can be really emotional when talking about my parents. They died two days apart when I was 17 years old. I was left to take care of my new baby and my three younger brothers. My life has never been the same.”

Raised by a single mom with the village. Four of the participants reported being raised primarily by their mothers. Three of the four stated that their grandparent(s) were living in their childhood homes and actively parented them as well.

- I.B.-“My mom raised us all by herself. She found a way to balance her job and us. I never felt like she was not available to me. I always wanted my child to have both parents, but it didn’t work out that way.”
- S.M.-“I spent most of my childhood growing up in my grandparents’ house. My mom, sister and I lived there. Of course we knew who my mom was, but it was like my grandmother and grandfather were in charge. It was good for us as children being there. When my mom moved out with us on her own is when things got bad.”

- K.C.-“My mom and my grand mom raised us. It was like a tag team. They kept all of us kids in order. We had a lot of love, but they didn’t play. I learned so much from both of them; I am especially close to my grand mom.”
- M.R.-“My grand mom and mom raised me and my siblings. My dad got involved in my life after I was grown. I believe not having a man in my life to teach me certain things created some of the pitfalls I encountered along the way.”

Raised by another relative. One participant was raised by her maternal grandmother, whom she described as mentally and emotionally abusive.

- C.M. (012)-“My grandmother was old and mean. She seemed as if she was angry because she felt trapped into raising me when my mom died. Sometimes when I am interacting with my son especially when he is not following the instructions, I am giving him, I will say things to get his attention. Once I have a chance to cool down, sometimes, I feel the things that I said when I was angry were mentally and emotionally abusive. Often I catch myself saying some of the exact things my grandmother would say to me. I normally say these things when I am feeling powerless, now I wonder if my grandmother felt the same way.”

Theme 2: Ability to ask for help. Taylor (2010), found that when single mothers felt supported, more positive, effective behaviors emerged, giving a greater sense of self-efficacy and help, suppressing the negativity and problematic parenting. Social support, from related and non-relative sources has been acknowledged as important in coping with

stressors, both in crisis or just everyday life (Brodsky, 1999). All of the women expressed the ability to ask for assistance and support from others, if needed. However, seven of the single African American mothers found it a challenge to ask for help. In most cases, it was not that they felt that help wasn't available, they just believed that it was their duty to take full responsibility for their children. However, others in the group expressed a great deal of ease in asking for help when needed. There were some participants that described situations where the bonds with their supportive network (family, friends, etc.) was so deeply-rooted that they did not have to ask for help. The support was freely given by others, when the need arose. Some women were able to discuss the impact of a limited or absent support system on their children.

- M.M.-“I had to handle what I created. I did not have my parents to support me as I parented because they both died when I was a senior in high school. The fear of being rejected was also something that kept me from asking for help. Because we had no supportive adults around, I had to push my son to assume responsibility at times when he was still quite young. He has told me several times he felt rejected growing up, like I didn't have time to be there for him.”
- C.M.-“After my divorce, I had to take full responsibility to raise and provide for my children, even getting welfare, which made me feel bad.”
- K.C.-“Because I had taken on the responsibility to raise children who were not my biological children, people often reminded me that I made a choice to parent. They would recommend that I seek help from my daughters' mothers, who couldn't even help themselves because of their drug problems. Instead of

helping, people wanted to give me advice. So most of the time, I did what I had to do without asking. Once my grand mom died, I was on my own.”

- C.R.-“I don’t ask, because I hate being rejected by my own family, who is family to my niece as well. All of my sisters are much older than me. It hurts when they don’t offer to help when they know there are things I could use help with while raising *our niece*. Even my oldest sister who is my niece’s grandmother doesn’t help. My mom is older, there is not too much she can do, I understand that. My family will give the money, but that’s about it. I think it’s difficult for both of us when we watch other families come together and be a family, supporting and caring for each other and working together. We do have friends who have been spiritually and emotionally helpful.”
- M.R.-“I truly try to be as independent as possible in providing and caring for my children. I feel embarrassed when I have to ask for help.”
- Q.L.-“It’s difficult, because we don’t have an immediate family.” We have been very fortunate not to have had really extreme needs where we needed help like that.”
- N.S.-“I find it difficult to ask for help. My thoughts are that I created my own situation, so I need to handle my own responsibilities. We have family and friends who would be happy and willing to assist us if I would ask.”

Eight of the mothers shared that they found it easy to ask for help. Some found it easy because they had very supportive family members. A few described themselves as being able to put their pride aside when it came to the needs of their children.

- I.B.-“My mom and my daughter’s paternal grand mom have always been very helpful. They would watch my daughter when I had to work, even kept her over weekends to give me a break sometimes. My mom would take her to doctor’s appointments if I could not. And both of them would go to special events at the school either with us or for me if I had to work.”
- L.B.-“When the need arises I have no problem with asking for help. I have no pride when doing what is needed and necessary for my children. We have family and friends who have been supportive financially, emotionally, and spiritually.”
- B.H.-“Asking for help from my family was easy, but I was really disappointed that my ex-husband and his family never were able to help out.”
- S.M.-“I am really blessed, not only is my family there to help out in any way (both of my grandmothers, and my paternal aunts), my children’s paternal grandparents are very helpful. Their dad does do things for them; it’s just that he’s not consistent.”
- H.B.-“My parents basically raised my daughter as their own, since I had her when I was young. The foundation they laid for both my daughter and self has been a blessing. We know the importance of family. Once I began to parent on my own at 27, I had to work really hard because my daughter’s dad did not give support of any kind, but we made it. It taught me to work hard to get the things I wanted.”

- L.B. –“It was easy to ask for help. If it was something they needed, I did what I had to do. I really didn’t rely just on that person who was willing to help out, and I still did my part as well. For the last three years, my friend has been a great help with my children especially my son. He offers male guidance and support”
- E.M. - “My help is limited. My mom is the one I can depend on to help us when needed. Everyone else has their own stuff going on, but if I really need them, my family will come through.”
- C.M. (012)-“Asking for help is easy for me, because I am only going to ask if I really need it. My family and my friends know this.”

Theme 3: Faith-based influences on parenting. One hundred percent of the participants in the study acknowledged and credited a relationship with God or their faith practices in being essential to raising their children, their strength, and ability to overcome adversity. Repeatedly throughout the study the single African American mothers accredited God, and their faith as the optimal source of their success as an individual and as a parent. Biblical principles and their abilities to trust God was the essential element in their personal and parental successes. The outcomes of this study coincided with these findings. All of the women acknowledged using prayer as a major mechanism in parenting.

- M.M. –“I grew up knowing about God, but after my parents’ deaths I was really angry and questioned God. When my oldest was 13, I began to come back to my faith and actively sought a relationship with God. I know that He

took care of me and my children and watched over us when I pushed away from Him. Both of my children experienced very serious medical situations, where they could have lost their lives. Those were extremely difficult times for me. God gave me peace and the ability to trust Him even when things looked bad.”

- I.B. –“I didn’t attend church with my daughter when she was small and growing up because of my work schedule. Nevertheless, when my employment changed, and I could actually go to service on a Sunday or to Bible School, it provided me with such a peace of mind and strength and we would worship together. Now she works and goes when she has off.”
- L.B.-“God has always been there. I am totally dependent on Him. My relationship with Him is an everyday part of my life. I seek Him in all of my decisions. The principle foundations of my home are Biblical.”
- B.H. –“I did not raise my son in the church, and I long for him to have a personal relationship with God. I know the benefits and blessings of walking with God. I pray daily and seek God in all areas of my life.”
- C.R.-“Even though we don’t attend church often, prayer and devotions are an important part of our daily lives. God provides the foundation for parenting. I seek Him for direction, as He is the other parent.”
- Q.L.-“We attend church regularly. I communicate with God throughout my day. I try to live my life based on Biblical principles. I’m human, and I have my issues, but I try to live right and do the right things.

- S.M.-“I was raised in the church, and my grandfather was a pastor. I don’t go to church on a regular basis now, but my children go every Sunday with their grandparents. I do pray and believe in God.”
- C.M.-“I pray daily. I believe in God, but not in organized religion.”
- K.C.-“I am inspired by God daily to pray and to live right. I am a Christian, but I do not participate in organized religion.”
- H.B.-“I grew up in the church and I have developed a personal relationship with God. I pray on a regular basis, but I don’t have a church affiliation. As a Christian, I prefer to focus on my personal relationship with God and I raised my daughter to do the same.”
- E.M.-“I am a Christian who was raised in the church, but I do not look for the church to raise my sons. The church is filled with people with issues which sometimes are looking for ways to make other people feel bad. I don’t believe in that. I pray every night and work hard to do the right thing.”
- C.M. (012)-“I practice the Islamic faith and realize the value and importance of seeking God in all areas of my life. I have raised my son to know the power of prayer and to seek God in times of need.”
- L.B.-“I am a Christian. I attend church regularly and know that prayers are powerful.”
- M.R.-“I am a Christian and very active in my church. I look to God for everything. He keeps me grounded when I face challenges. I couldn’t make it without God.”

- N.S.-“I have attended church all of my life. My parents made me go when I was younger. I still attend because I enjoy it, but I don’t force my kids to go. They may choose to attend sometimes. I follow Biblical principles in raising my children.”

Theme 4: Role models. The single African American mothers were readily able to identify role models and other individuals who had a positive influence on their lives. They used the examples given by these persons of influence to provide a foundation for their beliefs systems to raise their children and to serve as a prototype for their personal character development. The single African American mothers shared how they learned through the observation of others. As they watched the actions, attitudes and behaviors of certain individuals, they learned tactics which have helped them to develop and enhance skills for life and parenting. One single African American mother expressed that she didn’t need to experience everything; it was a wise person that could learn from the experiences of others.

Older females were an excellent source of influence and inspiration for these single African American mothers. As the single African American mothers shared their experiences with their role models, several became emotional. Some of these individuals had died and were greatly missed by the single African American mother. However, while telling their stories, smiles would come to their faces and laughter would permeate the air. There was an apparent level of gratitude. The Single African American mothers appeared to cherish what they had gotten from these individuals and made sure they passed the wisdom and knowledge on to their children and to others they encountered

along their journey. They talked about watching their mothers, grandmothers, and other women make it through some challenging times and rise victoriously. Several single African American mothers admitted that they could have averted some the impediments of life, had they taken heed to the advice of these individuals.

Participants in the group gave precise detail to having observed and being greatly influenced by the coping skills of their mothers, grandmothers, fathers and grandfather.

Four of the women shared that both of their parents were their role models.

- M.M. - “My mom was quiet, but strong. My dad was the provider.”
- L.B. - “My parents have been my role models in different ways. My dad has been a strong influence regarding my work ethics. I admire my mother’s tenacity- her presence factor – I’m here.” (Although, she shared that she was parentified as a child by her parents’ behavior, she was able to identify positive factors that influenced her.)
- B.H. - “I learned from my parents to stick it out together through thick and thin.”
- H.B. - “My dad was an outward strength while my mom was more spiritual.”

Three participants described their mothers as being their role models.

- I.B.-“My mom was a hard worker and still made time for her children.”
- C.R.-“My mom was stern, but loving.”
- E.M.-“My mom was the only girl in her family, and when her mom passed away when she was young, my mom cared for her younger siblings. She has always been loving and kind.”

A woman shared that her dad was her role model.

- L.B. - “My dad was a hard worker and had a strong work ethic.”

Two women shared their mothers and grandparent(s) were their role models.

- K.C.-“My mom and my grand mom always helped others and were very loving, just good women. There were other women in my community growing up who also possessed those same factors, and they impressed me as well.”
- M.R.-“My mom and grandparents were strong, spiritual believers and great providers. My dad became involved in my life later, and he taught me how to communicate my feelings.”

A participant described her grandmother as her role model.

- S.M.-“My grand mom will love you no matter what. She will always have your back. Grammy is my role model.”

A woman shared that the mothers of her friends were her role models.

- C.M. (012)-“My friends’ mothers, especially those who had large families were always enjoyable for me to be around. There always seemed to be an abundance of love; they paid attention to each child and appeared to be so strong.”

Two of the women, could not identify any one particular person, but credited learning different things from various people.

- C.M. - “I have watched enough people in my life to know what to do and what not to do.

- N.S. - “There have been several people who have influenced my life and parenting in different ways.”

One participant described television parents Cliff and Claire of “*The Huxtibles*” as her role models.

- Q.L. – ‘*The Huxtibles*’ were my role models. I always fantasized about being a part of that family. They were a loving and caring set of parents.”

Theme 5: Most influential person. Resilient individuals are greatly influenced by females (Hawley & De Hann, 1996). W.E.B. Du Bois (1990) tenaciously supported the importance of religion and family as protective factors, sources of resiliency, and empowerment for African Americans. This has shown to be true with the group of single African American mothers participating in the study. Van Breda (2001) stated that children who had an opportunity to bond with their mothers or some other female caregiver (e.g. grandmother, aunt or older sister) were found to be resilient. Eight of the eleven specifically acknowledged their mother as a role model for them. Twelve of the women shared that they have been influenced by a female (mother, grandmother, aunt, sister, and friends) either alone or along with a father or God. One individual shared that her father was the most influential person in her life. Another stated that her influence comes from God, and someone else professed that her spiritual leader is the influential person in her life.

Theme 6: Personality and parenting qualities. Spicer (2010), reported African American parents to be readily able to identify the relationship between their parenting practices, their upbringing and the power of their faith. Similar findings surfaced within

this study. The single African American mothers made reference to their relationship with God and faith-based values (e.g. faithful, strong, loving, and prayerful, etc.) as directives for their parenting qualities. Mothers were asked to discuss their personalities; parenting styles; how their children perceived them as parents; and how they believe their parenting has impacted their children. Quite a few mothers used terms such as strong, firm, and strict disciplinarian to describe their parenting styles, which would be evocative of an authoritarian parenting style; however, they included other words such as fair, approachable, and nurturing in their description as well. Overall, the parenting styles described by the majority of the participants would fall under the description of an authoritative parenting style. With regard to the question that asked mothers to explain how their child/children would describe them, many of the women prefaced their answer by saying.... “You should ask my child/children that question,” followed by laughter.

- M.M. – “I am a strong and serious individual. My parenting style was strict and firm. I was raised to believe that children should be seen and not heard, and I totally agree with that practice. I believe my children would describe me to be the same. My children would have to say that I have been a true and loyal friend to them. I believe my personality and parenting style has taught my children how to handle their business, to be strong and to be loving.”
- I.B.-“I have a very easy going personality. I feel that I am very approachable. I raised my daughter in a strict, but fair manner. I believe she would describe me to be patient and present available as a mom. I feel my personality, and parenting style has influenced my daughter’s work ethic and family values.”

- L.B.-“I would describe myself as persistent, strong and faithful. Each of my children would describe me differently, based on our individual relationships. As a mom, you realize each of your children may need different things from you. My daughter may say that I am not available for her, but there for everyone else. My youngest son would say I am strong, smart and wise. My parenting style is a combination of old school - 75% and new school- 25% techniques. I set the direction, but allow for their input. I have imparted a level of craziness and determination to my children. They have seen me do some crazy things that have had good outcomes.”
- B.H.-“I am kind, compassionate and thoughtful. I am not sure of how to describe my parenting style. I am a talker, who has uttered a lot of consequences, but never followed through on them. I don’t think the aforementioned has been good for my son in the long run, but I gave him my best in raising him. I feel this is why his father should have been more involved. My son would say that I am a great mother and a God-fearing woman. I believe I have imparted to my son to just do the right thing.”
- C.R. - “I see myself as being loving, kind and prayerful. I am no-nonsense, but a loving parent. In addition, I believe my niece would describe me as being loving, but strict. Based on what she sees from my personality and parenting, I’ve shown her how to be a person with good character, values and to be responsible.”

- Q.L.-“Determined would be how I would describe my personality. My son would probably say that I am a good mom, but moody. I would say I have a nurturing, loving, disciplinarian type of parenting style. I am my son’s biggest advocate, but I hold him accountable. My son has been raised in the church, so I believe he has gotten a pretty good foundation on how to have moral values.”
- S.M.-“I am a very loving and helpful person. My children are too young to tell me what they feel, but based on how they act towards me, I would say they think I am loving and fair. I see them both being very nice and caring towards other people now; I hope this is how they will be when they are older.”
- C.M.-“I would describe myself as a way maker. I only see one of my children having that particular characteristic. They all would say I am strong and independent. My parenting style could be described as strong, but also as a nurturing disciplinarian. I believe that I have instilled in my children the need to become hardworking and independent.”
- K.C.-“I have a loving, caring, and understanding personality. My children would describe me as a good mother. I raised them with a parenting style that was authoritative. I taught them about the streets and how to survive. I think the way they were raised helped them to become loving and caring adults.”
- H.B.-“I have a strong and focus-driven personality. I believe my daughter would describe me as open, direct, nurturing, protective and doting. My style of parenting was authoritarian, but nurturing, which was how I was raised. I

feel my personality and parenting style has resulted in my daughter becoming an honest, hardworking leader who is family oriented.”

- E.M.-“I would describe myself as a stable person. I provide my children with the comfort of knowing I am there for them. My children would probably describe me as being sensitive and fun loving. I am a nurturer and I believe I impart the importance of being responsible to my children.”
- C.M. (012)-“I am a person who is open minded and always learning. I believe my son would describe me as being smart, confident, and knowledgeable about all things. I would describe my parenting style as nurturing. I talk and listen to him. I am his teacher. I have imparted the importance of being present and hardworking with a great work ethic.”
- L.B.-“My personality is fun and easy going. My children would describe me as a hard worker. I have parented with a style that is firm, but fair. I see my children emulating me by being hard workers, and helpful to others without any expectation of a return.”
- M.R.-“I would describe my personality to be loving, unconditionally. My children would probably say that I am a crazy woman at times and I am a motivator. I have made myself to be a very approachable parent, but I am a disciplinarian that will hold them accountable. I feel that by watching me they have learned to love God and put HIM first. They have learned to love themselves and to watch the company they keep.”

- N.S.-“I feel that I am a patient person. My oldest son would say I am a great and loving mother while my youngest would say I am tough. I have a combination of parenting styles. I am nurturing, and also a disciplinarian. I believe I have demonstrated to my children the importance of being respectful, and looking to God for strength and guidance.”

Theme 7: Society’s impressions of single African American mothers. The levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy of the single African American mothers participating in this study were so extraordinary, they seemed to obliterate any unfavorable ideas concerning single African American mothers. Most of these women presented with such a high degree of self-confidence that they were not impacted by whatever society felt or said about them. However, there was an astounding level of defensiveness from the single African American mothers in response to people’s judgment of their children. When it came to society attempting to proposition a life of negative outcomes for their children, these single African American mothers were not in agreement with that fate.

- M.M.-“Society follows negative stereotypes of the media. They look at single African American mothers as being promiscuous, looking for handouts, unintelligent and less fortunate.”
- I.B.-“I think it would be a different answer based on who was answering. I don’t think it’s a race thing. I think people understand its hard being a single mom and raising children alone.”

- L.B.-“It depends on the culture. I feel society tends to make excuses for Caucasian single moms. There seems to be more programs and services available to them. While single African American mothers appear to be made to suffer for the poor choices, they have made. It’s hardly ever assumed or acknowledged they could have been married.”
- B.H.-“I believe people have different views. Some understand of the hardships and struggles while others feel we are in our predicament because of our own choices.”
- C.R. - “I believe negative concepts are perpetrated through the media. T.V., news and magazines would have you believing that single African American mothers are young girls with a lack of morals and values having babies.”
- Q.L.-“Those who don’t know me personally may feel that I was irresponsible or question why I don’t have a husband, but once they see how I operate, they can’t help but to change their views about me. I deserve to be respected. I am taking care of my responsibilities with my son, and he is doing well. I work hard to provide for him. Single motherhood seems to be more dominate in the African American race than others and society may feel this is our norm.”
- S.M.-“I think society looks at all single mothers some kind of way, not just African- Americans. There are Hispanic, Asian and Caucasian single moms too. I don’t think people care as long as you are taking care of your children and not needing help from the government for them.”

- C.M.-“Society can think a whole lot of stuff about anybody. I don’t let them define me. I can only be seen as a strong, independent, Black woman who has raised her children well.”
- K.C.-“I think society feels we are not educated, on welfare and unemployed looking for a handout. I believe single African American mothers having babies are a part of a generational curse. Historically, we were left alone to raise our children when our men were taken away from the families and the women were raped. I feel single parenting is now on neutral ground because every race has single moms.”
- H.B.-“I think society feels single African American mothers want to have babies, for handouts, welfare, etc. Because so many of these women don’t have support or finances, some have to use the system.”
- E.M.-“I feel society is judgmental rather than loving. I feel some single African American mothers give a bad image, but not all single African American mothers are bad or have bad outcomes with their children.”
- C.M. (012)-“I think society feels single African American mothers are neglectful to their children because of their obligations to their employers and other things they need to do to make sure their children are provided for. The media promotes these stereotypes.”
- L.B.-“Society feels children will have better outcomes with two parents; especially concerning women raising boys alone. People follow myths until they are exposed to the truth.”

- M.R.-“I think it varies, when people see that you are doing positive things and not being dependent it’s okay. But, when you are looking for handouts and live on DPA, they see you as a liability”.
- N.S.-“I think society believes single African American mothers are overly sexual and irresponsible, having kids just to get a check. I think that the studies that are conducted and stereotypes in the media reinforce these negative thoughts.”

Theme 8: Challenges of single parenting. It was not the intent of most of the participants in this study to raise their children alone. Seven of the participants were married to the fathers’ of their children. They became single mothers as a result of divorce. Which left them faced with the lonely and frightening experience of parenting alone. Two of the participants in the group were parenting by choice, non-biological children. One of these individuals raised two children from infancy. And, the other participant is raising her great niece. All participants agreed single parenting by choice or by chance has had struggles and challenges. Several moms reported listening very carefully to teachers and other adults who engaged with their children for indicators that would show they were being treated differently because they came from a single parent household. Single parenting can be stressful, as one individual has to manage and organize various aspects of life (McBride-Murry, et. al., 2001; Taylor, 2010). Many of the issues historically related to single parenting were found to be prevalent among this group as well.

Finances were a common issue. Although all of the women in the study were employed full-time at the time of this study, they all were in agreement that money was an issue for them with regard to parenting. Only four participants reported receiving regular financial support (child support or voluntary) from their child's father. Bowman & Sanders (1998) studied the lack of paternal involvement within the African American family and considered the stressors placed on single African American mothers regarding the family economic provider role barriers (e.g. underemployment, low income, etc.), and credited resiliency with getting these women through tough times (as cited by Mendenhall, Bowman & Zhang, 2013).

- M.M. – “My money was limited to getting the basic necessities for my children. I was young, undereducated, and my jobs did not pay much. It taught me how to stretch a dollar and make it work.”
- S.M. – “I don't have enough money to do all the things I would like to do for my children. I have to remind their father constantly, to help out with things like pampers and stuff.”
- K.C. – “I remember not having the money to purchase a high chair, so I went looking through people's trash and found one. I took it home and cleaned it up. I did what I had to do to make sure my children had what they needed.”
- M.R. – “Not having enough money to do what I need to for my family has always been an issue for me. However, God always made a way. I work hard and miss time away from my children in order to provide, but still money is an issue.”

- N.S. – “Providing for my children with regards to their education, food and clothes is a challenge. If I had more money, things would be a little easier.”
- H.B. – “Once we left my parents’ house and were out on our own, it was very different. Everything was on me to make it work. I do realize that if I needed them I could ask my parents, but I didn’t because they had already given and done so much to help with my daughter.”

Balancing work and responsibilities with the children. The single African American mothers in this study voiced concerns and the difficulty in juggling the children’s needs such as parent-teacher conferences, class trips, medical appointments, special events, holidays, etc. with their jobs. They were grateful that there were people in their village who would readily fill in for them but felt like these were things they should be present for.

- I.B. – “I remember being so upset and overwhelmed about missing or having to juggle my work schedule to go to medical appointments and special events. Finding time to be Mommy was a challenge on many days.”
- M.M. – “Because I always had to work in order to have a roof over their heads and to provide for them, I had little time to spend with them doing cute mommy things like baking and having fun.”
- C.M. (012) - “Handling the external forces that I had to contend with (work/life) and still be a mom is very overwhelming. It has gotten better as he has gotten older, but it’s still a challenge.”

- C.R. - “Coming home after a hard day at work and having to deal with things like homework, attitudes, etc.; it can be real crazy when it’s just you.”
- E.M.- “Having to make a decision to leave my sick child, so that I could go to work and take care of someone else’s child was always something that broke my heart. I couldn’t miss too many days if he got sick. So I had to have my mom take care of him.”

Raising a male child without paternal involvement. Several of the women were passionately disappointed in having to raise their sons without their fathers’ participation. While many acknowledged that they could not assume the role of the father they refused to let the paternal absence interfere with what they felt their children needed. Therefore, surrogates for the father which included uncles, grandfathers, family friends, and other males (i.e. teachers, clergy, etc.), were identified as male role models for their children.

- Q.L. - “I was very disappointed because I never envisioned raising my child alone. I wanted my child to have a two-parent experience.”
- B.H. - “Raising a male child, preparing him the best I could for life was a challenge. I am left to wonder if things would have been better for him if his dad were more involved in his life. I came from a two-parent home, with three sisters. Things were much different for us.”

Lack of family support/involvement from the dad. Some women shared of just feeling alone in their parenting role. Support from family felt scarce and absent at times. A few of the women acknowledged purposefully not looking to her family for support, as they believed people had their own issues to deal with and they did not want to burden

them. Aside from the strain of not having the fathers provide financially, the women also reported feeling a huge void and resentment towards them due to the lack of emotional support and physical presence.

- L.B. - “When you have to carry it ALL, it is a challenge. There is no one to share the emotional weight. Being a mother and a father has been the most difficult thing for me.”
- C.R.- “It’s a challenge, and it’s very hurtful when you have a family that is just as connected to this child, but no one else seems to care about what’s going on with her. No one is there to help out with raising her.”
- Q.L. - “Once my parents died, we were all alone. I worked to do my best so that things would happen for my son. I make sure his teachers know me by name and that they can contact me.”
- E.M.-“It was a challenge accepting the fact that I had to let my sons’ father go. I could no longer have him living in the house as part of a family with him doing nothing.”
- C.M. (012) - “Not having someone to talk to about my son’s well-being was hard. Having to make all of the decisions on my own was really tough.”
- M.R. - “Playing the roles of both mother and father was a lot; sometimes I just wished I had someone I could send to handle the issues regarding the children.”

- N.S. – “Not having my children’s dad there for them, especially since they are boys is difficult. He will pay child support, but never has time to spend with them. It’s really sad.”

Theme 9: Mother’s views of her childhood. The responses to questions related to this theme evoked a variety of emotional responses. While some of the SAAMs reported having good memories of their childhood, others were readily able to identify adversities experienced in their own childhood. Some of the women shared how substance abuse and mental health issues of parents affected her childhood experience. One individual shared on how a traumatic event of sexual abuse, interfered with her childhood process. Past research has shown that single mothers are more likely to have higher rates of childhood adversities themselves, due to negative familial experiences (Taylor et al., 2010). However, the single African American mothers participating in this study demonstrated their abilities to achieve positive outcomes for their children, despite the adversities they experienced in their own childhood experiences.

Four of the women described their childhood as being “good.”

- I.B. - “I had a good childhood. I watched my mom make many sacrifices so that my brothers and I could have things. Money was tight, but there was always love.”
- K.C.-“My childhood was good. I knew I was loved.”
- E.M. - “I had a good childhood. My mom stayed home and was always available.”

- N.S. - “I had a good childhood. Both of my parents were there, no trauma or bad events.”

Two participants described a childhood that was interrupted by substance abuse (drugs/alcohol) by one or both parents.

- Q.L. - “My childhood was not great. My mom was a drug addict, and my dad was a functional alcoholic. They fought all of the time. Due to my mom’s addiction, my home life was bad; no utilities at times, no food, strangers in the home etc. The relationship with mom was bad. However, dad always made sure I had money so that I could eat and get the things I needed. As the years elapsed the relationship with mom improved.”
- S.M. - “My childhood started off good. We lived with my grandparents until I was 7. Even when we moved, we still spent a lot of time at their house. Things were cool until I was 16, and my mom got on drugs. She and I had **a lot** of problems. I did not like the person she had become and I was out of control. I had to go to a residential program for a while.”

Four of the women described their childhood home life experience as being “strict” or “sheltered.”

- M.M. - “I grew up in a “*good*” home, but it was very strict with little to no freedom to be a child. This led me to rebel. I never had an opportunity to be a child. My parents focused so strongly on making me a responsible person, I never felt like I could make a mistake. Both of my parents died days apart

when I was seventeen, and I had to assume responsibility for my infant son and my brothers. I never really had a childhood.”

- C.R.-“Because I was much younger than my siblings I have always felt like an only child. In addition, because my parents were older, they really sheltered me. My childhood experience was much different than my friends.”
- C.M.-“My childhood was good and my home life stable. It was a house where I was held to certain standards and disciplined a great deal. We were held accountable; this is the same expectation and measures I use with my own children.”
- H.B.-“My dad was a pastor, we were very involved in church and my childhood was sheltered. My parents were very stern, and there was no room for conversation or discussion.”

One woman shared that her childhood had been impacted by a childhood sexual assault.

- M.R.-“I didn’t have a “bad” childhood, my mom and grandparents were there. Something bad happened to me as a child, which impacted my childhood process.”

A woman shared that her childhood experience was what it was. Both parents were there, but each had their own thing (mom- depression/dad-workaholic) going on.

- L.B.-“My childhood was limited. Being the oldest child in the family, I had to fill in the gap and take care of my siblings and run the house.”

Theme 10: Rewards of parenting. There are single mothers who have successfully navigated the course in life, pass the negative stigmas of society and have

demonstrated resilience in the rearing of their children (Taylor, 2010; Ugarriza, 2006). The SAAMs in this study expounded on how their children were involved in extra-curricular activities to build their character and enhance their personal development. These SAAMs made it a point to engage their children in activities that would make them well-rounded individuals. All of the participants shared the excitement of watching their children grow, seeing them reach milestones (graduation, college, drivers' license, prom, marriage, grandchildren, etc.). Maternal self-efficacy has been identified as another means used by single mothers to produce positive results in their children, despite adversity (Taylor, 2010). Every participant in the group displayed a level of excitement and gratification while responding to this question. There were smiles and shining eyes from the mothers as they shared on the accomplishments of their children.

Theme 11: Outcomes and potential of children. Maternal efficacy is defined as the mother's beliefs in her ability to influence her child/children and their environment to foster a child's development and success. Ardlet & Eccles (2001) conducted a study with single mothers, which demonstrated that it was not the African American mothers' promotive strategies, but their own efficacy beliefs that were associated with the children's self-efficacy and academic success. The children of mothers' who demonstrate a high sense of efficacy most likely replicated the dispositions of their parent independent of coercion by the parent. Even in light of raising children who have avoided the stereotypical pitfalls of children coming from single African American female-headed households, a few of the mothers feel that their children have done okay, but have not reached their full potential.

- M.M.-“My children are both grown and independent, but I don’t feel either has worked up to their fullest potential.”
- B.H.-“My son is slowly making progress, even though he is not where I would like to see him.”
- K.C.-“My girls are doing okay, could be better. I feel if they both put some effort into expanding what they have, it would be better for them. I feel like they have both settled. They are independent, but I know they both could do better skill wise and have better jobs.”

Nine of the mothers have children that are actively pursuing their education (college, high school and middle school). These participants report themselves to be supportive, active and involved in monitoring their children’s activities (e.g. school, extracurricular activities, friends, etc.). Research has demonstrated that the parenting strategies of SAAMs have been bolstered by their sense of maternal self-efficacy (Jackson, 2000). I was able to discern a great deal of maternal efficacy from the responses the women gave related to the expectations of the outcomes of their children. They all reported great things and are hopeful for their children’s futures. The youngest mother in the group has children who attend day care. She shared how impressed she is with how much they learn daily. Two of the mothers have grown children who they feel are doing well as adults.

Theme 12: Cultural influence. These researchers also shared that there is a high-level of value and respect placed on the maternal role within the African American community regardless of parentage. Twelve of the participants were able to explain how African American culture has influenced them. Most of them shared that through their

personal observations and experience with other African American women while growing up impressed the importance of being strong and staying focused, despite adversities. Past research has also spoken to the heterogeneity of single parenting between single African American mothers and Caucasian single mothers. Brodsky (1999) pointed out that single African American mothers were more successful in replacing income lost in the absence of a father, had higher self-image and experienced less role strain than their Caucasian counterparts. I felt that the connection and appreciation of the cultural influence was the strongest with the older participants. It appeared to me that the older participants had more life experiences to relate to. The two youngest participants did not credit culture with having an influence on them. They felt that issues will come, and they will work to do what is needed to move forward. One individual felt culture had no impact.

- M.M.-“Culture has influenced me a great deal. Being raised in the 70’s during the Black Power Movement, I was taught I could achieve anything. And this is what I’ve stressed to my children.”
- I.B.-“I have seen many African American women struggle and make it regardless of what they were faced with. I learned to be strong from these women.
- L.B.-“As African Americans, we came from struggles and learned to work past disappointments. Struggles are anticipated, but we must press forward. Stopping is not an option.”

- K.C.-“Reading about the Middle Passage and talking with older African American women has influenced me a great deal. I’ve read a lot of history, and I believe one must know where they came from in order to know where they are going.”
- E.M.-“Culture has played a big part, and it pushes me to want more for my sons because African American men are looked at as being bad according to society.”
- C.M. (012) -“Our culture is not only African American, but Native-American also. Our lives are highly influenced by culture. I think it is important for children to know their history, so they can see the richness and be proud.”
- L.B.-“I grew up in a predominately African American community; it operated like a village. Everyone helping each other.”

Focus Group

Morgan and Spanish (1984) explained that phenomenological groups give the researcher access to the participants' basic thoughts and explanations. A focus group was conducted with the participants to allow for an opportunity to obtain collective feedback from Single African American Mothers regarding their resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. The focus group was conducted after the individual face-to-face interviews. This method provided an opportunity for the SAAMs to build on the responses of each other, ultimately sharing thoughts and experiences they may not have shared during the face-to-face interviews. The focus group also served as a catalyst for member checking. Trustworthiness of the data collected during this study is vital. As a researcher, there was

an interest in the validity and reliability of participant responses (verbal and non-verbal) from both the face-to-face interviews and the focus group regarding their experience as a single African American mother. Triangulation was also a useful tool for looking at my feedback as observer-participant and the feedback collected. The group was audio-recorded and monitored by a peer-reviewer. I enlisted the said person in order to ensure validity and to enhance credibility. The peer-reviewer provided feedback to me immediately following the focus group session. The expectation that each member of the study participate in the focus group was explained and outlined in the consent form. All of the SAAMs were in agreement to participate. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, five of the women were unable to attend the focus group. Some of the reasons that prohibited participation were either work-related or directly related to activities regarding their children. When completing the Participant Feedback Form (see Appendix F), all but one of the participants who missed the focus group expressed feeling that they had missed out on something special. Ten of the participants were able to attend the focus group. This was their first and only meeting as a group. Two of the group members were friends prior to the group.

The questions that framed the discussion of the focus group were derived from a conceptual framework incorporating the resiliency and self-efficacy (social learning) models. Responses from the focus group were strictly qualitative and cannot be scientifically replicated. There were 10 focus group questions (see Appendix H), designed to capture the essence of how the participant would describe her parenting experience. Several of the questions posed by the focus group resulted in responses that

offered a minimal change from those asked during the face-to-face interviews. In lieu of specific responses that would offer only repetitive information to several of these questions, I provided the questions and identified the specific themes of the Individual Interpretations to which they are common.

Focus Group Question 2 examined whether or not the single African American mothers believed their upbringing impacted her thoughts, practices or beliefs in the rearing of her children. The responses described in Themes 1 and 9 of the Individual Interpretations, which covered the childhood experience and views of her childhood by the mother, provided basic feedback given with regards to this question.

Focus Group Question 3 asked how she felt society's views impacted her children and herself. The answers provided were identical to those they addressed in Theme 11.

Focus Group Question 6 required the SAAMs to rank the following topics in terms of importance to parenting: faith, family/social support, culture, and parenting strategies. As reported in Theme 3, 100% of the women acknowledged faith as being at the forefront of their parenting. This was the number one answer. With regard to family/social support, eight women who participated in the focus group believed it to be the second most important. Theme 2, covered the single African American mothers' ability to ask for help. African American culture was seen as being important to parenting and was sufficiently covered under the cultural influence in Theme 12 of the Individual Interpretations. Parenting strategies were covered adequately in Theme 6, which covered personality and parenting qualities. The following information will provide a summary of questions asked during the focus group.

Focus Group Question 1 was an icebreaker. It offered an opportunity for the women to pair up and address the first question. I found it very interesting that without knowing anything about each other, members of the group, naturally paired themselves with others who shared certain commonalities and appeared to be quite surprised as they shared their responses with the group. In response to the question: “As a single African American mother, what do you believe is/was your greatest attribute(s) in raising your child/children?” The group partners identified the following as being their greatest attributes:

Group 1: (N.S. /C.M. (012)). Both of these participants were raising male children with patience and confidence. The women shared that learning to be patient with their children and others was a significant element in raising their children. Learning to pace herself in the rearing of their children was an important factor. Because they both feel confident in who they are as individuals, they believe their children to be confident even in the absence of a father.

Both women shared an expectation that their sons would be able to use their own lived experience of growing up without a father, along with the attributes they have shared, to become responsible men.

Group 2: (K.C. /C.R.). Perseverance, love, and understanding were characteristics these participants used to raise their children. *(Both were parenting non-biological children).* These women both have female children. The women shared the ability to stay focused (persevere) and not get distracted by “life” as an integral tool in raising their children. They also shared that being able to express love and understanding

to their children helped their children to become loving and understanding individuals as well.

Group 3: (H.B. /S.M.). These participants both felt they offered strong support to their children. *(Both raised children in homes with other adults in the lead (i.e. parented young, live-in-assistance from parents/grandparents in raising of their children).* These women felt they provide their children with support that lends credence to a certain level of comfort. They believe they provided an element of parenting to their children that assured them that they are loved and will be there for them.

Group 4: (M.M./L.B./QL). Three women were in this group because one of the participants came in after things had begun. Strength, faith, and a desire to do better were traits these women reported to utilize in the rearing of their children. *(All had children with disabilities and were raised by two-parent families).*

Focus Group Question 4 asked the participants if they ever felt judged for being a single mother. Initially, the participants said that they didn't feel judged; however, further discussion resulted in the revelation that some of the participants did engage defensively in areas that related to their children, because they felt they might be judged for being a single parent. Three of the women who were divorced still used their married name because it was the same as their children's and they didn't want others assuming that they "had kids" with men they weren't married to.

- Q.L. –“I make sure that I stay involved and connected to everything that goes on at my son's school. I don't want them to make up any excuse for treating

him differently because his dad is not visible. I make sure nothing goes lacking as far as parental involvement is concerned.”

- L.B.-“I still use my married name. Even though my marriage didn’t work, I believe that it’s important for people to know that some Black women do have husbands before they have children.”

Focus Group Question 5: “How do you feel your faith or spiritual beliefs have influenced your parenting?” As indicated in the responses from the participants face-to-face interviews, faith/religious beliefs were a prominent factor of resiliency. All of the participants believe that their faith or spiritual beliefs has been at the core of their success in parenting.

- L.B.-“God is all I have. People have come and gone in my life and the lives of my children. They make promises and give temporary help; but God has been there all of the time. He never disappoints or changes. I learned to trust and depend on Him a long time ago.”
- C.M. (012) -“It’s a blessing to see how your faith influences your child. When I see my son praying and trusting Allah it makes me feel confident that he has learned that God will always be a help to him.”
- Q.L.-“I could feel God’s presence from the very beginning of my pregnancy. I had considered terminating my son, but realized just what a blessing it was to be a mom. I believe the dilemma of having a baby without the support of the father led me to a closer relationship with God.”

- C.R.-“God is the second parent. The instructions are written in the Bible on how a child should be raised. Some people might think it is old fashion, but it works.”
- N.S.-“God is just amazing and He will show up all of the time. I was really feeling bad about having my second son. Here I was dealing with a man who I already had one baby with. He was not willing to commit to a relationship with me, even though we had a child, and I got pregnant again. On the day I was scheduled to terminate my baby, God sent my mother to talk to me. I had not shared with her that I was pregnant nor did she know of my intent to terminate. My mother gave me a paper with the scripture Jeremiah 1:5 written on it. I read that scripture and cried. I knew that God was speaking directly to me. I made a decision then to continue the pregnancy and I had my son. I love my children and realize that they are truly a gift from God. Even though I wasn't married to their father, I know God blessed me with them.”

Focus Group Question 7: “How do you feel your child/children were able to avoid some of the adversities, other children of single African American mothers struggle with (poor academics, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and illegal behaviors)?”

- Q.L.-“I am a very involved parent. Hands-on, constantly monitoring what and who my son is involved with; I'm not too overwhelming. I leave some room for him to make mistakes so that he can learn from them. My son thinks about the decisions he makes because I raised him to consider the consequences of his choices.”

- C.M. (012) –“God- I have raised him to be mindful of people and to trust God.”
- M.M.-“Accountability. I always pointed out to my children that all behaviors have a price. You do good things and good outcomes will happen. You do bad things and even though it may feel good to you at the time, bad consequences will surface”
- N.S.-“Communication- I talk with my sons about everything. I hold nothing back. My sons will never be able to say they didn’t know. If I know something, good or bad, I share it with them. I make myself approachable so they feel comfortable talking to me about anything.”
- L.B. - “I am open to expose the negatives. I didn’t grow up living a straight and wonderful childhood; I made mistakes and learned from them. I share with my children the process of my journey so they can be advised and avoid some of the same pitfalls. I let them know even if they get into a situation that may not be great, they can still control the outcomes and turn it around. Just because you have done something bad, does not mean you are bad forever.”

Focus Group Question 9: “What would you say has been your greatest sacrifice as a single African American mother?”

- C.M. (012) -“My education. I should have finished college before I even got married and had a baby, but I didn’t. Once I had him, several times I considered going back to school, especially after I was divorced. We could have really used the additional funds that would have come with a degree, but

I could not juggle a babysitter, money, work, his homework, school and everything else while raising him. He's 17 now and I am on a mission to finally complete my bachelor's degree."

- M.M.-"I missed out on being a mom. When I was raising my children I had to work two jobs most of the time to provide for them. We would be like ships passing in the night. I would sometimes be asleep when they would come home from school or I would be getting ready to go to my jobs; this robbed us of quality time together doing fun things. I would have loved to have memories of making cookies and all of that sweet stuff."
- L.B.-"My education. I had my first child when I was in high school. I got married after I graduated high school and had my other children. Raising children had been such a great part of my own childhood, because I had basically raised my siblings, it was a natural thing for me to do. I was extremely blessed to have had several employment opportunities that have allowed me to use my God-given talents, but I know that in order to reach my maximum potential I need to go back and finish my degree. My youngest son is always encouraging me to do this."

Focus Group Question 10: "If you could make a request of President Barack Obama for single African American mothers, what would it be?"

- K.C.-"He's on target.....free education!"
- C.M. (012) -"Education! The fact that people can't get money to go to school prevents them from bettering themselves and their situation."

- L.B.-“Education! The more a mother knows the better off her children will be. Education is key.”
- M.M.-“When my children were young and I lived in Connecticut, there were programs for single mothers to go to school. They helped out with daycare and other things. The programs were great, but I had to work in order to have a place to live and to pay my bills. So even the times when I started out in those programs, I couldn’t finish. President Obama should have someone to really look at the needs of single mothers and have someone come up with a viable program.”

At the close of the group, participants were given an opportunity to make remarks.

Overall, the women truly enjoyed the study. They voiced an interest in continuing the group after the study was over. The women shared that it was comforting to know they were not alone in their experience. Those who were still actively parenting, felt encouraged and optimistic based on what the women in the group who had already raised their children shared. One participant shared that, until now, she never looked at herself as a single African American mother.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There were several strategies employed to safeguard the trustworthiness of the data in this research study. Saldana (2011) stated that credibility and trustworthiness are matters of the researchers’ honesty and integrity. Working and writing with transparency helps achieve credibility and trustworthiness. It was my aspiration and optimal goal to

ensure that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were at the heart of this study.

Credibility

Credibility is the confidence in the 'truth' of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Being an African American single mother, I worked diligently to avoid counter transference and bias. As it was imperative that subjectivity and objectivity be maintained throughout the study. A peer-reviewer, who was also a Master-leveled licensed clinician was recruited to participate in the study in order to corroborate the findings, reduce bias, and ensure objectivity.

Member checking also was used throughout the study. Creswell (2007), stated that member checking is a validation strategy where the researcher shares the data, analyses, interpretations and conclusions with the participants, so they can assess the accuracy and credibility of the work. I reviewed the data collected from the various aspects of the study. This included the criteria qualifier form, participant data collection sheet, and interview protocol forms. The data (handwritten documentation and audio recordings) were transcribed and formulated into a document identified as the individual phenomenological participant descriptions. Participants were provided a copy of the description for their review and feedback. The focus group also operated as a means of member checking in the study. Participant evaluations were used to obtain feedback as well.

Transferability

Thick description, is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a method of gathering data from a phenomenon in a detailed manner so that it can be evaluated and replicated at another time, setting, situation or group. The thick description method was used in this study to report the interpretation of data collected from the participants, study results and findings. These women who participated in this study shared their lived experiences in an effort to provide an understanding of single African American mothers.

Dependability

Triangulation was the method I employed during the analysis process in order to ensure dependability. The recognition of the inevitability of subjectivity also yields the process of triangulation which utilizes multiple sources, methods, investigators and theories (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to ensure the dependability of the research. I triangulated the data from the questionnaire, the focus group, the peer reviewer, participant evaluations and theories. Dependability was established by the participants' feedback/responses and my observations, which found a wide spectrum of commonalities.

In this study, it was important to me as the researcher, that the essence of single African American mothers was captured. Therefore, thick description (direct statements from the participants); peer review (to control researcher bias); a reflexive journal and audio recording were used as means of ensuring dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest. An audit trail consisting of a reflexive journal and extensive field notes was established to ensure validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In establishing confirmability of this phenomenological research study, the participants were provided with the opportunity to review the individual phenomenological descriptions to ensure accuracy in the analysis. The focus group and evaluations were also another means of member checking used to ascertain confirm ability. Additionally, triangulation was used for the purpose of determining confirmability. Furthermore, I was able to corroborate the information from the theories relating to resiliency and maternal self-efficacy, used throughout the research with the findings from the study.

Results

This study explored the lived experience of 15 single African American mothers regarding to their resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. The women all lived in the tristate area (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware) and voluntarily participated in the study. A phenomenological, subject intensive, qualitative descriptive research method was used to complete this study. Face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used to encourage the women to describe their personal experiences concerning resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. The interviews were transcribed using the raw data that included word-for-word quotations of the participant's responses. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I used a reflexive journal to

recall comments and responses that may be unclear on the audio recorded encounters and to capture any noteworthy behaviors/expressions that the participants displayed during the interviews. The data were analyzed identifying major themes common to all of the participants in the study. There were three research questions that guided this research study. They are:

RQ1: What, if any, are the protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity?

RQ2: What, if any, are the self-efficacy beliefs of single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent?

RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children?

These research questions were devised with reference to the resiliency model theory and social learning theory. The resiliency model theory establishes a belief in the ability of individuals to achieve positive outcomes, despite the adversities of life that may have been present (Rutter, 1999). In more recent years of study, with regard to the construct of the theory of resilience, the focus is now on the strengths of individuals instead of the deficits (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Resiliency examines the risk factors and protective factors of life. Risk factors can be summed up to be those negative encounters of life (poverty, abuse, unemployment, low self-esteem, etc.). The personal and environmental measures and characteristics, used by individuals in order to circumvent

potentially negative situations, in order to acquire positive outcomes are known as protective factors (Gramezy, 1983; Werner, 1993). These factors are both internal and environmental. Individual characteristics include such traits as positive social skills, positive self-esteem, and internal locus of control. Environmental characteristics include factors such as extended family, church, schools, employment, and alternative caregivers (Blum, 1998).

Bandura (1977) defines Social Learning Theory as a combination of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences that are the catalyst for human functioning. He further identifies personality as an interaction between the three components. In 1986, Bandura also identified self-beliefs (self-efficacy) as a very significant element; this had been the missing element from his original theory. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief about his or her capabilities to produce outcome expectancy, which exercises influence over events that affect his or her life (Bandura, 1994). All actions and behaviors of individuals come with an outcome expectation. Self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate a level of faith that an individual has within him or herself to achieve and maintain personal goals and values.

When analyzing the responses from the single African American mothers participating in this study, I discerned an immense association between the existing theories and the lived experiences of the women. With regard to the first research question: What protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity? Van Breda (2001) identified several protective factors as being pertinent to resiliency. As reiterated by the

findings of this study, a large number of the single African American mothers had good early bonding with another female (mother, grandmother, aunt, etc.). High self-esteem and a strong perception of competency were also protective factors identified during the analysis of the study's data. Moreover, faith, family, social support and perseverance were factors with which the women in this study identified a strong alliance.

The single African American mothers all identified faith as a protective factor used in raising their children. According to the women, faith and their belief in the power of prayer attributed to their successful parenting. Chatters et al. (2008) discussed how African Americans have looked to God for support, strength, and guidance. *God* was acknowledged as the solid factor in life in both good and bad times. *God* was described as providing all that was needed, just at the time when it was needed. It was *God* who the single African American mothers identified as being the source of comfort and encouragement when the factors pertaining to being a single mother became an issue for them. Several of the women shared that they read their Bibles and found direction in the scriptures. They described being faithful and trusted that *God* would come through on HIS promises. Many of these women shared that they used Biblical doctrines as a platform to raising their children. The second highest reported protective factor endorsed by these single African American mothers in the rearing of their children was family and social support.

The participants in this study reported feeling truly supported by their families, churches and friends. Several mentioned that their preference was to do things independently. They were willing and prepared to take responsibility for their children

and their needs. However, when it came to asking for help pertaining to the needs of their children, they had no problem asking for help when a situation exceeded their own abilities. The “village” was a term used to describe the individuals (related and non-related) these women could depend on for support in raising their children. The cultural aspect of the support from the “village” is demonstrated by the strong connection between the strength of the African American extended family networks (inclusive of the nuclear families and aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and non-relatives) and African values and customs regarding families (Parent, et al., 2013).

Taylor (2010) found that when single mothers felt supported, more positive and effective behaviors emerged, giving a greater sense of self-efficacy and help, and suppressing the negativity and problematic parenting. While these single African American mothers were able to credit a great deal of supports from their families and other extended resources, the majority of them reported feeling an enormous lack of support from the fathers of their children. Even with the few fathers that were acknowledged to be fiscally responsible to their children, hardly any were actively involved with them.

Another protective factor identified by a majority of the participants in the group was her personal level of perseverance. The women shared over and over again in response to different questions on how they were determined to raise their children to the best of their abilities. Even if it meant juggling time (work/parenting), finances, and their own needs; making whatever sacrifices necessary of self (getting limited sleep; having no social life; placing their education on hold; depriving self of basic necessities; etc.) to

ensure their children were provided for was of great importance. These behaviors stand to verify that resilience is not demonstrated by the avoidance of the risk, but through the actual engagement of the risk with successful outcomes (Masten, 2001).

The second research question investigated the self-efficacy beliefs of the single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent. Pajares (2002), stated that an individual will push him or herself to whatever lengths and do whatever is necessary to achieve expected outcomes even in the face of adversity. Self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate the level of faith individuals have within themselves to achieve and maintain their personal goals and values. Individual experiences provide the catalyst for the development of efficacy beliefs, as individuals reflect on what they have learned from experience and use such guide them to the desired outcomes (Caprara et al., 2004). Maternal self-efficacy has been identified as another means used by single mothers to produce positive results in their children despite adversity (Taylor, 2010). As a part of this research study, the single African American mothers identified challenges they faced as single mothers. They were able to verbalize how their role models and culture provided them with skills they employed in confronting the adversities of single parenting.

In addition to reaffirming the conventional challenges faced by single mothers, inadequate finances and lack of involvement from the paternal parent were two of the greatest challenges the single African American mothers felt strongly about. Several of the women shared that they worked hard to earn money in order to provide for their children. Some described this to mean that they had to work multiple jobs, and sacrifice

some of their own basic needs (e.g. shoes, clothes, socialization) so that they could provide for their children. Most of these women did not aspire for their children to be afforded with the “top of the line” items, but wanted their children not to feel deprived or less than their peers. Several of the participants voiced the desire to make sure that their children’s childhood experience was better than their own. This did not necessarily mean that her own childhood experience had been “bad,” but they wanted to ensure that their children did not feel the voids they experienced in their own childhood. Many of the women voiced their abilities to make things work in their favor using what they had. This would include recycling items from the trash of others to meet the needs of their children. Most of the participants in the study, especially those who had male children, shared on the hardship of parenting without paternal involvement. The single African American mothers were able to voice their concerns and frustrations of the father’s absence in the lives of their children. However, many were able to identify other men (related and non-related) who were influential in the lives of their children. These mothers made sure their children were involved in sporting activities and social groups such as Boy Scouts and male mentoring activities sponsored by churches or fraternities to ensure exposure to positive male role models. The data provided by participants, afforded insight into the influence of role models in their own challenges of single parenting.

In agreement with past research findings (Hawley & De Hann, 1996), the majority of the single African American mothers in this study identified other women to being their role models. The women shared that observing the women whom they identified as role models provided a great influence to them as they were growing up. Descriptive

words such as strong, hardworking, loving and stern were used to describe the role models. Eleven of the participants in this group directly identified an African American female as their role model. Eight of the eleven specifically acknowledged their own mother as being their role model. Others recognized grandmothers or the mother of a friend as being their role model. One woman even identified a television sitcom mother as her role model. This television mom was a married mother of five children and a lawyer. On television she made being a mother seem so easy. She had time for children, husband and work. For the most part, the role models identified provided sound and realistic examples for the women in the study. Some of the role models were also single mothers who were reported to have successfully raised their own children. Watching these women (the role models) overcome adversities in their own lives, were reported by the single African American mothers to be a great source of inspiration that served as a motivating factor in their own child rearing experience. All of the role models identified were of African American descent.

While single parenting is not a solely African American women's experience, past research has demonstrated that there are some cultural characteristics unique to single African American mothers (Parent, et al., 2013). Cultural beliefs, values and practices contribute a high-level of respect placed on the maternal role within the African American community regardless of parentage. Historically, African American women have parented their children without the involvement from a paternal figure quite often. In acknowledgement to the ordeal of slavery, women and children were taken from their homeland and brought to America. This process alone tore families apart. In other

instances, women and men who were married or had children together were more than likely separated and not by choice, but by the sheer design of slavery. People were considered as merchandise and were often sold off away from the family units. And, then there were the situations where the women were impregnated by slave owners and left to raise the children on their own. There was a great deal of help and support from the “village” in lieu of the absence of the missing parent. The missing parent sometimes meaning just one or both of the biological parents. Two of the participants in this study were parenting children, who were not their biological children. Another participant had adopted a child in addition to having one of her own. The culture of the African American community displays the ability of individuals (related and non-related) to do what is needed to raise and provide for the children. The findings from this research demonstrated that single parenting is so inbred into the culture of African Americans, several of the participants did not even identify themselves as “single mothers” prior to participating in the study. One mother even shared that she never really thought about it. She reported that she was just doing what she needed to do to raise her son.

Research question #3 asks: How do single African American mothers believe they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children? Brodsky & DeVet (2000), found single African American mothers tend to set a clear set of values, morals, and a code of behavior that they use to raise their children. The parenting styles commonly used by single African American mothers has been identified as an authoritative style (Abell & Clawson, 1996). Use of this particular parenting style in the African American community often results in children with positive social attributes, good mental health

and academic outcomes (McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Klein & Forehand, 2000). The single African American mothers views of their own childhood; their faith; personality and parenting styles were all verbalized as catalyst for passing on efficacy to their children.

The single African American mothers participating in this study demonstrated their abilities to achieve positive outcomes with their children, despite the adversities they experienced in their own childhood experiences. The women in this study described using their own experiences with risk factors and positive factors in their childhood to create a framework for expectations, both short and long-term, for their children. These women were able to take their unique and individual experiences and identify aspects (positive factors) that would guide them as they parented. Two particular participants' experiences stood out for me as they shared on maternal self-efficacy. One mom shared that as a child she had the responsibilities of caring for her siblings. Despite her age she took on the maternal role for them due to her mother's mental health diagnosis and her dad working all of the time. For this mother, it was important to her that she be "present" as a parent and her children enjoy their childhood. She stated having divorced during their adolescence development period made it more challenging for her and them as she had to deal with their loss as well as her own. However, this woman attributes the experience of seeing herself go through this trial, and trusting God to see them through it, as an example for her children on how to face adversities. Another mother shared that her childhood experience, which consisted of being raised by a drug addicted mother and functional alcoholic father made her determined to have a different lifestyle for her son.

She felt she has an open line of communication with him and works diligently to provide this young man with the comfort of knowing that she loves, supports and will provide for him. She also stated that she instills a level of determination in her son by encouraging him to work through his learning challenges. In essence, he may have a learning disability, but it does not have him. It is the belief of this mother that she depicts a great example of this to her son through her persistence of doing what is necessary to succeed, despite the trials and tribulations that arise.

In general the single African American mothers pointed to their faith as the greatest channel for passing on their sense of efficacy to their children. Several women shared that they have non-traditional ways in which they share their faith practices with their children. Instead of forcing their children to attend church on Sundays, they allowed the children to choose how they relate to God. Quite a few of these mothers felt it more important to encourage relationships between their children and God than attending church. They expressed prayer to be a direct method of communicating with God that resulted in answers. These mother's reported to reading the Bible and praying with their children, in addition to living lives which provided good examples of sound relationships with God as means of showing their children a sense of efficacy. The women made reference to their relationship with God and faith-based values (e.g. faithful, strong, loving, and prayerful, etc.) as directives for their parenting qualities.

There have been indications that the choices of parenting styles/strategies and maternal self-esteem/efficacy have yielded levels of successful child rearing (Jones et al., 2007; Parent et al., 2013). Spicer (2010), reported African American parents to be readily

able to identify the relationship between their parenting practices, their upbringing and the power of their faith. Similar findings surfaced in the present study. As a part of the study, mothers were asked to discuss their personalities, parenting styles, how their children perceived them as parents and how they believe their parenting has impacted their children. In terms of describing their own personalities, the women used adjectives such as fun, easy going, faithful, thoughtful, stable, open-minded, fair, kind, compassionate, and independent. While words they felt that their children would use to describe them included: stern, strong, loyal, strict, determined, serious and focused. I found it very interesting that the words the women used to describe themselves to be more subtle than those they believed their children would use to portray them. Based on the data documented in the reflexive journal, during the face-to-face interviews it was evident that the women felt they had to “put their game face on” when it came to parenting. Several of the women shared that they were adamant in regards to holding their children accountable, because the world was not going to pamper them. It appeared that maintaining a tough image to their children was helpful in the avoidance of adversities. Interestingly enough, amidst all of the authoritarian terms the women believed their children would use to describe them, loving and nurturing were characteristics each woman mentioned. I found it to be a very similar situation with the vocabulary used to describe parenting styles.

Several mothers used terms such as strong, firm, and strict disciplinarian to describe their parenting styles, which would be evocative of an authoritarian parenting style. However, they included other words such as fair, approachable, and nurturing in

their description as well. Overall, the parenting styles described by the majority of the participants would fall under the description of an authoritative parenting style. Past studies conducted with African Americans, have confirmed parenting styles used most often produced children with positive social attributes, good mental health and academic outcomes (McBride-Murry et al, 2001; Klein & Forehand, 2000; Taylor, 2000). The women in this study described themselves as parenting with a purpose. That purpose being: (1) to value the need of obtaining an education; (2) to become community minded; and (3) work towards becoming self-sufficient.

Summary

This study was conducted in an effort to provide an understanding of how single African American mothers raise their children with successful outcomes, withstanding the odds. I used a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of fifteen single African American mothers. The factors of resiliency and the maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers were explored, giving each woman an opportunity to tell her story. In accordance with the resiliency theory, the women in this study showed that they possessed a variety of protective factors, which promoted their levels of self-esteem and competency. Faith was shared by all of the women to be essential to their success as single parents. The women in this study were able to also indicate, how their behavioral, personal and environmental influences laid a foundation for their roles as mothers. Individual face-to-face interviews, a focus group and evaluations were conducted. Data from these encounters was analyzed and presented in this chapter.

The overarching research questions which guided this study were formulated around the desire to examine: RQ1: What, if any, are the protective factors of resiliency allow single African American mothers to raise their children with positive outcomes, despite adversity?

RQ2: What, if any, are the self-efficacy beliefs of single African American mothers regarding their abilities to confront the adversities they face in their role as a maternal parent?

RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children?

Twelve themes were shaped from the feedback provided from the participants in this study. These themes were represented within the theories which framed this study. With regard to the resiliency factors that allow these women to raise their children despite adversity, three areas were found to be consistent. The childhood experience of the mother and her ability to ask for help were identified. The single African American mothers in this study reported faith, relationships and competence to be the resiliency factors they profoundly believed to direct their parenting experience. The findings from this study demonstrate faith as an eminent characteristic for single African American mothers. These women rely heavily on their faith for individual and parental guidance. God is described as the center of their strength, direction and foundation. The "village" which is composed of family (related and non-related) and social supports was seen as extremely important to the women, providing guidance, security and support to the

mother and her children. The mothers believed that, despite the fact they were raising their children alone, they were competent to do what was necessary for positive outcomes with their children. These women reported organizing their own lives and needs around those of their children. The single African American mothers in this study verbalized the reality of what they believed to be essential in the success of their parenting was God, the love and support of others and their ability to do what is necessary.

The women who participated in this study reported the self-efficacy beliefs they deemed fundamental in allowing them to confront the adversities of a single mother, were influenced by their role models and cultural influence. Role models were imperative for these women, as they provided an example to the mothers on their parenting journey. With the exception of one man, all of the role models reported were other African American women. These role models included the mothers and grandmothers of the participants, however, other women were inspirational as well. Observations by the single African American mothers of the role models as they functioned effectively in various aspects of their own lives provided a confidence to these women that they too could be successful. In regard to how cultural influence inspired the maternal self-efficacy beliefs of the mothers in this study, the majority of the women reported a high-level of inspiration obtained through the learned history of the African American struggle and watching their family members handle adversities of life. Survival beyond the circumstances, are a unique core experience of African American families in general. While the participants in the study did acknowledge the existence of negative stereotypes regarding single African American mothers and their children, promoted by the media

and past research, they reported these to have very little personal impact on them individually. The women did express a desire for society to acknowledge African Americans are just like any other race or nationality, having both positive and negative people. The women participating in this study had a strong focus on leaving a good legacy for their children and future descendants to follow; successfully surviving irrespective of the obstacles and barriers they faced.

The last question that framed this research study was: RQ3: How do single African American mothers' think they pass on their sense of efficacy to their children, if they feel as though they are passing on their sense of efficacy to their children? The women in this study shared that they maintained good lines of communication with their children. Aside from the verbal advice they provided, they believed themselves to be living examples of efficacy for their children. The single African American mothers credited their own childhood experiences as being the framework for their own efficacy, which they in turn used in raising their children. Learning from both the good and bad occurrences in their own childhood provided the fundamental foundations for these women. Faith again had been affirmed as an indispensable element in the lives of single African American mothers. The women in this study believed that as their children observed them actively practicing their faith (trusting God, praying, reading/applying scripture reading, living with values and morals) they were greatly impacted and inspired to do likewise. The personalities and parenting styles of the single African American mothers were considered to also be a means of passing on a sense of efficacy to their children. These women verbalized a desire to help their children be successful in life.

There was not a definitive description of what successful meant. However, the women in the study were able to provide specific accomplishments that were expected and deemed necessary in order to be successful. It was the expectation of these single African American mothers that once their children were “grown”, they would be able to: provide for themselves and their families (good jobs, homes, education) and to enjoy some of the luxuries life has to offer (cars, vacation, etc.). The women credited themselves with providing strong, firm, strict and structured parenting, while yet offering loving and nurturing relationships to their children. This balance is what these mothers believe provides the structure necessary to confer efficacy to their children. Throughout the course of this research study, the women shared how honored and excited they were to participate in a study that would allow them to “tell their story” of living as a single African American mother whose children have averted the typical adversities usually associated with the children of single African American mothers. In the next chapter, this research will provide an interpretation of the study’s findings, limitations, recommendations and social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Historically, minimal research has been conducted that examines the resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers in relationship to favorable outcomes relating to their children, despite their challenging circumstances (Simons, et al., 2006; Taylor, 2010; Taylor et al., 2010). Most of the studies that have been done to date with this population concentrated on the causes and adverse effects of single parenthood (Kincaid et al., 2011; Robinson & Werblow, 2012). This study examined how resiliency and maternal self-efficacy helps to prevent their children from experiencing consequences typically associated with the children of single African American mothers.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was (a) to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers and address the imbalance of problem-focused approaches to studying mother-headed families, and (b) to provide an opportunity for single African American mothers to tell how their resilience and maternal self-efficacy played a part in child rearing and avoiding the expected adversities. Fifteen single African American mothers shared their stories and explained how they applied resiliency and maternal self-efficacy in the raising of their children. It is anticipated that the findings from this study will stimulate positive social change by broadening the knowledge of and interest in the development of culturally relevant interventions. The core findings from this study can be used by scholars, human service professionals, and

community-based organizations to develop and enhance programs and services for these families.

In the fall of 2014, a sample of 15 single African American mothers was recruited to participate in this study. These women affirmed that they were single African American women who had parented or were currently parenting a child or children. Study participants' children had avoided the stereotypical misfortunes associated with children of single African American mother's, such as teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and low educational attainment. The women enthusiastically agreed to share their stories. Based on data collected in individual face-to-face interviews and a focus group, findings provided confirmation of various attributes of resilience and social learning theories. Twelve prominent themes were derived from the data: (a) childhood experience of the mother, (b) ability to ask for help, (c) faith-based influences on parenting, (d) role models, (e) most influential person, (f) personality and parenting qualities, (g) society's impressions of single African American mothers, (h) challenges of single parenting, (i) mother's view of her childhood, (j) rewards of parenting, (k) outcomes and potential of children, and (l) cultural influence. The data collected from the focus group provided a level of validity to the study. Emerging themes were consistent with the data from the face-to-face interviews and resonated throughout the conversation in the focus group. The following discussion section will elaborate on these thematic findings with support from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Interpretation of the Findings

Through the use of a phenomenological research design, the single African

American mothers were provided an opportunity to share their lived experiences from their personal perspective. The conceptual framework for this study integrated two theories: the resiliency theory (Rutter, 1999), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), an extension of Bandura's social learning theory. An array of elements from both theories was prevalent and well established through the findings of this study. A great deal of commonalities were identified between with past research and this study.

Findings Implicated by the Resiliency Theory

Resilience has been described as the ability of individuals to achieve positive outcomes, despite the adversities of life that may have been present (Rutter, 1999). Overall, the past literature and the findings from this study were consistent with each other. High levels of self-esteem, being social and outgoing, having female role models, and the ability to ask for help when needed have all been associated with resilience (Hawley & De Hann, 1996). Resiliency is composed of two distinct entities: risk factors and protective factors. Werner (1993) stated that risk factors are those aspects of life that can pose negative consequences, while Blum (1998) described protective factors as the characteristics, personal, and environmental measures of individuals used to circumvent adverse situations, to secure positive outcomes. The first six themes were consistent with the resiliency theory addressing both risk and protective factors.

Themes 1 through 6. Themes expressed by the single African American mothers included childhood experience, ability to ask for help, influence of faith on parenting, role models, most influential person, and her personality and parenting qualities. The responses of the participants in this study were directly reflective of the findings reported

in past studies that identified individual characteristics such as positive social skills, positive self-esteem, and internal locus of control as factors common in resilient individuals (Gramezy, 1983; Werner, 1992). There were several commonalities found between the findings of this study and those of the past. The women in this study reported utilizing mindsets associated with the various models of resiliency. The compensatory, challenge, and personal models of resilience were prominent throughout the responses given by the women participating in the study. The challenge model of resilience considers moderate exposure to risk factors (adversities) as an opportunity for individuals to acquire and use problem-solving skills (Masten et al., 1988). Alternatively, the protective factors model of resilience credited exposure to the risk as an opportunity to develop protective factors, which are used then to avoid the risk of another encounter with the same or similar risk (Richardson, 2002).

The compensatory model. The compensatory model explores how to nullify the risks of adversities. Both the risk and compensatory factors contribute to the prediction of outcomes (Masten et al., 1988). The single African American mothers in the study spoke of how they used their coping skills, lived experience, and innate abilities to compensate for adverse situations or occurrences experienced by their families. For one of the participants, that meant adhering to a lifestyle exemplified by an African American sitcom family. While being raised in a home with substance abusing parents, she used the example of what she perceived as a “good” family to provide the structure and direction for herself and her children. The women in this study verbalized how they used available

supports, interpersonal skills and resources to compensate for the risks they encountered, such as a missing father and limited finances.

The challenge model of resilience. The challenge model of resilience distinguishes how moderate levels of exposure to a risk can help individuals develop and enhance skills that will produce positive outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). One participant whose educational dreams were deferred while she raised her children counted it a blessing to have had very excellent employment opportunities in spite of not having a college degree. Once her children were grown, she returned to the community college to complete her degree. As this study was being completed, I was informed by this mother of her graduation with honors.

The single African American mothers who participated in this study were able to verbalize not only able the challenges they encountered as a single parent, but also ways they worked to overcome the obstacles in their lives. They set goals and worked to accomplish them. These women tended not to allow the challenges to discourage them. These women aspired not to have their children repeat some of the mistakes they made.

Personal resilience model. Lastly, Polk (1997) introduced the personal resilience model. This model identifies four patterns of resilience: (a) dispositional (individual characteristics that promote resilience); (b) relational (activity between an individual, others and the world); (c) situational (the aspects that link individuals and stressful situations); (d) and the philosophical pattern (individual's beliefs). This model was illustrated through the lived experiences of several of the single African American mothers who shared stories of their personality and parenting qualities, their role models

and others who were influential in their lives, their childhood experiences, and their belief in God.

The dispositional pattern. In their accounts, the single African American mothers described themselves as being strong, serious, and stern when it came to parenting because they were aware of the views often associated with the children of single African American mothers. Brodsky and DeVet (2000) found that single African American mothers tend to establish a clear set of values, morals, and code of behaviors that they use to raise their children. The women in this study described themselves as parenting with a purpose, that purpose being to raise their children to value education, to be community-minded, and able to care and provide for themselves. They admitted to intentionally being rigid in their parenting style because they knew once their children stepped outside their protected boundaries very little compassion would be afforded them. Despite the parenting styles of these women, their children knew they were loved. Their goals were not to be a friend to their children but to provide them with skills and knowledge that would afford them an opportunity to avoid some of the difficulties they faced. The participants in the study felt it was better for their children to learn from a loving mother than from an uncaring stranger.

With regard to personal levels of confidence, Taylor and colleagues (1997) concluded that single African American mothers had positive beliefs about their relationships with their children, their parenting abilities, and their self-esteem. Concerning, their personalities and parenting qualities, the women in this study proclaimed to being stern, and strong in their child rearing practices. They readily

acknowledged possessing the compassionate, tender and loving part of being a nurturing mother. The descriptions they provided were consistent with the authoritative parenting style. Baumrind (1971) shared that parents who are warm and responsive, set guidelines for acceptable behavior, and provides opportunities for cognitive and social stimulation are most likely to have positive outcomes for their children. These single African American mothers reported to having standards and guidelines established with their children which set the parameters for positive outcomes. Prior research found that single African American mothers tend to have a clear set of values, morals and code of behaviors for their children (McBride-Murry et al., 2001; Klein & Forehand, 2000). Even raising children in the challenging times, single African American mothers most often use authoritative parenting styles with energies focused on lowering their children's likelihood of involvement in high-risk behaviors (Abell & Clawson, 1996).

The relational pattern. Ramey (1995) shared that African American women who are able to identify a role model are more likely to develop positive self-esteem (as cited by Byrd & Shavers, 2013). Myers (1991) stated that African American women, in most cases equated themselves to other African American women. They modeled their behaviors after their mothers, grandmothers or mother substitutes. These role models were seen as being strong, offering sound advice and support. Eleven of the participants in this group directly identified an African American female as their role model. Others recognized grandmothers or the mother of a friend as being their role model. One participant even acknowledged a television sitcom mother as a role model for herself. Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), maintains that individuals may

develop coping strategies through modeling their parents' coping behaviors.

Role models and individuals of great influence were fundamental in the lives of these single African American mothers. The women in this study credited these persons of influence as being there for them. Supporting them even when their actions and decisions had been disappointing. They intensely credited their role models and God with providing the example and strength they needed to be successful with their children. Bandura (1996) stated the most common practice of individual learning is first through observation and then modeling what has been observed.

The situational pattern. With regards to the rearing of the mothers, the participants appeared to be comfortable sharing their journey, even when it was painful. Past research has pointed out that individual experiences provide the catalyst for the development of efficacy beliefs, as individuals reflect on what they have learned from experience and use them to guide them to the desired outcomes (Caprara et al., 2004). One of the participants shared how growing up with parents who were substance dependent made her unwavering on her stance of not to use drugs or alcohol. Another shared how an individual trusted by her family molested her during her childhood. For as many of the other participants who shared on issues regarding stressful events they experienced both during their own childhood and as adult women raising their children alone, they were determined to not have their children affected by similar situations.

The philosophical pattern. Faith/religion were identified in a previous study as an influential factor of resiliency (Utsey et al., 2008). Likewise, Van Breda (2001) reported that resilient individuals' often boast an unwavering belief that God will provide and

work things out for them even in the face of adversity. They often possess a deep-seated faith providing them with an outstanding ability to consistently have a positive outlook on life. Previous research has demonstrated that for African Americans, faith has not only helped in managing stressful events but also provided an explanatory framework for adverse events (Byrd & Shavers 2013). The term “religious coping” has been used by other researchers to explain how individuals use prayer during stressful times and look to God for support, strength and guidance. In these studies, there has been a huge endorsement of African Americans using religious coping in their daily lives (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson, & Lincoln, 2008).

The single African American mothers in this study accounted their trials and tribulations as opportunities to learn, grow and develop into better individuals. Many of them shared that prayer was an important part of their survival. Two of them stating you can't pray and worry at the same time. They never reported never feeling alone because they felt God was always there for them. Some shared that even when other people failed them or let them down, God was always dependable. Their unwavering faith in God was the part of their existence that appeared to be imperative for them to pass on to their children.

Culturally, African Americans have been strong proponents of faith and a belief in God as a means of survival. The church or one's faith in God is used as protective factors to alleviate risk factors which have historically challenged single African American mothers and their families (Hawkins et al., 1992). All of the participants in this study agreed that faith was a central foundation in their parenting. They reported that God

guided, provided and protected their families. Although a few of the women embraced the idea that a relationship with God was not founded on attending or belonging to an organized religion, many were involved with a church. Some women shared that they looked to their religious leaders for guidance and support. Prayer, worship, and living a life which exemplified a relationship with God were ways the women in the study professed to have shared their beliefs with their children. The information shared by the single African American mothers in this study was congruent with past findings. During the focus group, 100% of the study participants stated that God was their greatest influence as a parent.

Financial issues, uninvolved fathers, limited education, balancing work and family responsibilities and their childhood upbringing were risk factors the women in this study were readily able to identify. Protective factors, which included personal characteristics such as competence, positive self-esteem, support network, belief in God, and role models, were correspondingly transparent among the group. Themes 1 through 6 were found to be more relative to the principles of the resiliency theory, looking at the risk and protective factors. While, themes 7 through 12 were more related to those ideologies ascribed to in the social learning theory. The next section will examine the findings of the study and their relationship to the social learning theory.

Findings Implicated by the Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory incorporates both behavioral and cognitive learning aspects. In his explanation of the model, Bandura (1986) reported social learning as the core stimulus for human functioning. Bandura's social learning theory stated that people

learn through observing others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. The single African American mothers in this study shared on the various levels in which their lives and the lives of their children have been impacted by their personal observation of others. They reported that by watching their mothers and other women they were around while growing up had a great influence on how they react to and handle various situations that arise. Over years of observing other women who were faced with challenging circumstances and were able to have good outcomes proved inspirational to these single African American mothers. Social learning is a combination of personal, behavioral and environmental factors. It is greatly influenced by one's nature and self-beliefs (self-efficacy).

Caprara and colleagues (2004) suggested that efficacy beliefs originate from the reflection of a lived experience. Individuals use what they have learned during these encounters to guide them to their desired outcomes. Self-efficacy is the belief of a person, regarding their capabilities to produce outcome expectancy, which exercise influence over events that affect their lives. The development of self-efficacy is a life-long process. Beliefs are established in early childhood and continues to develop throughout life. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to work hard to overcome challenges. They invest in the activities they choose to participate in and form a strong commitment to these interest and activities. These individuals also recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments.

Themes 7 through 12. The last six themes of this study were congruent with the principles encompassed within the theory of social learning and self-efficacy. These

themes explored the responses of the participants in the study to the following: society's impressions of single African American mothers, challenges of single parenting, the single African American mother's, views of her childhood, rewards of parenting, outcomes and potential of children, and cultural influences. According to Bandura, there are four primary sources of self-efficacy. These include mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses (Bandura, 1994).

The mastery experiences. Successful performance of a task increases ones' belief in their abilities. The theme that emerged concerning the challenges of single parenting was so significant to the single African American mothers; four subthemes were developed to relay the information. Irrespective of how one manages to arrive at being a single African American mother, there are challenges to be met. Some of the issues identified by some of the women in study were: finances, lack of a male role model for the children, balancing work and parenting and a need for more general support. Moreover, in light of pointing out the various challenges they faced as single African American mothers, these women were able to align their maternal self-efficacy beliefs in a manner that would help them elude some of the adversities. Self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate a level of faith individuals has within themselves to achieve and maintain their personal goals and values. Personal experiences provide the catalyst for the development of efficacy beliefs. Individuals will reflect on what they have learned from experience and use them to guide them to the desired outcomes (Caprara et al., 2004). Even as the participants shared on the challenges they faced, they readily shared on methods which they used to manage the situations.

The challenges regarding finances. Managing the money so that the needs are met, was shared by the women in the group to be a significant challenge. All of the single African American mothers in the study were working at various levels of employment. The spoke about how they learned to manage their finances to meet their responsibilities and to create situations that were less stressful. Most felt that the cost of everything is rapidly increasing. Provisions for the family such as food, utilities, housing, clothes, and shoes were considered to be the basics and reported to be manageable. In general, these single African American mothers appeared not to live above their financial abilities. The single African American mothers' desires to involve their children in extra-curricular activities and do family activities were significant enough to her that she would get an extra job or do overtime to meet that financial requirement. A sense of resourcefulness was evident from this group of single African American mothers as they shared on how they advocate and network on a regular basis to connect with agencies, organizations and events that are beneficial to their children social, educational, spiritual, developmental growth. However, when the single African American mothers encountered unexpected things like car repairs, home repairs, and medical or dental bills, everything seemed to get chaotic. All of the women in the study shared that there was someone they could identify to provide financial assistance if really needed, however they primarily would only ask if there were no other options. They shared that even when others are willing to be helpful, they would often begin to ask questions about how the single African American mothers were managing their money. Getting help financially, would lead to "suggestions" about how the single mothers could better manage her money. Several of the women shared

that their experiences of having to borrow money made them adamant not to repeat the situation when possible.

The challenge of the absent father. The women in the study shared that there was definitely a void left by the lack of involvement of the paternal parent. As the researcher, I felt this was the one area in which these single African American mothers appeared most disheartened. Based on the responses given in both the individual interviews and during the focus group, the participants felt utterly powerless over the fact they could not get the fathers of their children engaged in meaningful relationships with the children. The majority had children with men who did not engage with them on any level. Dad was not around to show the male children how to become a man. Nor was dad available to show his daughter how a man should treat her. Bandura (1997) shared that even in situations where individuals are not initially successful in securing the expected outcome, they will continue to work toward obtaining their original expectation. Several of the single African American mothers freely admitted that even with the use of substitute males (grandfathers, uncles, etc.) the void left by the father was apparent at some level. Some of the participants had successfully navigated meaningful relationships between their children and men who they respected and held with high regards.

From the findings, I believe the reactions to the absence of their children's fathers were so strong because the majority of these women had grown up in homes where their fathers were present. Ten of the fifteen women in this study had grown up in homes, raised by both. One of the participants shared that she grew up in her grandparents' home along with her mother. So her maternal grandfather fulfilled the father role in her life.

Based on their lived experiences in their childhoods, these women appeared to have desires that either met or exceeded their childhoods for their children. No matter what the age of the child was at the time of this study, the women voiced a longing for the fathers to work to develop meaningful relationships with their children. There was a sincere recognition of the importance of the involvement by the fathers, even with the availability of surrogates.

The challenge of maintaining balance. Several of the participants stated if they could clone themselves into several individuals they would. Balancing all of their responsibilities could be problematic at times. For some of them looking at all of the responsibilities related to single parenting was too overwhelming, but taking things on as they came along, made things a little easier to endure. The role of being the head of the household comes with a heavy load for the single African American mothers. A few of the women with young children shared tearfully on the frustration and guilt of having to choose between staying home with their sick child and going to work. Others talked about feeling hypercritical about encouraging their children to engage in recreational and social activities only for them not to be able to attend games or recitals because of work. The women in this study voiced concerns and the difficulty in juggling the children's needs such as parent-teacher conferences, class trips, medical appointments, special events, holidays, etc. with their jobs. They were grateful that there were people in their village who would readily fill in for them but felt like these were things they should be attending.

The participants who now had adult children, offered reassurance and comfort to

the younger SAAMs. They encouraged them to make their best efforts to support their children when they could. And when that was not possible; they encouraged them to have small celebrations or acknowledgments of the children's events. The women shared how they found a balance between work and parenting, sometimes even using a surrogate (family member or friend) to fill in for an activity with their children when they weren't available. The single African American mothers recognized that they had also stimulated the village support mindset with their older children, who were often recruited to accompany younger siblings to events or appointments. Through this level of participation, seeds of self-efficacy are being planted in the children of these women.

Social modeling. Social modeling is the art of imitation. Bandura, 1995 shared that seeing others people succeed, provides encouragement and motivation to the observer, so that they also possess the ability to be successful in a comparable event. The single African American mothers shared on how they watched their role models and listened to stories shared with them about individuals who faced hardships have positive outcomes. They talked about gaining strength and encouragement that they too could overcome adversities. A few of the women shared how they were encouraged by stories of famous African Americans who faced adversities and managed to have good results. Many shared how the general culture of African Americans lent to the philosophy of the payoffs of hard work and determination. They spoke about being inspired by God and others that their families could do well. Each of these participants had an idea of what they considered to be successful, with regards to their families. Using references from what the single African American mothers had acquired through a conversation, reading

about or their own lived experience, I took note of the well thought out and realistic goals they had set for themselves and their children.

Following in the footsteps. Despite terminology such as “*strict*” or “*sheltered*” being used to describe the childhood experiences of some of the SAAMs, the participants basically had childhoods where they knew there were adults at home who loved, cared about them and had their best interest at heart. In response to questions which inquired how their children would describe them, very similar terms were used. Words like “*strong*,” “*firm*,” “*stern*,” and “*serious*” were the descriptions provided of how these single African American mothers believed their children viewed them. Even so, the overarching portrayals depicted loving, caring, compassionate and concerned mothers. Regarding this theme, I was able to perceive how the single African American mothers believed their children viewed them was reflective of how the SAAMs saw their parents. This was one area where the participants had bursts of laughter just thinking about how their children would describe them. The responses from the women were an explicit depiction of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1986) shared how individuals learn through observing others’ behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. The most common practice of individual learning is first through observation and then modeling that which has been observed. During the observation period, one can observe the behavior and then the reactions of others to the behavior. If the behaviors elicit positive feedback from others observing or evokes a positive feeling from the observer, the behavior is most likely to be replicated by the observer, with the expectation of the same or similar outcomes.

Past studies conducted with African Americans, have confirmed parenting styles used most often produced children with positive social attributes, good mental health and academic outcomes (McBride-Murry et al, 2001; Klein & Forehand, 2000; Taylor, 2000). In the process of this study, what I observed was that these SAAMs mimicked parenting behaviors they seen used by their parents or role models, in the rearing of their children. One participant even admitted that as a young adult she felt her mom was way too strict. But, as an adult and especially as a parent she now understood and used very similar parenting techniques with her children. What I found totally prodigious was the mindset of these mothers who described themselves as parenting with purpose, were parallel to the social learning theory. The overall reward these single African American mothers were anticipating was that their children be self-sufficient and able to be an asset to their families and society.

Parenting with a measure of confidence. Hughes et al. (2006) reported even with slavery and the Civil Rights Movement so far behind, African American parents still expressed deep concerns about the racial barriers, negative stereotypes and the impact of such on their children.

Many assumptions and stereotypes surrounding the African American single mother and her children currently exist; these areas need clarity and resolution (Fouquier, 2011; Mandara & Murray, 2000). All of the women acknowledged that the media often paints a bleak and negative image of single African American mothers and their children. However, quite a few women felt there are individuals who may have started off with an image influenced by the media until they personally interacted with an African American

mother raising her children alone. Several of the women did not feel that they were singled out for being African American and felt that all single moms (Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, etc.) are given a bad look by the media. The participants in this study, while acknowledging the adversities they faced, were confident in their abilities to raise their children and for their children to do well.

The cultural connection. Scholars of African American Studies identify African heritage as the primary source of adaptive cultural strengths (Mendenhall, et al., 2013). Constantine and Sue (2006) model of optimal human functioning for people of color, analyzes how cultural beliefs, values, and practices contribute to resiliency. Several of the women participating in this study were able to make direct connections with how culture has influenced their parenting. The term “village” was used by quite a few of the women to describe their community or extended family. Fouquier (2011) points out the need for a historical understanding of the African influence on the African American family in order to be considerate of the experience of a single African American mother. There is a strong connection between the strength of the African American extended family networks (inclusive of the nuclear family as well as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and non-relatives) and African values and customs regarding families (Parent, et al., 2013). African American families tend to exhibit certain cultural characteristics which have allowed them to be adaptive. These modeled attributes include, but are not limited to family support, community, religion, and self-esteem. The West African influence on customs such as a tribal mindset, deeply-rooted faith and value systems are still prevalent in today’s African American society. Similar to the native African tradition, many

African American families are matriarchal. Being in a family where a female is a head or the dominant individual in the family is nothing new to African Americans. Raising children alone (blood related or not) is something African American women have been doing forever. Studies have shown that most African Americans have close family ties and many live in extended families (Hill, 2001). For single African American mothers, raising children in a “village” with involvement from blood and non-blood relatives has been a practice continued from their African heritage. Assuming the maternal role in the life of a child who is in need of a mother, has stemmed from the “village” mentality.

The motives behind single parenting, today have come a long way from the reasons such family units existed before, but they are still prevalent in the African American community. McAdoo (2003) finds that, in the African American community, divorce is the greatest contributor to single parenting by women, followed by births of young unmarried women and lastly, a small, but growing population of African American women who are older, more stable and opting to have children out of wedlock. All of the women commissioned culture to having a great influence on them and their parenting. Religious beliefs and practices (prayer, Bible reading, etc.) are qualities taught throughout childhood and shared with family and friends. Spirituality provides a roadmap for these women, setting the framework for teaching them how to be: loving, compassionate, helpful, faithful, trusting and patient. The faith of these single African American mothers had been cultivated in such a manner that they were assured that God would provide and work things out for them even in the face of adversity.

Psychological responses. Bandura (1993) notes that by learning how to minimize stress and elevate mood when facing difficult times, an individual can improve their sense of self-efficacy. Moods, emotional state, stress levels and physical reactions can all have an impact on how an individual feels about themselves and their abilities. The women in this study readily admit that there are times when they are truly “stressed out.” Parental challenges (e.g., single handily juggling bills and other expenses related to the provision for their child), lack of a male role model for the children, and time management are just a few that are mentioned in the literature (Sharp & Ispa, 2009; Taylor et.al, 2010; Taylor, 2010). Issues concerning the children, bills, their parents, their health, etc. are often on their minds. However, most of these participants ascribe to the importance of taking time out for themselves. Enjoying life and having an opportunity to enjoy some of their accomplishments, big and small were stated to be important to the SAAMs. These women admitted to giving their all to raise their children and felt blessed to watch them grow up and flourish in various areas of their lives. The participants also shared there have been times of disappointments with some of the things regarding their children. However, these women can respond to the situation at hand and move on. Most displayed the ability to acknowledge that any failure of their children was a negative reflection on them. However, during their times of dismay, they still loved, supported and encouraged their children.

Setting the standards, for who I am. In response to the questions posed in both the individual interviews and the focus group, the women did not give much credence to society’s impressions or judgments towards them as single African American mothers.

The single African American mothers identified the typical stereotypes of single African American mothers being: young, having multiple babies with random men, getting on welfare, unemployed, uneducated and looking for handouts. While a few of the participants acknowledged that negative ideas and perceptions of single African American mothers by society were a reality, society's opinions appeared to be irrelevant to the majority of these participants. The stereotypical thoughts that single African American mothers are uneducated and unemployed were met with the data from this study, which provided a different set of findings. Many of the women shared on being taught on the importance of and encouraged to get an education. While some professed to being delayed by parental responsibilities, those who had not completed higher education levels, were committed to one day returning to school. Several were able to acknowledge how not adhering to the guidance of others earlier in life affected their processes. It was demonstrated by the single African American mothers in this study that the path that led you to becoming a single African American mother, is not as important as what you do as a single African American mother.

Working to set a standard for my children. There were was a fervent sense of pride, shining eyes and plenty of smiles as the participants described the rewards of parenting. Here the (maternal) self-efficacy became tangible. Bandura (1994) ascribes self-efficacy as an individual's belief about their capabilities to produce outcome expectancy, which exercise influence over events that affect their lives. The women demonstrated an intensity of pride as they shared on the achievements (graduation, college acceptance, marriage, employment, grandchildren, license, etc.) of their children.

These single African American mothers could promptly identify their anticipated outcomes and the potential of their children. Although the age range of the children of the women participating in the study went across the spectrum, ranging from 2-years-old to 39-years-old, each woman was able to share on her child's potential and outcomes. No mother reported being totally disappointed or disenchanted regarding their children's outcomes or potential. Although several of the SAAMs with adult children reported that to feeling that their children were not living up to their fullest potential but had achieved the ability to be self-sufficient. One participant with adult children shared that as a mother you never stop worrying or being concerned. She felt you realize that your children reach a point where they have to learn to trust God for themselves, to make it through life. The majority of the participants in this study were actively parenting, and still had children in school at varying levels (college, high school, middle school, elementary and pre-kindergarten). These women appeared to have prepared themselves to support and encourage their children along their life's journey. They seemed to be grooming their children to set goals that challenge their normal levels of performance, which goes along with the social learning theory. Pajares, 2002 stated that an individual will push themselves to whatever lengths and do whatever is necessary to achieve expected outcomes even in the face of adversity. The ability to work through hardships and troubling situations is nothing new African Americans. The historical experience of slavery and the struggles associated with merely being African American comes with its set of challenges.

Social persuasion. As asserted by Bandura (1995) social persuasion is ability to persuade individuals to believe they have the skills and capabilities to be successful. Hearing of someone's successful experience or being encouraged directly by positive reinforcement can persuade an individual that they can achieve a goal. The encouragement can be helpful in overcoming self-doubt and allow for the attention of the individual to focus on achieving the goal. The SAAMs in this study, have provided data which indicates social persuasion as a truth. They described being inspired by others to do well. The women felt reassured that being a single mother did not determine a lifetime of failure for children or herself.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, the following limitations are noted. The population was relatively homogeneous limited to single African American mothers, living in the tristate area (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware). The women had to have been or currently was the primary caretaker of their child/children. The single African American mothers had to confirm that, their children had not as minors: (a) been arrested on felony charges, (b) had issues with substance abuse, or (c) dropped out of school. These parameters around the guidelines for participation may have eliminated candidates based on the behaviors of their children during their adolescent years. There are many young people who struggle during this period of their life, making wrong decisions, they later amend. Some single African American mothers who have had children who had experienced levels of adversities during childhood may offer another aspect of parenting as a single African American mother. Phenomenological research

limits the opportunity to produce definitive conclusions. This study was conducted without projectable outcomes, as its findings are a result of the personal lived experiences of 15 single African American mothers. The results from this study will provide a significant source of information to support those concerned or interested in developing services for the SAAMs, or gaining a better understanding of how their children succeed even in the face of adversity.

Also being a single African American mother, I thought it to be essential that countertransference and bias be avoided. I recruited a peer-reviewer, who was a master's-level clinician to ensure objectivity and to corroborate the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation would be to expand the research by studying the fathers' of the children who are now being raised solely by single African American mothers. Most of the men who had conceived these children with the single African American mothers in the study had little to no involvement in the lives of their children. In response to every other challenge of being an SAAM, the participants appeared to demonstrate a high level of maternal self-efficacy, except in areas concerning the fathers' of their children. Each expressed how they believed the void impacted their children, but felt incapable of getting the men involved or connected with the children in a way that would be fruitful. It would be interesting to find out why the fathers are not involved and what could be done to improve the connection and relationships with their children.

Another recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative study examining the children of single African American mothers, who managed to avoid adversities. One of

the questions asked of the participants in the study questioned what their children would say about them. A large number of the responses were prefaced with the suggestion to ask the children. Also a study of this nature may provide insight and information regarding the impact of the absence of the fathers that could be helpful in navigating the male children not to replicate the behaviors of their fathers. It can also enlighten the female children regarding their choices of male partners. Having an opportunity to hear directly from the children their lived experiences may help in shedding light on what can be done to improve the number of individuals who have positive outcomes.

Finally, it is suggested that this study be replicated with single African American mothers between the ages of 18-30. As most of the literature available which speaks to the demise of the children of single African American mothers are composed primarily of mothers' within this age group. It would be interesting to explore the similarities and differences in beliefs, practices, and attitudes of the younger group of single African American mothers and the group participating in this study. The data produced may be favorable in helping to address some of the problem areas traditionally identified in this group.

Implications for Social Change

Several implications for social change are depicted within the findings of this study. While this study provided a voice to single African American mothers to share the resiliency and self-efficacy factors that have allowed them to parent their children with favorable outcomes. It also provided an opportunity for the identification of areas that could be developed and enhanced to support single African American mothers.

Addressing the areas of vulnerability possibly lessen negative encounters. Purposeful involvement from faith-based organizations, implementation of educational advancement opportunities and research methodology would be areas of urgency that should be under consideration.

Each of the 15 women participating in this study identified their faith in GOD as the nucleus of their strength, determination, and abilities in relationship to their role as a mother and an individual. The SAAMs in this study voiced a level of excitement, hope and gratitude for having had the opportunity to share and connect with other women who shared and understood their plight. In unison, they made a request that I consider initiating a support group for single African American mothers once the study was completed. Engaging the single African American mothers in the study did not propose a significant challenge for me. It appears that single African American mothers would be appreciative of just being afforded the opportunity to convene in a safe environment; converse with women who are aware of what their struggles entail; and support and encourage one another. The realization for some of the single African American mothers that they were not in this struggle alone appeared to provide comfort and strength to them.

It would be ideal for faith-based organizations to research what type of support and assistance can provide for these women and their children. The information shared and collected during the focus group and from the evaluations, clearly indicate a need and desire for such a support group. The data from the study also exhibited a high level of trust and respect for faith-based support. Therefore some of the tedious work in

establishing support groups, which includes getting members to have confidence in the provider has already been established. The cost associated with formulating such a group would be very minimal. The group would not need to be created in such a manner where someone would be “preaching” to the single African American mothers, they get how GOD works for and with them. However, I do believe that the facilitator of such a group should possess a level of knowledge about counseling and supportive services. The thought process of establishing such an endeavor could similar to other self-help groups.

Culturally, SAAMs have been drawn to and supported by faith-based organizations, I believe if such a group were created, the single African American mothers would come and invite other single African American mothers. The group should consist of SAAMs who are currently and those who have formerly parented. This would provide insight, motivation and support among the women. As revealed in the findings from this study, single African American mothers are inclined to be highly influenced by other females and faith-based entities. The formation of such a group may also prove beneficial in helping to curtail and possibility decrease some to the typical negative factors associated with younger SAAMs and her children, as depicted in past research.

Two of the questions that were posed to the participants during the focus group provided compelling responses, which are indicative of the sacrifices and the needs of single African American mothers. When the women were asked about their greatest sacrifice as an SAAM?” The predominant response from the single African American mothers with regards to their greatest sacrifice as a single African American mothers

centered on them not continuing or pursuing their educational goals while actively parenting. Several of the single African American mothers talked about the inability to juggle school, children, work and home. The SAAMs talked about the barriers they faced as parents. Trying to balance work, which was a necessity, with the responsibilities and expectations that come along with being a parent (school meetings, extra-curricular activities, homework, etc.). They felt there was no room to incorporate an educational opportunity for themselves into the equation. Lack of finances for babysitters, classes, books, transportation, etc. was also brought up as an obstacle to the single African American mothers continuing their education. The desire to further their education and skills exist, but the means and other supports necessary to do so are lacking.

When asked: “If you could make a request of President Barack Obama for single African American mothers, what would it be?” Education was the response of the single African American mothers. The majority of the SAAMs in the study shared they would request assistance with education for themselves. They wholly commended President Obama for his initiatives regarding the opportunity for free community college. The current trend of the government to address the need for education should continue on all levels: national, state and local. The establishment of supportive services (on-campus childcare, transportation assistance, computers, and book stipends) are things that need to be considered when working with single mothers.

This study was established, principally, in response to the significant gap that exists in the qualitative literature which have examined the single African American mothers’ views of their experiences as single mothers. There have been limited studies

conducted with regards to the influence of cultural values, beliefs/practices and strengths gained through adversity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, research is needed that will allow a comprehensive understanding of specific risks, their origins and means of alleviating them as well as resilience factors that allow these families to thrive must be identified (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2013; Parent et al., 2013; Taylor & Budescu, 2013). There is limited research that examines the functioning, rather than the structure of the families headed by single African American mothers (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2013; Moore-Hines, & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). This research project provided an opportunity for the examination of the how much an individual's own beliefs in their own abilities and past experiences influence their outcomes.

For this study, the theories of the resiliency model and social learning were examined. The findings from this study support the characterizations of the theories, demonstrating a huge emphasis to the influence of faith and culture in relationship to resiliency and maternal self-efficacy. The adversities experienced by the participants in the study, where perpetually reported to be managed through the inspirations of faith and culture. While the findings from this study will offer data that can be beneficial to future research, social policies, and clinical applications, further investigation with this population is necessary.

Summary and Conclusion

Historically, research conducted on single African American mothers has primarily focused on the demise and devastation of their children. Past research has only provided an inadequate amount of information which explores the cultural aspects, along

with the factors of resiliency and the maternal self-efficacy of single African American mothers as they relate to their childrearing practices. SAAMs who raise their children with successful outcomes have been disregarded, and their experiences are consequently abrogated. This study bestowed an opportunity to determine patterns that exist among single African American mothers who raise children with successful results, notwithstanding the odds. It provided a voice for single African American mothers. There is not a need for further speculation by others as to what is the essence of the SAAMs abilities to thrive despite the challenges associated with single parenting. The participants in this study have deemed GOD and their faith to be the central factor in providing them with strength, direction, support and the tenacity needed to raise her children successfully. These 15 women provide a voice that speaks assertively to their desires to be educated, and for their children to be educated. It is the desire of single African American mothers to produce and raise children who will contribute positively to society within a diversity of forums. The SAAMs have reverberated academics, social, financial, cultural and spiritual throughout the study to be of great importance. These single African American mothers have shared on the barriers and obstacles which inhibit them from participating in the lives of their children. These pose a hindrance to aspects that are crucial to the emotional development, self-esteem, and sometimes the health of their children. By conducting a culturally sensitive study, the SAAMs were able to share comfortably and confidently on factors they believe to be important and of great influence with regards to them raising their children. The “village” which has been a cultural inspiration within the African American community historically, is alive and

thriving. Past studies have been constructed on deficit-focused models. However, the single African American mothers in this qualitative study have lent their booming voices and challenged the past findings of quantitative studies, which were saturated with hopelessness and spoke to disastrous ends for the African American family as a whole. If hope for the children of African American families dies, the African American family dies. These single African American mothers speak life! They express hope for the futures of their children, the world, and themselves. The SAAMs had an opportunity to share their lived experiences, resulting in a source of data that can be applied in various ways for future.

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the factors of resiliency and maternal self-efficacy of 15 single African American mothers as they related to their childrearing practices, measuring the capacity to influence the outcomes of her child/children. These women were able to share the essence of their lived experience with regard to her journey as a single African American mother. In working with the participants throughout the study, their faith emerged as such a crucial element to their survival and success. Their trust and faith in GOD provided strength and direction to them as an individual and as a mother. The factors of resiliency exuded from the stories shared by the women participating in this study. They were found to have: good early bonding with another female (mother, grandmother, aunt, etc.) high self-esteem; strong perception of competency and a strong faith foundation. Besides to being outgoing/social and having the ability to ask for assistance. Their innate abilities to pull things together and display dispositional optimism was apparent. They provided confirmation to the

definition of self-efficacy, which ascribes them to being able to approach difficult situations head on, with a sense of ease. The findings from this study gave credence to the abilities of single African American mothers to use their resiliency and maternal self-efficacy as a provision of directing their children towards positive outcomes. Sometimes the participants were totally oblivious to the negative impressions or stereotypes of others. During other times, in sheer determination to prove them wrong, these single African American mothers imparted what they believed to be the essence of their successful upbringing of their children. Single parenting is not new to African American women. For many years, single African American mothers have had to raise children as the primary caregiver. They have parented related and non-related children with the same love, enthusiasm, and expectations. Employing the knowledge, skills and tools generated from role models and cultural attributes, needed for success. These single African American mothers have been sold out on the philosophy that “if you can believe it, you can achieve it.” They have set goals for their children’s success. These objectives were sometimes spoken, sometimes not, but these women appear to have sacrificed whatever necessary to see their children afforded the opportunity to obtain favorable outcomes. Many times that sacrifice being herself (sleep, shoes, food, education, etc.).

In conducting this study, it is the hope that the findings will be instrumental in setting a tone for future research. The findings from this study offer sound literature which help to eradicate the negative stereotypes formulated by earlier studies which focused on the adversities, by examining the lived experience of single African American mothers. It is of great importance that culturally relevant models of study and qualitative

methods of research, be employed in the study of single African American mothers and their children. Research of this formation tends to provide a more positive and holistic perspective of the phenomenon. It is hoped that the findings from this research will promote further investigation into the factors that may contribute to the lack of acknowledgement, delays or interruptions of the positive outcomes of single African American mothers and their children. Change agents (clinicians, politicians, researchers, faith-based leaders, community leaders, etc.) should follow these studies closely and use them for the development of supportive family policies and prevention efforts regarding single African American mothers and their children.

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Appendix A: Criteria Qualifier

Project Title: *Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers*

The information collected will be used solely for completing the dissertation research project identified above as partial fulfillment of requirements for the PhD degree at Walden University.

- *A Single Mother – is a female individual who is parenting or has parented a child/children as the primary caregiver, as a result of divorce, death, adoption, choice, out of wedlock, or as assumed responsibility of a child/children. Would this definition describe you as a parent? Y ___ N ___*

(If no, thank candidate and end screening)

In efforts to ensure the safety and voluntary participation in this research, I will need to ask the following questions:

- *Are you under the age of 18? Y ___ N ___*
- *Do you currently reside in an apartment or private home, not operated or monitored by an institution or agency? Y ___ N ___*
- *Do you consider yourself to be a mentally disabled individual? Y ___ N ___*
- *Do you consider yourself to be an emotionally disabled individual? Y ___ N ___*
- *Are you currently pregnant? Y ___ N ___*
- *Do you have any professional or working relationship to the researcher? Y ___ N ___*
- *Are you currently experiencing a crisis situation or any acute illness at this time? Y ___ N ___*
- *Do you consider yourself to be economically disadvantaged? Y ___ N ___*
- *Are you 65 years old or older? Y ___ N ___*
- *Have any of your children, prior to their 18th birthday, ever been arrested for felony charges? Y ___ N ___*
- *Have any of your children, prior to their 18th birthday, had issues with substance abuse? Y ___ N ___*
- *Have any of your children, prior to their 18th birthday, dropped out of school? Y ___ N ___*

(If yes to any of the above questions, thank candidate and end screening)

- *Do you speak, read, and understand English fluently? Y ___ N ___*

If candidate meets the above qualifications, the participant consent form should be completed at this point, before moving on to the next set of questions.

You have met the qualifications to participate in this study. At this time I would like to review with you the informed consent form to so you can determine rather or not you would be in agreement to participate in the study. (Researcher will review participant consent form with candidate. If candidate is in agreement with the terms outlined in the consent form, candidate will sign and will be given a copy for her own records. At this point of the process, the candidate will now be referred to as a participant).

Appendix B: Participant Consent Letter

You are invited to take part in a research study because you are an African American single mother, parenting or have parented as the primary caregiver. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named_____, a doctoral student at Walden University. The researcher is employed at_____. She is an African American single, mother of three children.

Background Information:

Little research has focused on single African American mothers who have raised their children with successful outcomes. Much of the research that has been done with this group has focused on negative outcomes. This study is intended to give these mothers an opportunity to share their thoughts/feelings regarding the unique challenges of culture, parenting styles/skills, and social supports that have allowed them to successfully raise their children.

This study will look at the behaviors, beliefs and practices of single African American mothers who raise their children with successful outcomes.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete the Participant Data Collection Sheet with the researcher to determine if you meet the criteria for participation in the study.
- Review and sign the Participant Consent Letter with the researcher.
- Participate in a research study that will be conducted over a 2 month span.
- Participate in an initial one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will basically be to complete the Interview Protocol Questionnaire (1- 1 ½ hours), which will ask you questions regarding your experience as a single mother.
- Participate in a 2- hour focus group with 10-15 other single African American mothers who are participating in this study to discuss any commonalities that may exist between the *participants*. ***There will be a licensed professional “peer observer” at the focus group whose only role will be to observe the researcher to ensure that***

the study remains unbiased. The actual focus group will run about 1 hour, with a 40 minute break for lunch which will be provided for you; and 20 minutes to ask any question and to complete the Participant Focus Group Evaluation.

- Participate in a ½ hour follow-up interview with the researcher and discuss your participation and views about what you have experienced via a telephone conference.
- Having both the individual and focus group sessions audio taped.
- Agree to review the transcript of the interviews. Transcripts will be sent out via email or regular mail.
- Complete the Participant Feedback Form.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary:

- No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study.
- If you decide to participate in the study now, you can still change your mind during the study.
- If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time.
- You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

There will be no compensation or reimbursement for travel associated with participating in this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks of participating in this study include sharing your behaviors as a mother, how you were raised, your own parenting practices, and how comfortable you may be with sharing this personal information. However, sharing your experience as a single African American mother will benefit the African American community, by providing examples of women who overcome life issues and successfully raise their children. Professionals (social

workers, psychologist, and therapist) will also benefit from gaining an understanding of what allows women like you to successfully parent. Your contributions to this study may help to build a model for research involving other single African American mothers and their children which may change future researcher, programs, funding, and society as a whole.

Should your participation in this study cause you to need support, local resources for free and low cost counseling services are available:

- Council for Relationships 4025 Chestnut Street Philadelphia, PA 19111 215-382-6680
- Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine Center for Brief Therapy 4190 City Avenue Philadelphia, PA 19131 215-871-6487
- Methodist Services Community Counseling Services 4300 Monument Road Philadelphia, PA 19131 610-252-2000
- CAMcare Health Corporation 801 Ferry Avenue Camden, NJ 08105 856-602-4012
- Mental Health Association of SW New Jersey 505 Cooper Street Camden, NJ 08102 856-966-6767
- Widener University Community Counseling Center 610-499-1261
- Catholic Social Services 240 N. Springfield Road Springfield, PA 610-626-6550

If you have private medical insurance, you can access counseling services through your mental health services provider, which will be listed on the back of your insurance card.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will only be limited in cases where the researcher is legally bound by federal or state law to report risks to public health, bodily harm, terrorism, or child abuse. These matters would have to be reported to the appropriate authorities. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reported of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone or email at ****@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call *****. She is the Walden University Research Participant Advocate who can discuss this with you. She can be reached at (***)*****or by email irb@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is September 7, 2014 and it expires on **September 7, 2015**. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a voluntary agreement to participate. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date of consent: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix C: Participant Data Collection Sheet

Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

City, State & Zip Code _____

Phone #: _____ Email Address: _____

Race/Ethnic Background: _____

Number of Children: _____
 (Number of biological: _____ Number of adopted: _____ Number of assumed responsibility _____)

Age & Gender of Children:

1. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____
2. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____
3. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____
4. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____
5. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____
6. Age _____ Sex _____ Highest grade completed _____

Marital Status: Married _____ Separated _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____
 Single (never married) _____

Highest Level of Education Completed:

- _____ 11th grade or under
 _____ High School Graduate/GED
 _____ College Degree (Assoc./BS/BA) Major: _____
 _____ Graduate Degree (MA/MS/MSW) Major: _____
 _____ Advanced Grad Degree (Ph.D., etc.) Field: _____

Profession (Current Occupation): _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide: Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers

Introduction: My name is (name of researcher) on (date) with participant (assigned #). I am going to ask you about your parenting experiences as a single African American mother with regards to resilience (ability to recover from negative experiences and situations or to cope with stress and adversities) and maternal self-efficacy (feelings of competence in the role as parent). There is no right or wrong answers; I am basically interested in your honest opinions, thoughts and feelings.

Initials of participant: _____

1. How old were you when you had your first child, and when did you become a single parent?
2. What are the challenges and rewards of being a parent?
3. What's the most difficult part of being a single parent? How do you manage that?
4. How do you think your child/children would describe you?
5. What do you do to balance your life?
6. Who were you raised by and how would you describe your childhood experience?
7. Is there any particular experience you had in your own childhood that has influenced the type of parent you are?
8. Who would you describe to have been a role model for you as a parent? Why?

9. How many siblings do you have and what number are you?
10. Have you found it easy or difficult to ask for help with your children when needed?
11. What is it about your personality that you feel has impacted your children?
12. How would you describe your children's outcomes to date?
13. What is your greatest strength and your greatest challenge, as a person?
14. What do you believe are society's perception of you as a single African American mother? What do you think makes them feel that way?
15. What are your perceptions of your child/children's overall potential? Why do you feel this way?
16. What qualities do you believe you have imparted to your child/children that will influence their long term outcomes?
17. How would you describe your "support system" and how has or lack of a support system(s) impacted the lives of your children?
18. How would you describe your parenting style?
19. Do you have a religious affiliation, if yes, how have your faith based beliefs/practices impacted your parenting?

20. How active would you say you are in faith based activities (attending church/temple, etc., prayer, meditation)?
21. Who would be the person or people most influential in making you the individual you are today? Why?
22. What influence, if any do you believe culture has influenced you as a parent?
23. Is the father or fathers of your child/children involved with the child/children? If yes, what impact does this have on your children?
24. How has the involvement or lack of involvement of your children father impacted you?
25. What advice would you give to your child/children regarding single parenting?

I am going to read to you a list of resiliency factors used most often, I am going to read you the list, you can let me know which of these you have used in the past or currently used while parenting and I will check them off.

- Relationships - Sociability/ability to maintain positive relationships
- Inner Direction - Bases choices/decisions on internal evaluation (internal locus of control)
- Perceptiveness – Insightful understanding of people and situations
- Independence – “Adaptive” distancing from unhealthy people and situations/autonomy
- Positive View of Personal Future – Optimism, expects a positive future
- Flexibility – Can adjust to change; can bend as necessary to positively cope with situations
- Self-motivation – Internal initiative and positive motivation from within
- Competence – Is “good at something”/ personal competence
- Self-Worth – Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence
- Spirituality- Personal faith in something greater
- Perseverance – Keeps on despite difficulty; doesn’t give up

Appendix E: Participant Focus Group Evaluation

The Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers

Of dissertation research project identified above as partial fulfillment of requirements for the PhD degree at Walden University.

(Name of researcher), Researcher

Participant Initials _____

1. When you hear the term single African American mother, what is the first thought that comes to mind? _____

2. What do you feel societies' overall thoughts are about single African American mothers? _____

3. Prior to your participation in this study, have you ever heard any of the following the terms: "resiliency, resilience, or resilient?" Y ___ N __.
If yes, which one have you heard of and what do you understand the term to mean?

If yes, had you ever heard the term used to describe single African American mothers?

Y ___ N ___.

4. Prior to your participation in this study, have you ever heard the term “maternal self-efficacy or self-efficacy?” Y ___ N __. If yes, what did you understand the term to mean?

If yes, had you ever heard the term used to describe single African American mothers?

Y ___ N ___

5. As a participant in this study, you have heard resiliency described as one’s ability to navigate successfully through negative and stressful situations. While maternal self-efficacy is defined as a mother’s ability to achieve successful outcomes in child rearing despite adversity. If there was one particular aspect of your resilience or self-efficacy you would desire your child/children to emulate, what would it be, and why?

6. How did participating in the focus group today with other women who have similar situations as yours make you feel?

7. What image do you feel society holds with regards to the children of single African American mothers?

8. Do you feel that participating in this study has impacted you in any manner? Y ___ N ___. If yes, please explain how.

9. What is one essential point you take away from this study that you would want to influence society with regards to single African American mothers and their children?

10. Additional comments:

Thank you for your participation in this study

Appendix F: Participant Feedback Form

RESILIENCY AND MATERNAL SELF-EFFICACY OF SINGLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Date: _____

REVIEW GUIDELINES

Complete this feedback form, using the following scale: **NA** = *Not Applicable*
1 = *Strongly Disagree*
2 = *Disagree*
3 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*
4 = *Agree*
5 = *Strongly Agree*

EVALUATION

	(5) = <i>Strongly Agree</i>	(4) = <i>Agree</i>	(3) = <i>Neither Agree or Disagree</i>	(2) = <i>Disagree</i>	(1) = <i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Researcher demonstrated respect and listened to me throughout the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The materials used to conduct the study were easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt I could ask questions about things I didn't understand or wanted to further information on.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the importance of having a study like this one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not feel harmed or threatened by any aspect of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel excited about the possibility of influencing change with regards to studies regarding single African American mothers and her children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that the information already available regarding single African American mothers and her children is sufficient and provides a good representation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I feel empowered by my participation in the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I learned information that will be helpful to me and my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I felt that my confidentiality and integrity were respected during the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I consented to participate in the study, and gave honest feedback throughout the process.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am satisfied with the feedback from the researcher regarding the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I enjoyed participating in the focus group with the other women.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Additional Comments:

Appendix G: Confidentiality Agreement

During the course of my activity in reviewing this research: “Resiliency and Maternal Self-Efficacy of Single African American Mothers.” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s names are not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I will only access or use systems or devices that I am officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

License Number (if applicable): _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Focus Group Questions

1. Warm-up question: We are going to ask you guys to pair up with another group member to start? I ask that if you be sure to connect with someone you don't know already. To get us all in a common frame of reference, I would like you to each discuss: ***“As a single African American mother, what do you believe is/was your greatest attribute (s) in raising your child/children?”***
2. How much do you believe how you were raised has impacted your thoughts, practices or beliefs in the rearing of your children?
3. How would you describe the overall view of society with regards to single African American mothers and her children? How does impacted you in raising your child/children?
4. Have you ever or do you feel judged being a single mother? How? When?
5. How do you feel your faith or spiritual beliefs have influenced your parenting?
6. How would you rate the following in terms of importance (using 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) to your parenting, and describe why:
 - ***Family/Social Supports***
 - ***Faith***
 - ***Culture***
 - ***Parenting strategies***
7. How do you feel your child/children were able to avoid some of the adversities, other children of single African American mother struggle with (poor academics, substance abuse, teen pregnancy and illegal behaviors)?
8. What would you say has been your greatest challenge as a single African American mother?
9. What would you describe as your greatest sacrifice, as a single parent?
10. If you had an opportunity to make a request to President Obama as a spokesperson for single African American mothers, what would it be for and why?
11. Our final question as we end our focus group, Is there anything else that anyone would like to say or add about our discussion?

Appendix I: Study Flyer

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT THE RESILIENCY AND MATERNAL SELF-EFFICACY OF SINGLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

_____, a doctoral student at Walden University (Walden University IRB # 09-08-14-0063658) will be conducting a research study that explores the experience of single African American mothers who raise children with successful outcomes. Historically research has pointed to the demise and poor outcomes of African American children who are raised by their mothers alone. Little effort has been made to give single African American mothers an opportunity to look at the factors of resiliency and the maternal self-efficacy as they relate to their childrearing practices, measuring the capacity of influence on the outcomes of her child/children. The purpose of this study is to investigate the behaviors, beliefs and practices of single African American mothers and commonalities that may exist among the participants. This research project will provide an opportunity for single African American mother to tell the story her own story providing a more positive and/or holistic perspective, with the hopes of facilitating the development of supportive family policies and prevention efforts for those affected by this phenomenon.

A Single Mother – is a female individual who is parenting or has parented a child/children as the primary caregiver, as a result of divorce, death, adoption, choice, out of wedlock, or as assumed responsibility of a child/children.

Please contact _____ at _____@waldenu.edu for additional information and if interested, to schedule an interview.

Study for Single African American Mothers _____@waldenu.edu	Study for Single African American Mothers _____@waldenu.edu			
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Appendix J: Participant Demographics

Participant CODE	Age	Marital Status	Age At Marriage/ DIVORCE	Mother's age OF INITIAL PARENTING	Children's Gender/Age	Relation to Children Biological/ Adopted/ Assumed Responsibility	Participant Education Level	Employed (Yes/No)
001	57	Divorced	22/22	18	Male/39 Female/35	2 -Biological	Some college	Yes
002	49	Divorced	30/33	33	Female/18	1-Biological	Some college	Yes
003	46	Divorced	25/42	19	Male/26 Male/21 Female/23	3-Biological	Some college	Yes
004	52	Divorced	23/36	24	Male/28	1- Biological	High School Graduate	Yes
005	41	Single		26	Female/17	1- Assumed Responsibility	Graduate Degree	Yes
006	38	Single		21	Male/16	1- Biological	Bachelors' Degree	Yes
007	25	Single		22	Female/3 Female/2	2- Biological	Some college	Yes
008	54	Divorced	23/38	23	Female/30 Female/29 Male/26	3- Biological	High School Graduate	Yes
009	51	Single		25	Female/25 Female/23	1-Adopted 1- Assumed Responsibility	Associates' Degree	Yes
010	44	Single		17	Female/27	1- Biological	Bachelors' Degree	Yes
011	36	Single		19	Male/18 Male/4	1- Biological 1-Adopted	Some college	Yes
012	47	Divorced	28/33	29	Male/18	1- Biological	Currently attending College	Yes
013	42	Divorced	25/27	25	Male/17 Female/17 Female/19	2- Biological 1- Assumed Responsibility	Graduate Degree	Yes
014	38	Single		18	Female/19 Female/16 Male/8	3- Biological	Some college	Yes
015	37	Single		20	Male/18 Male/11	2- Biological	Associates' Degree	Yes