OUR RELATIONSHIP, MY ACADEMIA: HISTORICAL AND HEGEMONIC

IMPLICATIONS IMBUING ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN

AMERICAN WOMEN FROM SINGLE-MOTHERED FAMILIES


A Dissertation

by

JOHNITHA WATKINS JOHNSON


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Chair of Committee,      Norvella P. Carter
Co-Chair of Committee,   Chance W. Lewis
Committee Members,       Elsa M. González
                         Patricia Larke
Head of Department,      Yeping Li


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# ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to describe college-enrolled African American daughters' interpretation of their single mother's personal characteristics, acts of parenting, and meaningful influence on their collegiate academic achievement. Other fundamental purposes included examining the influence race, gender, and class have on the mother-daughter experiences of these African American women. Four African American female Texas college undergraduate/graduate students described and interpreted their single mother's parenting acts and its influence on their college academic success. Specifically, this study specifically utilized Narrative Analysis, as an applicable analysis method.

Findings indicate the single-mother offered verbal guidance, which permanently resonated with participants particularly in her mother's absence. Moreover, each participant evidenced self-motivation, role-models, consistent discipline, and the use of their demographics (race, gender, and class) to undergird their *potentiality* rather than *risk*. Findings also substantiated a sister-brother dichotomy indicative of the mother "raising" her daughter while "loving her son." These characterizations resulted in the following themes: (A) She's in My Head; (B) Sister-Brother Dichotomy; (C) Helpful Disposition; (D) Self-Motivation & Role Models; (E) Discipline; (F) Race, Gender, and Class; and (G) Transitioned Inclination to Mold.

DEDICATION

Many are those whose humble beginnings led to this moment, particularly the lineage of strong, resilient African American women from which I thrive.  To my maternal great-grandmother Dollie Austin Moss, who as a young, uneducated widow ensured her six children attended and graduated from college—thank you.  Thank you for setting the foundation for excellence in education.  To my maternal grandmother, Alma Austin Rush or "Big Mama," who also fostered her mother's education values within her own children—thank you.  Thank you Big Mama for embracing, loving, and encouraging me through my failures and accomplishments.  I might be the only person under 35 who has a 93 year old best friend. But I am honored to call you Big Mama and live to make you proud. To my paternal grandmother, Erma Dean Watkins whose strength rested in her phenomenal ability to love her husband, raise six impeccably genuine children, and serve her church while humbly working as a domestic for her White neighbors—thank you.  Thank you for your example of how a wife/mother should lead, follow, and endure. To my maternal and paternal aunts: Alfar Watkins, Bettie Hicks, Callie Watkins, Cleo Lee, Evelyn Watkins, JoAnn Rush, Joyce Rush, Malinda Marlin, Mary Rush, Robbie Neal, Sherryl Johnson, and Virgie Rowe, who unknowingly helped structure the ways by which I love, laugh, and lean on my faith—thank you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE PARADOX OF SINGLE-MOTHERED AFRICAN

AMERICAN HOMES

In 1965 Daniel Moynihan, on behalf of the United States, declared the single-mothered home "the source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or anti-social behavior that… serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation" (p. 30) among African Americans.  Damning the family a "matriarchy" (p. 30), Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* fueled the charred minds of national constituents concerned with the Negro woman's familial position and alleged dominance.  Having deemed the family pathological, the nation would institute social and educational policies anticipated to thwart the forsaken matriarchal family structure.  Despite overt racism, legislated sexism, emerging scientific *evidence* bearing African American's innate inferiority, and societal ostracism (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008; Hess & Weiner, 1999), these single-mothers were also extolled as stalwart household leaders (Jones, Zalot, Foster, Sterrett, & Chester, 2007; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsburg, 1986) fostering independence (Cauce, Hiraga, Graves, & Gonzales, 1996; Foster, Zalot, & Jones, 2007; Karraker, 1991; Mandara, Varner & Richman, 2010), resilience (Billingsley, 1974; Brodsky, 2000), and strength (Billingsley, 1965; Hill, 1999; Turnage, 2004), particularly among their daughters (J. W. Scott, 1993; K. Scott, 2003; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010).  Thus, the matter of this dissertation, to ascertain college-enrolled daughters' interpretations of their single

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African American mother's parenting acts, and how amidst contemporary societal imposed stratification those acts manifested in the daughter's collegiate academic success.

The ubiquity with which single motherhood supervenes African American families is noteworthy.  Currently, African American families encompass an estimated 9,418,000 households across the nation, 46% of which are led by single mothers raising their own children (Johnson & González y González, 2013; U. S. Census Bureau, 2010; 2011).  Between 2009 and 2010, single African American women gave birth at rates twice as high as their married peers, resulting in over 51% of these 11,155,000 children residing in single-mothered households (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).  These mothers, averaging 35.6 years of age (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011), unquestionably bear the brunt of raising the African American progeny.  Given the single African American mother's exclusive familial household role, she holds an increasingly important position in her children's lives, particularly so for her daughters' whose lives' trajectory and academic prowess rest on the mother's influence (Stevens, 2002).

More than 50% of African American daughters are raised by their single mother (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).  Scholars declare the mother-daughter relationship is one of the strongest, closest, and most impactful in human relationships—greatly influencing the daughter's self esteem (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Morris, 2007; Turnage, 2004), autonomy (Costigan, 2007; Townsend, 2008), abstention from illicit substances and sex (De La Rosa, Dillon, Rojas, Schwartz, & Duan, 2010; Foster et al., 2007; Merten & Henry, 2011), family loyalty (Gilford, and

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Reynolds, 2011), and marriage (Merten & Henry, 2011) among other factors. Slated as parents who "love" their sons and "raise" their daughters (Mandara, Murray, Telesford, Varner, & Richman, 2012; Mandara, Varner et al. 2010, p. 42), single African American mothers are noted for differentially socializing their sons and daughters, resulting in varying degrees of maturity. While sons are encouraged to exemplify egalitarianism, racial pride, and permitted to embrace their household freedom, daughters assume increased household responsibilities, hold higher educational expectations, and endure abridged freedom (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010). Single African American mothers invest their time and effort into the academic promise of their daughters, socializing them to higher academic achievement (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010) than their sons.

To appreciate the degree to which single African American mothers discerningly parent their daughters and influence their academic achievement, one must first understand the plight of all African American women (Johnson & González y González, 2013). Scholars suggest this phenomenon of warmly yet discerningly mentoring daughters is primarily due to the intersection of race, gender, and class characterizations that influence African American women (Mandara, Murray et al., 2012; Merten & Henry, 2011; Townsend, 2008). Juxtaposed against her White counterparts, the African American mother's job is weighty, as it requires her to manage the aforesaid factors (race, gender, and class) in addition to poverty and the basic parental duties (Hill Collins, 2009). Hill Collins (2009) asserts this position leads to African American mothers growing in self respect, empowerment, and independence, while also, according to Joseph (1984), raising their daughters to simultaneously exemplify independence. This

distinction between African American and White women's cultured experiences, in addition to other considerable factors, manifests in the African American mother's exclusive mothering acts (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mandara, Murray et al., 2012; Merten & Henry, 2011). This exclusivity is rarely mentioned in pages of peer reviewed research; and minimal research exists in demystifying the single African American mother through an African American scholar's lens. Due to cultural and social differences, research focusing on Euro-American, or White, family ideals appear inapplicable to the plight of African Americans; and such comparisons are not offered in this inquiry as a means of standardizing particular behavior. For this inquiry, similar to Mandara and colleagues (2012), I attempt to qualitatively understand the influence single African Americans mothers' parenting acts impose on their daughters' collegiate academic achievement.

## Sociocultural Theories

A significant amount of research rationalizes single motherhood from a pathological perspective, leaving the plight of single African American mothers as dismal (Carter & McGolderick, 2005; Du Bois, 1973; Frazier, 1931, 1932; Gilford & Reynolds, 2011; Lee & Kushner, 2008; Moynihan, 1965). Regarding this particular population, historical, deficit-oriented research includes a focus on lack of education, poverty, welfare, social deviance, ineffectual emotional support, family transitions, occupational and familial stress, depression, and other factors as hindering African American single mothers from optimal parenting (Holland, 2009). While disregarding the aforementioned influence of racism, sexism, and classism, deficit theories also

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advance unsubstantiated stereotypes and purport the single-mothered household as causing the social ails in which many African Americans find themselves enraptured. For example, in their review of U. S. families, Carter and McGolderick (2005) discussed African American families only when discussing poverty; they failed to categorize them as constituents of other social classes, or any other social class as constituents of poverty. As noted by Holland (2009), instances such as these permeate academia and further the unsubstantiated stereotypical characterizations of African Americans.

Deficit theories also create an academic gap, such that particular perspectives are offered to explain complex phenomena influenced by various historical and institutional factors. While this study does not attempt to dispel those stereotypes, it does attempt to accurately depict daughters of single-mothered homes from a position of merit; that is, one of empowerment, by embracing Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1989), Parental Investment Theory (Trivers, 1972), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, these frameworks were selected because of their personal relevance to me as an African American woman. The tenants of these frameworks are real and familiar and cast unprecedented relevance to the African American female experience. By virtue of the dominant culture's ideas of African Americans, including the findings from their research efforts, these frameworks lead one to examine the systemic racist process that has led to the inferior quality of life these citizens regularly experience.

I selected Black Feminist Thought as a framework for guiding this study for multiple reasons, one of which is its powerful implications for African Americans. The integration of experiential knowledge, storytelling, and other forms of alternative yet

valid methods of creating knowledge, is seemingly a conduit for effectively sharing the life experiences of African Americans through the perspective of race. This validation of one's experiences via storytelling offers hope for the African American population whose educational matters appear hopeless.

Parental Investment Theory, an evolutionary theory developed by Robert Trivers, suggests a parent's perception of which children will generate the greatest return on their time and energy results in siblings' differential socialization (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010; Hertwig, Davis, & Sulloway, 2002). Mandara, Varner et al. (2010) utilized this theory in their trailblazing article that found African American boys had fewer domestic responsibilities than did their sisters. Moreover, the eldest African American boys were less likely to have strict rules regarding their whereabouts or receive punishment for outbursts when compared to younger girls. This theory's relevance manifests in its assertion that parents socialize children to favor or reject certain cultural or social norms.

I selected Social Learning Theory, the connecting agent, due to its basic principle, purporting that one learns by engendering the behaviors, values, and beliefs of models. Guided by Operant Conditioning, this theory suggests one's learning is contingent upon reinforcements, positive or negative. It further states differences in behavior are often reflective of one's encounters throughout life. This theory's relevance is noted in its indication that single African American mothers shape their daughters' value of education.

**Personal Story**

In 1995 my parents conceded to disappointment, anger, and judicial separation. As a result, my baby sister, innocent young brother, and I joined the millions of African American children reared in a single-mothered family. While my father was an ever-present financial provider, my mother effectuated the overwhelming task of raising three children ages 14, 10, and 4 without the emotional and physical support of a spouse.

Anguished yet resilient, my mother immersed herself in meticulously raising children, grooming particularly my educational future and social qualms. She regularly verbalized her displeasure with my father's lack of availability for the family from which he separated. While growing insatiably furious with the plight of African American men, particularly my father, my mother utilized her divorce as a salient illustration of why African American women must attain an education and independence. Moreover, my mother's feelings and personal experiences influenced what she taught me about strategies to which all women must adhere when preparing oneself for life's inevitable tribulations.

Thriving under my mother's tutelage, I sought excellence in each educational endeavor. I graduated from high school as an honor roll student who participated in multiple extracurricular activities. Upon graduation, I matriculated to a Historically Black University, which fostered the same values my mother instilled— pride in oneself, academic excellence, and independence. While a student, I reflected on my mother's lessons and believed my future rested on my personal commitment towards education. And although I initially succumbed to my newfound freedom in ways that did not foster

academic superiority, I quickly realized it served as the impetus for asserting and embracing the identity my mother set forth in years past. Moreover, reflecting daily on my mother's life lessons set the course towards striving for academic excellence. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how single African American mothers' parenting acts influence their daughters' academic achievement.

## Statement of the Problem

One of the most noteworthy relationships in the African American daughter's life is the one she possesses with her mother (Cauce, Hiraga, Graces, Gonzales, Ryan-Finn, & Grove, 1996). Perceived as a "refueling station" (Turnage, 2004, p. 159), the African American mother offers nurturing tenderness that serves as a protective measure against the racist and sexist encounters that attempt to debase her daughter. Turnage (2004) explains the African American females' plight as a member of two oppressed groups warrants an uncanny need for a compassionate and competent mother.

The African American mother-daughter relationship is sufficiently documented as powerful, necessary, and influential, even impacting the daughters' global self esteem (Turnage, 2004). Having been demonstrated as positively impacting the daughter's character, it is logical to question if and how this relationship, impacts the African American daughters' academic achievement.

One's academic achievement is attributed to numerous factors including intellectual capacity (Geary, 2011; Kearns & Fuchs, 2013), curricular magnanimity (Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2010), teacher quality (Ingersoll, 2005; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson; Carter, 2003), and teacher expectations (Emdin, 2010;

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Ferguson, 2005; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1997) among other factors.  Given that African American mothers are leading almost 50% of African American households (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010; 2011), and the mother-daughter relationship is characterized by overwhelming influence, one must consider the function it plays in the daughter's academic achievement.  Although much of the research addresses the importance of the relationship, there exists a gap elucidating the advantageous impact the single mother's parenting acts play upon the daughter's academic achievement.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe college-enrolled African American daughters' interpretation of their single mother's personal characteristics, acts of parenting, and meaningful influence on their collegiate academic achievement.  Other fundamental purposes include examining the influences race, gender, and class have on the mother-daughter experiences of these African American women.   In essence, this study is a catalyst for investigating the unique academic plight of African American daughters, as influenced by their single African American mother.

Seeing that qualitative or naturalistic inquiry assumes reality is multifaceted and mutually interactive, it would have been optimal to interview the mother as well as the daughter.  This would have also added more context to the memories, statements, and perceptions of the daughters.  Additionally, it would have allowed the mother to explain and clarify perceptions that were perhaps different than the daughters perceptions.

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Nevertheless, this case study sets the foundation for further research, exploration, and insight in this area by focusing on solely the daughter's perceptions of these influences.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it narrates the lived experiences of African American daughters raised by their single mother, and describes their interpretations of the influence this relationship had on their academic achievement. Furthermore, this study validates daughters' lived experiences by explaining their behavior through the context of their sociocultural environment. Significance of this study is also evident through its potential for initiating conversation within the African American community about the single mother's role in shaping her daughter's educational stamina and influencing her academic achievement. I anticipate this study will allow mothers and daughters to examine their role in the relationship and the subjective meaning each places upon the events of their lives. Consequently, I also anticipate this study will provide insight regarding parenting skills.

This study is also intended for school administrators and teachers, as the findings are likely to provide insight into many African American females' perceptions of academic achievement and relationships. School psychologists and/or counselors, whose job it is to provide research-based guidance to students whose familial predicaments are manifested in their behavior and academic achievement, may find also the results of this study useful. Furthermore, this study seeks to offer valuable suggestions for the further exploration by scholars and practitioners, and provide insight into an area that lacks comprehensive understanding.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do African American females describe their single mother's personal characteristics in raising them?

2. How do African American females describe and interpret their single mother's acts of parenting as they raised them?

3. How do African American females describe their single mother's influence on their academic performance?

4. How do African American females describe the influences of race, gender, and class on their single mother's parenting?

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic Success**- proficiency in one's academic discipline as noted by a 3.4 or higher GPA

**African American**- a late 20th century term to describe U.S.-born citizens of African descent; promoted by Ramona Edelin and Jesse Jackson to associate one's heritage with their mother country, increase one's cultural integrity, and reconceptualize Black as an ethnicity rather than racial group (Smith, 1992)

**Black**- a term used after the Civil Rights era to describe U.S.-born citizens of African descent; associated with racial pride, power, shedding the remnants of slavery, and militancy (Bennett, 1970)

**Family**- the householder and all (one or more) other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by blood, marriage, or adoption (U. S. Census Glossary, 2013)

**Father**- biological male parent who concurrently assumes paternal nurturing

**Mother**- biological female parent who concurrently assumes maternal nurturing

**Negro**- a late 19th century term used to define U. S. born Americans of African descent; also used as a term of reproach given its association with racial epithets (Bennett, 1970)

**Single**- one who has never-married, is widowed, or divorced. Also used in the context of 'single-parent family/household' to denote one parent is present in the home (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012)

**Slave**- a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them; one who works exceptionally hard without commensurate pay or praise (Oxford Dictionary, 2013)

## Summary

African American single mothers are birthing and rearing children at increasing rates. While research typically perpetuates the perceived deficits this family type imbues on African American children, this research effort attempts to expose its strengths, particularly in regards to academic achievement. African American single mothers play a significant role in their daughter's life trajectory. My attempt is to determine how this role manifests in their college academic achievement.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*"We, the black women of today, must accept the full weight of a legacy wrought in blood by our mothers in chains…as heirs to a tradition of supreme perseverance and heroic resistance." Angela Davis*

To appreciate successful African American college-enrolled daughters raised in single-mothered homes and their academic plight, one must historically conceptualize the African American family (Billingsley, 1965) and their educational struggle.  The African American family's societal position gestated amidst physical bondage and many scholars currently characterize its position as one of societal bondage—enslaved to the hegemony commissioned through institutionalized racism, a legislatively controlled social class, and one's characterization as African American (Johnson & González y González, 2013).  In a noble effort to understand the historical implications of the African American mother's parenting acts, and the daughter's academic achievement I examine the aforementioned factors from pre-slavery until present.

**Family**

**The West African Family**

*"The universal testimony of travelers and missionaries was that the African mother's love for her children was unsurpassed in any part of the world"* (Staples, 1973, p. 151).

While the institution of family is often conceived as a Western concept or imposed upon Africans via the vicissitudes of slavery, scholars (Hale, 1982; Johnson &

Staples, 2005; Staples, 1973; Sudarkasa, 1988) assert West Africans possessed elaborate laws and customs, which included the institution of family, marriage procedures, and parental roles. West Africans' family structure did not typically reflect the European influenced conjugal pair living in an ostracized space; rather, according to Sudarkasa's (1988) notable study concerning the African family, family often constituted a consanguineal group comprising one husband, multiple wives, and their children. Historians and anthropologists agree that consanguineal husbands historically dominated African societies (Staples, 1973) by protecting their families, and providing and making decisions for them (Johnson & Staples, 2005). Simultaneously, the West African family fostered wives' independence given their distinct familial responsibilities, and autonomy over earned wages and property (Sudarkasa). Consequently, mothers, despite their subordinate familial position, shared considerable power, influence, and authority over their families.

The role of motherhood was an aspiration that most West African women sought to attain (Johnson & Staples, 2005; Sudarkasa, 1988). The world recognized African mothers as loving their children to levels unparallel to mothers in neighboring countries, even offering her services to slave traders in exchange for her children's assured safety (Sudarkasa, 1988). African society, including the community but particularly her children, respected mothers for having bore and raised them (Sudarkasa, 1988).

Sudarkasa (1988) found that West African children naturally respected their mothers, as they spent significant time with her including sleeping with her until they reached the appropriate age to communally room alongside their half sisters or brothers.

Fathers earned respect from their wives and children by appropriately assuming the aforesaid responsibilities of protection and decision-making. Once earned, his family revered him much like a king, saturating him in love, adoration, and gifts (Sudarkasa, 1988).

The contemporary African American family directly reflects West African values. Mothers and fathers shared an endearing relationship with their children (Staples, 1973). Sons of the Ashanti tribe desired nothing more than to build his mother a home; daughters held an unbreakable bond with their mother who served as the daughter's lifelong adversary (Staples, 1973). In fact, a mother's greatest reward included living in a home with her children and grandchildren (Staples, 1973). African mothers reveled in their children's dependence on and respect for her. This role of motherhood, more prominent than wife, theoretically placed the woman at the hierarchy of her family and community. The institution of family represented a social construct through which African society thrived (Staples, 1973).

The life of West Africans reflected liberation and nurturing. Children enjoyed a carefree life and engendered no responsibilities until the age of 10 (Sudarkasa, 1988). Fathers embraced their families, and worked laborious jobs to provide for them (Sudarkasa). Mothers produced most of the family's food, tended to her young children, and performed household duties (Jones, 1982). Multiple tribes had great familiarity with picking cotton, cultivating indigo, and tilling farms. To a great degree, Westerners were aware of West African's physical and mental endurance, which contributed to the former's decision to exploit their agricultural competencies through savage enslavement

(Jones, 1982).  Westerners pilfered their liberated lifestyles as they captured Africans,

marched them along the coast of West Africa, crowded them aboard ships, and brought

them to the New World, where the surviving suffered separation from families and

selling to the highest bidder (Billingsley, 1965).

**The African Slave Family**

*"… white folks in my part of the country didn't think anything of breaking up a family*

*and selling the children in one section of the South and the parents in some other*

*section"* (*William Johnson, Virginia* as cited in Dunaway, 2003, p. 68).

Sudarkasa (1988) asserts the West African consanguineal family group generally

dissipated amidst European influence, slavery's wrath, and the oppressive system under

which newly enslaved Africans found themselves.  Emotionally complex, spousal and

parental roles now lacked legal recognition, and only occurred given the master's

consent and financial stability (Elkins, 1986).  Legally discounting slave marriages

emphasized their assignment as property for the sole pecuniary benefit of their master

and the hegemonic society under which they endured (Du Bois, 1908).  The plantation

economy relied on slaves' indispensability, which opposed the concept of a Christian

marriage.  Thus, slaves, primarily men, were often auctioned and sold to other

plantations, leaving their spouses and children behind and resulting in women raising

their children without their spouses emotional and physical support (Frazier, 1989).  For

this reason, slave marriages were unstable; although the love between husband and wife

endured (Jones, 1989).  Moreover, while enslavement greatly impacted the woman's

interaction with and authority over her children, it did not alter her instinctive love and

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maternal adoration towards them (Staples, 1973).  In instances where slave families

remained united, the father relentlessly attempted to exert his patriarchal role, despite its

overwhelming limits (Jones, 1982).  He and his wife worked together to rear a loving,

respectable family within the confines of their authority in the home and oppression

elsewhere.

Contemporary slave studies suggest masters were sympathetic towards slave

unions to which they held higher regard (Frazier, 1989; Genovese, 1994).  However,

slave narratives and census data debunk this assertion (Dunaway, 2003).  Dunaway's

(2003) study of Appalachian slaves residing on small plantations suggests 50% of

auctioned slaves resulted in permanent separation of children from parents, 40% of

marriages were terminated due to slave owners' indiscriminate actions, and more than

33% of Appalachian slave marriages resulted in disruption by forced labor migration.

Dunaway suggests single-mothered slave homes primarily occurred as a result of labor

migrations.  In fact, her study reveals family disruption, in over 75% of cases, occurred

because of slave sells, and long term hire-outs to other plantations.

Structured disruption among slave families left them dispersed throughout the

country and in fear of impending sale and disconnection from loved ones.  Nevertheless,

within these controlled family structures, extended family networks emerged on

plantations (Nobles, 1988), allowing slave women to "mother" slave children, and slave

men to exert minimal authority over all slave constituents.  Some scholars agree the

female-headed household later developed as an aberrant family structure, resulting from

spousal death or sale, and unwed mothers birthing children (Gutman, as cited in

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Sudarkasa, 1988). Others pronounce this female-headed family structure as one representing African traditions (Staples, 1973).

By declaring that slaves adapted well to family separation, demonstrated minimal emotional distress, and seamlessly acquired new mates, slaveholders rationalized their indiscriminate selling of slaves (Dunaway, 2003; Genovese, 1994). The more cynical slaveholder ignored slaves' ability to express deep affection, and reassured despondent spouses of future marital prospects. Accounts of sympathetic slaveholders exist, who suggested slaves' morale and production increased when they were among loved ones. However, Genovese (1994) asserts, more often than not, the *business* of slavery superseded familial sanctity resulting in broken families, psychologically traumatized parents, and fatherless children.

Familial disruption also ensued via enslaved women's perpetual sexual victimization by barbaric masters (Billingsley, 1974). Women reproduced at the master's request, upon the onset of puberty and throughout their generative periods (Dunaway, 2003; Jones, 1989). Scholars disagree on the nature of women's reproduction, as some suggest women often aborted their fetuses, while others state abortion was contrary to their values (see Penn, 1991). Nevertheless, women more often than not, grudgingly submitted to systematic breeding (Dunaway, 2003) and birthed babies who inherited their parents' physical and psychological bondage.

Slaves expressed their disdain towards breeding, its inhumanity, and thwarting of family stability (Dunaway, 2003). They resented the master's incessant control over their sexuality and sex relations (Clinton, 1989). The woman's dual position as a

producer of crops and reproducer of future slaves meant her benefit to the master was limitless (Jones, 1989). Essentially, "White men in slave society were at liberty to exploit slave women despite family or Christian obligations to the contrary" (Clinton, 1989, p. 14). As Dunaway (2003) cited one slave mother who stated, "…you can never understand the slave mother's emotions as she clasps her new-born child…and from her own experience she sees its almost certain doom is to minister to the unbridled lust of the slave-owner…" (p. 120).

Dunaway's (2003) study found more than 10% of Appalachian slave families were headed by a woman raising children from sexual abuse. These instances often resulted in jealous tension, hatred, and violence between a slave master's White wife and slave casualty (Clinton, 1989; Jones, 1989). Clinton (1989) reports White wives, victims of their husband's infidelity, held feelings of embarrassment, which typically resulted in violence towards the sexually victimized slave woman, and attempts to silence any hearsay about her husband's extramarital relations with the slaves. However, slave women understood that passive sexual adherence secured them from future familial disruption away from their spouses, children, and friends. Consequently, familial stability to some degree relied on the mother's resilience, altruism, and selective passivity (Jones, 1989). While scholars agree slavery debased African families by undermining their African familial structure and traditions (Dunaway, 2003; Jones, 1989; Clinton, 1989), disallowing marriage and separating families, they disagree on the degree to which African families remained intact immediately prior to emancipation (Furstenberg, 2007).

**The Emancipated Negro Family**

*"We did not get nothing except we were turned loose like a bunch of wild hogs to make it the best we could"* (Anna Lee, former slave, as cited in Dunaway, 2003, p. 223).

Emancipation brought about freedom, for which slaves were overwhelmingly grateful, yet, it also served as a crisis for the family (King, 2011). In an effort to secure equal rights and protections, and an all-inclusive term covering mulattoes and others of African ancestry, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois initiated a movement, in the late 19th century, to replace the terms 'African' and 'Colored' with Negro (Smith, 1992). Most contended, Negro appeared a stronger term, offered more grammatical versatility, and represented the turn towards racial progress and equality (Miller, 1937). Nevertheless, White masters found their slave benefactors' psychological and physical freedom problematic and in some instances exhibited malice including holding slave children hostage, and inflicting harm on persistent parents (King, 2011).

Numbers of slaves endured abrupt eviction without wages or food (Dunaway, 2003). Ellen Miller, a former slave whose interviews are included in Dunaway's (2003) study, recounted experiencing extreme indigence, as ex-masters allotted their working contingents little food and clothing in an effort to keep them near and under his manipulation. Whites, as authorizers of local job positions, refused to offer employment to ex-slaves, in an effort to avert their financial independence, and delegated unemployment as a federal offense punishable by forced volunteerism or legal enslavement (Dunaway, 2003). Other Whites erroneously declared many freedmen vagrant thieves, a charge easily indicted and punishable by peonage (Du Bois, 1908).

Unfortunately, according to Dunaway, women heading their household typically remained with the former master to assure their children's basic wellbeing; a grave sacrifice of pride and freedom.

Nevertheless, masters absolved less than 10% of slaves from bondage (Dunaway, 2003). Essentially, less than 33% of emancipated slaves departed the plantation within the first year, and 20% left to explore life outside the plantation, only to reluctantly return and work for their owner for two or more years (Dunaway, 2003). Billingsley (1974) asserts the Negro family emerged from slavery representing three forms of crises: having to work for one's former owner, agreeing to sharecrop, or men abandoned their families in search of work and new opportunities. In the latter instance, women again found themselves raising and providing for their children with few means from which to accomplish this goal. King (2011) found that most emancipated families chose to bask in their freedom while searching on foot for displaced family members and relatives.

Often masters refused to release children until parents paid a given amount of money to cover their pecuniary gain (King, 2011). Or masters forced apprenticeships upon former slave children, notwithstanding parents' adamant disproval (King, 2011). Former slaves complained to the Freedman's Bureau and even to the President of the United States, affirming their desire to live and thrive with their family, and control the conditions under which their children labored (King, 2011). Many spouses legally married and scribed their union in the Freedman's Bureau marriage registry, further affirming their commitment to family and removing the illegitimacy characterizing their children (King, 2011). Consequently, most Negro children during this era grew up in

two-parent households (Franklin, 1988). Ruggles (1994) asserts that despite emancipation and African Americans' cultural dynamics, slavery, and poverty undermined freedmen's marriage stability throughout the 19th century.

Before emancipation the Negro enslaved male held no authority over his children's circumstances, in protecting his wife from the master's ferocities, or providing for his family as were White males (Lewis, 1989). Staples (1988) and Jones (1989) agree that emancipation granted Negro fathers the autonomy to designate patriarchy in their homes, and assist their wives with caring for their families. Men sharecropped on plantations in exchange for a "decent" furnished residence, while women devoted time to motherhood and homemaking (Staples, 1988). Finkelman (2009) suggests the mother's attention toward her family pleased her husband, as her homemaker status removed the mark of slavery while also, according to Jones (1989), thwarted Whites' power to subdue her as a field laborer and domestic servant.

The early 20th century brought about more stress for Negro families. Given the nation's increased overt racism during the Reconstruction period, working only in the home was short lived for Negro women (Staples, 1973). Negro men's growing unemployment rate and minimal daily pay forced their spouses to seek employment. Consequently, masses of Negro men relocated north for war training (Staples, 1973); an effort erroneously anticipated to provide improved financial stability and perhaps respect toward America's underclass. While Negro fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons trained for war, their women managed home life and outside employment (Finkelman, 2009). Still many husbands attempted to find civilian work to provide for their families.

However, their menial per diem salary often left their family economically inept causing women to enter the workforce merely for contributing towards basic needs.  Thus, in 1900 fifty-seven percent of Negro women and 80% of Negro men aged 10 and above worked outside the home (Harley, 1990).  The Negro family's legislatively strategized economic instability blatantly represented America's resistance to Negro's upward mobility (Harley, 1990). Finkelman (2009) explains the African Methodist Episcopal Church encouraged young couples to prepare their daughters for work, given the likelihood that work was inevitable, despite marital status.  Negro women worked as nurses, elevator operators, subway porters, and so on.  It was during this time that the Negro woman's familial role increased in prominence, as she served as a labor reserve for her family and the hegemonic society under which she operated (Furstenberg, 2007).

Du Bois (1899), concerned with Negro's societal fate and socioeconomic downturn, studied Philadelphia's Negro populace.  His study, the first statistically-based sociological study of Negroes buttressed the realization that systemic racism and capitalism resulted in social marginalization and thwarted Philadelphian Negroes' economic and social plight.  Du Bois' (1908) more extensive work concerning these families concluded that economic leverage impacted one's status and resources, but more importantly one's mores, value system, and discipline.  He categorized families into four classes: the middle class and above, the working populace who lived comfortably, the poor who barely maintained, and the underclass who reflected extreme disadvantage and poverty.  Du Bois (1908) concluded that Negroes' social conditions would inevitably disappear once they mainstreamed into American or White society.  He

further conveyed that race did not equivocate absolutely to poverty; rather the invariant vicissitudes of class resulted in cultured poverty. Du Bois' (1908) keenly perceptive stance suggesting social class imputed one's race became the lens through which 20th century scholars examined and labeled the Negro family.

**The Socially Oppressed Negro Family**

*The Great Depression.* Finkelman (2009) recounts The Great Depression as the most economically challenging time for Americans, particularly Negroes and their families. Having suffered discrimination, racism, and prejudice fostered by federal and state policies, Negro families' suffering exacerbated during this time of national poverty. Disproportionately, Blacks endured unemployment, malnutrition, and familial strife (Hill, 1990). Reid, Valien, and Johnson's 1938 study concerning the "urban Negro worker" (p. 1) found that between 1930 and 1936 Negroes experienced a 25% unemployment increase. Moreover, skilled workers' salaries decreased by almost half. Drake and Cayton (1962), in their study suggest almost half of Negroes required emergency work during the Depression. More than 67% earned less than $1,000 per year, while only 32% of their White counterparts endured such economic distress. President Roosevelt's New Deal, the creation and enactment of programs to assist White Americans in recovery efforts, offered no hope, promise, or assistance to the oppressed African American family. Whites replaced Negroes on jobs, even those stereotyped as "Negro work" (Finkelman, 2009). Finkelman (2009) declares constituents rarely extended their charitable donations and relief efforts to Negroes.

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Frazier (1929), who began studying the Negro family during the Depression, argued that cultural and socioeconomic differences manifest in familial stability. His work concerning the Negro family supported Du Bois' work and sought to debunk the notion surrounding the perceived chaos— family structural patterns, and matrifocality— representing biological inferiority. Frazier's work asserted these dynamics reflected slavery's legacy, one's social class, urbanization, and migration (Frazier, 1927, 1931, 1932, 1937; Furstenberg, 2007). Frazier (1937) emphasized the Negro's transient, migratory affiliations as corrupt, but asserted The Great Depression's economic disenfranchisement invoked one's adaptive imagination. Frazier (1937) delineated three types of Negro family, which he declared symptomatic of socioeconomic burden and classlessness. The first type he described as matrifocal, which he derisively assessed as resulting from "as one would expect…illegitimacy, often involving several men…" (p. 609).

The second family type Frazier (1937) juxtaposed to Whites' traditional family, indicating this type's superiority to the former; patriarchal, stable, and fostering common interests and trust were its primary features. The final family type, deemed superlative and mulatto exclusive, involved free Negroes whose familial circumstances warranted inheritances from White ancestors, cutting-edge educational opportunities, and association with the White hegemony. Accordingly, Frazier found this family reflected patriarchy, pride in their mixed blood, and superiority over their unmixed Negro counterparts. Frazier's study concludes, just as did Du Bois, that Negroes' familial fate rested upon its economic resources. At that time, more than 80% of Negro families

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earned $999 or less per year, while only 29% of the entire American population lived within those means (Frazier & Bernhert, 1946).

Frazier's (1939) study concerning the Negro's familial state declared matrifocal families as morally contemptuous and reflective of one's maladaptiveness toward socioeconomic conditions. His adamant assertions toward this familial pattern solidified the foundation from which future scholars would assess the Negro family in juxtaposition to that of Whites of a comparable social class (Fusterberg, 2007). Frazier's research throughout the Great Depression applies social class and/or education to Negro community disaggregation (Frazier, 1929), generational conflict (Frazier, 1931), illegitimate births (Frazier, 1932), and cultural resources and demure (Frazier, 1939).

*WWII (1939-1945).* During World War II, research concerning the Negro family increased in scope. Drake and Cayton (1962), E. Franklin-Frazier adherents, explored the Negro family in totality. Their study found that World War II brought about increased financial stability for Negro families; however it simultaneously disrupted the family, as men enlisted in the army and women increased their outside employment. The authors attribute Negroes' perceived instability to conditions related to the Great Depression, but primarily to cultural factors, which enable desertion, illegitimacy, and divorce. Drake and Cayton's study further aligns family values with social class. The authors conclude, as did Frazier (1937) and Du Bois (1908), that middle and upper class Negro families value education, self-discipline, social mobility, and exclusivity from lower class Negroes as did Whites. Lower-class Negro families,

according to Drake and Cayton, employ uncouth values including familial instability, illegitimacy, low ambitions, and excessive secular activity.

Given the White populace suffered, although disproportionately to the conditions of the Great Depression, the government instituted policies to eradicate poverty and foster social mobility. However, racism left Negroes rare recipients for the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), housing, and other welfare services under the Social Security Act. Consequently, impoverished Negro families which veteran scholars and society deemed lazy and lacking ambition, were enveloped in an economic downturn and thereby governmental dependence.

*Civil Rights & Women's Liberation Movements (1950-1980).* During the early Civil Rights period, 48% of Negro families and 65% of single-mothered families lived in poverty (Glick, 1988). While this era represented economic growth in general, it also represented the government's skewed perception of young Negro men and its attempt to limit their welfare recipiency. The government instituted additional welfare policies, including one that did not allow families with able-bodied males living in the home to receive welfare (Glick, 1988). Consequently, women in some cases, avoided marriage given their economic stability rested on their family's maintained separation (Glick, 1988). The government continued playing a key role in Negro family structure. Thus, Negro mothers did not imbue their men to leave the home; governmental institutions played the largest role (Jewell, 2003).

Hill (1990) reports that society further undermined Negro families by neglecting to establish housing, health, and educational institutions in their neighborhoods;

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pressuring breadwinners to travel to find work, and pressuring their wives to supplement the family's income by acquiring gainful employment and leaving their children unattended. Hill concludes that these families disproportionately experienced crime, low educational success, family instability, and health related issues due in part to these factors.

The fervent undermining of Negro families and their overall well-being coupled with the Civil Right's eventual progress caused Negroes to reexamine their American identity (Smith, 1992). The term Negro was readily scrutinized and associated with subservience to Whites, and complacency. Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Black Power movement, encouraged one to abandon the term Negro for the term Black—a term describing a people who embraced racial pride, power, and militancy (Bennett, 1970). Similar to 'Negro,' the term Black denoted strength and power, but it also represented the antithesis to 'White' (Wilkinson, 1990). This external recharacterization resulted in psychological stamina to continue working towards equality during this time, and particularly during the Women's Liberation Movement (Wilkinson, 1990).

The Women's Liberation Movement gained national notoriety during the 1960s when White women and many Black women seemingly proclaimed the same struggle—oppressive male dominance. Nevertheless, Black women affirmed the White woman's suburban frustration towards her homemaker lifestyle was starkly different from the racial, gender, and socially constructed discrimination for which the Black woman protested (Staples, 1973). While White women affirmed the need for middle class luxuries such as childcare centers, self-defense classes, and free birth control, Black

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women insisted on fighting for their basic human right—equality (Staples, 1973).  Black

women hesitated to put forth effort towards a movement conjoining White women, when

the issue was not Black men but the societal forces under which all women lived.

Jacqueline Grant (as cited in Burrow, 1998) stated, "We have a tendency to overlook the

differences and to talk about our commonalities, but that is problematic because it

attempts to move toward reconciliation without liberation" (p. 22).  During this

emerging movement, while White women fought for childcare centers, Black women

desired their children to attend schools with equal resources as Whites (Burrow, 1998).

White women desired self-defense classes, however, Black women had never had

protection from the ails of White men; even Black men still lacked the authority to

protect their women (Burrow, 1998).

The Women's Liberation period brought about multiple liberal policies, which

primarily transformed middle-class Black educational, economic, and political prowess

(Jewell, 2003).  Hill (1990) asserts Black families suffered negative consequences given

policies that transitioned the nation's tax burden to middle-income and working-class

families, and the Regan administration's budget cuts for the impoverished.  Moreover,

affirmative action, civil rights, and access to education grants and loans allowed a

privileged few to climb the social ladder in similar ways as Whites. Jewell (2003)

explains middle-class Black citizens easily transitioned to the White elite society, given

their previous participation in the Black elite society.  Contrary to Black working-class

citizens, the middle-class had negotiated the sophisticated intricacies of attending higher

education institutions, purchasing rather than renting property, occupying professional

positions, and so on (Jewell, 2003).

***Black Family Studies during the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation***

***Movements.*** Several scholars (Bernard, 1966; Drake & Cayton, 1962) emerged during

women's liberation to debunk the notion that Black mothers' alternative means for

rearing children contributed to aberrant Black family structure. Bernard (1966) asserted

the Black family "should not be viewed as a deviance from a white norm" (p. viii). She

further attributes societal constraints and the hegemonic society under which Blacks

thrived as the catalyst for the female-headed household. Others (Billingsley, 1965;

Lewis, 1966; Moynihan, 1965) expounded upon these notions, particularly regarding

socioeconomic status, and offered ameliorative suggestions for the debauchery facing

such families.

Despite scholars' attempt to uplift the single-mothered home, Moynihan (1965)

decried the Black family and appealed to the American government by adopting

Frazier's (1937) views attributing Blacks' perceived dysfunction to their own frailty,

coupled with historical and hegemonic implications. Moynihan described the single-

mothered home as a matriarchy, and further suggested it reinforced the grave conditions

it sought to escape such as lower socioeconomic status, dependence upon public support,

and above average child birth. He finally characterized this family pattern as one which

thwarts Black progress in totality. Stirring unrelenting controversy, according to

Furstenberg (2007), Moynihan's report served as the impetus by which future

sociologists, anthropologists, and intellectuals analyzed Black family life.

Billingsley's (1965) study defined three Black family patterns that he deemed emergent from slavery's wrath: patriarchal, equalitarian, and matriarchal. He defined the patriarchal pattern as one in which the husband embodies social, economic, and psychological dominance in the home. The most stable, he reported most upper class Blacks adopt the pattern, share values with the larger society, and embody strict socialization customs. Most Black families, he explained, reflect an equalitarian pattern; one in which both parents share flexible roles and authority. He explained this family primarily represents the middle class. Billingsley finally reported the most common family as matriarchal, which he divided into three subtypes: father is not in the home, temporary father is in the home, and stable father in the home whose economic and/or parental support is fleeting. Billingsley, just as did Lewis (1959), reports these matriarchal women typically bear the parental and economic household burdens. He substantiates Moynihan's (1965) report by describing these as "multiproblem families" (p. 33) whose psychological, economic, and social deprivation exacerbated their place in society. He concluded that although these families are stigmatized given their likely lower socioeconomic status, their social mobility rests with eliminating the stigma to strengthen families and as Lewis (1966) would later suggest, inculcate social responsibility.

Having studied several world cultures, Lewis (1966) negated previous research suggesting single-mothered Black homes as aberrant due to slavery's history. Rather, his cumulative studies addressing world cultures yield similar behaviors among African American single-mothered homes and the world's impoverished. Having identified 70

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traits characterizing poverty, Lewis asserted one's distinction from the larger society, illegitimate births, and loose family arrangements were not distinctive to the single-mothered Black family, but to the ever-present culture of poverty. He refuted Billingsley's (1965) multiproblem family thesis suggesting it emphasized their dysfunction. Lewis reported the world's impoverished as a group who recognizes legal marriage as an ideal but views consensual or common law marriage as a socially convenient institution given it allows women to experience freedom in similar ways as men, purports stronger holds on children, and absolute control over their own property.

Drake and Cayton (1962) found that lower class Black men, victimized by gross underemployment opportunities, relied on their women for financial stability because their domestic position was more reliable. Thus, while Black men lived in the homes and may have assisted in raising their children, Black women held the dominant role. Jewell (2003) found that during the Women's Liberation movement, although Black men earned less than their White male counterparts, they earned more than their educated wives and maintained their position as the breadwinner. Because of this, the White male ideal of high status breadwinner was starkly different in the Black household where the wife's job held a higher status than her husband who was nevertheless the breadwinner (Jewell, 2003). In his retrospective study, Staples (1988) attributed White patriarchal familial stability to the wives' passivity, in which her economic dependence fostered. He further declared that Black women's feelings of freedom and equality manifested from their forced economic independence and resulted in tensions within their marriage that Whites hardly experienced. Moreover, while more Black females

than Black males attended college, significantly more White males than White females attended college, placing them in a high status, high socioeconomic position (Staples, 1988).

Manifesting in the Black family life, the Women's Liberation Movement brought about social policies that further victimized Black women, particularly those receiving public assistance. The complex issues, as aforementioned, between White women and their children and White women and men suggest that the White standard of family is not an appropriate model to which Black families adhere (Hale, 1982; Jewell, 2003). While White women focused on gender differences with their male counterparts, Black women continued asserting that their basic human rights were inherently violated, given their race and gender (Jewell, 2003).

**The Liberated African American Family**

For more than 15 years (1973-1988) America accepted the term Black as the official descriptor of those of African descent (Smith, 1992). However, in the late 1980s Jesse Jackson, on behalf of the National Urban Coalition, encouraged Blacks to strengthen their identity by connecting with their African heritage. Jackson along with Ramona Edelina proposed the term African American, which symbolized cultural significance and integrity. Moreover, advocates believed this term, African American, would assist others in perceiving these persons as an ethnic group rather than merely as a race or color (Allen, 1990; Smith, 1992). The change from Black represented African American's newfound cultural and familial changes. During the latter 20th century there was an increased rate of single-mothered African American homes, as they were noted

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as the fastest growing impoverished population (Jewell, 2003).  Chapman (1988) states

African American children were three times more likely than their White counterparts to

live in a single-mothered household or live in poverty.  Due to increased divorce rates,

and birth rates amongst African American single women between 1970 and 1982, single-

mothered homes rose from 28% to 41% (Jewell, 2003) ending the decade with 49% of

African American children living with one parent (Chapman, 1988).  Conversely, the

United States Census Bureau data revealed that in 1980 and 1990 White women received

70% and 65% of the total abortions respectively, which reduced the births to their single-

mothered households (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The year 1985 represented a time when African American single-mothered

homes (30%) almost equaled African American married couples with children (27%)

(Glick, 1988).  Glick (1988) explains the proportion of births to African American

unmarried mothers increased from 35% in 1970 to 59% in 1984.  Increased education

coupled with unemployment rates, and the increased preference for cohabitation prior to

officially marrying resulted in postponing marriage longer than other races (Glick,

1988). Consequently, as suggested by Glick (1988), in 1985 72% of African American

men and 64% of African American women in their twenties characterized themselves as

never married. Nevertheless, Glick concludes African American children in the 1980s

lived in homes with parents who had attained higher education than was accessible

earlier in the century.

Given the African American woman's increased likelihood of single

motherhood, scholars (Dowd, 1997; Nobles, 1988; Spencer, 1990) began concerning

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themselves with the mother's parenting acts and relationship with her children. Nobles' (1988) study described the African American parent-child relationship as one embodying strength, unconditional love, and respect. Nobles asserted the African American parent-child relationship legitimates the child's humanity, mediates life's uncanny conditions, and enables strength. Parents primarily fostered these strengths by preparing their children to negotiate the hostile, racist environment in which they lived (Nobles, 1988). Spencer's (1990) study concerning childrearing among African American families negated previous research (Frazier, 1937; Moynihan, 1965; Wilson, 1987) that assessed lower-income Black families as classless and valueless. Spencer also found all families in his study exhibited similar values, mores, and beliefs, despite socioeconomic resources.

     ***Black Feminist Thought and Family.*** During this era began to validate African American's lived experiences, Hill Collins (1989) established the theory of Black Feminist Thought which vehemently asserts that the Black woman's lived experiences and interpretations are manifested through her double oppression as Black and female (Hill Collins, 1989; Johnson & González y González, 2013). Having reflected on the legacy of Black, oppressed, female leaders such as Harriet Tubman, Ida Wells Barnett, and Sojourner Truth, Hill Collins found that Black women's oppression breeds through the interwoven notions of class, race, and gender oppression. Because of this, the Black woman's consciousness, concerning her reality, is inherently distinct from those who are neither Black nor female, particularly members of the dominant group.

Historically, society has suppressed the Black woman's notion of truth due to its lacking an association with a conceptually validated epistemological premise (Hill Collins, 1989; Johnson & González y González). Black Feminist Thought seeks to discredit the dominant group's metanarrative concerning Black women by rearticulating and validating the view and interpretations of the world via the Black woman's culture and traditions. It further declares the shared and enduring identity of Black women is best substantiated through the scholarly lens of one who is Black and female. This strategy negates the "truth" of institutions that view their reality as superior (Johnson & González y González, 2013).

Hill Collins (1989) explains that Black Feminist Thought shares a contradictory relationship with theories such as postmodernism. Although postmodernism challenges scientific notions of nature and social constructions, which are aligned with Black Feminist Thought, it asserts no political identity and offers no policy recommendations. Postmodernism, according to Hill Collins, is a means of discrediting the discourse of the dominant group and the oppression of Black women. However, unfortunately it is often only to the politically elite who have access to the ideas and notions associated with postmodernism.

The theory of Black Feminist Thought is uniquely aligned with my study, as it purports the need for Black female scholars to research and interpret the experiences of Black women (Johnson & González y González, 2013). As indicated by Hill Collins (1989), theories are based upon the interests and cultural perceptions of its creator— thus, the necessity for Blacks to research themselves. Moreover, this theory validates

the Black woman's lived experiences as unique, distinct, and knowledge-based, despite its incongruence with mainstream White masculine thought.

Dowd (1997) suggests the African American single mother, unlike her White counterpart, has community support and a strong self-identity, which gives her the mental capacity to endure her impending hardship.  Moreover, her perseverance teaches other families a sense of endurance and resilience, given she's faced the most obstacles yet often emerges from her paradoxical position with affirmation and distinctiveness. Hill (1999) holistically studied the African American family and concluded that familial dysfunction in single-mothered homes stemmed from institutional racism and sexism, recessions, increased unemployment, low wage service positions, and disproportionate rates of African American male incarceration, among other factors.  Hill further concludes that African American families, single-mothered and otherwise, reflect five characteristics which mediate the anticipated negative social effects: achievement orientation, work orientation, flexible family roles, kinship bonds, and religious orientation.  Hill (1999) explained these five components allow the single-mothered home to function as smoothly as the ideal two-parent family while instilling strength, resilience, and independence.

Despite the growing trend to validate the single-mothered home, scholars still research its deficits to substantiate its aberrance.  William Julius Wilson (1987), a Du Bois and Frazer adherent, suggested that African Americans and their communities synergistically beget cultural reproduction and familial disadvantage.  He further

concluded that for children, a single-mothered household sustained their disadvantage, even through adulthood.

**The 21st Century Single-Mothered Family**

*Since time immemorial the black man's emasculation resulted in the need of the black woman to assert herself in order to maintain some semblance of a family unit. And as a result of this historical circumstance, the black woman has developed perseverance; the black woman has developed strength; the black woman has developed tenacity of purpose and other attributes which today quite often are being looked upon negatively. She continues to be labeled a matriarch. And this is indeed a played upon white sociological interpretation of the black woman's role…* (Chisholm, 2006, p. 132).

United States representative Shirley Chisholm, in her 1974 address to her professional constituents on the scholarship of African American women, asserted the historical significance African American women executed in their families. Historically African American women secured their family's survival (Chisholm, 2006). Moreover, the Black woman's hierarchical position was one of urgency, vigor, and significance (Chisholm, 2006). One can confidently declare that neither prominence nor stability would persevere in their families had African American women waned during their years of slavery, emancipation, oppression, and even liberation. Twenty-seven years after Representative Chisholm's insightful lecture, African American women, especially mothers, still impact their families, because they generally serve as the only parent in the household. U. S. Census (2011) data indicate that of the 11,155,000 African American children in the United States, 90% live with at least one biological parent; 51% of which

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are raised in a single-mothered home.  Of the estimated 15,691,024 African American women in the United States, 47% are classified never married, 5% separated, 9% widowed, and 13% divorced  (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).  The vast majority of African American female householders in general (41%) live in the south of the United States and average age 44 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). The least amount of female householders live in the northeast United States, and average age 45 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Hill's Five Familial Components, U. S. Census Data, & 21*[st] *Century Research.* This section utilizes Hill's (1999, 2003) five familial components: strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong achievement orientation, and strong religious orientation; coupled with U. S. Census data and 21st century research to describe the contemporary African American single mother and her home. This is significant given Social Learning Theory, a framework which undergirds this study, emphasizes the magnitude of social models and consequences (Bandura, 1977).

Developed by Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory posits that one's thoughts and behaviors are considerably influenced by observations and direct experiences (Bandura, 1977; Johnson & González y González, 2013).  I selected this theory given Bandura suggests that reciprocity exists among one's environmental, cognitive, and behavioral influences and that humans' innate ability to use symbols allows for imagination, engagement, and communication despite space and time.  Resultantly, humans are the primary conduit for personal change (Bandura, 1977).  Often deemed a theory that adjoins cognitive and behavioral theories, Social Learning Theory simply

emphasizes the function of modeling and observation. Moreover, the theory avows that humans' unique capacity to learn through observation elicits anticipated consequences, which consequently initiate cognitive responses and actions.

Recently, Social Learning Theory framed multiple research efforts through the scope of parenting (Chlosta, Patzelt, Klein, & Dormann, 2012; McCullough, 2012; Patock-Peckham, Cheong, Balhorn, & Nagoshi, 2001), crime (Atchison & Heide, 2011), medicine (Ford, 2008; Samek & Rueter, 2011; Wood & Alderman, 2011), and education (Shaw, 2012; Teater, 2011; Yeager, 1998). Esteemed as a credible approach for analyzing behavior, this theory has for decades explained how humans are influenced by those they observe (Johnson& González y González, 2013). Regarding this study, social learning theory's relevance is noted in its indication that children learn through direct and vicarious observation of their parents. Largely, children imitate their parents' behavior if the consequences of such behaviors are desired.

*Strong kinship bonds.* Hill (2003) defines strong kinship as an innate responsibility to one's relatives despite personal distress. He reports that African Americans are more likely than their White counterparts to allow the elderly, relatives under 18 years of age, and related families experiencing hard times to reside in their home. Strong kinship is also reflected in single-mothered families, particularly with her own children. The U. S. Census Bureau (2005) and Foster et al. (2007) found that maternal warmth protected adolescents from smoking, even in instances when their mothers smoked. Akers, Yonas, Burke, and Chang (2011) found that nurturing single mothers increased their children's self-esteem which reduced, particularly for their

daughters, dating manipulation.  Gibson-Davis and Gassman-Pines (2010) in their study

of family structure (cohabitating, divorced, and never married) and mothering found that

children living in married arrangements experienced more positive interactions with

their mother.  However, the extended family and co-parent mediated factors children in

single-mothered families are likely to experience (Gibson-Davis & Gassman-Pines,

2010).

The 21st century brought about more scholarly depth into the single-mothered

home.  Scholars found these mothers, 97% of low-income mothers in one case,

characterize their parenting by the assistance of a fervently involved co-parent (Johnson

& González y González, 2013; Jones, Shaffer, Forehand, Brody, & Armistead, 2003;

Shook et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008).   For example, a grandmother, biological father,

aunt, or  co-parent's involvement often reduces the unfavorable affects that are typically

associated with White and Hispanic single-mothered households such as lack of

emotional support, depression, stress, economic instability, and so on (McAdoo &

Yonge, 2009; Merten & Henry, 2011).  Thus, the culture of single motherhood in

African American families is not exclusively designated as a mother parenting her

children with minimal support, given she values and utilizes the collaborative efforts her

extended family and community offer (Jones et al., 2007).  Consistent with Hill's (1999)

kinship role, African Americans are more likely to designate parenting as a community

effort (Jones et al., 2007), allowing co-parenting to mediate the negative effects typically

associated with single-mothered homes.  Shook et al. (2010) found the mother co-parent

support resulted in child competence and easier adjustments.  Sterrett, Jones, and

Kincaid's (2009) study revealed the co-parent's relationship even influenced the mother's optimal parenting. Thus, for African Americans the term family, which includes other important adults, is more appropriate than household. Currently, of the 5,716,000 African American children living in a single-mothered home, eight percent have a grandmother in the home (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Of this number, the grandmother is actually the householder in 62% of these homes (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Another four percent have both the grandmother and grandfather present, 90% of which the grandmother and grandfather are the householders.

While these mothers utilize a co-parent's assistance (Hill, 2003) 94% do not have an opposite sex partner in the home (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). In fact, of the 11,155,000 African American children under age 18 in the United States, 92% live without the parent's sex partner (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Of the 864,000 children who live with their parent's opposite sex partner, that partner is the child's other biological parent in 54% of cases (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Essentially, these parents may choose to raise their children in a single-mothered home or a home with an immediate relative. Almost 20% of children raised by an African American single mother are between ages of three and five (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). 51% are eight years of age, and 48% are between ages nine and seventeen (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Most (71%) of homes led by a female African American householder have three or less members of the family, while 29% have four or more (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Strong work orientation.* Hill (2003) defines a strong work as the desire to induce self-help and request additional help when needed. He further states that impoverished African American women were more likely than their impoverished White counterparts to work; he added that African American women, just as White women, desire to acquire prestigious jobs to support their family. Researchers have found that children's intellectual development is positively impacted when single African American mothers as opposed to married mothers are employed (McLoyd, 1993; Milne et al., 1986). Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, and Jackson's (2001) study concluded that a single African American mother's employment was associated with birthing fewer children, obtaining more education, and fewer depressive symptoms. Moreover, there is evidence that it may also be associated with their children's higher math abilities (Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Jackson, 2001).

Currently, the single African American mother is working tirelessly to meet the financial needs of her children (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Because of this 72% of children in these households are raised by mothers in the labor force that receive no financial support from the children's father (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). According to recent data from the U. S. Census Bureau (2011), 31% of children are in single-mothered households that earn more than $30,000 annually, and 13.5% of which accrue more than $50,000 annually. Moreover, because of these mothers' hard work, less than six percent of their children are in the workforce (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Of the African American females who are 18 years of age or older and who earn $40,000-$74,000 annually, 60% are unmarried (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). These data however indicate

that of the more than 11,155,000 African American children in the United States, 65% are being raised without the assistance of food stamps, and 89% without any public assistance; 60% of all African American children are living at or above the poverty level (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, due to these mothers' incessant need to work and provide for their families, 91% of African American children raised by their single mother are covered by health insurance (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Flexible family roles.* Hill (1999; 2003) asserts African Americans' familial strength and stability also lie in their ability to perform multiple roles. For example, mothers perform roles that are traditionally stereotyped as masculine, husbands perform roles such as cooking and cleaning, and older children take upon the parental role in their parents' absence (Hill, 2003). Regarding single-mothers, confidence in their ability to carry out both parental roles contributes to their low remarriage rates. U. S. Census Bureau (2011) data indicate that while all women's remarriage rates reduced over the latter 21st century, Black women were 20 percentage points less likely than White women to remarry.

This is significant given Parental Investment Theory, a framework of this study, rationalizes the dynamic between parents, their offspring, and their resources (Webster, 2009). In juxtaposition to Parental Investment Theory, Hill's flexible family roles suggests single-mothered homes may function best when the mother and children adopt malleable roles; roles which allow one to supplement the duties of another. However, Parental Investment Theory implies parents invest their resources, trust, and efforts into the child(ren) who will likely generate the most return. Mandara, Varner et al. (2010)

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found that African American single-mothers tend to invest their resources and even responsibility into their daughters. Single-mothers were noted to delineate household duties to their daughters rather than their sons, which resulted in the daughter's differential socialization towards independence, resilience, and success.

Biologically, Parental Investment Theory suggests parents, particularly mothers, are obligated to invest resources in their offspring rather than themselves. Socially, Parental Investment Theory implies children reared in nurturing, loving homes form secure relationships, whereas children reared by negligent parents exhibit less secure attachment patterns. I selected Parental Investment Theory to undergird this study, given its assertion that children are the sum total of their parent's overall investment.

*Strong achievement orientation.* Single mothers are noted to have less education than married couples with children (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Currently, 39% of all married couples with children under age 18 have a bachelor's degree, while only 17% of single mothers, regardless of race, hold the same degree (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Even more specific, of the 8,175,000 female householders between ages 15 and 44 with children under age 18, 15% have at least a bachelor's degree; 84% of single mothers within the same age range who have children between ages 12-17 are without a college degree, and 35% of female householders with children 18 or below have some college but no degree (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). And finally, an estimated 17% of single mothers are leading homes without a high school degree (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Overall, it seems more than 80% of single mothers are raising children without a college degree, which translates to meager incomes.

The average single mothered family has 3.27 members (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Black families overall average 2.57 members, however it appears that with increased education, the size of the female household decreases (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). For example, 54% of single mothers with a bachelor's degree average two members in their household; 28% have three members, and 16% have four members or more (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Regarding all households in the U. S., those led by a householder without a high school degree average 2.85 person per family, while those led by one with a bachelor's degree average 2.53 per family (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Moreover, 13% of female householders with a bachelor's degree have three or more children, while 36% of female householders with some college have three or more children (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Strong religious orientation*. Hill (2003) states the African American family is strongly orientated to practicing religion and involving oneself in the church. He describes the "Negro church" (p. 27) as an institution Blacks used for survival, particularly during the Civil Rights era. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), two experts on the Black church, purport its intersection with the African American family instigated the progression of both institutions. Families, particularly in rural areas, served as the church's building blocks, and the church offered preaching and a belief system that brought the community and family closer (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Scholars over the past 40 years have documented religion and its importance in African Americans' lives (Billingsley, 1968, 1992; Frazier, 1963; Hill, 1993, 2003). Recent studies reveal African Americans compared to Whites, more readily depend upon

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religion to negotiate parenting and health problems (Brodsky, 2000; Brome, Owens, Allen, & Veviana, 2000). Levin and Taylor (1993) studied gender and age difference in African American religiosity, and found that women across all ages and a number of demographic variables are more likely than men to have a religious affiliation, attend church, and believe church assisted in eradicating historical oppression. Chatters, Taylor and Lincoln's (1999) holistic study on African American religiosity revealed those living in the South are more religious than those in other parts of the United States. Moreover, married, and educated African Americans more religiously involved than those who are unmarried and/or uneducated. Consistent with Levin and Taylor (1993), Chatters et al. found that African American women exhibited religiosity more than men. Brodsky (2000) found that religion offered hope to African American single mothers whose life circumstances appeared hopeless. Moreover, religion aided these mothers in negotiating racism and discrimination, provided a framework for teaching their children appropriate behaviors, and enabled them to transfer their children's safety to a higher power (Brodsky, 2000). Regnerus (2000) found that religious activity serves as a protective measure against low academic achievement.

**The African American Daughter from the Single-Mothered Household**

African American children are more than twice as likely as their White counterparts to live in a single-mothered household (54% vs. 21% according to the U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Currently, more than 50% of African American daughters are raised by their single mother (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Over one-third of these daughters live in homes with mothers who have never been married, while nine percent

live with a divorced mother and five percent live with a mother who's separated from her spouse (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Daughters of single African American mothers are reared to engender strength and self reliance (Hill, 2003). Critical race adherents (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998) and feminist scholars (Hill Collins, 1989, 2009) suggest the racist and sexist society in which these mothers lived placed them at the head of their immediate family, which shaped the way they raised their children. Sharp and Ispa's (2009) study revealed these mothers living in the inner city socialize their daughters based on their personal, and often negative, experiences with men. Essentially, these mothers encourage their daughters to avoid men, focus on their education, and rely on themselves (Sharp & Ispa, 2009). Their study is consistent with literature elucidating the mother anticipating her daughter will likely raise a family alone in the future and seeks to thwart that plight, but also prepare her (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008). Although research indicates that African American families are strengthened when women are empowered (Collins, 1998, 2000), little research is available describing the plight of those raised in single-mothered homes (K. Scott, 2003).

## Education

African Americans fought in similar ways for their education as for their family. Education was not a right which slave owners and policy makers liberally endowed, but a privilege reserved for those of a particular color, ethnicity, and social class. Similar to understanding family, it is pertinent for one to understand African Americans'

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educational trajectory.  Therefore, a brief synopsis of African American education is offered.

**The African Slave's Education**

Goose Creek Parish of Charleston, South Carolina founded the first known school for Negro slaves in 1695 (Gordon, 1971).  The school's primary mission included indoctrinating slaves with American and Christian principles, and teaching literacy.  The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, along with various groups of sympathetic Whites believed enslaved persons required education, at least to save their souls (Anderson, 2004).  During the early 18th century Benjamin Franklin also posed as a dedicated proponent of indoctrinating slaves with Christian principles (Bly, 2011), as he founded the Bray School, which cultivated reading skills for free and enslaved boys, and reading and domesticity for free and enslaved girls.  Numbers of slavemasters believed an intelligent slave provided endless benefits, given he could speak the language and thereby understand instruction (Woodson, 1915).  Moreover, he reflected, although minimally, contemporary American civilization rather than the perceived deficient third world from which he came (Woodson, 1915).

Woodson (1915) and Bly (2011) report slavemasters appreciated the ease with which intelligent slaves assimilated to their disheartening status, but also believed intelligence fostered a desire for freedom and inevitable empowerment.  In fact, Lewis' 1827 slave study found one slavemaster required his slaves to sleep when idle to prevent them from merely thinking.  Widespread beliefs regarding slaves' inevitable edification compelled South Carolina, in 1740, to prohibit slave literacy.  The savage regard for

slaves as mere human property (Goddell, 1857) holding an innate inferior mental

capacity (Powdermaker, 1943) accounted for Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, North

Carolina, and Missouri enacting fierce laws prohibiting slave literacy over a 90-year

span (Anderson, 2004). Cornelius (1983) reveals this legislative motion meant radical

consequences, such as finger amputation, for slaves caught reading or writing. Despite

this, slaves secretly taught themselves to read, and at times learned from their

slavemaster's children (Bly, 2011; Webber, 1978) or sympathetic Whites.

While free Blacks in northern states worked to pressure executive constituents to

afford Black students aesthetically palatable public education facilities (Curry, 1981),

southern slaves recoiled at The Dred Scott Decision of 1857 which constitutionally

denounced their citizenship and entitlement to public education (Bond, 1901).

Essentially, this legislation legalized slavery and allowed the oppression of African

American persons to thrive. As a result, emancipated slaves reflected a 90% illiteracy

rate (Bond, 1966). Bond (1966) asserts only five percent of slaves emerged from slavery

having acquired a basic education.

Possessing reading and writing skills served as the educational pinnacles that all

slaves, for various purposes, dreamed to attain (Washington, 1902). Many slaves

desired to improve their fundamental knowledge, while the great majority desired to read

and know the Bible for themselves (Webber, 1978). But it was not the only type of

education to which slaves exposed themselves.

Via storytelling, parents and grandparents educated slave children about their

ancestors, Africa the Motherland, and slavery's wrath (Webber, 1978). Parents, through

a severe degree of corporal punishment, also educated their slave children regarding the harm befriending and communicating with White children eventually brought to the slave quarters (Webber, 1978).  The family yielded the most knowledge to one another; teaching each other to dance, sing, hunt, and even read (Webber, 1978).  Proficiency in these skills allowed the African slave to excel and experience some degree of confidence.  Still the thought of formal knowledge proved distressing and further demonstrated the slave held no authority, no power, no valid opinion, and no meaningful position in the society he lived.

**The Emancipated Negro's Education**

The Civil Rights Act of 1866, a product of the Civil War, represented the first piece of congressional legislation that protected African Americans' civil liberties. Essentially the Civil Rights Act reversed the Dred Scott v. Sanford ruling of 1857, emancipating all slaves.  Legally affording former slaves' citizenship, the Civil Rights Act theoretically provided slaves equal protection under the law.  Persons found guilty of denying one equal liberties because of their race or former enslaved position, were guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

Emancipation brought upon a wealth of social ideals, particularly the legal pursuit of education, which slaves believed would thwart their oppression (Washington, 1902).  Consequently, freedmen immediately initiated an educational reform to establish public education for the African American populace.  Initially, they sought to expose themselves to French and Latin, a classical education to which wealthy, college attending Whites adhered (Bond, 1966).  They later abandoned the notion that

knowledge manifested in foreign language, but maintained their own ideas about education, which Woodson (1977) articulated as something Whites could not define for the Black race. In fact, Blacks embraced the idea of attending their own schools. Newly freed Blacks also recognized their constitutional right to vote under the 1866 Civil Rights Act, and the 14th Amendment, enacted in 1868, afforded them civil rights, such as federally funded schools, that Whites could not ignore. Thus, until around 1900 voting meant that the proportion of Negroes within a specified state received equal proportion of state funds for their schools (Bond, 1966). For example, Bond (1932) found that during 1889, Alabama's African American schools received 44% of school funds given they constituted 43.8% of the population. Anderson's (2004) study indicates that during this time more than 50% of Blacks purported literacy. Specifically, during the late 1800s, he estimated literacy rates at 64% and 71% for Black males and females, respectively, between 10 and 14 years of age (Anderson, 2004).

Freedmen received their elementary education from churches and northern missionary teachers who migrated south (Bond, 1966; Brazzell, 1992). Holding varying views of how to educate ex-slaves and prepare them for appropriately living as freedmen, these teachers sought to indoctrinate conservative American principles (Brazzell, 1992). Cash (1941), an early 20th century historian, believed these northern teachers sought to impose ideas upon the ex-slave that opposed traditional southern values. Other historians (Bond, 1966; Brazzell, 1992) suggest they utilized education to disempower the racist and sexist policies by which the south abided. While these northern White teachers played an important role, emancipated slaves primarily brought

themselves from under the slate of illiteracy by initiating an educational reform to establish public education for themselves and their progenitor (Anderson, 1988, 2004).

Bond (1932) reports the Deep South responded to freedmen's growing inclination towards learning by enacting laws to reduce teacher pay and pecuniary appropriations to African American schools. As a result, the 44% of appropriations Alabama received in 1889 were reduced to 11% by 1930. This modus operandi manifested in states across the Deep South. Freedmen countered Whites' organized methods to maintain Blacks as the social and economic underclass. Booker T. Washington and WEB Du Bois, two literate ex-slaves emerged as unofficial national leaders for freedmen, the former encouraging peace and submissiveness towards Whites, while the latter believed African Americans' psychological bondage would cease to ensue once they committed to social change and formal higher education, rather than merely a frustrated, studious onlooker (Berry, 2010).

By 1900, meager federal, state, and donated resources resulted in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) dawning throughout the Deep South. While extremely desirous of education, there was widespread illiteracy among Black populations in the region. Cole (2011) noted that Negro Education in 1917 published "…though a large number of the schools for colored people are called 'colleges' and even 'universities,' there are very few institutions that have equipment for college work or pupils prepared to study college subjects" (p. 168). Consequently, only 58 of the 99 HBCUs offered higher education curricula until around 1930, and only 10% of African American students were in postsecondary academic programs (Cole, 2011). Bernard

(1966) asserts that in later years these institutions thrived from Du Bois' declaration that "Of all the essentials that make an institution of learning, money is the least" (p. 15).

**The Socially Oppressed Negro's Education**

The year 1954 represented the end of separate schools for Black students. The Brown v. Board of Education ruling of 1954 ended education segregation and initiated the legislated outset of equal education for Blacks and Whites (Cole, 2011). Although Black students had up to date educational resources including textbooks and curriculum, resistant White teachers, and scholars were more interested in Black students' alleged lower academic achievement (Ogbu, 1988). Theories challenging African American students' intellectual prowess and achievement expounded during the 1960s and beyond. Social scientists attributed one's learning capacity to home environment, school environment, and genetics (Ogbu, 1988). Moreover, schools adopted policies and strategies consistent with this era's research (Drake & Cayton, 1962; Moynihan, 1965) regarding the African American family. The research, as aforementioned, suggested the single-mothered African American home fostered maladaptive behaviors. Thus, scholars and educators assumed Blacks' lack of educational success was a manifestation of an inferior home, school, or genetic makeup.

Formally deemed the "deficit model," (Dickerson, 1995) this theory gained popularity after the Moynihan report, which ultimately states Blacks social ails including joblessness, reduced academic success, and disproportionate reliance upon welfare were primarily exacerbated by culturally internal issues such as inappropriate work ethic, single-mothered homes, teenage pregnancies, and poor work skills (Hill, 1990).

Although this theory represents the crass, hegemonic nature of public education, it also represents the first time educational constituents attempted to educate both Blacks and Whites for adult occupational positions. Less than a decade after desegregation, Blacks still received inferior education through oppositional teachers, teachers' low expectations, inferior curriculum, tracking, and monocultural textbooks (Ogbu, 1988). Moreover, school counselors guided Black students toward lower-class occupational positions, which reinforced the hegemonic social strata from which they came (Ogbu, 1988).

During the several years after desegregation and of increased societal access, Black families differentially encouraged their daughters and sons to attend college (Jewell, 2003). Black daughters' likely career positions as teachers or domestics provided different lifestyles, which encouraged Black families to opt for the former and have their daughters educated (Spanier & Glick, 1980). One estimate of African American college graduate differentials indicates 62% of African American college graduates in the 1960s were female (Jewell, 2003). However, by 1980 Blacks' median educational level was comparable to Whites, 12 and 12.5 years respectively (Jewell, 2003). Despite Black's educational and thereby financial progression, according to Furstenberg (2007), the Black man's economic status in juxtaposition to his wife, created tension within marriages, further exacerbating Black family's already grave state.

**The Liberated African American's Education**

For the African American, education promised to mediate the economic turmoil that appeared bound to their culture. McAdoo (1988) describes the motivation to acquire educational success as the best inheritance a Black family can bestow upon its generations. Her study revealed that upward socioeconomic mobility for African Americans is hardly maintained through successive generations. Each generation must recreate the mobility cycle, given relatives rarely have a substantive inheritance to pass on. McAdoo's study asserts each generation must sacrifice and promote achievement for socioeconomic stability to ensue among their posterity.

Some scholars, baffled at Black students' gross underachievement, theorized their academic failure culminated with their culture's discontinuity (Ogbu, 1988). Essentially, this perspective asserts the complex and aberrant manner by which Black parents raised and groomed their children lacked recognition in teaching, learning, and testing. Ogbu (1988) declares that essentially Whites' assumption of Blacks' educational needs, contributed to them providing an inferior education, inclusive of misappropriating school funds, reduced teacher pay, and disproportionately labeling Black children as learning handicapped, which guides them towards lower-class adult occupations. Ogbu's study concluded with three prerequisites for Black school performance to improve: recognizing racial stratification in the U.S., acknowledging the disproportionately high rate of school failure results partially from discrimination against the Black population, and change requires those in power to create job opportunities for Black youth and adults rather than attempting to understand and negotiate their cultural

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quirks.  During the 1970s-1990s, single African American mothers with a college education increased from 8% to 26% and their high school dropout rates decreased from 66% to 29% (Hill, 1999).  Moreover, studies negated the notion that one could correlate Black single motherhood with their children's lower academic achievement.

**Educating African American Girls**

Historically, scholars quietly ignored African American girls' educational needs to further understand African American boys' educational plight, given their gross underachievement, and disproportionate graduation, behavioral referral, and special education placement rates (Conchas, 2006; Fordham, 1993; Lewis et al., 2009).  Over the past few decades, however, scholars have increasingly researched African American girls' educational plight.  For example, Grant (1984) explains this population paid the cost of desegregation, given their transition from top students in relation to African American males, to average and below average when considering their newfound White counterparts.  Grant's study revealed teachers, particularly White teachers, enable African American girls' below average academic achievement by focusing on their social rather than academic prowess.  Furthermore, researchers revealed African American girls exhibited higher academic achievement than their male counterparts, but lower than White girls and boys (Center for Education Policy, 2010; Grant, 1984), on all socioeconomic levels (Wheat, 1997).  Moreover, scholars (Center for Education Policy, 2010) found that African American females surpassed their male counterparts in higher education achievement.

In an effort to comprehensively understand African American girls and their educational trajectory, researchers also found that teachers offer minimal encouragement, praise, attention, and even criticism to African American girls (Brophy, 1974; Brophy & Everston, 1984; Grant, 1984; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein 1991). In fact, the literature revealed these students interacted less with their teachers than any other population because they rarely offered behavioral problems or required significant assistance with assignments (Grant, 1984; Sadker et al., 1991). Yet, other researchers found these students received disproportionate discipline experiences similar to African American males (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2010).

Regarding parental involvement, Karraker (1991) found single Black mothers imbue such a voracious appetite for education in their daughters that they are more likely to postpone marriage, and pursue higher education than those living with a mother and father. While Karraker acknowledges the association between the single Black mother's parenting acts and her daughter's passion for education is weak and stresses future research in this area is needed, she also concludes that the association is likely due to daughters concluding self-reliance is necessary. Recent studies support these findings asserting African American parents socialize their daughters for success by investing time and energy in ways they do not in their sons (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010; Madera, Murray et al., 2012; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Townsend, 2008). Conversely, other researchers found these daughters' socialization towards accountability and differential parentification (Townsend, 2008) stressed college students because they felt responsible

for their siblings and accountable to their family's hardships (Gilford & Reynolds, 2011).

**Resilience**

Allowing one's struggle to engender strength and direction is the crux of resilience.  Resiliency research seeks to determine how one adapts and moves from risk to overcoming life's challenges (Shene, 1999, Brown & Davis, 2000).  Bernard (1999) adopted a strengths perspective in regards to research.  He recommended that resiliency research identify and determine how and why protective factors emerge in the midst of significant challenges. Consequently, researchers found that resilience is the synergy between positive adaptation and adversity. When positive adaptation meets adversity, persons emerge having experienced minimal adverse consequences.

African Americans have demonstrated great resilience in their fight for educational equality.  While not totally shielded from adverse consequences, African Americans' adaptation to perpetual adversity fostered a synergistic eruption resulting in progress. Resilience is seemingly the conduit for African Americans familial and educational advancements. Currently, African American single mothers are raising their children to engender resilience.

<center>**Summary**</center>

Literature over the last century has blamed single-mothered homes for intergenerational crime, poverty, and other familial dysfunction experienced within the home (DuBois, 1809, 1906; Frazier (1929, 1931, 1939, 1989; Wilson, 1987; Johnson, & Staples, 2005; Jewell, 2003).  Critics of single motherhood asserted the single African

American mother caused strain on American society by birthing children for which she could not care (Carter & McGolderick, 2005; Frazier, 1932; Moynihan, 1965). Other scholars praised them for uplifting the African American populace deeming the African American single mother as empowering and fortuitous (Billingsley, 1965, 1974; Hill, 1990, 1999). Recent studies indicate the daughters of African American single mothers are academically and socially progressing (Mandara, Varner et al., 2010; Madera, Murray et al., 2012; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Townsend, 2008). Nevertheless, historical and some contemporary research blame African Americans' cultural, familial, and financial characteristics as significant and perhaps sole contributors to their disparate IQ, academic achievement, graduation rates, and so on (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008; Hess & Weiner, 1999). Because of the invariant inconsistencies, more inquiry is required to determine how daughters overcome the said difficulties experienced in school to obtain unwavering academic success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

African American women's paradoxical history laced with cultural deprivation and sporadic victories influenced the frameworks by which this study is theorized and implemented. This study seeks to unearth how single mothers' parenting acts and characteristics imposed on their daughter's successful collegiate academic achievement amidst societal upheaval. While Black Feminist Thought, Parental Investment Theory, and Social Learning Theory frame the study, narrative analysis guides the methodological principles adopted for this study. This chapter explains the study design and modus operandi. It should be noted that the research methodology was carefully selected to expose the responses to the research questions. Accordingly, this chapter provides a synopsis of narrative inquiry and the process by which the data was collected and analyzed. Again, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do African American females describe their single mother's personal characteristics in raising them?

2. How do African American females describe and interpret their single mother's acts of parenting as they raised them?

3. How do African American females describe their single mother's influence on their academic performance?

4. How do African American females describe the influences of race, gender, and class on their single mother's parenting?

**Background**

For this work, four African American female students enrolled in colleges at the undergraduate or graduate level in Texas described and interpreted their single mother's parenting acts and its influence on their college academic success. This inquiry provided an outlet for participants to paint their academic success upon the canvas of their mother's characterization as single. Given this study's purpose and use of narrative inquiry, participants reflected on their entire lives in an attempt to reveal the essence of their academic success and their mother's direct and vicarious contribution. Each narrative led both the participant and the researcher to more comprehensively understand their drive to maintain superior academic standing. Thus, a narrative analysis of these participants lived experiences is offered and analyzed.

**Participants**

This study utilized purposive sampling, which Patton (1990) describes as purposively selecting participants whose knowledge is central to the phenomenon under study. With this in mind, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that researchers select participants until the point of redundancy is reached, that is, when adding participants will likely produce no new information. I adopted these principles to ensure an ideal sample pool.

Four participants were referred for this study by a mutual friend or colleague or contacted the researcher after viewing the recruitment flyer. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate. To protect their confidentiality, all are designated with an alias: Heaven, Layla, Kerri, or Savannah. Because I was interested in how daughters describe

and interpret their single mothers' parenting acts, and how those acts and interpretations influenced the daughter's successful college academic performance, participants for this study met the following criteria:

a. African American female

b. Raised by biological single mother from birth

c. Limited male presence

d. Currently enrolled at a university in Texas

e. Has a GPA of 3.4 or higher

f. Mother was classified as low-income during the daughter's rearing

Although all four participants were students, they represented diverse educational backgrounds, regional locations during upbringing, types of institution they currently attend (HBCU or Predominantly White Institution (PWI), and the mode of obtaining this degree (face-to-face or online). Additionally, they majored in various fields including mathematics, family studies, psychology, and business administration; ranged in age from 20-35; and reported varying feelings toward their mother. Nevertheless, their common experience as academically successful daughters of single African American women was my primary interest. Criterion C is mentioned given the aforementioned literature that indicates African Americans' extended family network and/or co-parenting assist in reducing the negative effects children in single parent homes experience. For the purposes of this study, I was only interested in those single-mothered homes whose co-parent was a female. Regarding Criterion E, I was interested

in daughters whose superior academic achievement, is averaged over a four semester attendance or longer period at their said university.

## Study Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, a design which seeks to unearth the interpretations and meanings people deposit upon their life experiences (Merriam, 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit that to define qualitative research one must include historical factors, given that qualitative research is a metaphor for "colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth….an objective way of representing the dark skinned Other to the white world" (p. 1). These authors explain that historically qualitative research was employed when learning about unknown indigenous human behavior, and indicated it was perhaps to unethically assess others. With philosophical roots in phenomenology, constructivism, and symbolic interactionism, the qualitative research paradigm is one by which scholars, through various methodologies, seek to determine the meaning people derive from their experiences (Merriam, 2009). While the quantitative research paradigm purports knowledge is *found*, the qualitative research paradigm purports knowledge is *constructed*.

Ontologically, the qualitative paradigm assumes that multiple subjective realities exist (Morgan & Smircich, 1980), which are molded by our cultural, political, economic, gender, and ethnic values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Because of this, multiple interpretations of a phenomenon may subsist (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Epistemologically, it seeks to understand these constructions of knowledge or realities through phenomenological insight and hermeneutics (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Methodologically, it primarily employs three techniques: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation, and written documents (Patton, 1990).

This study more specifically utilizes narrative analysis, a research technique focusing on the meaning placed upon life experiences and their storied symbolism (Merriam, 2009). Reissman (2008) describes narrative analysis as a complex family of methods used to interpret storied text. She further explains the researcher focuses on language and communicative meaning details. Similar to Black Feminist Theory, narrative analysis primarily values how persons utilize stories to convey and interpret an experience. Yuval-Davis (as cited by Reissman, 2008) equates one's identity to stories that one conveys to others and self about "who [they] are and who they are not" (p. 8).

For this study's purpose, narrative is used to analyze the recollections of college-enrolled daughters in their efforts to discuss their mother's parenting acts and the influences on their successful academic achievement. Moreover, this technique was selected due to its ability to provide insight into the content and context of the daughter's narrative. Given narratives assist one in acutely understanding human experiences, I anticipate that the participants and I will gain profound knowledge while also constructing a group identity that informs others. In essence, narrative analysis will rationalize one's behavior through the meaning they place upon it.

After the tireless task of transcribing data, I coded data by rewriting notable points throughout the interviews on colored index cards. To acquire depth from the data, I meticulously reread the interviews while listening to the audiorecordings, comparing them to the field notes and taking additional notes. As the data awakened and took upon

its own life, patterns, hunches, and ultimately themes emerged and endured continuous

revision and pruning until they reflected the lives of each participant (Erlandson et al.,

1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).  Erlandson et al. (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)

explain this type of pruning allows one to determine the major themes and patterns of the

narratives.

<div align="center">**The Qualitative Researcher**</div>

**Researcher as Instrument**

This qualitative study poses the researcher as instrument, the ideal means of

collecting qualitative data (Merriam, 2009).  Merriam (2009) expounds upon this

statement and declares the human instrument as researcher is advantageous as "the

researcher can expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal

communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize

material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or

unanticipated responses" (p. 15).  Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain the researcher is

analyzing an indeterminate naturalistic point of view, and only a human researcher has

the distinctiveness necessary to deal with such data.  These characteristics are

responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, processual

immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and opportunity to

explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses.  Merriam, and Lincoln and Guba acquiesce

that the researcher as instrument is a key benefit to qualitative research.

**Researcher Biases**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the qualitative researcher as the instrument that will gather, analyze, and interpret the data. Patton (1990) explains that the qualitative researcher "provides a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking" (p. 64). Quantitative researchers find this researcher position problematic, given the researcher, in their opinion, introduces biases to the observation and findings (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba assert that one cannot gain insightful understanding and meaning from the human experience without human interaction; moreover, techniques such as purposive sampling require interaction. The authors describe interaction in research as a necessary opposing factor to what one attempts to accomplish. One attempts to collect and accurately interpret research findings with minimal biases. Nevertheless, the researcher's position is one of bias. The authors recommend researchers acknowledge his or her position in each phase of the study. Essentially, in qualitative research no meaning is placed on an idea without its human interaction (Cheek, Onslow & Cream, 2004).

**My Positionality**

Prior to conducting this study, I reflected upon my characteristics, which pose as biases for this study (see Table 1). Each characteristic molded me, a product of a single parent home, into my current mode of viewing the world. Given I chose to study daughters from single-mothered homes indicates how these characteristics have precedence over my perceptions, beliefs, and interests. Nevertheless, in addition to

fulfilling the requirements of this degree, this study has assisted me understanding

myself as well as students who are have experienced similar life circumstances.

**Table 1**
**Primary Identifiers that Influence Me as a Researcher**
(Bold areas contributed to my selection of this topic)

| Position | Demographics | Personal Characteristics | Educational Characteristics |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sister | **Woman** | **Christian** | **Inquirer of Knowledge** |
| Student | **African American** | Thanatophobic | **Third generation college graduate** |
| Wife | **Briefly reared in single-mothered home** | Verbose | **Third generation teacher of students of color** |
| **Daughter** | Member of Generation X | **Inquisitive** | **Psychology Background** |
| **Friend** | Politically Affiliated | **Family oriented** | **Believer that education is transformational** |

**Data Collection**

Data collection is complex for the qualitative researcher. The researcher, in

efforts to obtain data, seeks to employ the strategy that will yield the most accurate data.

Seemingly, the most accurate way to obtain data is to utilize a video or audio-recorder.

However, these objects may pose logistical and intimidation issues, as compared to

simply taking field notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state video and audio-recording

objects are more threatening than field notes. Participants' willingness to speak or act without hesitance may be reduced when video and audio-recordings are used. Secondly, field notes keep the investigator more alert and responsive, and field notes are not subject to technical difficulties. Lincoln and Guba also state that field notes allow the researcher to denote their own thoughts and insights during the interview. Nevertheless, audio-recording is a means of ensuring dependability and confirmability, and also assists the researcher in accurately representing the participants' voice (Erlandson, et. al, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Thus, audio-recordings were utilized in the study; all participants confidently agreed.

For this study, the researcher collected data through two to three individual semistructured interviews at locations which fostered participants' candidness and anonymity. After encouraging participants to read and sign the Informed Consent form, the researcher guided the interview by posing approximately 45 questions. Cultivated by storeytelling, the participants then responded to the questions as the researcher penned field notes. The audio-recordings were then transcribed and collaborated with the field notes to provide a comprehensive view of the interview. Triangulated with the participant's college transcript, and so on the researcher analyzed the narratives utilizing narrative analysis.

<center>**Data Integrity**</center>

**Trustworthiness**

In the quantitative researcher's endeavor to elicit a trustworthy report, he or she ensures external and internal validity along with reliability (Merriam, 2009). The

qualitative researcher substitutes these terms with credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Merriam 2009). Credibility is the degree to which findings are credible, as approved by the participants who submitted the data (Merriam, 2009). Dependability is the degree to which one can *depend* on the findings and is a process by which the researcher assures that the data collection methods are documented and logical (Schwandt, 2007). Dependability is achieved by assuring the community where the phenomenon was studied acquiesces with the interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is a process by which individual readers can relate and transfer the findings to their own situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, confirmability is a means of assuring the accuracy of data through confirmations by multiple sources such as documents, and other persons who can confirm the information is in fact true (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is concerned with the association of all interpretations and findings to the data (Schwandt, 2007).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further assert that humans, just as other instruments, must be trustworthy (reliable), and amenable to refinement over time. Therefore, as a researcher, one must undergo critique, mentoring, and pruning to ensure the analysis is pure and objective. Triangulation and other integrity measures must be utilized to increase the validity and credibility of research effort (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the purpose of this study, the researcher adhered to each criteria, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, as described below.

**Credibility and Transferability**

To fulfill the dissertation requirements, prior to analyzing data, I submitted a proposal to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University for approval. Upon approval, I began the study while adhering to the IRB guidelines and the qualitative standards noted below.

It was the researcher's intention to determine how African American women describe their single mother's personal characteristics, interpret her mothering acts, and describe her influence on their academic performance. In an effort to produce a credible product the researcher employed prolonged engagement, persistent, observation, and triangulation. The researcher achieved prolonged engagement and persistent observation by interviewing respondents on multiple separate occasions. This allowed the researcher and respondent to progressively gain rapport and successive member checking. Member checking involved emailing each participant's transcript to them and requesting them to contact me if they desire to make changes to their narrative. But it also involved me verbally reviewing their narrative with them and securing their agreement of my hunches and interpretations. To triangulate data, the researcher required respondent's current college transcript. Peer debriefing also contributes to a work's credibility. During peer debriefing, I utilized committee members or peers as a means of catharsis and to ensure my personal experiences and feelings were not impeding my professional judgments. Also, I utilized peers to discuss emerging hypotheses.

It is important that African American daughters and mothers, whose life circumstances are similar, find relevance and familiarity in the interpretations. In an

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effort to produce transferable interpretations, I obtained a purposive sample and provided "thick" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125) descriptions of the daughters and mother's experiences. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) as reiterated by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1993), thick descriptions allow the reader to transfer participants' robustly detailed experiences into their own lives. Without these descriptions, one cannot "get a feel for what it is like to actually be in the context" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 146). To obtain a purposive sample, the interviewer purposively searched for information-rich participants, while utilizing the snowball technique. Participants primarily learned of the research opportunity from a mutual friend or after reviewing the research flyer. Upon contacting me, I thanked them, reviewed the participant criteria and Informed Consent with them, and then scheduled the first interview, if applicable. Several prospective participants contacted me but did not meet all criteria. Nevertheless, they were encouraged to inform others of the opportunity if aware of persons who met the criteria. By employing member checking, and providing all necessary details that cover a range of information, I attempted to ensure this inquiry reflects credibility and transferability.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is absolutely necessary for all qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To make certain this inquiry was dependable, I allowed participants, through member checking to determine if findings substantiated the offered data. Moreover, I adequately explained each decision reached regarding methodological and design changes by ensuring each change connected to a legitimate logical explanation

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and each finding connected with each participants' data. This is located in the reflexive journal, which details significant incidents and interview notes regarding this inquiry. Finally, I attained dependability by ensuring participants' rather than the researcher's knowledge was utilized. This was done by providing a personal story that exposes research biases, and undergoing peer debriefing when necessary.

To assure this inquiry was confirmable, I kept a reflexive journal, in which all decisions, feelings, biases, peer debriefings, and other related scheduled events were documented. Additionally, I kept all raw data such as audio-recordings, field notes, and other confidential documents in a secured area to which only I had access. While I cannot ensure the findings are free from researcher contamination (Erlandson et al., 1993), I do assert that one can track *all* findings to the raw data.

**Authenticity Criteria**

In an attempt to develop criteria reflecting optimal trustworthiness for qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (2005) established additional standards allowing one to judge the outcomes of qualitative research for appropriate use of the researcher's inherent power (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Each authenticity construct (fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic) is believed to support the principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

*Fairness in Qualitative Research.* Fairness is the degree to which all participants' "voices" are equally "heard" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 156). Essentially, a balance among perspectives, concerns, and assertions should exist whereas multiple perspectives are advanced and the integrity of the study is upheld. Guba and Lincoln (2005) assert

that when fairness is disregarded, participants' stories are inherently marginalized and researcher biases are introduced. The construct also seeks to bind participants and the researcher in a mutually beneficial relationship whereby they support one another and seek to accomplish the goal together (Erlandson et al., 1993). I considered fairness by ensuring each participant's voice was equally represented within each theme and overall. Moreover, themes were determined based upon each participant substantively having indicated a particular experience and so on.

*Ontological and Educative Authenticity in Qualitative Research.* Ontological and educative authenticities posit that individuals who consider self-actualization, are reflective in their view of themselves and the world, and are growing from their newfound revelation (Erlandson et al., 1993). Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggest these constructs are aligned with Schwandt's (1996, as cited by the authors) "critical intelligence" (p. 260) whereby participants morally critique their data. Each participant reported their participating in this study resulted in their own personal growth. All reflected on their life experiences and challenged their ways of negotiating the world. Moreover, each participant indicated a need to share their story or learned experience with one whose life circumstance is similar. I must say, as the research, I reflected on my own life and learned more about myself and I attempted to learn about them. This is the purpose of ontological and educative authenticities—to promote reflection and growth.

*Catalytic Authenticity in Qualitative Research.* Catalytic authenticity refers to participants' newfound energy to engage in social change (Erlandson et al., 1993; Guba

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& Lincoln, 2005).  This construct is measured through participants' openness to use their new knowledge to advance social and political involvement (Erlandson et al., 1993). Tactical authenticity involves the researcher interacting with participants by encouraging social action (Erlandson et al., 1993).  This form of emancipatory practice aligns itself with critical theory which suggests one to act on their beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To engender catalytic and tactical authenticities, I encouraged participants, although they clearly indicated an emerged desire, to utilize their newfound knowledge to uplift their families and immediate communities.  Participants rebutted by confirming their intention to positively change others along with themselves.

## Summary

This chapter discussed the overall framework of the study. It begins by providing information about the participants, the mode of their selection, the study design, as well as detailed information describing the ways in which the data were collected and analyzed. This chapter discussed the qualitative research methodology and the ways by which this study was executed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

**Introduction**

This chapter presents four daughters of single African American mothers their voice, and interpreted experiences of having been reared in a single-mothered home. Specifically, these daughters explored and reflected upon their lives and determined how their mothers contributed to their academic success.  To appropriately relay the narratives, I used the participants' voices and words to present their ideas, memories, and interpretations, and merged their voices with their behaviors.  I also used other archival data to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.  Seven themes emerged from the rich data, all of which classify these young women as resilient, independent, and brilliant women.  Please see Figure 1.

All participants agreed to anonymity and are thereby noted through pseudonyms as Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah.  The data are organized in the following manner: (a) a substantive narrative introducing each participant, (b) an exhibition and discussion of the emerged themes, and (c). a brief analysis following each theme. Again, the following research questions were used to guide the study:

1.  How do African American females describe their single mother's personal characteristics in raising them?

2.  How do African American females describe and interpret their single mother's acts of parenting as they raised them?

3. How do African American females describe their single mother's influence on their academic performance?

4. How do African American females describe the influences of race, gender, and class on their single mother's parenting?



**Figure 1.** *A Framework Describing Single African American Mother's Influence on their Daughters Academic Success.* For illustration purposes this figure demonstrates that each theme contributed to the daughter's overall academic success.

## Participant Narratives

**Heaven's Narrative**

Heaven, a 29 year old "country girl," as she called herself, is proud of having been raised from birth to age 18 in a small community in the southern United States. One of two children in her household, Heaven is the only daughter and her mother's oldest child. She is a brilliant, pragmatic thinker, and asserts she's always enjoyed school and performed well. In high school she enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, earned A's, and graduated in the top 4% of her class—the valedictorian of her African American graduating counterparts. Immediately after high school, Heaven matriculated to a four-year university where she majored in mathematics and worked as a tutor. Her position as a tutor espoused her love of teaching and reaching students and particularly observing them "excel in math."

*Childhood.* When reflecting on her childhood relationship with her mother, Heaven affirmed, "My mother wasn't really strict, but I knew she didn't play." She recalled spending most of her time with her mother and brother, or other family members. She added that she and her mother were not really close given her mother's distinct admonition that Heaven was her daughter and not her friend.

Heaven recalled her mother attempting to instill in her a work ethic at an early age. She explained, "Like if I wanted some shoes or something it wasn't just, 'Oh, here's the money go get you some shoes.' It was you clean the house, you do this and that and because of all of that you'll get you some shoes." She described this as the best lesson her mother could have taught her—you must work for what you want.

Educationally, during Heaven's childhood, her mother purchased videos for her to watch that reportedly assisted her in learning faster. She recalled finishing her homework at school and watching the videos once she returned home and her mother checked her homework. Working hard and staying productive was an integral part of her childhood memories.

*Adolescence.* Heaven's success rested mostly in her personal motivation and fortitude, and her mother's superior standards. Her mother worked often, but ensured Heaven remained aware of the implied expectations—all A's. Her mother pushed her to aim for excellence, even in her elective courses. Smirking, Heaven recalled once earning an 88 in Spanish III on a progress report, which aroused her mother to anger. She laughed and stated,

> I think my mama was so accustomed to me having A's and I was so accustomed to having A's that a B just broke our hearts, you know… and my mama was upset, not knowing that I was upset at myself.

Heaven stated her mother rarely needed to reiterate expectations. She wasn't a strict disciplinarian, but Heaven respected her mother and knew that if she didn't meet the expectations she would suffer the consequences.

Heaven denied talking to her mother about boyfriends and sex while in high school. She stated her mother withheld her emotions and so she did as well. She reported openly discussing school and sports with her mother, but recounted feeling uncomfortable discussing intimate issues. Thus, she described her adolescent relationship with her mother as "distant" and declared they never "had the sex talk."

Heaven attributes this apparent distance to her mother trusting her to take care of herself and grades, while she took care of providing for the family. Additionally, she states her mother emotionally offered Heaven what she knew.

Using the term "mannish" to describe her adolescent demeanor, Heaven explained she enjoyed spending time with her same-aged male peers, which often resulted in discipline. In fact, once her mother whipped her with an extension cord after Heaven returned home with a passion mark on her neck. Her mother also took several of her favorite items away from her and refused to allow her to visit with her elder cousin, who was aware of and apparently encouraged Heaven's mannishness. Heaven described herself as mannish because she reflected unlady like characteristics.

***Transition into College.*** Heaven's relationship with her mother improved drastically when she transitioned from high school to college. She recalled their relationship became more intimate, given her mother called often and wanted to know specifics about her life as a college student. Heaven reported relying heavily on her mother's high expectations, as her mother knew her student log-in information, and checked her grades often. Although an adult, little changed with regards to her mother's involvement in her studies.

***Heaven's Description of Her Mother.*** Heaven described her mother as "strong, goal-oriented, loving, and caring." She attributes her mother's ability to successfully and independently raise two children to those characteristics. Heaven is quite proud of her mother and reports her mother embodies all the positive characteristics of a strong

Black woman.  Although she'd been joking for the duration of the interview, Heaven sincerely stated,

> We have this picture up of like a strong Black woman and that's someone who makes things go easy for you.  Like even though it may be a struggle, like you can't really tell it's a struggle.  So it was a lot of things that we experienced when I was growing up that was a struggle, but I didn't realize it was a struggle because my mom didn't show that.  You know?  And it took real strength to be able to not crumble or be depressed or just show overall that something is wrong.  It takes strength.

Heaven appeared to most admire her mother's altruism and caring nature. She spoke for several moments offering instance after instance that her mother offered her time and effort to help others without requesting compensation.  She stated, for example,

> She's very caring… I have a great aunt who has no children and her sisters put her in a nursing home… my mama, she checks on that lady hand and foot.  Like she go visit her, she pick her up and take her to church with her.  Like its just little things that you really don't think to do that makes a difference that shows that she's caring.

From cleaning the historical African American cemetery in her hometown, to annually volunteering her time at Heaven's summer math camp, Heaven most certainly defined her mother as caring.  Heaven added that these incidences help her to strive towards considering others more instead of only thinking of herself.

When asked how her mother's characterization as single impacted her, if at all, Heaven stated it "pushed me even harder."  Appraising her mother as a "Jill of All Trades," Heaven reportedly admired her mother's independence and know-how. Laughing out loud she reflected on her mother getting underneath a car to assess its malfunctioning parts, performing construction work alongside her male relatives, mowing the yard, cutting down trees, and other duties that are typically considered masculine.  Moreover, she explained, her mother cooked, cleaned, obtained a bachelor of science in education through a basketball scholarship, and later pursued a computer engineering degree, all while rearing two children and working a full-time job. Although Heaven almost hesitantly acknowledged she never desired to become a single mother, as did her mother, she admired her mother's mental stamina and ingenuity.  She stated,

> … seeing my parent in a single home having to do it on her own made me push to be like, 'I can do it on my own too, if I had too.' … And being able to do it on my own would be having a degree, having a good job, making good money, being independent.

Currently, Heaven is pursuing her Ph.D. and teaching mathematics.  Her GPA is a 3.9 and she reflects excellence in her education and career.  She attributes all of her success to her mother's tenacity and strength.  Given her recent marriage, Ph.D. candidacy, and newly coveted position, Heaven is in a happy place.

**Layla's Narrative**

Layla, a 20 year old "city girl," as she noted, relishes in her nativity from a large metropolitan city in the southern United States. Layla is the only daughter and eldest child of her mother; and one of three of her father's children, all of whom share different mothers. Although reared in a working class single-mothered home, she exudes sophistication which she attributes to the large, diverse, wealthy high school she attended. Currently, an attendee at a historically Black university, Layla misses the diverse and astute population with which she once mingled. However, she added, this environment motivates her to obtain her bachelor degree with haste.

*Childhood.* Layla achieved the honor roll and shared a close uninhibited relationship with her mother until 6th grade when she began questioning her mother's commitment to her. With an angry and broken tone, Layla described her post 6th grade years as dismal, given her mother's elderly boyfriend once inappropriately touched her and her female cousin. Layla recounted,

> When I was in the 6th grade her disgusting man friend touched me um
> inappropriately and the way she handled it I didn't like it. It made me feel as if
> she cared more about him and she had just met him when I think I was in the 5th
> grade. And I didn't like that… There was another incident with my cousin but it
> wasn't as bad as um mine. He just I guess touched her thigh or something like
> that. I still think that is just disgusting and perverted.

According to Layla, her mother after learning of the incident became defensive and stated her job was possibly at stake. Moreover, her mother was more concerned

with others' perceptions of her and her boyfriend rather than Layla's emotional wellbeing. Nevertheless, Layla's mother implored everyone to attend family counseling to assist in resolving the issue. Unfortunately, counseling has done little to resolve this situation and mend their relationships. Layla adds this incident defined her childhood and brought about anger during her adolescence.

*Adolescence.* Layla acknowledged that her mother's decision to remain in a relationship with her alleged perpetrator caused tension. She recalled feeling uneasy about being at home; and although her mother's boyfriend didn't live with the family, he visited often. After learning more about sexual assault in the 8th grade, and finally understanding the weight of her experience, Layla reportedly became fueled with anger. She reflected:

> I didn't like to be home. And then when my cousin's mom died she had to permanently live with us. So I was then sharing my room… And I didn't like that no one just sat me down and asked me how I felt about that. That was probably like the worst; I just hated life.

She added that the incident also impacted her attitude and relationships while in high school:

> I have just always been my own person and I always want to do whatever it is I want to do. And I am still that way it's a just a little more lighter. I had an attitude for days. I realized it when I was in like the 11th grade… and after that I just kinda gave myself a personality makeover because I had a bad attitude.

Layla believes her mother's desire to engage in a relationship placed she and her cousin in harm's way. She viewed her mother as strong, given she endured so much, however, she reported her mother allowed things to happen rather than setting standards to prevent unwanted happenings. Layla confidently asserted the latter characteristic as one that unfortunately makes her mother "weak."

Educationally, the aforementioned incident impacted her 8th through12[th] grade academic performance such that she had the intellectual capacity to obtain all A's, but struggled emotionally and typically earned A's, B's, and D's. Focusing and testing became difficult, and she lost motivation to work as hard as she could. Losing focus was a daily experience, one which she believes hindered her from achieving the grades she needed to qualify for a more prestigious university. However, when she would try to improve, it was because she wanted to please her mother.

**_Transition in to College._** Layla's mother suffered unemployment immediately after Layla entered college. Observing her mother struggle even more encouraged her to take college more seriously. Coupled with her mother's fervent requests that she attend all classes and graduate without prematurely starting a family, her mother's brief unemployment renewed the motivation she'd lost during high school. Currently, she has a 3.5 GPA and is majoring in family and child studies.

**_Layla's Description of Her Mother_**. Layla loves her mother and described her as "giving, very goofy, and calm." With a serious tone, Layla stated her mother is "giving as in any sense of the word giving can be used in… forgiving. She will offer what she has if she has it and knows she has the means to give it." She mentioned her mother's

forgiveness of her boyfriend having touched her and her cousin. Layla grapples with her mother's ability to forgive him and continue a romantic relationship; she described her mother as smart and investigative, but weak. She believes her mother's working class status warrants her to endure more angst, given her boyfriend provides financial assistance when needed. Additionally, Layla believes her mother is not happy with herself; she adds she doesn't want to mimic this characteristic. Rather, she desires security within herself. Layla simply stated, "She shows me how I don't want to be." Nevertheless, she forgives her mother and understands her mother made a "mistake" for which she is remorseful. She further described her mother as nurturing and understanding, which ultimately "makes her a good person."

On a lighter note, Layla seemed tickled while offering several incidences describing her mother's goofiness. "She'll tell a joke or something and it's really funny and we'll all just kinda look at her with a stale face like, 'why did you just waste your time on that story' and she'll think it's like the funniest in the world and no one else does." Layla believes her mother's humor keeps the family connected and happy. Layla finally stated her mother is typically calm in the worst situations but exaggerates small things. She laughingly recounted,

> …she went to the beauty shop one time and the beautician, who we still go to, she cut a plug in her hair because it was late. And um she didn't do nothing. She was like, 'Oh ok' and just let it go. That's the type of person she is—very, very calm.

Layla has been impacted by her mother's marital status as single in various ways, but it primarily motivated her to attend and graduate from college so she can provide for herself without relying on a second income. She said that she hopes to "find a good job and make some money so that I would not have to depend on a second income." Layla concludes that she desires companionship but not at the cost of her integrity and most prioritized relationships.

**Kerri's Narrative**

Kerri, a 31-year-old mother of two, was raised in a small city in the southern United States. One of several children, Kerri is the eldest of her siblings, all of whom share either a different mother or father. Currently, working towards her Ph.D. in psychology, she boasts of her academic excellence, and occupational ingenuity.

*Childhood.* Kerri's childhood was characterized by fear and physical abuse. At age four, Kerri innocently informed her father of a passionate moment she'd witnessed—her mother kissing another man. As a result, her parents divorced and Kerri lived with her father and paternal grandmother until her grandmother passed away. Consequently, when Kerri was approximately ten years of age, her father determined it was in her best interest to return to live with her mother, the commencement of a life bathed in physical and emotional abuse.

Kerri described multiple instances involving her mother physically abusing her, "She beat me with one of those breaker bars, those metal bars. She beat me with a bat before and has thrown me down the stairs. And she's choked me until I passed out… she pistol whipped me." Kerri attributes the incessant abuse to having innocently

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informed her father about her mother's infidelity. She explained that prior to her parent's divorce her mother worked as a stay-at-home mother and lived comfortably, given her father worked as an attorney. However, after their divorce, her mother was forced to return to live with her mother and attend college.

Kerri reported that during her K-12 years, her mother functioned as a dictator towards her. Her siblings enjoyed "loose boundaries," while she endured rigidity, which she paralleled to the toddler in the movie Mommy Dearest. Kerri reflected,

> She was great to my brother because she always wanted a boy. Um so…if anyone of my siblings got into trouble I was the one who got the punishment… my sisters would eat their snacks and leave their chip and candy wrappers under the bed and I would get in trouble. Um my brother would leave a toy out and I would get in trouble. So it could be anything… I think it was more like she was doing it to make herself feel good. She got something out of it.

When asked about her mother's involvement, Kerri described her as "absent." She explained that her mother never helped her with homework, participated in the parent-teacher association (PTA) at school, or volunteered. Kerri depressingly described her associated feelings as, "I've never really had a close relationship with her so I've never had feelings that really matter."

*Adolescence.* Kerri described abuse as the overarching theme of her adolescence.

> She would hit me with whatever object she could find. I've been spanked with a plastic baseball bat, a hose to a vacuum cleaner, an extension cord, a hanger, a

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groundbreaking bar, her guns, belt, she broken a paddle on me, a punch, choke, uh sit on top of me, push me into walls…

Kerri, with shaking hands, described her mother once dragging her by her hair and beating her "head into the faucet of the tub."  She further explained,

… because my sisters told her I was having sex but I wasn't.  I was actually smoking marijuana.  I was actually getting high, not having sex.  I was smoking weed with my friend that I snuck into my bedroom window.

Educationally, Kerri read on a college level in 7th grade, and completed the 12th grade curriculum by 9th grade.  Kerri stated that she believed her haste toward high school graduation would allow her to move out of her mother's home.  It did not.  She sadly reflected, "I thought if I graduated I could get out of the house… She made me want to push harder so I could leave."

Kerri explained her inept socialization skills in high school were due to her dysfunctional relationship with her mother.  She rarely socialized with peers; and only with peers on her sports teams.  With wide eyes starting at the floor, Kerri stated, "I didn't exist. I was non-existent."  She reported that she typically attended school and sports practices all the while interacting very little with peers.  She reported having difficulty knowing how to appropriately act around her same-aged peers and believes it still impacts her.

***Transition to College.***  Kerri reported her strained relationship with her mom continued into her college years.  Snickering, Kerri recalled her mother encouraging her to attend a predominantly White private institution because it would "look good to other

people. She didn't want me to go to a Black school." Nevertheless, Kerri enrolled and graduated from a historically Black university, despite her mother's disproval. This further exacerbated the already incessantly deteriorating relationship.

Given her age, Kerri acknowledges the physical abuse has discontinued, however, her mother has resorted to emotional abuse. Upon returning home from college her freshman year, Kerri's mother forced her to strip naked in front of her siblings, to allow her mother access to "check every orifice." Kerri's psychiatrist, with whom Kerri is having an affair, recently stated the incident was molestation, although no penetration occurred.

Kerri graduated and later obtained her master of science degree in psychology from a different university. Currently, she's working toward her Ph.D. in psychology at an online university. Additionally, she provides group therapy to female alcoholics enlisted in the military. Kerri stated, "Academically I'm strong. Intellectually I'm stronger. But then when you start adding in the ugh other parts that's where it starts losing its strength." Kerri offered she's diagnosed with "major depressive disorder, anxiety, and panic attacks" as a result of her relationship with her mother.

*Kerri's Description of Her Mother*. When asked to describe her mother, Kerri first stated, "Without profanity right?" She then described her mother as "evil, self-centered, and abusive." She laughingly stated, "I looked at her as a female version of Lucifer. It's just another form of him." She reports that it's difficult to gauge her mother's positive characteristics, given the negative overshadow them.

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When thinking about her relationship with her mother, Kerri stated her mother makes her feel like 1/5 of a person; suppressed. Kerri concluded that her mother has overtime "broken me down to something that has been, really to a point where it's been really hard, even now, to ugh think." She further stated,

My social cognition isn't where it should be at my age… [My psychiatrist] described me as being at a 13-year-old level and not at the level of a 32-year-old or soon to be 32-year-old. I'm acting more like a teenager than an adult.

Kerri added that her mother's status as single did not impact her at all, either positively or negatively because "everyone was middle class so it really didn't have any impact." With a scholarly tone Kerri indicated that the risk associated with her mother's singleness was balanced with her middle-class status. She concluded experiencing no risk at all.

**Savannah's Narrative**

Savannah, a 35-year-old mother of one son, is native to a metropolitan city in the southern United States. She is the youngest of three, one sister and one brother, all of whom share the same mother and father. Savannah offered multiple narratives that spoke of the nurturing, loving home in which she was raised.

*Childhood.* Savannah describes her childhood as joyful. She reported her mother successfully concealed the sacrifice it took to financially struggle and independently raise three children. She explained that she and her siblings thought they were rich, particularly after they relocated to a two-story town home. Nevertheless, Savannah's mother struggled to provide a decent life for her children.

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When asked to describe her childhood relationship with her mother, Savannah with great humor stated,

I mean I didn't look at my mom as my homegirl! You know like she wasn't that person that I could just say, 'Well let me tell you what I want to do.' She wasn't that. But I can recall some of the things that I went through at school. Whether it be somebody messing me with or something I just remember my mom, you know, always being there.

Savannah recalled thinking her mother had psychic powers given her ability to discern when she was truthful or not. Now, she attributes her mother's know-how to wisdom and experience. Her mother was unable to attend PTA meetings and volunteer for random parent positions during the day, given she worked two jobs.

*Adolescence.* Savannah stated that during high school she functioned as a leader in her friendships. She reported this is likely due to her similarity to her mother— "reserved, hardworking, and witty." Savannah recalled observing her mother's work ethic and decided to mimic that in school and work.

Regarding adolescent peer pressure, Savannah acknowledged feeling unable to discuss sex, heterosexual relationships, and other taboo topics with her mother. Characterized as her mother's shortcoming, Savannah explained that her mother provided no platform for she or her siblings to express their feelings regarding these types of things. She thought about it and stated that her mother did not want her children to experience a similar life—raising three kids alone. Therefore, she sheltered them from the truth rather than discussing possible situations they many experience. Thus,

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both Savannah and her sister desired to talk to their mother about sex, but instead "bottled it up."

Educationally, Savannah reported her mother accepted only A's and B's and refused to listen to excuses as to why accomplishing these grades were difficult and/or impossible. Savannah laughingly recalled discussing with her mother her anxiousness regarding enrolling in pre-calculus. She stated,

> I remember I had to take pre-calculus. And I remember thinking, 'Wow this is gonna be so hard for me. I'm not even ready for this.' And I just remember my mom, it just wasn't an option to be hard... like whatever you need to do... my mom is not standing for 'I can't do it.'

Savannah's mother constantly reminded her that her mind was good or better than her counterparts. She smiled and stated her mother always made her feel special and able to accomplish anything. Moreover, her mother reminded her of the obstacles her forefathers faced, which encouraged her to embrace freedom, hard work, and opportunities that weren't necessarily available to them. This translated into Savannah's successful high school tenure, and college acceptance.

***Transition into College.*** Again, Savannah reflected on her undergraduate years and recalled adopting her mother's characteristics—"reserved, witty, wise, and hardworking"—to negotiate college. She recalled her friends sleeping in late, and enjoying their newfound freedom while she adhered to her mother's teachings of dedication and hard work. Savannah added that during her undergraduate years she became pregnant, a decision which she asserted had nothing to do with the way her

mother raised her but a choice she made.  She returned home from college and finished her degree at a different institution.  Savannah stated that her mother was supportive throughout the entire ordeal, and is still.

Although Savannah is 35, her mother holds the same standards as when Savannah attended high school—no excuses and nothing less than a B.  Currently pursuing an M.B.A. while also working full-time, and raising her son, Savannah experienced a rough semester, where she obtained all B's.  Savannah, embarrassed at her mother's discipline, reported her mother saying, "Well what happened?  How did you go from getting A's in one semester to getting B's in this semester?  How much time did you devote to your studies?" After Savannah offered what she thought was a substantive reason, her mother rebutted,

> Well maybe you need to spend a little more time and like find out what's going on because apparently you went from here to here in a matter of one semester and that don't look good.  You don't want to keep dropping.

While hysterically laughing, Savannah reported that her mother's comments reminded her of when she was a child.  However, she knows her mother does not want her to fail or experience adversity.  She added, "Like she's telling me and I'm paying for my own education."

***Savannah's Description of Her Mother.***  Savannah described her mother as "reserved, witty, wise, and hardworking."  A twofold conundrum, her mother's characterization as reserved served well given she was rarely aroused to anger but offered rigid discipline.  Amused at her memories, Savannah repeated her mother's most

notable saying to her children, "Remember who you belong to: God first and then me."

Her mother's wittiness, yet keen reservation appeared to shock Savannah in ways that

even she couldn't understand. Savannah admired her mother's wisdom and relies upon

it even as an adult. She understands her mother's experiences are more robust and

asserts she listens to and follows her wisdom. Another saying of her mother's was,

'Respect yourself and respect your family." This saying helped she and her siblings to

think twice before publically engaging in inappropriate behavior.

Savannah depicted her mother as wise and a great listener. Proudly, she recalled

her mother offering bits of wisdom during random conversations and personal trials.

Savannah concluded her mother's presence was such that she "made up for" her father's

absence. Savannah had no memory of her mother's marital status impacting her at all,

given her mother's strict, loving, ever-present mode of parenting. Currently, Savannah

has a 3.4 GPA and is looking forward to soon graduating and making her mother proud.

**Analysis of Data**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah offered vivid narratives which allowed me,

with broad strokes, to paint the story of their truth, their lives. Moreover, as these young

women spoke, a rich, colorful, in-depth portrait emerged which stood as a backdrop in

their lives, influencing their academic success and allowing their mother's

characterization as single to serve as power rather than risk. School districts and other

educational constituents characterize children from single-mothered homes as "at-risk,"

a loosely utilized term to describe students whose cultural demographics may result in

academic disadvantages (Banks, 2004). This is because often they have yet to obtain a

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college degree, earn less money than their educated counterparts, and so on. Nevertheless, these participants' vivid portrait is undergirded by power and characterized by the following themes: (a) She's in My Head; (b) The Sister-Brother Dichotomy; (c) Helpful Disposition; (d) Self-Motivation and Role Models; (e) Consistent Discipline; (f) Race, Gender, and Class; and (g) Transitioned Inclination to Mold.

**She's In My Head**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah each acknowledged their mother's voice served as a whispering reminder in a noisy world regarding the academic standards to which each should adhere. Throughout their life, these whispers have provided guidance, discipline, structure, and even shame when their mother's presence was impossible. Each participant revered their mother and believed her words, although they weren't always affirming as in Kerri's case.

*Heaven.* Heaven simply states, "My mama wasn't always there physically, but she was always in my head." Describing her years as an adolescent she explained her mother neither visited the school regularly, involved herself in the PTA, communicated with teachers, nor regularly attended Heaven's extracurricular activities. This was primarily due to her mother's work and school attendance, which required most of her time. However, Heaven says her mother "checked on me at home making sure I was doing all my homework and everything." Essentially, Heaven's mother clearly communicated and implied the standards, while allowing her room to accomplish them.

Heaven recalled this parenting strategy aroused her to fear when considering skipping

class or school, or even putting little effort into her assignments.

When considering academia, Heaven recalls her mother failing a test, yet

persevering to retake it.  She noted that when a similar situation occurred she heard her

mother's whispering message,

> Who says you have to pass on the first time?  If this was your goal you set… then
>
> why give up… when life hits you with a discouraging act... you can't give up and
>
> change your mind because it didn't go the way you wanted it to go.

Heaven's decision to major in mathematics was also due to her mother's voice in

her head.  When vacillating over her college major, she heard her mother say, 'pick

something that you love to do.'  While in awe of her mother's wisdom, Heaven noted,

> Like, it was so simple and I don't even know if she realized it. But it was
>
> something that was so powerful; to do something that you love to do.  And not
>
> just do it because you'll find a job, a guaranteed job doing it.  But do it because
>
> you love to do it.  And so that is why I chose to major in math, cause math is
>
> something I really loved doing.  It was something I enjoyed.

Heaven added that her mother's wisdom coupled with several clichés she offered, also

assisted her while attending college.  She pondered on her mother's lived teachings such

as 'you reap what you sow,' 'what's done in the dark will come to the light,' and 'treat

others the way you want to be treated.'  Heaven recalled these basic moral principals as

taught by her mother served as reminders of her mother's standards and inevitably

contributed to her academic success.  Heaven acknowledged her academic success is

also in part due to observing her mother's perseverance while raising two children, attending school, and working a full-time job.  This remained in her head.

*Layla.*  Layla reports hearing her mother's whispers of wisdom when she's experiencing struggling times in college and desires to quit.  She reflects on her mother's nurturing and hears her mother whispering, 'do your best.'  Layla deliberated and declared,

> So to have somebody to motivate you to do your best and even if you make a B if that was your best that's good enough for them.  If you make a C if that was your best that's good enough for them because you passed it and it's clear that you tried.  So for someone who's not there to constantly motivate you rather than think they know what's going on and telling you, you could've did this or that I think that's good.

Layla noted these whispers encourage her to persevere when circumstances are unfavorable or "when things become a little hard and I don't want to do certain stuff anymore."  Further, she described her mother as one who is constantly rooting for and supporting her.

*Kerri.*  Kerri's mother whispered in her head as well, although they weren't always validating and encouraging.  Although Kerri is beautiful inside and out, her mother's whispers over the years have reduced her confidence and self-esteem.  She quietly murmurs, "…that relationship with her has damaged me in so many ways when it comes to my self-esteem."  Emotionally, Kerri recounted her mother attempting to "hook me up on dates" with her educational or occupational superiors "so she can get

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ahead." These incidences bring power to her mother's whispers, as in Kerri's opinion they remind her that she is a valueless "object."

While Kerri offers a dejected narrative regarding her mother having objectified her, she laughs as she cogitates on having consciously engaged in relationships that fostered this ideal. Referring to an unknown "they" she spiels,

I've learned to use my looks and sexuality not saying that I have sex but my sexuality in order to control somebody and I know how to manipulate someone without doing anything to them. I did it for years with someone… and they ended up having to see a psychiatrist for it. And I didn't do anything with them physically I just made them believe it felt one way but I never felt that way. So those are the things that I've picked up from her that I don't like.

Kerri explained that while this manipulation resulted in her tuition being paid for, it also resulted in him attempting to murder her after he realized her true intentions. Kerri further explained that for professional gain, she engaged in a separated romantic relationship with her psychiatrist. She spiels,

… with the doctor that I had uh briefly dated, um you know, some of my homework assignments I didn't understand he was able to um teach it to me in a way that I was able to understand. But I didn't like him like how he likes me. So, I didn't tell him that. I led him to believe that it was more than what it was because it was like a professional gain. I'm not trying to get a promotion at work but as far as academics wise, you know, with him being at the level that he's in

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and as long as he's been in practice it helps me because it gives me a different

perspective from what I was think.

Kerri acknowledges that her interactions with her teachers, peers, and those in

authoritative positions usually mimic the relationship with which she shared with her

mother—deceitful, manipulative, and abusive.  Moreover, although she is 31 years of

age, her mother's voice rings constantly in her mind and inappropriately guides her

decisions.  Kerri specifies that her mother's whispers were never affirming.  She scorns

her mother for never offering lessons regarding perseverance, strength, responsibility,

independence, and self-respect.  With a condescending smirk, she maintains that her

positive qualities materialized after joining a military organization and embracing her

sorority's protocol.

*Savannah.*  When Savannah scrolls through the dockets of her life, she finds

poignant moments in which her mother's whispers fueled her drive to succeed, even

when in the midst of adversity.  She cleared her throat and with a shaky voice avowed:

> I've had some challenges. You know I've had some nights that I just, I wanted
>
> to just give up.  I didn't wanna deal with anything.  I didn't want to go to school.
>
> And I could still hear my mother from when I was young before I even started
>
> school and college saying, 'You don't quit. You don't ever give up. You don't
>
> ever stop. You keep pressing. You keep going.'  And that was in my head like,
>
> 'You cannot give up.'

During each major transition in Savannah's academia—elementary school to middle

school to high school—her mother discussed with her how she's entering 'a different

world.' She recalls her mother discussing increased responsibilities and expectations due to achieving another milestone. While in college, when desiring to skip class or turn in an assignment late, she heard her mother's whispers,

> 'It's a different world; it's a different world… you can't revert back to your old study habits if they didn't work… you have to take more responsibility for your studies… you're trying to better yourself.' So when I got there [to college] I didn't feel like, 'Oh my goodness this is so much freedom!'

Recently, Savannah realized her professors weren't familiar with her name and face. Feeling limp and confused, her mother's whispers provided the sound advice she needed to decide her course of action and rectify this potential problem. Savannah uttered,

> I can still hear her saying, 'you know you need to try to form those relationships with those professors. They need to know who you are. They need to see your face. They need to be able to recognize you because there may come a day that you're gonna need to look back and say I need your help… one day you're gonna need that… that extra little credit or whatever you're gonna get.'

**Analysis**

Each participant acknowledged her mother setting high academic expectations throughout her childhood, adolescence, and college tenure. In fact, participants partly attributed their college success to their mother's innate whispers of encouragement, motivation, and even chagrin. Serving as an audible manifestation of their mother's unwavering high expectations, these whispers fostered academic stamina, responsibility, self-confidence, resilience, and ultimately achievement. Either literally or figuratively,

these daughters received a perpetual "push" towards success from their mother because she expected greatness. In turn, it molded them into highly successful high school and college students.

The daughters' willingness to adhere to the whispers speaks to the power their mother holds in their life. Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah could have ignored and neglected their mother's whispers. Rather, they executed and respected them. For Kerri this was likely more difficult because while the whispers were powerful they spoke words of damnation. This is evident in her narrative that speaks to her disdain for, yet emotional ties to, her mother.

The whispers are significant given they appear to momentarily replace the mother while reinforcing her life lessons. All participants, whether or not noted above, discussed their mother's intermediate inaccessibility due to her working, attending school, and so on. Nevertheless, each indicated their mother's whispers reminded them of her expectations and motivated them to academic achievement, even when in college. This is important given it suggests that when children revere or engage in fearfully respecting their mother, her expectations and desires may perpetually resonate with her children. All attending college, are yet relying on their mother's whispers.

**The Sister-Brother Dichotomy**

While each participant reflected academic excellence and attributed it to their mother's whispers, they all asserted their brother represented the polar opposite. All reported their brother expressing himself in ways which were unacceptable for them. Moreover, each participant acknowledged their brother receiving little reproach and

considerable discipline. Consistent with Mandara, Varner et al., (2010), it appears these mothers "loved" their son and "raised" their daughter.

  ***Heaven.*** Heaven and her brother are ten years apart; they are academic and social opposites. She's an all A student; he strives to earn C's. After graduating high school she thrived while attending a renowned university; he was "kicked out" of his university for inappropriate behavior. Afterwards, he enrolled in a community college where he earned all F's. Heaven feels obligated to work; her brother feels entitled to his mother's earnings. She and her mother share a respectful enduring relationship; he respects and obeys his mother only when she withholds financial support. Heaven believes a major contribution to this disparity is they've both adopted their father's work ethic—her father owns business, her brother's father is perpetually unemployed and is not seeking employment.

  Heaven attributes this dichotomy to multiple factors including her mother's varying socioeconomic status. She passionately stated,

> I seen her struggle going to school… going to class everyday… going from work to class to home. Versus my brother it's like she's arrived. She's not in that struggling moment…or…going through the same struggles that we went through when I was younger… I saw that it took hard work. Versus him, he didn't see that it took hard work.

Heaven hypothesized her brother's behavioral and academic obstacles are partly attributed to her mother's reduced rigidity and leniency towards him. She explained that her brother embraces his freedom and reflects an arrogant sense of egalitarianism.

Offering narrative after narrative itemizing his staying out past curfew, taking his

mother's car without permission, and smoking marijuana, Heaven concluded,

> When he was younger he got whoopings. [But] after he got so big she didn't
>
> even whoop him anymore… And she really didn't take things away from him
>
> like she did with me. I just don't really recall times when my mom told him
>
> no… he's very spoiled. She's starting to [discipline him] now.

***Layla.*** Layla reminisced of her 18-year-old brother's raising and stated a

dichotomy exists; however, she asserted its legitimacy given her brother's diagnosis with

autism. She describes him as "kinda normal" and acknowledges a "strain" due to his

dependency and elusive behaviors. Nevertheless, she praises her mother for exhibiting

patience and altruism that averts undue duress in the household.

According to Layla, her brother and mother share a "pretty good relationship,"

although he acts out by putting "up his fist or something…or slamming stuff" when his

mother makes requests of him. While Layla declares these are responses to which she

would never resort, she considers her brother's diagnosis a legitimate rationale for his

behavior. Layla states,

> He gets in trouble way more than I ever got in trouble… everything he does is
>
> pretty much genuine and innocent. It's really impossible for them to not have a
>
> good relationship. He gets whoopings all the time because… it's just a different
>
> way to handle a guy than you do a girl.

***Kerri.*** Kerri's narrative is quite disturbing , but at the heart of her experiences lie

telling similarities to the other participants—Kerri observed and experienced the sister-

brother dichotomy in her own home.  Kerri's brother is the result of her mother's girlfriend and a donor.  And although he's not her biological brother, her mother raised him as her son and Kerri's sibling.  Tickled pink to have a son, Kerri's mother bathed her son with love and adoration while, incessantly physically and emotionally abusing Kerri.  Flushed and anxious, Kerri stressed, "She worshipped the air he breathed because she always wanted a boy.  And so there was nothing he could do wrong.  My mom spoiled him."

Kerri contended her brother rarely received discipline, because she suffered his and her other siblings' discipline.  She attested her brother's discipline was typically due to "bad grades," which she never received.  During interpersonal conflict, between Kerri and her siblings, her mother always sided with the siblings and released a wrath of punishment upon Kerri.  She simply stated, "She never spanked them."

Kerri believes her mother's leniency towards her brother has contributed to his antisocial behaviors.  She cited his previous incarcerations for violence and attempted murder; financial dependency upon her mother; and refusal to obtain fulltime employment.  Kerri theorizes their dysfunctional familial interactions during childhood greatly contribute to both her inclination to achieve academically, yet her brother's inclination to embrace mischief.

*Savannah.*  As if watching a movie of her life, Savannah silently pondered, chuckled, and with great humor disclosed her mother's interactions with her brother. She acknowledged her mother placing restrictions on her that were optional for her brother.  Savannah offered an example, "I remember when it came to simple stuff like a

curfew. I don't remember my brother having a curfew. Like it wasn't one; it didn't exist." She further stressed her mother's rigidity and house rules, which were open for questions and negotiation only with Savannah's brother.

Savannah reported rarely getting into trouble while in school because she feared impending consequences, but also respected her mother. However, she indicated, her brother remained in trouble given his history of negotiating boundaries. She vaguely recounted, "… he ended up getting into some trouble growing up, and later on when he got older. Had she been more stern with him I think you probably would have seen a bit of difference with him." Moreover, while Savannah has vivid memories of receiving a "good old fashioned spanking" after exhibiting rebelliousness, she has no memory of her brother receiving physical punishment.

Savannah speculates that her brother's behavioral and academic disparities were partly due to her mother's leniency, and single status. Savannah surmised,

> Looking at having to raise girls I think my mom, she sometimes, when I say harder on us I think she was harder on us than she was my brother. Um, and I think that was because she didn't have that male in the house to be able to put his foot down and be more, you know, stern in his approach. I think she'll be honest if you was to ask her, that maybe she should have had more involvement with my brother instead of letting him be more free.

**Analysis**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah each acknowledged their mothers' disparate discipline, tolerance, and intimate rearing amongst them and their brother. Each

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believed their brother's behavior and academic ineptitude was partly attributed to their mothers' stark leniency towards the son, yet overwhelming investment in the daughter. One can presume that the fervency with which the daughter's heard their mother's whispers was minimal in the brothers, given their academic and behavioral disparities. This leads me to consider how the mother's equal vigilance with her son may have impacted him—academically and overall. Heaven declares her mother spoke a degree of wisdom unto them both; Layla and Savannah indicated the same. Nevertheless, each suggested the mother's perhaps subconscious prejudicial actions stifled the son's growth, while rousing the daughter's. Consequently, the mothers are noted as raising their daughters and loving their sons.

**Helpful Disposition**

Whether poverty, sexual assault, emotional and physical abuse, each participant experienced a level of tragedy or risk, which molded them to desire to help others in similar situations. Moreover, each participant attributes their sense of benevolence to experiences, either positive or negative, with their mother. This helpful disposition appears to have emerged from a void that the participant's endured.

*Heaven.* With sheer excitement and bright eyes, Heaven boasts of her mother's goal-oriented personality. Rapidly speaking, Heaven describes her mother's persistence, energy, and influence on her to assist others in need. She closes her eyes and narrates a time gone by when her annually offered summer math camp was merely a dream. She recounts,

I had this dream to have a summer camp—a free math summer camp for
economically disadvantaged kids—cause you know kids lose their knowledge
throughout the summer. And economically disadvantaged kids, their parents
can't afford to send their kids to these nice camps that rich people can afford, you
know? So, me being the person that I am, from the traits I inherited from my
mama, goal-oriented… I didn't know how, I just knew I had a dream and I
wanted it. This will be the fourth year we're having the summer camp, and its
growing. One of my goals is to have a ranch where [students] can do um outdoor
activities…um horse riding, teaching them to ride horses …appreciate nature but
connecting all of that to math…. Because my mom has instilled in me goal-
orientedness those goals I'm gonna keep striving for.

Heaven also states her mother's role modeling has indirectly persuaded her to
live as a positive example for young women, particularly those of African American
descent. With a sincere tone, Heaven affirms children should have multiple types of role
models because "everybody can't sing [like] Beyonce [or] rap [like] Nicki Minaj."
Throughout Heaven's narrative, she stressed her mother's physical and mental presence,
which served as a catalyst for her helping persona. She desires to mimic her mother's
benevolence by broadening her annual summer camp, and contributing to higher
education by "improving mathematics education for African American students." She
asserts an unwavering desire to "help other African Americans."

*Layla.* While discussing her sexual victimization, Layla briefly reiterated how
her experience resulted in lower academic achievement, reduced focus in school, and a

depressive symptomatology. As aforementioned, Layla dejectedly described her 8<sup>th</sup> grade and high school years as cumbersome, given she felt her academic wellbeing was trapped in the complicated prism of unresolved conflict with her mother, hatred toward her mother's boyfriend, self-pity, and later academic and social marginalization. She indicated desiring to share her experience to prevent others from experiencing similar circumstances. She passionately stated,

> I am open to sharing it with people because I like for them to know that if
> something has happened to you… the way you respond like from then on cause
> you don't like to talk about it can change you or effect your day to day life.

Layla's career goals are primarily centered around her experiences with her brother. Although she considered working as an attorney or beauty consultant, she concluded that her passion rested with caregivers of disabled children. Cogitating on disturbing memories past, Layla explained the need for families and caregivers of disabled children to have counseling in hopes of gaining strategies to cope with or "handle their kids because they're going to these therapists for others things just miscellaneous things, just to talk, instead of going for a clear purpose." With a choppy yet serious tone Layla continued:

> We [the caregivers] want to learn how to handle that person because that person
> gets therapy, that person gets all of these things to be able to move on with their
> life. But their family all the while they're taking care of that person, they're not
> getting the medical attention they should be getting in order to help this person
> live a healthy life and not be um pacified or kinda hand held their entire life.

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Layla's helping mentality is a result of helplessness. She acknowledges feeling helpless and lonely after her sexual victimization. Moreover, she acknowledged helplessness given her and her mother's need for assistance and strategies to assist her autistic brother. While she asserts her mother played no role in influencing her career choice, she also indicates that observing her mother in continual psychological turmoil regarding her [Layla's] brother has cultivated a professional goal to assist others in similar circumstances.

*Kerri.* Kerri ruminated over her experienced familial dysfunction and her mother's affair that led to divorce, lesbianism, enabling Kerri's siblings towards "antisocial personalities," and gross physical and emotional abuse towards Kerri. Condescendingly, Kerri explained this utter dysfunction cultivated her helping mentality. She adds that her mother indirectly "pushed me… to want to be in a helping field" given the "turmoil that went on." Working towards a Ph.D. in marriage and family therapy, Kerri's ambition is to help families foster healthy environments for their children.

While Kerri's ambition is to promote sound ways of rearing children while actively assisting families who experience dysfunction, her personal involvement with her married psychiatrist reveals a disturbing paradox. This paradox suggests Kerri is unwilling or unable to embrace the very lifestyle she professionally promotes. Kerri's narrative indicates she seeks validation from others, especially men, with whom she casually and professionally interacts. She laughed out loud when acknowledging this detail and her fiancé's cluelessness of her truth. Expected to marry in a few months to her college sweetheart, Kerri indicated her keen enjoyment with mysteriously playing

four opposing roles-—therapist, patient, fiancé, mistress. When speaking of her positions as patient and mistress, Kerri spiritedly uttered, "[It's] so horrible. It's so unethical. So risky. It's kinda fun. I didn't think I could be as receptive [to my psychiatrist] as I am."

Kerri's helping mentality is fueled by helplessness as was Layla's; nevertheless, she speaks with authority while discussing her clear, specific, long and short-term goals. Fervently, she stated, "My mindset when I got into anything professionally and academically is that I'm going to meet the standards, exceed them, and set new ones… So once I've exceeded and set new standards I can move on to somewhere else."

***Savannah.*** Savannah's mother is the standard by which she makes decisions, raises her son, performs in school, and further negotiates the world. Feeling blessed to live under her mother's tutelage; her helping mentality is invoked when she spreads her mother's wisdom to others but primarily to her son. Savannah finds herself reciting to him words of wisdom her mother once cited to her. Acknowledging these words fostered her own academic achievement and civility, she feels these bits of knowledge will also propel her son to seek high academic achievement and civility.

Savannah boasts of her son's persona, which is in part to due to her having helped him adopt personality traits which reflect her mother. She described her son as reserved, and recalled her friend stating about him, 'I remember when [he] was a baby and he would never get excited about anything. It was almost like you had to do the most to get him to smile.' Savannah proudly explained that he was merely imitating her as she'd imitated her own mother. Savannah, like most mothers, wants her son to

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exhibit a set of behaviors that would ultimately lead to his success. Her need to help is primarily situated around her own son's success, as was her mother's around her own kids.

**Analysis**

A helpful disposition characterizes each participant. Interestingly, their desire to help another emerged from their experienced void. Additionally, this void is the crux of their self motivation. Heaven desires to help low-income students excel in mathematics, given she was reared in a low-income household with little resources besides her mother's vigilance and empowering words. Layla desires, as a career choice, to help caregivers of disabled family members receive counseling, given she's yet to acquire the appropriate counseling to negotiate dealing with her brother, and having been sexually mishandled. Kerri desires, as a career choice, to offer family therapy to those experiencing deeply embedded dysfunction. She acknowledged this desire is due to the dysfunction she experienced in her own family. Savannah urges to primarily help her son accurately negotiate life and its reality, given her mother withheld transparency.

But why the fervent need to help? Perhaps helping others who experience similar life circumstances fills the void associated with those circumstances? Perhaps helping provides validation? This is the conundrum.

**Self-Motivation & Role Models**

Heaven, Kerri, Layla, and Savannah all indicated, either consciously or subconsciously, mimicking their mother's behaviors and/or lifestyle whether or not she served as their role model. Interestingly, the participants often perpetuated the very

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characteristic they believed their mother should improve upon. Further, that particular characteristic is one in which all participants utilized to gain an academic vantage.

*Heaven.* Throughout Heaven's narrative she movingly described her mother's independence. Heaven determined that her mother's ability to independently raise two children, pursue a second bachelor degree, and work full-time warranted her description as such. Heaven admired her mother's self-sufficiency, viewed her as a role model, and recalled once self-expressing, "I don't need no man to do this or that because I can do it myself, you know." However, in later years she concluded that interdependence and companionship were her preference. Nevertheless, she found it difficult to shake off this personality trait she believes to have "inherited" from her mother.

Heaven reasoned that while her high academic achievement was due to her mother's whispers "in my head," it was also partly influenced by her independence, and innate self-motivation. Persistently earning A's through high school and college required discipline and self-assurance, which was cultivated through independence. Heaven recalled her grades reflected her own desire to achieve, even though she wanted to please her mother as well. Her sense of independence motivated her to strive toward excellence; she considered nothing less. She recalled,

> My mama always pushed me to be the best…but…I always strived to be the best at everything I did. I don't know why but I always wanted to be the best. In school, I never made anything less than an A…in K-12. My master's [degree] was the hardest part of education I've ever experienced. It was something about getting a master's in math that was so challenging. And it was many of nights

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when I cried… but because of my goal-orientedness [and] my strength, I stuck

with it… I had a goal and I was gonna accomplish it.

While this independence fostered Heaven's thriving academia, career, and even self-

worth, it corrupted relationships.  Heaven humorously explained:

My mama is very independent and therefore I inherited those traits.  Now, this

hasn't always worked in my favor when it came to dating…. One [prior

boyfriend] told me I was quiet controlling and I think it's because of me being so

independent, and of me being so goal-oriented, and because he was really not

trying to do nothing with his life and I was trying to push him too and it was just

too much for him.

Currently married, Heaven acknowledged her independence manifests in her interactions

with her husband. She indicated that while he is proud of her professional

accomplishments, their having a successful marriage requires interdependency, a

characteristic she's working to reciprocate.  Heaven asserted,

Now in my marriage one of the things I really had to learn was to stop being so

independent and make my husband feel needed sometimes… I was so used to

doing everything on my own and waiting for nobody to do nothing… cause I can

be so independent at work.  But like Fantasia's song says, 'If you gone be the

man, then be the man…cause if you can't baby I can.  I can and I will so figure it

out cause one of us gone be the man of the house.'  So that hasn't always worked

in my favor; it's been really a pride-swallowing issue.

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***Layla.*** Layla's narrative indicates her clear displeasure with her mother's

handling of Layla's sexual victimization. As previously stated, Layla recalled her

mother's concern about losing her job or others perceiving her in an unfavorable manner

more important than Layla's truth. Moreover, Layla recalled in $8^{th}$ grade attending a

workshop that discussed sexual harassment, assault, how victims should respond, and

the perpetrators likely consequences. Layla reported,

> When that was explained to me I began to understand the severity of it,
>
> especially when I learned that if I was to say something…or go to the police…he
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> could…be put in jail or something could happen to him…I shared it with her and
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> she got really defensive. I felt like she was very selfish and all she thought about
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> was herself.
>
> Because of this, Layla never considered her mother a role model. Layla loves

her mother, but given her mother's working class position, financial dependence upon

the alleged perpetrator, and thereby "selfishness," Layla viewed her aunt as a more

credible role model. She explained that her aunt represented physically, occupationally,

morally, financially, and psychologically all that Layla desired to work towards. She

offered that her mother's financial dependence and preference "to keep a man around

who she just met" permanently changed her perception of her mother.

> Throughout the interview Layla, with a self-centered tone, indicated she's

adopted the same characteristic—self-centeredness—that she once despised in her

mother. She emphatically professed her autonomy; informing her mother of her plans

"if she like it, if she don't like it;" growing to "care about me first and not what anyone

else feels, thinks, wants;" academic ingenuity and it's direct correlation with her success; future employer's likely reluctance to "turn me down because it's clear that I'm serious about school and about life in general;" inability to relate to her college classmates due to their lack of exposure and close-mindedness; and her unwavering righteous ethics. However, Layla's pompous demeanor, according to her, is a defense mechanism brought about from feeling conned by her mother who showed more concern for her professional reputation and friendships than Layla's academic, physical, and psychological wellbeing. Layla explained feeling dismissed, isolated, and psychologically traumatized taught her to prioritize herself above others.

This major life tragedy has fostered the very characteristic Layla despised in her mother. Layla's self-motivation was therefore fostered by her desire to mimic her aunt's personal and professional trajectory, her mother's response to her sexual victimization, and her mother's alleged financial dependency. This characteristic resulted in Layla considering her academia and future as the top priorities. Currently, she earns mostly A's as a college student, as reflected by her 3.5 GPA.

*Kerri.* At length, Kerri described her mother's manipulative persona. Offering narrative after narrative, Kerri damned her mother for exploiting Kerri's sexuality for professional or personal gain. She detailed her mother bargaining with a car salesman by offering him an opportunity to "date" Kerri if he gave her a "good deal." Moreover, she recounted her mother boldly offering her supervisors the opportunity to date Kerri should they consider her mother for a promotion. Kerri explained, "It's almost like human trafficking. It's like I'm an object; that's how she uses me." Because of this

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coupled with Kerri's history of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her mother, Kerri didn't view her mother as a role model. Rather, she viewed her grandmother as a role model given her "determination and not taking no for an answer."

Throughout the interview Kerri acknowledged objectifying herself and utilizing her sexuality to control people and situations. As previously noted, she engaged in an intimate relationship with a man until he contributed toward her college tuition and she no longer needed him. Moreover, Kerri has engaged in an intimate relationship with her psychiatrist who is also her own supervisor, given his knowledge base as it is aligned with her major course of study. Kerri attributes her actions to her low self-esteem, and inability to appropriately receive compliments, but also as necessary because she needs the help. She further stated, "I feel like I'm enslaved, mentally enslaved. I'm trying to break free of my chains… it's happening but it's at a very slow pace." Kerri seems to be self-enabling the very characteristics she despises in her mother—manipulation and objectification.

*Savannah.* Savannah spoke positive, affirming words about her mother; fortunately for her, she experienced little stress in her mother's household. Nevertheless, she explained that her mother's reserved demeanor caused her to "[hold] back when there should have been more interaction with us." Savannah explained that her mother concealed her true feelings and didn't reveal "transparency." Moreover, she discussed how her mother opted not to converse about premarital sex, peer pressure, and other sensitive topics. Rather she stated, "Don't do it." Savannah further concluded,

… I think, you know, she feared… what she had to deal with being a young

mother.  She got married early and she divorced early… and she just didn't want

her girls to… experience that.  Growing up, a lot of times…her parenting could

have been a little more open… But I think her approach was a little more

protective…

Beside this, Savannah believes her mother's reservation has served her well; she

never acts erratically or irrationally.  Because of this, Savannah's mother is her role

model.  She desires to imitate her parenting, morals, and often asks herself, "what mom

would do, how would she respond, you know, what would be her actions."  Savannah

adopted the characteristic of reservation, and believes it along with her mother's

encouragement fostered her academic achievement.  She highlighted how it served well

in relationships with her teachers and friends, offering that she rarely had unresolved

conflict.  Moreover, when conflict arose, she generally sought to "fix it."  However, she

also reported this characteristic doesn't work well with her son given she wants

transparency with and from him.  Therefore she strives to converse with him about

sensitive topics, even though they're uncomfortable at times.  She further stated this

characteristic has been unfavorable at times.  She recounted,

There was a situation at work where I had an idea and I shared this idea with

some of my coworkers.  And when it was presented in a meeting where we were

talking about a certain project, of course my team members presented the idea

that I gave….a part of me wanted to just go off…and a part of me felt like I

should've made that known and I didn't.  I sat back and needless to say those

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people, they didn't get an award for it, but they were recognized… I really

should've spoken up for myself.

**Analysis**

James Baldwin (unknown) said, "Children have never been very good at

listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."  For the participants

in this study, their role model served as the standard, which they often strived to imitate.

Educationally, this role model functioned as their motivation to procure academic

achievement. A tangible representation of their future, participant's role models served

as another impetus of their academic success.

Self-motivation appeared directly linked to their role models.  Having observed

their role model, and considered the steps to actuate their role model's success,

participants took the necessary steps beginning with academic achievement.  While their

mother's whispers and consistent discipline functioned as a chief motivator to attain

academic success, participants expressed independently acquired goals that fostered their

self-motivation. These goals, as fostered by their role model, provided another layer of

security to these daughters.

**Consistent Discipline**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah each noted their mother utilized corporal

punishment as retribution for an offense.  Interestingly, none acknowledged receiving

corporal punishment for grades; academic achievement was rarely their issue.  Rather,

their discipline was the result of behavioral infractions.  Nevertheless, their mother's

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promised consequences encouraged them to perform well academically and meet her academic expectations.

*Heaven.* Heaven described her mother as tolerant, "nonconfrontational," and "not strict." She respected her mother and knew her expectations. Heaven described herself as a one who "stayed in a child's place" and rarely required her mother to reiterate her clear behavioral and academic expectations—all A's. She added that she always "let my mama be right… I didn't argue with her… if I had something to say I said it in my head… I didn't really talk back to my mama or nothing like that." Heaven illustrated her mother's verbal correction as demanding your attention. She added "when she's angry, she's angry!" Heaven smiled and described her mother's whippings as difficult to forget. Heaven stated, "My mama definitely believed in whoopings. She didn't whoop me a lot because I was a good kid, but when she did whoop me I remembered. I remember those whooping. I remember getting a whooping with an extension cord."

*Layla.* Layla asserted her mother "likes for us to be us. She never really tries to make us be something that we don't want to." While her mother appreciated Layla's authenticity, Layla reports primarily adhering to her mother's rules and having earned her mother's trust, she states her mother resorted to corporal punishment to correct her when her behavior was grossly inappropriate. She stated, "We only got a whooping if we just did something awful. And I can only remember getting a whooping maybe twice because I never get in trouble." Layla recalled her whippings were the result of "talking back, having a bad attitude, or tuning out [my mother] when she talks to me for too

long… or sounds like she's saying the same thing." But Layla stated the whippings didn't bother her as much as her mother's fussing. She stated, "All she has to do is yell and I swear I'll never do it again." Layla expressed her disdain for her mother's yelling and "getting into trouble." She indicated the yelling is "annoying" and guarantees her immediate change.

     *Kerri.* As stated, Kerri's mother overwhelmingly disciplined and berated her. This fostered Kerri's fear of her mother, but also her academic achievement. Kerri stated her academic achievement was in part to leave the house as soon as possible. She determined that if she graduated high school early she could relocate and attend college. Kerri reported finishing her high school curriculum when in the 9th grade. Nevertheless, her school advised Kerri's mother that Kerri's social skills were inadequate to attend college.

     *Savannah.* Under no circumstances did Savannah's mother tolerate disrespect. Obviously reverent to her mother, Savannah summed up her mother's parenting as "pretty much you were gonna follow the rules." She added that her mother cringed at her children "talking back… and just didn't tolerate it." While Savannah's mother utilized corporal punishment to keep her obedient and civil, she also spoke words of wisdom to her afterwards, challenging her to think of the possible consequences of her actions. She remembered her mother once asking, "Why would you do that? Tell me why you did that…What do you think should happen to you now that you've done that?" Savannah sighted her mother's challenging as a means of forcing her to discuss lessons learned and meticulously consider her future decision.

Another unique way Savannah's mother disciplined was by allowing real world consequences. Snickering, Savannah stated the scariest mode of discipline was when her mother responded, "You know what? You've just made the decision. This is what you decided to do. You're growing up and must know that they're gonna be consequences to what you do." Anxiously, Savannah uttered, "and to me those moments stuck more than a whooping." And the whippings were rampant; Savannah acknowledges being quite disobedient. Savannah states she still remembers the memorable whippings and dreaded to get them. But worse to her was disappointing her mother. She dreaded hearing her mother say, "You disappointed me." Savannah stated, "I feel like that carried more weight than her whooping me cause in my mind that's the only person I wanted to please, you know, God and her." Savannah concluded that her mother "had a way of getting her point across to where you had no choice but to respect it!"

**Analysis**

Consistent discipline was key in keeping these women anxiously stimulated to work hard. Interestingly, all participants reported their discipline rarely resulted from low grades. This could be because their self-motivation, role models, and mother's whispers resonated well with them.

**Race, Gender, & Class**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah each agreed their mother used their race, gender, and/or class as a mode of actuating their academic achievement. Primarily, each participant reported their mother embraced two of the three factors, to which she at

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random times used as a mode of encouraging or empowering them. Participants'
acknowledged their mother's rearing was during a time of national unrest and poor race
relations, which shaped her perspective of American life, African Americans in general,
and more specifically, her family. Because of this, coupled with their mother's
singleness, she molded them to consider each, but primarily any given two, as factors
that control one's life dynamic. As a consequence, each acknowledged their mother
warning them of the need to "work harder" than their White counterparts.

  *Heaven.* Heaven stated her mother primarily utilized race and gender as factors
for actuating her success. As a child, Heaven reported, she engaged in no direct
conversations with her mother regarding race. In fact, Heaven reportedly believed
racism was nonexistent until her own college experiences. She recounted her White
professor targeting African American female students who earned A's in her class.
Heaven stated,

    I had a teacher to tell me I would never be nothing because of the culture I come

    from. I would never succeed. I would never amount to anything. And I found

    that very troubling and… hurtful. So, I tried to take action… I tried to… talk to

    the dean, and then I talked to the NAACP, but because she was tenured, nothing

    could be done to her. But when I started talking I found there were definitely

    other successful Black women in her class that she targeted.

  After this incident, Heaven recalled her mother teaching her why it's necessary to
"work twice as hard" as her White counterparts. She recalled her mother explaining that
racism exists in persons and systems. Heaven indicated she and her mother entered a

new world together, one which brought them closer given their conversations brought about in-depth discussions about race, it's place in America, and how Heaven would respond to the world. In her "shock to know that there were still racist people," Heaven vowed to use her race as a motivator to academically succeed. She earned an A in the professor's class, graduated with her bachelor of science, and master of science in mathematics, and is currently working toward completing her Ph.D.

Heaven declared her mother mostly emphasized how her designated gender could impact her life. Heaven denied having discussed gender with her mother during her rearing, but recalled regularly having those discussions since her college years. Heaven smiled, sat erect in her chair, and stated, "She taught me that being a woman, I don't need a man. That's one thing she strongly taught." Heaven explained that her mother's words were empowering, motivating, and gave her a sense of autonomy and will to conquer her dreams. Moreover, these recent conversations built Heaven's self-confidence, self-worth, and assurance in knowing that "I will be ok without one."

Insightful and wise, Heaven theorized that her mother's minimal conversations about race and gender during her rearing positively impacted her academia. First, she theorized that one's race and gender as a factor for motivation is more advantageous for students who have minimal self-motivation. Further, she concluded that her decision to major in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field was greatly motivated by her racial and gender naiveté. She explained that many African American females don't major in STEM fields due to the "stereotype threat," and had she known that information prior to declaring her major, self-doubt would have

emerged.  Heaven lightheartedly uttered that her mother's choosing to limit their conversations about racism and sexism, "helped me to not even… recognize the elephant in the room" and succeed.

*Layla.*  Race and social class are the factors that Layla's mother emphasized for actuating academic success.  Layla began by stating that while she hasn't ever experienced racism, her mother told her that "in the world it could possibly be harder for me because I am an African American."  She added that her mother's random conversations about race encouraged her to "take care of my business."  Moreover,

Layla recalled her mother mentioning how her race may offer unfavorable results, particularly if she works for a "White company or something like that."  Layla reported that while her mother informed her of race relations, she's concluded that one's success is more correlated with their college's resources rather than race.  Highlighting large land grant universities, Layla believes their predominantly White graduates achieve success because of their large alumni and popularity.  Nevertheless, she asserts her mother's lessons molded her to work exceptionally hard, particularly in college, and embrace diversity.  She concluded that she is not "pro Black," enjoys spending time with all races, and believes "times have changed even though all people haven't."

Layla described her lifestyle as one that allows her to "want for nothing. [My] money that I get from work is usually for what I want to spend it on: food, gas, going shopping, whatever the case may be."  While she believes her mother qualifies as low-income, her mother regularly professed, "We are not poor."  Despite this, Layla knew that her mother's secretarial salary did not afford the life she desired for her future.

Layla tossed her hair behind her shoulder and stated, "She always tells me that I need to be rich so I can afford myself. She tells me that all the time... She would say I need to graduate [from high school] and go to [college], and do what I have to do in order to live the life that I would like to live." Keeping the money she earns from part-time work has allowed her to learn to negotiate small amounts of money over multiple bills, needs, and wants. Her mother's real life experiences have given her wisdom to determine she needs to graduate from college.

Layla indicated that her mother's mode of teaching financial discipline, without disclosing her true socioeconomic status has taught her responsibility and given her drive to complete college. Reflecting upon her godmother's $100,000 salary, her mother's hard work to provide for their family, and what her mother has taught her about socioeconomic status, Layla concluded she needs to "work hard in school to be able to one day have my god mother's type of lifestyle." Layla continued,

> ... I do not want to constantly go to bed at night and have on my mind all the
> money that I have to spend on this bill and that bill and this bill and that bill,
> doing this and doing that and paying for this and paying for that. I feel like those
> shouldn't be concerns.

*Kerri*. Kerri's mother mostly utilized race and socioeconomic status as factors to actuate academic achievement, however they did not work. Kerri's mother utilized tactics that were not always empowering or validating. Kerri noted that her mother identifies as African American given her father is African American; nevertheless Kerri's maternal grandmother is White. Although Kerri's mother identifies as African

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American, Kerri describes her as a "prejudice… bigot…doesn't have an identity…she never had that sense of pride for who she was." Exceptionally fair skinned, Kerri's mother prefers spending time with her fairer skinned relatives and, according to Kerri, makes fun of dark skinned African Americans, including her own grandchildren. Distressed and embarrassed, Kerri recalled giving birth to her first child and her mother hurriedly looking behind her infant daughter's ears and uttering, "Oh her ears are so dark. She's gonna be so Black!" Consequently, Kerri's mother spends most of her time with Kerri's sister's children who are fair skinned with blue/grey eyes, blonde hair, and externally look White.

Kerri reported that her mother's feelings translated to Kerri's academic achievement. As mentioned earlier, Kerri's mother requested she attend a predominantly White, conservative institution rather than the historically Black university Kerri eventually attended. Fueled with anger at Kerri's decision she haphazardly left her on campus her freshman year with only a few items to sustain her. Kerri's race experiences with her mother have left Kerri blind to one's color. Thinking of how her mother's race preference manifested in her academia, Kerri declared, "… I'm not that way. I don't see color when I'm around other people. But everything to her is that's Black people and it's not, you know, cool." Kerri explained that her adopted color blindness serves her to embrace diversity, and attempt to build relationships with people despite their race. Academically, Kerri again stated her mother's actions inadvertently served to foster her color blindness when she elected a college to attend, helped to solidify her identity as African American, and initiate her love for her heritage.

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Moreover, she stated her mother's sophomoric comments have ignited a competitive spirit, and commendable work ethic, given her realization that her race is the barometer by which she's initially gauged.

Kerri reported her mother also valued social class and attempted to use it to foster Kerri's academia and life decisions. As a recent example, Kerri discloses how her mother advised that she cancel her wedding and begin officially dating the married psychiatrist with whom she's having an affair. Kerri offered, "She told me to drop my fiancé, keep the doctor because it would look good that I'm married to a doctor and not someone who actually works, like someone who does manual work." Kerri explained that her mother's primary concern is how other's perceive her, and she would rather one perceive her as a wealthy socialite. Kerri further explained, "…what people think means the world to her. She doesn't care how I feel. It's how she's perceived to be." Kerri added that she had a nanny growing up, but indicated she didn't need one it just looked good.

Kerri stated that her mother's desire for others to view her as wealthy has played no part in her academic success. She reported that she desires to be unlike her mother and attempts to negate her mother's attempted "life lessons" because they are unethical and even immoral. Nevertheless, as indicated throughout this manuscript, Kerri has adopted a few of her mother's characteristics and is working on unleashing the chains by which she is bound.

*Savannah.* Savannah's mother primarily valued and utilized race and gender to actuate Savannah's academic success. With reverence, Savannah spoke of her mother's

limited educational opportunities in the 1970s. She remembered her mother often

discussing African Americans' historical limited opportunities, but how it's different for

Savannah. Savannah reported her mother stressing the need to "work hard… because

there are some obstacles that are in place not by any fault of your own, but it's just the

circumstance." Moreover, her mother encouraged her to strive towards excellence and

take advantage of all opportunities, particularly since they were not readily accessible

during her rearing. With a serious tone Savannah reported, "… here it is now we had a

little bit more opportunity so why not take advantage of it? Why would you ruin it?"

Savannah explained that her mother's tireless lessons on race manifested in her

academic performance because "it allowed me to work harder;" in school knowing that

"some doors have been opened." Savannah wrapped up by saying, "When you know

that you come from a race that has not always had that opportunity, that's the motivation

that you need to have, that it hasn't always looked like this."

Savannah's mother also utilized gender to actuate academic success. She spoke

regularly of the "Black woman's" oppression. Laughingly, Savannah stated her mother

rarely separated woman from Black. She added that her mother spoke of Black women

once having few rights because of their race and gender, both characteristics of which

they had no control. Nevertheless, Savannah's mother emphasized that her race and

gender called for her to be responsible, take care of her family, and become a person of

integrity. Academically, Savannah was consequently motivated to "find more ways to

improve and not just be ok with being average." So, in school she worked exceptionally

hard to earn all A's although she primarily earned mostly B's. She strived toward excellence, studied hard, and hired tutors when needed.

**Analysis**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah all determined their mothers utilized two demographic factors to actuate their academic success: race, gender, and/or social class. Each mother strategized to mold the daughter's academia, future aspirations, and overall disposition by endowing power upon her demographics. In the case of Heaven, Layla, and Savannah, their mothers validated their otherwise demographics, while Kerri's mother used them in a demeaning manner. Nevertheless, all participants indicated their mother's use of these factors molded their mirrored identity, encouraged them to disembody the stereotypes associated with that factor, increased their appreciation for their forefather's sacrifice, and set a precedent by molding their academic achievement and desire to achieve excellence in life.

**Transitioned Inclination to Mold**

Heaven, Layla, Kerri, and Savannah each indicated their mother's manner of molding and grooming them toward success transitioned into their college attendance. While their mother trusted them to succeed academically, she did not discontinue her mothering demeanor after the daughter graduated from high school. For Heaven, Layla, and Savannah, their mother's involvement significantly increased upon the daughter relocating to college. Nevertheless, each mother maintained her authoritative role and continued emphasizing, in her own way, the need for academic excellence.

***Heaven.*** As stated earlier, Heaven's mother worked and attended school while raising her children. Because of this, she encouraged and pushed Heaven when around, but primarily trusted Heaven to meet the standard of excellence. She reported her mother emphasizing, "be the best at everything!" Heaven concluded that her mother's primary role was providing the resources she needed while intermittently facilitating her mark toward excellence. Beyond this, Heaven stated because of her mother's schedule she relied on listening to her mother "in her head."

Heaven added that her mother was emotionally withholding—she's only once observed her mother crying. Because of this, she rarely conversed with her mother about personal, often embarrassing, teenage concerns she had. While Heaven described her mother's parenting as "effective" and standards as "clear," she still described their relationship as distant during her childhood and adolescent years. However, upon entering college, Heaven stated she noticed a distinct change in their relationship. Her mother conversed with her more often and intimately, insisted on staying abreast of Heaven's academic standing, and tightened her reign on Heaven although she trusted her the same. She recalls them having long discussions about relationships, sex, race relations, excellence in academia, and other personal matters. Tickled at her mother's investigative nature, Heaven reported, "…she was always checking. Like she'd call me, 'Congratulations! You made all A's.' Like how you know my log-in information? She was more active in college." Heaven stated that although she felt self-motivated, she appreciated her mother's continued and progressively increased attention.

*Layla.*  Layla also reported her mother's increased encouragement while she was in college. She stated that while in high school her mother encouraged her and engaged in intermittent empowering conversations; however, once Layla relocated to college her mother's strategy for encouraging Layla's academic success expanded.  Smiling, Layla stated that while in high school her mother primarily "made sure I was always at school."  She described the discussions in which she and her mother engaged but reported while powerful, they were intermittent.

Layla detailed the changes that occurred once entering college.  She states her mother is regularly concerned about her grades, although she trusts her.  Moreover, she stated the frequency and intimacy with which her mother prefers to converse has increased.  Her mother regularly emphasizes the need to graduate from college and obtain a well paying job.  Moreover, her mother regularly insists Layla graduate from college without prematurely starting a family.  Layla indicated these regular conversations are at times bothersome, however they keep her perpetually striving for academic excellence while solely focusing on her grades.  Layla realizes her mother merely desires for her to succeed and enjoy the opportunities in life which her mother did not.

*Kerri.*  Kerri reported her mother's mode of molding her toward excellence transitioned to college as well.  As previously stated, Kerri described an incident involving her mother forcing her to remove all of her clothes so she could check each orifice.  Kerri explained her mother's intent was to somehow determine if she'd engaged in sexual intercourse since entering college, while assuming she had not engaged in sex

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prior to college.  Nevertheless, after haphazardly checking and concluding Kerri had recently engaged in sexual intercourse, her mother reportedly beat her.  Kerri explained that her mother's use of force to maintain control and ensure her impending graduation was brutal.  Additionally, her mother expressed a more intense interest in Kerri's grades although she'd been "absent" throughout Kerri's secondary years.  When describing her mother's involvement during Kerri's secondary years, Kerri simply stated, "she never helped me with anything I always did it alone."  She added her mother had no involvement with her teachers, and/or school administrators.  Nevertheless, college introduced newfound interest for her mother.  Kerri believes this is because her mother is evil and not necessarily attempting to mold her towards anything.

*Savannah.*  Savannah indicated her mother played a heavy presence during her secondary years.  Her mother worked often but set expectations and gave Savannah no choice but to achieve them.  As noted earlier, Savannah reported her mother's whispers, consistent discipline, and upright demeanor as more than motivation for her to succeed.  However in college, her mother's presence increased even more.  As an adult, Savannah acknowledged her mother encouraging her to balance her time, and make changes to increase her academic success.  She recalled her mother saying, "You can't approach college the way you approached high school.  And the same thing with grad school. You can't approach grad school with the same mindset that you approached undergrad. Cause it is different."  Savannah detailed how her mother "stayed on top of her" while in college.  She recalled her mother asking about her grades, incessantly reminding her about her ancestor's lack of opportunity, and pushing her to strive toward excellence.

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Savannah indicated that at times it became bothersome, but she knew her mother "challenged mediocrity" and didn't "want me to fail." Laughingly, Savannah remembers her mother steadily emphasizing, "Get good grades, go to school… get a good job, and have a well-off life to where you can support your family and be ok."

**Analysis**

Each participant acknowledged their mother's attempt at molding them toward academic success, even in college. Each agreed their mother's attempts at maintaining their academic success significantly increased once they entered college. Additionally, each participant stated having attained age 18 and relocating to college did not reduce their mother's perceived reign on their life. In fact, her presence and conversations increased in frequency and intimacy. Participants indicated that while their self-motivation, role models, and mother's whispers sustained them while in college, their mother insisting to remain an integral part of academia was further motivation. F or Heaven, Layla, and Savannah this motivation was affirming, empowering, and nurturing, For Kerri, this motivation to succeed was undergirded by her fervent desire to get out from under her mother's authority. This is consistent with contemporary research that indicates African American parents have alternative ways of involving themselves in their child's education (Auerbach, 2007); are typically involved in their education at home rather than participating in school related activities (Crozier, 2003), and their involvement yields academic achievement for their children at all levels (Spera, 2005). increased participation in their child's K-12 experience yields positive rewards.

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Therefore, one could presume the single-mother's increased participation in her daughter's college academic success would reap similar results.

## Summary

Findings of this study are consistent with the conceptual framework below, which indicates the mother's personality characteristics, parenting acts, and rearing acts culminated to influence the daughter's academic success.  Specifically, findings offer the following themes: (a) She's in My Head; (b) Sister-Brother Dichotomy; (c) Helpful Disposition; (d) Self-Motivation and Role Models; (e) Discipline; (f) Race, Gender, and Class; and (g) Transitioned Inclination to Mold.  Each theme, as indicated by the conceptual framework, supports the notion that single mothers hold great power in molding their daughter's disposition and academic stamina.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION


This study sought to qualitatively understand and describe college-enrolled African American daughters' interpretation of their single mother's personal characteristics, acts of parenting, and meaningful influence on their collegiate academic achievement.  Moreover, this study sought to examine the influence race, gender, and class had on the mother-daughter experiences of these African American women. I posed the following research questions:

1. How do African American females describe their single mother's personal characteristics in raising them?

2. How do African American females describe and interpret their single mother's acts of parenting as they raised them?

3. How do African American females describe their single mother's influence on their academic performance?

4. How do African American females describe the influences of race, gender, and class on their single mother's parenting?

Findings indicate the single-mother offered verbal guidance, which permanently resonated with participants particularly in her mother's absence.  Moreover, each participant evidenced self-motivation, role-models, consistent discipline, and the use of their demographics (race, gender, and class) to undergird their *potentiality* rather than *risk*.  Findings also substantiated a sister-brother dichotomy indicative of the mother

"raising" her daughter while "loving her son." These characterizations resulted in the following themes: (a) She's in My Head; (b) Sister-Brother Dichotomy; (c) Helpful Disposition; (d) Self-Motivation & Role Models; (e) Discipline; (f) Race, Gender, and Class; and (g) Transitioned Inclination to Mold.

### Research Question One

Regarding research question one, findings revealed the single-mother-daughter relationship as characterized by "distance" and "absence" in the daughter's childhood and adolescence. Mothers set a distinct authoritative relationship tone, which "placed" the daughter in a permanently subordinate position. Daughters respected and obeyed their mother, while offering few behavioral and academic issues. Themes A and G resonate well with this question. Participants spoke tirelessly of their mother's clear academic expectations and no-excuse policy for achieving them. The passionate mode by which the mother imposed these expectations left the daughter reflecting upon and attempting to reify her mother's expectations even in her mother's absence. In essence, participants described their single-mother's personal rearing characteristics as emotionally distant yet academically efficacious, intermittingly intimate, and ultimately powerful.

### Research Question Two

Regarding research question two, findings revealed the mothers consistently disciplined their daughters. All mothers utilized corporal punishment as a mode of securing retribution for the daughter's offense. One participant endured physical and psychological abuse at her mother's hands—the hyperbole of corporal punishment.

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Nevertheless, all participants indicated their mother's consistent and predictable resorting to corporal punishment for behavioral infractions served as motivation to excel and exceed academically. Additionally, participants acknowledged their mother invested in them in ways she did not in their brother. The mothers held higher expectations and more rigid boundaries for her daughter, while allowing her son to feely express egalitarianism. As a consequence, participants acknowledged they are reaping the academic and social benefit of their mother's investment, while their brother continues to struggle. Themes B and E resonate well with research question two.

**Research Question Three**

Regarding question three, all participants reported their mother's personal characteristics and parenting acts directly impacted their academic achievement. Her considerable investment in their relationship, either positive or negative, resulted in their desire to attain academic excellence. All participants reported a desire to please their mother by meeting or exceeding the academic expectations she'd established. Yet one reported a desire to also achieve academic excellence and relocate away from her mother. Essentially, mothers coupled with the daughter's role model induced the daughter's self-motivation, which resulted in the daughter achieving without requiring her mother's reinforcement. This was evident when participants relocated to college, reinvented the mother-daughter relationship, and still excelled. Their mother's inclination to mold their daughters continued throughout the daughter's college experience. For these mothers, the mother role intensified rather than subsided when the

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daughter relocated to college. Themes A, D, E, and G resonate with research question three.

## Research Question Four

Each participant revealed their mother utilized their race, gender, and/or social class as a mode of engendering the daughter's academic capabilities. Mothers reflected on the historical implications of their demographics in an effort to push the daughter toward what they perceived as excellence. All participants indicated their mother emphasized how their race, gender, and/or social class warranted them to "work harder" than their White, male, and or wealthy counterparts. Each seemingly embraced their demographics and emboldened themselves with power. Themes A, D, F, and G resonate with research question four.

## Findings' Correlation to Previous Research

The findings presented here are consistent with previous research which avows the mother-daughter relationship is one that is characterized by significant power and influence (Cauce et al., 1996; Johnson & González y González, 2013; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Merten & Henry, 2011; Townsend, 2008); greatly influences the daughter's self esteem and autonomy (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Morris, 2007); reflects an auspicious dichotomy given single-mothers socialize their daughter toward accountability in ways they do not in their son (Mandara et al., 2010; Thomas & Speight, 2009); and utilize race, gender, and class characterizations for promoting competency (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Hill-Collins, 2009; Merten & Henry, 2011). Additionally, findings align with previous research asserting education for

African Americans is key in providing hope for future generations (DuBois, 1906;

McAdoo, 1988).  Contrary to Moynihan's (1965) declaration, this study reveals single-

mothered African American homes can cultivate civility, encourage one's academic

prowess, and perpetuate success in similar ways as two-parent homes.

### Findings' Correlation to Sociocultural Theories

Black Feminist Thought, Parental Investment Theory, and Social Learning

Theory served as the frameworks guiding this study.  Black Feminist Thought seeks to

rearticulate and validate the interpretive experiences of Black women (Hill-Collins,

1989).  Additionally, this theory negates the "truth" of Black experiences as researched

and interpreted by those with minimal cultural familiarity.  This theory undergirds this

study given the researcher's status as African American and female, coupled with her

effort to rearticulate the life experiences of women who similarly identify and whose

family structure has been damned to solely perpetuate dysfunction.  This study evaluated

multiple factors including how the interwoven notions of race, gender, and class

manifest in the single-mother's parenting acts.  Aligned with Hill Collins' theory, the

results of this study demonstrate how these daughters were exposed to race, gender,

and/or class as a mode of engendering academic success.  Their single-mother often

utilized these factors to instill pride, self-motivation, and ingenuity in their daughters.

Parental Investment Theory purports children's successful building of secure

adult relationships is contingent upon having been reared in a loving, nurturing home

(Webster, 2009).  Also, it purports that parents tend to invest their limited resources into

the child who is likely to produce the greater return.  Supporting Parental Investment

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Theory, this study evidenced that daughters who held a secure adult attachment to their single-mother boasted of more secure, healthy attachments with friends, significant others, and loved ones.  This study also evidenced that mothers tirelessly invested themselves in their daughters rather than their sons, which resulted in behavioral and academic polarity.  Daughters consistently reflected civility and academic wellbeing, while their brothers were noted as experiencing loose boundaries under their mother's tutelage, consistent behavioral infractions at school, home, and/or in public, and below average academic performance.  As suggested by Parental Investment Theory, the dichotomous investment may have contributed to a gap in social wellbeing.

Social Learning Theory postulates that one learns and thereby models the behavior of another when they value the anticipated consequences of such modeling (Bandura, 1977).  Undergirding each participant's academic success was their having identified a role model who became a tangible vision for the participants to observe and imitate.  All participants reported attempting to imitate their role model's demeanor, and success, which began with unearthing one's innate self-motivating accelerant and embracing the desire to solely strive for excellence.  Interestingly, all participants didn't choose their mother as the role model, as I had presumed.  However their academic success is partly attributed to their insatiable desire to effect personal change by imitating their role model.

## Discussion

Findings warrant several thought provoking questions regarding students from single-mothered homes and their academic success.  First, given such encouraging

research which denotes the African American mother's power in her child's life experiences, academic stamina, and value set, why are schools and districts continuing to associate this power with teachers? A body of research (Lewis et al.; Carter, 2003; Ingersoll, 2005) exists which suggests students' overall achievement is primarily contingent upon their continued instruction from quality teachers. And this is true. But, African American mothers are consistently noted as ones who possess considerable authority in their child's world perspective (Costigan, 2007; Townsend, 2008) abstention from sex and illicit substances (De La Rosa et al., 2010; Foster et al., 2007; Merten & Henry, 2011), self-esteem (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et.al., 1991; Turnage, 2004; Morris, 2007), marriage (Merten & Henry, 2011), and even academia (Stevens, 2002). But furthermore, how does one classify a "quality teacher" with regard to students? In other words, is the veteran middle-class teacher who's successfully instructed wealthy White students also considered a "quality teacher" for students of color classified as low-income, and below average for literacy and math achievement? If we agree the term quality is relative, we also agree that given the sheer percentage of employed middle-class White teachers, African American students are likely under the instruction of one who has questionable "quality." Is this fair to conclude? A separate body of research (Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2010) discusses the legitimacy of cultural relevance. I postulate that this relevance is also undergirded by one's family structure, particularly when considering students reared in the single-mothered home.

Secondly, this study warrants one to ask if mothers subscribe to the casual 'boys will be boys' and 'girls will be girls' theory and thereby perpetuate their son's reduced

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academic achievement, school involvement, and increased proclivity for behavioral and criminal offenses. This research effort did not focus on the brother, but additional research in this area is recommended, particularly given more than 40% of African American males are raised by their single mother (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). The academic plight of African American males is drear and requires research efforts that focus on their secure childhood relationships with invested adults.

Also, this study leads one to consider resilience. This study suggests single African American mothers utilized their demographics to engender psychological strength and academic stamina in their daughters. How does one embrace their trials, bypass their induced struggle, and choose strength? Given the multitude of low-income students who attend public schools, this question is the key to unlocking the ways in which successful academic achievement is manifested in children despite their parent's education and socio-economic status, and their childhood environment. Inquiry in this area is suggested.

Finally, parent and professional ethics are of concern, given Kerri's experiences of emotional abuse at the hands of her mother and psychologist/supervisor. The Texas Code of Criminal Procedure allows one ten years to indict another for injury to a child. Therefore, Kerri's statute of limitations has expired. Besides, Kerri is not interested in prosecuting her mother for having physically and emotionally abused her throughout her childhood. Nevertheless, Kerri is perpetually suffering due to her mother's gross parenting acts. In fact, one can presume that her acquiescence to engage sexually with her psychologist/supervisor is influenced by having been physically and emotionally

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abused by her mother.  The Code of Conduct for psychologists emphasizes their conduct with current or former clients must not include sexual intimacy.  It is therefore unethical for Kerri's psychologist to sexually pursue her once he has provided professional therapy.  It is his responsibility to make choices that are in their best interest.  It is illegal, immoral and unethical to physically and/or emotionally abuse.  Although this dissertation does not focus on parent and professional ethics, they are key in protecting human vulnerabilities.

<div align="center">**Recommendations and Future Research**</div>

**Teacher-Student-Parent Interaction**

Based upon the findings of this study, I recommend that K-20 begin to appropriately utilize one of their most powerful resources yet to actuate student academic success—the parent.  As stated by Ladson-Billings (2009), the school is the central community center for students and their parents, which serves students' needs through intense teacher-student-parent collaboration.  If one of the three components is nonconforming, the puzzle and possibly the student's motivation to learn is weak.  Therefore, schools and teachers should intensively utilize parents' knowledge, skills, efforts, and influence to maximize student results.  Districts can accomplish this by consistently emphasizing and demonstrating the need for parents to remain intricately involved.  Districts should seek to respond to the parents' silent question, "How does increased parent-teacher-student interaction and involvement impact my child's academic performance?  Districts could offer optional parent workshops, which discuss and possibly teach, their child's curriculum so parents are more comfortable assisting

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their child with homework.  Districts could also offer optional parent workshops which emphasize scholarly data and elucidates potential "risk" factors and their possible consequences.  But more importantly, districts could offer workshops that describe strategies parents can use to increase their child's academic and behavioral wellbeing, ultimately allowing the school to serve as the central community center for uplifting students and parents.  Finally, given Kerri's life experiences, these workshops could focus on parenting skills because they can enhance academic achievement.

Schools serve as a smaller community within the district, but with minimal interaction with its community members, its purpose is likely futile.  Thus, schools should focus on the academic, behavioral, and familial needs of its community.  Schools can accomplish intense parental and community interaction by hosting regular, perhaps bimonthly, parent-teacher-student networking events.  Imagine if parents, particularly single mothers, could look forward to interacting with their child's teacher and learning of their child's progress.  This would allow parents and teachers to interact regularly, whether the student is performing well or not, and thereby build rapport.  Moreover, it would allow teachers to naturally gain cultural familiarity by merely conversing, observing, and interacting with parents.  This also would allow parents to interact with one another, and build a community themselves.  Finally, regular teacher-student-parent interaction gives students an additional reason to strive for excellence—they are always aware that their mother and/or father will likely and frequently converse with their teacher(s).  In summary, African American families thrive from community building and investment.  It is most wise to reflect this same dynamic within the school system.

Future research could include a more detailed study on students who don't have competent relationships with their mother or teacher.

**Teacher-Administrator Training**

While teacher training is necessary, often teachers are allowed to elect the professional development that they or their immediate superior believes is most necessary for their success as a teacher. However, I suggest that some training should be mandatory. For example, training on cultural relevance should be mandatory. As a teacher, I once received a pamphlet (during a faculty meeting) which described African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics and their value systems. African Americans and Hispanics were noted as ones whose culture valued education "very little." This was shocking to receive but was offered as a means for understanding our students and their struggles. But how does this type of random, presumptuously disseminated information play into teachers' beliefs about their students?

Cultural relevance and familiarity is significantly important and suggests for teachers to meet their students' needs they should first know them and meaningfully understand their culture. The truth is, you don't know a person or their culture by analyzing an erroneous pamphlet that justifies one's academic ineptitudes to their own culture or worth. Nevertheless, these types of casual modes of engendering cultural relevance and familiarity are represented nationally and thus require teachers and administrators to question their knowledge and seek analysis of this "knowledge" by learning from one who is culturally relevant. This is simple. This is necessary. This is key.

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## Conclusion

This study sought to qualitatively understand and describe college-enrolled African American daughters' interpretations of their single mother's personal characteristics, acts of parenting, and meaningful influence on their academic achievement. Through narrative analysis, participants divulged powerful authentic stories describing their most intimate thoughts of and experiences with their mothers. Baring their souls, I further sought to accurately expose the daughter's interpreted life experiences alongside her single-mother and their mutual influence on her academic success while also validating her voice and perspective. Essentially, this work is a collaborative effort of women whose said "risk" factors have engendered power, strength, resilience, and college academic success. Maya Angelou (1969) said,

> The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance. (p. 34)

It is with this spirit that I approached this study. It is hopefully with this spirit that you embrace it.

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