ABSTRACT


Generational, economic and social class are a few of the many factors that impact the lives of single African American mothers. Single African American mothers are unique according to their lived experiences and these experiences impact them in various ways over time.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of single African American mothers. The intent was also to examine stereotypic images that depict their population and the role these images have in the racial and feminist identity development of this sample.

The sample consisted of 10 single African American mothers. Data were collected through demographic surveys and open ended interviews and were analyzed through a phenomenological qualitative approach to allow the participants to fully describe the phenomenon. Interviews were transcribed and the data were coded, categorized and themes were created. The data produced the following themes: Lived Experiences, Stereotypes, Racial and Feminist Identity.

Data analysis provided evidence that the single African American mothers in this study are aware of stereotypes. It was determined that these stereotypes were derived from historical and societal images that were inaccurate for the participants in this study. Further, while hardships, racial and gender inequities were reported, single African American mothers gain strength and resilience and feel empowered by their experiences.
The Role of Stereotypic Images in the Racial and Feminist Identity Development of Single African American Mothers

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this heart felt work to the single mom that dedicated her life to me. I love you Mom and I will never forget your sacrifice. To my Dad, a strong man of God who made sure that we grew up knowing his presence; Thanks for the lessons, love and support. This one is for you. To my backbone, my sister and best friend Tameka. When God made you, he broke the mold.

To the beautiful man who has the glow of God in his eyes, my loving husband Sam Rowley. I love you. Never would have made it through this without you.
BIOGRAPHY

Alishea Sonte’ Rowley was born in Atlanta, Georgia to Daniel and Tonya Buggs. She is the middle child of five, two sisters and two brothers. Alishea lived in Decatur, Georgia for eighteen years before leaving for Tallahassee Florida to attend Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University on a band scholarship. After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and Secondary Education, Alishea was accepted to the University of Central Florida, where she studied Counseling with an emphasis in School Counseling and received her Masters Degree in 2006.

Alishea’s professional work experience includes a position as a Graduation Coach at Cedar Grove High School in Decatur Georgia. This was an innovative position, which was the brainchild of Governor Sonny Perdue in efforts to employ School Counselors to focus specifically on reducing the retention rates in the state of Georgia. She holds a School Counseling Certificate from the State of Georgia and is a Licensed Professional Counselor. Alishea is presently a counselor at New Beginnings Therapeutic Resources and works with adolescents, families and couples.

Since enrolling as a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, her research interests have included African American adolescents and families as well as racial and feminist identity development. She has presented her research interests at an international conference. She plans to secure a tenured professorship in counseling as well as to pursue private practice.

Alishea’s professional memberships include the American Counseling Association, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and the North Carolina Professional
Counseling Association. She is also a member of Chi Sigma Iota National Honorary Counseling Association.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose for the study was to describe the lived experience of single African American mothers as well as to understand what role stereotypic images play in the racial and feminist identity development of single African American mothers. The research was intended to begin to fill gaps in the current literature in hopes of furthering the development of training programs for helping professionals. The goal of this chapter was to provide the statement of the problem, explain the significance of the problem, the rationale for the study as well as the overall purpose of the research.

Statement of the Problem

For decades, researchers have attempted to understand and describe racial and feminist identity development in African American women (Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971; Cole, & Zucker, 2007). However, to date, the research has neglected to provide a recent, accurate view of the lived experiences of single African American mothers in the process of racial and feminist identity development. As defined in this study, racial and feminist identity is a process that an individual will encounter as they define what it means to be a member of their racial and gender group. It is argued that this process cannot take place without an inclusive view of the factors that impact an individual’s life, more specifically in this study, single African American mothers (SAAM). Robinson-Wood (2009) suggests that several of the resources produced were in efforts to promote multicultural counseling competence with the collective aim of improving the lives of the culturally diverse clients helping professionals intend to help. However, much of that information lacks the lived experiences
of the sub groups within this multicultural umbrella, with single African American mothers being one of those groups. An understanding for how racial and feminist identity is developed within single African American mothers is vital to helping professionals to better understand the needs of the population as well as effective ways to help them. Collins (2000) suggests that these experiences must be analyzed through intersectional paradigms such as race, class, gender and sexuality to get an accurate depiction of their lived experiences. Currently, there are few studies that provide this view of single African American mothers.

A study done by Cole and Zucker (2007) provides evidence of the varying perspectives of femininity between Black and White women. The researchers demonstrate evidence suggesting the uniqueness of feminist identity development across racial lines. Further, the research outcomes suggest that this development is contingent upon a woman’s cultural background. Black racial identity development is understood as the process an African American person encounters as they assimilate themselves to a group with a common racial heritage (Helms, 1990). For African American women, it is believed that race is a factor in their everyday lives and affects societal perceptions of single African American mothers by operating as “an important conduit for racialized social class system(s)” (Collins, 2000, p. 46). This view may affect the way an African American woman feels about her racial group membership. Feminism is rooted in the fight for equal rights for women. Cole and Zucker (2007) have studied several feminist theorists and concluded that feminist identity development is an identity forming process that is compounded by an individual’s historical and societal place as well as “ecological niche”: gender, social class, family, community, ethnicity, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1977.) Black Feminist theorist such as
Patricia Hill-Collins (2004) further support this conclusion by asserting that gendered power structures are reflected in cultural practices and ideologies unique to a woman’s normative feminine behaviors.

The research was intended to examine the lived experiences of single African American mothers. With multiple identity factors impacting African American women as racial beings, it is believed that motherhood adds an additional component that could impact identity development in single African American mothers. Thomas et al. (2004) utilizes the term *multiple identity factors* (p. 427) that will be utilized in this study to explain the expansion of theoretical concepts of identity from a singular perspective, such as an examination of race alone, and move to a multifactoral perspective, such as examining identity development with an inclusive view of race, gender and ethnicity. Burke (1980, p.18) further explains identities as “meanings a person attributes to the self as an object in a social situation or social role” (in Demo & Hughes, 1990). This is significant in the research contributing to single African American mothers because it considers several factors and aligns with the belief that several components are necessary to understand racial identity development. Additional factors include the challenges that emerge from the lived experiences of single African American mothers. It is assumed that many of the challenges in single parent homes are often due to economic, generational and political factors that potentially affect the lives of African American women in the process of racial and feminist identity development. Moreover, challenges unique to single parenthood provide possible impacts of additional stressors. The lived experiences of single African American mothers may uncover risks including being female head of household, low social support networks
and economic hardships. It is believed that stereotypic images are additional challenges that play a role in racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers.

Inequality continues to persist amongst multicultural individuals in our society. Collins’ (1990) theoretical view is foundationalized in the recognition of oppressive structures in society that minimize the voice of African American women. She utilizes the voice of Maria W. Stewart, the first African American female lecturer to speak on political issues to illustrate the marginalization of African American women. In Richardson (1987), Stewart’s 1833 speech proclaims “We have pursued the shadow they have obtained the substance: we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them” (p. 59). In this speech, Stewart colorfully explains the inequity and subordinate voice of African American women. Limited research specific to the developmental process of marginalized groups can prove problematic for single African American mothers. Neglecting to examine identity development in marginalized groups could have an affect on an African American person’s self-concept and self-esteem as well as contribute to the way an African American develops racial identity. Single African American mothers represent a marginalized group with an added challenge of developing self-identified definitions of racial and feminist identity. However, there is a lack of research that describes the lived experiences of African American single mothers. It is imperative that several aspects of a single parent’s life be considered during exploration of identity development in African American women. Multidimensional factors like race, gender and social class, should be inclusive in identity development inquiry (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004). Collins (1990) asserts that aspects such as racial and gender oppression cannot be examined
independently. In essence, it is important that multiple complex factors be considered during an in depth examination of the identity formation process in African American single mothers. It is important for these factors to be considered to comprehensively explore the lived experiences of African American mothers to give them a more dominant voice in the current research. Furthermore, this information should be relatable and utilized within the African American community. This research was intended to provide implications for counselors and other helping professionals in hopes of creating training programs and community initiatives that support single African American mothers.

As a mental health professional and former school counselor, I have worked with single mothers and their children for several years. Witnessing the strength and resilience of single African American mothers, in spite of many of their circumstances, fueled a curiosity to learn more about the issues they face. Collins (1990) recognizes the daunting task a mother has to shape the lives of her children. The responsibility can be a heavy burden for some, especially those who are attempting the task as a single parent. The magnitude of single parenthood along with the social, political and economic issues African American women face can make racial and feminist identity development a difficult journey. Providing an understanding of the experiences of African American single mothers is intended to afford counselors an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about and helpful to their clients.

**African American Women**

Historical racism and oppression of African American women has been extensively examined (Thomas et al., 2004; Jones, Cross & DeFour, 2007; Demo & Hughes, 1990).
Jordan (1991) further supports this examination by concluding that societal oppression has historically accompanied devaluation based on race, gender and socio economic class, causing African American women to experience multiple marginalization in the United States. Additionally, African American women have also had to face the stereotypic images that have been historically created while developing racial and feminist identity. It is assumed society purports stereotypic images to portray African American women negatively. Once these images are exposed, it can be difficult for the perceiver to consciously alter these images (in West, 1995, p. 458). Researchers have theorized the long-term effects of historically oppressive events and their effects on African Americans. Coping mechanisms are developed as a result of the affects of race related events. Disparities in employment, education and socioeconomic status continue to impact African American women. Dickerson (1995) asserts that there is a societal misconception that assumes that African American family systems were derived from slavery, societal racism or some type of socioeconomic disadvantage. Conversely, many of the principles that are common among Black people such as childbearing, the mother-child unit and collectivity are African principles. Collins (1990) Black Feminist Thought further supports this by highlighting the strengths in the African American culture as well as the contributions made to the community and family by African American women. The next section will discuss these strengths and contributions in further depth.

**Single African American Mothers**

Single African American mothers are presented with a unique and multilayered set of circumstances. It is not fair to generalize all single mothers as struggling, however, they
share a familiar set of challenges that have various affects on them and are specific to their cultural surroundings. Much like mothers of various cultures and backgrounds, the task of motherhood carries multiple and shifting identities (Robinson-Wood, 2009). However, two main factors, race and gender, may contribute to difficulty for African American women to develop a self-defined sense of self. The process of identity development may contribute to added stressors and negative affects for single African American mothers. Single African American mothers are defined in this study as unmarried African American women who are the head of household. According to the US Census Bureau (2009) in 2007 over 48.2 percent of African American households were headed by single mothers. This is over twice the number of white single parent homes. Nearly one quarter, approximately 24.6 percent of single parents live below the poverty line, with over 82 percent being single mothers (US Census, 2009). Poverty is determined according to the thresholds that are representative of financial eligibility for certain government programs. Poverty rates for Blacks far exceed the national average and is highest for families headed by single Black women or Hispanics (National Poverty Center, 2011).

Hill (1999) recognizes the growth in single parent homes. With a growing increase in single parent homes accompanies a need to better understand the origins of African American single parent homes. Further, it is anticipated that gaining a better understanding for the dynamics of single parent homes of African American women will provide a more accurate view of their needs, therefore giving helping professionals more comprehensive tools for helping single African American mothers and their families. The research fully intends to value the cultural systems of the African American family throughout the
exploration process. To do this, it is equally important to acknowledge and embrace the cultural values and principles of the participants and their experiences.

**Rationale for the Study**

Theoretical models and empirical evidence converge to describe ways in which African American women develop racial and feminist identity. A study by Miller, Gurin, Gurin & Malanchuck (1981) demonstrate an examination of racial identity from a group perspective. The researchers assert, “Differential participation among demographic subgroups has generally been expanded with resource availability” (p. 494). This further emphasizes the neglect to focus specifically on the lived experiences of sub groups, like African American single mothers. While several aspects of identity development have been examined, there is little empirical attention devoted to (a) racial and identity development in single African American mothers and (b) how stereotypic images may affect racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers. The purpose of this study was to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these lived experiences.

**Racial Identity**

Several studies have been published in recent years to expand society’s knowledge of culture and ethnicity. Robinson-Wood (2009) attributes the expansion of cultural and ethnic principles to the work of theorist that intersect race, gender and ethnicity along with other cultural identity constructs. This expansion was an effort to better understand an individual from a multicultural perspective, believing that each element is critical in a person’s development. Racial identity is defined several ways. Theorists contribute their understanding of the developmental process by providing an explanation for the process of
an African American acknowledging their heritage in the face of societal oppression. Cross (1971) first asserts this experience in theoretic form with the “Negro to Black Experience”, providing a framework for this process. The developmental structure of this idea formed Nigrescence theory, originally a five staged theory outlining the complexities of developing racial identity theory (Cross, 1971). The importance of intersecting race is imperative for multicultural individuals because it is a present factor in their daily lives (Carter, 2005). More specifically, Helms (1990) understands racial identity as a shared heritage amongst a group. In essence, the developmental process for an African American is a more explorative process in which an African Americans create an understanding for their African heritage. Cross (1971) more specifically defines this process as a psychological metamorphosis that takes place in stages he theorized as the Nigrescence theory, which will be further discussed in the review of literature. More simply and parsimoniously explained, it is believed that racial identity, as it is defined above, is an integral part of an African American single mother’s overall identity.

**Feminist Identity**

Feminism is grounded in a movement toward fighting for the equal rights of women politically, economically and socially. It is argued that African American feminist issues must be understood from a multidimensional perspective. For this reason Janet E. Helms (1990) created the Womanist model, to understand feminist development from the perspective of women of color. Challenging this view of feminist identity has urged the examination of multidimensional views of feminist identity development in African
American women in recent years. Many of these views include the examination of racial and
feminist identity development simultaneously. Understanding the relationship between race
and gender has motivated researchers to re-think the ways that we understand feminist theory
(Zin & Dill, 1994). Scholars have understood feminism as a connection women have at the
core of similar experiences supposedly shared and understood by all women. However,
women of color experience differences with issues that arise from societal power and
privilege. Cole and Zucker (2007) summarize five elements of femininity that dominate
aspects of feminist thought: beauty, demeanor, marriage and family arrangements, sexuality,
and (White) race (Collins, 2004). These elements permeate societal images of African
American single mothers without respect to the voices of their true lived experiences. The
researchers further assert that these images are promulgated through societal systems such as
mass media, schools, cultural institutions and social networks. (Chen, 1999). This provides
evidence of the importance of understanding the additional factors that may impact racial and
feminist identity development.

African American women have long been under represented politically, under paid
financially and under appreciated within the labor force as well as overall in society (Collins,
1990). Politics, economics and equal rights in the labor force have been theorized as
inequalities that contribute to how gender is perceived and experienced (Zin & Dill, 1994).
Current feminist argue that gender identity development must be understood within the
depths of culture and ethnicity. These factors must be appreciated individually rather than a
understood as mass culture used within our society as the “seasoning that can liven up the
dull dish that is mainstream White culture” (Hooks, 1991, p. 21).
In recent years, counseling programs have increased efforts to produce multiculturally competent professionals. It is important to further this competence with valuable research related to feminist identity development in African American women from the perspective of single African American mothers. Their experiences provide a multidimensional view that is unique to current feminist theory.

**Stereotypic Images of African American Women**

Historically, African American women have been personified through several images that have evolved and taken various shapes over time. Through documented historical events, such as slavery, the role of African American women as mothers and other mothers robbed them of the opportunity to develop racial and gender identity aside from these images (Hill-Collins, 1994). Given the legacy of race being used as a source of power to stereotype individuals of various cultures, the overwhelming presence of stereotypic images as a representation for the experiences of single African American mothers is not unusual. This study examined the relationship of stereotypic images in the racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers. Historical images such as Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel were examined to better understand the origin of negative stereotypes of African American women.

The *pot and kettle* images are representations of an African American mother’s longstanding responsibility as a free laborer also known as Mammy. This image is a representation of the economic oppressions that are present in society with African American mother’s being portrayed as under compensated laborers and heavily populated in service occupations (Collins, 1990, p. 6; West, 1995).
The image of Sapphire dates back to the 1940’s and 1950’s. The Amos and Andy show created this character to symbolize a loud, shrill, emasculating African American women who was often verbally offensive (West, 1995; Jewell, 1993). Essentially, this character represented Black women who are not taken seriously. They are the women who are perceived to be loud, obnoxious and hostile (in Thomas et al., 2004; West, 1995; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Bell, 1992). Modern day images include the baby mommas who are portrayed to be unsatisfied, bitter and angry.

The stereotype of Jezebel represents the historical image of the overly sexual African American woman who is perceived to be promiscuous, sexually aggressive and immoral (West, 1995, p. 462). This image convolutes the sexuality and sexual expression of a Black woman by suggesting that it is a negative thing. Historically, the inception of this image derives from a time that Black women had little control over being sexually exploited and abused. The image was a way to justify sexual exploitation and the victimization of African American women that dates back to slavery.

Some stereotypic images represent the misinterpretation of the strength and resilience of the African American culture. Leaving the responsibility to societal images to serve as the voice of the lived experiences of single African American mothers chances a distorted view of the experiences of this population and may also impact their racial and feminist identity development. Theses images, if internalized, could have devastating affects on a single African American mother.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of stereotypic images in the development of racial and feminist identity within single African American mothers. The understanding and meaning of these images were examined through the lens of the participants. The study focused on how African American women cope with the current impact of their experiences as single parents as well as the impact of stereotypic societal images as they strive to develop racial and feminist identity. The goal was to examine the influence that these stereotypic images have had on an single African American mother’s identity development in the presence of historical oppression, gender inequality, societal stereotypic images and parental stressors. The researcher aspired to increase within group literature in an effort to empower single African American mothers by giving a voice to their lived experiences.

Summary

How can the experiences of single African American mothers be defined and resources created for them with their personal experiences not being reflected within current research? For this reason, it is difficult to establish thematic issues related to the lived experiences of single African American mothers of this age. It is concerning that several of these women and their children seek help in the mental health system, yet little research is done to provide professionals with methods for helping this population, which would provided insight for their current needs. While it is not completely evident if all African American mothers have felt the impact of such historical adversity, nor is it evident that this adversity has had an impact on their racial and feminist identity development, it is clear that
suppression of their voices contribute to the influence of the ideals of more dominant groups within our society (Collins, 1990). Increasingly researchers recognize that ignoring the impact of multidimensional factors in the examination of identity development of marginalized groups minimizes their voice in the literature (Jordan, 1991).

**Research Questions**

This study examined the impact of stereotypic images on the development of racial and feminist identity in African American single mothers. The lived experiences of single African American mothers were investigated. The guiding research questions were as follows:

- **RQ1:** What are the lived experiences of single African American mothers?
- **RQ2:** What is the role of stereotypic images in the racial identity development of single African American mothers?
- **RQ3:** What is the role of stereotypic images in the feminist identity development of single African American mothers?

**Definition of Terms**

**Black.** To be used interchangeably to describe American women of African decent

**Womanist Identity.** A representation of Feminist theory from the perspective of women of color (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004). To be used interchangeably to describe feminist theoretical views.

**Jezebel.** Stereotypic image that represents a sexually aggressive, seductive, promiscuous and immoral African American women (West, 1995;
**Sapphire.** Stereotypic image that represents a 1940 and 1950’s character created by the Amos and Andy show to depict African American women as a an emasculating, loud, animated and verbose woman (West, 1995, p. 461; Jewel, 1993).

**Mammy.** Stereotypic image that represents historical view of African American mothers as care givers, nannies and cooks. She is perceived as a physically large, dark skinned woman whose duties are domestic and sacrificial in nature. More modern day stereotypic image represents the under represented African American woman as being represented fairly in the current day labor force (in West, 1995, p. 459; Jewel, 1993).

**Single African American mothers.** Defined in this study as unmarried African American women who are the head of household.

**Poverty.** Determined according to the thresholds that are representative of financial eligibility for certain government programs. Poverty rates for Blacks far exceed the national average and is highest for families headed by single Black women or Hispanics (National Poverty Center, 2011).
Chapter 2

Introduction

Multidimensional factors are an important aspect of understanding an individual’s culture and further gaining an understanding for the way an individual develops identity (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004). To better understand the issues that impact single African American mothers, it is important to gain an awareness for the process of racial and feminist identity development within their population. Increasingly, researchers are recognizing the importance of including multidimensional factors such as multiple identities and multiple oppressions when theorizing about identity development (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Knowledge of multiple identity factors related to single African American mothers such as race and gender are important to better understand their needs. Gaining this understanding is especially important for clinicians working with single African American mothers.

Theorists are increasing their awareness for the importance of including racial and ethnic identity factors in feminist theories and several contributions have been made to the literature (in Moradi, 2005, Collins, 1990; Ossana, Helms & Leonard, 1992). However, while there is considerable research regarding the African American community, little specific information has been published regarding identity development in single African American mothers. For this reason, theories and relevant literature will be presented to examine the relevance for single African American mothers. The theories and literature will be conceptualized, evaluated and synthesized to address key constructs and assumptions made by the authors of the theory. The theories and literature will also be examined for its
historical, social, political and economic relevance to single African American mothers. Further, this review of literature will provide information on historical and contemporary examples of stereotypic views of African American women. The focus of the literature review will be to provide theoretical frameworks for racial and feminist identity as well as to provide a historical foundation for historical stereotypic images specifically highlighted in this study: Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel (West, 1995; Jewell, 1993). The theoretical underpinnings of W.E. Cross’ racial identity development model (1971, 2001) Patricia Hill-Collins’ Black Feminist Thought (1990) and Janet E. Helms’ Womanist theory (Ossana, Helms & Leonard, 1992) will be specifically examined. A review of literature reveals that there are several disparities within the African American community that can impact single mothers. In part, these disparities are due to societal stereotypes that have an impact on African Americans as a marginalized group and have been linked to various psychological disorders in Black women (West, 1995). Moreover, this literature review will support the need for more knowledge and awareness regarding single African American mothers.

**Stereotypic Images of African American Women**

Thomas, Witherspoon and Speight (2004) conducted a study highlighting historical stereotypic images of African American women. It was determined that images adapted through slavery such as those depicting women as heavy laborers as well as those depicting women in positions to be exploited and sexually victimized still exist in society today. Further, these images greatly impact the way African American women are viewed. A study exploring content and gender specific stereotypes conducted by Jackson, Lewandowski, Ingram and Hodge (1997, p.381) defined stereotypes, a term that was foundationalized in
1922 (Lippman, 1922), as “cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs and expectations about a social group” (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986). The prevalence of stereotypic images in today’s society depict modern day racism and sexism. These images perpetuate the historically negative connotations and myths about African American women. According to West (1995), these images not only affect African American women but they also can affect a person who perceives these images. Stereotypes are referred to in this study as “an imitation, a copy of something or someone that is, by means of the media machinery, held up first as THE symbol or symbols to the exclusion of others; and then repeatedly channeled out to viewers so often that in time it becomes a ‘common’ representation of something or someone in the minds of viewers” (Blackwood, 1986, p. 205). Stereotypical perceptions potentially carry over into the counseling relationship, influencing clinicians and the way they help clients. Stereotypes can also produce social destructive elements in African American relationships contributing to interpersonal issues within African American families (Bethea, 1995; Willis, 1989). Further, stereotypic images potentially impact self-esteem in African American women. While not all stereotypes are negative, the general premise is that these images generalize groups of individuals that may share one or more commonalities, however are not completely the same in every way.

Stereotypes may also have an impact on ways in which African American women view their own sexuality. In an examination of stereotypic images in African American women, West (1995, p. 459) presents historical images that are still prevalent today. Some societal images depict African American women as self-sacrificing, argumentative and promiscuous (Collins, 1990; Sims-Wood, 1988; Weitz & Gordon, 1993). Further, these
depictions could contribute to racial and gender discrimination impacting self-esteem and self-efficacy. It is important to examine the degree of the affects of stereotypic images for this matter. The media further perpetuates these stereotypes and portray them as accurate images (Edward, 1993; Sims-Wood, 1988). The angry Black women stereotype has been a reoccurring stereotype within the media and is now generalized to all Black women regardless of skin tone, social class or body type. Krestsedemas (2010) describes this racialized view as a class distinction, an insinuation that the upper middle class does not include African Americans.

Three historical images, Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel will be examined for their role as well as contemporary relevance to single African American mothers. Further, other more contemporary images will be used to explain the way these three images have evolved over time and are still present in modern day society. This section will also explore the way contemporary stereotypic images have been used to distill and synthesize historical images of African American women. It is important to examine stereotypic images because many African American women still report feeling discriminated against due to race and gender (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The research intended to examine the ways that stereotypes are imbedded within American society and potentially impact single African American mothers. Thomas et al.’s (2004) examination of stereotypic images was widely based upon the work of West (1995) and will therefore be the basis for the examination of the three stereotypic images: Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel.
Mammy

Stereotypic images that depict African American women date back historically for hundreds of years. Specifically, Mammy is one of the most common symbols, often recognized by characters like Aunt Jemima; the brown skinned woman figure featured on a brand of syrup, for example. Mammy is also one of the eldest stereotypic images of African American women that date back to slavery (Thomas et al, 2004). An obese, dark brown-skin, African American female caregiver who was loyal and served in several capacities such as the cook, field worker and housekeeper characterizes this image (West, 1995, p.459). Much like single mothers in contemporary society, she was expected to focus on the needs of others more than herself. She carried multiple identities with many responsibilities and no compensation. This contributed to the perception of African American mothers being nurturing caretakers who were strong, self-less and supportive. Mammy’s image is comparable to the modern day Welfare mother, the breeding, low-income, non-threatening African American mother. These images can be internalized by African American women adding additional pressure for them to live up to societal norms of motherhood. Abdullah (1998) theorizes that internalization of this stereotype can lead to poor self-concept. Mammy is the least threatening of the three images. The Mammy stereotype symbolizes the rejected images of upper middle class African Americans. This is evident in mainstream media’s attempt to distance itself from racial subordinate images with shows like The Cosby Show, which aired in the early 1980’s. The Cosby show provided a different view of the African American family, one that did not affirm stereotypes by isolating African American women as single parents with little emotional and economic support.
Sapphire: The Angry Black Woman Portrayal

While the image of the angry Black woman has become more familiar in recent years, it derived from a character on television in the 1950’s. Sapphire was the wife of Kingfish, a Black male stereotypic figure (in Kretsedemas, 2010, p. 151; Bogle, 1973; Turner 1994). She was depicted as a loud, shrill, emasculating wife. Sapphire’s character was not taken seriously or intimidating, rather she was seen as comedic (in West, 1995, p. 461; Jewell, 1993). The personality of her character sought positive attention from her male companion but was unsuccessful. African American mothers who internalize the Sapphire stereotypic image could potentially feel that it is necessary for them to be loud and aggressive to receive desired results or positive attention (West, 1995). More contemporary images within the media have attempted to change this view by depicting more upper middle class African American families. Social classes are still separated by factors such as socio-economic status and educational attainment and are often created by society. However, even with the depiction of middle class African Americans, some characters still echo historical stereotypes. The Jefferson’s, for example, a show that aired in the 1970’s, depicted an upper middle class African American family. Their socio economic status deliberately distanced this television family from the mainstream images of Black families. Nevertheless, the tumultuous relationship between the husband and wife echoed a similar view of the 1950’s characters of Sapphire and Kingfish (Turner, 1994). The Sapphire stereotype is also problematic for single African American women who strive for higher professional positions. Her drive and aggression is perceived as angry, difficult and intimidating, much like the image of Sapphire. From a more contemporary view, African American women who are
attempting to shun this stereotypic image may find emotional expressiveness difficult for fear of being labeled (Bell, 1992).

**Jezebel**

The Jezebel image derived from events surrounding sexual exploitation and victimization of Black women during slavery. This image was created as a means to justify non-consensual sexual acts with African American women (Thomas et al., 2004). West (1995) explains the justification of this image as the *bad black girl*, one who had little control over her sexuality and reproduction (p.462). While Black women were portrayed as the sexual aggressors, in actuality, they had little power resulting, in their victimization. Yet, Jezebel was characterized as being hyper sexed, loose, immoral and aggressive (in West, 1995; Jewell, 1993). African American women who internalize the Jezebel stereotypic image may have a difficult time expressing their sexuality. Sexual expression could easily be attached with feelings of shame and guilt.

Stereotypic images are no longer being used to describe a particular type of Black woman, yet they have increasingly become a standard template for the way all Black women are portrayed (Kretsedemas, 2010). It is important to examine the impact of stereotypic images on African American single mothers due to ways in which stereotypic images are perpetuated within the media and society. These images have systematically portrayed African American women historically and are now being continued through mainstream media. Much of the effects of stereotypic images have been minimized due to the *colorblind discourse* that has been created to minimize the impact on African American women (Kretsedemas, 2010). The *colorblind discourse* describes methods the media and society
have created to ignore stereotypic images that are perpetuated and instead judge Blacks by the *content of their character* while depicting incongruent messages (p.151).

Stereotypes create undesirable societal images and behaviors for African American women. This undesirable societal perception could potentially impact the development of racial and feminist identity in African American women. Overall, stereotypes can make it difficult for African American women to develop positive self-identities in the presence of such strong societal views. For this reason, the impact of these images may cause internalization of negative views making it difficult for women to express need, vulnerability and sexuality (West, 1995; Bell, 1992).

**A Historical View of African American Women**

In 1851, Sojourner Truth’s famous words rang out at a woman’s conference during the women’s suffrage movement, “Ain’t I a woman?” (Bell, 2004, p. 146). Her assertion symbolized the demand for respect and acknowledgement for Black women. The history of Black women in America began when women were brought from Africa as slaves to supplement the workforce. As emphasized earlier, African American women had little control over their own sexuality and reproduction and their primary purpose to slave owners was for them to breed a larger population of slaves (Freyberg, 1995; West, 1995; Collins, 1990). Black women were expected to do equally rigorous, physical, free labor alongside men (Davis, 1971). Various negative factors were born from the slave era. One such instance is the discrimination of African Americans based on skin tone (Lake, 2003). For example, per the previous discussion on stereotypic images, Jezebel was often used for sex at the free
will of the slave master. Her offspring were described as mixed race individuals with more European features, closer to the *White standard of beauty* (West, 1995, p. 462)

From slavery to the present, African Americans have a long standing history of being exploited physically and economically. This is specifically evident in education, where African Americans were long excluded from receiving higher education (Lawrence-Webb et al., 2004) and potentially improving their economic, social and generational well-being. Marginalization is an issue that affects African American women and men. Affects of oppression economically, for instance affect African Americans of both genders. For this reason, gendered societal norms, such as the man as the head of household, are frequently void in African American families. As a result, the roles of African American women have become even more vital in their families and communities.

To fully understand African American women in any research study, it is important to examine her in the context of systems in her life. This includes cultural norms, societal standards, gender roles/duties and racial identity. It is necessary for African American women to understand their gender and race to develop healthy identities. History has created difficult racial, social and gender class oppressive conditions (Bell, 2004) that have made it difficult for African American women to overcome powerful societal perceptions. It is assumed that these perceptions affect African American women personally, socially and economically.

While African American women have long been viewed and understood as a collective unit, one that plays an integral part in her community, the current societal disparities within the African American community has reduced her character to a more
needy character in despair in society. Compared to other social demographic groups, African American women have the highest infant mortality rate, HIV/AIDS cases, incidents of heart disease, and have shorter life expectancies (McCloud, 2011). It can be reasonably assumed that along with lifestyle choices, social stresses also contribute to these disparities. Diane Woods (2009) support the findings of the increasing disparities in the African American community, which outlines a historical view documented health issues and ailments amongst African Americans. Further, the researchers affirm the root of these disparities as well as the unfavorable medical outcomes due to unfair medical treatment.

**Single African American Mothers**

According to the U.S Census Bureau, over 60 percent of African American homes are headed by women (2005). Unfortunately, in many of these circumstances, the odds have been against single parent households. The Census Bureau’s (2009) report of poverty asserts that poverty rates for African American homes far exceed the national average and are highest in homes headed by single mothers. Over 50 percent of African American homes are headed by single mothers (U.S. Census, 2005). In this study, poverty is defined by using the thresholds that are representative of eligibility for income specific government programs. With the current economic downturns, it may be more difficult than ever for low-income families to overcome economic struggles. According to the economic policy center, over 7.3 million children are living in homes with an unemployed parent (U.S. Census, 2009). The 2008 Census Bureau further asserts that over 16.7 million children live in households where food is unsecure, meaning that for many of these children, it is not definite that their household will have food in their homes to eat. Current data paints an insecure image of African American...
American homes headed by single women. For those relying on government welfare, the average benefit is $367 per month or $4,400 per year in the United States (Bell, 1999). African American families and African American women have often been misunderstood and misrepresented within the literature due to research being done on high-risk populations and through convenience samples that produced comparative quantitative data (Stephens & Few, 2007, p. 251; Jones, 1991; Staples, 1994). Some research studies are based on federal government data that may not be as current and relevant to the needs of African American families. For instance, according to the Annie Casey foundation (2010) there have been over sites in current statistics due to outdated data. In 2003, a report published by the U.S. Census Bureau stated that the number of single parent homes grew from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003, 3.1 million being Black mothers compared to their White counterparts at 6.4 million. The 2002 U.S. Census Bureau states that out of 8.8 million Black families in the United States, over 56 million White families, 43 percent of those households were headed by single African American women compared to White families, which 13 percent were headed by single mothers.

While challenges exist within the homes of single African American mothers, their strength is evident in their assumption of multiple roles as the head of household and financial provider. They are often the glue that holds Black families together (Bell, 2004). Under the circumstances, the assumption of these multiple roles is commendable. However, the positives are often distorted by economic and social challenges and struggles that impact their lives. The oppressive history of African Americans has had a great impact on their
gender roles. Increased stress can adversely affect interpersonal relationships, thus the reason that many African American women may choose not to marry (Stephens & Few, 2007).

**Racial Identity Development**

In the past, literature on identity development focused on one dimension, either race or gender, at a time. Theorists have since expanded their knowledge about African American women’s issues and created theories that are multidimensional. Racial and ethnic identity development theory was born primarily as a means to give a voice to the black experience from an African American perspective in the United States. While developmental theories, such as Erik Erikson’s (1959) theory of psychosocial development, pioneered the field of developmental psychology, few differentiated the issues of African Americans. African Americans may encounter issues during the stages of development as a result of important cultural implications that are missing; yet needed in order to be applicable to the African American population and other multicultural populations. Studies on Black racial identity development generally focus on group based historical experiences rather than examining the influence of various social factors over the life course of African Americans (Demo & Hughes, 1990). An interest in a multidimensional population like single African American mothers creates a responsibility for the researcher to examine the relevance of racial identity models to single African American mothers. Some empirical research has shown a difference between the socialization process of a White woman, for instance, and a Black woman. As a result, theory and research have often treated gender and race as a separate process (Collins, 1990; Cole & Zucker, 2007, Ossana, Helms & Leonard, 1992).
Cross’ Nigrescence Theory

Nigrescence (Cross, 1971) theory was developed as a basis for a number of theoretical explications related to Black identity development (Helms, 1990; Parham, 1989). Cross utilized the term “Nigrescence”, a term that is derived from *negritude*, a French term that means the state of being black (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Helms (1990) further defines Nigrescence as a developmental process by which individuals evaluate themselves and their racial group to define what being Black actually means, rather than to base this definition solely on skin color. She further asserts that Nigrescence theory was formed based upon the assumption that self-actualization was the most sophisticated form of self-awareness. The model attempted to encourage racial identity development through self-actualization rather than through the experiences of racial oppression (Cross, 1971; Maslow, 1970). Cross’ theory is among the most widely utilized and most frequently cited theoretical models pertaining to racial identity (Parham & Helms, 1985). Although there have been several revisions (Cross, 1971, 2000) to the model since the original version, developed in 1971, the model maintains focus on the process of an African American person abandoning externally derived ideas of Blackness and redefining Blackness through the adoption of more empowering definitions of what it means to be Black (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). Black racial identity development theory describes a process of “transformation of a pre-existing identity (a non-Africentric identity) into one that is Africentric “(Cross, 1995, p. 97). Nigrescence theory researchers theorize the dangers of over identification of the White culture and the need for African Americans to re-define a healthy Black racial identity (Helms, 1990).
The original theory contained five stages, Pre-Encounter (Pro-White/Anti-Black), Encounter, Immersion/Emersion (Pro-Black/Anti-White), Internalization (Humanist) and Internalization/Commitment. At the Pre-encounter stage, an African American would have low salience for race and the African culture, meaning that race is not seen as an important element in one’s identity. Societal racism and group marginalization is not apparent. The Pre-Encounter stage is the period before a person actually identifies a racial encounter in which inequality is apparent. The Encounter stage marks the beginning of the search for Black identity, motivated by life changing events (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). A person is encountered by an event that is moving enough for them to recognize that there are racial differences that are present in society. The event is profound enough for the individual to begin to re-examine their cultural identity and the event can be positive or negative (Cross, 1991). The third stage of the initial model, Immersion/Emersion, a person excludes others with their pre-occupation of being Black, specifically White people. A person may adopt a pro-Black/anti-White attitude in which he or she embraces their culture and totally immerses themselves in the Black culture. Internalization-Commitment, the fourth and fifth stages, is when a person establishes Black people as their primary reference group and begins to establish self-confidence about Blackness (Cross, 1991). The primary characteristic of this stage is its maintenance.

Since its inception, Cross (2000) has revised his theory several times, expanding and revising each time. To illustrate the changes within his theory the following table provides a developmental view of the Nigrescence model and evidence of ongoing research and evolution to the model.
Table 1: Cross’ Nigrescence Stages and Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971 Original Model</td>
<td>Pre-Encounter</td>
<td>Pro-White/Anit-Black</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Anit-White/Pro-Black</td>
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<td>Immersion-Emersion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Humanist</td>
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<td>Internalization-Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991 Revised Model</td>
<td>Pre-Encounter</td>
<td>Assimilation/Anti-Black</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Anti-White</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immersion-Emersion</td>
<td>Intense Black Involvement</td>
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<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Black Nationalist</td>
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<td>Multiculturalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000 Expanded Model</td>
<td>Pre-Encounter</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Miseducation</td>
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<td>Self-Hatred</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immersion-Emersion</td>
<td>Assimilation/Anti-Black</td>
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<td>Internalization</td>
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<td>Multiculturalists</td>
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Cross first revised Nigrescence theory suggesting multiple identity clusters at every stage (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). From Cross’ (1991) first revision, the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) (CRIS; Vandiver et al., 2000) was developed. The CRIS examines Assimilation, Self-Hatred and Miseducation, three Pre-encounter clusters, one Immersion/Emersion cluster (anti-White) and two Internalization clusters (Multiculturalists Inclusive & Africentricity, a form of Black Nationalism). Measurement of the six identity clusters was refined using exploratory and confirmatory factor analytic procedures providing some level of validity and reliability for this instrument. Additionally, hypothesis can be generated from Nigrescence theory and tested within the CRIS to provide empirical results. W.E. Cross’ (2000) model has become one of the most widely researched models on the development of racial identity of African Americans (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004).

Shades of Black (1991) highlighted the revisions to the Nigrescence model. The changes to the model fell into two broad areas: (a) the distinction between group and personal identity and their influence on self-esteem and (b) revision in the number of stages and identities within those stages (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). The revised racial identity model outlines four stages with specific characteristics within each stage. Preencounter, the first stage has three characteristics: assimilation, miseducation and self-hatred. The assimilation characteristic is the adaption of pro-American values and little relation to their own race. Miseducation is characterized by negative stereotypes toward African Americans and self-hatred is characterized by negative attitudes about the self due to race. The second stage, Encounter, occurs when an experience challenges one’s awareness of
race. This stage is characterized by alarm, confusion and often depression stemming from this life changing experience. The third stage, Immersion/Emersion, individuals become more educated and accepting of African American culture. There is an over romanticized immersion into Black culture, which is often characterized by an intense involvement within the Black culture and/or strong anit-White feelings against the White culture. Internalization, the fourth stage, is characterized by a commitment to empowering the Black community through self-acceptance with other cultural variables emphasized (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001).

Many aspects of Cross’ (1971, 1991) theory are relevant to African American single mothers. Multi-layered components have an affect on the potential of a single African American mother to reach self-actualization. Some researchers suggest a relationship between identity development and self-actualization, self-esteem, and psychological functioning (Carter, 1991; Parham & Helms, 1985a, 1985b; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). The Nigrescence model is relevant to single African American mothers because it recognizes African American women as being an oppressed group (Vandiver et al., 2001). African American women have unique experiences based upon multiple identity dimensions such as gender, race, social class and sexual orientation. Their statuses as a marginalized group must be understood through a careful lens that considers racial oppression, as well as oppression related to gender and social class. Cross’ (1971, 1991) theory provides a model with contextual information that is useful to practitioners researchers, and educators in training programs that prepare students to serve African American clients. Several theories such as Baldwin’s (1981) African self-consciousness theory as well as Sellers et al. (1998)
Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity have been influenced by the work of Nigrescence theory.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

In his paper *Theory of Human Motivation* (1943), psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a model for a hierarchy of needs that influences the human motivation. His theory was based upon several foundational needs that must be realized in order to achieve full self-actualization. The Theory of Human Motivation outlined five motivational levels. From the bottom level, Maslow explained that a human must first have the basic physiological needs met. These things were considered survival mechanisms such as food, water, shelter and clothing. Above physiological needs is the need for security. The individual would need to feel a sense of security that ranged from physical security of the body to employment security. Other matters of security are a secure health/wellness and security in the family structure. The next level is the need to be loved and to belong. An individual may have this need fulfilled in a loving family sense or intimate sense. In ascending order, the next level is esteem. This level describes an individual’s need for self-esteem, confidence and achievement. It is theorized that once the needs on the previous levels are met, self-esteem can be achieved. The final stage to Maslow’s initial theory was self-actualization. At this stage, an individual seeks to achieve their full potential. This can be characterized by a desire to achieve the highest morality, lack of prejudice and acceptance of the facts. Maslow described self-actualization in this way:

“It refers to the (person’s) desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially.”
The specific form that these needs will take will of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual, it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in another it may be expressed in painting pictures or inventions (Maslow, 1943, p. 382-383).

Maslow’s theory is relevant to single African American mothers because it further supports the idea that this population experiences identity development differently. Much like Nigrescence theory (1991), it is theorized that self-actualization is the ultimate destination. As Maslow explains, from a physiological level, humans have needs that may affect their life’s progression if they are not met. As previously mentioned, a large percentage of African American single mothers are living in poverty (U.S. Census, 2009). This means that some may struggle with the basic needs of food, shelter and water. It is also possible for many of the economic and financial disparities experienced by African American women result from being members of a marginalized population. It has also been argued that resources are not as available to some African American woman as they are to other social demographic groups due to race, gender or social class (Hill-Collins, 1990; Helms, 1990).

**Feminist Identity Development: Theoretical Frameworks**

“The intersection of race and gender.. creates unique aggregates,…the life chances and experiences of which assume patterns that cannot be anticipated simply by adding the effects of race to those of gender” (Ransford & Miller, 1983, p. 46). This quote expresses the importance of an integrated examination of racial and feminist identity. Feminist theory must be examined from a multifactoral perspective. Historically, sexism has been a central aspect of feminist identity development. Sexism, like racism, is largely expressed in terms of
economic and social power (Freyburg, 1995). For African American women, sexism has generally been centered around economic oppression and the lack of opportunities rather than rights to work, the initial complaint from their White counterparts (Jordan, 1991). Eventually, feminist theory evolved with contributions to the field that focused on multiple dimensions of development specific to African American women. It is assumed that gender oppression can psychologically affect an individual. Gender oppression, therefore, may be internalized and affect feminist identity development in women. Parks, Carter & Gushue’s (1996) research provides evidence that there is a growing research base that supports the correlation of gender identity development and racial identity. Research also asserts that gender identity development is a different process across racial lines. Gender inequality, racial inequity, and unequal status are also terms to describe power differentials between men and women. These power differentials can be reflected in a variety of ways, including within women’s’ relationships and sexual behavior.

The feminist movement was born to define, establish and defend equal political, economic, and social rights for women (Collins, 1990). During the feminist movement, women began to question male dominated societal norms. However, there were issues early in the movement regarding the need to understand how different equality is defined across racial lines. Due to the inequality of feminism across racial lines and a long-standing history of oppression, Black women were hesitant to adopt labels (Collins; 1990, 2000). Additionally, Cole and Zucker (2007, p.3) found that some Black women found the label feminist problematic because of the lack of acknowledgement of racial tension that existed within the feminist movement (Harnois, 2005; Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997). Due to
inequality and oppression that Black women have encountered many Black women do not identify as feminist (Harnois, 2005). Because of racism and marginalization that exist within feminist literature, this study will examine other feminist perspectives that are multiculturally inclusive. The term womanist or humanist will be used to describe feminism through the lens of a culturally diverse woman. The inclusion of multiple factors of feminist identity development makes some Black women more comfortable with adapting to these terms (Harnois, 2005, p. 812).

It is argued that because Black women have long occupied nontraditional roles within and outside of the home, they are more politicized than White women (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Still, more work can be done to understand the role of race and the way an individual performs gender, as well as how different racialized versions of femininity and masculinity might be unequally proportioned in value in our society (Bettie, 2003; Chen, 1999; Collins, 2004; Pyke & Johnson, 2003). For an African American mother, this could be problematic because for them, gender attributes are multifactoral as previously defined. Since single parenthood carries duties that may not match with normative societal views in the United States, single African American mothers may face further social isolation or social censure. Some researchers have made progress toward multifactoral feminist theories. Baca-Zinn and Thornton-Dill (1996) describe multiracial feminist theory as going beyond an additive model of oppression. Multifactoral/multiracial feminist theories extend feminism to include oppressive systems such as poverty, sexism and racism. Two such models will be further examined.
Patricia Hill-Collins’ Black Feminist Thought

The Combahee River Collective argued that the liberation of Black women would include the liberation of all people because it would involve the end of the oppressive notions of racism, sexism, and class (Harris, 2001). Black Feminist Theory was developed by black feminists who were engaged in the process of defining and clarifying politics while conducting political activism within African-American communities as well as partnering with similar organizational movements (Harris, 2001). In 1973, the National Black Feminist Organization was founded in New York and the essence of Black Feminism emerged. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) defines Black Feminism as the manner in which ordinary black women synthesize and theorize their experiences and ways in which these experiences angle their vision of self, community and society.

Black Feminist Thought provides an explanation for the process of feminist identity development in African American women both as women and racial beings in the presence of oppression (Bell, 1992). Understanding gender roles is one of the multifactoral dimensions of feminism in African American women. Gender is a multidimensional issue that includes personality traits, beliefs about domestic roles, and social and cultural expectations for thinking and behavior (Twenge, 1999). African American mothers, in particular, have experiences that have created many non-traditional roles, unique to their cultural values (Dickerson, 1995). Due to these differences, feminism may mean something different to women across racial lines (Collins, 1990, 2000; hooks, 1984). To further understand feminist identity development in single African American mothers, research
studies specifically to the issues related to African American single mothers is imperative. As previously stated, there is little research related to an African American woman’s gender role attitudes and gender role identity, thus the importance for better understanding the process of gender identity as it relates to single African American mothers. One way of expanding the research on gender identity is through the perspective examination of feminist theory.

Black Feminist Thought explores the concerns of how race, class, and gender are intersected to produce an incorporated examination of power and oppression (Burnham, 2001). A distinguishing characteristic of Black Feminist Thought is its insistence that both the changed perception of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute true essential components for social change (Collins, 1991). Black Feminist Thought ensures that the experiences of African American women are kept central. Additionally, Black Feminist Thought offers insights on concepts, worldviews, and epistemologies on the basis of an Afrocentric perspective (Collins, 1991). Moreover, it also offers major strengths towards increasing the understanding of important connections between knowledge, awareness, and the notion of empowerment. Primarily, Black Feminist Thought advances a paradigm shift in the way oppression is conceptualized (Collins, 1991). By understanding the impact of race, class, and gender in United States society, Collins believes that social relations of domination and resistance are then re-conceptualized. Black Feminist Thought focuses on the ongoing epistemological disputes in feminist theory and the sociology of knowledge surrounding methods of ascertaining truth (Collins, 1991).

Patricia Hill-Collins’ Black Feminist Thought (1991) asserts that feminism should be magnified through a multidimensional lens of a Black woman’s experiences. Collins states
that offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering, but revealing new ways of knowledge that allows these oppressed groups the opportunity to define their own reality has larger implications. Collins’ depiction of Black Feminist Thought proposes symbolizations of power as agents of knowledge for Black women. Knowledge as a means of empowering an individual is at the core, as well as the main component to casting out images of historical experiences that are part of social relations of domination and resistance. Black Feminist Thought offers two significant contributions toward assisting others in developing connections between knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. First, it fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how oppression is conceptualized. Collins (1991) suggests that it is important to embrace paradigms of race, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression. Secondly, Black Feminist Thought offers alternate ways of assessing truth from a Black feminist perspective. Black feminist Thought asserts that in order to empower one must be empowered through knowledge. However, multidimensional factors of race, class and gender are additives to oppression and must be addressed to overcome domination. Collins (1991) believes that doing this will expand the focus of analysis from merely describing, “the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect” (Collins, 1991, p. 222).

Collins also suggests that Afrocentric view of family must be re-conceptualized to include the non-traditional roles of African American women as blood mothers, other mothers, and community other mothers. Blood mothers, other mothers and community mothers are terms used to describe various parental simulated roles a mother facilitates in her
home and community. Black feminist Thought aligns with other feminist theories that address a woman’s power which emphasize energy and community with special attention to the experiences of Black women, which are not specifically discussed from a historical perspective. Collin’s view on femininity is based on the idea that a dominant femininity exists, one that personifies White middle-class women as the achievers who are valued in American culture. This dominant femininity results in social devaluation of other women (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Such femininity, Collins’ (2004) asserts, is hegemonic, encouraging beliefs about desired gender roles and practices to maintain societal inequality.

Above are the key constructions of Black Feminist thought. Patricia Hill-Collins presents ideas that are relevant to African American women. Black Feminist Thought alludes to the various roles and responsibilities of African American single mothers within the home and community. Little has been done to understand how gender is related to race as well as the differences in racialized femininity and its unequal value in United States society specific to single African American mothers. The lack of research helps to maintain Black women at the “bottom of the gender hierarchy” (Lull, 2003, p. 193). Collins (1991) focuses on eliminating oppressive structures in housing, education, employment, public accommodations, political representations and the welfare system, as well as oppressive ties, through oppressive thoughts and situations. Additionally, she conceptualizes an understanding for no two individuals being alike.

Black Feminist Theory considers the multiple facets of oppression such as race, class, and gender, which shape the experiences of African-American women in the United States and allows women to share their viewpoint from their own experience/reality, and not
that of an imposed societal, hegemonically based ideology. The intersectionality of these facets must be each considered as separate parts as well as all together in understanding their impact on an African-American woman’s life (West, 2002). Black Feminist Thought presents relevant ideas to single African American mothers and their feminist identity development. Collins (1991) is intentional and informative with important multiculturally diverse concepts. She integrates vital historical, political and social issues that much of the current research is lacking as they attempt to develop theories of race and gender, neglecting to integrate the two.

**Janet E. Helms’ Womanist Model**

Feminist identity development is argued to be a unique process for women of color. While the common premise surrounding gender identity development theories asserts that gender identity is evolved around external and societal views of womanhood (Ossana et al., 1992), Helms (1990) moves from this external developmental understanding to one that is foundationalized upon internal definitions of self. Due to multiple identity factors, research findings suggest that for African Americans, racial identity may occur before womanist identity (Carter & Parks, 1996; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). Janet Helms (1995) developed a model of feminist identity development for people of color based on earlier works by Cross and Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (Helms & Cook, 1999) that utilizes the term “womanist” to describe the link between race, gender, and other oppressive factors (Moradi, 2005). Womanist identity seeks to move past the examination of single aspects of identity and embrace multidimensional aspects of an individual’s culture. By moving toward the goal of capturing the multidimensional aspects of
a person’s culture individually and collectively, the literature on identity development has a better opportunity to capture a more diverse view of an individual (Moradi, 2005). Helms’ (1984, 1990, 1995) outlines an individual’s psychological processes within a sociopolitical and cultural environment or society in which power differentials are clear because of race. Helms’ model has broad applicability to African American communities and extensive research validating and establishing its usefulness.

Erikson’s (1959) theory suggest that an individual is charged with the psychosocial task of mastering eight stages of life in order to achieve healthy identity development. Unfortunately, these stages lack the fluidity, which often occurs in a person’s life that would account for stagnation or regression. For this reason, many question the validity of such developmental theories. Helms (1990) provides a theory of development specific to multicultural populations that are more useful in understanding the development of African American populations. The model suggests four identity stages that are sequential, however, provide the opportunity for an individual to re-visit various stages based upon their current life experiences. Specifically, she defines these stages as racial and gender identity schemas or “the dynamic cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes that govern a person’s interpretation of racial and gender information in her or his interpersonal environments” (Helms, 1995, p. 184). Moradi (2005) summarizes the stages of the Womanist identity model according to Ossana et al. (1992) and Carter and Parks (1996). The four stage womanist model is described as follow:

1. Pre-Encounter. The individual adapts to and internalizes White perspectives of one’s racial group and gender role. An African American woman in this stage can be characterized by
adopting societal standards that belittle women and privilege men. Women in this phase are oblivious to sexism and inequality in society against women.

2. Encounter. Women of color recognize the lack of parallel associated with assimilating themselves into a White male dominated society and therefore begin to identify with their own ideas of sexism and womanhood. Women in this phase can be characterized by a greater sense of awareness and a desire to explore gender roles created by society.

3. Immersion-Emersion. In the first phase, womanhood is idealized and external definitions of womanhood are rejected. During the second phase, women search for more positive, self-derived definitions of womanhood. They also seek relationships with other women. In this phase, a woman begins to identify more with their womanhood with an awareness of sexism and externally derived definitions of self.

4. Internalization. Internally derived definitions of self are realized without the reliance on societal sexist norms (Carter & Parks, 1996).

Moradi (2005) provides a synthesis for the concepts of Womanist theory and concludes that Womanist theory differs for Feminist identity development in the lack of required political stance in other feminist constructs (p. 230). Counselors should examine the political considerations as well as to consider the intersections of racial identity and related experiences when helping African American clients. It is further important to understand levels of privilege from a helper’s perspective. It is believed that cultural foundations and experiences affect feminist identity development. While Helms’ provides a model and not a theory, the assumptions made are relevant to current day issues that African American people face. Helms’ model highlights the relevance and importance of counselors being aware of the
sociopolitical, cultural and environmental issues that affect race and identity specifically within African American communities. While human development theories should not be dismissed as a means to understand the issues that affect the African American communities, it is necessary to amend developmental stages based upon a person’s generational, socioeconomic and environmental factors, specifically those that are relevant to the African American single mothers. Helms’ model is not only applicable to the African American community, but it also provides implications for future research within sub groups within African American populations.

**Synthesis**

The counseling field is making efforts to advance its efforts of becoming more multiculturally competent. Understanding the complex aspects of an African American single mother’s culture individually and as a group will provide a more accurate framework for counselors and other helping professionals. This review of literature explored the significant body of research regarding African American women, racial and feminist identity. This literature review also revealed the gaps within the current literature and further supports the need for qualitative research studies on racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers.

Cross’ (1991) model for racial identity development laid the foundation for the careful examination of racial identity theory for people of color. It is important to recognize that identity development of any kind for people that belong to marginalized groups is unique. However, it is also important to understand that the needs for African American
single mothers potentially differ from other African Americans in the racial identity process. According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), an individual arranges their needs based upon the satisfaction of a previous pre-potent need. It is important to consider the multiple identity factors, as well as the multilayered components of a single mother’s life to better understand her process of development. It is assumed that an African American single mother’s identity development ultimately affects her children. As Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains, identity formation is contingent upon an individual’s “ecological niche” which can be further explained as an individual’s gender, social class, family, community, ethnicity and culture. It is imperative, therefore to additionally consider ecological impacts to understand the experiences of single African American mothers as the foundation for this study. Exploring the process of racial identity in African American single mothers is important because it has been conceptually linked to mental health functioning of African Americans (Baldwin, 1984; Cross, Parham & Helms, 1998; Parham, 1989; White & Parham, 1990). The Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS), a scale used to operationalize Cross’ Nigrescence model, also supports this conceptualization (Parham & Helms, 1981). While research supports a direct link between racial identity and mental health, more should be considered when linking the factors that illuminate higher risk of psychopathology (Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellars & Notaro, 2002). One possible variable is stress. African American women often carry the load of parenthood independently. There is an extensive amount of literature that links the association of negative outcomes to stress (Blanley, 2000; Mazure, 1998). Cross, Parham and Helms (1985) argue that racial identity is internalized to buffer against deleterious mental health consequences (Caldwell et al., 2002).
The additional factor of stereotypic images in society potentially has a greater impact on African American single mothers. The struggle to maintain positive images of strength and resilience in light of negative stereotypes can cause mental stress for African American single mothers. Some may adopt a Superwoman persona, one who believes that she should be able to accomplish multiple tasks successfully (Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Romero (2000) asserts:

“Strong Black Woman” is a mantra for so much a part of U.S. culture that it is seldom realized how great a toll it has taken on the emotional well being of the African American woman. As much as it may give her the illusion of control, it keeps her from identifying what she needs and reaching out for help (p. 225).”

The concern is that Black women may be held back from expressing themselves and developing an identity that derives from self-definitions, rather than societal standards. It is believed that Black women may have developed a code of silence to quietly deal with sexism and racism for fear of being mistreated. For Black women, oppression is a life long experience (Smith & Smith, 1981, p. 114). In addition to mental health disparities, as outlined in the literature review, African Americans are on the negative end of several health disparities. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1 in 4 African Americans lives in poverty, which creates a concern for the lack of access to health care and limits resources for them to overcome these disparities (CDC, 2007). The examination of multifactoral aspects of oppression is the beginning of understanding: (a) the lived experiences of African American single mothers and (b) the role of stereotypic images in the racial and feminist identity development in African American single mothers.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will outline the procedures used to conduct the study. It will address the methods used to explore the research questions as well as to outline the research design and discuss its appropriateness. The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of stereotypic images on racial and feminist identity development of African American single mothers. The study is also intended to examine the lived experiences of the participants through a phenomenological descriptive qualitative research approach. Further, this section will outline the sample selection, discuss the logic for the method of data collection and present limitations for this data collection strategy.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design

According to Stephens & Few (2007), research on racial and feminist identity development in African American women has provided theoretical frameworks for ways in which we give meaning to visual cues (p. 251). This study examined the role of stereotypic images as single African American mothers develop racial and feminist identities. Examining these variables through the lens of the participant will provide a raw authentic view for ways in which these images affect African American single mothers. Therefore, the researcher chose a phenomenological descriptive qualitative approach to deepen research regarding single African American mothers. The phenomenological approach was appropriately chosen to investigate, understand and give meaning to the lived experiences of single African American single mothers. Further, the phenomenological approach utilized these lived experiences to give meaning to the research phenomenon described in the study. This
epistemology was utilized to give the participants complete autonomy and allow the true voices to be depicted within the research. The qualitative approach involved using open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. Qualitative data imparts a detailed description of the lived experiences of the participants, thus the reason that this method was utilized within this study. This method was chosen because multiracial feminist theorists found that different racial and ethnic groups have qualitatively different experiences. Multiracial feminist suggest that work, family, religion and the relation amongst the three may affect women’s feminism in different ways (Collins, 1990, 2000; hooks, 1984; & Harnois, 2005).

**Appropriateness of research design**

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to gather information on the lived experiences of single African American mothers. I used this method to explore the possible role and/or impact of stereotypic images on the racial and feminist identity development in African American single mothers. Qualitative analysis is systematic in its approach to collect data. Features of qualitative data include the use of inductive reasoning, subjectiveness rather than objectiveness, and an examination of the unique lived experiences of the participant (Patton, 2002). In contrast, quantitative data is collected to produce data that will provide numerical outcomes and make it easier to prove validity and reliability. However, a shortcoming of qualitative methods is that it lacks the true lived experiences of the populations it intends to examine, thus the reason I chose the qualitative method for this study. Further, the methods used to collect quantitative data limits the responses of the participant. In this study, I posed open-ended questions through a semi-
structured interview that gave the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences to their level of comfort. This reduced the limitations in data collection as well as allowed the participants to be candid with their responses, producing rich, valid data. Open-ended questioning further provided an advantage to the data collection process by allowing the participant the freedom to navigate through the research topic by narrating responses that are essential to answering the research questions. The qualitative method was chosen because there is a need to further the research related to the lived experiences of African American single mothers in the current literature. The research questions sought to understand the experiences of single African American mothers as well as to explore the role of stereotypic images in racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers.

In using a phenomenological qualitative methodology, I was able to gather rich data directly from the experiences of the participants and utilize this data to address societal stereotypes about African American single mothers. As a result, the descriptive data was acquired based on the use of open-ended question, affording the participant’s the freedom to disclose their lived experiences. While there appears to be a shift toward culturally engaged approaches within the field of qualitative research, educational research specific to African-Americans only represents a small segment of the research that appears in mainstream journals (Kershaw, 1992). The literature identifies African American culture as (a) differing from European-American culture(s) in various ways that include individual and collective value orientations, language patterns, and worldviews (Tillman, 2005); (b) a shared orientation based on similar cultural, historical, and political experiences, (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995); and (c) “cultural deep structure,” suggesting a complexity of behaviors that
under gird cultural distinctiveness (Boykin, 1994). The data from the research methodology was also used to address dated research and contribute to the lack of literature regarding the experiences of African American single mothers. The data was also useful in developing trends and conducting analysis on the findings. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative research design also meant that I served as the chief interviewer, a viable data collection tool.

Moreover, the utilization of a qualitative methodology gave the participant the freedom to provide data freely, from their own realities and to their comfort levels. Utilizing quantitative methods through surveys, for example, may make the participant feel forced to provide information that they are not comfortable with providing. This coincides with the rationale for employing Black Feminist Theory within the literature review as one of the Afrocentric Perspectives in the study. It kept the African-American woman, who is the research participant, as the central focus and allows her to express herself and her experiences from a personal perspective. Further, Haronis (2005) conducted a qualitative analysis referencing several theorist (Collins, 1990, 2000; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981; Ridley Malson, 1983) and concluded that qualitative methodology was utilized due to the research that supports the notion that African American women, as well as other women from various racial and ethnic groups, tend to have qualitatively different experiences that may affect a woman’s feminism in different ways. For African American women, “oppression is a life long thing” (Smith & Smith, 1981, p. 114). Because of this, it is important to approach the research topic from a culturally sensitive perspective in order that the varied aspects of the African American cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences must be acknowledged (Tillman, 2002). The opportunity to gather data through the lived
experiences of African American single mothers was invaluable. The opportunity to examine research questions through an in depth analysis with one on one communication with the participants provides rich data directly through the lens of the participant.

**Logic of Data Collection Procedure**

In conducting a study on the role of stereotypic images in the racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers, two data collection procedures were utilized: demographic form and semi-structured interviews. The following were the guiding research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the lived experiences of single African American mothers?
- **RQ2:** What is the role of stereotypic images in the racial identity development of African American single mothers?
- **RQ3:** What is the role of stereotypic images in the feminist identity development of single African American mothers?

The demographic form requested information such as age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, marital status, educational attainment and number of children. These questions were appropriate because the data collected from the demographic forms were used to interpret the data and further support the nature of the study.

**Procedure**

**Participants**

The focus of this study was African American single mothers. The researcher utilized a purposeful sample of a homogenous group due to the nature of the study. The goal was to provide data from the lived experiences of African American single mothers. I contacted
community organizations in North Carolina through an electronic flyer that included information about the study to recruit participants. I then communicated with leaders of these support organizations to build a rapport. After which, I was given permission to post flyers to which participants voluntarily responded. The participants were given an informed consent form, approved by the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University, which was read and thoroughly explained. The participants were not identified by full name rather they were given the choice to identify by first name only or a name abbreviation. This identification was used on the demographic form as well as the transcripts to link the participant to the appropriate response. Prior to the collection of any data, the informed consent process explained the purpose of the study, method, their rights, risk and benefits anticipated during the participation in this study. Participants were then asked to sign the informed consent indicating their receipt and understanding of the document. Participants consented for their responses to be audio taped and transcribed. A copy of the transcript was provided upon request.

A sample size of 10 was purposefully selected, as this number is considered appropriate for producing enough data within a qualitative study for the data to be considered valid (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Patton (2002) indicates that purposeful sampling is a design approach used in qualitative inquiry and was selected for identifying participants for this study. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study because it ensured that the lived experiences of African American single mothers would be depicted. Further, this form of sampling provided a deeper understanding for the phenomenon being examined. The
research sample made possible in depth and real world information related to the research questions and the lived experiences of single African American mothers.

The demographic form was given to the women individually by reading the questions aloud and allowing them to answer them. The questions on the form address demographic information such as age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, marital status, educational attainment and number of children. When the demographic questions were completed, the researcher continued with the semi-structured interview process. Each participant was interviewed individually in order to acquire in depth information from their personal realities around issues such as the lived experiences as an single African American mothers raising one or more children. No compensation was provided for this study.

**Limitations**

I served as a data collection agent in the qualitative research study. While I utilized a phenomenological research approach and therefore bracketed thoughts and feelings throughout the data collection process, it is possible that my personal feelings/attitudes entered the data collection process, therefore serving as a limitation to the data collection method. Another possible limitation is in the sample of participants, as well as possible fabrication in the questions answered by the participants. Additionally, a final limitation is that researcher/selection bias can occur due to purposeful sampling.

**Boundaries of Qualitative Research**

A researcher is almost certain to find boundaries in any research design. One of the main boundaries was the presence of the my biases in the methodology and data analysis selection of the study. Another boundary was with generalizing the data to similar groups.
The participants used to gather the data may have had views that had been influenced by various life events that are not mentioned/explored during the data collection process. Further, it is possible that the participants fabricated their lived experiences, therefore, possibly affecting the data. Participants may have also not feel comfortable disclosing certain aspects of their lives due to the length of time the researcher has to build rapport.

**Researcher as the Interviewer**

As a clinical mental health counselor, my background has afforded me the opportunity to do extensive work with single African American mothers and their families. This research was motivated by my experiences as a counselor and an African American woman. As a first hand observer, I have noted the frustration of single African American women. This frustration has motivated me to contribute their lived experiences to the current research. I have witnessed African American women cope with the affects of historical oppression through societal stereotypes. These stereotypic images were often of a broke, destitute woman who is comfortable on welfare. This is not congruent with some of the women I have met. This view is also incongruent to the small body of current research on single African American mothers. While there is a significant body of research on African American women I found that many of the experiences my client’s express are not being portrayed in the literature. This is troubling because it is believed that this published literature becomes the foundation for counselor training programs.

As the principle investigator, I had both insider (emic) and out (etic) perspectives to contribute to the researcher. My emic perspective was foundationalized in my heritage as an African American woman. Raised primarily by a single mother, I identify as a product of a
single parent home. Additionally, my experience as a former school counselor and graduation coach has afforded me the opportunity to gain a deeper perspective in the lives of several African American families from various income levels. This was an advantage because I could relate to the experiences of African American single mothers on some level. Due to my inside understanding of many of their experiences, I was patient, respectful and responsive to their needs. I also felt comfortable in my interview approach and asked the appropriate probing questions when needed. This is a disadvantage because I may unknowingly generalize my views of African American single mothers. Moreover, generalization of my emic perspective may have impacted the outcome of the data analysis.

My undeniable academic and economic privilege as an African American woman explains my etic perspective. While I was raised in a single parent home, my father was very active in my life. He was also an advocate in the community, as well as a positive role model for me. Many single parents do not have an active partner who participates in co-parenting. Therefore, while I can relate to several aspects of single motherhood, I acknowledge that my perspective as a privileged African American woman, whom is not a parent, is an outside perspective. This etic view was a possible advantage because I was able to appreciate and accept the raw views of the participants. My etic perspective could have been a disadvantage because of my pre-conceived views, personally and professionally. Further, as an outsider, I have been exposed to the societal stereotypic images of African American single mothers. It is possible that my own assumptions could have been affected for this matter.

Awareness is a key component in the data analysis process of qualitative research. As the principle investigator, I am aware of my extensive professional and personal knowledge
regarding single African American women and families. Further, I understand that my experiences have contributed to my perspectives and worldview. Bracketing my views was imperative to avoid paralleling my experiences, personally and professionally, and further reducing the lived experiences of the participants. As an academic scholar, I intended to conduct the research with the upmost integrity and professional ethics to ensure that the data is as raw and authentic in nature as possible. I fully anticipate the lived experiences of the participants to be depicted in my study.

Data Collection

The research utilized open-ended inquiry to investigate the lived experiences of the participants. Data were drawn from a purposeful sample of 10 single African American single mothers who were voluntary participants and stratified based upon marital status, race, gender and status as the head of household with children. Flyers explaining the study were given to organizers of programs that support single African American mothers. These flyers were displayed with the researcher’s contact information. The participants were met at a confidential location and given a demographic form to follow as the questions were asked aloud. After the demographic questions were answered, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interview. The following are questions posed during the interview:

SSIQ1: What are the experiences of single African American mothers?

SSIQ2: Are there stereotypic images of single African American mothers?

Probe Question 1: If so, what are those images?

Probe Question 2: What do these images mean to you?

Probe Question 3: How do these images make you feel?
Probe Question 4: Can you relate to any of these images?

Probe Question 5: Are there inaccuracies to these images? If so, what?

SSIQ3: What does it mean to be a feminist?

Probe Question 1: Are you viewed differently when you are assertive? Sensitive?

Probe Question 2: When is the last time you felt empowered as a woman?

Probe Question 3: When is the last time you felt disempowered?

Probe Question 4: What are your thoughts about your gender group?

SSIQ4: Tell me about ways you have felt excluded personally or professionally because of your gender?

Probe Question 1: Do you feel that you have equal opportunities in the job market?

Probe Question 2: Who do you feel are the advantaged people in society?

Probe Question 3: Who would advocate for these inequalities on your behalf?

SSIQ5: What are your gender roles?

Probe Question 1: As the head of household? Professional Life? Interpersonal relationships?

SSIQ6: What role does race play in your daily life?

Probe Question 1: How does this impact you?

SSIQ7: What are your thoughts regarding your racial group?

Probe Question 1: Does your racial group membership impact you as a single mother?

Probe Question 2: How do you feel about your racial group membership?

Probe Question 3: What does it mean to be a member of this racial group?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Related Interview Questions</th>
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</thead>
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| Lived Experiences          | What are the Lived Experiences of SAAM?  
*Probe: Do you consider your experiences positive or negative?  
Probe: What are your experiences as head of household?  
Probe: Does being a single parent impact your professional or personal responsibilities?  
How do you cope with difficult situations in your life?  
*Probe: Do you have a support system  
*Probe: How do you cope with feeling disempowered?  
*Probe: How do you cope with societal inequalities (such as racial, gendered, and parental)? |
| Stereotypic Images         | Are there stereotypes of SAAM?  
*What do stereotypes of SAAM mean to you?  
*Do these stereotypes impact you?  
*Can you relate to these images?  
*Are these images inaccurate? |
| Racial and Feminist Identity | What are your thoughts regarding your racial group?  
What role does race play in your daily life?  
*Probe: How does your race impact you?  
*Probe: Does being a member of your racial group impact you as a single mother?  
*Probe: Do you feel that you have equal rights as a woman?  
What does it mean to be a feminist?  
Do you feel that you are excluded personally or professionally because of your gender?  
*Probe: Are you viewed differently if you portray a different, sensitive or assertive traits? |
Data Analysis

Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data involves placing words into categories and identifying common themes in presenting the data that has been collected (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The demographic data collected included participant identification (name or alphabetic letter), ethnicity, income, level of educational attainment, marital status and number of children (see appendix B). The use of constant comparative analysis is used in analyzing the qualitative measures. The constant comparative method (Glauser & Straus, 1967) is a data analysis method that involves the constant comparison of data as it is obtained. When conducting qualitative data analysis, it is important for the researcher to begin reviewing and interpreting the data before the official data analysis phase. Charmaz (2002) contends that constant comparison should be ongoing throughout the study. The researcher conducted the qualitative data analysis immediately after the data was obtained to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of single African American mothers. If further clarification was needed after the individual interview, I asked additional questions for clarification during and after the interview. Further, I utilized member checking, a method where the researcher checks with the participants to ensure that their true lived experiences were accurately depicted in the research.

Coding

I acknowledge that there might have been biases from my own cultural, personal and professional experiences that may have impacted the coding process. Therefore, I utilized bracketing, member checking and theoretical/perspective triangulation to reduce the impact of my biases and skewed data analysis outcomes. I also journaled throughout the research
process to ensure that my biases were documented. I did not utilize multiple coders, and therefore coded the data independently. The purpose of utilizing coding in qualitative data is to expose relationships and common experiences amongst the participants. It also presents the opportunity for the researcher to examine the participant’s interpretation of these experiences. The codes served as labels to mark meaningful descriptions in the participant’s responses when they are transcribed. Essence, or common participant experiences (Racher & Robinson, 2002), emerged from the lived experience the participants as well as the themes that were developed from those experiences. A detailed description of the findings will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important to address in any study. While it is common for a novice researcher to become perplexed while incorporating validity and reliability in a qualitative research study, it is generally agreed that determining validity and reliability are absolutely necessary to create credible studies (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It provides insight on how the research can be generalized or validated for future research that may want to duplicate the study. In qualitative research, validity and reliability refer to how consistent the study findings are to the data that was collected. Researchers utilize a variety of methods including triangulation, member checking, thick description, peer reviews and external audits to confirm validity and reliability. Validity is defined as how well the participant’s lived experience and social phenomenon are depicted within the study. (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Validity establishes credibility within a study and is determined by how well the inferences are drawn and translated (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Further,
a key component of reliability is the ability for the findings to be replicated if re-tested. Reliability is also judged by the accuracy of the outcomes and its parallel to the data. As previously mentioned, due to the lens of examination, a post positivist perspective known as member checking was utilized to ensure that the researcher interpreted the participant’s responses correctly.

**Internal Validity**

Threats to internal validity are addressed through the use of theoretical triangulation, the acknowledgement of the researchers bias and the data review process of the researcher. Reliability is a common threat to internal validity. Triangulation will increase validity within this study by comparing the analyzed data to current various sources such as theories and literature related to the study. I bracketed thoughts and ideas that may have interfered with the authentic lived experiences of the participants. Bracketing is utilized to remain aware of biases. In addition, the review process by the researcher provides oversight and assistance in identifying codes and themes in the qualitative data analysis process.

**External Validity**

External validity, also known as generalizability is the degree to which the findings of this study can be generalized to other populations. While qualitative research is not intended to be generalizable, findings of this study may be relatable to African American single mothers from various cultural backgrounds. While this study specifically examines African American single mothers, the findings may also be relevant to single mothers of other cultural backgrounds. However, it is less likely that the findings are relevant and relatable to other populations due to the lack of shared lived experiences.
Summary

This chapter contains the details of the descriptive qualitative research design used to conduct the study. A description of a phenomenological qualitative research design was provided as well as theoretical underpinnings utilized to analyze the data. The logic for the research design chosen, the method of data collection, the method for data analysis, criteria selection and the targeted homogenous sample were discussed. Additionally, validity and reliability were discussed. The researcher provided a detailed examination of the etic and emic perspective as the principle investigator, as well as the possible advantages and disadvantages to those views. The next chapter will discuss the findings for the research study along with a detailed description of participant demographics.
Chapter 4

Results

This study was intended to provide a rich, meaningful description of the lived experiences of single African American mothers (SAAM). The purpose of the study was to examine the role of stereotypic images on the racial and feminist identity development of single African American mothers. Guided by a phenomenological framework, the data was collected and examined through qualitative analysis based upon the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of single African American mothers?
RQ2: What is the role of stereotypic images in the racial identity development of single African American mothers?
RQ3: What is the role of stereotypic images in the feminist identity development of single African American mothers?

A phenomenological qualitative approach was appropriate due to the rich descriptions provided by each participant. Through a demographic survey and open-ended interview questions, data was collected from 10 randomly selected participants from North Carolina.

In chapter 4, the findings are provided. Data were collected from 10 single African American mothers through a demographic survey and an open-ended interview. Several inquiries were made regarding stereotypic images of SAAM as well as how these images impact their racial and feminist identity development. The participants were encouraged to speak candidly and to share as much or little as they were comfortable. The researcher did not gain a rapport with the participants prior to the
interviews. This approach was intentionally to gain a raw view of the participant’s lived experience.

**Background Characteristics of the Sample**

The participants were volunteers who responded to flyers that solicited single African American mothers who were interested in sharing their lived experiences. The women completed a demographic survey and an open-ended interview. The interviews ranged from 29-58 minutes. Criteria for participation in the study included being an African American woman who was single and had at least one child. The demographic survey asked questions about age, employment status, marital status, educational attainment, annual income and number of children. All of the women who had never been married explained their pregnancies as unplanned. Participant’s ages ranged from age 29-56 with the median age being 33. A common theme amongst participants was the need to obtain education to overcome the middle ground of “being too poor too be rich, to rich to be poor.” Participants use this analogy to describe the feeling of being in an income bracket that exceeds the criteria to receive government assistance, yet in an income level that was barely above poverty with the amount of money they make, compared to their financial responsibility. The demographics are described in table 2 below.
Table 3: Background Characteristics of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>39-44</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College (Bachelor Degree)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
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<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Current Income</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-40,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-55,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55,000 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, Never Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Children</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual Participant Profiles

The mothers in this study were all voluntary participants who were eager to share their lived experiences. While participation was anonymous, several participants were linked through shared experiences. Because of this, not all individual responses will be presented in
this section in an effort to reduce repetition. The following section will present a brief introduction of each participant.

**Mrs. Prez.** Mrs. Prez, is a 56-year-old SAAM. Mrs. Prez is a divorced mother of three children ranging in age from 30-41 years old. She was raised in a home with both her parents, who were blue-collar workers. Her lasting memories were them working hard all of her life. Mrs. Prez was married for 12 years and she divorced in the middle of her third pregnancy. Her husband had a substance abuse problem and he left the family destitute with no housing or money. She reports having to sell bottles at times just to get bus fare to go to work. With three small children, she was not eligible for government assistance because she made $30 over the annual income requirement. Because of her negative credit history as well as her husband’s substance abuse addiction, she was technically homeless, which was disclosed in the interview. She cites her strength and faith as a “believer” as a way of protecting her mind from itself. Her ex husband attended rehab and has since “cleaned up his act,” per her report. However, due to the trauma he caused the family, he is now remorseful for the broken relationship he has with his children as well as the hardships he caused his family. Mrs. Prez is a college graduate and has been teaching for over 30 years. While she had dreams and plans to continue her education, she reports having to put her dreams on hold to raise her children. Along with being a cancer survivor, Mrs. Prez has demonstrated her strength through raising children who are all college educated, owning her own home, all while enthusiastically educating as a music teacher.

**Neese.** Neese is a 34-year-old SAAM raising one infant male child. A native of Mississippi, Neese reports never thinking of many of her experiences as unequal or
disempowering because growing up in Mississippi, that was just “the way it was.” She grew up in foster care with a family member and was raised with spiritual principles from which she later distanced herself. Many of her experiences as a racial being were experienced as she earned her Masters degree in Counseling. Neese reported not planning to become a parent, especially with unfavorable domestic issues (i.e. cheating) that were revealed about her significant other shortly after she conceived. Some of her biggest fears, however, surround stereotypes related to SAAM’s raising African American boys. Neese’s body language became tense as she considered the possible outcomes for her young son related to her status as a single parent. While she does have family support, she is fully physically and financially responsible for her son without the assistance of a partner.

Ray. Ray described herself as “a very religious woman.” She is a 31-year-old SAAM raising an African American male. A product of a two-parent home that was heavily spiritual, Ray reports having no intention of “having a baby out of wedlock” because it was frowned upon “in the church.” She reported falling in love with her college sweet heart, becoming pregnant and having to drop out of college. She was marginalized amongst her church community because of her pregnancy. While her parents were outwardly supportive, she remembers being degraded verbally, being called a “whore” and a “failure” behind closed doors. Due to her limited education, Ray is having difficulty gaining full time employment. She has settled for part time, low paying jobs to get by. Additionally, while her family is not emotionally supportive, because of their avid support for her son and her low income, she feels “trapped” living in her family’s home and depending on them financially. The father of her son has no contact with him due to his disdain for the personal relationship between he
and Ray. Ray is currently expecting a response for a possible full time job that will provide a more secure income.

**Dree.** Dree is a 29-year-old SAAM who is currently raising a 4-year-old African American male child. Dree is self-employed and owns a hair salon. She was raised in a two-parent home and is interested to learn more about trends within women who become single parents that were raised in two parent homes. Before becoming a hair stylist, Dree graduated with a four-year degree in Criminal Justice. Financial benefits from the death of her father made it possible for her to own her own business. Dree currently has a tumultuous relationship with her child’s father. The father of Dree’s child was recently married and has a child with his wife. Dree reported him being heavily involved in the life of his other male child, whom was conceived around the same time as Dree conceived. While the father of Dree’s child has a court mandate to pay child support, he is currently not consistent with financial assistance. Dree reported financial and emotional struggles as a business owner. She discussed the constant struggle to maintain financial and emotional stability despite higher education and a career.

**Reese.** Reese is a 34-year-old divorced SAAM who is currently raising a 10-year-old African American male child. When probed with questions using the term “SAAM,” Reese felt that she could not relate to the term due to her own stereotypes of what a SAAM is. Reese is financially stable independently and she earned a doctoral degree while being a single parent. Her ex-husband, who lives in another state, does financially contribute to her son’s life on a regular basis. I observed Reese’s change in body language when the term was used to describe women who were mothers raising children without partners in the home.
Reese admits to being “in denial” about her status as a single parent. Additionally, Reese reports having an excellent support system of family and friends. With Reese’s parent’s being married for over 30 years, she admits to feeling that embracing the term “single parent” would signify failure for her.

**Charlie.** Charlie is a 30-year-old SAAM raising a four-year-old African American male. Charlie never indicated whether she was raised in a single parent home, however, she reported having a very supportive family whom assist her greatly in parenting. Her pregnancy was unplanned and the father is not currently involved. The father of her child lives long distance and only wants to be involved in her child’s life “in-frequently” and “for his own selfish reasons.” Charlie reported finding strength in her faith and spirituality. She uses it to drive her passion and determination as an educator and a mother. Charlie is proud to have earned a Masters degree and to become a homeowner as a single parent.

**June.** June is a 31-year-old SAAM who is raising a four-year-old African American female. June was the most candid, forthcoming participant. She was open and honest about her disdain for her child’s father, who is not “a bad person, but is too immature to understand that parenting is not a part time job.” June has a Masters degree, however is unemployed at this time. She was among several participants to use the phrase “to rich to be poor, to poor to be rich” to describe a financial position that disqualifies her for government assistance, yet places her below poverty level. June reported inequalities within the workforce, making it difficult for her to maintain employment. June has a support system of family and friends, however she is careful to call upon for fear of overwhelming them.
Nic. Nic is a 32-year-old mother of a 15-year-old African American male. Despite conceiving at a young age, Nic graduated in the top 10 percent of her high school class. Her child’s father was a part of the child’s life and fully intended to participate as an equal parent. However, three and a half years into their child’s life, he died. Nic was a senior in college at the time and still went on to graduate a couple of weeks later despite the tragedy. Nic is a business owner and attributes her success to a positive attitude. While she expressed some difficult experiences in her life, she felt that it was important to emphasize that a positive perspective should not be situational.

Chi. Chi, a 40 year-old mother of one adult son has always been a single parent. She conceived while she was in college pursuing a four-year degree. Chi chose to leave school to become a full time mom. She reports always feeling like the “under dog” or “black sheep” of her family due to getting pregnant at a young age and being compared to more successful family members her age. Her child’s father has not been involved for her son’s entire life. Chi is a working class parent who is supporting her son through college. She feels that he is her greatest accomplishment as a third year college student. She is determined for him to graduate and promises to focus on her goals and dreams once he has assisted him in securing an educational foundation.

B. B is a 44-year-old mother of three. B conceived her first child as a teenager and her other two children while married. B divorced while pregnant with her third child, married a second time and ended her second marriage a short time later. B reported feeling confident and independent as a single mother. While the father of her children are not involved, she reported a determination to provide for her children in spite of their father’s short comings. B
earned a Bachelors and Masters degree as a single parent. She reported several inequalities within the workplace that caused several setbacks in her life. She is now gainfully employed and working her way into a better financial position.

**Data Analysis**

Initially, I read through transcribed interview to gain a better understanding for the content. Along with listening to the interviews twice, aside from the live interview, several additional readings were necessary to ensure that the phenomenon was properly understood. I utilized the hard, transcribed copies of the interviews to code and create categories. The data produced the following categories: Lived Experiences, Stereotypes, and Racial and Feminist Identity.

**Lived experiences.** The lived experiences category describes the raw experiences of SAAM from the unrestricted view of the participant. While this view varied by personal experience, participants provided a view of their original parenting plan prior to conception. Lived experiences produced the following codes: positive experiences, negative experiences, “generational curses,” emotional impact of experiences, intended parental plan, interpersonal relationships, paternal involvement and influence on children, parental strategies, parental responsibility as head of household and sole provider and life changing events.

**Stereotypic Images.** The stereotypic image category includes images reported by the participants that depict SAAMs. Some images were derived from the media, personal experiences and/or long-term historical images. Stereotypes produced the following codes: generational cycle, impact of stereotypic images, evolution of images, historical images, age specific stereotypes and SAAM’s raise gay boys.
Racial and Feminist Identity. The racial and feminist identity category includes an objective view of the participant’s definition of racial and feminist identity development. The participants unanimously viewed this category as an integration of several factors that constitute their identities. The racial and feminist identity category produced the following codes: power, equality, self-efficacy, societal standards of ideal family, gender roles, unexpected educational attainment and socio-economic status. The table below illustrates the alignment of the codes and categories to the research questions.
Table 4: Categories and Codes Aligned with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the lived experiences of single African American mothers?</th>
<th>Lived Experiences</th>
<th>What is the role of stereotypic images in the racial identity development of single African American mothers?</th>
<th>Racial and Feminist Identity Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Experience</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional Impact</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generational Curses/Cycle</td>
<td>Societal Standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intended Parental Plan</td>
<td>Gender Roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Relationships</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life Changing Events</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Strategies</td>
<td>Generational Cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Responsibilities, head of household, sole provider</td>
<td>Impact of Stereotypic Images</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Involvement and Influence on Children</td>
<td>Evolution of Images</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the role of stereotypic images in feminist identity development of single African American mothers?</td>
<td>Historical Images</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racial and Feminist Identity Development</td>
<td>Age Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Affect of Marital Status on Children's Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Societal Standards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender Roles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generational Cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of Stereotypic Images</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evolution of Images</td>
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<td>Historical Images</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affect of Marital Status on Children's Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of Emergent Themes

Central to the purpose of this study were the raw experiences of SAAM. Questions in the semi-structured interview were formulated around understanding the lives of the participants. Several factors were revealed as the mothers spoke openly and candidly about their lives. The following section will highlight themes that illustrate the phenomenon of this study. Table 3 illustrates the intersection of emergent themes in relation to the semi-structured interview questions used within the study.
Table 5: Intersection of Emergent Themes and Semi Structured Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Related Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lived Experiences       | What are the Lived Experiences of SAAM?  
 Probe: Do you consider your experiences positive or negative?  
 Probe: What are your experiences as head of household?  
 Probe: Does being a single parent impact you professionally or interpersonally?  
  How do you cope with difficult situations in your life?  
  Probe: Do you have a support system  
  Probe: How do you cope with feeling disempowered?  
  Probe: How do you cope with the societal inequalities (as a racial being, gendered being and single parent)?                                                                 |
| Stereotypic Images      | Are there stereotypes of SAAM?  
  Probe: What do stereotypes of SAAM mean to you?  
  Probe: Do these stereotypes impact you?  
  Probe: Can you relate to these images?  
  Probe: Are these images inaccurate?                                                                 |
| Racial and Feminist Identity | What are your thoughts regarding your racial group?  
  What role does race play in your daily life?  
  Probe: How does your race impact you?  
  Probe: Does being a member of your racial group impact you as a single mother?  
  Probe: Do you feel that you have equal rights as a woman?  
  What does it mean to be a feminist?  
  Do you feel that you are excluded personally or professional because of your gender?  
  Probe: Are you viewed differently if you portray gentle, sensitive or assertive traits? |
Lived Experiences

A series of questions were asked surrounding the lived experiences of single African American mothers (SAAM) and the participant’s view on stereotypic images that depict their group (i.e. whether accurately or inaccurately). Themes such as ideal family, roles and decision-making, relationships and support systems were revealed. The themes will be described further below.

Ideal Family

Each participant individually and uniquely expressed having a plan to conceive with a partner with whom they were in a committed relationship. Several factors influenced the relationship, however, a recurring theme was that the father chose to leave the family. Additionally, some mothers expressed being vexed by a “generational curse,” meaning that they came from a lineage of single parents and conceiving children outside of marriage or a committed relationship was an undesirable outcome. B expressed being in a relationship with a person who was her high school sweetheart. While her first relationship did not result in marriage, she later married and reported the following about her marriage:

When I turned 27, I met someone else. He had children from a previous relationship, which I knew about, but I got involved anyway. Trying to get, I guess, the ‘ideal’ family with that quote ‘father figure’ in the picture. We ended up getting married. After being married for two years, I got pregnant with my second child, my daughter, [who] is now 16. Everything was going good [but] then he just started [cheating]. Because I was working the second shift, as men do, he started cheating and one thing led to the next. But before we broke up, I ended up getting pregnant with my third child. Then he
decided he didn’t want any more children. So his thing was, get an abortion or I’m leaving.

As she expressed her view, her body language shifted from anger to confusion. There was ease when she spoke about her first child’s father, with whom she had a good relationship. She then shifted to discomfort when she began to speak about her ex-husband. She later explained that she still could not understand why he chose to leave her family and disown their daughter when it was a shared responsibility. The eldest participant of the study, Mrs. Prez, echoed this sentiment. Mrs. Prez reported feelings of doing things “the right way,” courting, getting married and having children. The idea of her marriage being unsuccessful was not the expected nor ideal outcome; although Mrs. Prez maintained that the majority of her marriage and family issues were due to her husband’s addiction.

Chi reported being heavily influenced by the societal standard of the “ideal family” as well. While the father of her child had no interest in becoming a parent, she did not believe in aborting a child. Further, she felt a sense of responsibility for becoming pregnant and therefore, decided to become a parent. Chi asserted previous desires for the ideal family:

You had that little dream of everybody being together, but that does not work out. So through the years, it’s [the relationship with her child’s father] like up and down up and down, the relationship [between her son and his father], not my desire to be with him. I just wanted him to take care of his son emotionally and financially.

Ultimately, Chi realized that forcing a relationship with her son’s father caused a greater negative emotional impact than a positive impact. Therefore, she decided to raise her child independently and is currently working to financially support him through college.
Responsibility and Decision Making

When considering roles and decision-making, Chi felt that her role as head of household increased her level of responsibility significantly. She explained her role as the primary provider and she imagined that parenting would be much easier with a partner. She reported not wanting to “hinder anybody else’s lifestyle.” Therefore, even when she needed assistance making decisions she opted not to reach out because he [her son] was “her responsibility.” Aside from responsibilities that accompany being the head of household, Chi felt equally responsible for her child’s decision making. She assumes that there were individuals in her life that expected her to fail as a single parent and she was determined not to prove them right. She reported a situation that occurred as a result of her son’s lapse in judgment. Chi was on bed rest from surgery when she received a phone call from the Wake County jail. Although this was her son’s first and only brush with the law, she felt completely responsible saying that this was her “worst nightmare” and questioning herself asking, “what did I do as a mother?”

Charlie discussed her lifestyle before she became a parent. She reported, “not knowing what I was doing before having my son.” Her actions were highly selfish and lacked purpose, per her assertion. Dree echoed this sentiment with her reports of full financial, physical and emotional responsibility for her son. Although she did not imagine that she would be parenting independently, she made a decision to become a parent and she expressed her pride in taking full responsibility for her son. During the interview, she passionately reflected on difficult times in her son’s five years of life where her son’s father opted to assume a passive role in his upbringing. While it fostered her independence she reported not having the choice
to put her son aside or making his needs secondary to her own.

**Relationships**

As I probed the participants about their lived experiences, a significant portion of the discussion focused on interpersonal relationships. When asked about interpersonal relationships and personal time, Neese reports:

I have to come straight home and relieve my mom because that’s my responsibility. On the weekend, it’s like “do you mind keeping him?” It’s like I’m asking her. It’s different now because when I was single I could go anywhere I wanted to, but now I can’t because I’m responsible for my child. Sometimes, I wish I could have that freedom to go somewhere, but it’s not the case anymore. Not that I mind it. I love my child, but there’s times I wish I could have the whole day to do what I needed to do. A lot of times I find myself asking my mom “do you mind if I go somewhere,” then I feel guilty for asking my mom because she’s caring for him Monday-Friday. So, it’s a different thing. Even as far as dating, I’m not even trying to date right now because I’m so focused on trying to be there for him. Then I think about if I start dating, how do I incorporate that into my life with my son? You don’t want to start dating a person and introduce them too soon to my son, and then- it’s just so much I’m thinking about. It’s a lot. So right now, dating is not even on my radar. Honestly it’s not. I’m single. That’s it.

Generally, the participants with a strong support system that consisted of a close family member, such as a mother, expressed having a better chance at having a romantic
relationship. However, there was a strong sense that safety and the well being of their children was prioritized over having interpersonal relationships.

Additionally, several of the mothers felt that they were judged by stereotypes. Some reports included preconceived notions about the mothers looking for a paternal replacement or some men who took advantage of single mothers. The men who took advantage of single mothers assumed that they were established already because they have children. Single mothers are often vulnerable to men who take advantage of them, per participant reports.

Essentially, societal stereotypes affected the men they dated. Further, the responsibility that the mothers felt was encompassed with a sense of fear for their children when they were not around. Having a social life was not a priority and sometimes more of a risk. Nic expressed the following when probed about single parenthood and romantic relationships:

I have had a social life as a single parent, but only, again, because I have that support. I’m the type of parent that I’m not gonna leave my child with anyone. A lot of single parents they make that mistake. They’ll pawn their kids off to all these different people. It’s not a stereotype, it’s the truth because they want to have a social life and they can’t find a balance. Even now, my son is like old enough to stay at home by himself, but my mom is over protective so she’s gonna look out for him wherever I go. Like when I travel, she’s gonna be the one to watch him. It’s hard if you don’t have that support system in place. I can’t speak for everyone else, but you definitely want to have someone you can trust. Not even just African American [mothers]. The statistics say one out of four people are molested, or sexually assaulted in some way. So you just have to be careful with whom you’re leaving your kids.
Nic further asserts: What I have found with dating is that guys typically don’t understand when I say well you can’t come to my house. They joke about it and try to say that my son has control over my household. No. My son just does not need to see his mother dating all these different men. If you’re here for the long haul and it becomes something serious, then hey, you can come over to the house and meet my family. But if you’re just causally dating, like everybody is entitled to try to get to know someone, there are certain things that I won’t allow. It took a while for me to get there. As a single parent, I was open to more things [when I was younger]. But as I got older, which I think came with age, [I became wiser].

Reese reported an intentional lack of intersection between her personal relationships and her relationship with her child. Although her significant other comes to her home, she reported her son’s thoughts of him as “mom’s co-worker because he [her son] doesn’t see when he spends the night, he doesn’t see any of that.” Reese makes an effort to separate her personal relationships out of respect for her son.

**Support System**

An important factor in understanding how the participants cope with several roles is to understand their support system. Not every participant felt that they had a support system because they felt that their children were their responsibilities (i.e., “momma baby, daddy’s maybe”). For those participants who did report a support system, some systems were compiled of family, friends and community resources. Others reported feeling that expected supports (i.e., family and friends) in their lives were actually more toxic than outside forces. Ray explains how not only her family, but also her spiritual community affected her as a
single parent:

‘I am a very religious woman; I was raised in the church.’ As she expressed her dependence on the ‘church’ as a support system, she further explains the impact that her pregnancy had on her spiritual life.

I was 19 when I became pregnant. I was active in school, in college. I fell in love and that whole story. It didn’t work out and I ended up pregnant. In the church (laughter), you can’t make any mistakes because you are looked upon to be an example for your peers, the younger ones and to the outside world. My parents were both head ministers of the church so it wore on me very heavy. I got called whore, I got ostracized, I was teased, I was cast to the side. Even though my household family was very hands on with me and very supportive to the outside world, I had to deal with a lot of that behind closed doors as well. When you’re 19 years old and you drop out of college and [you are] a stranger to work and you’re pretty much by yourself, you are dependent upon the people that you stay with, so even though I was getting help, I didn’t drive and didn’t have a license, that’s another story. I didn’t have a license so I was dependent upon other people to help me, so I really couldn’t express how I felt because the same people that were helping me were basically the same people saying the things that other people were saying about me but to my face everyday. Imagine, I’m 7 months pregnant, can’t keep anything down and I’m crying because I’m going through the motions. The father wants to work things out, but I know that he’s sleeping around with other women and I’m trying to make the best decision for myself and the future for my child. Because I choose not to be with him, he wants to
make my life a living hell, so there’s no one to depend on. Anyone that I spoke to and confided in ran back to my mother or my younger sister, who loathed me and was enjoying all of this. I had to suck it up and cry behind closed doors and “never let them see you sweat.” That was my life motto. It taught me that it is me against the world. But I didn’t allow it to make me bitter.

One common occurrence echoed throughout the lived experiences of the SAAM was the ability to develop “tough skin” to survive. Several participants utilized the term to describe a mental and sometimes physical toughness that had to be developed in response to hardships in life. Appreciation for family and friends was expressed, however the participants cite themselves as ultimately responsible for their experiences as a single parent. Charlie reported the emotional impact of her lived experiences:

It’s hard, especially when situations come up. If the car breaks down, you know you have to get your car fixed, but you still have to maintain a home, feed, clothe, whatever, wipe tears. You still have to have ‘tough skin,’ so it does get very hard. Many times you don’t get to eat, but it’s just those kinds of situations. It’s lonely sometimes, if you don’t have a support group, I do. But a lot of times, if you don’t, sometimes it does get hard if you don’t have anybody to talk to. Lonely and very confusing, so I tend to resort to spirituality, family, friends and such.

Further, Charlie reported feeling a great sense of self-efficacy that has assisted her through her difficult lived experiences. She discussed making a decision to move forward in a positive direction rather than to regress and harbor anger. Therefore, Charlie eliminated her
debt and became a homeowner while earning a Masters degree. She reports accomplishing these things as a means of getting past her negative feelings to support her son.

Stereotypic Images

One of the leading questions of this study involved the examination of stereotypes of SAAM. In a short time, the interviewer learned of the various “labels” within the African American community directly related to SAAM. Each participant eagerly expressed perspectives on the accurate or inaccurate nature of those images. Prominent negative historical stereotypes of African American women include being loud and aggressive, often being viewed as child bearers and care takers, and being sexually aggressive. Generally, two types of SAAM were described: those who closely perpetuate societal stereotypes and those who do not. The following themes: economics and “the cycle,” distinctions between stress and strength, and sexuality were revealed.

Economics and “The Cycle”

One common stereotype reported by the participants, was the welfare dependent, broke, destitute single mother with several children. While several mothers admit that they know of women who resemble the negative images in society, the common theme was that the participants were hard working, educated women who did not want a “hand out, but a hand up.” This “hand up” symbolized knowledge and some level of economic assistance to work their way into the middle class. Several mothers echoed the feeling of being “too rich to be poor, too poor to be rich.” Additionally, while nearly half of the participants came from two parent homes, those who were raised in single parent homes unanimously reported a
repeated cycle of single parenthood in their families. Some termed it a “generational curse.” Low self-efficacy was reported in those that felt that they failed to break the “cycle” or “curse.” There was an asserted sense of confidence for being able to economically support their child/children, due to several of the participants experiencing economic hardships while growing up. B summed up the generational events in her life as follows:

I want the generational curse to be broken. My mother was married and divorced so she raised three children on her own. Here I am married, divorced and raising three children by myself. It’s a generational curse that needs to be broken. In my family, out of all of my aunts, nobody is married with a husband, but you have children that you are raising. She further states: You see momma did it, it was ok. I saw momma on welfare and she made it. That was good enough for her so that will be good enough for me.

She further states:

It was so funny, yet strange, that she [her mother] did all of this to prevent me from getting pregnant and I ended up getting pregnant the same age that she was when she got pregnant. It was really like a curse

Raised in a two-parent home and married when her children were conceived, Mrs. Prez never imagined that she would have to figure out how to care for three children on her own. She reported being “$30 over the annual financial requirement to receive any assistance” as a single mother raising three children on one income. The welfare system requires an individual to earn a certain amount of money to receive assistance, however, if they exceed that amount, all assistance is lost. This is difficult for the mother who is not
comfortable with and “way too proud” to live off of government assistance, however, cannot risk the possibility of not being able to feed her children. This was especially true to for participants in this study because they are all educated and while some may have received assistance at some point, they are all currently financially self-sufficient. Mrs. Prez reports innovative techniques for “getting by” without the help of government assistance. While she technically experienced some level of economic struggle, she asserted her belief in the “mind’s ability to protect itself.” She further explained that this meant that the mind has a way of prioritizing thoughts and events to preserve sanity. Mrs. Prez was motivated by her children and knowing that not only was she head of household, but she was also her children’s only source of being provided for.

June is college educated and currently unemployed, she reported feeling misunderstood when she had to stand in a line for government assistance. She is college educated and should be able to provide. However, she said the following about economic hardships:

Most women are on welfare because, me included. I got knocked off my pedestal when my daughter was about a year old. I didn’t realize that daycare was like $700 per month! So when I started finding that out, you have your bills under control, then, when you have to start paying for daycare, you’re like $700? That’s rent! So, do you have a cot in the back? Cause that’s the only way I’m going to be able to afford it! So I did have to apply for assistance for things like that and I didn’t qualify. I was ‘too rich to be poor, too poor to be rich.’ I was literally eating one meal a day to make ends meet. I couldn’t afford to get a second job because I couldn’t afford to pay daycare
longer. I couldn’t find anybody to watch [her child] on a consistent basis to get a night job. Because my family is down here, they have families of their own. Two, three, four kids. My sister who is a college student has schoolwork and everything she needed to do, so I was literally working to pay for daycare. I didn’t reap the benefit of my check at all. So a lot of people don’t understand the cycle because it crossed my mind more than a couple of times “I might as well quit my job and get on welfare, at least I can be at home with my baby.” Crossed my mind many of times. Then I thought about my ultimate goals. I can’t get a house being on welfare. I can’t put [her child] in programs being on welfare. It’s not going to suffice for me. But I also have education, I also travel and I also know what else is out there.

She further reports:

Children come into the mix, I couldn’t afford a child and I was making $15 an hour. Imagine somebody who is making $10 and hour. Not no ghetto hood rat person. Just a regular typical person working their 9-5 and going home, whatever it may be. Working, making $10 an hour working full time, you don’t qualify for anything. Food stamps not even a daycare voucher. In order to qualify for a daycare voucher, you have to be making minimum wage. The ends does not justify the means. Just give me $200-$300 per month so that I can afford this daycare. These are not lazy people looking for handouts. These are people that are looking for a little bit of help.

Generally, June, along with other participants reported that the need was far greater than the resource. While they may have been living below the poverty line, they were unable to receive government assistance due to exceeding the government’s financial requirement.
Nevertheless, participants earned their way into economic independence for the wellbeing of her children.

**Distinctions Between Stress and Strength**

Often the term “stress” is used to describe the condition of being a single mother. The participants report that resilience makes a difference in influencing individual perception. The mothers in the study had all overcome some amount of adversity. While some events could be described as stressful, most women discussed the amount of strength and “tough skin” that was developed despite their circumstance. “Ray” expressed the following sentiments regarding her experiences:

When becoming a {SAAM} you really learn to be tough skinned, but you have to find your own pride, you have to find your own self worth if you don’t have it by then. It forces you to kind of grow up faster and see the world for what it really is and not get bitter, but just acknowledge the world for what it really is. I wasn’t allowed to get bitter because I had be that woman, that mother for my son. So his needs were above mine. I couldn’t mope and get into a depressed state. It was more like “that didn’t work, so now what works.” This person doesn’t respect me [her child’s father], so let’s avoid them and teach my son along the way. This is not the way you react to people who make a so-called mistake. This is not how you handle the situation and you don’t judge them for making that decision, you pray for them. So it really taught me a lot.

Ray expressed her experiences as a lesson learned rather than to view her experiences as stressful and unmanageable. Further, her desire to set a good example for her son was prioritized over her own emotions.
Reese reported her disassociation from the term “single moms.” She admits to developing her own stereotype for single moms. She felt that single moms are categorized by: “The ones that don’t know where their baby daddies are. The fathers are nowhere involved, they don’t have a support system, [some are] struggling. Some of them are receiving child support, some of them aren’t.” Reese expressed her sentiments sincerely and honestly. This was further affirmed by her body language. Reese did not smile or joke as if she were making fun or downgrading the women she referenced. She described the other category of single mothers being those who have solid support systems and are financially stable. When probed with a question that inquired about her feelings toward being grouped with this stereotype, Reese explained that she never considered being linked with the stereotype because she does not relate. She reports that she and her ex-husband are working very hard as a team not to perpetuate negative stereotypes of divorced families.

Dree experienced some financial strain as a business owner. She reported feeling frustrated by the stereotypes of single mothers “clubbing” and “doing them” (i.e., being more concerned with their social lives and interests than their children). She sponsors school drives for children and realizes that there are some single mothers who send their children to school “unprepared” because they do not identify with their responsibilities as a parent. Dree identified some stereotypes of SAAM as loud and argumentative. She admittingly relates to these stereotypes at times through her expression of frustration stemming from her responsibilities as a single parent. However, Dree reports using those situations (i.e., when she lost her temper and became loud and argumentative) as “learned lessons” to make her stronger and encourage her to react differently in the future.
Sexuality

Directly aligned with historical stereotypes, several participants expressed the societal depictions of sexual impurity and aggressiveness as stereotypes that represent SAAM. Ray reported the following:

If you’re an African American single mother, you’re a whore. It you’re a White single mom, you’re divorced, or widowed. That’s the jest of it.

She further states,

It’s amazing, because even on television, when you see a White woman who is a single mom it’s because her husband died in this horrible way. When you turn to BET and see a movie [the Black women have the attitude] “Uh, uh, I don’t need you!” Got the long florescent nails and the blond weave with the dark complexion. The media, oh my gosh, just floods people’s minds with what a single mother is.

Mrs. Prez, who never re-married reported her faith in God and “laser focus” to have assisted her with sexual desires. She identified herself as an extremely spiritual woman who would have viewed sex as an unmarried individual as immoral. Further, she explained that her complete commitment to the well being of her children kept her occupied.

Another aspect of sexuality related to the participant’s children was reported amongst several SAAM. B reported being asked by a church member how she was “able to raise her son and he not be gay?” She further explained a stereotype of SAAM raising African American boys to be gay. I probed her comments for further explanation. She explained that because a SAAM is unmarried, society assumes that there are no men around. From B’s responses, I determined that B utilized the term “gay” to describe males who displayed
feminine characteristics and whose sexual orientation was gay. It was further understood that homosexuality was not acceptable in B’s community. Raising a son who was gay would signify that he was a product of his environment and that she was responsible for his sexuality.

Some SAAM did not want to associate themselves with the term “single mothers” because of the societal stigma associated with the term. One mother admits to stereotyping single mothers as unmarried women who were never in a monogamous relationship and have financial struggles. When asked about her experiences as a SAAM, Reese would often redirect the interviewer by insisting that she be identified as a mother who is no longer married. She felt that she was exempt from being labeled as a single parent because of her educational level and socioeconomic status. She later mentioned that she realized that during the interview she had been using her disassociation with single mothers as a protective factor to prevent the embarrassment she felt from “failing” at her marriage. Association with the term “single mother” also signified weakness and struggle for her.

While all of the mothers could identify with challenges in their daily lives, a common reoccurring theme was the strength that was required as a single parent along with resilience and “tough skin” that must be developed and maintained to make it. It was often cited that strength was not only needed to sustain the duties financially and physically as the head of household, but mental and physical toughness was also imperative to provide emotional support to their children. “Children are always present and watching closely,” many of the mothers would say. The mothers reported that the children often sense bitterness and develop anger and other emotional issues that the mothers worked hard to prevent.
Racial and Feminist Identity Development

Also central to the purpose of this study were the research questions related to racial and feminist identity development. Although I developed inquiries about racial identity and feminist identity independently, the participants often reflected upon their experiences using intersecting factors of race and gender. After the examination of the lived experiences as well as the stereotypic images of SAAM, a thorough examination related to the meanings of the participant’s race and gender produced the following themes: automatic identity, equality, feminist identity, racial identity, and self-efficacy.

Automatic Identity

Participants were asked to reflect on their personal definitions of identity, race and gender. Due to the importance of the participant creating the phenomenon, I was open to the participant’s raw view and expressions. Automatic identity was termed to describe automatic or instinctual characteristics as a single mother. The reported characteristics directly impacted their identities per the participant’s report. Nic described an automatic change in her identity that was characterized by her drive and focus when she became a single parent. She describes the changes that were instinctual when she became a mother:

So before, I was a self-motivator, which I still am, even before being a single parent. It was just that extra drive. It’s certain things that you couldn’t do, or for me I felt like I couldn’t do. I felt like I needed to have some stability for my son. So for me, I probably felt like that’s the biggest thing that has changed. Just that caring for another person.
Charlie explained her identity changing as a parent immediately personally and professionally. As an educator, she explained being more protective of Black children within the school system. Since becoming a mother, she felt that “White teachers don’t necessarily understand what Black kids are going through.” She asserts her position further by explaining that most of the children in her school are products of a single parent home. She could relate to the difficulties of single parenthood. She reports realizing that many of the children who were products of a single parent home may not get the attention needed at home because of the many roles a single mother assumes. Therefore, she makes an additional effort to listen to and understand these students; something she feels that non-Black teachers will not do.

Mrs. Prez reported not having an identity aside from her children for most of their lives. She neglected her sexual desires, goals to obtain higher education and her own financial needs to provide for her children. When she realized that her ex-husband would not be an equal partner, she knew that several decisions had to be made. The change came “automatic” per her report. She explained being a working mother and dedicated her entire life to her children because she was determined “not to let them be out on the streets.” Dree described her identity as “stable and consistent.” She reported her priorities shifting automatically when she became a parent because “I have to live for my child.”

Throughout the findings, the participant’s responses to this theme were parallel. The participants explained instinctual aspects of their personalities that shifted when they gave birth. Often, mothers reported their answers about identity in future tense. The participants felt that they could work on their own definitions of self once their children had been raised.
Equality

When probed with questions about who the privileged people were in society, participants answered rich, White American males, while others also felt that foreign people (i.e., non-American people who immigrate to America) and married people were amongst the privileged. June expressed that when it comes to showing emotions like sensitivity, it is best not to show emotions especially as a mother. The researcher clarified meaning with her to gain a better understanding for her feelings. June clarified by reporting the following:

I don’t have no pictures of my family at the office, anything like that. It’s just as plain as it wanna be! You’re not even gonna know my hobbies. I want to be judged specifically on my work alone, not what you think of me.

June felt that it was necessary to create a distinct separation between work and her personal life. She reported having several “strikes” against her in the workplace as an African American and as a woman. If she revealed being a single mother, she did not feel that she would be treated fairly. June reported feeling that employers viewed single mothers as a risk. Single mothers, in her view, were more likely to be absent from work for a “sick child” since single mother were viewed as having no support system.

Reese expressed inequalities stemming from being a single parent. She expressed a societal image that identifies welfare recipients as single mothers with multiple children, thus the reason she has a difficult time relating to the term “single parent.” Reese felt privileged due to her educational attainment and financial earnings. She also reported her professional environment being heavily populated by African American women in “powerful positions” who encourage her to maintain high personal and professional standards.
Ray, however, reported a painful story regarding the inequality she feels in the workplace. She reported being fired after winning a contest in which she was competing against a White woman. This job was her only source of income and she felt that she got fired for doing a good job. As an African American woman, she reported feeling that others are threatened of her achievements when she excels in the workplace.

**Feminist Identity**

An inquiry regarding the participants personal definitions and understanding of feminist identity were posed. Several of the responses were intersected with other factors that influenced the participant’s feminist identity. June’s responded to the interview question that probed about her feminist identity by explaining intersections of her gender roles as a single parent:

At the end of the day, it is the woman’s responsibility to make sure that the children are taken care of. Even in a married situation. When the child is sick, who is calling out of work? Not the father. I don’t even care if the mother makes more money. Not the father! He’s going to work. You’re gonna stay here and take care of this sick child. I’m not doing it!

Reese reported her feminist identity as an intersection of her gender roles and her professional accomplishments. She reported, “doing what she has to do” as a single mom. She has received awards from her dedication at her son’s school while juggling her profession, role as head of household and as a mother. She clarified her feminist identity being heavily influenced by her being a “mom, not just a single mom” because of the
responsibilities she had as a formally married women. She determined that the gender roles were still heavily inclusive. The only difference to her was that she is divorced. Reese further explains that she disassociates herself for the term “single mother” because of her own biases. She feels like she is “better than that” when she “puts herself up against those stereotypes and biases.”

Additional questions related to feminist identity probed about empowerment and disempowerment. When asked about the last time she felt disempowered, several participants reported feelings of disempowerment when they reached out to their child’s father for assistance or had to fight for court ordered assistance. B reported feeling degraded when she was forced to sit quietly in court as her children’s father lied about his income to protect him from child support payments. She felt that it was “unfair” and “degrading” that someone would get the opportunity to lie about an issue right in front of you. Charlie echoed this sentiment when she discussed a court battle between she and her child’s father. She felt that he only wanted to be involved in his life for “selfish reasons.” It made her feel disempowered to know that he had any rights at all as an inactive participant in her child’s life. Dree reported feeling empowered when she became a business owner. As previously mentioned, Charlie eliminated her debt and was able to purchase a home independently, causing her to feel empowered.

**Racial Identity**

A series of questions about racial identity development were asked. The participants expressed an understanding for what racial identity meant to them. Further, I requested that
the participants expound upon racial experiences as a single mother. June reports some experiences being exclusive to motherhood and having little to do with her race:

They [White women] go through the same things that we go through. When I go to the WIC office, I don’t see only Black people there. When I go to Durham child alliance, it’s not only Black people there. When I go down to social services, I don’t only see Black people there. It’s not about your age. It’s not about being a single mother. It’s not about being an African American single mother. It’s about being a parent period.

Unanimously, participants reported positive feelings for their race. The participants did not expound upon race alone, rather they began discussing the intersection of race and other factors such as gender and being a single parent. Charlie asserts: “I’m very proud. I don’t have any regrets or hold any doubts about where I am when it comes to representing my group when it comes to being a Black woman and a Black single mother of a male.”

Self-Efficacy

With race and gender being examined, self-efficacy frequently surfaced. In this study, self-efficacy described the participant’s belief in their ability to care for her child financially, physically and emotionally. The participants often wanted to clarify their feelings about their ability to care for their children independently as head of household. June reported the following:

It does make me feel good to be able to provide for my daughter. I saw what my mom went through. I did not want to be a single mother. I DID NOT want to be a single mother. Take off my foot, take off my hand, don’t make me a single mother. My mother worked around the clock. I was a latch key kid and when I did get a chance to
talk to her, she was so aggravated. She didn’t want to be bothered. Please God no! Don’t make me a single mother and that’s exactly what happened. So for me to know that I was able to do it, because I didn’t think I was going to be able to do it, to be honest. I didn’t want to do it and I didn’t think I could do it. So not only I overcame so many things as far as my own stereotypes. As far as being too soft, being too strong, find my way in the dating scene, career wise. What can I do to balance work and home? What can I do to earn enough so that I will only have to work one job? What exactly can I do? What part time thing can I do that’s gonna give me some extra money because I want to be able to take my daughter to Chuck E Cheese. What can I do to make that happen? By me finding these solutions and also free things was very empowering. The fact that I am a single mom and it doesn’t make me feel bad.

Dree reported the negative impact financial instability has had on her confidence. Grateful for her gift as a beautician, she often barters with the landlord by trading services so that she is not charged a late fee. She explained:

His [her child’s] father has been court mandated to pay child support. When he doesn’t pay, I don’t have the choice not to pay the rent! On top of that, if I can’t afford the rent, what makes you think I can afford the late payment? There is no point in getting behind. I am blessed to have the landlord as one of my client’s. She’s like ‘[Dree], as long as you pay by the end of the month, we’re ok.’ I feel good about that and try not to let it get me down. I have to provide food and shelter for my son. If I don’t his Dad sure won’t.
Generally, the SAAMs in this study reported feeling good when they are able to make “ends meet.” However, a noticeable trend was the resilience the mother’s reported as well as how imperative it is to remain positive, thus the aforementioned phrase “tough skin.”

**Summary**

Chapter four presented detailed findings from data collected from 10 open-ended interviews with single African American mothers. The mothers in this study expressed that while raising her child without a partner was not the plan, overcoming obstacles was something that they made them proud. While there were several challenges expressed, one thing was clear- these women expressed resilience and strength that made parenthood an achievable task. Data were analyzed into categories, codes and themes and descriptively outlined in this chapter.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of stereotypic images on racial and feminist identity development in single African American mothers (SAAM). The study was also intended to examine the lived experiences of the participants through a phenomenological descriptive qualitative research approach. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of single African American mothers?

RQ2: What is the role of stereotypic images in the racial identity development of single African American mothers?

RQ3: What is the role of stereotypic images in the feminist identity development of single African American mothers?

Ten single African American mothers voluntarily participated in sharing their lived experiences. The participants completed a demographic survey and an open-ended interview about their experiences, identity and stereotypes that depict their population. The interviews took place in North Carolina in confidential locations to protect the anonymity of the participants.

A thorough analysis of the data revealed that there are several interrelated factors that impact racial and feminist identity development in this sample of single African American mothers. The single African American mothers (SAAMs) were aware of stereotypes that negatively and inaccurately depict their population and these stereotypes do have an impact
on them in some way. The findings showed, however that generally the mothers used the negative images as a way to build strength.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

The research goals were to understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of single African American mothers. After a detailed analysis, which included conducting the study, coding, developing themes and providing a written analysis, the goals of the research had been fulfilled. After the data analysis, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Participant’s view of negative and positive experiences varied with perspectives.
   
   Generally, the participants created protective factors to maintain a positive outlook on life. Additionally, some experiences were shared across race and not specific to the racial identity of the participants.

2. Positive relationships maintained with family, friends, community support systems and/or a shared partnership with the child’s father provided a higher level of support for single mothers and lessened the negative financial and emotional impacts of single parenthood.

3. Depictions of SAAMs are generalized by inaccurate assumptions created from societal images and stereotypes. Some images depict SAAM as struggling and stressed when they feel empowered and accomplished as single mothers.

4. Single parenthood is one of several intersectional factors that impact racial and feminist identity development in SAAMs.
Lived Experiences

1. Conclusion One. Participant’s view of negative and positive experiences varied with perspectives. Generally, the participants created protective factors to maintain a positive outlook on life. Additionally, some experiences were shared across race and not specific to the racial identity of the participants.

The data collected surrounded an inquiry about the lived experiences of single African American mothers. The findings provided evidence of shared experiences for mothers, both African American and different races. Single parenthood encompasses a multitude of responsibilities regardless of race or gender. As several participants reported, financial stability is imperative in taking care of a family without a partner, thus the need for some participants to pursue financial assistance. Some mothers considered financial hardships as a negative experience, especially if the participants ever needed government assistance. Additionally, the images surrounding SAAM and the welfare system made it more difficult to reach out for help. While Reese reported stereotypes about welfare recipients being primarily Black single mothers “with multiple children,” June counters this assumption with her first hand account. Although Reese was reporting a known societal stereotype, June reported seeing individuals of different races in the welfare office needing the assistance just like her. June also reported feeling better about seeking government help for this reason. Initially, she experienced negative feelings about soliciting government assistance. June reported these feelings being due to the stereotypes of single mothers as the “face of welfare.” However, she and other participants report knowing “White people who are suffering more than me.” June rationalized her negative feelings as she learned of single
mothers, who were not African American and needed assistance just as she did. The data collected also provided evidence of increased emotional and financial hardships for those who experienced relational issues with their child/children’s father. Reese, for example, reported working with her child’s father as “a team” to decrease the negative impact of their divorce. She also reported putting herself “up against those stereotypes and biases” as a constant comparison and reminder not to relate to them in anyway. While African American mothers are often the nucleus of the Black family (Bell, 2004), the strain of multiple roles can be difficult, especially for a single mother. Chi reported the responsibility of caring for her child his entire life without the help of his father. While she does feel that she has gained strength from her negative experiences, she did report financial stress related to putting her son through college. Moreover, her duties are time consuming and they affect her romantic relationships. This increase stress has proven to impact her personal relationships (Stephens & Few, 2007).

Since this was a phenomenological study, I allowed the participants to shape the phenomenon. The determinant factors for whether a participant felt that their experiences were positive or negative varied for the participants. For instance, Nic revealed a traumatic experience surrounding the death of her child’s father while she was in college. He was supportive of her and they were working together to raise her son. While this was a devastating experience, she did not consider this to be a negative life experience. She gained a level of self-efficacy from her demonstrated strength and resilience. Nic completed college that same year and she is proud of successfully raising her teenage son thus far. Charlie shared a similar distinction in expressing positive and negative lived experiences in her life.
She is a single mother whose personal relationship did not work out with her child’s father. She is also currently raising her child without the assistance of his father. However, with the support of her family, she was able to earn a Master’s degree as well as to become a homeowner independently. She reported feeling proud that she was able to overcome racial and gender biases as well as stereotypes surrounding her being a single parent.

Moreover, I found that the data provided evidence of protective factors that impacted the outlook of the participants. Many of the mothers did not see the significance in dwelling on negative experiences. Mrs. Prez discussed an instinctual way the mind “protects” itself. She did this through a “laser focus” in which she focused on her children and their well being completely. Generally, all of the participants were protective of their personal definitions of self. The mothers reported feeling that societal images had been created and there was little they could do to change other people’s minds. However, some participants used education and earnings to create more status and further distance themselves from stereotypic images. This was another method for coping with negative images and situations. The findings further supported the work done by Rowley, Sellers, Chavous and Smith (1998), which provided evidence of higher self-esteem among Black people with positive racial attitudes and identities. While there was an awareness of the ways in which SAAM were depicted in society and the media, each participant did their best to distance themselves from stereotypes that inferred weakness or struggle as a result of their marital status, race or gender. This created another protective factor against a direct attack on the identity of a single mother.

**Conclusion Two.** *Positive relationships maintained with family, friends, community support systems and/or a shared partnership with the child’s father provided a higher level*
of support for single mothers and lessened the negative financial and emotional impacts of single parenthood.

In exploring the experiences of SAAM, several reported on the role of the participant’s support systems. I attempted to understand the participant’s support systems and ways of coping with the pressure of being the primary care giver and head of household. While in the past some researchers have found that African Americans are more likely to be closely linked and associated with extended family or “kin” (Hayes & Mendel, 1973), the participants reported some family relationships to be toxic and of little help to their situations. It seemed that those who had family members who were willing to assist in a more positive manner felt much more emotional support. Many expressed experiences that would have been much more emotionally taxing without their support system.

McAdoo (2007) explained a link between access to childcare and financial stability. The study reported that over 73% of children over 5 years old being were in some type of childcare. Over 50% of Black children are in the care of a family member. These children primarily live in homes with low incomes. Neese and Nic further supported these findings with their reports of at least one parent living in their home caring for their children on a full time basis. Both women admit that single parenthood would be significantly more challenging without the kinship assistance. Further, per June’s report, the financial burden of her child’s daycare was the primary cause of the financial difficulties in her life.

Financial stability can be difficult for a single parent hoping to achieve stability regardless of race. According to the US Census Bureau (2000), 35% of single parent homes are financially below poverty. Poverty rates are over 63% in Black communities. Without
additional support it is even more difficult for SAAM to realize financial stability. As Dree reported, she was a product of a two-parent home. Both parents remained supportive throughout her pregnancy and beyond. When her father died, he left her with a level of financial security that assisted her in realizing her dream of opening her own business. She reported feeling that the positive support that she received from her family has assisted her in coping with the emotional, physical and financial difficulties she has faced as a single mother. Further, Reese reported a significant amount of support from her child’s father as well as her extended family. Reese, a college professor, reported not feeling like a single parent due to the level of support that she receives. Participants such as Ray, however, reported external support from friends and the community that were more emotionally helpful than her family. She shared stories of emotional abuse from her family members due to being marginalized by her spiritual community. Additionally, participants like B and Mrs. Prez reported having less support with multiple children. They felt that appealing for support was an emotional and financial burden for their families; therefore, they often resisted requesting support for this reason. Overall, the single parents in the study who reported a strong positive support system from kin or next of kin were better equipped financially and were also in a better emotional position.

**Stereotypes**

**Conclusion Three.** Depictions of SAAM are generalized by inaccurate assumptions created from societal images and stereotypes. Some images depict SAAMs as struggling and stressed when they feel empowered and accomplished as single mothers
African American people are often depicted as a monolithic culture and not respected for their ethnic variances (Phelps, Taylor & Gerald, 2001). Such depictions contribute to stereotypes that group all single African American mothers into a singular identity. The data from this study provide evidence that not all households headed by SAAM are the same. This is evidenced in the lived experiences of the participants. The participants ranged in age, educational attainment, socio economic status and number of children, with distinctive, as well as similar experiences related to single parenthood and coping mechanisms. Some experiences were generalized, having more to do with just being a parent and not specifically a single African American mother. As Reese explained, she felt that many of her difficult experiences were not due to her being a “single mom.” Reese explained difficult situations being attributed to just being a “mom.” Further, she reported the importance of highlighting the lesson in difficult lived experiences.

Much like Maslow’s (1943) model for a hierarchy of need, the participants in this study reported various levels of motivation to meet the demands in their lives. One reoccurring account has been the frustration the SAAMs in this study have felt with their children’s fathers for not financially contributing. Dree reports lashing out on her child’s father by yelling loudly and becoming argumentative. The participants expressed their basic need to be heard, which is humanistic in nature. Dree asserted her need to be heard, however feels that she is viewed differently (i.e., as loud, angry and uncooperative) when she expresses her frustration. The participants in the study desired to escape the view the inaccurate stereotypes of their group. Kretsedemas (2010) conducted research that provided evidence for negative stereotypic depictions of African American women on television. As
stated in Chapter 2, historical images such as Jezebel, Sapphire and Mammy are personified through the media and television (West1995). Moreover, the popularity of African American women on “reality television” has made perpetuating stereotypes of African American women much more popular in mainstream culture, per participant reports. African American women are personified with strong personalities that are intimidating and unwarranted. This image carries over into the job market, making it difficult for SAAM to be viewed fairly within. Mrs. Prez reported feeling underestimated in the job market. She felt that she was generalized amongst mothers who are unable to earn an education while being a single parent. Although she worked in a field that required higher education, she felt that her strengths were assumed to be less than her White colleagues. June reported her strategies for overcoming stereotypes that impact her within the workplace. She expressed how she is unable to discuss personal aspects of her life such as hobbies or other interest due to the judgment she already receives from being a single parent, an African American and a woman.

The mothers in the study also reported feeling stigmatized by societal standards of family and gender roles. Some participants were concerned about raising African American males who fall prey to gang activity and incarceration. Heiss (1972) found that instabilities within the Black family unit did not mean that there would be issues with future generations. This was especially true for Neese, who discussed her fear of raising an African American male at length during the interview. Neese was one of nine participants in the study who were raising African American males. Other stereotypes reported were that African American males who are raised by SAAM are gay, will have low academic performance and
are irresponsible. Chi reported emotionally taxing experiences as she raised her son in a society that depicts these stereotypes. She, along with other participants felt they had to push their son’s to succeed much harder than other races. Further, Pipes-McAdoo (2007) asserted that single parenthood is not the cause of instability in single parent homes. The stereotypes of single parents producing children who are criminals as a result of being raised in a single parent home are inaccurate.

**Racial and Feminist Identity**

**Conclusion Four.** *Single parenthood is one of several intersectional factors that impact racial and feminist identity development in SAAMs*

As Patricia Hill-Collins asserts in Black Feminist Thought (1991), intersections of race, socio-political issues and gender affect identity development in African American women. Additionally, in the review of literature, I relied heavily on the work of Thomas, Witherspoon and Speight (2004) on the “multi dimensional” factors that impact individuals and the racial groups to which they belong. The data supports theoretical underpinnings of racial and feminist identity development as an intersectional process, rather than an independent one, especially in SAAM. While the semi-structured interview probed about racial and feminist identity separately, the findings demonstrated the difficulty in identifying singular aspects of the participant’s identity when it is, in fact several factors that encompass their view of their identity. The participants reported feeling that the responsibilities of parenthood had more of an impact on the way they viewed and developed their identities than race and/or gender alone. As many participants stated, there were several factors related to gender duties and being head of household that warranted attention. Because race has
always been a part of their lives, little attention had been given to the racial and/or gender inequalities until it interfered with their ability to care for their children.

The impact of stereotypic images was especially difficult on the racial and feminist identity development of the participants. The participants attributed many of the stereotypes to historical images that were brought on by years of racial injustice. Ray explained her feelings of anger toward images that depict unmarried mothers as “loose whores who are good for nothing but laying on their backs and reproducing.” The mothers reported feeling the need to appear “harder” and less feminine to be taken more seriously as a mother and a professional. Feeling the need to combat these stereotypes impacted their identity as a gendered being because they were intentional about developing “tough skin” and appearing not to be sensitive for fear of someone taking advantage of them. Arguably, the need for an African American woman to appear to have everything under control has been theorized by several Black feminists in the past (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1993) as what has been termed the “Superwoman” concept. This concept describes an external character that an African American feels that she needs to display to appear strong and capable in an effort to increase status and combat negative stereotypes.

Cross’ (1991, 1995) theory of racial identity provides stages of development in which African American people reach a point in their lives when race becomes meaningful and significant. While none of the participants may have reached self-actualization (Cross, 1971, 1991), all of the SAAMs positively identified with their racial group. The participants made a direct connection between stereotypes and racial identity. The data demonstrated the participant’s needed to distance themselves from stereotypic images as much as possible to
feel good about themselves as racial beings. The mothers in the study expressed disdain for being connected to negative stereotypes. The participants felt good about being a member of their race because the stereotypic images were inaccurate for them.

Originally, questions were created around an inquiry of the role of stereotypic images in racial and feminist identity of SAAMs. As Chi asserts, she, like the other participants had little time to think about the racial and gender injustices that are ever present in society. She had epiphanies and enjoyed being interviewed because she reported being asked to think about things that she had never thought about before. It was clear that none of the participants felt that they were among the privileged in society. Charlie felt that married people were among the privileged because they conform to an accepted societal image of family. Ray felt that “foreigners” (i.e. non-Americans) were among the privileged because they are given better economic opportunities and have better chances receiving loans. The rest of the participants agreed that White American males were the most privileged in society. While the mothers in the study were aware of the ways their racial and gendered experiences have shaped their identities they also agreed that much of their definitions of “self” derive from an automatic, instinctual identity that happens when becoming a mother.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

As a phenomenological, qualitative, descriptive study, which explored the raw lived experiences of the participants, there were several strengths of the study. As a product of a single parent home, I could relate to the participants, which was a strength of the study. Although I intentionally eliminated my perspective to protect the authenticity of the data, my lived experiences assisted greatly in probing the participants. Based on my own experiences,
I could navigate through some hesitant responses and I knew what probing questions to ask to assist the participant with responding to the inquiry. While this is my first independent qualitative research study, the inquiries came natural and comfortably.

My ability to convey unconditional positive regard was also a strength of the study. My warm counseling nature contributed to creating a safe environment for the participants to disclose their personal experiences. I was mindful of my body language and facial expression. I am confident that my kind nature encouraged the participants to be forthcoming therefore, increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

There was no stipulation for participant age, income, education level or number of children. This was a strength because it provided a broader range of lived experiences that may be applicable to a larger portion of the population. While it would be beneficial to conduct additional research including within group comparisons, the findings from this study provide a diverse range of outcomes and will contribute to a small body of research on single African American women.

Naturally, there were some limitations of the study. The first limitation is the possibility that the participants felt uncomfortable with disclosing more raw, personal experiences due to the limited rapport with the me. I did not build a relationship with the participant’s prior to the interviews. While I have full confidence that the participants were forthcoming, it is possible that they were reserved due to our limited relationship.

Another limitation could be that the views of the participants were not completely authentic due to wanting to protect their identities as single African American mothers. Each
participant expressed having an understanding for societal stereotypes that are negatively depicted in society. Several participants expressed empowerment from getting the opportunity to contribute a “voice” to the literature about SAAM.

One participant expressed feelings of married individuals being amongst the “privileged” people in society. I was open about being married when asked and wore a wedding ring. My marital status may have affected the participant’s feelings toward me and caused them to react differently.

Another limitation for the study was my knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. I am not only a passionate investigator, but also have several years of experience working with this population. My desire and commitment to help African American mothers may have had an effect on the analytic outcomes and conclusions. Although I bracketed and maintained a journal throughout the process, previous knowledge of related theoretical concepts cannot be ignored.

The final limitation to the study was that there was no way to confirm the level of truthfulness within the participant accounts. In fairness, lived experiences were based upon participant perspectives, which included feelings about the level of paternal involvement as well as the way others treated them. I was only interested in the participant’s perspective of their lived experience; therefore none of their accounts were verified.

**Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators**

Counselor education programs and counselors in practice would benefit from knowing that most SAAM have a need for programs that provide emotional support as well as a network of other single mothers to assist with sharing coping mechanism for the
difficulties of single parenthood. Many of the participants expressed how difficult the struggle is for mothers who are “too rich to be poor, too poor to be rich” and “need a hand up, not a hand out.” This information gives counselors an internal perspective for marginalized populations like single African American mothers.

Further, it will assist in eliminating biases in the counseling relationship. With the outdated data in current literature, it is my concern that counselor training programs are being based on inaccurate, outdated data. It is important to understand that no population is exactly the same. It is also important to understand varying perspective for the individuals we help.

Recommendations for Further Research

While the researcher’s goals of the study were fulfilled, there is still much work to be done. During the data collection and data analysis processes recommendations were bracketed to further this research. The rationale for duplicating the study in the suggested manners below would be to further research with single African American mothers and conduct within group comparisons. I developed a curiosity for what differences in age, number of children, educational attainment and socioeconomic status would have on the findings. While Reese related to the participants in several aspects, many of her responses were outliers to the responses of the other mothers. She reported several times that her relationship with her child’s father, her educational attainment and earnings had much to do with her disassociation with other single mothers. Further, over half of the participants reported some form of emotional, physical and/or financial support system. Support systems demonstrated a theme to describe coping mechanisms for single African American mothers.
An in depth examination of the role a support system plays in the overall well-being of a single African American mother would assist in furthering the research on SAAMs. The following are relevant research recommendations:

1. Replication of this study with single African American mothers with more specific demographic requirements such as specific age range, annual earnings and educational attainment.

2. Replicate the study with single African American mothers and specify marital status. Conduct the study with the purposes of generating data of within group comparisons such as the experiences of single mothers who conceived children in a committed relationship and those who conceived children and were never in committed relationships.

3. Replicate the study with single African American mothers who were teenage mothers.

4. Replicate the study with an additional sub groups of women who are receiving community support such as adequate childcare, mental health support groups and parental education to compare the findings.

5. Replicate the study and add the perspective of the child/children’s father.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of single African American mothers. In reading several studies related to this population, it was determined that much of the data is outdated and not specifically related to the racial and feminist identity development of SAAMs. Additionally, policies and programs are being developed based on inaccurate societal images and outdated information for the population. Based on
the findings, the single African American mothers in this study were aware of historical and societal stereotypes that depict their group. It was determined that according to the participants in this study, these images are false, however, some women have internalized oppressed and therefore they believe they perpetuate some of these stereotypes.

There is no way to understand an entire population through a small sample, however, this research contributes valuable data that will add to a growing body of literature that provides an accurate depiction of the lived experiences of single African American mothers. This study explored single African American mothers as racial and gendered beings. It also examined the role of stereotypic images in the racial and feminist identity development of SAAMs. An examination through a multidimensional lense of several intersectional factors must be considered when studying this population (Hill-Collins, 1991). SAAMs face several obstacles related to race, gender and social class. However, based on the findings of this research, the SAAMs in this study still have a high level of self-efficacy and feel proud about being a member of their racial and gender groups. Further based on the findings the SAAMs in the study are not loud, shrill, destitute, baby making welfare queens as they are depicted in some historical and society stereotypes.

This study provides implications for further research with single African American mothers. The lived experiences of the single African American mothers in this study were typically personified as strength and mental toughness to overcome the effects that race, gender, socio economic status and marital status have on their lives. Finally, there are SAAMs that have several needs aside from financial assistance. It is my hope that the data from this study will be used to further studies on single African American mothers.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A
North Carolina State University
Informed Consent Form for Research
Title of Study: The Role of Stereotypic Images On Racial and Feminist Identity Development in African American Single Mothers
Principal Investigator: Alishea S. Rowley
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Marc Grimmett, Dissertation Chair

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a small pilot study purposed to gather information related to the lived experiences of African American single mothers. I am a third year doctoral student in the PhD program for Counselor Education and Practice at North Carolina State University. This small pilot study is designed with hopes to gain a better understanding of the affects of single motherhood within the African American community. You will be one of 5 participants chosen to participate in this study. Your voluntary participation is invaluable to my research efforts as a doctoral student. You have a right to stop participation in the study at anytime as well as a right to view any transcripts or other written material, including the final project. This study does not guarantee personal benefits for you nor is there any monetary compensation for your participation in this study. Below, you will find specific details about the research study you are being asked to participate in. If at anytime you have further questions regarding your participation or the purpose of the study, please free to contact the named researcher above. The interviews will be conducted in individual format at a private location to ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality
All information in the study will be kept confidential. You have the freedom to self-disclose at your discretion. Per your permission, direct quotes may be used within the research, however, your identity will not be disclosed. At no time will you be asked to provide your first and last name on any materials nor mention your first and last name in the audio taping. The audiotapes will be erased once they are transcribed. Secured, locked cabinets are available for the researcher to store all data gathered. The researcher will preserve your privacy by ensuring that the entire research process be followed as outlined above.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this pilot study is to gather information about the lived experiences of African American single mothers. Questions will cover topics related to social, economic and spiritual experiences as well as racial and gender identity development. Responses will be transcribed and provided per your request. To increase validity, the researcher will utilize member checking, which means that the researcher will review your transcribed interview with you during a second meeting to ensure that all of your answers were transcribed correctly. At that time, the participants will have the opportunity to clarify or amend responses for editing.

Methods for conducting the study
Your participation in the study will include a thirty-minute semi-structured interview that will be audio taped with your permission and transcribed shortly after the interview. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic form. The questions will be asked and you are open to answer them as freely as you choose. Questions will again include
topics regarding social, economic and spiritual experiences as well as racial and gender identity development. The demographic form is estimated to take around 2 minutes to complete. The remainder of the time, approximately 25 minutes will be utilized for the open-ended questions for the semi-structured interview. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. Transcriptions will be completed verbatim and verified through member checking with the participants during a second meeting, at which time the researcher will review the transcribed interview. If you requests transcriptions, one will be provided to you via e-mail within 48 hours of the request. Alternatively, the researcher is willing to provide a manual copy via US postal services per your request. You will have the option of being identified by an alphabetic letter or being identified by your first name only. This identifying information will not be utilized in written reports. Your responses will be written in the report anonymously. You will also have the option to participate in a follow up study related to the researcher’s dissertation research on the same subject matter. Participants may decline at will. Therefore, by choosing to participate, you are being asked to participate in the following phases of data collection: demographic survey, individual semi structured interview and follow up meeting for member checking purposes.

**Risks**
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African American single mothers. Some disclosure may be sensitive and difficult to share. Therefore, I ask that you evaluate your sensitivity toward the subject matter and use your discretion in sharing only what you feel comfortable to share. The researcher will be available after the interview to debrief with the participants as well as to provide community resources for mental health related issues that may surface during or after the interview.

**Benefits**
I highly anticipate that you will benefit from sharing your lived experiences as a single African American woman. It is my hope that your lived experiences inspire further research in the field of counseling.

**Compensation**
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

**Questions or Concerns**
If you have any questions about your participation in this study at any time, please feel free to contact the researcher, Alisha Rowley via e-mail at asbuggs@ncsu.edu (please specify the title of the study in the subject line). If you feel that you have been treated unfairly according to the descriptions on this form, please contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, North Carolina State University, or via phone at 919-515-4514.

**Consent to Participate**
“I have read and understood the information above entirely as well as received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this research at my own free will with the understanding that I have the right to stop participating at any time. I hereby grant permission for the investigator’s signature to serve as verbal consent for my participation.”

Investigator’s signature indicates that verbal consent was obtained by the participant. Further, the participant will be audio taped consenting to their participation in the study.
Appendix B
Demographic Form

Please read the following questions and answer to the best of you ability.

Participant ID (to be completed by the researcher)______________________

Age __________

Are you currently employed (Please circle one)?

Yes

No

Highest Level of Education Completed (Please circle one):

Less than High School

High School Diploma/GED

Some College

Trade School

2-Year College (Associates Degree)

4-Year College (Bachelors Degree)

Masters Degree

Doctoral Degree

Professional Degree (MD, JD)

Annual Income (Please circle one):

No Current Income

Less than $10,000

$10,000-$25,000
$25,000-$40,000
$40,000-$55,000
$55,000 or more

Marital Status (Circle one):
Single, Never married
Separated
Divorced
Widowed

Number of Children (Circle one):
0
1
2
3
4
5 or more
Appendix C

Semi Structured Interview Questions

SSIQ1: What are the experiences of African American single mothers?

SSIQ2: Are there stereotypic images of African American single mothers?
   Probe Question 1: If so, what are those images?
   Probe Question 2: What do these images mean to you?
   Probe Question 3: How do these images make you feel?
   Probe Question 4: Can you relate to any of these images?
   Probe Question 5: Are there inaccuracies to these images? If so, what?

SSIQ3: What does it mean to be feminine?
   Probe Question 1: How important is it for you to maintain physical traits of femininity?
   Probe Question 2: What does it mean to be gentle or sensitive?
   Probe Question 3: Are you viewed differently if you are assertive?

SSIQ4: Tell me about ways you have felt excluded personally or professional because of your gender?
   Probe Question 1: Do you feel that you have equal opportunities in the job market?
   Probe Question 2: Who do you feel are the advantaged people in society?
   Probe Question 3: Who would advocate for these inequalities on your behalf?

SSIQ5: What are your gender roles?
   Probe Question 1: As the head of household? Professional Life? Interpersonal relationships?
SSIQ6: What are your thoughts regarding your gender group?

Probe Question 1: Does your gender group membership impact you as a single mother?

Probe Question 2: How do you feel about your gender group membership?

Probe Question 3: What does it mean to be a member of this gender group?

SSIQ7: What role does race play in your daily life?

Probe Question 1: How does this impact you?

SSIQ8: What are your thoughts regarding your racial group?

Probe Question 1: Does your racial group membership impact you as a single mother?

Probe Question 2: How do you feel about your racial group membership?

Probe Question 3: What does it mean to be a member of this racial group?

SSIQ9: What role does race play in your daily life?

Probe Question 1: How does this impact you?