


2016

# Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education

Jackiethsha Lynette Fluellen  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

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Jackiethsha Fluellen

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education

by

Jackiethsha Fluellen

MA, Prairie View A&M University, 2009

BS, University of Phoenix, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education and Adult Learning

Walden University

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## Abstract

The number of households headed by single mothers living in poverty exceeds that of all other categories of poverty-stricken households, and poverty impacts the children negatively in various ways. When single mothers choose not to continue their education, they lessen their chances of finding higher paying jobs and raising their families out of poverty. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand why some single mothers decided to continue into higher education. The study considered the decisions of 6 single mothers of young children in Montgomery County, Texas, and the obstacles they overcame while completing their education. The women were recruited from a co parenting workshop using snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria included single mothers of children ages 0-10 years old and who obtained a degree or specialized certificate. The conceptual framework was based on Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and Carspecken's critical theory. Interviews were used with the 6 women to collect data that were then transcribed, compared, coded, and thematically analyzed. Emergent themes included overcoming obstacles, receiving help from others, acting as their children's role models, dealing with the impact of the father's absence, and receiving motivation from their own parents. The social significance of this research is that it illuminates the problem of poverty among single female-headed households and increases the understanding of why some single mothers decide to continue into higher education.



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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to all single mothers with young children. Work hard and sacrifice now to set a positive path for the family's future.

## Acknowledgments

First, I must praise God for guiding me through this incredible journey. I would also like to give thanks to my mother and father, Pamela Murphy and Gary Richardson, for their encouraging words and to my grandmother, Edith Elaine Petties, for her assistance with my children during this path in my life. You all have been so helpful. I would also like to give thanks to my family and friends, Wilbur Fluellen, Tressie Fluellen, Amber Murphy, Christina Lockett Jones, Shantrice Holly, Carmeshia Edwards, and Sisily Rainey. They are always encouraging and keep me grounded with sound advice.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem .....	3
Local Problem/Rationale .....	6
The Purpose of the Study.....	8
Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature.....	8
Single Mothers and Low Wages .....	9
Support for Households in Poverty.....	10
Definitions.....	11
Significance of the Problem.....	11
Guiding/Research Question .....	14
Review of the Literature .....	15
The Conceptual Framework.....	15
Current Research.....	20
Implications.....	38
Summary .....	39
Section 2: The Methodology.....	41
Introduction.....	41
The Research Design .....	41
Phenomenological Studies .....	41

The Elimination of Other Qualitative Studies .....	46
Participants.....	46
Obtaining Participants for the Interviews .....	47
Researcher/Participant Relationship .....	49
Privacy Protection of the Participants.....	51
Data Collection .....	52
Data Analysis .....	54
Validity and Member Checking.....	56
Discrepant Cases.....	57
Themes From Research Findings From the Interviews .....	58
Continued Education.....	58
There Were Hardships .....	59
Scheduling and Planning Is Important.....	59
Overcoming Obstacles.....	61
Receiving Help From Others .....	62
Existing as Their Children’s Role Models.....	62
In the Absence of the Children’s Fathers.....	64
Parental Motivation for the Single Mothers of Young Children .....	66
Conclusion .....	71
Section 3: The Project.....	72
Introduction.....	72
Description and Goals.....	73

Rationale .....	74
Review of the Literature .....	75
Professional Development and Learning Goals.....	76
Professional Development and Motivation.....	77
Types of Professional Development .....	78
Self-Efficacy in Professional Development.....	78
The Purpose of Professional Development.....	80
Implementation .....	80
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	81
Potential Barriers .....	82
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	82
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others .....	84
Professional Development .....	84
Implications Including Social Change .....	85
Local Community .....	85
Far-Reaching.....	87
Conclusion .....	88
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	90
Introduction.....	90
Project Development Strengths.....	90
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	91
Scholarship.....	93

Project Development and Evaluation.....	93
Leadership and Change.....	94
Analysis of Self as Scholar .....	95
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	95
Analysis of Self as Project Developer .....	96
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	96
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	97
Conclusion .....	98
References.....	100
Appendix A: The Flyer for Interview Participants .....	126
Appendix B: The Interview Questions .....	128
Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation .....	130
Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation .....	131
Appendix E: Professional Development 3-Day Agenda .....	133

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Information..... 68



## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

This doctoral study explored the lived experiences of six single mothers who completed or are currently completing their education while raising children ages 0 to 12 years old. The study also focused on the single mothers' perspectives on continuing their education (Dayton, 2005). Single parenthood has become increasingly common in the past thirty years with the number of single-parent households increasing between 1990 and 2010. Dayton (2005) specified that over this period, there have been more child births from unwed men and women, divorces, remarriages, cohabitations, and single-parent families in America than ever before. According to the U.S. Census in 2010, a total of 14,843,000 households are headed by women, whereas only 5,580,000 are headed by men. Huber, Stephens, Bradley, Moller, and Nielsen (2009) indicated the greater part of the households in the United States were headed by women. In addition, 91.4% of households maintained by single mothers with dependent children were listed as below the poverty level. In short, as Yoshikawa, Aber, and Beardslee (2012) argued, households with one parent are more likely to stumble upon poverty. The level of poverty stated in the 2010 U.S. Census needed to be addressed and recommendations in policymaking needed to occur to strengthen the quality of life for the households of single mothers with young children (Keller, 2010; Yoshikawa et al., 2012).

In providing evidence that fewer single mothers with young children continue their education than that of single fathers of young children or married couples with

young children, two subtopics were assessed. The first topic was single mothers and low wages, exploring the many reasons why mothers with young children often receive low wages. Information related to these issues included the following: most single mothers do not possess a higher education degree, those who do have a higher education degree work jobs with low wages, and single mothers bring in one limited income for the entire household (Keller, 2010). Since the mother is single while caring for the household, she carries much stress while ensuring that the child's needs are met as well as her own (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011). The complication of low wages often stems from not obtaining a degree that leads to a career that contributes more income for the household (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011).

The second subtopic was support systems for households in poverty. This subsection explained that many single mothers with young children need to procure support from various sources, including family, friends, and support groups. Because 91.4% of the single, female-headed households were living in poverty, single mothers were not able to afford daycare for their young children (0–4) who were not yet old enough to attend public school; therefore, they needed to have a family member or friend care for the children during their absence (Drake & Rank, 2009). Also, due to heading a household in poverty, the mothers were not able to afford extracurricular activities for their children and sometimes enlisted a family member to financially support them in this area (Lleras, 2008).

### **Definition of the Problem**

Poverty is defined as having a gross family income below the financial amount the household needs to obtain in order to cover expenses acquired such as the bills of the home (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). Zhan and Pandey (2004) asserted that poverty has many causes, but families with only one parent are particularly susceptible to poverty. Edin and Kissane (2010) concurred that, after divorces, two-parent households often become single female-headed households and the family ends up living in poverty because of the change from two incomes to one lower income. In a survey highlighting the education of single female heads of household in the United States, 47% (3,930,000) had only a high school diploma or no diploma at all (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In comparison, 53% (4,489,000) of the single female heads of household in the United States had an incomplete higher education degree (attempted to obtain a degree further than a high school diploma, but did not obtain it) or obtained a higher degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Single women without children in the home that had only a high school diploma or no diploma represented 52% (1,158,000) in the 2010 United States Census, while 48% (1,061,000) had an incomplete higher education degree or obtained a higher education degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Single men with children younger than the age of 18 living in the home that had only a high school diploma or no diploma represented 53% (1,173,000), while 47% (1,050,000) of the single male heads of household in the United States had an incomplete degrees in higher education or obtained a higher education degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Married couples with children younger than the age

of 18 who had only a high school diploma or no diploma at all represented 34% (8,374,000), while 66% (16,200,000) of married couples had an incomplete higher education degree or completed a higher education degree.

Edin and Kissane (2010) postulated that there are numerous possible reasons for household poverty including job changes, relocation, and disability. Households in poverty exist in part because of a lack of continued education that boosts the average household income (Lleras, 2008). This was true especially for women heads of households because they comprised a greater percentage of families in poverty than single male heads of households do; 91.4% of homes are single female-headed households, and 8.6% of homes are single male-headed households. Of the 84.9% households headed by single mothers, 91.4% were living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The effects of poverty extend further than a lack of physical resources available to the family. Children living in poverty are much more likely to experience child abuse, exhibit behavioral issues in school, and have low reading development/comprehension (Drake & Rank, 2009). Drake and Rank (2009) also explained that other negative aspects of poverty include violence and arrest, exposure to environmental hazards, crime victimization, and schooling with low test scores. One issue that accompanies households in poverty is the need for assistance in food, shelter, and childcare.

When a single parent of two or more children possesses only a high school diploma or less, getting the household out of poverty tends to be more difficult (Hill,

2011). Single mothers who have incomplete higher education degree attainments, meaning less than a full degree, brought home more personal income than single mothers with no more than a high school education or less (Pandey & Kim, 2008). The studies of Hill (2011), Pandey and Kim (2008), and other researchers showed the importance of higher education in keeping single-parent households out of poverty. Children living in homes headed by mothers fare better in terms of educational attainment and economic stability if their mothers obtain college degrees (Augustine & Crosnoe, 2010). It is more plausible that these children will stay in school, have increased possibility to graduate from college, and be less likely to go to prison, experiment with drugs, etc. (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). Single mothers attaining a college education reinforce the importance of education for the entire household. Thus, understanding the barriers to continuing education from the perspective of single mothers becomes particularly significant if a community yearns to increase the number of single mothers making the choice for postsecondary education.

Bandura (1977) commented that when people successfully execute the behavior needed to attain what they have envisioned for themselves, self-efficacy serves as the driving force to get them to their desired goal. Based on principles stated by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is an important quality enabling women heads of household to help raise their households out of poverty. Ronning (2009) observed that students with high levels of drive (an aspect of self-efficacy) work harder, study harder, and participate in activities they believe will help them reach their desired goals. It follows that when single

parents continue their education or receive a college degree, the percentage of households under or at the poverty line may be lowered (Lleras, 2008). With low intensities of self-efficacy, there may be low intensities of drive, while high intensities of self-efficacy often correlate with higher intensities of drive (Nwankwo & Onyishi, 2012). The best way of positively influencing self-efficacy is to successfully master a task (Korpershoek, van der Bijl, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2011).

This study explored, from the perspective of single mothers, the factors that influenced them to pursue higher education, probing the participants' own perspectives of self-efficacy and how it may have related to their educational decision-making processes. In short, this study examined what drives single mothers who are heads of household in making educational pathway decisions from the perspectives of the interview participants.

### **Local Problem/Rationale**

In 2008 – 2010, the Montgomery County United Way (2012) in Montgomery County, Texas, reported that 42.1% of the households headed by women (without a spouse) lived at or below the poverty level. Of this 42.1%, only 11.3% worked full-time, and both unemployment and underemployment were considered major factors to family poverty in these households (Montgomery County United Way, 2012). A total of 86.2% of Montgomery County residents in Texas graduated from high school, and 29.8% of the graduates continued on to acquire a bachelor's degree or higher (Montgomery County United Way, 2012). Yoshikawa et al. (2012) agreed with this assessment by explaining

that higher income, more often available to those with a higher education degree, lessens the family's monetary struggles. Further, the Montgomery County United Way stressed that the lack of postsecondary training for single mothers affected not just them and their economic stability, but also that of their children. Thus, more women need to attain higher education to lower the number of single-mother homes with young children living in poverty within Montgomery County.

The Texas Acts of the 76th Legislature (1999) noted that all Texas colleges should create and possess a standardized system of identifying, attracting, retaining, and enrolling students that reflect the population of Texas, with special attention paid to disenfranchised populations, including single parents and people experiencing poverty. However, within Montgomery County, there is little concerted outreach toward single mothers. Lleras (2008) and Yoshikawa et al. (2012) shared that continuing education is one way for single mothers like those in Montgomery County to raise the household out of poverty.

One decision made by the single mother head of household can affect the household for a lifetime. At the completion of this research, the findings brought forth positive insight from the life changes of the single-mother participants who continued their adult education; the research findings also revealed effective guidelines to combat the issue of households headed by single mothers who reside in poverty.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand why some single mothers decide to continue into higher education. The study attempted to uncover the influences related to the decisions of single mothers of young children in Montgomery County and also the issues or obstacles they overcame while completing their education. Some of the information gathered identified the reasons for making the decisions to continue their education and the thoughts that may have led them to the decision to continue their education. Once the association between continued education and fewer households living in poverty was identified, strides could be taken to empower positive change in the economic status of single-mother households and decrease the instances of poverty. Single mothers with young children who do complete higher education could act as role models and inspire others to change their life's trajectories; moreover, through their collegial experiences, single mothers with significant responsibilities might learn how to (a) be a change agent in their lives and other single mothers' lives, and (b) advocate for themselves and lead other people, as their protégés, to success.

### **Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature**

In this section, the evidence of the problem was presented from professional literature. The subtopics discussed in this section are: (a) single mothers and low wages and (b) support for households in poverty. These two subsections aided in understanding the lives of single-mother heads of households and what actions eliminated the adverse circumstance of poverty in the home.



## **Single Mothers and Low Wages**

Single mothers tend to have a harder time tending to the family financially because they do not have a spouse and may need help in providing for the family. The financial burden is often carried by the single mother alone. Bianchi (2011) explained the two ways family life has changed (in the last fifty years): more mothers have to work outside of the home to assist bringing in more household income, and more mothers are single heads of households. Many mothers today work during their pregnancy and as close to the due dates of their childbirths as possible (Bianchi, 2011). The jobs at which single mothers without higher education work tend to pay low wages (DeFina, 2008). This fact coupled with not continuing her education tends to leave the single female-headed household in a continuing state of poverty. Gazso and McDaniel (2010) expounded that single mothers are informed that they should not take for granted the assistance they receive from the government and should work toward monetary independence. If the single mother is not in a relationship that leads to marriage or cohabitation, one logical option is to continue her education, receive a degree, and procure a career to lift her household out of poverty. Many households use public assistance as a safety net to help with the financial strain (Dodson, 2007). In addition to Dodson's (2007) statement, Ridge and Millar (2011) noted that many single-mother households are financed by multiple monetary means, some of which include child support, housing benefits, and child benefits.

### **Support for Households in Poverty**

Support for single mothers who are the head of a household is important and can be a determinant of how the children in the homes fare based on the support they receive. Emotionally, single mothers may receive support from family and friends. Research by Bandy, Andrews, and Anderson Moore (2012) showed that single mothers who report receiving sufficient emotional support had children who were more involved in school. Martin (2012) judged that the government and some private-funded programs provide much support for mothers in terms of daycare, but not much support for finding and keeping jobs. Financial support has also been made available for single mothers in need by state entities and government entities as well.

Through bonds that the single mother has with friends, family, and other single parents, support with childcare and finances can be prearranged (Hawkins, 2010). McLanahan (2009) explained that social support or bonds with others are viewed as insurance for the single parent when help is needed. In terms of emotional support, Taylor (2010) explained that, when there is emotional support from kin for the single mother, order and routine are present in their lives as well.

Many types of assistance are available for single-parent households living in poverty. One type of assistance for families in need is called TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). In 2011, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012) reported that a total of 955,984 single-parent households received TANF assistance. In the state of Texas, the number receiving TANF assistance was 15,043. The

amount of 15,043 TANF recipients is lower than in some states, but there still needs to be a positive change in households receiving welfare aid.

### **Definitions**

Several relevant terms will be utilized throughout this study:

*Chronic poverty and transient poverty:* Chronic poverty is explained by Barrientos and Neff (2011) as poverty that extends unmitigated over an period of time. With transient poverty, people are in poverty for a short period of their lives (Barrientos & Neff (2011).

*Head of household:* A person who is unmarried, pays more than half the household bills, and has another person living in the household (Internal Revenue Service, 2013).

*Self-assessment:* When learners set goals and use learner autonomy to evaluate themselves and their learning progress (Adeyemi, 2012).

*Self-efficacy:* The deep-rooted understanding that an individual can successfully complete the behavior required to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). The term also pertains to the drive within everyone that moves a person toward completing a goal. Self-efficacy may also be explained as people's discoveries of how well they have completed tasks based on their capabilities to complete the tasks at hand.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Exploring the drive of single mothers with young children in continuing their education had critical implications for both local and national populations. Single

mothers stress over income and resources more than do married or cohabitating couples because they are the only source of income for their household (Lleras, 2008). The Montgomery County United Way (2012) provided local information of the percentage of single-female households residing in poverty as 42.1%, while single-parent households headed by men residing in poverty was 9.0%.

Because the percentage of single female-headed households residing in poverty is the highest percentage of households living in poverty locally and nationally, continued education is one of the best ways to create economic independence for the single mothers of young children who are heads of household (Martin, 2012). Some specific programs for continued education are trade schooling, schooling for certifications for specific employment, and going to college to obtain a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral degree. It becomes critical to understand single mothers' perspectives on continuing education to make education more accessible. In addition, stakeholders need to combat the obstacles that hinder the single-mother heads of household from continuing their education so that assistance can be given in lifting their households out of poverty.

If the trend of single-mother-headed households living in poverty continues, negative effects may continue or increase in Montgomery County, Texas, one of which may be more children living in or being exposed to poverty. Living in poverty may prohibit children from having healthy diets, positive learning/school experiences, and from being able to participate in activities that require membership fees or dues. Children living in poverty may also lack the opportunity to travel and see different areas of their

country, state, or other regions of the world due to the lack of discretionary income to do so.

Another negative effect of single-mother led households living in poverty is that the mothers often do not have quality time to spend with their children's activities including playing games, helping their children with reading and writing skills at home, and teaching the children household skills such as cooking healthy meals because they are working multiple or overnight jobs to provide for the family monetarily. Some children also lack proper clothing for fall and winter seasons due to the shortage of income. In addition, many children grow up believing poverty is an acceptable way of life and continue the trend when they get older and have children of their own. This trend then becomes a generational trend, which may be more difficult to break. As the children perceive the poverty as a constant aspect of their family, they may fail to hope for more and work toward a better life.

Nationally, the United States has made available many programs to aid families living in poverty, and the government allocates a plethora of funds to different organizations to help those in need and/or who live in poverty although funds are constantly being misappropriated. If the number of households living in poverty remains the same or increases, the government may not be able to continue providing funds for those organizations due to the strain on the U.S. budget (Smith, 2013).

Martin (2012) agreed that educating single mothers to fight poverty would lower the percentage of households living in poverty. Champlain College in Burlington,

Vermont, has a program specifically geared toward single parents that teaches them how to advocate and support themselves through workshops, access to various available resources, and services to aid in reaching their educational and career goals. Over 500 single parents have gone through the program and have earned degrees. Also, the 500 single parents who received welfare while in school and graduated with a degree from college in Vermont no longer needed welfare (Marklein, 2010). This appears to validate the claim that single mothers continuing education can lift their households out of poverty.

Exploring the drive of single mothers of young children in continuing their education also benefited the children in the home in that the mothers may set a positive example of working hard toward a goal. Single mothers continuing their education also exemplified the truth that even with only one parent in the home, goals can still be achieved. Another positive aspect of single mothers continuing their education was the pride the single mothers felt when they obtain a higher education degree while raising children without a helpmate, working full-time, and maintaining a household or the feeling of experienced self-efficacy.

#### **Guiding/Research Question**

When women further their education, their wages increase as well (Perry & Gundersen, 2011). The number of female heads of household far exceeded that of their male counterparts. In addition, the percentage of female heads of household living in poverty exceeded that of males nationally and locally. Cancian and Reed (2009) reported

that single-parent households are five times more likely to be in poverty than two-parent households.

The research questions set a path for the research and contributed to understanding the mindset of single mothers in Montgomery County, Texas, and the ways society aided in lowering the statistics of poverty in single female-headed households. This study was steered by the following research questions:

RQ1: Why do some single-mother heads of households that have young children decide to successfully complete their higher education degrees?

RQ2: what characteristics must be in place to produce self-efficacy in single mothers with young children and what makes them want to succeed?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **The Conceptual Framework**

This study drew on a two-pronged conceptual base. The first examined Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. The second used Carspecken's (1996) critical theory. Bandura's work on self-efficacy was important because it highlights the complexity of beliefs that contribute to a person's decision making. Bandura (1977) identified that self-efficacy is the certitude that a person can positively fulfill the intent to produce desired outcomes. Self-efficacy mainly focuses on capabilities to achieve precise outcomes, and self-efficacy is primarily defined by the situation of the person (Holzberger, Philipp, & Kunter, 2013). A person is drawn to goals or obstacles that may be encountered based on that person's degree of self-efficacy.

Degrees of self-efficacy can be swayed by past experiences, whether positive or negative, but it does have some influence on a person's decision-making capabilities (Bandura, 1977). People have little incentive to act when difficulties arise unless they have belief in themselves and that what they work toward will come to fruition (Jackson & Scheines, 2005). Within the aspect of self-efficacy, future decisions are made based on a person's level of self-efficacy, which indicates its importance. Self-doubt and self-esteem are factors as well. Self-efficacy and self-esteem may have a reciprocal relationship (Maccio & Schuler, 2012). Maccio and Schuler (2012) also shared that self-esteem affects self-efficacy. Individuals with high self-esteem can perceivably control their situations with greater levels of self-efficacy; however, persons with low self-esteem and lower amounts of self-efficacy may not be able to control their situations.

Seeing another person who has similar backgrounds or circumstances succeed helps in raising individuals' own self-efficacy and the belief that they, too, can succeed (Bandura, 1977; Joët, Usher, & Bressoux, 2011). As Freudenberg, Cameron, and Brimble (2010) implied, lack of self-efficacy can hinder single mothers and their ability to achieve a higher educational status. Jackson and Scheines (2005) added that higher self-efficacy in single mothers was due to employment and resulted in fewer instances of the mothers becoming depressed. The use of the concept of self-efficacy was included in researching the ties between the self-efficacy of single mothers with young children and continuing their education at the same time. Probing a woman's perspective provided me the ability to understand the aspects of her beliefs, values, motivations, and perceptions of obstacles



toward pursuing continuing education. These are all, as Bandura (1977) argued, contributors to self-efficacy.

Based on the research completed by Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, and Zumbrunn (2013), when motivational conditions are less than perfect and tasks prove to be demanding, self-efficacy is essential or women start to doubt themselves and the possibility of them attaining their goal. Self-efficacy motivates a person to forge through complex dilemmas and focus on success, not failure. On the negative side, the ability to suitably manage different negative emotions may reside in a person's self-efficacy beliefs and capabilities (Caprara, Di Giunta, Pastorelli, & Eisenberg, 2013). If a person does not possess the ability to complete a specific task, the person's level of self-efficacy may be low. In addition, if a single mother with young children feels that she is not capable of completing a task but has the ability, then it may be deduced that her level of self-efficacy is low. A person's generalized self-efficacy level is swayed by a person's ability (Miyoshi, 2012). Oman et al. (2012) concluded that self-efficacy may be higher for individuals who are spiritual or religious due to the practice of teaching optimism. Decisions made, including decision making regarding career choices, show negative and positive associations between trait anxiety and self-efficacy contingent on the outlook of the situation and the optimism and pessimism of the surroundings (Işik, 2012).

In order for individuals to embody self-efficacy, they may need to be able to perform self-assessments. In accordance with research performed by Adeyemi (2012), self-assessment involves the individual self-questioning and reflecting on tasks at hand.

In the self-determination theory (SDT), when failing to meet goals, an individual has feelings of low self-worth, negative feelings of self, and self-criticism (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The second aspect of the conceptual base draws on critical theory. While this is not a formal critical theory form of research, I recognize that single mothers living in poverty are disenfranchised and that the issues being probed—educational access, poverty, and decision-making—are power-laden. This presence of power and disenfranchisement necessitates explicating a critical perspective as a means of framing this study. From another perspective, Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Regalia, and Scabini (2011) believed that people are not just products of their life circumstances but are contributors due to the decisions they have made in their lives, an idea derived from Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy.

Critical inquiry aims to reveal oppression and seeks to bring about equality (Carspecken, 1996). Critical theory emerged and was advanced by the Frankfurt School after the destruction brought by World War II (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Theorists of the Frankfurt School, including Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), Habermas (1975), and Marcuse (1966), among others, began to consider inequality, oppression, and destruction as omnipresent social conditions. Critical theorists view such social conditions as a necessity to explain humanity's need to dominate and oppress, but to combat such tendencies, they call for political action and work toward freedom, rationality, and equality (Carspecken, 1996). In this study, which examined women who

may have once been disenfranchised by society because of their socioeconomic level, decisions to raise children as single parents, and, in some cases, their race, a critical perspective acknowledges that these women do not hold powerful positions in society and that self-efficacy for them may look different than for a woman coming from a position of privilege. Critical theory supports that power is unequally distributed within society and that certain groups (e.g., single mothers of young children living in poverty) are disenfranchised as a result (Carspecken, 1996). I clarified that studies informed by this knowledge seek to give voice to groups whose perspectives are often unheard and, therefore, are not a part of decision-making processes. Another aspect of critical theory is that, based on Carspecken's (1996) explanation, becoming informed tends to be a liberating realm for the groups or individuals affected. This study sought to give a voice to single mothers on the topic of continuing education in an effort to understand, from their perspective, what continuing education means and what makes continuing education a reality for them. Thus, by paying attention to the women's perspectives, both holistically and within the overall concept of self-efficacy, I gained understanding of the complexity of the decision to pursue continuing education for the women in my study.

In this study, critical inquiry served as a guiding theoretical perspective of the study. This influenced, in particular, the concepts of facts and values within the critical inquiry study. Unlike positivist or postpositivist research, in critical inquiry facts, values, and ideology cannot be removed from the research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Critical research, however, realistically expects a researcher's values to affect

interpretation and epistemology, so it is vital to investigate the connection between factual and value claims rather than pretend that an entirely objective stance can be achieved (Korth, 2005). I am a single-mother who recognized that the challenges posed in continuing her education were substantial. This research may help readers understand how single mothers view and make choices about their education.

### **Current Research**

This section explored the current research literature that aided in the development of the idea that there is a link between self-efficacy and single mothers with young children who abstain from continuing their education. Three foci showed the parallel between self-efficacy and the absence of higher education for single mothers with young children: (a) women and self-efficacy, (b) the occurrences of children in single-parent uneducated homes, and (c) women and higher education. Each section delved into the implications of single-mother heads of household and how education or the lack thereof guided the lives of the single mothers and the children living in the household.

**Women and self-efficacy.** This research study expanded the current literature on women and self-efficacy. It was imperative to expound on the self-efficacy of single mothers to aid women in planning and working toward a better future for themselves and their families. Single mothers with young children were then be able to clearly advance to continuing their adult education after combating any existing low levels of self-efficacy. Bubany and Hansen (2010) provided that insight into self-efficacy and its impact on learning experiences.

The information presented aided in the research of single mothers who are heads of household by showing that single mothers have more responsibility than the fathers of the same children (Erchull, Liss, Axelson, Staebell, & Asakari, 2010). Erchull et al. (2010) asserted that women in relationships feel obligated to take on the bulk of the responsibilities in the marriage and with the children because they believe they wanted it more than their male partner did. In another aspect, the participants' self-efficacy may be lower in regard to wanting to reenter into the learning world because of doubts of success in an unfamiliar environment (Kim, 2009). Bonnycastle and Prentice (2011) shared in their research that many mothers do not continue their education in higher learning because they feel overloaded with the demands of home, work, and school. Student persistence in higher education was directly determined by self-efficacy and academic integration of the student (Weng, Cheong, & Cheong, 2010).

Academic integration is seen as the ways students integrate themselves and submerge themselves into the required coursework. It involves concentration, study time, and much focus. Also, Thomas et al. (2009) noted that as self-efficacy increases in the higher education learner, so does the persistence to complete the task; motivation to learn more; and resilience as a student, a worker, and a parent. Continuing the effort toward examining women and self-efficacy, the use of podcasting in college classes rather than attending lectures depends on the students' department, outlook, and self-efficacy (Chester, Buntine, Hammond, & Atkinson, 2011). Chester et al. (2011) commented that it does not matter whether students use lecture recordings or other resources in the course

of their schooling; the use of any and all resources available to help get to the desired outcome is valuable and promotes higher self-efficacy. Higher degrees of self-efficacy are needed to be successful throughout the duration of completing a higher education degree, as is having the drive to want something more as far as level of education, way of life, higher income, and happiness.

To help develop students' self-efficacy, higher education institutions need to actively stimulate students' self-efficacy through positive interactions (Van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). Some of the positive interactions mentioned by Van Dinther et al. (2011) include cooperative learning, focusing on the students' talents and what they can contribute to the group, and producing programs in which much of the students' previous knowledge is used. The information provided added insight to certain factors that may influence the single mothers who are heads of household while examining their self-efficacy and the causes leading to their self-efficacy levels pertaining to continuing education. Self-efficacy decreases when individuals spend useless time on the computer and using other electronics (Odaci, 2011). Examples of useless time would include time spent on Twitter and Facebook. Odaci's (2011) research is important because it demonstrates that procrastination and self-doubt can come into play when time is wasted on activities that are less meaningful. The self-efficacy of single mothers applies not only to self-efficacy for themselves and their ability, but also to self-efficacy in the decisions they make pertaining to their children's health (Holland et al., 2011). When single

mothers of young children have low self-efficacy in their parenting abilities, they do not make wise decisions about their children's health (Holland et al., 2011).

**Single mothers, stress, and health while living in poverty.** The role of women in the 1950s consisted of them being homemakers and caring for the children while their husbands worked and brought in the family income (Lemoine, Mayer, Gordon, Johnson, & Budden, 2011). The current status of women could not be further from that role. In accordance to single mothers representing the majority of single caregivers of young children, women more often than men, have to assume dual roles in their households (Osbourne, Lawrence, & Magnuson, 2012). Reasons for women gaining the role as a single mother to a child or children could entail any of the following: divorce, death of a husband and father of the children, or having children outside of marriage. In the event of divorce or death of a husband, the now-single mother of children generally experiences a loss of economic status or of social or health resources (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

In the event of becoming a single parent without marriage, the single mother may already be accustomed to taking on multiple roles at once without the help of a husband. Some people may frown upon non-marital childbearing because, as illustrated previously, the single mother then takes on all the responsibilities of raising children alone. They may anticipate hardships upon the single mother that could have been avoided with the help of a husband to share in the home responsibilities. The dual roles that the single mothers may have to assume are that of primary caregiver of the children in the home and

of primary source of household finances. Thus, single mothers of young children may endure stress due to juggling these two very important roles of the home. Stress can be alleviated or diminished through the care giving help of family members (Zabkiewicz, 2010).

Single mothers are also susceptible to increased anxiety, major depression, agoraphobia, and mood disorders due to being the single breadwinner for the household. In addition, single mothers have to mind the children, tend to the home, and work many hours with low pay, if they have not completed a higher education degree (Wade, Veldhuizen, & Cairney, 2011). Single mothers of young children who have not obtained a higher education degree may also neglect their personal health due to inadequate health insurance coverage or because they cannot afford health insurance (Holland et al., 2011). The children may be covered by their fathers' health insurance through their employment, which leaves the single mothers uninsured. In the event of some single mothers having children with disabilities, financial security is diminished or lowered due to having to provide finances for specialized care, medication, and doctor visits (Parish, Rose, Swaine, Dabanah, & Mayra, 2012). Such a situation may also add stress to single mothers because they may worry more about being able to provide all of the above without the financial help of a husband or help in caring for the children with disabilities.

**Children in uneducated single-parent households.** Lack of education emerges as a possible contributing factor to the poverty issue (Brady & Burroway, 2012). Much of the existing research explains how children often become misguided and lost in the world



of academics, parental love and attention, and societal misfortune. Past research leaned toward the notion that adolescents living in poverty may possibly have decreased amounts of self-control than their more privileged counterparts (Mandara, Rogers, & Zinbarg, 2011). In addition, mothers who are better educated are more absorbed in their children's education and communicate regularly with their teachers about their progress in school (Augustine & Crosnoe, 2010). Much research has been conducted on parental involvement and its weight in the success of children in schools (Johnson, 2013). Some parents may believe that children learn only in school, but in actuality, the parents are their children's first teachers. For a child to learn and retain the information taught in the schools, they must practice at home, sometimes with the help of their parents. The importance of education in the household should be modeled by the parents continuing their education and exhibiting positive learning habits. Such parents also tend to help the children with their homework and projects for school.

While living in poverty, many parents may tend to not discern the effects of poverty on the children. Much attention is placed on how they feel and how they live in day-to-day life. To reduce their levels of stress by worrying about different issues including schooling, clothes, and even food, single mothers of young children living in poverty may tend to teach their children to not worry about the future. Some single mothers may even encourage their children to seek help through prayer and find strength in faith. Past research has indicated that children who are cultivated in poverty in the household have greater negative experiences than those who did not grow up in a

poverty-stricken household (McFarlin, 2012). This information may be true because there may be no extra money in the household finances to afford extracurricular activities, family trips, vacations, and other amenities. It may also be due to the frustration of not having disposable income to have fun or exciting events to experience with the family, which may lead children living in poverty to reverting to criminal activity for excitement. In the interim, parenting stress, if continued, hinders the health of single mothers (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

In single-mother homes, work demands and hours conflict with home responsibilities and childcare (Son & Bauer, 2010). Many single mothers with young children may struggle to find a balance in keeping the home clean, cooking meals for the family, tending to the family laundry, working 40+ hours weekly, and twelve other tasks that keep a household functioning. Most single mothers may choose the chore with the highest priority and tend to that chore at that time. To make sure all the said aspects of the home are taken care of, single mothers may have the children of the home complete assigned chores as a duty to the family and in an effort to have help with various responsibilities of the home. Also, in the aspect of hierarchy in the household, because the single-mother household is deficient of the male role in the home, authority is viewed vertically instead of with a view of the male partner helping in the discipline (Nixon, Greene, & Hogan, 2012).

Another negative aspect of single mothers' workloads and their low wages could entail the problem of their children suffering from childhood obesity. With single

mothers having less time to cook meals for the children, some may resort to fast food or freezer dinners, both of which are unhealthy options for the children (Miller, 2011). In some cases, fast food is cheaper than buying healthy meals for the children (Miller, 2011). The cheaper option of value meals and dollar menus may also seem enticing when single mothers of young children without a higher education degree receive less pay in the workforce.

There is evidence that parents who continued their education can become positive role models for their children, influencing their children toward obtaining a degree and overcoming poverty (Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009). For single mothers, being self-sufficient without a higher education degree may be unrealistic (Swaner, 2011). Shpancer et al. (2010) revealed that the majority of the study participants recognized positive parental involvement in their childhood education. Some of the past positive parental involvement would include one-on-one time during homework completion, quality parent/teacher communication about their progress in school, participation in the parent-teacher organization (PTO), and attendance/involvement in extracurricular activities. The participants who reported negative recollections of their childhood expressed that there was little to no parental involvement in their education.

The lack of parental involvement may derive from working long shifts or multiple jobs, which causes the parent to become absent in the household. Research shows a negative effect of poverty in parent-child relationships (Jung, 2009). Parents who have completed postsecondary education positively influenced their children's decision to

pursue college education because they were able to give advice on experience in school expenses, sacrifices, and the dedication it took to complete the journey (Fike & Fike, 2008). For example, through their life paths, parents who are computer engineers, nurses, lawyers, or electricians can show their children the difference between the income of their career choice and that of someone who does not have a higher education degree.

In addition, the children often follow the lead of the head of household in their own decisions of whether to pursue higher education (Christofides, Hoy, & Yang, 2009). Parents who were students set a positive example, and the future positives can far outweigh the present negatives such as spending less time with the children while in school (Estes, 2011). For example, as the parent initiates study time during the week and actively works toward obtaining good grades in school, the children see their parent and mimic the effective study habits. More time can be spent with the children after the degree is obtained due to higher pay and less hours spent at the workplace; thus, single mothers may have to make sacrifices in the present for the greater benefit of the future.

Based on recent findings shared by Crosnoe and Kalil (2010), maternal education may matter in the children's achievement in school. This information is pertinent in this research, showing ties between maternal education and the educational well-being of the children in the homes headed by women. According to some studies, mothers, more than fathers, were the ones to most encourage their children to go to college and achieve their goals (Hammill, 2007). Tieben and Wolbers' (2010) research expounded that children of

lower socioeconomic status choose paths that are less advantageous in college degree attainment than do children of a higher socioeconomic status.

Along with higher education of the parents, the parents' pursuit of a college degree increases the chances of the child successfully pursuing postsecondary education (Trivette, Wilson-Kearse, Dunst, & Hamby, 2012). Some of the activities included tutorial sessions, academic enhancing activities, group/peer mentoring, homework assistance, group counseling for the parents, financial aid preparedness for the parents, and other preparatory programs. Encouragement and parental involvement in career choice, college choice, and financial aspects of college help to mold students into successful postsecondary graduates (Smith, 2008). In addition, being a present and helpful parent from the beginning of the child's school years through high school graduation may aid in the child's success in higher education.

**Access and higher education.** Access to higher education has been customarily divided into three capacities (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013): (a) academic orderliness with a concentration on how students organize their lives for college level assignments in primary and secondary education; (b) the college the prospective student becomes interested in attending, and (c) the ability to afford attending college through scholarships, loans, grants, full-time/part-time employment. Each of these elements is studied, with significance given to the distinction between distance education and face-to-face education. Before the 1960s, attending college was afforded only by upper-class males (Brock, 2010). Also, many men felt that they did not need to attend college to be

successful. The men would learn a trade and become successful enough at that one trade to live comfortably. The same idea of learning a trade after high school and becoming successful in that one trade continues to entice many men in today's society, as well as in the 1960s. Some of these people may excel and become successful in the workforce while others may work harder for less pay for many years. In obtaining a higher education degree, people may not have to work as hard, yet receive higher pay. According to Brock (2010), the traditional student from the 1960s to 2000s often relied on the parents for financial backing and attended college while working only part-time or not at all. This way of life is decreasing; more students have to work, tend to families, and so forth while attending college.

Two very important aspects of college access, Winkle-Wagner (2009) added, pertain to academic readiness, financial readiness, and academic preparation through attending elementary, middle, and high school. Many prospective students are riddled with the question of how to obtain the needed funding for college. Some of the various ways to pay for college include work/study, financial aid, private loans, grants, scholarships, and pay as you go. After a single mother makes the decision to attend college, the next decision should be how to afford attendance.

Some people may tend to forget that completing primary and secondary education may help individuals in successfully completing higher education. Primary and secondary schooling prepares the minds of many in a "ladder" fashion. A person completes one level successfully and proceeds to the next level, which leads the individual to being

college bound. If a person does not complete a level but proceeds to higher education, success in higher education may not as be feasible. Brock (2010) inferred that some believe the low persistence and completion in higher education stemming from unpreparedness and lack of practicing teaching concepts that reach all types of learners in primary and secondary schooling.

**College preparation for single mothers.** Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar (2005) generated that the academic research literature has had grave concern with the preparation of students' coursework for primary or secondary education. Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) and Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow (1997) shared that the current research gives insight into certain issues: the effects of academic importance in parental involvement, which was provided by Lareau (2003), as well as the impact of schools in preparing students for higher education and goals for their academic years (e.g., trade and vocational schools vs. four year institutions). Vague from these observed examinations into scholarly preparation are discoveries of how students may perhaps need to organize in a different way for university assignments that are presented in the brick and mortar college institutions opposed to college assignments that are accessible online or by means of collective types (e.g., courses that are offered wholly through online instruction and coursework, wholly through classroom instruction and coursework, or through hybrid--a combination of online and classroom). One reason for this deficiency may be a lack of understanding of the differences between course offerings (i.e., objectives or how syllabi possibly are at variances among various types of class

offerings). Also, single mothers may need to seek assistance in childcare while attending school and while focusing on coursework assigned by the professors. When deciding on the type of coursework and college, single mothers may need to be mindful of these two important points; type of courses and childcare arrangements.

**Single mothers choosing the right institution.** In literature focusing on college choices for prospective students, Desjardins and Toutkoushian (2005); Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989); and Paulsen (2001) revealed that decisions are based on a person's goals, finances, and the prospect of moving upward on the social class ladder (e.g., the competence to gain an advanced status and advanced paying jobs). Research studies of the continued education selection process soon followed and have begun in providing focus on cultural persuasion, elaborated by Paulsen (2001), Kane (2006), Rowan-Kenyon (2007), and Perna and Titus (2005). Social influences, for example, include affiliations with peers, relatives, or staff of collegiate institutions. Valadez (2008) proposed that ethnographic research on attending practices are not primarily about costs and benefits but about negotiating important issues such as where the college is located and how to finance the education (e.g., wanting to remain near family), with familial concerns (e.g., students' responsibilities in the family home, wanting to provide for the family, decreased understanding and support from the family).

**The educational course track and the family.** The growth of internet course student acceptance and degree programs has altered the dialogue about higher education acceptance. The process of choosing the right college in relation to face-to-face education



or online education programs may alter the way people make their decisions. There is a concern about the amount of access to all the resources available for students when choosing various course paths. Online learning has increased in colleges and universities (Castle, 2010). This may be due to having access to course content, assignments, and so for that any time of the day. Being able to reach students over a multitude of countries and being the most popular avenue for higher education, online education may be a great way for single mothers to obtain higher education degrees (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012).

Less is known about the dissimilarities in how courses are constructed and organized as well as the time slots in which they are completed in person or through distance education or as hybrid courses (i.e., alternative time slots may be offered for individuals who work full-time and through courses that are an intermingling of “in person” courses and online courses). Having available class times that are created for prospective students who have unusual work schedules could alter the way prospective students view continued education. In addition, it may change the contemplations of college attendance and choice of which college to attend. For some mothers of young children, online education may be the more practical route due to worries of accessible babysitting, babysitting fees, and time and money spent commuting to and from classes. To avoid the costs of babysitting services, many single mothers who are students have family members, including grandmothers and great-grandmothers that assist in the care for their children in their absence (Pierce & Herlihy, 2013). In addition, women with

children and strenuous responsibilities who are making the decision to continue their education later in life may seek online education as the preferred academic route for their lifestyle (Delgado Garcia & Oliver Cuello, 2010).

**Financing a college education as a single mother.** Finally, college affordability through scholarship interconnected to college access and attendance often focuses on the way students conquer financial barriers to attending colleges and universities. Financial aid (e.g., scholarship, loans, grants, etc.) has been evidenced as an aspect of the most significant factors in shaping whether a student has the ability to continue their education after high school (De La Rosa, 2006; Perna, 2006; St. John, Paulesen, & Carter, 2005), and eventually, whether the student achieves their degree.

**Women and higher education.** The ASHE Higher Education Report (2011) exposed an increasing number of male enrollments in higher education. The current study will illustrate that many single mothers with young children tend to discontinue their learning and education, primarily because of the concerns of childcare and the children not having their mother at times when they need them most (Dodson, 2007). Other reasons include life demands, household responsibilities, and childbearing. Johnson (2010) provided insight into how women may feel about going back to school as well as anxieties women face while pursuing a higher education degree. Johnson's own accounts of struggle and sacrifice are examples of needed steps to obtain the desired result. Most single mothers have emotional strains and struggles when trying to balance their school, family, and work responsibilities all at once (Hayes Nelson, 2009). All of the above may

also be a strain on the single mothers because they often neglect personal time to relax and rejuvenate. Not taking the needed time for relaxation may lead to accumulated stress and anxiety, which may lead to health issues.

Women with young children may have low self-efficacy with regard to reentering the educational path. During the educational journey, the level of self-efficacy may increase due to the completion of goals and excelling in academic performance (Jang & Kim, 2010). Wainwright and Marandet (2010) shared that with many single mothers, the motivation to be a good single mother provides the drive to continue college education and obtain a degree and professional career. Another type of motivation that is essential to the progress of single mothers continuing their education is support from friends and family. Encouragement helps the single mother progress in her schooling with a positive outlook and higher self-efficacy becomes the result that is the driving force in the completion of degree attainment. In respect to Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, Artino et al. (2012) evaluated that the self-efficacy of single mothers has nothing to do with their ability; rather, it relates primarily to their belief that they can achieve their goals against all obstacles. In addition, it may behoove single mothers of young children to dismiss or alleviate all aspects of their lives that may be of hindrance, such as boyfriends who are not helpful or productive, friends who do not have the same goals in mind, jobs or careers that do not foster time or encourage the completion of a higher education degree, and partying. It would also be in the single mother's best interest to refrain from dating because fostering a new relationship with a significant other could

take away time and effort from completing the goal of attaining a higher education degree.

Returning to school is a critical way for a single mother to improve poverty statistics and positively impacts the economy as well. Returning to college and achieving a higher education degree changes the person and the family monetarily, socially, and psychologically (Long, 2010). Maintaining the households of single parents, particularly single mothers, has been a concern due to the costs of welfare with so many single-mother households living in poverty (Mokhtar & Platt, 2010). Murray (2009) reported that obtaining higher education degree not only allows for a monetary change to the family, but also yields other positive aspects, such as better health due to better healthcare, less crime due to more funds in the yearly earnings, and the children achieving degrees. Attending and completing higher education, attaining training, and developing skills are the most logical ways to relieve poverty in the lives of single women who are heads of households (Faul, 2012).

Completing a higher education track is the most appealing way to gain finances and move up in social class (Ramsey, 2013). In most cases, receiving a higher degree could mean a salary increase of \$10,000 or more per year. In most cases, having a higher education degree and earning more money in a yearly salary negates the cost of obtaining the degree. When people gain more knowledge, they may yearn for more in their lives, including advancement in their career or another career that yields more income for the household. Mothers who attended higher education displayed intrinsic motivation, and in

turn, the children began developing intrinsic motivation for learning as well instead of the usual extrinsic motivations (Ricco et al., 2009). For example, in most cases children expect a tangible reward for successful learning, such as video games, money, or other gifts, but as they witness their mother wanting to do better just to succeed, they may in turn do the same.

Milne (2008) also illustrated the obstacles she overcame while caring for a gravely ill child. She used a journal to record and track her experiences, feelings, and emotions about what she and her son were going through while she attended school online. Caring for a sick child is just one of the obstacles that may arise as mothers return to school. Other obstacles may include not having available childcare, demands of the college professor, obligations of work and family, and lack of time for coursework completion (Sturm, 2010). Obtaining a degree and influx of commission are directly correlated for single mothers. There is an implied understanding that if a single mother does not further her education, obtaining increased income may be unlikely; obtaining a higher-paying career while being uneducated as a single mother proves to be very difficult (Sturm, 2010).

Single mothers joining with other single mothers in continuing their education is an effective way for them to both network and uplift each other in the obstacles of academia (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). Engberg and Wolniak (2010) also proved that friends with similar interests and lifestyles motivate friends in educational settings and goal attainment. Therefore, single mothers can become positive motivators for other

single mothers in continuing their education. Also, single mother friends who are attending college at the same time or together could offer advice on different aspects of their lives to make improvements or diminish levels of stress. Some such tips may include making larger meals so they will not need to cook every day, using Sundays as the day to prepare for the week-- ironing the family's clothes, packing multiple baby bags, and completing all of the laundry could be a system that would work for many mothers. Some colleges employ the practice of having deans or prominent women/graduates as mentors in an effort to maintain positive gains in female college students and graduates (Morris, 2011). In making this effort to retain female students, the mentors could offer sound advice on how to make lifestyle changes that are conducive to goal attainment, which, in this case, is obtaining a higher education degree.

### **Implications**

There was an implication that if single mothers were to continue their education, they would bring in more income for the household. Based on the data collected, I am led to believe the implication to be true. The goal of data gathering was also to assist single mothers in accomplishing their goals of higher education with evidence showing self-efficacy in their continued education brings many rewards such as more income as explained before. The research lead me to create an informational session through a three part professional development aimed at single mothers with young children with interests in continuing their education. The informational sessions also be tailored for policymakers and reveal key issues about poverty among single-women-headed

households. There are various outlets that the data could be used for as it pertains to advancing education among women. As an example, when the research lead to developing an informational webinar, the facilitator highlighted the key findings and the conclusion of the research from the study. There were college representatives and liaisons present to provide the attendees with materials and resources pertaining to enrollment into community colleges and universities and the different course tracks they offer. In addition, engaged opportunities for tips from successful single mothers of young children who have completed their higher education degrees and a question and answer session occurred. As stated previously, the project emerged after the completion of the research according to the type of project needed based on the research findings. I thus allowed for the research to develop and help guide me to the path/project best suited to this research, without permitting a bias.

### **Summary**

In summary, Section 1 of the research presents clear information relating to the number of single-mother headed households there are in the United States. Most single-mother headed households are in poverty, and the households' poverty affects the children as well as the mothers in many ways. Section 1 also introduced one way for single mothers of young children to raise their households out of poverty. That way is to continue their education and begin a career that brings in more money for the household. The facts pertaining to poverty in the households of America were provided, as well as,

the proportion of female headed households existing in poverty. The significance of the problem and the research question were provided for the reader as well.

Section 2 will delve into the methodology of the current research. Sections 1 and 2 both serve as introductions to Section 3, where participants will be studied and the results of the research will be shared. The methodology gives the readers a clear theme of the research by presenting a background of the study and laying the foundation for the rest of the research as well. The current research may be seen as a new contribution to the world of research due to it providing insight into how single mothers of young children make decisions of continuing education based on drive as an extension of self-efficacy.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The decision to explore the drive of single mothers with young children in continuing their education was based on the continuing problem of poverty that is predominant in the homes of single women with children. A plethora of single mothers are trying to maintain their households with one income or with combined incomes from various sources; for instance, the inclusion of child support payments, and part-time jobs (Swaner, 2011). In the interim, the issue remains of poverty in the United States and in Montgomery County, Texas, of which single-mother heads of household are a predominant group.

### **The Research Design**

#### **Phenomenological Studies**

I used a qualitative research methodology with a phenomenological design. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because I was seeking to understand participants' own lived experiences and decision-making processes. Quantitative approaches to these queries would not have sufficiently captured the participants' perspectives. Inductive approaches in qualitative research consist of observations, interviews, and document analysis (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). The qualitative research approach is a less restraining approach to research without the imposed structures present in other methodologies (Thomas, 2005). The phenomenological study approach allowed for in-depth analysis of the individual lived experiences of the

purposively chosen participants because it has particular qualities that suit the overarching research inquiry (Yin, 2010). In this case, Montgomery County in Texas has a large number of postsecondary opportunities particularly aimed at nontraditional students, but also has a large number of single mothers of young children not pursuing continuing education. The phenomenological study method was chosen as the type of research design due to its inclusion of participant thoughts, lived experiences, and ideas. With the phenomenological study, I was able to give attention to single mothers with young children and their struggles while attending continued education and holding the role as the head of household. Phenomenological studies do not allow numbers to represent the participants, but instead highlight their lived experiences through their eyes for the sake of research. The participants have an opportunity to tell their stories to the audience/reader. With phenomenological studies, the reader of the study not only hears their stories, but feels their pain and triumphs and empathetically experiences their obstacles. Providing lived experiences for the sake of research also provides the reader with insight that many people have like experiences and tend to go through the same things (experience the same or similar phenomena). Phenomenological studies also provide awareness to the readers of the different phenomena that may exist in different groups of individuals. Therefore, the use of the phenomenological study method was appropriate for the current research. I wanted to provide readers with information regarding the phenomena of single mothers continuing education with small children and their lived experiences as single mother heads of household at the same time.

Phenomenological studies include participant interactions and accountabilities as their major emphasis and definition. In other words, there is no right or wrong outlook or outcome when completing a phenomenological study. The participants provide their shared experiences and the outcome is those experiences. This phenomenological study brings their experiences together for others to see that it is not just one person who has these experiences, but many. Also, phenomenological studies tend to place more attention on individual situations of different people that seem to have many similarities and occurrences (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). According to Dreyfus (2014), phenomenology arrives through socialization and brings about social norms. This phenomenological study concentrated on why the single mother heads of household made the decision to complete a higher education degree. It also shared what they endured as single mothers, not having a partner in the home to depend on, carrying all the financial responsibilities for the household. It answered the following questions: What did they do or are they doing to complete their degrees? Who helps/helped them with their children while they are in school and completing schoolwork? What drives/drove them to continue? In phenomenological studies, like actions or *shared patterns* of individuals are also researched to help come to a better of understanding of the like occurrences of individuals and their shared behaviors (Lodico et al., 2010).

This phenomenological study included the use of semistructured interviews with single mothers who have completed or are currently enrolled in postsecondary education, whether vocational or academic. The analysis of the data, according to Thomas (2005), is

guided by specific objectives based on personal occurrences and lived experiences. At the same time, this method of data collection placed the experiences and perspectives of the single mothers of young children at the center of the study, rather than relying on experts on single parenthood to speak for the parents. In this sense, the qualitative phenomenological study approach was appropriate because it sought to put the perspectives of single mother heads of households and their choices at the center (Yin, 2010). The qualitative phenomenological study approach also followed the guidelines for methodological decision making set forth by Carspecken (1996) for working with disenfranchised groups. Individual thoughts and responses were needed from the single mothers to obtain much-needed insight into their reasoning; therefore, the qualitative research design was appropriate. No numerical representation was needed in the research since real-world accounts were included.

The phenomenological study method of qualitative studies was also the most desirable type of study for this research because it lent itself to adding personal accounts of the participants' life events and explanations of how they made the decisions to continue their educations (Giorgi, 1985 & Moustakas, 1994). Personal accounts of the participants and their hardships and triumphs while attending school and graduating were included. The use of phenomenological studies allows the researcher to focus on participant feedback and on the how and why instead of merely giving the reader statistics based on numbers (quantitative research studies). Another reason the phenomenological study method was the most ideal method for this research is that it

granted the participants inclusion in the research, allowing them to provide in-depth statements and to incorporate their personal beliefs and life occurrences that drove them to completing their higher education degrees while being single mother heads of household (Polkinghorne, 1989). In phenomenological studies, the act of bracketing is used to keep the research and the gathered information in the forefront and prevent the researcher from developing inferences and opinions throughout the maturation of the research. Bracketing, as explained by Tufford and Newman (2010), is used to protect the researcher from collecting preconceived notions of different aspects of lived experiences of others that may not be perceived as a normal action or thought of the participant.

Through the phenomenological study method, this research took the various participant responses and holistically examined a large quantity of information. The various participants' life paths offered the reader evidence and meaning of the similar occurrences as well as some differences. Similar life occurrences showed that most single mothers of young children will likely go through the same life occurrences while continuing their education while fulfilling the role of head of household, which is called intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 2001). The phenomenological study method typically works with a lesser sample size of participants, and allows the researcher to focus on the depth of the information gathered from the participants. In addition, with fewer participants, the researcher is typically able to spend more time with each participant during the interviews; moreover, the atmosphere is more relaxed while data is collected without compromising its validity.

### **The Elimination of Other Qualitative Studies**

Ethnographic studies tend to focus on a particular area or region where a cultural phenomenon in society occurs, and the researcher analyzes the participants' point of view of the occurrence (Lodico et al., 2010). This research, however, while conducted in a particular area, can be generalized to the United States and even other countries.

In grounded theory, researchers use collected data to present a theory, as explained by Lodico et al. (2010). In the present research, the effort was not to present a theory from the information collected. In addition, it would have been complex to present a theory based on the information gathered because each participant is an individual and has different life experiences that may have led them to the circumstances in which they live.

Case study research presents one instance or occurrence of a group of people (Creswell, 2012). This research study presented lived experiences that presented the data of the group, not individual accounts. Therefore, the case study method of research did not sufficiently address the needs of the current research.

### **Participants**

This study included six participants who were interviewed. The participants of this study were gathered using purposeful sampling for the interviews. Purposeful sampling is detailed as selecting participants who will intentionally offer much information and depth in my work (Creswell, 2012). All participants were single mothers with at least one young child ten years old or younger while attending college or while

having completed a college program obtaining a degree or specialized certificate.

Purposeful sampling seeks to only enlist the inclusion of interview participants with specific qualifications (Petty, Thompson, & Stew, 2012). Because the participants met the qualifications specified, they provided rich information pertaining to what single mothers with young children go through to complete a higher education degree, how the decision has affected their lives, and how the decision has affected their children's lives. The researcher interviewed a sample of six mothers who have attended college and received higher education degrees while single with young children.

### **Obtaining Participants for the Interviews**

Before beginning collecting information from the participants of this study, the researcher obtained an approval from the IRB (Walden University's Institutional Review). After gaining approval, as explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the researcher began distributing flyers in a Consider the Children workshop to obtain participants (see Appendix A). A question-and-answer session then took place after the "Consider the Children" workshop with potential participants in an effort to clarify the objectives of the research in which they soon took part. A total of four participants were recruited from the workshop. As the researcher scheduled prospective participants who agreed to be a part of the study, she also employed the snowball sampling technique to ask them if they could recommend qualified participants (as previously defined) for the study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher then asked the participants for their contact information and scheduled an interview date and time, arranging a location to conduct the

interview. Before meeting with the prospective participants, the researcher emailed them and asked them to read and sign a consent form that explained their participation and limitations before meeting for an interview (see Appendix B). After the consent form was signed by the participant, they emailed them back to the researcher. I then met the participants on the agreed upon date and time at the location that was agreed upon as well. A total of four participants met with me at a large park and participated in the individual interviews on a bench while the mothers watched their children play in the park at different times. The reason the interviews were conducted at a park was because the mothers did not want to make arrangements for babysitters and instead wanted to make the most of the meeting with having the children play while we spoke alone on a bench and keeping a watchful eye on the children at the same time. The other single mothers that were obtained from Consider the Children workshop preferred to conduct the interview on SKYPE due to having limited transportation and childcare issues (a total of two participants conducted interviews via SKYPE). The interview questions were prepared for the one-on-one interviews (see Appendix C). As I finished speaking with the participants, I then called the person they had provided to be a potential participant through snowballing. I informed that person of how I obtained their contact information, the research I was conducting, and my interest in them becoming part of the study. I then moved into a question and answer session while on the phone with the potential participant. Two potential participants were obtained through snowball sampling. When the potential participant agreed to become part of the study, I then emailed them the



consent form to fill out and email back to me, as well as, scheduled a date, time, and location for the interviews.

I called the CEO of Consider the Children (the gate keeper) in an attempt to obtain participants through the co-parenting workshop. I gained access to the women for participation after the Letter of Cooperation was signed by the gatekeeper (See Appendix D). I contacted them two days later to ensure they were still interested in participating; obtained contact information for other potential participants they knew would fit the criteria, and provided a question and answer session to answer questions they had since last speaking with them.

### **Researcher/Participant Relationship**

I am currently a home evaluator by trade and complete reports of FADs and kinships as a subcontractor for various child placing agencies and a social services agency. Foster, Adopt, or FAD/Foster-to-Adopt types of cases are when the potential caregivers want to foster a child or adopt a child. A kinship is a type of case in which the child(ren) have been placed with kin or fictive kin (friend of the family) due to Child Protective Services removing the child(ren) from their family home. Reasons for removing the children from the home include domestic violence, drug abuse of the parents, parental violence toward the children, sexual abuse of the child(ren) in the home, alcoholism in the home, children not being provided for, and other perilous damage.

I am categorized as an outside researcher due to the lack of experience in college-level facilitation. The participants of this study included mothers of children who are

divorcing and need to take the co-parenting course as a requirement for divorce in Montgomery County. The mothers specified they have been single mothers while obtaining postsecondary degrees in the past. I have not had any supervisory role over the prospective participants. I requested permission from the gatekeeper to hand out flyers at the co-parenting workshop before passing them out.

The relationship between the prospective participants and I consists of me being a knowledgeable entity in this research that encourages dialogue as well as critical thinking in respect to poverty, single mothers with young children, and education as a whole as well as how these issues influence each other. The participants were reminded that I was not judging their lives or the decisions they have made, but rather gathering information for research to provide insight for future single mothers with young children wanting to continue their educations. The participants were supplied the information gained from the entire research once it was completed.

To avoid bias as a qualitative researcher, I did not offer my personal opinions or personal matters/information to the participants. I also did not have a supervisory role in the lives of the participants and was not judgmental towards the participants or against the information they provided. I actively listened to the participants and did not interrupt or interject when the participants shared information. In addition, I was attentive of my tone of voice during the interviews and my body language. I yearned to ensure that I maintained the role of the qualitative researcher and not that of a mother, friend, or

colleague. Member checking was also utilized as a means of avoiding bias and ensuring validity (Mays & Pope, 2000).

Some biases I had included being an advocate for single mothers of young children continuing their educations, understanding the joys and hurts of being a single mother with young children, and not understanding single mothers of young children who do not work toward bettering their family's financial position. I do not know if I can totally stop myself from having these particular biases, but I did work toward not allowing them to steer the path of the research. Again, I did my best to maintain the role of an effective qualitative researcher through not allowing my biases to hinder the research. I kept an open mind, did not judge, and allowed the interview participants to speak freely of their life choices, paths, obstacles, and circumstances as single mothers of young children who have continued their educations.

### **Privacy Protection of the Participants**

I asked the participants to sign a consent form before beginning the interview (see Appendix B), explaining how the interview was conducted along with the regulations that were followed to ensure the protection and privacy of the participants and the information given in accordance with the standards of the National Institute of Health (NIH).

The consent forms were locked in a filing cabinet in a locked room in my office. To protect the identity of the participants, I assigned numbers to the recorded interviews instead of the participants' names. The same was done when transcribing the information from the recordings. The participants' age, race, ethnicity, and other forms of descriptive

labels were omitted to protect participant confidentiality. The participants were made aware that I was the only entity to see any personally identifiable information. All the single mothers who were heads of household while in higher education and were interested in voluntarily participating in the research were scheduled to participate. They were also enlightened that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. A question-and-answer session took place to answer any questions pertaining to the interview and the objectives of the research.

### **Data Collection**

I gathered six participants to become part of the phenomenological study by going to a co-parenting course called Consider the Children. I asked the gatekeeper if I could enlist women who would meet the criteria for the study and if she could recommend women that would fit the criteria. I then approached potential participants of Consider the Children through introducing myself, explained the purpose of the conversation, the type of participants I was seeking, and asked the potential participants to be volunteers in my research study if they matched the criteria that was needed to participate. The interviews between the six participants and me lasted between 45-60 minutes, but I did allow more time available if needed to complete the interview. I asked the participants if they would either like to meet face to face, interview by telephone, or through SKYPE. The meeting place, if they chose to do a face to face interview, was at a public park so their children could play and be supervised while the mother and I interviewed on a bench away from others to ensure privacy during the interview (the face to face participants preferred this

option). The two interviews that were conducted through SKYPE were decided by the mothers, as well, because they did not have reliable transportation. The interviews were still somewhat private due to the mothers answering the questions and in the privacy of their homes and making sure the children were preoccupied in playing with their toys, but still under their watchful eyes. I utilized premeditated questions (Creswell, 2012), but mostly utilized semistructured questioning with the intentionality of allowing me opportunities to delve into questions that would be omitted in more structured questioning (See Appendix C). Also, the interviews were one-on-one, using a data collection method in which I gathered and recorded the information of each participant, as explained by (Polkinghorne, 2005), with a tape recorder.

Women who chose to participate in the research study were scheduled, provided contact information (I gave them my contact information so they could ask me any questions that arose before the scheduled interview), were debriefed for added understanding, and met with me face-to-face or through Skype to complete an individual interview. The women were asked if they knew of anyone who would fit the criteria as a participant and were asked if they could pass along my information to that individual so they may become part of the research as well (snowball sampling). For interviews that were face-to-face, the participants and I decided on a location where it would be private to protect the privacy of the participants, but also a place where I felt safe and did not have to worry about being secluded from everyone and not be able to seek help in an emergency, if needed. During the interview, I asked the participants questions pertaining

to their lives as single mother heads of households and all the responsibilities their role entailed including rearing children without a mate living in the home, juggling work life, home life, and school life at the same time, and also what influenced their decisions to continue their educations. After each interview was completed, I transcribed the information and called the participants to ensure the transcribed information was accurate. I read the information I had transcribed to the individual participants and asked if the information was correct. The participants who wanted to add to what they had already stated while in the interview did so; I allowed added information from the participants. The process that is explained is called member checking. Member checking is also a form of ensuring validity in the qualitative research (Seale, 1999). Once that step was completed, I took all of the transcribed interviews and searched for categorical information and grouped similar data together (coding the information) through triangulation. The storage of the collected data and participant information, including signed participant forms, were locked in a file cabinet then locked in a room. I was the only person who possessed the keys to the locked file cabinet and the locked room where the participant information and the transcribed data was stored.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was guided by specific objectives, which is a common systematic approach (Thomas, 2005). Coding is a system of gathering data or pictures, segmenting the information or images, and placing the segments into categories, which

are then labeled to bring any embedded information to light (Creswell, 2009). This method generally follows the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1968).

Constant comparison analysis could be described as data (such as interviews from different participants) which is constantly compared with other data in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). The constant comparison method showed what the participants had in common and also how they differed in many aspects to them continuing their education. No software program was procured or used in the transcribing of the interviews. Instead, I opted to transcribe the interview conversations from the recorded sessions. I collected the data from the interviews through the use of a tape recorder. The recordings were then transcribed into a computer and saved on a zip drive. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I printed them all and compared them all side by side on the floor based on the information gathered. The interview data was analyzed independently, and the themes emerged once I recognized the likenesses and compared the collected data. I cut out common words that stood out such as “hardship”, “obstacles”, “help”, and “organized” from the transcribed interviews of the participants. I sat with the common words and noticed the majority, if not all, of the women had shared experiences and used those same words in their answers for the same questions they were asked to express their feelings and paint a picture of what they were going through during that time in their lives. These words then led me to form themes that provided me the foundation for providing an organized outlook into the lived experiences of the participants. Once the themes were formed, I then expounded upon what the participants shared and organized the shared

information from the participants under the themes. After all the themes and shared/compiled information were formed, I listed them in the research so the reader can see the like experiences/themes as a compilation instead of individual likes which stated what each participant shared; which in turn, would only confuse the reader and force them to have to sit down and find likenesses (I took the guess work and made it more organized for the reader). The emergence of the themes (likenesses of the participants' lived experiences) allowed me to organize the information to show the readers what may occur as a single mother of young children while continuing their education. It also provided insight of what did actually happen to these women and how they had to overcome obstacles to reach their desired goals of attaining degrees or certifications. These same shared experiences and themes link these strangers together in a group and place them in the phenomenon. Since they have been placed in a phenomenon based on being linked in shared occurrences in their lives, they were well suited for the present study and fit well as useful participants. Their participations and the information they provided may help educate the public in single mothers continuing education and their roads to obtaining degrees. The aim for this phenomenological study is to take this phenomenon and brightly shine the experiences single mothers with young children may experience when continuing their education.

### **Validity and Member Checking**

I determined the validity of the research through the practice of checking and ensuring that the information had no apparent flaws in the research. The participants met



the qualifications specified previously. The data was organized, coded, and analyzed. The input from the participants in the interviews attested to the usefulness of this research when the data was presented. The practice of collecting only interview data from the interviewees provided me with true and uninterrupted data that was analyzed and included in the research to validate the findings. In addition, member checking was implemented to ensure validity. After I interviewed the participant, I then transcribed the information from the tape recording of the interview within 2-3 days after the interview ended. Once the interview was transcribed, I called the participant and went over the information she gave during the interview to ensure that the message the participant was trying to convey was accurately conveyed and the interpretation of the information was accurate to the account of the participant. This also offered an opportunity for the participant to add information to be used in the research, if they decided to do so (member checking) (Creswell, 2012).

### **Discrepant Cases**

In the emergence of discrepant cases of information, including the process of member checking, I attended to the discrepancies by calling the interviewed participants to ensure that the transcribed information was accurate in its account of participant contributions. Discrepant cases were not to be viewed as an issue of differing responses, but helped the researcher to identify a thought or idea that had not been considered before when collecting data from the participants. When discrepant cases were found, I carefully considered them in an effort to sustain an increased level of validity in the research and

considered the other aspect of the discrepancy so that I stayed open to information of contradictory evidence. An example of a discrepant case may be when a participant shares information of how she would complete a task differently than I or other participants based on her learned experiences or culture.

### **Themes From Research Findings From the Interviews**

I interviewed six single mothers who had young children while attending higher education. The reason I chose six participants was due to not wanting to saturate the research with too many participants, but rather have enough participants to offer valuable information. The research findings from the interviews with the six participants were gathered. After analyzing the research, themes began to emerge. The themes that arose during the interviews are named as: Continued education, There were hardships, Scheduling and planning is important, Overcoming obstacles, Receiving help from others, Existing as their children's role models, In the absence of the children's fathers, and Parental motivation for the single mothers of young children. Those themes are presented and aided in offering information that is not merely on the surface when the questions were answered.

#### **Continued Education**

All of the interview participants have completed high school and worked toward or received a higher education degree and aspired to receive higher education degrees; therefore, all of the participants possessed the prerequisites and drive (a major characteristic of self-efficacy) to complete a postsecondary education. The participants of

the study seemed to have received different levels of continued education except for working towards a doctoral degree. Many of the participants explained how they wanted to achieve the goals they had in mind and no longer wanted to continue on for the next level after achieving the goals.

### **There Were Hardships**

All of the participants experienced hardships to get to their goals; furthermore, since the participants had already experienced obstacles that shaped who they were as human beings, the goal and attainment of a postsecondary degree substantially changed their trajectories and circumstances in life. Also, the participants did not want to arrange another set of goals and endure more hardships for an extended amount of time. When speaking with the participants, it was also evident that once they achieved their goals, they no longer wanted to depend on their outside help; i.e., familial babysitters, family friends, or caregivers. They wanted to prove to others and themselves they could now do things and manage their households independently. “It was very difficult at that time, but I had to do what I had to do,” said Participant #4. Savi (2011) explained how many students work towards degrees and certifications for many different reasons. When we look into the reasons for the goals, we can be offered insight into short term and long term goals they may have.

### **Scheduling and Planning Is Important**

The participants explicitly mapped out schedules for their families and managed to follow them on a consistent basis; therefore, because preparation is a major

characteristic of self-efficacy, participants were dedicated and faithful to achieving their goals. If they did not follow the schedules they have made, one or more aspects of their lives would suffer. Participant #2 explained, "I had my entire day scheduled for work, chores, and school work. If I missed something, it would throw off my entire week."

Preparation was very much key to all of the participants and many of them had particular days where they fully prepared for the entire week; Sunday was the day of choice for many of the participants where they would prepare meals, clothing, wash clothes, clean the house, etc. for the week. Participant #5 said, "I would prepare five baby bags on Sundays. When the day came, I would just put a bottle in the bag and go. I received so many bags from my baby showers, I thought they could come in handy for preparation."

In the body language of the participants, they seemed to remember difficult times in their lives while in school and shook their heads in disbelief when reminiscing on those memories. The participants seemed to understand the importance of preparation and scheduling. All the participants explained in depth how if they did not prepare for the week, they would be behind in time each day of the week and would not get things done in an appropriate manner and time. All of the participants seemed as though they did not allow anyone or anything in their lives that would not coincide with the scheduling and lifestyle they already had in place; i.e., boyfriends or lots of friends to hang out with.

Increased role strain, explained by Forste and Jacobsen (2013), is integral as single mothers have to juggle different aspects of their lives as college students, workers, and

head of household. To complete all aspects in a timely manner, planning must be done in and of their lives.

### **Overcoming Obstacles**

Another theme which arose during the data collection was strong women overcoming sometimes insurmountable obstacles in an effort to dramatically change their children's' lives. The obstacles shared by the participants included not having enough time for themselves, not having babysitters when needed, sacrificing sleep, time management issues with the demands of the home, work, school, and the children. Participant #5 said, "Yeah it was a lot for me to do or for any one person. I just kept my eyes on the prize and took everything day by day; even though I had my planner." The body language of the participants showed they were all very proud of the fact they overcame the obstacles through smiling as they reminisced. Everyone will come across obstacles in their lives at some point and single mothers are no exception. As detailed by the participants, those obstacles could range from money, transportation, time, babysitting help, etc. As the participants shared, each week brought about a new obstacle that needed to be quickly resolved before it would hurt the schedule or other aspects of their lives. In hindsight, those obstacles made the single mothers stronger, more resourceful, and resilient. For example, they went into detail how when they were low on food in the home, they would make meals with what they had at the time and the children in the home still loved the food their mother made for them. Intrinsic motivation molds the learners' minds into them positively working towards their goals and achieving over

obstacles, as explained by Henderson-King & Mitchell (2011). They also stated that if the learner was motivated by monetary gain, they would then have a more negative experience while achieving their higher education goals.

### **Receiving Help From Others**

The majority of the participants received help from family and friends in babysitting, transportation, and/or scholarships to help with schooling costs. One participant received help with hospital costs, room, and board while living with her parents. The body language of the participants (who received help) showed they were all thankful and sure of the help they received from family and friends through giving head nods and smiles. All the participants reminisced on how they could not have survived as single mothers and students if they did not rely on help from others. Having to manage a household, work, and complete schooling is a large load for any one person to handle; therefore, help from others was always welcomed by the mothers. Hoffnung and Williams (2012) shared that in order for single mothers in higher education to succeed, they need to have help with childcare from their family members. Some of the mothers said when a family member offered to take the children while they worked on homework. Such a small gesture as that was a huge relief for them to get some things done.

### **Existing as Their Children's Role Models**

Obtaining a home, gaining strength as a single mother, and not having an abortion were all things the single mothers were proud of with obtaining a degree as the main accomplishment in their lives of attaining after much hard work and dedication. Being a

great role model for their children when it came to education was also what the participants were proud of. For their children to see them work hard in school while being head of household for their children was very much their crowning glories. The single mothers/participants explained they knew they had to continue their educations for the betterment of their families and to possibly ensure their households would retain more income and less financial strain when they obtained degrees for jobs with higher pay than jobs without degrees. Participant #2 explained, “My son witnessed me working in school work at the table many nights. He then would become more studious, work hard, and do well in school. I guess he saw me working hard, he wanted to imitate me and work hard too.” The body language of the participants exuded pride with smiles as they explained how they reached their goals of degree attainment. Majority of the participants’ most prideful moments were obtaining degrees while being single mothers of young children. Intrinsic motivation is the driving force of adults/single mothers while they are obtaining degrees, while children rely on extrinsic motivation as told by Afip (2014). With obtaining degrees as single mothers of young children, the mothers seemed to be very happy with themselves in working hard and obtaining the goals they have set for themselves as single mothers and winning against adversity. Holding the title of “living role models” for their children was also a huge accomplishment for them. The participants believe their children saw how hard they worked and can now appreciate their own educations.

### **In the Absence of the Children's Fathers**

Not all of the women received monetary assistance from the fathers of their children (only two of the six mothers received financial support from the fathers of the children), not all of the fathers visited or even acknowledged the children (only two of the six mothers said the fathers visited the children regularly), and not all of the children had relationships with their fathers (only two of the six mothers said the fathers had relationships with the children). This was one trend that was heartbreaking for the participants to share with the researcher; four of the six participants who did not receive monetary assistance from the fathers of the children, the father of the children did not visit the children, or have relationships with the children. Participant #6 said, "My child's father was never there nor did he help financially." Participant #3 said, "My son's father does not even want to acknowledge our son and he looks just like him." The information provided from the participants showed how the children missed out on having two parents in their lives loving, supporting, and caring for them. The information provided by the participants also showed that the participants had to take on the roles of mother and father to the children in the absence of the biological fathers. Nurturing, supporting, clothing, feeding, housing, etc. were all responsibilities endured by the single mothers of the young children without much help from the fathers. The families and friends of the single mothers stepped up and helped the single mothers when needed, except for one who chose to move far away from her family and friends, which resulted in her taking on all responsibilities of child rearing without any help. Also, the understanding that one



income was all they had, they explained they knew they needed to continue their educations so more income would be brought into the household through obtaining a higher education and higher pay immediately following the career with the degree. The body language of the participants was tense as they did not smile, but would frown when speaking about the fathers who did not help financially, visit the children regularly, or have relationships with the children. For the mothers who did receive help from the fathers of the children, visit the children regularly, and have relationships with the children, there was still some form of discomfort in the body language of the participants with rolled eyes or pursed lips.

Financial support from the biological fathers of the children would have helped the mothers as they went to school to aid in babysitting fees, daycare costs, etc. The sad fact some single mothers in the world do not use the funds for the children, but instead use the funds for their personal gain; therefore, some fathers are leery in giving financial support to the single mothers. There are also some fathers who just do not care about the children or the mothers and just do not want to tend to the financial responsibilities of caring for the children. Kotila and Dush (2012) explained that society suggests the fathers help the mothers through financial; support since they do not live with the mother and child in the home. With the participants, this subject hit a sore spot for them and most of the participants were a little private in their feelings on the subject.

### **Parental Motivation for the Single Mothers of Young Children**

All of the participants explained their parents pushed and/or encouraged them to continue their educations. Although, some of the parents of the participants did not help them with homework or support them in their schooling, they were all encouraged by their parents to continue their educations through college and obtain degrees. All of the participants went on to explain their parents instilled in them that professions with degrees paid more than professions without degrees and were mainly less taxing on the body as they would age in the profession/career. With the belief that degreed professions would pay more and be less taxing on the body as you continue in the profession for many years, the participants were swayed to continue their educations. In the body language of the participants, they seemed very sure and confident in giving the responses to the question with head nods and raised eyebrows during their explanations. In speaking with the participants, it was clear once they had children and saw through life experiences after making choices in their lives that money was surely needed in a household of two or more, the participants took the advice of their parents, family, and significant people in their lives to pursue degreed professionals to obtain more income for the household. Wilson (2011) shared how many single mothers' motivations to continue their education centered on their children's futures. In most cases, having an income without a degree is okay for a single person without any children, but once children are added into the household, more is needed. Also in most cases income from a profession without a

degree for a household requires more hours, which does not work in the favor of single mothers.

Only two of the six participants did not have parents who were active in their schooling for various reasons. Although not all parents were active in their schoolings, the drive/self-efficacy of the single mothers to continue their educations was the driving force in their continuances. The body language of the participants showed no negativity towards their parents with shoulder shrugs leading toward the explanations of their parents' activity or inactivity in their schoolings. The participants with inactive parents seemed to give explanations of their parents' lives being filled with work related stresses. The question and answer section of the research offers truth to the previous section of the research. The participants who stated their parents were not involved in their schooling while growing up were very busy in working more hours to bring in income for the household. The participants have worked hard and have obtained degrees so they may gain careers that pay more and do not always require more hours in the workplace. The participants then may not have had to sacrifice time with their children and family and still bring in finances required to ensure their household has everything needed and will not lack for anything. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) said parental involvement not only helps the child in their academics, but in their mental health as well. The child tends to have less stress in the classroom and has more confidence in their abilities when they have been assisted with their homework in the home with the parents. More information

pertaining to the participants and their experiences as single mothers are provided in Table 1 which is provided below.

Table 1

*Participant Information*

Participant	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
Degree Level Obtained	Associate's Degree	Medical certification	Bachelor's degree, Master's Degree, and Entrepreneurship Certification	Some college	Master's degree	Master's degree and Realtor's license
Current occupation	Senior secretary	Hospital registrar	Commercial sales representative	Regional security manager	Caseworker for CPS	Real estate broker
Number of children in the home during schooling	2 children	4 children	1 child	1 child	3 children	1 child
Highest degrees of parents	Father-high school graduate Mother-9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Father- 5 <sup>th</sup> grade Mother-high school graduate	Father- high school graduate Mother-Cosmetology certification	Father-Bachelor's degree Mother-6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Father- high school graduate Mother-Master's degree	Father-Bachelor's degree Mother-high school graduate

Table continues

Participant number	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
Who helped with home work while growing up?	Participant helped younger siblings	Mother	Siblings helped one another	Parents	Siblings helped one another	Mother and siblings
Are you currently married, divorced, or never married?	Married in 1993, separated in 1997, and divorced in 2003	Single	single	Married	married	divorced
Is/was the father of the child(ren) actively involved in the child's life?	yes	No	no	No	Yes, but not in the past	Yes, but not very much
Who helped in caring for the children?	family	Family	Friends and father helped with babysitting	Father	family	parents
Degree Level Obtained	Associate's Degree	Medical certification	Bachelor's degree, Master's Degree, and Entrepreneurship Certification	Some college	Master's degree	Master's degree and Realtor's license
Current occupation	Senior secretary	Hospital registrar	Commercial sales representative	Regional security manager	Caseworker for CPS	Real estate broker

Table continues

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Number of children in the home during schooling	2 children	4 children	1 child	1 child	3 children	1 child
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Who helped with home work while growing up?	Participant helped younger siblings	Mother	Siblings helped one another	Parents	Siblings helped one another	Mother and siblings
Are you currently married, divorced, or never married?	Married in 1993, separated in 1997, and divorced in 2003	Single	single	Married	married	divorced
Is/was the father of the child(ren) actively involved in the child's life?	yes	No	no	No	Yes, but not in the past	Yes, but not very much
Who helped in caring for the children?	family	family	Friends and father helped with babysitting	Father	family	parents

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sections 1 and 2 are the guides for the research, leading the reader to explore the drive of single mothers with young children in continuing their education. Various elements such as the definition of the problem, the rationale, the conceptual framework, and so forth bring light on this issue. The treatment of the participants and their privacy was clarified and upheld. All policies and procedures were adhered to in accordance with the NIH. In addition, in Section 2, the results of the participant interviews were provided for the reader.

Section 3 serves as the exploration section of the entire research, in which data was collected and coded. The guiding research question, presented in Section 1, was answered based on the data analysis provided in the research. The research question is the following: Why did the single-mother heads of households with young children decide to successfully complete their higher education degrees?

Once the research was completed, based on the information presented, a guide for single mothers of young children continuing their education was created to provide helpful information about lifestyle changes, decision making, and real-life stories and examples from the journeys of previous single mothers of young children.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

Section 3 will provide information pertaining to the reasons I chose a professional development series as a means of impacting society for positive change. I developed a PowerPoint as a tool to reach and captivate a mass audience. The PowerPoint can be used in many different universities, educational institutions, or venues. The rationale of the professional development project will show how providing a PowerPoint to students in poverty will help them in developing clear expectations in their journeys as single mothers of young children who are higher education students and potential higher education graduates. In the next section, I provide a review of the literature explaining why professional development is best suited for the project in this research. Execution of the professional development will then be discussed along with the prospective resources, existing supports, impending obstructions, a proposal for implementation and timing, and functions and tasks for learners and others. An evaluation of the professional development session that has been created for the research and the implication for social change will be provided as well. Section 3 highlights the introduction of the professional development, why a professional development was chosen, and how the professional development may impact the world of higher education in a positive manner as it pertains to single mothers of young children.



### **Description and Goals**

A PowerPoint was chosen in the professional development because I believe a PowerPoint can be used in forums to educate prospective higher education students who are single mothers of young children of what to expect in their lives as professional students and mothers of young children. Preparation is critical once any individual embarks on the experience of obtaining a higher education degree. Preparation is even more important once a single parent embarks on the experience of obtaining a higher education degree. Therefore, since the single mothers of young children are actively showing interest in attending college for a higher education degree and advancing into a higher level of learning in their lives, a professional development is the right fit for the positive impact project. The problem, which was stated in Section 1, is that a majority of single mother households are living in poverty.

According to the U.S. Census in 2010, 91.4% of the single female-headed households are living in poverty. One of the goals of the professional development was to fully inform and prepare single mothers of young children in continuing their educations. The second goal of the professional development was to ensure that single mothers understand what will be needed of them in order to become successful students while raising young children at the same time. In learning how to balance their families, school demands, work demands, and all other types of issues that arise in life, prospective higher education students who are single mothers of young children will be less likely to end their academic journeys due to stress, time constraints, and everyday challenges.

### **Rationale**

I chose a professional development project after gathering data from the individual participant interviews. In the professional development, I explained the problem of there being an excessive amount of households living in poverty that are being led by single mothers. I then explained how attending higher education would help alleviate the issue of poverty in single mother led households. I interviewed six women who were single mothers of young children who attended higher education to understand what drove them to make the decision to continue their educations. Lastly, in completing the professional development project, I was able to share the information from the participants in an effort to show that there are many challenges to obtaining a degree for a single mother leading a household, but it is attainable through time management, planning, sacrifice, and overcoming hardships.

Many single mothers of young children need to understand what will be required of them when they make the decision to continue their educations to better themselves and their families. Many single mothers of young children make the decisions to continue their educations, but do not know how to take the steps and prepare their lives for success in school while raising young children. A PowerPoint and a series of informational sessions were developed to explain to single mothers of young children the steps to take and what to expect while attending higher education. Many of the steps were gathered from interviews with participants who offered them as various methods in preparation and forward thinking to make their lives easier. Some of the methods included Crockpot

cooking on Sundays and freezing meals for the week, preparing diaper bags for the week, creating and maintaining schedules for the family during the week, and setting study time aside once the children are asleep.

The data analysis presented in Section 2 provides insight from the interview participants' life experiences and was included in the PowerPoint. This professional development would be very helpful in the lives of single mothers of young children wanting to continue their educational paths towards degree attainment because the PowerPoint informational sessions clearly explain what they should expect while attending school and juggling all other aspects of their lives. This professional development will also aid in reducing the numbers of unfinished degree tracks due to stress, anxiety, and overall loss of zeal in obtaining a degree. By attending the informational sessions, single mothers of young children will also develop an understanding of what they need to do and the steps they need to take in their lives to prepare for attending higher education. When single mothers attend college and obtain degrees, they then have the ability to enter careers with higher pay, which will reduce the poverty rates among single mother headed households with young children.

### **Review of the Literature**

In this section, I discuss different aspects of professional development and why it will be useful for the project I chose to complete. With professional development, single women with young children could obtain information they could apply in their lives to continue their educations and advance in their careers, which may then add more income

in the home and lessen their chances if living in poverty. I have added five sections explaining the usefulness of professional development in the following segments and how it is the best choice as a project for my study. The five sections are: professional development and learning goals, Professional development and motivation, types of professional development, self-efficacy in professional development, and the purpose of professional development.

### **Professional Development and Learning Goals**

Meeting the needs of a group of people is difficult (Casey, Starrett, & Dunlap 2013), but it is necessary when the desired outcome is greater than the difficulty of the task. With evidence being provided showing a need for single mothers of young children to continue their education in an effort to combat poverty, the need for a professional development in preparing these prospective students for what will be expected of them is critical. Professional development can be described as learning experiences that focus on the advancement of individuals and aids in them progressing to the next level in their professional lives (Kluck, Pennuto, & Hartmann, 2011). Continuous and structured professional development also provides the learner with gained knowledge which is essential to expand job prospects and opportunities (Enkin, 2015). The learners will have the ability to take away acquired knowledge from the professional development and apply it to their private and work lives for improvement in the areas needed. During professional development, most facilitators use their own learned experiences (Corte,

Brok, Kamp, & Bergen, 2013) to support or substantiate the information they give the students.

### **Professional Development and Motivation**

Professional development creates intrinsic motivation for those who participate. Also, job satisfaction and anticipated job retention have a correlation with professional development; therefore, professional development also would positively affect the stakeholders (Xu, 2014). The use of the professional development will aid in decreasing the number of single parent dropouts. Single mothers may become weary due to not being better prepared for attending higher education. The use of a professional development session could help single mothers with young children to be more prepared and work efficiently to achieve their desired goal of graduating and obtaining higher paying jobs. The content of professional development is an important consideration but how professional development should be conducted is of equal importance (McNamara, 2010). There are two types of professional development tracks available: online and face-to-face professional developments. With online professional development, learning and training can be done anytime and anywhere. Online professional development offers a variety of advantages such as convenience, efficiency, and autonomy, in comparison to face-to-face learning (McNamara, 2010). With the use of professional development, the learners will be better outfitted and prepared to continue their education while meeting other life demands. The professional development will be informative and will groom the

learners to come to their journey of education as single mothers of young children as experts on how to handle obstacles as they appear in different areas of their lives.

### **Types of Professional Development**

Campana (2014) expressed that there are two types of learning in professional development. There is informal learning and situational learning. Informal learning was explained as learning through relationships while on the job to promote learned skills or professional development. Situational learning was explained as learning through daily rituals and everyday experiences on the job. Both types of learning have been proven to promote workplace efficacy. Bayar (2014) shared there are two other types of professional development. The first one is traditional that consists of conferences and workshops. The second one consists of mentoring and coaching in the workplace. For higher education students to be successful, combinations of the different types of professional development are needed to grasp all different kinds of learners. The type of professional development I decided to use is the traditional approach. The reason I chose the traditional professional development is because the single mothers of young children want to attend high education to continue their education and the other types of professional development do not offer the needed forum for the audience/single mothers of young children.

### **Self-Efficacy in Professional Development**

Albert Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory strongly fashioned the development of the project by insisting the best way for an individual to grow and excel is for them to

take an in-depth look at themselves and their goals and come to the realization that there is a need for positive change. Bandura inferred that it is beneficial to have people to encourage you, but there is no greater form of encouragement than the drive within oneself. With this project, reflection is implemented and shared in the informational sessions. With the prospective students participating, learning about themselves, and becoming self-aware, the training is then personalized (Ellis & Kell, 2014). It is difficult for students to be adequately prepared without having active participation in training (Rashe, 2012).

Students who are single mothers of young children, study off campus, have highly stressful personal lives, and have highly demanding work obligations have many challenges and obstacles they face (Ronning, 2009), but staying focused on the end result is an example of self-efficacy. Other challenges that have surfaced with single mothers of young children in continuing their educations include those pertaining to limited college resources, strained finances, a general fear of returning to school, and having uncertainty regarding transportation (Dayton, 2005). Understanding various challenges that may be ahead places the prospective students in a better position of defense and preparedness of what is to come. Professional development has also been proven to aid in job growth promotions (Wilson, 2012). With a certification, degree, or learned skill, the learner is then considered to be knowledgeable and highly qualified in the job they are seeking to be advanced in.

## **The Purpose of Professional Development**

Past case studies have indicated that professional development improves teaching and learning (Goldring, Preston, & Huff, 2012). The purpose of professional development needs to be aimed at the proposed need of the learner. That proposed need of the learner, in most cases, is how to do their job more efficiently and/or learning to better themselves for the next level in a certain factor in their lives (self-improvement). The proposed need for the learner in my project development is single mothers of young children need to be better prepared for their journey in continued education while living the life as a single parent. The expected outcome of the project development is to decrease the amount of single parent students who do not finish their degree tracks and obtaining higher education degrees. The learners are expected to use their learned knowledge from professional development through actively practicing what they have learned (Boud and Hager, 2012). Attending professional development is a method of “improving” one’s tactics in the workplace or for “self-improvement” (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2012).

## **Implementation**

I plan to pilot the professional development project in an educational setting over a period of three days during three hours of length each time. The prospective higher education students will be shown the PowerPoint in the informational sessions and I will facilitate question and answer sessions after the PowerPoint slides have been shown and explained in depth. This will give the prospective students opportunities to reflect and ask



other questions pertaining to attending college and seeking to obtain higher education degrees while living as single mothers of young children. The prospective students will be instructed to take notes and write reflections as homework and be asked to share their reflections in the next session. In each of the three sessions, I will present a series of PowerPoint slides pertaining to the steps and preparation prospective higher education students need to take in becoming triumphant students and complete their degrees with less stress and anxiety while living their lives as single mothers of young children. They will also be given opportunities to have conversations and group sessions with other single mothers to gain information about what has worked well for them in their lives of preparation.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The potential resources that are available to use while in the informational sessions are statistics about mother households and the poverty level, journal articles about continuing education, a planner for the attendees of the informational sessions, the public library has many books on continuing education, information for different universities and community colleges and the courses/degree tracks they provide, and business cards for university and community college advisors to begin their journey in choosing a degree track. The existing support I have available includes holding informational settings in the building of The Montgomery County United Way (after receiving a signed Letter of Cooperation). A small fee would be needed to perform the informational sessions in the building.

### **Potential Barriers**

The potential barrier that may have been present with the project development is the possibility of educational entities not expressing interest in the professional development and not allowing me to facilitate the informational sessions for single parents who are prospective students. Another potential barrier with the project is after prospective students attend the informational sessions I have prepared and facilitated, they may no longer have an interest in continuing their educations due to losing time in their present personal lives such as going out to have fun, dating, having less time for themselves, and sacrificing as a whole. Therefore, instead of the same individuals dropping out of higher education in the future, they would be declining to attend higher education in the beginning since the decision would not fit the lifestyle they may want to keep or have.

The creation of the project was guided through wanting to facilitate informational sessions so the participants may learn from one another's experiences, share what they have learned, and grow after reflecting on their own lives and practices. I was also guided to break up the session into three days instead of compiling all the information in one day/session to ensure the prospective students truly absorb the information gathered from the sessions and reflect each day.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

I plan to introduce myself to the administrators of the campus and provide the purpose for meeting. I will also provide a letter of intent so they may have a written

explanation after I meet with them. The meeting and the letter of intent will explain my research I have completed pertaining to single mothers of young children continuing their educations and how obtaining higher education degrees will aid in diminishing poverty amongst female headed households.

I will also explain the professional development/informational sessions I have developed to better prepare single mothers of young children who are prospective students. Immediately following the explanation of the content, I will emphasize the importance of the informational sessions through explaining that many single mothers of young children drop out of higher education for various reasons that will be listed and how the research participants overcame those obstacles. The administration will then understand through sharing information from single parents who have overcome those said obstacles, they could better prepare prospective students who are single mothers of young children attending the college. They will also understand that the end result will be having better prepared students, less dropouts, and more fulfilled graduates. The amount of time to contact the appropriate college staff may take three to five business days. After reaching the appropriate staff, it may then take two to three weeks to schedule a day and time to meet with the administrators and explain the purpose of the informational sessions. After the meeting with the administrators, it may then take two to three months to schedule a day and time to have informational sessions on the campus and create and post flyers around the campus inviting prospective students and others who may be interested to attend the informational sessions.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

My role in the professional development will be to create a PowerPoint that will be explained, provide handouts for the prospective higher education students who are single mothers of young children, facilitate discussion and engaging activities, and initiate a question and answer session over a span of three days. I will be given the opportunity to set up a conference room and facilitate the informational sessions on campus. I will also prepare and post and facilitate the informational sessions on campus. I will also prepare flyers that will be posted around the campus for interested participants. The campus advisors will make the informational sessions mandatory for all prospective students so they may be aware and learn for future reference (if they are single mothers of young children or not). Having this gained knowledge in case the students become single mothers of young children would be beneficial and proactive instead of reactive. After the informational sessions, I will gather comments from participants and share them with campus administrators/leaders to ensure the sessions provide much needed information and tactics that have been gathered from the interview participants and have proven to be useful for them.

### **Professional Development**

While facilitating the informational sessions for prospective students, I will observe and make notes of what is an effective practice and what could be fine-tuned to make the informational sessions better for future sessions. Feedback will be gathered from all participants. I will also ask the participants to write a reflection about the

informational session for them to turn in after the last session anonymously into a box on the table near the exit. Reading the comments of the prospective students will provide me with much needed information pertaining to the usefulness of the informational sessions and what could be added or deleted to make the informational session better for all prospective students who are single mothers of young children. After the informational sessions are complete, I will meet with the leadership of the educational entity and discuss my experience in facilitating the information sessions with the PowerPoint. The comments that were anonymously provided by the prospective students will be summarized and discussed so that the leadership may understand what is needed as the next step in helping single parents of young children so they may be successful in their college careers and graduate (reducing the amounts of drop outs amongst single mothers of young children).

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

The project development concentrates on the needs of the learners in the local community by providing much needed insight of obstacles they may encounter during their college years as single mothers of young children. With thought-out preparation, the single mothers of young children who attend higher education will have an immense start in their college careers with using the information they have learned to implement in their lives and aid in their successes in having a healthy balance in school, work, and family demands. The project development will also give the prospective single mother learners

faith in successful completion through having them acknowledge realistic goals and demands in their lives and how to manage them all at the same time. Through interviewing single mothers of young children who have continued their educations in Montgomery County, there was evidence that they all implemented different tactics that they had learned that were useful to them during their times as students and single mothers at the same time. This project development's importance to the students will be that, in learning different things to do to make their lives easier through planning, their experiences will be successful as students and single mothers of young children.

The professional development will be beneficial to the families of the prospective students who are single mothers of young children because the single mothers of young children will be less stressed and will be able to plan and prepare for different aspects of their lives. With preparation, the children will also receive everything they need, including time with their parents. For the instructors of single mothers with young children, the implementation of this project development will help them to focus all of their energy on facilitating for their classes instead of having to train the students in how to manage their time effectively, having to deal with students not turning in assignments late, or working hard to encourage their students to continue their educations instead of giving up and quitting due to poor planning, stress, and anxiety of the demands in their lives. The administrators of the colleges will ultimately see that the student body that represents single parents will thrive in the higher education environment and be able to learn effectively after attending the informational session. They will be able to learn

effectively by being able to completely focus on their studies and not mishandle other aspects in their lives through learned planning techniques based on practices that were shared by the interview participants of my research study.

The community members will benefit from single mothers of young children attending the informational session because the single parents will obtain much needed knowledge in preparation and organization. With their new knowledge, the single mothers of young children will not only use these practices in their personal lives, but also in their work lives as well. Much success in the workplace can be attributed to superior organizational skills and preparation. The community partners will see the project development to be a success through witnessing more single parents successfully completing their higher education degrees.

### **Far-Reaching**

In a larger context, in implementing and facilitating a professional development with a PowerPoint in the informational sessions for single mothers of young children in continuing their education, the informational sessions could alter the thought process of many educational institutions. Many educational institutions provide babysitting and other resources, but there has not been any evidence of informational sessions providing insight or assistance for single mothers of young children. There also needs to be guidance as to how to organize their lives and make sacrifices while attending higher education with the main goal of alleviating poverty in their households (if they themselves are currently in poverty) in mind. In addition, after the single mothers of

young children attend the informational sessions, incorporating what they have learned and building on what they have learned in the informational session in the prospective students' first class (which is normally a generalist course) may be very helpful to all single parents throughout their college years. After the single mothers of young children receive their higher education degrees, they will continue to implement the skills they have learned in the informational sessions before they began school with planning and preparing in other aspects of their lives. Maintaining the trait of planning and preparing can and will help the single mothers of young children in other aspects of their lives including their careers, family lives, dating lives, recreational activities, and religious circles. The skills learned in the informational sessions may be used in other aspects of their lives where single mothers of young children see fit.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, an explanation of the path toward professional development was explained. The research guided me to create a three part series of informational sessions for prospective higher education students who are also single mothers of young children. It was discussed in depth of the reasons the informational sessions were created and how prospective students who are single mothers of young children could benefit from attending and reflecting on what will be discussed and learned. The college would also benefit from their attendance because the prospective students will be better prepared for obstacles and challenges. The universities also can learn how to combat shared obstacles that single mothers with young children experience while attending college, maintaining



their households, and work demands all at the same time. Self-efficacy was explained as the contributing factor in the success of the prospective students as well. With the combination of preparedness through attending the informational sessions and self-efficacy, the prospective single mothers of young children students have better chances at becoming successful higher education graduates. In Section 4, I will expand on the research findings I have collected and will provide insight to the obstacles and challenges they had. I will also include different practices they did to help them prepare their lives and the lives of their young children while they were attending school. The voices of the single mothers of young children will be heard and the examples of their strengths and triumphs through times hardship and sacrifice will be expounded upon as well.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In this section, I explain the strengths of the project, the limitations, and the path toward which the research and the project may lead in future research. The implications of the project are also discussed as well as an analysis of me as a practitioner and a project developer. This section offers as a collected ending to the research and provides different routes for future research and questions that may be raised after reading this research and viewing the developed project. The conclusion leads future researchers to think about poverty among female-headed households and how to lessen poverty in the households by using increased preparedness as an aid in the fight against poverty.

### **Project Development Strengths**

The strength of the professional development I have created is that each participant has the opportunity to share and reflect on the information they receive in the informational sessions. Another strength of this professional development is that it provides a plethora of background information that sparks thought and questions in the minds of the participants. With the problem of the existence of many single female headed households with children living in poverty, the project encourages the single mothers of young children by providing tactics in preparation for them to be successful during college, in their schooling, personal lives, as well as in their work lives. Shagrir (2015) explained that professional development is a process that is ongoing, takes place over time, and requires constant effort on the part of the individual. This professional

development also provides tactics and pointers given by the interview participants to help the participants in the informational sessions understand the extent of what they must do to be successful in all aspects of their lives while in school.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

The professional development's limitations in addressing the problem of poverty among single mother headed households are the following:

1. Just because the prospective students who are single mothers of young children will attend the informational sessions and graduate from college successfully does not mean the households will definitely be raised out of poverty. There are many variables that may come into play for the single mother headed households in poverty, but while attending the informational sessions and successfully completing college with a higher education degree does not guarantee the households will escape poverty, it may help lessen the amount of single mother households living in poverty by helping the mothers attain higher paying jobs after obtaining a higher education degree.
2. I would like for all prospective higher education students who are single mothers of young children to attend the informational sessions, but I realize not everyone will have the ability due to many different reasons. Therefore, I cannot speculate that if they do not attend, they will not be successful. They would indeed be better prepared if they attended, but just attending the

informational sessions is not a guarantee that the prospective students will be successful and/or will graduate.

3. The sessions may not be engaging or effective for many learners. It may simply be too late for some mothers to make such changes and they may be content living in the poverty to which they feel the most accustomed. Change is difficult for many and the extensive work, time, and effort it takes to attain a degree may be too strenuous or burdensome for some women.

Fortunately, there are many different variables that may assist in the success of the prospective students. To remediate the limitations of the project, the colleges should make sure they have staff available for the prospective students so that there are available counselors or psychologists with whom to converse if and when the single mothers with children realize they are stressed or have situations in their lives that may be obstacles so they can find ways to stay on the course of finishing their degree tracks. Often, students tend to believe there is no other way to get past an obstacle but to quit school, but there may be other ways to overcome the obstacles they are experiencing. To remediate limitation number two, the colleges should encourage all single mothers of young children who are prospective students to attend the informational webinars to help them in becoming better prepared for what is to come during their college years. A different way to address the problem of poverty among single female headed households may be to propose the option of single mothers having family members live in the home with them. When there is more than one income and the finances of the home are shared, the burden

of the finances may become less, and with more than one income in the home, the home may no longer be in poverty. Having a roommate may provide substantial help if they would consider it.

### **Scholarship**

I learned that with scholarship, there may be many sacrifices that need to take place. The sacrifices I have made were having less sleep, not having a dating life, missing out on parties and other gatherings, and having less money due to needing to complete homework and therefore being able to work less. I have also noticed that the friends I had in the beginning of my college life are no longer in my life at this time. I also have fewer friends due to not being able to socialize like I used to do before seeking a higher education degree. Scholarship is very important for me and my household because I too am a single parent with two young children living in poverty. I knew I needed to continue my education to ensure that my household does not continue to exist in poverty and, with a higher education degree, I will have more opportunities to have a flourishing career and bring more income into the home. As a scholar, I have noticed my interests have changed. For example, my interests in certain movies (especially types of comedies) and music genres have evolved into more sophisticated content.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

In the creation of the professional development project, I learned that I must plan according to my audience. Since my audience will be that of adults, I had to prepare the informational sessions with the expectation that adults need to be able to move around,

have something tangible to take away, have opportunities to share, and have times for reflection. In project development, facilitators must also use information from journal articles to ensure that research has been completed for the topic and presented to the audience for reliability and the ability to relate to the issues they may face in continued education as single mothers of young children. I also learned that project development needs to be evaluated to prove its effectiveness, and then altered to ensure it is useful to the audience. There are many types of projects that may be developed, but choosing the right type of project for the audience is very important. For my developed project, I wanted the audience to take away an experience and not just shared information. I knew that with a gained experience, the audience would be saturated with knowledge and take in the information provided by me as facilitator and by prospective students as well.

### **Leadership and Change**

I learned that leadership does not always mean that a person needs to be in control of others or in the role of an overseer of other individuals, but a person who portrays and possesses the traits of someone who sets a standard and does not always follow the lead of others. A leader is a person who is content with being different and does not mind going down another path to arrive at the same destination. A leader is also someone who encourages others to be their best and makes sure they are emotionally available to others when a listening ear is needed. In making a difference to cause change, leaders pose a question and seek an answer to positively influence others for positive change. Positive social change is an action that causes a ripple effect for the greater good of the

community. The project manifested from the gathered information of the interviewed participants. If single mothers of young children were better prepared after making the decision to go back to school to obtain a higher education degree, then the research not only educated individuals, but caused a ripple effect in the lives of single mothers of young children, their families, and the colleges they attend. Just presenting research is not enough; a solution needs to be formed, presented, and used to bring about positive change.

#### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

As a scholar, I learned I actually have grown to enjoy writing and giving others evidence that causes them to think and question the norm. I also learned to investigate more in depth and question information presented by others. Now that I have completed research, I no longer listen to any and all information presented, but I tend to look into several different sources to synthesize and ensure the information presented is truth and not just propaganda or accentuated opinions. As a scholar, I know I will not be able to stop at the completion of this research and project development, but will be lead to complete other research and seek ways to positively influence the community in the future.

#### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, I learned that I have been actively emerged in my own learning. I am also actively emerged in my research and ensuring the readers understands the problems that exist amongst single mothers with young children. The readers need to

truly understand poverty strongly exists in the homes of the majority of single female headed households. As a practitioner, I have an obligation to not only present the problem, but present a solution as well.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I have learned I really prefer developing a project that encourages others to think, reflect, and feel empowered to make changes in their lives. With the project, I wanted my audience to also learn from other participants as well and offer insight so everyone in attendance, even the facilitator, is taking away more knowledge than what they entered the informational sessions with.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The potential impact of this research and project is that the readers will know and understand there is a problem of poverty amongst single female headed households. With single mothers attended higher education and graduating with higher education degrees, the households may be lifted up out of poverty once the mother obtains a higher paying job/career with the degree they have obtained. What was also learned in this research and project is that just attending college is not enough for single mothers; they must maintain a lifestyle of preparedness, diligence, and zeal to truly be successful. Therefore, preparedness is truly the trait that is needed for single mothers to be successful and raise their households out of poverty, along with obtaining higher education degrees and careers/jobs that offer more money in pay. The impact the project has on local change is that in Montgomery County, Texas, more single mothers of young children were able to



obtain higher education degrees, obtain better paying jobs/careers, and their households were raised out of poverty; the same goes for female headed households beyond the local level. As more female headed households living in poverty are lessened, the national percentage of 91.4% of female headed households will decrease as well.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The importance of this research and project is that there is a major issue of poverty amongst female headed households. Combating the issue with higher education degrees obtained by the single mothers will aid in their own households being lifted out of poverty through obtaining higher paying jobs with the degrees they have obtained. Lessening the high amount of female headed households in Montgomery County, Texas and even in the United States is very crucial due to the research also explaining the effects of poverty for everyone involved, including the children in the households. Self-efficacy is also a contributing factor in the successfulness of single mothers of young children continuing their educations. If they lack self-efficacy, then the drive to become better and do better for their families is nonexistent.

For future research, there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of the project that has been developed from this research. Have the informational sessions been effective in helping prospective students who are single mothers of young children in becoming successful students/graduates? What have the prospective students who are single mothers of young children learned that has shown to be helpful to them in their college years as higher education students and single mothers of young children at the

same time? These questions need to be answered to evaluate the developed project and its effectiveness in helping to prepare prospective students who are single mothers of young children. In the field of education, single parent assistance in college preparation is necessary as we fight poverty in female headed households. Informational sessions and/or meetings giving insight into the lives of single mothers of young children while attending higher education courses is needed in order to ensure success and fulfilled degrees of these single mothers of young children. For future research, there may be a path toward investigating the drive of single mothers of young children who have attended the informational sessions. There may also be future research in investigating the drive of single fathers of young children in continuing their educations. There are many different paths to take in future research from this point, but to aid in combating poverty are the key and there is certainly a necessity to do so.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the drive of single mothers of young children could be heightened once they have all the tools needed to become successful higher education students and graduates. They then would have the ability to raise their households out of poverty through obtaining a job/career that offers more monetary gains for their households. The development of informational sessions that are divided into a three part series may help the single mothers through providing insight into preparedness and what they would need to expect while attending school, working, and tending to their households simultaneously. When colleges use the professional development that has been

developed, they aid in the preparedness of the prospective students and ultimately sets the prospective students up for success rather than failure when the students are not prepared for what lies ahead in their lives as graduate students, parents, and workers. The availability of classes and the times the classes are offered in colleges are mediocre, but more needs to be done to prepare single mothers of young children for graduate school. With this research and the professional development, the single mothers/parents will be better prepared; therefore, self-efficacy will then exist as a motivator to the prospective students. This research and professional development not only provides the readers and prospective students with insight into combating poverty in female headed households, but also opens the metaphorical door of possibility to other ways we can fight against poverty amongst female headed households and end the cycles that may exist as well.

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### Appendix A: The Flyer for Interview Participants

Are you or have you been a single mother while attending college?

Are you interested in offering your lived experiences as you have decided to continue in higher education as a single mother of young children?



Calling all interested.....

The research being conducted is called “Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education”. The research will examine the drive of single mothers of young children in continuing their education and also what obstacles (if any) are affecting or have affected their decision making in going to college while in the role of head of household.

You are invited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. The requirements are:

- you must be a single mother or have been a single mother while obtaining a degree
- you must be head of household or head of household while obtaining your degree
- you must have at least 1 child ranging in ages from newborn to 10 years or had one child while obtaining your degree
- must be available for at least for a 1 hour one-on-one interview via phone, SKYPE, or face to face, which will be audio recorded

\*All personal information collected from participants will be protected, kept private, and maintained by the researcher.

As a participant, you would be considered very valuable to the research and deemed as a major contributor to the research and the world of single mothers of young children in regards to drive and continuing education.  
Call Kesha at 281-123-4567

## Appendix B: The Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

1. Tell me all the levels of education you have attained.
2. How long ago was the last time you were in some type of schooling?
3. How many children do you have?
4. What are your children's ages?
5. What is your occupation?
6. Tell me about a typical day for you?
7. What obstacles did you have while attaining your goals?
8. What types of help did you get while obtaining your goals?
9. What degree did you obtain or in the process of obtaining?
10. When was your child born?
11. Have you developed a bond with any other single mothers of young children who are working toward receiving a higher education degree?
12. What are the highest degrees your parents possess?
13. How was education viewed in your household as you were growing up?
14. Did your parents take an active part in your education? If so, how? If not, why?
15. Who normally helped you and your siblings with your homework?
16. What were considered bad grades by your parents?
17. What were the conversations like?



18. Based on your education efforts, what influences have you seen in your children toward their education?
19. If you are advancing your education, how are you getting help with care for the children?
20. Who helped you with the children while you were in school? How did they help you?

## Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Consider the Children  
 Gatekeeper-CEO  
 November 6, 2014

Dear Jackiethsha Fluellen,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give you permission to conduct the study entitled Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education by obtaining participants through Consider the Children. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview and collect data from participants who were participants of the co-parenting workshop. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and they may opt to discontinue participation at any time.

- I understand that flyers will be posted in the room where participants of Consider the Children may see and interviews may be conducted at the Montgomery County United Way building in a room that offers privacy for the participant and you, the researcher.
- I understand the interviews will last from 1-1 ½ hours long in time.
- I understand the interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.
- I understand that you will conduct member checking, about 2-3 days after the interview, which includes you ensuring the data collected from the participants represent the participants' intentions and they have the ability to offer more data during this time. This process may take 20-30 minutes in time.
- I understand you do not need any supervision during the interview process.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Gatekeeper-CEO of Consider the Children

\_\_\_\_\_  
 signature \_\_\_\_\_ date

## Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

Montgomery County United Way

October 16, 2014

Dear Jackiethsha Fluellen,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give you permission to conduct the study entitled Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education within the Montgomery County United Way. As part of this study, I authorize you to have use of a conference room to conduct your study within the office building. Use of a conference room may cost a small fee of which will be paid to us.

- I understand that flyers will be posted in the building and interviews may be conducted on site in an office or room that offers privacy for the participant and you, the researcher.
- I understand the interviews will last from 1-1 ½ hours long in time.
- I understand the interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.
- I understand that you will conduct member checking, about 2-3 days after the interview, which includes you ensuring the data collected from the participants represent the participants' intentions and they have the ability to offer more data during this time. This process may take 20-30 minutes in time.
- I understand you do not need any supervision during the interview process.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_ signature \_\_\_\_\_ date

Representative of The Montgomery County United Way

## Appendix E: Professional Development 3-Day Agenda

**Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education**  
Professional Development Three Day Agenda

Jackiethsha Fluellen  
 Higher Education and Adult Learning  
 Walden University

**Day One total time-2 hrs**

Introduction	Slide #6	(5 min)
Purpose	Slide #7	(5 min)
Reflections Part 1	Slide #8	(20 min)
Your Journey	Slide #9	(10 min)
Experiences Will Be Shared	Slide #10	(2 min)
Your Goals	Slide #11	(15 min)
Pros and Cons of Attending Face to Face College	Slides #12-15	(20 min)
Pros and Cons of Attending Online College	Slides #16-19	(20 min)
Reflections Part 2	Slide #20	(20 min)

**Day Two total time-1 hr 50 minutes**

Financial Aid	Slides #21-22	(10 min)
Resources	Slide #23	(5 min)
Admissions Counselors	Slide #24	(5 min)
<b>Prepare, Prepare, Prepare</b>		
Change Your Lifestyle	Slide #25	(10 min)
Prepare the Family	Slide #26	(10 min)
Prepare the Friends	Slide #27	(5 min)
Prepare the Children	Slide #28	(10 min)
Obtain a Planner	Slide #29	(15 min)
Weekends are Made for Planning	Slides #30-33	(20 min)
Reflection Part 3	Slide #34	(30 min)

**Day Three total time-1 hr**

<b>Prepare, Prepare, Prepare</b>		
Who Will Care for Your Children	Slides #35-38	(15 min)
Creating Bonds	Slides #39-40	(10 min)
Visiting Times and Playtimes	Slide #41	(10 min)

Reflections Part 4  
References

Slide #42  
Slide #43

(20 min)  
(5 min)

# Single Mothers of Young Children and Continuing Education

Jackiethsha Fluellen  
Higher Education and Adult Learning  
Walden University

## Table of Contents

Introduction	Slide #6
Purpose	Slide #7
Reflections Part 1	Slide #8
Your Journey	Slide #9
Experiences Will Be Shared	Slide #10
Your Goals	Slide #11

## Table of Contents

Pros and Cons of Attending Face to Face College	Slides #12-15
Pros and Cons of Attending Online College	Slides #16-19
Reflections Part 2	Slide #20
Financial Aid	Slides #21-22
Resources	Slide #23
Admissions Counselors	Slide #24

## Table of Contents

<b>Prepare, Prepare, Prepare</b>	
Change Your Lifestyle	Slide #25
Prepare the Family	Slide #26
Prepare the Friends	Slide #27
Prepare the Children	Slide #28
Obtain a Planner	Slide #29
Weekends are Made for Planning	Slides #30-33
Reflection Part 3	Slide #34



## Table of Contents

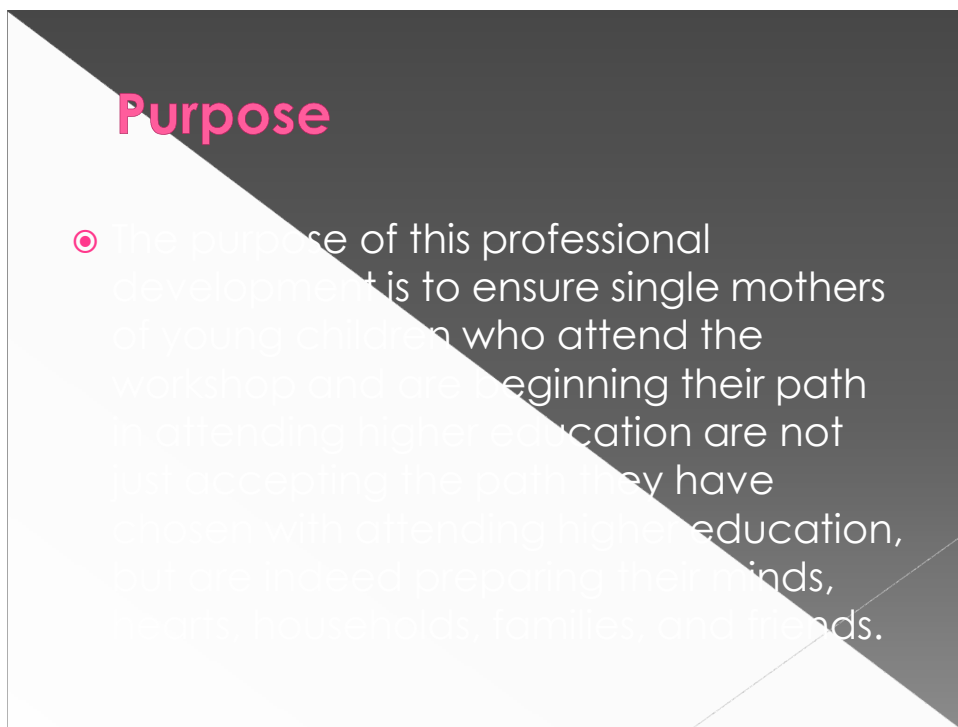
### Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

Who Will Care for Your Children	Sides #35-38
Creating Bonds	Sides #39-40
Visiting Times and Playtimes	Side #41
Reflections Part 4	Side #42
References	Side #43

## Introduction

Preparation is very important once a single mother of young children embarks on the experience of obtaining a higher education degree.

Notes-This professional development will be a three part series to fully prepare you all for your journeys in continuing your educations. At the end of each day, you will take time to reflect on the decisions you have made in your life pertaining to you continuing your education. There will be times where you will be asked to convene with your table mates and share information. Keep in mind, we all learn from each other and are all lifelong learners.



**Purpose**

- The purpose of this professional development is to ensure single mothers of young children who attend the workshop and are beginning their path in attending higher education are not just accepting the path they have chosen with attending higher education, but are indeed preparing their minds, hearts, households, families, and friends.

Notes-Meeting the needs of a group of people is a difficult task, as explained by Casey, Starrett, and Dunlap (2013), but is necessary when the desired outcome is greater than the difficulty of the task. This professional development has been created to aid single mothers in becoming successful throughout their higher education through preparation and support.

## Reflections Part 1

- What have you done to prepare yourself for the journey of attending higher education?
- How do your family and friends feel about you beginning the journey?

## Your Journey

In beginning your journey of continued education, you must understand your life will no longer be the same....

- Your outlook will change
- You will not have the same friends as you did before
- Your goals will shift
- Your children will follow your lead in their schooling

## Experiences Will Be Shared

Personal real life experiences will be shared to give clarity and examples to the life change suggestions being presented in this guide. The guide will be full of suggestions, therefore, you may follow everything suggested or you may choose different life change suggestions you like the most. As stated before, the guide was created to make your life easier based on the experiences of many other single mothers of young children who have continued their education. What may work for you, may not work for the next person.

Notes-This guide was created to help other single mothers of young children in their journeys of continuing education based on a collection of life experiences from myself, as a single mother of young children and student as well as other single mothers of young children who have continued their education.



Notes-According to the U.S. Census in 2010, a total of 14,843,000 households were headed by women, whereas only 5,580,000 were headed by men. In addition, 91.4% of households maintained by single mothers with dependent children were listed as below the poverty level. In providing evidence that fewer single mothers with young children continue their education than that of single fathers of young children, as well as, married couples with young children, two subtopics will be assessed.

## Pros and Cons of Attending a Face to Face College

Face to face college is a great option for someone who knows and understands they do not possess the discipline needed to self-direct themselves if they were completing a degree online. That is okay. There are different options for different people. Embrace that fact and explore the different colleges in the area you live after you have made a decision on the career path you would like to go.

Notes-Different colleges have different timelines, different types of classes, and different options are made available for you after you graduate. Compare them all while you are comparing the colleges that interest you.



## Pros and Cons of Attending a Face to Face College

Other great aspects about face to face colleges are:

- You can speak to your professor alone after class or during breaks to answer questions you may have about an assignment
- Other classmates may ask questions you were wondering about, but are too shy or afraid to ask. Therefore, you learn from their mistakes or accomplishments.

## Pros and Cons of Attending a Face to Face College

- You begin bonds with other classmates.
- If you have a hard time focusing at home with life demands, you are away from them in a class with other adult learners.

## Pros and Cons of Attending a Face to Face College

Some negative aspects of face to face college are:

- Gas costs
- Sitting in class while your kids are ill and in another person's care.
- Added mileage on your car.
- You have to pack books and binders to and from class
- You have no independence in learning as you would with online learning.

## Pros and Cons of Attending Online College

Online college is also a great option. Some positive aspects of online college are:

- No gas costs
- No mileage on the car
- No sitting in a room with many other students
- No boring lectures
- No college parking costs
- You have the freedom to learn wherever you are
- You have the freedom to work on your own pace within the assignment deadlines
- You are able to connect with other classmates from all over the world



## Pros and Cons of Attending Online College

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## Pros and Cons of Attending Online College

Some negative aspects of online college are:

- You need to be disciplined to ensure you complete all of what is expected of you as an online student
- You need to make sure you have all of what is required for online learning (ex. computer with lots of memory, broadband internet, zip drives, etc.)
- You do not get the face to face interaction some people value

Notes-As you can see, the positive aspects of online learning outweigh the negative aspects. Whatever decision you decide will be yours to make. Create your own list of positives and negatives to choose the path that will be best for you.

## Reflections Part 2

- What path of schooling did you choose?
- Why did you choose that path of schooling for yourself?
- Do you still believe it matches the lifestyle you want to live while in school?
- Does your schooling path match your lifestyle?

Notes-Take a moment and write down the answers to the questions so you may reflect. This will take about five minutes. Now take the time to discuss your answers with your table mates. This will take 10 minutes.

## Financial Aid

This section of this professional development workshop is for single parents who are not monetarily able to pay for college and/or college expenses out of pocket.

Notes-Welcome back to day two of this professional development. We will go ahead and begin today talking about financial aid. You may apply for financial aid to help assist you monetarily while you are in school. This will help you get your laptop, planner, zip drives, books, etc. that will be needed in your journey.

## Financial Aid

A doctoral graduate explained, "When I finished my master's degree, I was contemplating continuing for a doctorate. I was so afraid of the amount of student loans I would accrue. My optometrist said, "Keep going and get your doctorate. They can take the car, the house, and all the materials, but they cannot take away the knowledge you have obtained." One of my professors insisted, "It's all relative." Therefore, I continued my schooling.

Notes-You can too afford your advanced degrees with much planning. Don't be so afraid that you do not try. Doctors accrue much debt in school loans, but pay them off when they get the jobs they have worked so long and hard for.



## Resources

There are many resources available to help you in determining how your schooling will be paid. Some people pay out-of-pocket for their schooling. Some people receive scholarships and grants; others receive financial aid. One website you should visit is [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov). This website is great for exploring the different options in paying for school.

Notes-With many different types of careers, there is loan forgiveness. Loan forgiveness is after you meet the criteria specified all of your debt or some of your debt will be forgiven. You can find this information at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/repayment-loans/forgiveness=cancellation](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/repayment-loans/forgiveness=cancellation).

## Admissions Counselors

Admission counselors are counselors that are the first people you would need to talk to in order to become a student of any college. They are equipped to answer any questions you may have in regards to their school and what the school has to offer you. Before you call or visit the admissions counselor, you may want to compile a list of questions you have about courses, completion time, workload, etc.

Notes-When I made the decision to go back to school, on my way to work, I stopped in, asked for a brochure, and told an admissions counselor I would call her later to set up a time to officially talk about my interest in attending college again. You doing the same as I did may be the way to go. The reason I say that is because you need to sit down and engulf yourself into what is offered at the college you are interested in. Then compile a list of questions or concerns for the admissions counselor. Your education should not be treated like an impulse buy. Take your time and examine everything.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### Change Your Lifestyle

- Preparation is key in going back to school as a working single mother of young children. In preparing for school, you must first prepare yourself by changing your lifestyle.

"Student-parents want to be successful as parents and as students, but this can be difficult" (Estes, 2011, p. 199).

Notes-Before becoming a student, you were probably able to go out at night and on weekends to parties, bars, etc. Much of your old lifestyle must change in this aspect. Some indulgences have to be put aside for the goal at hand.



## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Prepare the Family*

- In preparation, you should inform your family. Expectations of you and from you will change due to the attention and time being required for your schooling.

Notes-Most family members will understand that you want to attend school for the betterment of your household and will let you know that they are there for you when you need them. Do not forget that. You may really need them in the future.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### ***Prepare the Friends***

- Your friends need to be prepared as well. You will not be able to go out and do the same things you used to do before attending college, working full time, and tending to your children and household demands. Some of your friends will understand and some will not.

Notes-Beware that friends who are not aligned with your plans and new lifestyle will soon fade out of your life.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### ***Prepare the Children***

- Last but not least, the children need to be prepared the most. They need to understand that you need their help the most while you are attending school.
- An age appropriate chore list for your children can be used.  
<http://thehappyhousewife.com/home-management/age-appropriate-chores-for-kids-printable/>

Notes-Discipline needs to be reinforced positively. The children in the household need to be assigned chores to assist you in maintaining your home. An age appropriate chore list can be used to ensure your child can complete certain chores.

<http://thehappyhousewife.com/home-management/age-appropriate-chores-for-kids-printable/>

For young children, placing a marble in a jar once each chore is completed and exchange an amount of marbles for things they would like or like to do. (Ex. 30 marbles = a trip to a fun place they love.) They will now be expected to help out around the house more, ensure they are doing what is expected as far as their schooling, and they need to be flexible while some changes will need to happen. For example, if you have more than one child and they are in different extracurricular activities, they need to align their activities so they can be in the same sport at the same time or no sport at all. To get around that option, you may enlist other parents of kids in the same activities to help you with transportation, but after some time, the other parent gets tired and you do not want to overuse them.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### ***Obtain a Planner***

- There is no way to keep track of doctor appointments, dentist appointments, extracurricular activities for the kids, birthday parties, assignment due dates, etc. Therefore, your planner is extremely important to stay focused and not forget important things.

Notes-Before a course starts, I write down the due dates of the assignments and also plan out days and times for studying and writing papers. My planner has proven to be very useful in times of riding in the car, on a plane, in a boring redundant meeting, or etc. and

I was able to plan out a paper I needed to write. You can do the same to not waste any time.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Weekends Are Meant For Planning*

- For some single mothers of young children, the house is normally cleaned on Saturdays. The laundry would also be done on Saturdays and Sundays.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Weekends Are Meant For Planning*

- One single mother of young children shared, "I would pack 5 diaper bags on Sundays for the 5 days of the week for my son. The reason I did this is because I wanted to grab a bag and go. I did not want to have to organize and pack a bag each day. On Sundays, I was able to organize all the bags and make sure everything needed was in each bag at the same time."

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Weekends Are Meant For Planning*

- Another single mother of young children suggested, "Cooking nice hearty meals on the weekend, separating meals into individual servings so your children can heat them up during the week as their dinners." Making dinners in the Crockpot all day while preparing for the week is optimal while preparing for the week. You can later separate the soups so you would have lunches ready to defrost, heat, and eat!"

Notes-This meal idea would work well for older kids as well.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Weekends Are Meant For Planning*

- A single mother of young children explained, "On the weekends, after I complete the laundry, I would plan out my outfits for the week with jewelry hanging on them, starched, and ready to go. Both my children have closet organizers with 5 sections in them. I would prepare and put the clothes they were to wear for the week including socks and underwear in the organizer so there would be no time wasted while getting dressed and ready for school each day."

### Reflections Part 3

- While discussing how you need to prepare your life for the journey, would you be able to invest time in a significant relationship?
- Do you think you would have time to do so?



## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### ***Who Will Care for Your Children?***

- Childcare is a very important part of a single parent's life. Trusting someone with your most precious possession(s) is a hard task and needs to not be taken lightly. To begin looking into childcare, you must first determine when childcare will be needed.

Notes-Welcome back to day three of the professional development. Today is the last day where we will finish the session and take a final reflection.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### ***Who Will Care for Your Children?***

- "Studies of social capital found that members of minority groups relied a great deal on mutual support and the assistance of fictive kin" (Hawkins, 2010, p 41). Whoever you choose to care for your children in your absence, please ensure the environment your children will be in is a safe environment.

Notes-In most cases, childcare is needed during the day. If you attend a face-to-face college on weekends, then additional childcare is needed. In the case of weekend childcare, a trusted family member or a close friend would be the best choice.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Who Will Care for Your Children?*

A single mother of young children stated, "When I was in school, I lived with my Mom and Dad. They both helped with caring for my son in my absence while I was in school. Whenever I needed to study with classmates or go and be alone for study time, they were willing to help."



## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Who Will Care for Your Children?*

Another single mother of young children stated, "If it wasn't for my Mama, I don't know what I would do! She is there whenever I need her to care for my children when I am in school or need to study."

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Creating Bonds*

- When you begin going to school on a regular basis, you begin to gravitate toward other classmates that have attributes that appeal to you. Examples of those types of classmates would be classmates who are better writers, great speakers, or others with great intellect.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Creating Bonds*

- You also gravitate toward others that you can relate to. Therefore, when you find out other classmates are single mothers of young children like yourself and do not live that far away from you, you start to connect.

Notes-You may begin by exchanging phone numbers and seeking help for assignments. You also compare notes on other things such as daycares, playgrounds, etc.

## Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

### *Playtime and Visiting Times*

- When you begin going to school, you will understand that friends and family would still like to visit with you and your children. What do you do when you have an assignment due date coming up and the kids' grandparents want to see them? You either leave the kids with the grandparents so you can have a lone time to complete your assignments or you go along and find a quiet place while your kids visit with their grandparents.

Notes-You either leave the kids with the grandparents so you can have alone time to complete your assignments or you go along and find a quiet place while your kids visit with their grandparents. Hint= a laptop would be a better buy than a stationary computer. While visiting my mother at her house, I would bring my computer and focus on schoolwork while my mother and sister would play with the kids.

## Reflections Part 4

- What have you realized throughout this professional development you have not thought of before?
- How has this professional development helped you while you begin your journey?
- How else do you think you can better prepare yourself for your journey?

After you answer these questions on your own in five minutes, please convene with your table mates for ten minutes. Once everyone is done, please assign a person to write all the wonderful ideas your tables have come up with for better preparation in your journeys as higher education students and single mothers of young children. Next, please take a moment to write your comments and/or suggestions about this professional development on a piece of paper and place on the table as you leave. I would love to know what you think and how I can make this professional development better for other single mothers of young children beginning their journeys in continued education. Thank you so much and good luck to you all.

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