SINGLE PARENTING: A PERSPECTIVE FROM YOUNG ADULT CHILDREN

by

TESS KIRA BURROW

B.S., Manhattan Christian College, 2012

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2015

Approved by:

Major Professor
Karen Myers-Bowman

Copyright

TESS KIRA BURROW

2015

Abstract

Single parenting has become a part of American society, yet it seems that through stereotyping and shaming these parents are looked down upon. Often times, single parents do not have the same resources as two parent homes, but single parents can still be effective and raise well-rounded children. This is a qualitative study that sought to provide a different perspective of single never-married parents by interviewing their young adult children. This study focused on the experiences of the young adult children and used Family Stress Theory to help understand and capture specific moments in their lives.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my parents for teaching me to work hard and always finish what I started.

Dedication

To my husband, who encouraged me to apply for Graduate School and continued to support me through the entire process. You are my best friend.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Parenting is common among most creatures because creating new life is a part of the cycle of life. Reproduction is a normal part of the world we live in. However, different species parent differently. Of all the creatures, humans are the most complex because we are able to communicate through language, create inventions, follow dreams, and much more. Families have been around since the beginning of humanity and parenting is one of the primary functions in families (Horowitz, 1995). Not only have families existed for thousands of years, but families have also had to evolve as times have changed (Horowitz, 1995). Horowitz (1995) stated, "The contemporary family is a dynamic system; its pattern is changing at a rapid rate within the context of social crises that mark the latter portion of the twentieth century" (p. 44).

In recent years there have been many changes in regards to parenting and families. In the 1920s domestic abuse was made illegal, but it was not until the 1970s that this was treated as a full-fledged crime (Hanna, 2002). World War I and World War II led to more women joining the workforce, which caused a cultural shift and began to move women away from being primarily housewives or stay-at-home moms (Bryant, 2015). This change continues to affect families because women are still joining the workforce at high rates. The number of women in the workforce has grown from 30.3 million in 1970 to 72.7 million in 2006 (Baig, 2013). Another shift in American culture is the decline or decrease of marriage. Individuals are waiting to get married until they are in their late twenties or early thirties and many couples are cohabiting rather than choosing to get married (Gabel, 2012). One of the most popular topics in current society is gay marriage (Levine, 2015). All of these things, and many more, have changed how we view families and how families view themselves. These structural changes have impacted not only families, but also parenting.

Being a parent is one of the most challenging aspects of family life (ParentFurther, 2013). This is simply because becoming a parent can (and often does) change a person's life forever. Much of the time parents are seen as the primary teacher of children, even if the parents do not view themselves in that light (Moynihan, 2015). It is common to assume that school is the primary place for children to learn; and while the school may provide necessary academic education, the child's primary life-long education is at home (PBS, 2015). At home children see how their parents interact with others, how money is used, how food enters their home, and countless other ordinary traits that are vital in a child's learning (Moynihan, 2015).

Parents play a large role in their children's lives and they have much responsibility because parenting is a process that is made up of tasks, roles, rules, communication, resources, and relationships (Horowitz, Hughes, & Perdue, 1982). Parenting is a process that is learned through application and practice. Positive parents are warm, supportive, show interest in their children's activities, give encouragement, and provide help with everyday issues (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Schofield, Conger, & Neppl, 2014). Many parents have seen models of positive parenting from their own parents or through media, but this does not mean that they are always able to put positive parenting into practice (Schofield et al., 2014).

"Parenting is dynamic, multifaceted, and complex. Individuals, families, and institutions fulfill parenting functions such as nurturing and nourishing a child, and creating an environment in which children can learn skills needed for social participation and acceptance of personal responsibility" (Horowitz, 1995, p. 45). Parenting also "involves the skillful and creative use of knowledge, experience, and technique" (Horowitz et al., 1982, p. 2). Parents have a lot on their plates with just being parents, because their children are depending on them and the parents are expected to function as healthy parents and individuals in society.

Parenting can be complicated, but is an essential part of society. It is ironic that for such an important aspect of life parents usually receive little, if any, formal preparation when becoming parents and continue to lack this support throughout the child's life (LeMasters & DeFrain, 1989). This is an issue because, "parenting ranks among the most important functions in society. The goals of parenting are to nurture, protect, and promote the successful journey of children from birth to inadequate adult/lifetime functioning or simply to reach age 21" (Horowitz, 1995, p. 46). How can parents effectively parent if they do not have the support, education, or resources to do so?

Parenting is an important and difficult role that has been changing in our society. Single parents are becoming more common and prominent, but are receiving little positive recognition (Wong, 2014). Much research on single parents is all encompassing because the operational definitions of single parents are not clear or all types of single parents are put into one group. Maier and McGeorge (2012) stated, "Given the review of literature, it appears that previous studies have neither examined positive societal perceptions of single parents nor explored how these perceptions vary between never-married custodial single mothers and fathers" (p. 167). I believe there is a gap in the literature because many researchers refer to single parents as those parents who have been divorced, are in the military, are cohabiting, have been widowed, or have never been married. The title of single parent seems to be a big umbrella term and researchers need to make sure they address which group of single parents they are referring to because each sub group can be vastly different (Gray, Garcia, Crosier, & Fisher, 2015). Hanson, Heims, Julian, and Sussman (1995) stated,

Research needs to differentiate groups of single parents in order to reduce

confounding variables… we need an in-depth description of the population.

Extensive in-depth qualitative research is needed to gain an understanding of the

conditions and variable for the many types of single parent families and primary

parents. Sources and bases of stigmatization and stereotyping of "single parents"

require systematic investigation. What questions are we asking that should be

continued to be asked? (p. 18)

In this study, I will be seeking to gain knowledge about single parents by learning about

the experiences of their adult children. The main overarching research question is, what are the

lived experiences of young adult children who grew up in single never married parent families?

Investigating the retrospective experience of young adult children of single parents will provide a

unique perspective to help better understand single-parent families.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Single Parents

In 2011, there were reportedly 14.4 million single parents in the United States. Of these, 18.3% were custodial fathers and 81.7% were custodial mothers (Grall, 2013). Clearly, single-parent mothers are the head of most single-parent families. However, single-father families have been increasing at a higher rate than single mothers (Brown, 2000).

Bennett and Jamieson (1999) asked college students about their perspective on different types of families. Based solely on perception, they found that "never- married parents were seen as significantly more likely than any of the other groups to have poor family relations and parenting skills" (p. 153). This highlights the stereotypes that many people have about single parents; however, it is important to remember that the stereotypes do not adequately represent most single parents (Stolba & Amato, 1993). Another stereotype that promotes a negative view of single-parent families is that a "normal" family is two parents, mother and father, White, and middle to upper class (Horowitz, 1995). Wijnberg and Weinger (1998) stated, "Stereotypes stigmatize welfare mothers as promiscuous women who become pregnant in order to obtain state and government support" (p. 212). This stereotype is almost 20 years old, but it seems that single mothers are still fighting this stereotype. Mayor (2013) shared stories of single mothers and described what is being said about them in current society. "They're easy, they got pregnant with some random guy, they're on welfare, they're always broke, their kids are troublemakers, they're sponging off taxpayers, and it is always their fault" (p. 1). However, according to the 2011 Census, only 48% of single parents were living in poverty, 16.2% of single fathers and 31.8% of single mothers (Grall, 2013). Grall also found that 56.8% of custodial parents have only one

child. These statistics would suggest that it is more common for single parents to not live below the poverty line or have multiple children to receive government support.

While all single parents do not live in poverty, Heritage (2012) reported that 48% of single parents had incomes below the poverty line in 2011. This is an unsatisfactory percentage, especially when only 6.8% of married parents with children were living in poverty in 2012. Clearly, poverty is more likely to happen in single-parent families. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that more single-mothers were African American than White. In this study, 41% of single mothers were found to be poor while only 13% of fathers were labeled as poor. While the statistics provide quantifiable information, what about the percentages not being discussed? What about the 59% of mothers who have not been labeled as poor? That is a large portion of the single-parent population, but it seems single-parent research is focusing on stereotypes and popular opinion.

It seems clear that single parents tend to have more difficulty raising children than two-parent families because of the absence of a partner (Jackson et al., 2009). However, Maier and McGeorge (2014) made a sound argument when they stated,

> Perhaps if the societal messages that never-married single mothers and fathers received were more positive in nature, they would have the opportunity to "perform up" to a more affirming concept of being a single parent or feel acknowledged for the positive parenting they are providing, which is often invisible in society. This idea of "performing up" to a positive stereotype or set of societal perceptions highlights the need to more fully document and explore the positive attributes that never-married custodial single parents are perceived to possess. (p. 165)

This statement shows that as a society we are forcing these perceptions on to single-parent families. Despite all of the degrading stereotypes of single parents, there are well rounded and adjusted single parents. While it is difficult for single mothers and single fathers to raise healthy children and teach them to become successful adults (Hill, 2010), this is because single parents are also dealing with economic issues and social stigmas (depending on his/her situation). However, many single parents are able to find help and support for the needs they have, which allows them to overcome their immediate position (Hill, 2010).

Wahler (2002) studied effective single parents by having conversations and holding home observations with single parents. Based upon these experiences, Wahler developed three conclusions about how single parents are effective. One, effective parents are "skillful at dialogue aimed at encouraging children to articulate their personal beliefs and life experiences" (p. 254). Two, the parents use their knowledge in order to develop "reaction strategies tailor made for each child's behavior patterns" (p. 254). Three, the parents "have an ability to keep the broader nonparenting issues out of the picture when interacting with their children" (p. 254). Overall, Wolf (2015) depicted a need for single mothers' experiences to be understood and valued,

> While these numbers give a snapshot, they don't tell the real story about what it
> means to be a single parent. For every story you hear about a single mom or dad
> abusing government benefits or living up to some other negative stereotype,
> remember that those behaviors don't reflect the reality most single parent families
> face. If you want to know more, ignore the stereotypes altogether and get to know
> the single mom who lives next door or whose children attend the same school as

your own kids. First-hand experience is the best way to buck these widely held

stereotypes and build a community of support in their place! (p. 1)

In conclusion, the literature tends to evaluate single parents by what they do not have. This information has been helpful in identifying problems, but too much emphasis has been put on what the single parents are lacking, which has created a gap in the literature. This gap can be best filled by qualitative research because the experience of single parents is needed to understand the statistics describing this population. It is also crucial that researchers describe the subgroups of single parents who are being studied. It is interesting that many single mothers are the primary single parents, but they are receiving most of the negative stereotyping. The person who is taking care of the child is also the person who is being blamed for everything. This is an issue in our society as a whole. The single parent who is taking care of the child is also the individual who is feeling punished and ashamed. Qualitative research can help identify the strengths of single-parent families and share those stories to begin changing our culture's perceptions.

Resources Available for Single Parents

Single-parent families have needs and these needs are often met through the means of resources. A resource is being able to obtain a need when it is needed (Merriam-Webster, 2015). A contributing factor to a person's well-being is the amount of available resources s/he has access to (Gervais & Millear, 2014). Therefore, resources can be different for every person depending on that person's situation and experiences. However, some of the most common needs of single parents are finances, childcare, or support (Smith, Gilmer, Salge, Dickerson, & Wilson, 2012). Single parents have met these needs by using resources like food stamps, having family members provide care for their children, or having a support group (Hilton & Koperafrye, 2008).

These are common resources for single parents, but single-parent families are not all the same. Each family has unique needs, and different resources available to them.

There are two different types of resources (Weber, 2011). First, there are tangible resources, things one can touch, hold, or grasp. The dictionary states that one definition of tangible is, "real or actual, rather than imaginary or visionary" (Dictionary.com, 2015). Some basic examples of tangible resources are food, water, and shelter.

Intangible resources are often not as clearly identifiable. An example of an intangible resource is time. We cannot control time or physically grasp it. I could hold a clock in my hand, but that would not give me the resource of time. Some common phrases that accurately depict the intangible resource of time are, "I need more time!" or "I spent time at work" or "time is of the essence." Education and support would also be examples of intangible resources.

Tangible and intangible resources often work together cohesively, as we see in many parent education programs. The goal of quality parent education programs is to provide parents with both tangible resources like books and intangible resources such as networking and knowledge, so they can better prepare themselves and their children in school (Albarran, 2014).

An example is a program called "Mama Club," which strives to provide education and support for its participants. The young women (mostly teenagers) who attend are encouraged to bring their children to sessions, are fed a meal, receive material goods (diapers, formula, etc.), and can receive transportation if they need (Smith et al., 2012). Smith and colleagues reported that the women who attended Mama Club also had mothers who were teenage mothers and were a part of a teenage pregnancy cycle. Therefore, the researchers suggested that adolescent mothers should be targeted for early pregnancy prevention and parenting education, in efforts to stop the cycle.

Julian (1995) provided a list of resources available to single parents across the nation. She gave the organization name, address, telephone number, and a brief description of the resource. Providing a list of usable resources is great idea and I am sure many others have been practicing this as well over the years. However, it is important that a great resource like this article is available to the public and is in lay terms. I do not know if this is the only way Julian submitted the resources, but if so, it seems quite unlikely that many single parents would have had access to it. Providing a list of resources for single parents is still being used today because it provides information to other resources that they may not have known about otherwise. This saves time and can provide direct access to the single parents' needs (Resource Directory, 2015).

Services and resources are important because they can provide useful information, networking assistance, and support (Julian, 1995). There are many parent training programs within agencies and through the Cooperative Extension Service that educate and help single parents (Barth et al., 2005; Collins & Fetsch, 2012). Julian (1995) stated,

> Useful services to be shared with others can also be generated by families who are experiencing a specific transition. Self-help support groups focusing on a particular family issue, such as parenting by single individuals, can be an important resource. (p. 500)

Tangible resources are of vast importance, but it seems like intangible resources are what make the ultimate difference. Wijnberg and Weinger (1998) found that practical support and help are essential for single mothers to meet their work requirements, but the emotional support may be what helps the women cope in long-term situations from the pressures and demands in their many roles.

Social support is helpful for single parents and their children emotionally and also physically (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003). Hanson (1986) found that "families with larger social support systems also enjoyed a better mental and physical health" (p.131). However, Cairney et al. found life events causing depression were stronger and more common for married mothers than single mothers. Single mothers were less reactive to negative situations than married mothers because they had already experienced significant life stress and struggles. Social support provides relative impact between the link of family structure and mental well-being. Social support is needed for all types of family structures, but because single-mother families often have more obstacles to overcome, they are less likely than married mothers to become depressed when faced with hardships.

Lastly, it is important to note that parents are able to have a wider support system than their children because of the connections they are able to make, but mothers typically have a larger support system than fathers (Hanson, 1986). Zhan and Pandey (2004) found fewer fathers received welfare income, child support, and support from relatives and friends. This could be because fathers typically have higher education than single mothers, have fewer children but more adults living with them than single mothers, and are more financially stable than single mothers (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). This is not to say that single fathers do not need social support, but because they are faring better in terms of other resources, social support may not be as critical for them as it appears to be for single mothers.

It is clear to see that tangible and intangible resources are critical in helping most single parent families. However, research overall is suggesting that intangible resources are what make the most significant differences in the lives of single parents. How does this affect the children who grow up in single-parent homes? The next section will explore this question.

Children's Experiences with Single Parents

A common assumption in our society is that children in families with a single parent are disadvantaged because they do not have both parents to provide support, control, and supervision (Stolba & Amato, 1993). Horowitz stated,

> Problems in school performance, including repeating a grade, difficulties
>
> requiring a parent-teacher conference, and school suspensions or expulsions were
>
> about twice as common for children from single-parent families, with children
>
> from homes with never married mothers exhibiting the highest rates of problems.
>
> (p. 62)

According to Wall (2012), 75% of children in hospitals for chemical dependency are from single-parent families and over half of the youths incarcerated in America lived in one-parent families when they were children. However, Garg, Melanson, and Levin (2007) found that out of all adolescents in their study from a low socioeconomic status, the adolescents who experienced high academic success were those who had high parental involvement. These researchers also identified that female students had higher educational aspirations than male students in both single-parent families and intact families, but the male children of single parents had the lowest level of future goals (Garg et al., 2007).

Stolba and Amato (1993) suggested that adolescents who live with a single parent often benefit from the presence of another adult of the adolescent's same sex. In some cases, grandparents may live with the single-parent family and can be in a parent-like role. The grandparents can be helpful because they can reinforce boundaries and help maintain structural authority within the family (Stolba & Amato). However, Stolba and Amato also found, especially for children in middle school, "Grandparents are especially likely to interfere with the

mother's childrearing practices when children are young…living with parents may be a burden as well as a resource" (p. 548).

While these statements provide some idea of the challenges faced by single-parent families, there could be other variables other than the parents' marital status that are creating these outcomes. A developmental psychology perspective suggests that children have better outcomes when parents provide much support and a significant level of discipline and control (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). An authoritative parent should direct his/her child's behavior rationally, encourage the child's uniqueness, but provide rules or guidelines. This parenting style allows children to practice responsibility, creativity, curiosity, and has been known to positively correlate with higher academic achievement (Dombusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Authoritative parents exhibit warmth and are able to respond to their child's signals, but they also practice respect and control by using techniques that are age appropriate for their child (Arnott & Brown, 2013). Authoritarian parents show high levels of control and low levels of nurturance while permissive parents practice low levels of control with high levels in nurturance (Arnott & Brown, 2013). Out of all three parenting types, authoritative parenting styles have the most positive outcomes for children, compared to permissive parenting or authoritarian parenting (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative parents seek to discipline or teach through love by being consistent, adjusting to the child's needs, and listening to the child's arguments (Darling, 2014).

Garg et al. (2007) showed that parents in single-parent families were typically not only lower in their socioeconomic status, but were also less involved with their children. Fewer parents (21.7%) from single parent families used the authoritative parenting style, compared to "intact" families at 41%. This suggests that almost twice as many "intact" families practice authoritative parenting and are more involved in the child's life. The researchers also stated, "No

differences were found between adolescents from intact families and single-parent families in academic self-schema and educational aspirations of students whose parents were highly involved" (p.1021). Families with two parents seem to be practicing authoritative parenting more than single-parent families, which leads to better child outcomes. This suggests that the marital status of the parents is not the issue, rather the parenting style the parents are using with their children is the issue. However, negative effects have been attributed to the status of being a single parent, rather than on the parenting style.

Therefore, a child's education does not seem to be directly caused by having a single parent, but it may be related to the absence of the other parent (Jackson et al., 2009). This statement seems to suggest that being in a single-parent family itself is not what causes low academic achievement. Rather, the lack of support from multiple parents or adults is what causes difficulties within a child's education. If family support is lacking, which could be the case in single-parent or two-parent families, then it is important for children to have academically-oriented peers (Garg et al., 2007). If a child is living with only one parent and the single parent with whom they live is uninvolved and is not an effective authority figure, then the child could seek out support from peers at school because that is where most children spend a large portion of their time. However, this child could possibly not do well in school because s/he would lack support from all around. Peers can be helpful, but they are also not the same as parents.

After considering the literature about single parents, their resources, and their children's outcome it appears that the underlying problem for children may not be single parents, but uninvolved parents. Unfortunately, it seems more likely that single parents may be uninvolved because they are the only parent and are trying to fulfill the responsibilities that may be shared across two parents in two-parent families. This may make it difficult for single parents to spend

time with their children because they are trying to juggle everything else (Hodgson, Dienhart, & Daly, 2001).

Family Stress Theory

The Family Stress Model is also known as the ABCX model (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). This theory was designed to explain how stressful events faced by families sometimes become crises (Hill, 1949; Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). Stressful events are a normal part of life and there can be positive and negative stress, both can potentially lead to a crisis (Smith et al., 2009). The first term, which represents the A is stressors, which are events that impact the family. There are two types of stressors: normative, which is predictable and expected, and non-normative, which is unexpected (Smith et al., 2009). The second term, represented by the B is resources. They can be tangible or intangible and include characteristics, traits, and abilities of the family (Smith et al., 2009). Next, the letter C represents the definition of the situation. This refers to how an individual perceives the stressor and his/her reaction to the stress, which could also be identified as coping skills (Lazarus & Launier, 1978). The final concept is crisis and is represented by an X. A crisis is "a period of disorganization that rocks the foundation of the family" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101).

When a family or individual begins experiencing stress (A), then the family (or each individual in the family) decides on how to use available resources (B) and how to cope with or interpret the stress (C). The crisis (X) happens after ABC as a result of the stress and the reactions to that stress (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Not all stress causes a crisis. A crisis is reached when a family cannot maintain the normal balance because of the stress (Smith et al., 2009). However, just because a family reaches a crisis does not mean the family will collapse or

remain stagnant. Often times, a family can bounce back from a crisis and become better than before (DeFrain, Swanson, Friesen, & Brand, 2008).

Figure 2.1 Family Stress Model

HILL'S ABCX MODEL OF FAMILY STRESS

(B) Internal Family Resources & Informal/Formal Social Supports

Family **(A)** Stressors

Family Crisis **(X)**

(C) Family Perception & Parent Self-Efficacy

(McDonald, 1998)
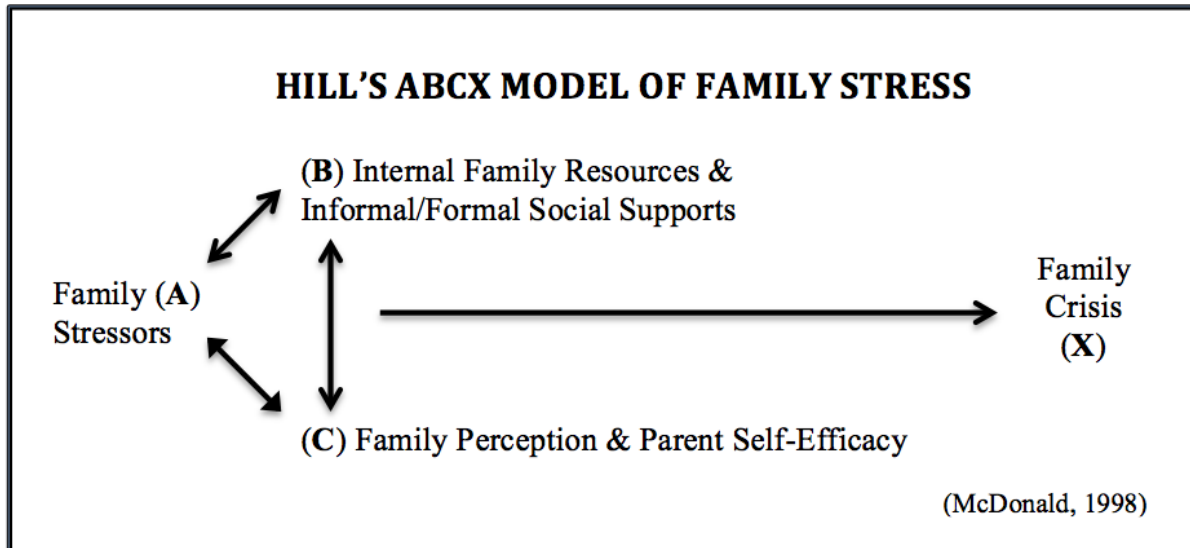
Another important concept in Family Stress Theory is adaptation. There are two types of adaptation: bonadaptation, which is a positive result to the crisis, and maladaptation, which is an unhealthy resolution to the crisis (Smith et al., 2009). Stress plays a part in everyone's life. How an individual or family deals with the stress determines how it will impact their future. Jackson (2009) suggested that, "The less parenting stress the mothers would experience; the lower the mothers' parenting stress, the more adequate would be their parenting" (p. 102). This supports the idea that single parents may be uninvolved as parents because they are stressed and busy. The Family Stress Model is a useful lens to use when examining single-parent families.

Family Strengths Perspective

The majority of single parenting research focuses on negative aspects and consequences, which makes it look there is no hope for single parents and their children (Hill, 2010). More attention needs to be given to what single parents are doing well. The Family Strengths

Perspective can be used to identify single-parent family strengths. Some common family strengths are appreciation and affection, commitment, positive communication, enjoyable time together, spiritual well-being, and managing stress and crises effectively (Olsen, 2006).

According to DeFrain et al. (2008), "All families have strengths. And, all families have challenges and areas of potential growth. If one looks only for problems in a family, one will see only problems" (p. 1). This quote accurately describes the problem-focused research that is so common regarding single-parent families. All families go through negative experiences, however, it is important to also examine the strengths within this family form. The "knowledge about perceived strengths would also be helpful to family therapists as they work to support these families and deconstruct harmful negative stereotypes by replacing those beliefs with affirming societal perceptions" (Maier & McGeorge, 2014, p. 164). Professionals can help single-parent families by assisting them in identifying the healthy qualities that their family possesses (Hanson, 1986). This is a crucial step because the support of professionals can impact single-parent families positively and help lead to a reduction of the negative stereotypes.

In conclusion, the single parent literature suggests that single parents are growing in numbers in American society. Single-parent families suffer from negative stereotypes and an emphasis on negative child outcomes. However, many child outcomes are not caused simply because one is a single parent, but because it is more likely for single parents than married parents to be uninvolved and have an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. Resources are necessary for single parents, especially intangible resources like support and help from the child's grandparents. Family Stress Theory can be used to understand the experiences of single-parent families within a Family Strengths perspective.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This is a qualitative study designed to understand single, never-married parents by focusing on their young adult children. I believed this to be an important population to study because single parents have become more common in American society and the negative stereotypes do not accurately define all single-parent families. This chapter explains my research questions, approach, reflexivity, recruitment strategy, participants, data collection, and analysis plan for my study.

Research Questions

My overarching research question was:

What are the lived experiences of young adult children who grew up in single, never-married parent families?

Several specific research questions, drawn from Family Stress Theory, were:

1) What are the stressor events for children in single, never-married parent families?

2) What resources did the parents and children have or use in stressful situations?

3) How do the children of single, never-married parents define stressful situations?

4) What crises did the children in single, never-married parent families face? How were they managed?

Qualitative Approach

I used a phenomenological qualitative approach, specifically using a constructivist and critical change lens. The phenomenological perspective helped me focus on understanding each participant's experience investigating the shared meaning between young adult children of single, never-married parent families. Phenomenology ties in with constructivism because I was looking to understand the real experiences of each participant by using Family Stress Theory

recognizing that each person's lived experiences are best understood through their own perspective. Lastly, critical change was chosen because this study is being done with the purpose to help single parents and their children by using qualitative interviews to share their experiences and change the negative stereotypes about single parents.

This study is applied research, according to Patton's (2002) definition, because single parenting is seen as a societal problem. My desire was to learn about single parents and to hear their real stories, rather than relying on the stereotypes that are so often misconstrued. I used Family Stress Theory and a Family Strengths Model to guide and organize my study. Family Stress Theory was decided upon because single parents typically have more stress than two-parent families. I wanted to find out the types of stressors single-parent families face and learn how they deal and cope with these stressors. Family Stress Theory was a useful guide because it helped me focus on resources as a point of interest, which coincided with what I wanted to know about single-parent families as a Family Life Educator. I interviewed young adults who were or are children from single, never-married parent families. The Family Strengths Perspective was used to identify the strengths of each family to counteract the negative stereotypes.

I emphasized depth rather than breadth (Patton, 2002). By using qualitative methods I was be able to explore meaning and experiences, instead of only learning about the outcomes. Qualitative interviews provided a thorough journey that quantitative strategies would not have been able to provide.

Researcher Reflexivity

As the measurement tool, I brought both strengths and limitations to the study. My first strength is my desire to know and understand individuals. I was able to ask clarifying questions and made sure that I fully understood what each participant meant because of this trait. This was

also challenging at times because I wanted to show empathy by sharing similar experiences. However, I remained neutral in the interviews and continually reminded myself of my purpose. Therefore, I practiced empathic neutrality in all of my interviews. This is when a researcher is empathetic toward the person, but neutral to the information (Patton, 2002). I found empathic neutrality helpful in the interviews and during analyses. Another challenge was that prior to the study I had conducted only a few interviews. At first this caused me to hesitate, but I did become comfortable in the interviews as I gained experience and feel like I was able to rise to the challenge.

Every individual has opinions, biases, and perceptions. I am no exception to that. In regards to single parents, the biases I held as I began this study were that children need two-parent families (not necessarily his/her parents to be together) and that children of single parents often misbehave. Regarding the first assumption, I was raised in a two-parent family as were almost all of my close friends. I do not think that every two-parent family is a functioning family, but many times if both parents are effective it seems to be easier than when there is only one functioning, or nonfunctioning, parent. I work at a mental health facility and an after-school program where I observe many children of single parents acting out. However, this is not an accurate representation of single-parent families because there are misbehaving children in both of these settings who are from both single-parent families and dual-parent families.

I also have heard people say things like, "Single parents made the decision to have kids. It's their fault and they are reaping the consequences." I believe that we all make decisions, but most cases are not simply right or wrong. It seems like many single parents made the decision to have sexual intercourse, but did not make this decision with the intent to have a child. Obviously, by having sexual intercourse, a person may possibly conceive and have a child, but they are two

very different choices. However, this is not true for all single parents. I think many single parents have had children with intentions to continue or start a relationship with the significant other. For me, it is pertinent to understand each single parent's specific situation because there are many different situations for how single parents became single parents. Each experience is different and single parents are not all the same.

From what I have gathered, being a single parent is hard. I do not believe that being a single parent should affect an individual so harshly that he/she is unable to support his/her family to meet their basic needs. I believe that dual-parent families are more desirable than single-parent families. However, there are always exceptions. If one partner works, cleans the house, buys the groceries, and takes care of the children while the other does nothing, his/her life may be easier if s/he was a single parent.

I identify with the Christian faith and I believe that marriage between a man and woman was the first relational institution created by God. However, I am aware that many people do not agree with me and I respect their opinions and beliefs. To counter this I had two co-analysts who had different beliefs and opinions, which accounted for my perceptions so that the data would not be skewed. I have the ability to judge people, but I have a stronger ability to understand and listen to them. I strive to learn from and understand all individuals. I believe we can learn a great amount about an individual by hearing about his/her experiences in life. During my interviews, I was more interested in knowing how I could help single parents, rather than trying to judge them. To be clear, I do/did not want to condemn anyone. I wanted to understand single parents and help in whatever way I can. I know that I cannot change the world with this one study. That was not my purpose or my goal, but I gained insight and learned a lot about single-parent families.

Recruitment Strategy

I implemented criterion sampling for my sampling strategy, which means that all of my participants had to fit specific criteria. The criteria that needed to be met were: all participants needed to be ages 18-25 years old and must have lived with his/her single, never-married parent for at least four years. If the single parent is currently married, but was not married to the biological parent during childhood, the participant was still accepted to participate. Cohabitation of parents or significant others was allowed if the significant other was not consistently in the home or a part of the nuclear family when the child was living with his/her single parent.

I chose this particular group because I found many parenting education programs for divorced single parents, military single parents, and adolescent single parents. There seems to be a gap in the literature because there are many forms of single-parent families and it is not acceptable to generalize every single parent into one distinct category.

I began the recruitment process by using social media to locate participants. I knew that this would be one of the best ways to reach 18-25 year olds. I created a Facebook post and an Instagram post, and then requested that others post it to increase the number of individuals who would see the invitation. From Facebook I received six respondents, but only four fit the criteria and participated in my study. Outside of social media, an invitation was included in *K-State Today*, an electronic email that is sent out to the Kansas State University student body with daily announcements. I also sent an email invitation to two classes in the College of Human Ecology. Three individuals from the class invitations responded, but none of them fit the criteria. I also had one person email me who fit the criteria, but he did not state what invitation he saw and was not able to interview because we had time zone and work-related issues.

Participants

Below is a table of my participants. It includes the participant pseudonym that is continually used throughout this paper, the participant's sex, age, and race. The race of the participant's single parent and the parent with whom the participant primarily lived are also included. Lastly, the participants shared their perceived levels of their Socio-Economic Status at several points in their lives.

Table 3.1 Study Sample

Participant	Sex	Age	Race	Race of Parent	Primary Parent	SES as child	Participant's SES Today	SES of Parent Today
Ayden	Male	24	Mixed- Black & White	White	Mother	Lower Class	Middle Class	Lower end of Middle class, but moneywise is middle class
Brandy	Female	23	White	White	Mother	Lower Class	Lower end of Middle Class	Middle Class
Cooper	Male	19	Mixed- Black & White	White	Mother	Lower Class	He stated he is not sure and feels confused	Upper Middle Class, because of recent marriage
Daphne	Female	22	White	White	Mother	Lower class, but lived as middle class	Lower Class	Middle Class
Emma	Female	21	White	White	Mother	Lower Class, but gradually moved to Middle Class	Middle Class	Lower Class
Fallon	Female	18	White & Hispanic (El Salvadorian), but mostly identifies with White	White	Mother	Lower class, but gradually moved to Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class

My sample consisted of four females and two males who lived in single, never-married parent families. All of the participants shared a commonality of having a White, single, never-married mother.

Data Collection

Once I had invited the participants through Facebook, Instagram, two K-State classes, and *K-State Today* I waited for responses. I received one message on Facebook from a friend who said she knew someone that fit my sample and was interested, but needed me to contact the person through Facebook. I extended invitations to three other participants that fit the criteria because they were unaware of the Facebook post. Another sent me a message on Facebook, asked about the study, and decided to be a part of it. The last participant asked about the research I was doing and she agreed to participate because she fit the criteria.

I held interviews with each participant because I wanted to hear about the individual experience for each participant. I conducted interviews in person and through video conferencing. Using technology allowed me to reach a wider audience of individuals who were not geographically located in the same place I was. I interviewed two of my participants using Google Hangouts, which provides users with Gmail accounts access to video conferences. One participant was interviewed using Facetime, which allows iPhone users to call each other using audio and video. The other three interviews were conducted in person in a quiet location.

Before the interview began, I provided each participant with the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) as had been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Kansas State University. During the interviews, I used the interview guide approach, because it provided some structure while also allowing for flexibility. Prior to the interviews I had prepared a list of questions, but I was able to ask other questions throughout the interview if I thought they were

pertinent or relevant to the topic that was being discussed. I began by asking the participants to describe the family they grew up in, which caused them to start thinking about their family and also gave me background information that helped me understand the context of their experiences. Next, they described what their parent did well and recalled times when their parents were challenged as single parents. I also asked questions focused on Family Stress Theory's components ABCX and the experiences of the participant. Throughout the interview I asked them about the resources their family had and what resources could help single parents in the future. (To see the full interview guide view Appendix B.) The interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes and were digitally recorded.

Data Analysis

In each interview I had an audio recorder that captured the whole interview. After the interview, I transferred the recording from the recorder to my computer. Then, I gave my participants pseudonyms, which protected their privacy and confidentiality. Next, I listened to an interview and typed what was said in the interview into a Word document. My co-analysts also helped with this process, by each transcribing one interview. In my transcriptions I began typing the interview once the first question was asked. I continued typing in dialogue form, but never typed my participants' names. I also took out words that were unnecessary or excessive (i.e., "like," "and,"), run-on sentences, or other grammatical errors that needed assistance to convey the participants' ideas. Once that was completed I saved the information on my computer and printed hard copies. These copies stayed in a folder at my house and my computer was locked when it was not in use.

When the interviews were finished I began reading through them and familiarizing myself with the data. I used my research questions to guide analysis of the data. First, I looked at

each individual interview by itself and determined the themes of the ABCX Model and the experiences each participant had in his/her single-parent family. Second, I combined the interviews and looked for findings and themes across all the interviews. I identified stressful events, resources, defining the situation, crisis, and experiences of the child. Within resources I coded tangible and intangible the sensitizing concepts of resources. I then looked for patterns amongst participants' experiences of being raised by single parents. The themes were color coded consistently throughout the transcripts and symbols were used when there was a finding that was deemed important. My goal was to identify what findings were mentioned consistently throughout the data and which were more unique to specific individuals. By doing this I was able to see personality types and individuality, which I believe is an important aspect in the data because no experience is ever exactly the same. Patterns were identified in individual interviews, but were also found across multiple interviews.

I used triangulation by having two co-analysts to help identify themes in the transcripts. Each of us read through all of the transcriptions and highlighted the parts of the ABCX model individually. After we had all gone through each transcription on our own, we discussed our analyses. We especially focused on when our coding did not match up. In these instances we would give a description of why we thought a finding belonged within a certain theme and then allowed for the other person to explain as well. Having three people analyze worked well because there were two other people who could ask questions, which allowed for findings not to be overlooked. We always reached an understanding and continued this process throughout all of the transcribed interviews. The co-analysts were very helpful and sought to make sure the coding accurately represented the data.

Chapter 4 - Results

Case Summaries

In this section I present a brief summary of each participant's experience in a single, never-married parent home. I found these summaries valuable to include because it gives context to the experiences of each participant.

Ayden. Ayden is a 24-year-old male who grew up with his mom and three other siblings. He lived with his mom, siblings, and uncle in his uncle's trailer for the majority of his life. He was told his whole life that he shared the same father as the rest of his siblings, but two years ago he was informed by his older brother that he was the only one with a different father. His father and his siblings' father are both Black, but he is the only one in his family who looks Black or biracial. This caused him to have a lot of identity and loneliness issues. Ayden also stated that he had trouble in school, specifically in reading. He said,

> *"There is not a day in my life that my mom read to me or that I was expected to go read. My mom was so exhausted by the time she got home that she didn't care to check if my homework was done."*

Ayden said that he remembers in 5th grade his mom telling him that she could not do it anymore and thought about giving them to the state because she believed it would be better for them. He also said that at times, he would hold her while she cried at night and she mentioned the option of suicide a couple times. When I asked him to recall a time when his mom was challenged as a single parent, he said, *"Honestly, I am trying to think of times when we weren't challenged as a single-parent family."* Ayden claimed that the most influential positive aspects of his life were his church and the male mentors who sought him out and invested in him.

Ayden remembered people offering to help is family, but not in a completely positive light. He stated,

> *A lot has to be relationally driven because there were times when folks tried to give money, but had no relationship with my mom and she felt like she was just a charity case for them. She did not feel like they cared about her as a person. They just wanted to 'this will help you out and I can feel good about myself, but I don't want to give you my time.'*

He suggested that single parents need a community of people who genuinely care and strive to understand the hardships of single-parent families.

Today, Ayden is married, has graduated from college, and has sought out counseling to help him process his experiences and improve his communication skills with his wife.

Brandy. Brandy is a White 24-year-old female who lived with her mom and younger half-brother until she was in the 4th grade. Her mom typically worked night jobs, but always made sure to get her daughter to where she needed to be, specifically school and Girl Scouts. She did not have a relationship with her dad, but they did receive child support. Brandy said multiple times in the interview that she really enjoyed living with her mom and had fun with her. She also stated that her mom made friends quickly and was great at networking with others. When she was in the 4th grade, participant two found out her mom was addicted to drugs. As a 4th grader she decided to move in with her grandparents because she did not want to be in that environment. She does not regret her decision and today her mom has been clean for 10 years. Brandy said her mom was away for about a year and when she came back they began repairing their relationship. She stated that they are really good friends and stay in close contact with each

other today. Lastly, Brandy stated that child support, Medicare, food stamps, and family are good resources for single parents.

Cooper. Cooper is a 19-year-old male, who identifies as mixed race (Black and White). He lived with his mom in his grandparents' house, but would visit his dad every other weekend. He stated, *"Grandpa was an alcoholic. Grandma liked to spend money."* He had a cousin who would stay with them sometimes, but was into drugs, alcohol, and spent some time in jail. Cooper identified that living for free with his grandparents was good for his mom because she did not have to pay, but that his grandparents did not provide support or encourage his mom to improve her life. He said, *"Her parents gave her a place to live, but they didn't really support her. They just didn't do anything."* He said that he would like to have seen more support for his mom, specifically from his grandparents and family. He moved out of his grandparents' house and they got a house of their own when he was in high school.

Cooper said that he liked how his dad did not talk down to him and did not baby him. He appreciated how his dad talked to him like he was an adult, even when he was younger. His mom had another baby when he was 10 and he said, *"It was a random guy and every body wanted her to get an abortion, but she didn't. She could hardly take care of me, but she choose to keep my brother."* Cooper noted that he and his mom began going to church. It was not until he began to take church seriously, that his mom noticed, and then she began to take church seriously too. He also stated that his mom would take them to fun things, like the zoo, which he felt was important because it got them out of the house.

Cooper stated,

> *Having my parents never married didn't really bother me until I was out of it. I*
>
> *was on my own when I looked back and said, 'Why couldn't I have a house with a*

mom and a dad?' It did not bother me growing up, but I now know, more than

having a successful career, I just want a family. Like a normal family or whatever

that means! A wife, a husband, we have a church, we have a dog, we have kids,

we live at the same house. Not like crazy cousins, grandpa, dad gets divorced, just

like a house.

His mom is now married and has moved into her new husband's house. Currently,

Cooper is the first person in his family to go to college, but he is considering the option of full-

time work instead. Cooper suggested that affordable daycare or government-provided daycare

should be available to single parents. He also stated that financial education or planning for

single parents could be useful, but when *"there is little to no finance in the first place, there is*

not much you can fix or help."

Daphne. Daphne is a 22-year-old White female who grew up as an only child with

never-married parents. Her parents cohabited off and on until she was 12, because her mom

would kick her dad out for a month or two, but then he would come back. She said that her dad

would consistently cheat on her mom, which is why she thinks her mom never fully committed

to her dad. When she was 12, her dad was arrested and she identified that situation as a crisis.

She described her mom as the breadwinner because she always had a *"consistent good job."*

Daphne told me that she grew up in a middle class neighborhood. While her mom had a hard

time keeping up with that lifestyle, she chose not to downsize because she felt the need to keep

up socially. Daphne described herself as a happy kid and a pretty compliant teenager, so her

mom did not have to worry about her *"acting out or being rebellious."* She discussed how her

mom did not share *"harsh realities"* with her, but instead held things back. She identified this as

both good and bad. It was good that her mom did not tell her things that were not age

appropriate, but bad because her mom held things in and handled this in unhealthy ways, sometimes by drinking or working really hard until she would just sleep for long periods of time. Her mom was also taking anxiety medication that she was not aware of at the time, but her mom told her she had quit taking it and began feeling much better, which helped their overall situation. Today Daphne is graduating from college and is highly involved in church communities and organizations.

Emma. Emma is a 21-year-old White female who grew up with her mom and did not meet her father until she was seven. She stated that she and her mom do not have a good relationship, but her mom always provided for them by working and would help her with homework. When she was really young they lived in a car for the summer on the lake, while her mom was working two jobs. Later, her mom had a full-time job, but was not able to receive any government benefits because she made a "decent wage." However, one income is still less than two, especially in regards to taking care of a child. She said it was a hard time for her mom because she had to be both parents and had no one else to depend on. Emma also noted that she did not have insurance and as a kid was not able to go to the doctor. Her mom married her stepdad when she was 12 years old and her mom had two other children. Some time later, her mom lost her job, divorced her stepdad, and then her stepdad passed away. Emma said that her mom moved away recently so that she could legally smoke marijuana to relieve her stress. She did not agree with her decision, but acknowledged it by saying*, "She went there to do it, so that is her thing."* Today Emma is married and they have an infant.

Fallon. Fallon is an 18-year-old female who identifies closely with White, but states that she is half White and half Hispanic. Her mom became pregnant her senior year of high school, but had already committed to playing a college sport and had a scholarship. When her

mom was 19 she had a baby, attended college, played a college sport, and started her work shift at 3 a.m. Her mom completed her degree while keeping up with all of her other tasks. They lived with her mom's parents for the first couple years of her life. Later, they moved out of her grandparents' home and into an apartment with a female roommate. This roommate provided support for both her and her mom. She saw her biological father a few times a year and explained that when she was little he would take her shopping or go do something fun, but now she has no real relationship with him. Fallon said that she felt different when she was at friends' house who had two parents because she was not used to that type of family structure.

She also identified that she and her mom were and still are very close because they had to rely on each other. She felt like she had more real-world experience than children with two parents because of the things she went through with her mom and how her mom talked with her about those things. Her mom was still aware of her young age and was always careful about being age appropriate. Fallon stated that her mom was smart in high school, but did not apply herself. However, when her mom got pregnant she rose to the challenges and got things done. Her mom got married when Fallon was eight, which was hard for her because their relationship changed. She stated,

> *I think as a single parent, they treat their kids a little bit more maturely. Once she*
> *got married she didn't tell me the same stuff that she used to. She seemed to be*
> *like, 'Now I have someone else to confide in and you can be the child now.'*

Fallon stated that her mom and stepdad had two more children, but recently got divorced and now her mom is a single parent again. This makes Fallon feel guilty for being away at college because her mom now has no one to depend on and she feels like she should be there for her. Fallon is involved in many activities on her campus.

What are the Stressor Events for Children in Single, Never-Married Parent Families?

The stressor events (A) are those that impact the family. Stressors are either normative or non-normative, which means the stressors are either predictable or non-predictable (Smith et al., 2009). In this section I will be addressing the stressor events that occurred in the lives of the single-parent families as described by their adult children. The themes identified were work demands and financial struggles, time demands, changes in living situations, relationships with their fathers, changing marital status, parenting alone, and the young adult children's stress.

Work demands and financial struggles. A normative stressor for all participants was that they all lived with a mother who worked full-time. This was a stressor because the mom's were not able to spend large amounts of time with their children and when they were at home they were often tired and had other responsibilities to take care of. For some of the participants' mothers working full-time also caused stress because they had to find affordable childcare. Emma said, *"My mom worked full-time, so she had money, but it was still not as much as two incomes."* Daphne also stated, *"My mom was the breadwinner, she always had a consistent job."* Ayden said that his mom has worked full-time for the same company his whole life, which is 24 years.

All participants also discussed the issue of finances and lack of money as a consistent trend in their homes. Daphne said,

> *One of the greatest struggles my mom had was finances. There were times*
> *growing up around adolescence when we didn't have electricity for a couple days*
> *or we would have to go to my grandma's house to take a shower because our*
> *water would get turned off.*

Cooper stated,

We didn't have money, which would cause my mom to be stressed out. Then, I

would do something that was not a big deal, but she would make it a big deal

because she was already stressed. Then, I would be pissed of because she was

pissed off, which would cause me to be mad when I was at school and then I

would get in trouble at school. It was just a cycle.

Time demands. Not only were the mothers working full-time and struggling with finances, but four out of the six participants identified that their mothers were busy outside of work as well. Ayden said, *"My mom was too busy. My mom could not go with me to a tournament and be with three other kids back home."* Fallon said she lived with her mom and grandparents the first few years of her life and during this time her mom was very busy because she was playing a college sport, attending college, working, and taking care of a baby.

Changes in living situations. Four out of the six participants lived with their single mother and grandparents. Two out of those four participants also lived with other relatives. Not all of the grandparents or family members caused stress, many times it was the environment or the change of environment that was stressful for the family. Cooper described living with his family as normative stress,

Grandpa was an alcoholic. Grandma liked to spend money. My mom is just my

mom. I lived in such a weird house. My cousin would come and stay with us, but

he had his own issues like drugs, alcohol, jail, and attempted suicide. My dad

lived with a roommate, then he got married, but got divorced about three years

later. Now he lives with his roommate again.

Brandy decided as a 4th grader to move in with her grandparents because her mom was addicted to drugs, which is an example of non-normative stress. Ayden, his mother, and siblings lived with his uncle, then had a house of their own but could not afford the house and had to move in with his grandmother.

  Relationships with their fathers. Most of the participants either have a limited relationship with their biological father or no relationship at all, which has caused stress for the child and their single parents. Two participants knew their biological father and saw him regularly and two other participants received child support from their father, but had little interaction. Fallon explained her relationship with her dad by saying,

> *When I was little it would be like, 'Oh dad is in town!' 'I am going to take you to*
> *the mall, take you out to eat!' I thought he was the coolest person ever because*
> *every time I saw him he took me to go do something fun. He also started paying*
> *child support, but recently he is not in my life at all. My dad got married last year*
> *and I went to his wedding, but while I was there he treated me terribly. In regards*
> *to my dad, I have always had to be the more mature one.*

Emma did not meet her biological father until she was seven years old. Ayden was told he had the same father as his siblings (who he has only seen about four times in his life), but at the age of 22 found out that he had a different father that he has never met.

  Changing marital status. Half of the participants experienced their single mothers getting married. Therefore, they had step-fathers. Two of the participants' mothers got divorced and are now single parents again, but with more children. Fallon said,

> *I think that my mom being a single parent again is a big change in her life. She*
> *has already been through it before at a younger state, so I feel like now it is less*

stressful, but still a hardship. I feel guilty being here at college because she is by

herself.

Parenting alone. Most of the participants shared the idea that their single mother had to be two parents or were often alone and relied emotionally on the children. *"She has to be a mom and a dad. Cook and clean and she does not have anybody else to depend on,"* said Emma. Ayden said,

> *My friends' parents would all spend time together and go out as couples. They*
>
> *would invite my mom, but she would never go. That made me feel weird because*
>
> *she would isolate herself, even though they were trying to bring her in and be a*
>
> *part of things. However, the biggest thing was probably the stress she carried as a*
>
> *single parent, added to the overall environment that we had as a family because*
>
> *she knew that she was always going to be going it alone. There was never*
>
> *anybody for her to fall back on, except for her kids. We carried some of the*
>
> *emotional burden for her that a spouse probably would carry. Like if you have a*
>
> *spouse, the sense of loneliness may not be that high and you would have*
>
> *somebody to unpack tensions and stresses with. I know that is not the case for all*
>
> *married couples, but there wasn't even the option of that.*

Fallon stated,

> *She doesn't have many friendships or connections. Growing up I noticed that she*
>
> *didn't have someone to talk to about really deep stuff because she talked age*
>
> *appropriately to me, but we were close. She did not have someone else to rely on*
>
> *all the time, so sometimes, not in a bad way, but sometimes we relied on each*

other. I was the person she would go to often if there were struggles or

difficulties. One big difficulty is my mom didn't have someone to go to.

Daphne concludes with her mom's experience and provides other single parents with some relatable guidance for handling loneliness as a single parent,

I think stress will always be a thing for my mom. That is one thing that could be

emphasized as a single parent. You are always alone in the end, but you're not.

You just have to figure that out, it is all about adjustment. My mom said that is

was not until she learned to adjust being fully alone, that was she able to start

finding success.

The young adult children's stress. Lastly, four out of the six participants self-identified that they handle stress like their mothers.

Emma said, *"I write in a notebook and I like to read, but I don't really do those things anymore. I just sit and ponder. I probably don't deal with stress very well either."*

Daphne said,

I probably handle stress similarly to my mom, which has been a hard thing for me

to realize and I am trying really hard to reject it. It is all work-work-work until I

feel like I have a handle on things, but then I collapse for a day or more. Collapse

means sleep and then I have extreme introversion. My mom is the same way too,

even though she's extremely extroverted. I take after her, but I see faults in that so

I try hard not to.

Fallon described her mom as always being determined, making lists, and getting things done. Then, she described herself, *"I always have to write things down. I have to make sure I get things done or it is really going to stress me out."*

When I asked Ayden how he handles stress he responded with laughter and said,

> *Oh gosh! Don't ask my wife! Unfortunately, it has made me a very volatile person*
>
> *as well. Fortunately, I have been able to see that in my own life and marriage.*
>
> *Early on, after I left my home, I became a control freak. I wanted to control*
>
> *everything, because if nothing got out of control then I could handle it. It was an*
>
> *illusion of control and security. My wife and I are from two completely different*
>
> *family backgrounds. We began to clash, especially with conflict resolution and*
>
> *how we dealt with things. I began to realize that I had a lot of anger. I began to*
>
> *see myself doing things that I hated growing up and that I hated living with. Now,*
>
> *my wife was having to live with that, which drove me to seek out counseling and*
>
> *accountability.*

The stressor events that were most widely identified were the single mothers worked full-time and did not have enough money, the mothers were really busy, the fathers were not consistently involved, mothers relied on the child or children emotionally, mothers isolated themselves, and the families had to change their living situations. The families were able to overcome some of these stressors by using available and varying types of resources.

What Resources did the Parents and Children Have or Use in Stressful Situations?

The second research question was created to examine the resources (B) each participant received during the time s/he lived with his/her single parent. Once a resource was identified, it was labeled as either a tangible or an intangible resource. To view each participant's table of resources please see Appendix C. The themes of resources that were identified were working mothers, grandparents, stepfathers, government assistance, appropriate support from the mothers,

support given from outside of the family, the importance of support, and the participants' suggested resources for future single-parent families.

Working mothers. A resource that all participants had was mothers who worked full-time jobs and provided for their families economically. Brandy's mom often worked as a bartender, which meant that she was not only working full-time, but also working at night. Ayden's mom has worked full-time for the same company his whole life, which is 24 years. When Emma was four years old, her mom worked two jobs and they lived in their car for a summer. These mothers are working full-time to provide for their child/children, even though it was not always enough.

Grandparents. All participants also mentioned grandparents. They provided a place to live, food, financial help, emotional support, and/or help with child care. Not all of the grandparents contributed all of these resources, rather these are the combined tasks of the grandparents that were noted in my study. Four out of six of my participants actually reported having lived with their grandparents for a period of time. Daphne said,

> *My grandpa would give me one hundred dollars at the beginning of the school year, and sometimes more, to get school supplies and new clothes. I was an athlete too, which meant there were always fees involved. So usually one set of grandparents would buy my school stuff and the other would buy new volleyball shoes or uniforms. My grandparents stepped up a lot. I don't know what we would have done without them.*

Fallon stated, *"We lived at my grandparents' house for the first two years of my life. My grandma watched me during that time when my mom had school and work."*
Ayden shared what it was like living with his grandmother,

We moved in with my grandmother, which is the house that my mom grew up in. My mom

slept on the couch, my sisters shared a room, and I was in a little walkway area. My

uncle lived with us at one point and then another uncle moved in, so there was a lot of

people in a small home.

According to my participants, grandparents are an important resource for children and their single, never-married mothers.

Stepfathers. Another family member that was discussed by half of my participants is stepfathers. Cooper said,

When my mom and stepdad were still dating, he would help pay our rent and pay

groceries every once in awhile. It's weird because my mom doesn't make more

money, but my stepdad now makes a lot of money and we live in his house.

Emma stated, *"Looking back as a kid I cannot recall any times I felt different from kids raised in two-parent homes, probably because I had my stepdad there."*

Government assistance. Five out of the six participants received some form of government assistance. This included reduced school lunches, Medicare, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), food stamps, and government assisted healthcare. Daphne said,

My dad very rarely paid child support and he was legally obligated to, so my

mom filed for government assistance. We used food stamps for a long time, had

government assisted health insurance, and I received free reduced lunches at

school. I don't know if it is because my mom asked for government assistance, but

I think it was because the government recognized that the person who was

supposed to be paying my mom's child support wasn't, so they compensated for it.

Emma was the only participant that did not receive any government assistance. She said, *"My mom always made too much money to get any government assistance, even though we needed it."* Government assistance provided resources for these participants, but much of the time the families were still in need.

Appropriate support from mothers. Half of the participants discussed the idea that their parent had age-appropriate conversations with them, but were still able to give them facts. Cooper stated, *"My mom talked to me about everything, everything she could at least that was age-appropriate. But she cried a lot, so I knew something was wrong."* Daphne described her mother's strategy:

> *I think one way my mom showed great parenting was how she kept some of the harsh realities from me. She was able to express to me that my dad was gone and she would never make promises that he was going to come back. She told me my dad was abusing substances, but I didn't even know what that meant at first, so she waited until I was ready.*

Fallon described a time last year when she went to her dad's wedding and he treated her terribly. She came back and told her mom what happened. Fallon said,

> *I have never seen my mom more upset in her life. She has never shown any hatred toward my dad. Growing up, she was very good about that. She was never immature about the situation. She gave me a chance to be in his life and him a chance to be in my life.*

Support outside of the family. All of the participants' families had some type of support outside their family. This support came from friends of the parent, friends of the child, or people from church. Most participants and their single parents received gifts of food and finances

41

from these outside sources. While most of these resources were tangible, the relationships with those who gave were intangible. Ayden listed the most resources out of anyone, but the only government assistance he received was free reduced lunches. When discussing resources he said,

I had friends' families that would pay for me to go on sports trips, my uncle paid

for my Taekwondo, and my friends' parents would pay for me to go do things that

I would not have been able to do otherwise. Medically, I had a friend's parent

that was a doctor and they would give us the free sample packets of medicine that

they knew we needed because we didn't have health insurance.

Emma discussed how her mom's friends would sometimes bring food or take Emma shopping for new school clothes. Daphne said,

My mom would get extensive amounts of money in the mail at random from our

church. Sometimes we would go to pay our electricity bill and it would already be

paid. My mom would be like, 'I know I am not going crazy, I know when I have

paid bills.' I think that was a resource, both tangibly and emotionally. There is so

much impact when a person is paying an item for you.

Daphne continued on to say, *"I would like to think the government took care of us financially, but we did not experience the love. There was no relational value or personal value attached to it until we became involved and interacted within a church."*

Importance of support. Finally, every participant discussed support. They either noticed a lack of support or acknowledged their family had great support around them. Fallon noted that she realized not every child in a single-parent family had the same positive experiences as she did with her mom. Her mom was determined and had much support, which she recognized by exclaiming, *"I grew up with a kick-ass mom! She may not have been perfect,*

but she did a great job raising me." Fallon was the only participant who discussed her mom's

personality as a strength. Fallon's mom's determination was a very important intangible resource

for their family.

       Suggested resources for future single-parent families. I asked participants what

they thought would be the most helpful resources and education for single parents. Four

participants stated they would have liked to see some sort of emotional support for their parent

and thought that would be helpful for the future. They suggested having support from the

community, support groups, and counselors. Ayden gave specific examples of resources that he

would like to have seen for his own family and for single-parent families in the future:

> *I want to say the resource that would have been the most helpful is time or money,*
>
> *but at the same time I do not think that would have really benefited the most. I*
>
> *think family counseling or a partner family would have been the most helpful.*

I asked him to describe what a partner family would like. He said, *"Having real life healthy*

families teaching other families how to deal with conflict, childrearing, and other life lessons."

He thought this or a single-parent support group could have helped his mom and his siblings. He

ended by saying,

> *This is going to sound really hippie, and I do not know how this could be done,*
>
> *but honestly, a community of people that strive to understand the situation of a*
>
> *single parent and love them where they are at. Who can continually find ways to*
>
> *take burdens off their plates. As silly as that may sound or as hard as that may be*
>
> *to manufacture or to build, that is what got me through personally and I feel like*
>
> *who I am today is a miracle. It was the community of people that I did have and*
>
> *that did engage in my life.*

Daphne shared the most valuable resource she thinks could be helpful for others. She stated,

>I see value in community. I am obviously biased towards the church community because I believe that is what saved my life and my mom's life. It was a different kind of love than just a good person, but a holy love that came from people who loved God. This was the most valuable resource.

Four participants also noted that they would like to see single parents have financial planning and management education because they felt like it could have helped their family. Two participants stated that childrearing education would have been helpful for their parent as children. Emma stated,

>I know I have trouble disciplining my one year old, but a smack in the hand isn't going to do anything and neither is time out. So, what other options do you have? I think childrearing education for my mom would have benefitted us all.

Two participants also discussed the issue of not having access to affordable daycare. Emma said,

>Affordable daycare would also be a major help because you have to spend $200 a week on daycare, but half your check is gone to daycare so that you could be at work! There is not even a point to go to work. You might as well just stay home and collect assistance from the state.

Emma indicated that she would like to see the government be more helpful to single parents:

>Food stamps should help out single moms, but it should also give them an opportunity to work and work for it.

She ended by saying she would like to see better jobs for single parents and more funds for single parents to go to college because if moms were able to get a better education, then they could afford to be a single parent.

Fallon would like to see single parents have all types of parent education. She said some education may be common or seem *"stupid,"* but everyone still needs to know it and have the opportunity to learn from different types of parent education.

The resources discovered from the single-parent families were full-time working mothers, assistance from grandparents, stepfather relationships, government assistance, age-appropriate support from their mothers, support outside the family, the importance of support, and suggested resources for single-parent families in the future.

How do the Children of Single, Never-Married Parents Define Stressful Situations?

Defining the situation (C), is how an individual perceives the stressor and his/her reaction to the stress (Smith et al., 2009). All of the participants were able to recall times when their parents were stressed and they were all able to identify reactions their parents had to stress. The themes found that led the adult children to defining a situation a crisis were the mothers' ineffective coping techniques, mental health, the mothers' reactions and body language, and the child shared the crisis with the mother.

Ineffective coping techniques. Four out of the six participants stated that their parent had adopted a bad habit to cope with stress. These habits consisted of over-eating, excessive sleep, drug use, and alcohol. Ayden said,

My mom has always been overweight and we didn't have a lot of money for

things, but she always had money to go and eat out or get fast food. I think a lot of

her stress, unfortunately, was coped with bad habits or just not dealt with at all,

just bottled up and not processed or handled healthily.

Mental health. Three out of the four participants who stated their mothers developed bad habits also described their moms to be depressed and/or have anxiety. Emma said, *"My mom was always stressed out because my mom has anxiety. Her strategies to manage stress were not very successful because she moved so that she could legally smoke marijuana."*

Daphne said,

My mom would deprive herself of sleep for so long that when she finally slept it

was excessive. That is how I knew she fell into a stress-induced depression for

sure. I noticed her stress level starting to diminish and simultaneously she told me

that she was trying to get off some anxiety medication that I didn't even know she

was taking. She was really happy when she realized she didn't need the medicine

anymore. Things were much better.

Mothers' reactions and body language. All participants also agreed that they knew when their parent was stressed based upon their parent's reactions and body language. Ayden stated that his mom would cry and several times, when facing extremely stressful situations, his mom told him she was considering giving him and his siblings to the state because she thought it would be better. In another instance, she mentioned the option of suicide. Brandy and Fallon said that their moms would begin taking action and trying to take care of the problem until it was solved. Cooper said that his mother would cry a lot or talk to him about everything, which is how he knew when she was stressed.

Children and mothers shared the same crises. All participants that labeled an event a crisis, not only labeled it a crisis for themselves, but their single parent as well. Ayden defined his situation by saying,

It was definitely a family crisis. Not just for my mom, but for the whole family. It was a crisis because I was so proud to finally have a home of our own and losing it affected everything in my life, in my sisters' lives, and in my mom's life. This lasted for years.

Brandy said,

It was a crisis because we did not have what we needed when we needed it and my mom was trying to figure out the best solution. Plus, she still needed to go to work and we had to maintain all of our other daily tasks.

Fallon described her situation as a crisis by saying,

It was definitely a crisis because I told my mom 'you aren't treating me the same and I don't like this situation.' I put how I was feeling on the table and then I got to hear back from her and actually fight, not a fight but yelling. It was just being able to get everything out. We knew there something was off, but no one was saying anything.

Therefore, all of the crises mentioned are considered a family crisis because the child felt that s/he was not the only person experiencing a crisis.

The themes discussed in this section described how the participants were able to define and label their situations. In the next section the crises labeled by the participants will be examined and explained by their experiences.

What Crises did the Children in Single, Never-Married Parent Families Face? How were they managed?

Each participant was asked to tell about a time his/her family experiences a crisis. To be clear, I did not label these events crises – the participants did so. I created a table that shows a side-by-side comparison of each participant's situation and what happened within each one of their families during the time of a crisis (Appendix D).

Five out of the six participants were able to identify a crisis within their family. Daphne's crisis involved both of her parents:

My parents had been emotionally separated for who knows how long, but were still living under the same roof. They had a huge argument, my mom had to call the police on him. He was under the influence of drugs that day. The swat team actually had to come and remove him from our home. I was standing across the street watching my dad be taken away in handcuffs.

Emma said a crisis that impacted her family was when her mom lost her job, then divorced her stepdad, and then her stepdad died later on. *"So it was like three years all in a crisis, bad timing."*

Fallon's crisis happened when her mom married her stepdad:

I felt like my mom and I's relationship changed because I wasn't treated the same. I think single parents treat their children a little more maturely. My stepdad viewed me as a child. I felt like she was like, 'Oh, now I have someone else to confide in, like you're the kid now.' I was very unhappy and it was definitely a crisis.

Ayden labeled a situation a crisis because it was not an issue that went away within a few days. There was constant stress for a long period of time for all of his family members:

My mom had purchased a home a few years prior and we were trying to make it

on our own, but my grandmother stopped paying bills on her own home. My mom

was paying for both houses and trying to get her comp back up…We ended up

having to file for bankruptcy and we got evicted. We lost our home. We showed up

one day and there were new locks, an eviction notice on the house. We lost the

home. She was months behind on rent and I remember her telling my uncle in

front of us kids that if she had a gun she would end her life.

Cooper did not label any experience as a crisis. However, when I asked him to give an example of a crisis he said,

My grandpa went to work drunk. Then, he passed out and broke his nose. He went

straight to the hospital and had to have surgery. Then, he lost a job that he had

for 35-40 years. So that kind of sucked, but I don't know that it was a crisis. It

was a big event among the family, but I would say I have never had a crisis in my

life. A crisis to me would be like one of my parents dying.

While this could have been a crisis, Cooper stated multiple times in the interview that he did not think he had ever experienced a crisis and that the events in his life were just normal. He said, *"The only thing that I think could be a crisis is if my parents were to die."* Cooper was the only participant to state the he had never experienced a crisis of any kind.

All participants indicated that a stressful event and a crisis are different. Participants defined stress as normal everyday events that could be dealt with or something that could be managed. Ayden said, *"Stressful events at my house were people got mad at each other and we*

didn't talk for two or three days." Brandy described that a stressful event for her family would be, *"My mom trying to figure out how she is going to get somebody to watch her kids for when she has to work late at night."*

The participants seemed to define stress similarly, but they had different ideas on what determines a crisis. Ayden, Emma, and Daphne discussed that a crisis is determined by the length of time the situation is affecting the family. For example, Ayden said,

> *This specific crisis went on for months, even years. There was constant stress and tension. My mom was always on edge. She wasn't happy or pleased with anything. My mom was just in a state of depression, lack of self-worth, and lack of care for self or family.*

Brandy and Cooper noted that a crisis must be a severe situation, even though it seems like their definition of severe would not be the same. Fallon stated, *"A crisis is finally getting it all out,"* which referred to when a problem or issue is confronted. Three of the participants indicated that their mothers managed the crises in an unhealthy way by using the same coping methods that were used during times of stress. However, Brandy's mother and Fallon's mother were able to use bonadaptation by using the resources they had to get through the crisis. Cooper did not identify a crisis or how his mom would have managed. Within the Family Stress Model, a crisis is reached when a family cannot maintain the normal balance because of the stress (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, each participant identified his/her crisis accurately because each situation caused his/her family to become unbalanced.

The Family Stress Model was used to identify the single-parent families' stressors, resources, defining or labeling of their situations, and the crises that occurred. This model

provided guidance to examine single-parent families from a perspective of their young adult

children's experiences.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This was a qualitative study that sought to answer the overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of young adult children who grew up in single, never-married parent families? I interviewed six young adult children, ages 18-25 who were raised in single, never-married parent families. I focused on learning about the phenomenon of their experiences and the shared meaning across all of the participants. This was done by using Family Stress Theory as a guide, which consisted of specific research questions that identified stressors, resources, defining the situation, and crises.

What are the stressor events for children in single, never-married parent families in the United States? They include work demands and financial struggles, time demands, changes in living situations, the fathers, changing marital status, parenting alone, and how the young adult children handled stress. What resources did the parents and children have or use in stressful situations? The single-parent families' resources were working mothers, grandparents, stepfathers, government assistance, appropriate conversations from mothers, support outside the family, importance of supports, and suggested resources for future single-parent families according to the participants. How do the children of single, never-married parents define stressful situations? Stressful situations and crises were defined by the mothers' bad habits, mental health, or body language and reactions. What crises did the children in single, never-married parent families face? How were they managed? The crises identified were different for each participant, but were self-defined. Many times the crises were not dealt with in healthy manners. Throughout the rest of this chapter I will explain what the results mean and then address implications for research and practice.

First, I would like to identify the strengths that each family had by using the Qualities of Strong Families (Olsen, 2006). Even though participants may not have realized their family had strengths, after reading through the data I can say that each participant did have at least one family strength. Ayden's family seemed to have affection and commitment. Brandy shared positive communication and enjoyable time together with her mom. Cooper's family strengths were enjoyable time together and spiritual well-being. Daphne shared many strengths with her mom, which consisted of appreciation and affection, commitment, positive communication, and spiritual well-being. Emma showed that her and her mom had qualities of commitment and appreciation. Lastly, Fallon and her mom were able to manage stress and crisis effectively, have positive communication, appreciation and affection, and commitment. All participants had family strengths within their single-parent family. The most common strength among all participants and their single parents was commitment. This could be because the mothers do not have a spouse to depend on and therefore, share a deeper level of commitment than child-parent relationships in two parent homes. This is supported by the literature that states every family has strengths and every family has challenges, but if challenges are the focal points than only family challenges will be seen (DeFrain et al., 2008).

All of the participants lived with single mothers who were working full time. This is helpful because it provided direct access to a very specific group of single, never married parents. These mothers worked hard, but even with full-time jobs they did not have enough to support their families. This is an issue because it caused them to remain in poverty, even with government assistance. Hirth (2014) stated,

> People like to think that poor and working class people really don't need all the
>
> help we get, or that we squander what we have on petty things that people without

public assistance can't afford. I won't deny that this occurs, but when it does it's the exception, not the rule. We know that society expects us to work two jobs and go to school and do everything we possibly can to better our situation, but it's never so easy as "just work harder." Most of us are already maxed out physically and emotionally. (p. 1)

The participants' mothers in my study were working full-time, were busy with other time demands, and had financial struggles. All single parents do not live in poverty, but in 2011 48% of single parents were living in poverty and only 6.8% of married parents were living in poverty (Heritage, 2012; Grall, 2013). However, all of my participants identified that as a child they were in a low SES category, but now five out of the six participants believe their parents are middle class. Therefore, more research should be done to concur this finding.

This study also supported the research that single parents are typically not only lower in their socioeconomic status, but are also less involved with their children than married parents (Garg et al., 2007). Parents often want to be more involved with their children, but single parents do not always have the means to do so (Hill, 2010; Hodgson et al., 2001). My study did not look directly at parental involvement, but about half of the single-parent families in my study supported this finding in the literature. However, this does not mean that single parenting directly relates with children doing poorly in school or acting out with behavioral issues, only two of my participants discussed that they had issues in school.

Five out of six participants were only children for at least the first five years of their lives. This finding is similar to other research that notes 56.8% of custodial parents have only one child (Grall, 2013). While all participants but one eventually had other siblings, it was not until many years later.

All of the participants discussed grandparents and most participants lived with their grandparents for a period of time. This means that single-parent families often include extended family as well. In the past, parents provided support until their children were fully grown adults. Then, the adult children were expected to take care of their parents if they needed assistance as they aged. However, single parents "undermine this social contract… Extended families open the opportunities for a broader network of kin relationships to draw on in time of need" (Hilton & Kopera-Frye, 2008, p. 34). In this study, grandparents were the most common resource and provided different types of support. They played large roles in the lives of their grandchildren growing up in single-parent families. Stolba & Amato (1993) also found that grandparents can provide support and a parent like role in single-parent families.

All participants were able to discuss tangible and intangible resources. These resources were often intertwined because of the relationships the participants had with the people who provided the resources, but intangible resources are what made the true difference in regards to their overall experiences (Wijnberg & Weinger, 1998). Most of the single parents were given food and finances, but was that the single parents' greatest need? According to my participants, those were not the greatest needs. Many participants acknowledged their parent was lonely and they would have liked to see emotional support for their parent. The young adult children stated the main issue that their single parents needed was interpersonal support. Along with this finding, is that many of the participants' mothers did not handle stress effectively; instead they created bad habits, practiced non-effective coping strategies, and varying degrees of mental health. Hanson (1986) found that "families with larger social support systems also enjoyed a better mental and physical health" (p.131). Could the mothers' loneliness and lack of support be related to them to handling stress and crises poorly? One could argue that the entire situation
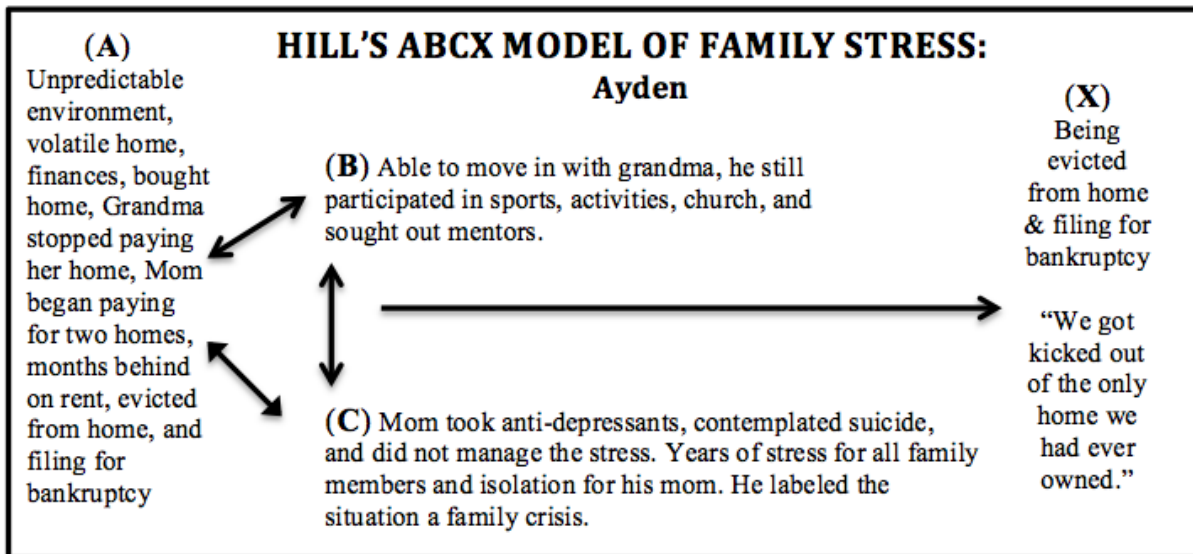
could be causing these outcomes. However, emotional and social support impact the family structure and each individual's mental well-being (Cairney et al., 2003). Many single parents may lack support, but many single parents have support from family and friends, which allows for the child and parent to get the support that is needed. It seems that many of the child's outcomes could also depend on the parenting style, child's personality, and how the child is able to deal with his/her own stresses (Baumrind, 1991; Jackson et al., 2009). Many of the participants noted that they handle stress in a way similar to their parents. Fallon stated that being determined like her mom is a positive way to handle stress, but three other participants stated that they handle stress like their parent, which they identified was not healthy and is something that they are trying to change. Many participants also discussed the importance of age-appropriate conversations and how their parents managed to practice this technique. This finding is supported positively in research for single parents in regards to positive outcomes from authoritative parenting styles (Arnott & Brown, 2013; Wahler, 2002).

A consistent finding throughout my study was social support, which is one of the most important resources for single-parent families (Cairney et al., 2003; McKenry & Price, 2000). I would like to continue to do research in this area to evaluate how a lack of support may cause bad habits and a lack of coping for single, never-married parents.

The Family Stress Model was critical in understanding the single-parent families because the young adult children did not have any problems identifying times that their parents were stressed or faced challenges. Figure 5.1 depicts Ayden's crisis situation using Hill's original model to provide an applied visual of the Family Stress Model. Ayden identified many stressors that led to the actual event of the crisis. He also identified that he had many resources that he believed kept him afloat.

Figure 5.1 Family Stress Model Applied

HILL'S ABCX MODEL OF FAMILY STRESS:
Ayden

(A) Unpredictable environment, volatile home, finances, bought home, Grandma stopped paying her home, Mom began paying for two homes, months behind on rent, evicted from home, and filing for bankruptcy

(B) Able to move in with grandma, he still participated in sports, activities, church, and sought out mentors.

(C) Mom took anti-depressants, contemplated suicide, and did not manage the stress. Years of stress for all family members and isolation for his mom. He labeled the situation a family crisis.

(X) Being evicted from home & filing for bankruptcy

"We got kicked out of the only home we had ever owned."

All participants reported large differences between stressors and a crisis. All definitions of stressors, resources, defining the situation, and crises fit within Hill's original model (Hill, 1949; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Smith et al., 2009). Using this model I have found that a stressful event can become a crisis, but the lack of coping and managing the crisis is what often escalates and perpetuates the continually state of crisis for the family (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

While some of these single-parent families may have fit some stereotypes, none of them fit them all or even came close to the persistent negative undertones (Wijnberg & Weinger, 1998). As an overall, the literature found supported my study. My participants not only observed the crises their single parents were having, but were experiencing the crises alongside their parents. Children of single parents should continue to be a crucial aspect of single parent literature to help create a more holistic view of single-parent families

Implications for Research

In my study I had two male participants and four females. All of them were raised by White, single, never-married mothers. In the future, I would like to see young adult children of

single, never-married parents interviewed from other races and cultures. It is also important to interview children of single-parent fathers to evaluate the commonalities or differences between the genders of the single parents. Few questions were asked about education, but in future research it would be ideal to see the child's education compared to the parent's education. Future research should also investigate multiple contexts of the children and single parents by investigating single-parent families who are in higher socioeconomic status categories and outside of the United States.

This study was retrospective, which means that the children were looking into the past. In future research it would be neat to see children younger than 18 that could talk about their single-parent family, but this could be difficult because they may not be able to think critically until they are older and have developed that ability. Through more diverse qualitative interviews this perspective could become generalizable. That was not the purpose of this study, but future research could look in that direction if that is the purpose.

The main goal and strength of my study was to give a different view of single, never-married parents rather than asking the single parents what they needed. This helps researchers understand single parents by talking with the children, providing an outside opinion or perception. Researchers should remember to be respectful and sensitive to the individuals and families they are working with (Hanson et al., 1995). Single parents (or any parent for that matter) will most likely have a different outlook than that of their children and vice versa. I would like to see this continued in future research to help create a more holistic view of single-parent families.

In the future, this could also be expanded to look at not only single, never-married parents, but other individuals that fall under the umbrella of single parents. If this is to be done,

researchers need to be sure to specify what group of single parents they are researching to provide deep knowledge and understanding within that group (Hanson et al., 1995). I found it difficult to sift through the scholarly literature and find information about single, never-married parents because many of the single-parent literature was all grouped together. This is effective if a researcher wants to look at all single parents, but there are many forms of single parents and it is important to separate them to get the best understanding of each subgroup.

In conclusion, this was a qualitative retrospective study of adult children who were raised in single, never-married parent homes and I sought to look at their experiences from a different perspective. Qualitative research needs to continue to be a part of single parenting research in order to gain understanding and insight. By using qualitative research I was able to hear about all of the resources each participant received, not only government assistance. Qualitative methods helped me identify the relationships participants had and the resources they received. This perspective should continue to be researched because it has supported the single parent literature and can continue to provide information on single-parent families.

Implications for Practice

Are we asking the right questions? Throughout this study this is something I struggled with because I wanted to do a study that was meaningful, that could help single parents and their kids, and provide more knowledge for the research world. I believe that my study did those things, but I would like to go further in depth and actually apply these findings by helping educate single-parent families who are in need by practicing Family Life Education.

As Family Life Educators, we need to continue to fight the single-parent stereotypes by not perpetuating them, but countering them with facts and stories. "Practitioners need to develop and compile a comprehensive prevention strategy, rather than an incrementalist emergency one,"

which means to act before a crisis occurs, instead of being reactive to situations (Hanson et al, 1995, p. 20). I had my own biases of single parents prior to this study. However, I can say that my perceptions have shifted because these single-parent families did not fit most of the stereotypes. Instead, they actually contradicted the stereotypes.

Emma stated that she would like to see a program where single mothers could still work for government benefits and also have more funds for education or college. I think she is on to something. "Wages that bring single working mothers…who are attempting to make the transition from welfare to work, out of poverty should be a key concern of policymakers" (Jackson et al., 2009, p. 104). This could be done by increasing the minimum wage and by making educational opportunities that enhance earnings more accessible to mothers like those in this sample. The participants' mothers in my study worked hard and they were willing to continue to work to provide for their families. If government policies could put some of these things into practice, single parents would continue to work and could actually benefit. Many policies in the United States are pushing for unmarried parents to marry, even though many of these couples are poor, less educated, and unstable (Amato, 2000). If the family is unstable, marriage could actually be more harmful for the child, especially if there is not a corresponding program that works to increase marital stability for couples such as these (Dush, 2009). I believe that marriage is an important part of family, but I do not think couples should get married because they are pregnant. The government may not want to encourage people to get married only because of pregnancy, unless they plan on providing counseling and education for the parents and children.

Our hope is that future legislation will be formulated on the basis of unbiased expectations about these women and grounded in an understanding of the choices

they are confronted with and how they are affected by social support systems and

governmental provisions and resources (Wijnberg & Weinger, 1998, p. 212).

This is my hope as well, that as a society we can strive to understand single-parent families by

leaving behind negative stereotypes, providing support, and giving them our time.

Lastly, family professionals are of great importance in regards to family policy. Pratt

(1995) stated this is because

family professionals often first engage the policy-making process in response to a

specific issue that is relevant to their roles as family therapists, educators, and

researchers. Once engaged family professionals who understand family policy decision

making will be most able to make solid, valuable contributions (p. 56)

As family professionals it is important to remember that we are the ones who can start

and enforce the changes that need to be made. Change starts with professionals who are

passionate about their work and seek to help individuals receive the resources that are needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, single parenting has become a normal part of American society. Single

parents are desperately trying to succeed and provide for their families, but they are in need of

assistance. This assistance is not just finances or government assistance, but also should include

policy, support for parent education, emotional and relational support, and support for

acceptance. Being a single parent is difficult and society often shames the parents who are taking

care of their children instead of supporting and helping them. Fallon echoed the message from

Maier and McGeorge (2014) when she described the resources she would like to see for single

parents:

Becoming a single parent happens all the time, it's a usual thing, but I think people still look down on it. I do not think that is okay because it is almost even more work than, I know there are struggles in every family, but putting all of that on one person is just crazy to me. I feel like single parents don't go out of their way to get help because they are ashamed of it, but they shouldn't be! Honestly, single parents need to be more accepted because it is her first time being a parent too! She is just winging it like everyone else, but she doesn't have anyone to ask like, 'How do I do this?' or 'How should we do this?' I would like to see guidance for single parents and for them to be able to talk about it.

References

Albarran, A. S. (2014). Improving school readiness through parent education programming: Understanding the role of community-based organizations in a large urban city center (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3615469)

Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 1269-1287.

Arnott, B. & Brown, A. (2013). An exploration of parenting behaviors and attitudes during early infancy: Association with maternal and infant characteristics. *Infant and Child Development, 22*, 349-361.

Baig, M. (2013). Women in the workforce: What changes have we made? *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mehroz-baig/women-in-the-workforce-wh_b_4462455.html

Barth, R. P., Landsverk, J., Chamberlain, P., Reid, J. B., Rolls, J. A., Hurlburt, M. S., Farmer, E. M. Z., James, S., McCabe, K. M., & Kohl, P. L. (2005). Parent-training programs in child welfare services: Planning for a more evidence- based approach to serving biological parents. *Research on Social Work Practice, 15*(5), 353- 371.

Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 11*(1), 56-95.

Bennett, M. & Jamieson, Lynne. (1999). Perceptions of parents as a function of their marital status and sex. *Infant and Child Development, 8*, 149-154.

Brown, B. V. (2000). The single-father family: Demographic, economic, and public transfer use characteristics. *Marriage and Family Review, 29*(2-3), 203-220.

Bryant, J. (2015). How war changed the role of women in the united states. Yale-New Haven

    Teachers Institute. Retrieved from

    http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/2002/3/02.03.09.x.html

Cairney, J., Boyle, M., Offord, D. R., & Racine, Y. (2003). Stress, social support and depression

    in single and married mothers. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 38*, 442-

    449.

Collins, C. L. & Fetsch, R. J. (2012). A review and critique of 16 major parent education

    programs. *Journal of Extension, 50*(4).

Darling, N. (2014). Authoritative vs. authoritarian parenting style: There's a big difference

    between discipline and punishment. *Psychology Today.* Retrieved from

    https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/thinking-about-kids/201409/authoritative-vs-

    authoritarian-parenting-style

DeFrain, J., Swanson, D., Friesen, J., & Brand, G. (2008). Creating a strong family: Looking at

    life from a family strengths perspective. University of Nebraska- Lincoln Extension,

    Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Dombusch, S., Ritter, P., Leiderman, P., Roberts, D., & Fraleigh, M. (1987). The relation of

    parenting style to adolescent school performance. *Child Development, 58*, 1244-1257.

Dush, C. M. K. (2009). In Marriage and family: Perspectives and complexities. Peters, H. E. (Ed)

    & Dush, C. M. K. (Ed). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Gabel, A. (2012). The marriage crisis: How marriage has changed in the last 50 years and why it

    continues to decline. Virginia. Retrieved from

    http://uvamagazine.org/articles/the_marriage_crisis

Garg, R., Melanson, S., & Levin, E. (2007). Educational aspirations of male and female

    adolescents from single-parent and two biological parent families: A comparison of

    influential factors. *Journal of Youth Adolescence, 36*, 1010-1023.

Gervais, R. L. & Millear, P. (2014). The well-being of women at work: The importance of

    resources across the life course. *Journal of Organizational Change Movement, 27*(4),

    598-612.

Grall, T. (2013). Current population reports. Custodial mothers and fathers and their child

    support: 2011. Retrieved from

    http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2013/demo/p60-246.pdf

Gray, P. B., Garcia, J. R., Crosier, B. S., & Fisher, H. E. (2015). Dating and sexual behavior

    among single parents of young children in the united states. *The Journal of Sex Research,*

    52(2), 121-128.

Hanna, C. (2002). Domestic violence. In Encyclopedia.com. Retrieved from

    http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Domestic_violence.aspx

Hanson, S. M. H. (1986). Healthy single parent families. *Family Relations, 35*(1), 125-132.

Hanson, S. M. H., Heims, M. L., Julian, D. J., & Sussman, M. B. (1995). Single parent families:

    Present and future perspectives. *Marriage & Family Review, 20*(1-2), 1-26.

Heritage Foundation. (2012). Marriage reduces child poverty. *The Heritage Foundation.*

    Retrieved from http://www.heritage.org/childpoverty

Hill, K. L. (2010). Single mothers- how are they doing? Proceedings of the academy of

    organizational culture, communications and conflict, 15(1), 20-25.

Hill, R. (1949). *Families under stress: Adjustment to the crisis of war separation and reunion.*

    New York: Harper and Brothers.

Hilton, J. M. & Koperafrye, K. (2008). Differences in resources provided by grandparents in

single and married parent families. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 47*(1-2), 33-54.

Hirth, T. (2014). How to make it in America as a single mother, by the numbers. *Huffington

Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/taylor-hirth/single-working-

mother_b_4688244.html

Hodgson, J., Dienhart, A., & Daly, K. (2001). Time juggling. *Journal of Divorce and

Remarriage, 35*(1-2), 1-28.

Horowitz, J. A. (1995). A conceptualization of parenting: Examining the single parent family.

Marriage & Family Review, 20(1-2), 43-70.

Horowitz, J. A., Hughes, C. B., & Perdue, B. J. (1982). *Parenting reassessed: A nursing

perspective.* Englewood Cliffs. NJ: Prentice- Hall. Inc.

Jackson, A. P., Choi, J. K., & Franke, T. M. (2009). Poor single mothers with young children:

Mastery, relations with nonresident fathers, and child outcomes. *Social Work Research,

33*(2), 95-106.

Julian, D. J. (1995). Resources for single parent families. *Marriage & Family Review, 20*(3-4).

Khaleque, A., & Rohner, R. P. (2002). Perceived parental acceptance-rejection and

psychological adjustment: A meta-analysis of cross-cultural and intracultural studies.

Journal of Marriage and Family, 64.

Lazarus, R. S., & Launier, R. (1978). *In Perspectives in international psychology: Stress-related

transactions between person and environment, ed*. Pervia, L. A. & Lewis, M. New York,

NY: Plenum.

LeMasters, E. E. & DeFrain, J. (1989). *Parents in contemporary America: A sympathetic view

*(5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co.

Levine, S. (2015). A record number of voters support gay marriage, new poll finds. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/09/gay-marriage-support_n_6835710.html

Maccoby, E. E. & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. *Handbook of Child Psychology, 4.*

Maier, C. A. & McGeorge, C. R. (2014). Positive attributes of never-married single mothers and fathers: Why gender matters and application for family therapists. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 26*(3), 163-190.

Mayor, T. (2013). Single mom stigma, alive and kicking. *Brainchild*. Retrieved from http://www.brainchildmag.com/2013/03/single-mom-stigma-alive-and-kicking/

McCubbin, H. I. & Patterson, J. M. (1983). The family stress process: The double ABCX model of adjustment and adaptation. *Social Stress and the Family.*

McDonald, L. (1998). A multi-family approach: Families and schools together (FAST) builds protective factors in potentially neglectful families. *Parenthood in America.* Retrieved from http://parenthood.library.wisc.edu/McDonald/McDonald.html

McKenry, P. C. & Price, S. J. (2000). Families coping with problems and change: A conceptual overview. In *Families in and change: Coping with stressful events and transitions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moynihan, M. (2015). Parents as primary educators. *The Heights School*. Retrieved from https://www.heights.edu/reflections/parents-as-primary-educators/

Olsen, C. (2006). Qualities of strong families. Kansas State University. Retrieved from http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/Families/~/doc8735.ashx

ParentFurther. (2013). The 9 parenting strategies. *Search Institute.* Retrieved from

http://www.parentfurther.com/why/9-parenting-strategies

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3ʳᵈ ed.). Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage Publications.

PBS. (2015). The role of parents. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-

school/supporting-your-learner/role-of-parents/

Pratt, C. C. (1995). Family professionals and family policy: Strategies for influence. *Family*

Relations, 44, 56-62.

Resource. (2015). In *Encyclopedia Britannica Online.* Retrieved from http://www.merriam-

webster.com/dictionary/resource

Resource directory for single parents. (2015). *Boulder Community Network.* Retrieved from

http://bcn.boulder.co.us/pss/spd.html#basic

Schofield, T. J., Conger, R. D., & Neppl, T. K. (2014). Positive parenting, beliefs about parental

efficacy, and active coping: Three sources of intergenerational resilience. *Journal of*

Family Psychology, 28(6), 973-978.

Smith, M. L., Gilmer, M. H., Salge, L. E., Dickerson, J. B., & Wilson, K. L. (2012). Who enrolls

in teen parent education programs? An emphasis on personal and familial characteristics

and services received. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 30*, 21-36.

Smith, S. R., Hamon, R. R., Ingoldsby, B. B., & Miller, J. E. (2009). Exploring family theories.

New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stolba, A. & Amato, P. R. (1993). Extended single-parent households and children's behavior.

The sociological quarterly, 34(3), 543-549.

Tangible. (2015). In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved from

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/tangible?s=t

Wahler, R. G. (2002). How do parents do it? *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 11*(3), 253-254).

Wall, K. (2012). Statistics reveal stark challenges for children raised in one-parent households. News- Leader.com. Retrieved from: http://archive.newsleader.com/article/20121125/ NEWS01/311250054/single-parents-Ozarks-poverty

Weber, J. G. (2011). Individual and family stress and crises. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wijnberg, M. H. & Weinger, S. (1998). When dreams wither and resources fail: The social support of systems of poor single mothers. *Families in society, 79*(2), 212- 219.

Wolf, J. (2015). Single parent statistics. About.com. Retrieved from

http://singleparents.about.com/od/legalissues/p/portrait.htm

Wong, B. (2014). The 15 biggest misconceptions about single parents. *The Huffington Post.* Retreived from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/18/single-parent-misconceptions_n_6344234.html

Zhan, M. & Pandey, S. (2004). Postsecondary education and economic well-being of single mothers and single fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*(3), 661-673.

Appendix A - Informed Consent Document

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because we would like to know the experiences of young adults who were raised in single parent families.

If you agree to participate, you will talk to an interviewer about your experiences in a single parent family. The interview will last about 45-60 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

You might feel discomfort with the subject or some questions in the interview. But you may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Benefits

Knowing this perspective is important to society and it may help other families. Individually, you may benefit because you may learn more about your parent and you may also learn more about yourself.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential. Audio tapes of the discussion will be locked in a cabinet in one researcher's office. When the audio tapes are transcribed, no information that identifies you will be included in the transcripts. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts. The list that ties your real name to your pseudonym will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher's office. After the audio tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study- related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

➢Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research

➢Representatives at Kansas State University (KSU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at KSU.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Karen Myers-Bowman, project director, Kansas State University, karensm@k-state.edu. (785) 532- 1491.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, (785) 532- 3224.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

➢You have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

➢You have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your

satisfaction.

➢You are 18 years of age or older.

➢Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

➢You consent to having the interview audio recorded.

➢You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study,

there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are

otherwise entitled.

Signature_____ Date_____

Printed name_____

❏ Please check this box and provide an email address if you are interested in receiving a

statement of the results of the study. (This page will be separated from the consent form to

protect confidentiality.)

Email address: _____

Appendix B - Interview Guide

1. Describe the family in which you grew up.

2. If any, tell me about a time when you felt different from kids raised in dual-parent families.

3. Tell me about a time when your parent showed what you think of as great parenting.

4. Recall a time when your parent was challenged as a (single) parent.

   a. What made this situation a challenge?

   b. What kind of help did your parent receive that you know about?

   c. What other resources or support do you think would have been helpful?

5. Tell me about a time when your parent was stressed.

   a. How could you tell she was stressed?

   b. How often did this occur?

   c. What were some things your parent did to manage this stressful time/event?

   d. How successful were those strategies? (How did you know about this level of success?) Would you have labeled this a crisis? Would your parent? (What is the difference between a crisis and an event that is merely stressful?)

6. When you think about your experiences growing up with a single parent, what kids of resources do you think would help single parents and their kids?

   a. Parent education?

   b. Other resource?

   c. Why do you think these would be helpful?

7. If not discussed in the above questions ask:

a. I would like to ask you a few demographic questions, are you comfortable with this?

b. (If yes) What race do you identify? What about your parent?

c. Would you consider yourself lower, middle, or upper class? What about your parent?

d. Where did you live with your parent?

    i. Location- Neighborhood, City, State

    ii. Housing type

e. How many biological children does your parent have?

f. How many children do you have?

g. Are you a single parent?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not had a chance to talk about?

Appendix C - Participants' Resources

Table 5.1 Participant 1 Resources

Ayden's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Reduced lunches at school - Child's friends' families would pay for sporting trips and other activities - Mom worked for same company his whole life (currently 24 years) - Same job sometimes provided extra bonuses or holiday gifts - Lived in Uncle's trailer with family - Uncle paid for bills and activities - Had no health insurance, but received free medicine because of his relationship with a friend - Grandma's church would bring boxes of food - School gave food and clothes during Christmas time - Lived in grandmother's home - Male mentors sought him out/he sought them out too	- Child had friends - Mom worked for same company his whole life (currently 24 years) - Provided with skills because friends' families and his Uncle would pay for him - Family support from Uncle and grandma - Had a friend who's dad was a doctor -The male mentors invested in him -Support from church

Table 5.2 Participant 2 Resources

Brandy's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Mom worked 2 jobs - Received child support from father - Children received Medicare - Lived with mother in a house - Lived in grandparents home	- Support from grandparents - Grandparents would watch her - Mom had friends, able to network - Mom had a determined personality - Support from sister

Table 5.3 Participant 3 Resources

Cooper's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Lived in home with grandparents - Mom's boyfriend/later stepdad bought food and helped pay bills - Received WIC - Received Food Stamps - Mom worked, which provided money	- Participant appreciated how his dad talked to him - Had fun family outings - Going to church - Participant liked to draw and skate - Support from stepdad

Table 5.4 Participant 4 Resources

Daphne's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Mom worked, which provided money - Received Food Stamps - Government assisted healthcare - Participant received free reduced lunches at school - Grandpa would give money for her to buy clothes and school supplies - Grandparents would pay for athletic fees and buy her equipment - Random bills would be paid from Church members of their Church - Their Church would send them money - People from their Church would bring them meals	- Mom worked full-time - Participant was a happy child - Mom did not share harsh realities with daughter - Lived close to grandparents - Mom and grandma have a close relationship - Church community - People called them every day - Family support from grandparents

Table 5.5 Participant 5 Resources

Emma's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Mom's friends would buy them food - Mom's friends would take daughter shopping for new clothes for school - Mom provided money, by working	- Had cooking and writing skills (for mom and daughter) - Mom had friends that were supportive - Mom had decent paying job - Support from Grandma - Support from stepdad

Table 5.6 Participant 6 Resources

Fallon's Resources	
Tangible	Intangible
- Lived in home with grandparents - Grandparents gave financial support - Child Support - Mom worked	- Grandparents watched her and gave support - Mother and daughter had close relationship - Mom was captain of soccer team in college, had a baby, worked, and went to school and graduated - Mom was determined - Aunt would watch her - Mom received a college education and got a good job - They lived with a female roommate who she referred to as an "aunt" for her amount of caring and help - Mom married stepdad

Appendix D - ABCX of All Participants

Participant	A	B	C	X	Participant's Definition of Crisis or Stress
Ayden	His mom had to foreclose on home and file for bankruptcy	Moved in with Grandma, mom has had the same job for 24 years	Mom was taking Anti-depressants, talked about suicide with participant, mom did not manage stress- would bottle it up and explode, arguments, and bad eating habits. Mom would isolate herself from other parents, which made him feel weird and caused him and his siblings to be isolated. He described his home as "volatile and polar"	Participant labeled this incident as a family crisis	"I think stressful events at my household were people got mad at each other and we either didn't talk about it or just let it go away, which took 2-3 days. Then, as far as crisis, this specific instance was just something that went on for months, even years. It took up to over a year of just constant stress, constant tension. My mom always on edge. She wasn't happy, she wasn't pleased with anything. I would say that she became more depressed. So I think just the extent of time and how that was handled, where as the stressful times she could be pissed, but it would go away in a couple of days. Where as this was something that just, it was just a state of depression, lack of self-worth, lack of care for self or for family. This went on a couple years I think. Just the extended period of time that the volatility became common, it became a way of life for us, unfortunately. "
Brandy	Her mom's car had been stolen	Mom had network of friends, determined personality and could make friends quickly, strong support system, help from grandparents (mom's parents) and sister	Mom immediately started calling people and took action.	Participant labeled this a crisis	"The severity of what happens determines a crisis. The car missing was more of a crisis. It caused stress, but it was a crisis. A stressful thing for her would be trying to figure out how she is going to get somebody to watch her kids for when she has to work late at night."
Cooper	Grandpa went to work drunk, fell, broke his nose, had surgery, and lost job that he had for 35+ years	Participant liked to draw and skateboard, mom would take him out to do things, dad did not talk down to him	Lived with his mom and grandparents, but felt like the grandparents were not supportive.	Participant labeled this as normal or stressful, but not a crisis	"I don't know if I have ever had a crisis in my life. I didn't have people die that are close to me. I don't know if it has to do with my faith, but all I can see that would be a crisis was if my parents died."
Daphne	Dad did drugs, was arrested	Mom had a good job, age appropriate information from mom, supportive grandparents, church community	Mom had age appropriate conversations with her and provided support	Participant labeled this a crisis	"I would say that stress is the result of a crisis, but just because you are stressed does not mean you are going through a crisis. You experience a crisis and then you are probably going to go through stress afterwards to redeem yourself from the crisis and get back to a healthy point."
Emma	Mom lost job, divorced stepdad, he died later on	Mom worked a lot, had friends, some friends brought food	Mom had depression and anxiety, Mom would cook, go on walks, write	Participant labeled these three years a crisis	"Stress is something you deal with. A crisis is where you stoop so low on yourself and you have to give it time to come back up."
Fallon	Lived with mom, mom got married when she was 8	Lived with grandparents, Mom shared information with her, they were close, mom was determined, Mom got a good job	Relied on mom and mom relied on her prior to marriage, Participant felt like she was treated differently and ended up "bursting out" and telling her mom what she was feeling.	Participant labeled this as an individual crisis for herself	"A crisis is finally getting it all out, whereas stress is when you know something is off, but no one is really saying anything."