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AFRICAN AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHER – AN IN-DEPTH STUDY

by

Donna Jean Russau

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2003

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Donna Jean Russau

AFRICAN AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHER – AN IN-DEPTH STUDY

Donna Jean Russau, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2003

This thesis investigates the life and role of the African American Single Mother (AASM) in America as the topic of this study. The AASM in this study will voice her experiences. The point of view of this thesis is that the AASM is in the unique position of being the only person able to convey facts about her life from her personal perspective. Through the voice of the AASM, this researcher will develop a written document which describes her life experiences and roles in which she operates in her family. This study will give the view of life of AASM's from an insider's perception instead of an observer's opinion. This research will offer a new perspective to outline and describe the AASM.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Topic of Interest

From the Perspective of the African American Single Mother (AASM)

The topic, the life, the experience of the African American Single Mother (AASM) is a unique but frequently discussed subject matter. From teachers to politicians on every level, decisions have been made, and policies have been implemented concerning the AASM based on stereotypes and a lack of information from her directly. It is the goal of this research to present the subject matter, the life and experiences of the AASM, from her point of view.

Relevance

The subject matter, the life of the AASM has been considered important because the subject of family appears to be an issue at the forefront of American society. When Dan Quayle used the term 'family values', it spawned a national debate about what the family consisted of. The AASM's family was part of that debate. The observations in the literature about AASM's have only been from a distance and from outsiders. Many of the discussions are based upon myth, ignorance, fear and undeniably an attempt to ignore the entire issue of race. According to Kelley (1997), it was

mentioned in a confidential memo from President Nixon's domestic advisor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, proposing that "the time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of 'benign neglect'" (p. 5). The mere attempt to ignore an entire population of a people even for a short period of time is proof that there is an absolute need to study and observe every component of their status and what the rationale was behind the attempted neglect. Although the conversation took place over 30 years ago, still today there is a sense of benign neglect for the AASM based on their growing numbers. There is a need for the understanding of the life of the AASM simply because she is part of the human race. Ignorant political advisors, fearful mainstream academicians, and the racist self-serving status quo cannot block the fact that there are different varieties of life styles for this heterogeneous society. Ignoring any part of the community does not make them disappear.

Re-defining the AASM

In my opinion the portrayal of the AASM is as a young, uneducated, promiscuous, welfare recipient, the person responsible for raising criminals and accountable for the moral decay of the nation has to be changed. Impressions of that AASM will be discussed in this study because the truth of her positive contributions will be exposed. The focus in this research study will be on the actual life experiences of the AASM. For instance, we will see her organize her life to accommodate all of the expectations of herself. We will observe her as a financier. We will observe how she juggles the expectations of her employer, children, extended family, and community.

The balancing act of having to conduct herself, the sole parent responsible for most aspects of her children, is a special skill that only she can describe realistically.

Historically Speaking

We are reminded of the representation of her family through the eyes of a patriarchal, male centered perspective. This view has historically represented the AASM and her form of family as deviant (Dickerson, 1995). The label is assigned because the AASM's family is looked upon as an exception to the idealistic homogeneous American family. The standard by which the AASM's family has been measured historically is unreasonable because American family life style is not homogeneous.

We can understand the discussion above better when we look at the foundation of matrilocality. In 1662 during the colonial period, African slaves and the offspring of the female were declared slaves for life, and marriages were not deemed legal between slaves, consequently we have the foundation of the African American Single Mother. According to Lorenzo Johnston Greene in "The Negro in Colonial New England", an abject slave, subject to the court's definition of him as mercantable and movable "property", as chattel or, and to his master's virtual whim. Indeed, the general assembly of Virginia in 1662 passed an act which directly and consciously invoked Justinian code: *partus sequitur ventrem*, whereby a child born of a slave mother was also held to be a slave, regardless of its father's legal status. A few years later, the population of Africans in bondage in Virginia reached nearly 2,000, and

another statute (1667) established compulsory life servitude, de addictio according to Roman code, for Negroes...slavery had become an official institution (Greene, 1942). What could a mother do but try to keep her family together in spite of the fact that her form of family was declared to be illegal? This status existed until well after the Emancipation Proclamation that went into effect in 1865 (Greene). In order to fully comprehend the recentness of this event, my grandmother who was born in 1883, eighteen years after the 13th Amendment legally ended slavery, was born into the first generation of legally recognized African American family.

Social, Political, and Economic Influences That Affect AASMs and Their Families

The Moynihan report had and continues to have a great influence on the perception of the African American family because of the notion that there is a homogeneous American culture. Although it is popular to ask about, “multicultural diversity”, it is not embraced by the people who have influence on our legislative rules (Mindel et al., 1998). That is why the Moynihan report namely, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* published by the United States Department of Labor in 1965, created such a stronghold on the American psyche with regard to the AASM’s family. Clearly, that prominent report only looked at the African American community from a denigrating perspective. Every negative aspect of the African American community was highlighted such as welfare dependency, crime, out of wedlock parenting, single headed households. Given the political influence Daniel Patrick Moynihan had and the respect he garnered from his role as a social scientist,

his word influenced many legislative acts in the late 60's and 70's and continues still today (Christian Science Monitor, 2003). However, innocent Moynihan may have been in his improper evaluation of the African American family, the harm clearly outweighed the benefit. We have observed that in our most recent version by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in their book, *The Bell Curve*. Thomas J. Bouchard Jr. (2003), in his review of *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, stated,

In the current political milieu, this book's message is not merely controversial, it is incendiary. Herrnstein and Murray have written one of the most provocative social science books published in many years. The issues raised are likely to be debated by academics and policy makers for years to come. (on-line)

Although Herrnstein and Murray may not have had negative motives for promoting such an idea, it is bound to influence social policy. In my opinion, much of it is silent influence because most politicians would never admit to engaging in blatant racist legislative enactment.

Recognizing that part of the problem is that the stage is set from an ethno-centric perspective based on the assumption that there is a homogeneous American culture. Thus the AASM's family is deemed disorganized, deviant, and dysfunctional because it just does not fit the traditional American value system. This is a natural response to any alteration to the norm. The system has to be contested because it is not fair, or even reasonable given the extensive role immigration has played in the American culture. We continue to experience vast immigration due to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold War, genocide in Cambodia, starvation in Ethiopia, ethnic warfare between the Hutus and the Tutsis and blood feuds between

the Bosnians and the Serbs (Mindle et al, 1998). Clearly the AASM family experience is not any more tumultuous than any of these other groups that have moved to the shores of the United States with the expectation of a lending hand. The issue that must be kept in the forefront in this regard is the fact that African American wage earners endure tremendous racial prejudice in the workplace, thus the quality of life may appear to be at an equal economic balance but the physiological and emotional equivalencies are not congruent (Lareau, 2002). When two people earn the same wage to do the same job it would appear to be an equal opportunity. If one of those persons' are constantly subjected to disparate treatment, denigrated talk, jokes, and the invisible treatment such as benign neglect, those two are not on an equal footing. No value can be placed on that scenario.

One view states that the African American family is functional in its own right and has developed in part based on traditional African culture as well as in reaction to oppressive racism in America (Mindel et al., 1998). Since the topic of discussion is really narrowed to the African American Single Mother and her family the other view that examines the influence of social class structure is one that most closely deals with her plight. According to this point, it is said that when class is held constant, there is little difference between Anglo Saxon and African American families in terms of family life (Lareau, 2002).

Cultural Relativity and Cultural Reality

Given the historical perspective, the concept of African American single

motherhood is looked upon by Dickerson in a sociohistorical context (1995). She referred to fictive kinships, grandmothers, and members of the community that play co-parenting roles in the life of the AASM. These roles are not included in the traditional nuclear family that is the standard by which the AASM is measured. Dickerson defends her argument by referencing cultural relativism. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, “cultural relativists assert that concepts are socially constructed and vary cross-culturally” (Marshall, 1998, pp. 134-135). These concepts may include such fundamental notions as to what is considered true, morally correct, and what constitutes knowledge or even reality itself. The sociological dictionary goes on to say, “our sense of reality is a social construction, based upon the prevailing discourse of a society” (Marshall, pp. 134-135). Paul Feyerabend (2003) said that there are cultures so different from the West that they are incomprehensible to outsiders, who therefore cannot translate them into their own terms. Ethnography thus becomes a process of uncovering the meanings by which people construct reality.

Matrifocality

One of the first cultural relativist paradigms that needs to be examined is matriarchy and visit matrifocality in this study in order to bring the truth to, and understanding of the family composition for the AASM. From the Eurocentric perspective, matriarchy is a power term to identify women who have dominance over their family, including her male counterpart; on the other hand, matrifocality is more of a mother/woman centered relationship to the family. The mother/woman holds the

family unit together (Collins, 2000). That applies to both the married and the single mother/woman. This stabilizing position that she holds does not imply that she is the controller of the family, she is simply in the position of being the one responsible to keep the family intact.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Give Voice to the African American Single Mother

From Her Perspective

The literature reviewed for this research is about the African American Single Mothers (AASMs). Here we will also review the AASM's condition from her perspective. The subject matter has been discussed extensively by politicians, psychologist, sociologist, and anthropologist. Clearly there is an interest in the topic of the African American Single Mother. The following reviews are a reflection of her personal impression of the topic.

Patricia Hill Collins identified African American motherhood as a symbol of power in the second edition of "Black Feminist Thought – Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment" (2000). She explains motherhood in a multi-dimensional way, they are as follows:

"Othermother" are Grandmothers, aunts, older siblings and cousins who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities. (p. 179)

"Community othermother" are women who experience a bond with all of the African American community children through cooperative child care traditions like neighbors looking after the neighbor children. (p. 189)

"Bloodmother" is the birth mother. (p. 178)

Commonly, the dual parent family is also served by the "othermother" in the African

American culture. She explains that within the African American communities and neighborhoods, the mothers of every classification have held the leadership for the community concerns. An entire chapter is devoted to conceptualizing African American Women's activism. One dimension is through influence in existing social structures like the othermother, community othermother, and bloodmother mentioned above. Another dimension is through the struggles for institutional transformation, and that is reflected in the participation in the boycotts, civil rights organizations, labor unions and other organized groups. Collins expounds on nearly every aspect of African American female manifestation.

Collins (2000) reminds us that the capitalistic market offers a complex and basic contradiction to a culture the AASM is born into. The perpetual privatization of the family by way of the single family home, private schools, private lessons which leads to the idea of children being private property, is in direct conflict with the AASM's community based family (p. 182). The idea of family like networks for socialization, reproduction, consumption, emotional support, economic cooperation and sexuality is in direct conflict with the nuclear family household experience. The AASM's family tends to be more communal than privatized. Therefore, the black motherhood is looked upon as a fundamentally contradictory institution.

"Flat-Footed Truths – Telling Black Women's Lives" by Bell-Scott (1998) is a collection of writings and photographs depicting Black women's lives by Black women. The phrase, 'flat footed truth' is a southern saying that means to tell the naked truth, or the whole truth, nothing but the truth. The Black women telling the

stories of Black women who were and are considered to be artistic contributors to society, goes beyond the most obvious role. Their stories reflect the mood of their times. In most cases, it took courage to disclose the opinions and observations of their very own lives. Not many other people were interested, and most did not care because they could not see the relevance or importance of African women's lives. Equally important, the stories gave the African American woman an opportunity to look at incidences from another angle and as a result, she could learn from herself, the people in her life would benefit from her knowledge and ultimately, she would grow from the experience of telling her own story.

In the forward of this book, Marcia Ann Gillespie asked the basic questions, "how do we tell our life stories?" The answers are not quite obvious, this study has also dealt with the issue. She further inquires, "where do our stories begin and those of our foremothers end? In answer to the second question, we have to understand the interconnectedness of our experiences with our foremothers. Unless we revisit as far back as we are able, we may not be able to see our own story. Bell-Scott refers to it as a means to connect the dots.

There is a section in the book on the difficulty of telling ones own story. The struggle emerges when the truth and the myth have to be differentiated. Just as bell hooks had to recall in "Writing Autobiography", the memory held for so many years was that as a child, she used to ride in a wagon at her Grandfather's house. Her mother informed her that there was never a wagon at her Grandfathers house, but a wheelbarrow. It made sense when she recollected getting bruised and scratched after

playing with her 'wagon' with her brother. This is just one illustration of the difficulty you are faced with when telling your story. In the course of this research, it was evident that the apprehension is alive when approaching prospective subjects for their story.

Another segment of *Flat-Footed Truths* addresses the adventure of claiming lives neglected or lost. The actual charge of this research is to stop the benign neglect with regard to the voice of the AASM. In a true sense, this is claiming lost lives by virtue of hearing her side of the story. Some of the Black women in this book had to be resurrected because of the lack of value placed on the contributions of a Black woman in their era. An example of that would be the contribution in this book by Alice Walker entitled, "Looking for Zora". That is Zora Neale Hurston; as the late Robert Hemenway put it, "Zora Neale Hurston is one of the most significant unread authors in America, the author of two minor classics and four other major books." She lived in an all African American community in Florida. Zora was a historian, she wrote African American folklores. She was not a single mother, however, through her writings she depicted the experiences of those AASM's in her life. Hurston tragically traded a potential family life for fame amongst the rich white people she befriended. A lesson is learned from Ms. Hurston, but taught by Alice Walker. No matter how scholarly Zora Neale Hurston was, publishers would not consider reviewing her work without the endorsements of her wealthy white friends. As a result of this knowledge, due to the painstaking tenacity of Alice Walker who went searching for Zora, we now see a clearer picture of what it may have been for the African

American family during Zora's time. As long as Zora could entertain and satisfy her rich friends, she was supported. This is another illustration of the absence of the voice of the African American woman simply because she lacked an endorsement by her oppressors.

There are numerous stories that interweave with the lives of the AASM in this collection through excerpts, pictures, and poems. This contribution is an encouragement to African American women to share their experience. African American women such as bell hooks, Sojourner Truth, Alice Walker, and Anita Hill all contributed to this collection (Bell-Scott, 1998).

"Ethnic Families in America – Patterns and Variations" by Mindel et al. (1998) deals with nearly all races and ethnics in America, the authors placed African-American families in the section categorized as "historically subjugated ethnic minorities." This classification is precisely why it was important to research the current standing of the African American family. Renowned professor of Child and Family Studies at Michigan State University, Harriet Pipes McAdoo wrote the chapter and expresses the sentiments that "...it is impossible to use median data to describe the situation today [with African American family's], yet authors almost consistently do so" (p. 361). As with the placement of this review in the book, the data that describes the standing of the African American family are not limited to only the low end of the socioeconomic scale. McAdoo explained that the measures of central tendency is not a good method to extrapolate the experience of the African American family because there are those who are prospering and those who are "sliding backward into

economic distress” (p. 361). Therefore, “being of African descent does not in itself determine what the life pattern of an individual will be.” (p. 361).

McAdoo points out that some Africans came to America as explorers, others came as indentured servants, and as history would tell it, most came enslaved. Enslavement took on different forms, depending on the region and the size of the plantation. Some Africans who were enslaved were able to maintain an intact family with the exception of the men being able to protect their women. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, poverty and dislocation was overwhelming for this community and as a result, many resumed an enslavement like relationship with their former owners as sharecroppers (Mindel et al., 1998, p. 362). Others drifted and never aligned themselves to a community. Many were members of segregated housing systems that reinforced cultural values. The former enslaved Caribbean families often came to the American mainland in search of a better life, however, they maintained their relationships with their homeland and thus were not affected to the same extent by the antiblack codes, the rampant hostility and hate. These different experiences generated different family systems; thus all African American peoples cannot be fused into one category. Thus, median data can not take into account the diversity African American family’s experience.

McAdoo does differentiate between marital stability and family stability, which she claims is not common in writings about African American families. The trend for parenting roles to lean toward consanguineal relationships of the mothers started in Africa and is perpetuated in America because of the marginalization of the

African American male. Thus, she indicates that family stability can be found in the single parent family as well.

Robin D. G. Kelley expresses his indignation about the depiction of African American mothers in the title of his book, “Yo’ mama’s disfunkcional! Fighting the culture wars in urban America” (1997). As an historian and expert on Africana studies, Kelley attacks the perpetuation of the 21st century version of ‘the dozens’, it is no longer a spoof of ‘yo’ Mama’s so fat jokes. According to Kelly, it appears to have moved to a new level, when the Riverside County Welfare Director in California, Lawrence Townsend referred to a bag lady as a possible former AFDC mother who got too old to reproduce children in order to support herself.

Kelley (1997) recognized that the former terms of “jungle bunny,” and “coon,” “jezebel” are terms that once were regularly spoken put-downs of African Americans have been replaced with terms such as “welfare queen,” “the underclass,” ‘matriarchy,’ and “dysfunctional” (p. 2-3). These attacks on the African American humanity are not just espoused from insignificant benign casual observers, these dehumanizing statements are being advanced by policy makers and social scientists as well (Kelley). However metaphoric, the ‘dozens’ appear to be, it can be ignored because negative perceptions are further likely to deteriorate and spill into policy issues and practices.

Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn wrote, “The Afro-American Woman - Struggles & Images” (1997). They give credit to Anna J. Cooper who gave voice to the Black Women’s issues as far back as 1892 when Ms. Cooper wrote a

book entitled, “A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman of the South”. She was not just discussing the lowly status of Black women in the U.S., but she was also saying how important the Black woman was in uplifting the entire Black race and that Black men could not speak on their behalf because, they experience a different set of issues. The African American female had a struggle for equality that would require the collective voice of the African American women in order to change her condition.

“The Fatherless Generation – Hope for a Generation in Search of Identity” was written by D. Stringer (1995). This book offers a Christian perspective of the reason for a generation experiencing fatherlessness. Stringer offers solutions from biblical principles. First, Stringer explains that Generation X has a lack of understanding of the father in the home. He says it is parallel to not recognizing the voice or presence of the Father in Heaven. His argument continues, “as long as this type of fatherlessness continues, we will continue to see a rise in violence, immorality and lawlessness in our communities” (Stringer, p. 21). He further supports his statement with the 68th Psalm verse five from the bible. It says, God wants to be a “father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Felder, 1993, pg. 881). Stringer argues that if humanity cleaves to God, the problems associated with fatherless children would be alleviated. The spirit of adoption is the key to the understanding of the relationship with God. Just as God chose man (adopted), man is supposed to adopt the orphaned. It is not until this connection is realized that there will be a positive impact on the fatherless generation.

In “all our kin” Carol Stack (1975) elevated the knowledge about the African

American family experience because she revealed revolutionary information about the kin network that so little was known about. Stack says “Who is socially recognized as kin depends largely upon the cultural interpretation of the chain of parent-child connections” (p. 46). She lived with African American families to study their experience first hand and to give them voice in order to refute the many stereotypes popularized by certain scholars of “the culture of poverty” and “the black family.”

“Rachel and Her Children, Homeless Families in America” by Jonathan Kozol (1988) reveals the ease with which anyone, families included, can become homeless. Jonathan Kozol interviews homeless men, women, and children in their predicament. He explains the bureaucratic pitfalls that the homeless face in their attempt to cope with their present condition, while trying to reconstruct their lives for the future. The hourly struggles to survive homelessness is depicted clearly from the voice of the victim.

Mark P. Orbe, “Constructing Co-Cultural Theory - an Explication of Culture, Power and Communication” (1998), presents the need for hermeneutic (interpretation) phenomenology, the study of the lifeworld, as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualize or theorize about it. The AASM’s expression of life experience certainly has the need for hermeneutic phenomenological investigation.

Jacqueline Kirby (2003) of Ohio State University, in Single-parent Families in Poverty, states that:

... ninety percent of single-parent families are headed by females. Not surprisingly, single mothers with dependent children have the highest rate of

poverty across all demographic groups. Approximately 60 percent of U.S. children living in mother-only families are impoverished, compared with only 11 percent of two-parent families. The rate of poverty is even higher in African-American single-parent families, in which two out of every three children are poor. (on-line)

Further, she indicates the effects poverty has on parenting, “Income loss appears to affect the well-being of children indirectly through negative impact on family relations and parenting” (Kirby, on-line). She identifies stressors that relate to poverty (i.e., financial, emotional, social). Furthering her argument, “the link between economic stress and mental health has been documented in various studies. Single mothers must obtain sufficient money to cover the most basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing” (Kirby, on-line). A lack of this eventually leads to an emotional imbalance. She states that, “financial strain is one of the strongest predictors of depression in single parents. Higher levels of depression are predictive of more punitive disciplinary practices and decreased parental nurturance, support, and satisfaction with the parenting role” (Kirby, on-line). The chronic strains of poverty combined with task overload significantly increases vulnerability to new life stressors. “Poor single mothers often experience a cycle of hopelessness and despair which is detrimental to both themselves and their children” (Kirby, on-line). In spite of what appears to be impossible odds for the single mother, “many families have increasingly demonstrated themselves to be viable, well-adjusted, alternative family forms” (Kirby, on-line). Kirby discusses the issue of single parenting from a pathological perspective, as if it were a disease. She further states, “Many are able to function well and to promote education, resourcefulness, and responsibility in their children”

(Kirby, on-line). The following adaptations or styles are what successful single parent families have adopted:

1. More available personal resources, which enhances their coping effectiveness.
2. Better family organization, which balances household responsibilities and decreases task overload.
3. A positive family concept, which values loyalty, home-centeredness, consideration, communication, and closeness.
4. An ability to highlight positive events and place less emphasis on negative aspects of stressful events.
5. Possessing less stress-producing, supportive social networks.

In summary, Kirby says, “Adaptive families possessed a sense of control over their own destiny and perceived themselves as effectively dealing with the outside world” (on-line). She also said more successful families had a distinct support network that enabled them to function effectively. I will incorporate these points in my thematic approach to the methodology in Chapter IV.

The variety of points of views are often a counterpoint to the messages promoted and perpetuated in the mainstream culture of America. This paper will emphasize the attributes that she believes she has, from her own point of view and not from the standpoint of what conventional society says she lacks.

In “I Don’t Know What I’d Do Without Our Mam: Motherhood, Identity and Support Networks”, Wendy Mitchell and Eileen Green (2002) state a recurring theme

in their research is that kinship continues to play a pivotal role in the lives of the African American Single mothers' lives in a practical, social and emotional context.

In “Personal, Moral and Street Commitment to Marriage: Gender and the Affects of Family Life Cycle Stage”, Kapinas and Johnson (2002) stated that the main objective of this article was to test Johnson’s commitment framework (1991) that moral, personal and structural commitments were dependant upon the stages of the family life cycle.

The lack of African American participation in the study is a continued concern for the African American sociologist as it was for W. E. B. Du Boise’. The following article depicts the intentional absence of scholarly investigation of the African American people in the mainstream literature.

Earl Wright II, in the July – September 2002 edition of the Sociological Spectrum entitled, “Why Black People Tend to Shout!: An Earnest Attempt to Explain the Sociological Negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory Despite Its Possible Unpleasantness” explains that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first American school of sociology incepted in 1896 and continued through 1924 (Wright, 2003). During the extremely difficult years for the races between 1896-1924 in America, the school was negated, criticized, omitted and discredited. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois’ suggested that the problem of the 20th century would be “... the color line.” He felt that contributions by African American scholars were overlooked because of race prejudice, thus failing to really see the significance of the real social problem “that had ever faced a great modern nation” (Du Bois, 2003, on-line). In

identifying the lack of objectivity, he was recognizing that “the color line” would not be crossed regardless of the educational attainment, social status and class position an African American had acquired.

The only validation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory by white sociologists was when they denigrated it by proposing that the study was done by inferior people, thus the methodology too was unscientific. Ethnocentrism was the basis, however racism was the outcome (Wright, 2003). An absence in the sociological literature of the scholarly sociological investigations by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory even 100 years later is evident because they are absent from current text books in sociology. Such a perpetuation of negation even after evidence that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first American school of Sociology is one of the reasons why black people tend to shout from frustration and anger over the race question and when it is mixed with joy, pain, confusion, anger and frustration, something has to come out. The “uproar is too big to hold inside” (Wright, on-line).

The lack of recognition for the first official study of the family by African Americans on African Americans is a source of great remorse for me as an African American sociologist because once again, our voices have been silenced.

Viazzo and Lynch (2002) suggests when considering family history, one must look at how it was formed by having been impacted by social history, population studies and social anthropology. Much of the emphasis has been focused on the topics of marriage, kinship and the family, which are present day oriented. The realization that anthropologist discovered in pursuing the historical analysis one can best

understand the social and cultural process by embracing historical work. Historically, the concept of family was focused on the terms of matrimonial (Viazso & Lynch).

One cannot look at the AASM and her social situation without looking at her in a historical context. In her history, one must consider the truth that her family did not include the institution of marriage as a necessity.

Sweeney (2002) offered in his article called “Two decades of family change: the shifting economic foundation of marriage” that the correlation between marriage formation and economic prospects grew for the baby boomers born from 1950 and 1965 for both whites and African Americans. The evidence is strong for both men and women to “resemble one another with respect to the relationship between economic prospects and marriage...” (Sweeney, 2002, p. 132). The median age for first marriage rose by nearly 4 years between 1965 and 1993 for both, men and women. The growth in women’s earnings has corresponded with the delay of marriage for women

The ethnographic study of 8 to 10 year old African American and white children in “Invisible inequality: social class and childrearing in black families and white families” by Lareau (2002) was for the purpose of finding out what impact social class had on the interactions inside the home. It was suggested that middle class parents utilize organized leisure activities and extensive reasoning to promote their children’s talents. The working class and poor parents prepare an environment for the children to grow naturally. Further it is argued that leisure activities are left to the children under the limitations of directions rather than reasoning. Lareau maintains

that race had less of an impact than class (Lareau).

The Original African Heritage Study Bible (King James Version) edited by Dr. Cain Hope Felder has offered an Afrocentric view of the Bible teachings. (1993).

The vantage point the Marxian historical materialist approach has, lays the groundwork for Nancy Hartsock's (1998) version of the "Standpoint Theory." Hartsock asserts that the historical materialism embraced by patriarchy would benefit a feminist perspective like the standpoint theory opposing all forms of domination. She states a standpoint is not simply an interested position, (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged. She urges feminist theorist to be grounded in women's material activity and to engage in the political struggle in order to develop a social life perpetuating this model. By doing so, a political economy that includes women's activities as well as men could redefine and restructure society on the basis of women's activity (Hartsock, p. 126).

Jawanze Kunjufu (2002) identifies the two greatest issues affecting the African American family in his book titled, "Restoring the Village Values & Commitment Solutions for the Black Family". They are "not being in relationship with God, and unemployment" (p. iv). Kunjufu asserts that all issues can be conquered by God. It is stated that the use of a people who were brought to this country primarily to work, has ended. He asserts there is no need for African descendants in a white America. As a result, a rejected people turn to "feel good" activities instead of fighting the oppression (p. v). The book offers solutions to restoring the black family village.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Study

The participants of this study are African American mothers who have been single mothers for at least five years. The AASM in this study will voice her personal experiences. She is in the unique position of being the only person able to convey information about her situation from her personal perspective. This thesis will document the description of her life experiences and her family roles from an insider's perspective.

The Research Questions

1. How does the AASM view her role?
2. What does the AASM perceive her family and children to be?
3. How do we best give voice to the AASM about her experience?

The research questions are guiding this investigation in order to understand the AASM's role in society. The condition, situation and experience of the AASM have a significant impact on everyone who is touched by her life. In order to fully understand the relevancy of the AASM in today's society, the best method to comprehend her story is through the qualitative methodology. There are many different avenues in the approach of qualitative investigation. This paper will utilize a combination of the

narrative knowing approach offered by Kathleen deMarrais (1998) and the theoretical lens concept by Cresswell (2002) and the Plumb approach developed by Ronald Chenail (1997).

Kathleen deMarrais rendered in her book, *Qualitative Research Reflections: Inside Stories* (1998), a framework that is centered around how we understand phenomena using qualitative research approaches. She observed that we understand phenomena based on data gathered through three approaches, archival, narrative, and observational knowledge (deMarrais). The appropriate way of knowing with regard to this study, is through narrative knowledge because of the methodological approach of an in-depth interview. Epistemological perception lends to the thematic projection of the data analysis by the 'narrative knowing' which relies on people's stories. This paper also relies on notes from the in-depth interviews. The stories from the interviews are the field texts. The research questions serve as the lens to give voice to the AASM using testimonials to report AASM's stories.

The subject matter of the study is of particular interest to the researcher because of her familiarity with the life condition of the AASM. The concern of objectivity or subjectivity was eased based on the observations of Ruth Queen Smith from University of Tennessee, Knoxville. During an ethnographic study she was conducting, Smith stated that she acknowledged the usual practice of a bracketing process to expose the researcher's beliefs, assumptions, and theoretical frameworks during the research process. However, she was not willing to participate in the "bleaching away [of] my cultural identity or muffling my intuition" (deMarrais, 1998, p. 83). Her

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familiarity with the subject matter actually produced an awareness of her cultural visualization and energized her research” (deMarrais, p. 83). I concur with that thought. Before actually interviewing AASMs, I did not appreciate the insight I too have to offer; it was very stimulating for me to proceed with high enthusiasm about my research. In congruence with Smith, this researcher is using the benefit of having first hand experience as an additional key to unlocking the stories of the AASM. For example, understanding the unstated words in an expression through empathy and experience could be a benefit to the research process. This researcher argues that the process of this type of investigation requires the intellectual connection between the respondents and the researcher.

This study consists of ten in-depth interviews of AASM’s. The participants were enlisted by the researcher, and from referrals by friends and associates. The prospective participants were given a Consent of a Responsible Adult form approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review form. They were asked to read the consent form. If they understood and agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to sign and date the document. The consent form outlined the research procedure. The AASMs agreed to attend one private session of up to four hours or two sessions of up to two hours each at an agreed upon location. They understood that the interview would be recorded with a cassette tape recorder and that the researcher would also take notes during the interview. The recording and notes were coded consistently to maintain confidentiality. The AASM also understood that at any point of the study, they could decline to participate in the study without prejudice or penalty. It was

further made clear that the recordings, notes, and forms would be retained at the Kercher Research Center on the campus of Western Michigan University for at least three years.

In order to keep this study coherent and on track, I have borrowed from The Qualitative Report, a paper by Ronald Chenail “Keeping Things Plumb in Qualitative Research.” Chenail acknowledges that the researcher is an important factor in the research process. The goal of the research can be lost somewhere between the literature, the field and self. He offered a solution to the inevitable chaos by specifying a mission statement or mission question for the project that kept you in line with the mission. Chenail calls this “plumbing in qualitative research” (Chenail, 1997). This guiding principle helps the researcher avoid the confusion of focusing on the lesser important stories from the data about the real issues at hand. These guiding principles are called the Plumb line and consist of the following four components:

Curiosity	the phenomena of life as an AASM
Mission	to learn more about the AASM’s life from her perspective
Data Collection	audio tape and field notes from in-depth interviews with the AASM
Data Analysis Procedures	Analyze the audio tape interviews based on thematic perspectives

The questions asked in the in-depth interviews with the AASMs were categorized into a demographic segment and three other parts that were directly related to each of the research questions. The first section of this consisted of questions specifically focused on the perception of her life as an AASM. This category directly

coincided with the research question that asked, “How does the AASM view her role?” The themes related to this category were reciprocating prospective, time management, organizational skills, expectations of others, cooperation, and support. The second section concerned the children and family life of the AASM. The research question asked, “What does the AASM perceive her family and children to be?” The themes derived from this section were education, cultural enrichment, security, social expectations, finances, mobility, daycare, sick child care, special circumstances, bureaucracy, and community. The third section pertained to the other concerns of the AASM. The research question asked, “How do we best give voice to the AASM about her experience?” The themes related to this section were responsibility, influential people, spiritual concerns, and family traditions. There was one optional final question that gave the participant an opportunity to share any concern they felt that may not have been covered in the study and could be helpful in sharing the voice of the AASM. In that case, it was assumed that the question would fall under one of the three research questions and the thematic correlation would have already been established in one of the questions. These data develop themes that lend insight to her life.

For each research question, the following illustrations give an image of how the data were analyzed. For example, Figure 1 depicts the research question, “How does the AASM view her role?” and it is answered by way of the categories of the questions posed to the respondents which were tied into the above mentioned themes decoded from the in-depth interviews. Figure 2 shows the research question, “What does the AASM perceive her family and children to be?” That answer is derived by

the categories of education, cultural enrichment, security, social expectations, finances, mobility, daycare, sick child care, special circumstances, bureaucracy, and community. Figure 3 similarly is depicted by answering the question, “How do we best give voice to the AASM about her experience?” That answer is delivered through themes regarding responsibility, influential people, spiritual concerns, and family traditions.

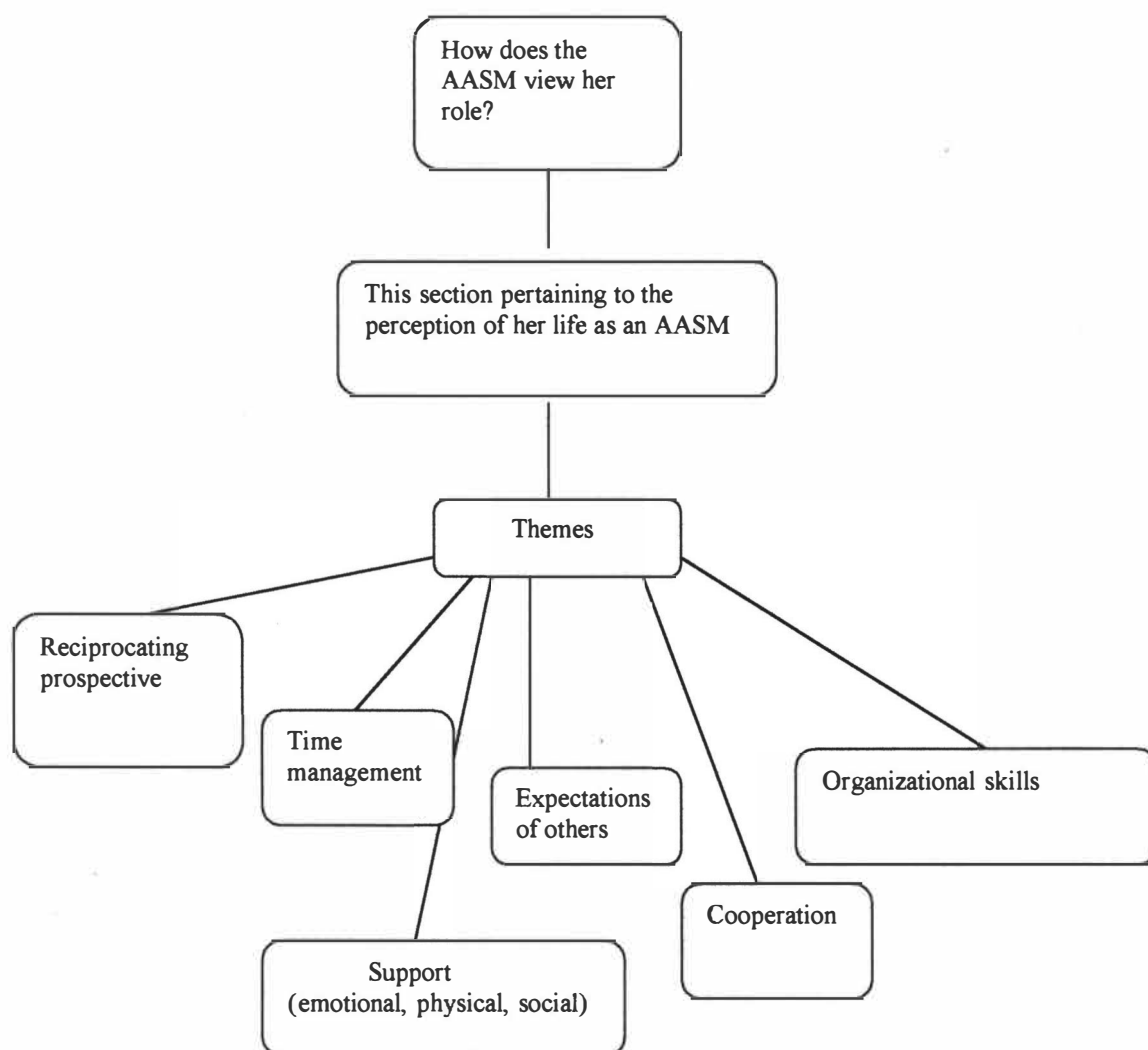


Figure 1. “How Does the AASM View Her Role?”

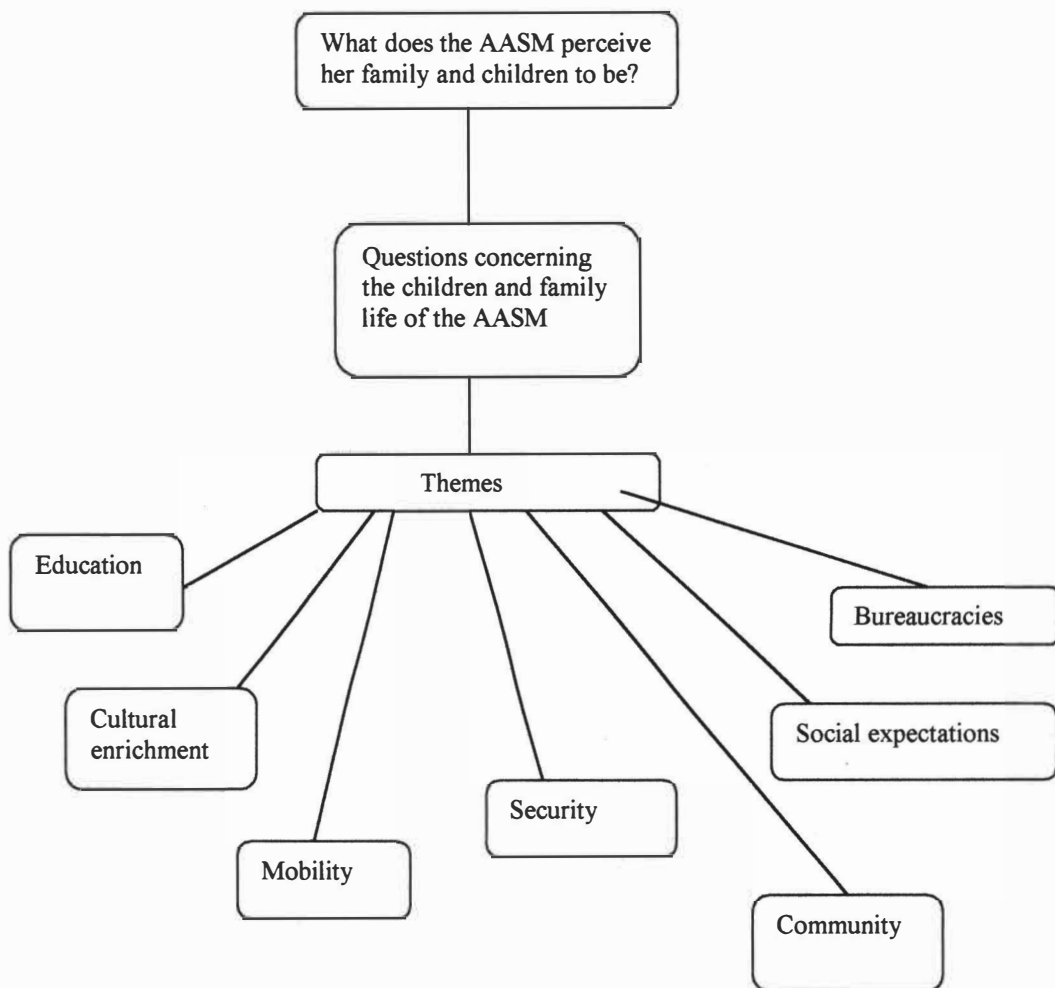


Figure 2. "What Does the AASM Perceive Her Family and Children to Be?"

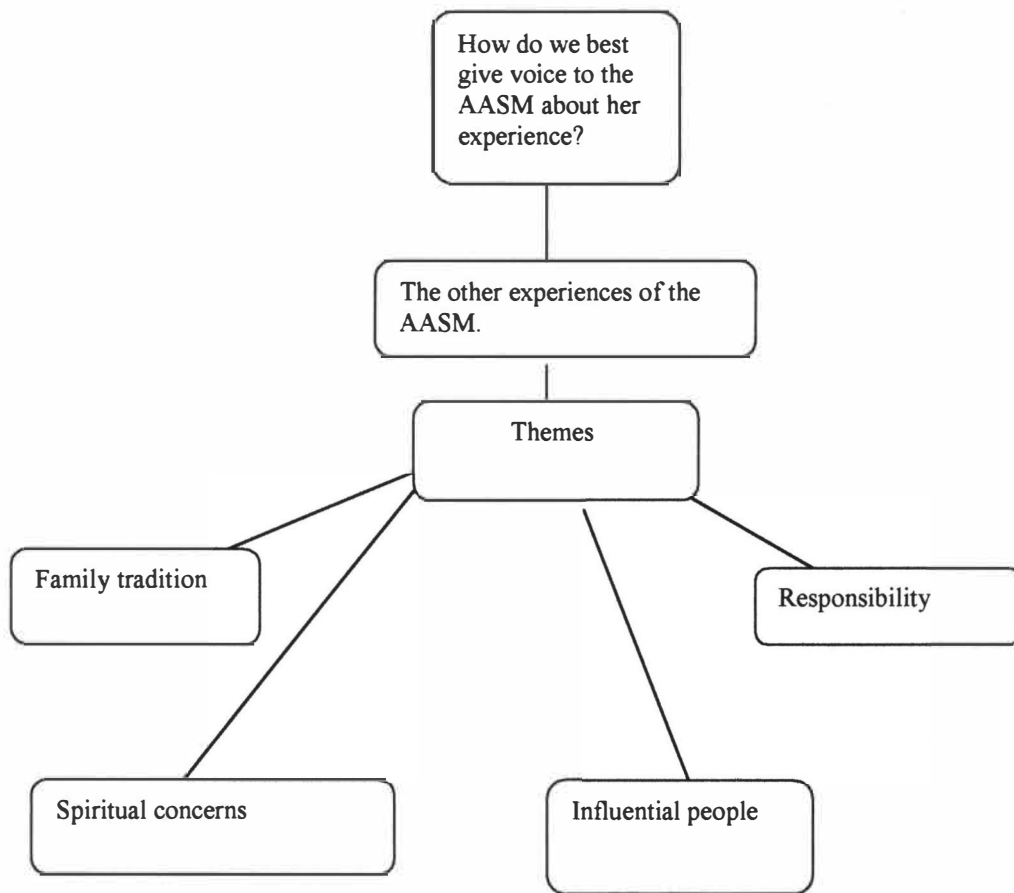


Figure 3. "How Do We Best Give Voice to the AASM About Her Experience?"

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Background

This chapter is designed to present the findings of the study. The study consisted of conducting 10 in depth interviews with AASM's who had at least 5 years of experience. The purpose of the study was intended to study the lives of the African American single Mother. An interview protocol was established and approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. All respondents were provided a consent form outlining the study and informing them of who to contact if any questions or concerns should arise. The interviews were accomplished through two two-hour private sessions or one four-hour private session with the researcher. The information was collected in a confidential manner. The interview was recorded on an audiotape and hand written notes were taken during the interview.

The AASM's spoke out about their life experience in this research. The respondent's in this study were thoroughly pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in a study about their lives. According to the participants, the in-depth interview method proved to be an exceptionally satisfying manner to give voice to the AASM because it allowed each AASM to leisurely reminisce so that she could capture, then relay the essence of her experience.

The study utilized questions that were divided into three major parts in the

interview protocol, proceeded by a demographic profile. The three research questions formed the basis for the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative questions. The first section of this consisted of ten questions pertaining to the perception of the AASM which is related to the first research question, "How does the AASM view her role?" The second section consisted of twelve questions that asked the AASM to expound on her children and family life which directly relates to the second research question that asks, "What does the AASM perceive her family and children to be?" The third and final section inquires about the other concerns of the AASM which is related to the third research question, "How do we best give voice to the AASM about her experience?" There was one optional open-ended question posed to the respondents. The answers to this question could fall under one or more of the sections. All summarizations for each of these three sections and the final open-ended question were completed in the context of the research questions.

Demographics

Starting with the demographics, the findings from that section are as follows: The respondents ranged in age from 22 through 70 years old. These women bore 15 female children and 8 male children. The ages of the children while the AASM was raising her family ranged from infancy to 21 years old (the agreed upon age of adulthood).

Duration of Single Status of AASMs

The duration of the single status ranged from five years to 21 years (see Figure 4). Two AASM's experienced single status for 5 years, one experienced single status for 7 years, one experienced single parent status for 11 years, one was a single parents for 14 years, one experienced single parent status for 16 years, two were single for 18 years, and two experienced single parent status the entire 21 years of child rearing.

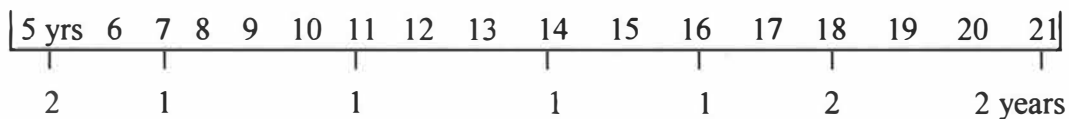


Figure 4. Duration of Single Status of AASMs.

Multiple Experience With Single Parenthood

Two of the respondents experienced single parent status twice in their child rearing years. One was due to having bore a child out of wedlock prior to marriage, and later divorcing resulting in single parent status again. The other AASM experienced two divorces while raising her family.

Marital and Other Status While AASM

- Seven AASM's were divorced.
- One AASM's was widowed.
- Two AASM's were never married.

- Eight AASM's had sole custody of their child(ren).
- Two had joint custody of their child(ren).

Residential Status While Rearing Family

- Two AASM's resided with family predominately while raising her children.
- Three lived with family and later moved into their own home.
- Four rented their residence and later owned their own home.
- One rented their primary residence.

Other Demographics

- None of the respondents were expecting another child at the time of the interview.

Self Image

The findings in this section deal with the perceptions of her life as an AASM. One AASM figured that her status as an AASM would be very temporary. Her expectation was to not be single for very long. She did not consider herself to be rejected from mainstream society because she was an AASM although she never envisioned herself to be a single parent. Another AASM had the expectations that single parenthood would not interfere with goals and aspirations that she already had mapped out for her life prior to her AASM experience. She said,

I was expecting for myself to finish school, college. I expected a lot more for myself. I expected to have my child clean all the time, I expected my house to be spotless, I expected a lot of things that were unrealistic at that time. I expected to have more income than what I had, and I expected their father to be a part of my expectations.

Essentially the AASM does have a wide variance of how she perceives herself in a role she may or may not have anticipated for her life. Generally, (based on the women in this study) she has a very good self-image.

The question about the multiple roles the AASM plays in the course of raising her children, raised a multiplicity of responses. One AASM said,

First of all I am a mother, and I have the role of a mother, I have to nurture, encourage and all the things that a mother does. At one time I thought I had to be the father too, but I am only a mother, to have that stern authoritative role didn't work to well for me because I am a mother. Since he was an only child, I think, sometimes I also had to be a friend, but that is hard to be a friend and a parent at the same time. Someone he could come to and sit down and talk to, that was a little hard for me to do sometimes.

Another AASM said she served as a counselor for herself and her children because she had to find solutions to conflicts between the children. She indicated that her greatest role was,

... trying to find [a] father figures for the male and female children; trying to think like a man would think in a situation. Ways to talk to my son and ways to talk to my daughters as well so that they would know what men think and what they expect. Of course I have never had the experience of being a man, I couldn't really tell them from a male experience, but I could tell them from what I had learned.

Another AASM identified the following roles, "first the mother, the childcare, the cook, the chauffeur, nurse, and friend." The findings suggest that the importance of the primary role as mother was the overriding function for the AASM.

Raising a Child

When asked about their comments about the famous saying from Africa, “it takes a village to raise a child” the feedback offered an assortment of information. One AASM expounded on the impact that good neighbors had on their lives. She could count on a neighbor friend to tell her children what to do when the streetlights came on, and she knew that her children would obey her neighbor’s commands. That was one example of the neighborhood support. Another recollection indicated the importance of the neighborhood. She said,

My children knew they had to behave while I was away from home at work because they could just as easily get a whooping from a neighbor if they were caught misbehaving and then when I got home they’d get another one.

Along with the neighborhood, there was the close knit extended family that would step in when needed. As one of the respondents indicated, “my child knew that I was his mother, however, he also knew that my mother was also mama, so he respected both our wishes accordingly.” Aunts, uncles, cousins, and sometimes-older nieces and nephews had a role in helping to rear the child(ren) of the AASM. The village was also represented through the religious instruction, for example one AASM relayed the following, “My daughter’s Sunday School teacher had as much influence on my child as the teachers in the public school system.” The educational community was a part of the village. As one AASM put it, “My son had one teacher who took special notice of him, he was one of the few African American teachers in the school and he served as an excellent role model for my son.” There was a common thread between these AASM’s interviewed; all of the children knew there was an expectation

for them to be well mannered in the absence of the mother, and that other people in their lives would step in and take corrective action if necessary.

Support

The numerous methods of providing food, shelter and clothes for her family included employment, family support, savings, alimony, welfare, child support, and inheritance. The most frequent method was employment, as one AASM said, "... through employment I bought two homes and I was able to provide all the necessary clothes and food that we needed." Another AASM experienced,

It started off with welfare, at the time I didn't have a job I just had my youngest child and so we were on WIC and welfare as far as food wise, until I got a job which was like 6 months later.

Another illustration of the support the AASM depended on is as follows:

My mother was always there to step in whether it was for diapers, clothing, shoes even food. We did have family dinners at our house every Friday, so that kind of helped out. We would go over to granny's on weekends and have a big Sunday dinner. If I needed her, she was able to pass me a couple of dollars for gas to make it back and forth to work so that was the support that I had at that time.

Another AASM experienced yet still another method of providing for her family due to the premature death of her spouse by way of inheritance.

My husband's life insurance policy enabled me to purchase my home for my children and keep us off of welfare. I gradually continued to get promotions and raises at my job that provided us with more income. As my salary increased I tried to maintain a reasonable standard of living so as not to spend every dollar I earned. We had emergency money when we needed it.

All of the respondents were creative when it came to managing their money to provide the necessities of life for their families.

Employment Issues

The employer situation could present challenging situations for the AASM who is in a position of subordination and since it is usually known that they are without a spouse, the situation could be to the disadvantage of the AASM. These findings discovered that these AASM have skills in making the environment work to their advantage in most cases.

Employment Role vs. Single Mother Role

With regard to the question that asked the AASM “did any of their employment positions ever keep them from fulfilling their role as a single mother?” the response was astounding. Nine out of the 10 AASM’s did not recognize the job as being an obstacle in her role of a single parent. One of the AASM’s had to travel for her job and she did not look upon it as a challenge to her role as a single mother. She viewed the responsibility of travel as another function in her profession. She mentioned that she garnered support from her community to assist in the care of her child. Another AASM mentioned that when in an emergency, she would have her children at the place of work with her. She worked in a community provider setting and it was not uncommon for staff to have to have their children with them. However, there was one AASM who had to document every doctor’s appointment, and had to hire a provider for sick child-care services.

One morning when I took my children to school, the school was not open on time as usual, it delayed me getting to work by 15 minutes. When I arrived late, I was given the third degree and it was even suggested that I could have

left my children there alone because someone would have eventually shown up. Needless to say, I was furious and just about the least productive employee in the place for the entire week or more.

The obvious role conflict that this AASM experienced was not a common experience amongst the rest of the respondents.

Support of Employers

The AASM in this study experienced both positive and negative response from their employer with regard to family emergencies such as a sick child, emergencies at school etc. One AASM said, “My employer was always very supportive and very understanding.” On the other hand, another AASM experienced just the opposite. She said,

If my child had an emergency and I needed to leave, my employer made me feel like I was derelict of my duties. I wasn't really sure if I would get reprimanded when I returned or even if I would have a job. It was especially hard when I worked for women who did not have kids.

There is also the middle of the road perspective on this issue. One respondent said,

I told my children when they were old enough, “do not call me at work unless the house is on fire” they knew what I meant and they honored that. I was not in a position where I could just pick up the phone. Someone had to relieve me if I had a phone call. There were a couple of occasions when my children had to call me and my employer was understanding because it was not a frequent occurrence.

The respondents appeared to work in supportive environments for the most part.

Difficult Situations

The following question pertained to three of the most difficult situations

experienced by the AASM and how she responded to it. The usual reaction to this question was contemplation. Apparently there were so many important and trying times that the AASM thought hard to share the most appropriate answer. One AASM responded with, “Well, I think one that was very traumatic for me was when my daughter got pregnant. You know, when she went through her rebellious stage, that was very, very difficult.” The AASM discovered that her daughter was not using the ‘women items’ and asked her daughter if she was taking her birth control pills. The AASM was aware that her daughter was sexually active and felt that she had instructed her how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Her daughter informed her that she was inconsistent about taking her birth control pills. The AASM asked her daughter if she was pregnant, eventually that truth came to the surface. The AASM explained all of the options her daughter had. The daughter chose to become a 17 year old teenage AASM. The household rules were discussed about sexual relations not being permitted in the home. The elder AASM caught her daughter breaking that rule, so she had to evict her child from the home. Needless to say, the knowledge of her teenage daughter being pregnant was difficult enough, but to compound it with having to evict her child made it extremely hard for the AASM.

Another perspective of one of the most difficult situations as a single mother was when her son faced puberty, she had to depend on the friends and family in her life to cope with what she considered an extremely trying period of her and her son’s life.

When my son became a teenager and he started dating girls, that was the most difficult part [of raising him as a single mother] for me. Not that I never

thought that he was going to always be there or that he wasn't going to like girls, that part I knew, but just what advice to give him and what to tell him, and what he was going through as a young man, I had no idea, so it was difficult for me. That is when I had to go to that village again to help me in that area to seek advice in that area to tell him what to do there and how to handle it. It didn't always work, but that was my most difficult time.

Important Life Lessons

Difficult situations are one side of life's most important lessons. The question was asked of the AASM to elaborate on a couple of the most important life lessons gained from the experience of single motherhood. It was responded to in a wide variety of ways, from the role of the mother, to a spiritual comment. One response is as follows,

I can only be a mother, even though I am a single parent, I can not be a father, and I can't be a friend, I have to be the mother. You can't try to do all that other stuff, or you'll make yourself sick, so you just have to be who you are and let the Lord take care of the rest.

Another response was,

The other thing that I learned was spiritual nourishment. I always taught them how to be good to other people and value others, and doing the right thing for yourself and for others. Because of the experiences I had growing up as a black child in a white community, and the racism I experienced in the churches, I didn't go to church again for a while when they were growing up. So they didn't have the opportunity to make a choice about whether or not they wanted to belong to a church or not. That is something that I did differently with my last child. We attended church regularly and I serve on the board at the church... She has some structure as far as church with the lessons from someone other than me.

Another AASM felt that the ability to rely on others while progressing through single parenthood was a lesson in and of itself. She said,

Being on your own, depending on your own, knowing that someone is there

for you even if you don't think there is. You have to open up to somebody. I wasn't one to open up, I kept everything inside, I didn't want anyone to know how I felt, what I was going through, I felt embarrassed. The lesson I learned is, open up, start talking, you find out that you are not the only one. You can learn from somebody else, what they're going through.

Special Relatives/Unique Bond

Though the lessons gained are a tremendous asset benefited by the single parenting experience, still there are special people that invoke influence and knowledge into the lives of the AASM's family type that is often mistaken for being incomplete. The people that encourage and respect the AASM in their role serve as ambassadors to the AASM. The question was asked, "Who are the special relatives that have a unique bond in the lives of the AASM?" One response was as follows,

My mom because she is a listener and she is an encourager. My mom was a single mom too so I got a lot of advice and encouragement from her. I was her oldest, we had a lot of bond because I had a lot of responsibility as the oldest child, so there was a lot of things. The other family member would be my aunt who I lived with for a while. That came from me living with her so I learned a lot of life lessons from her.

Another AASM responded,

I would say my Grandmother. She was just always real loving, my mom was not a real warm and loving person, she was real loving and cuddly when we were babies but as we got older, she was not affectionate. She was pregnant most of the time; there were 10 of us. I am next to the oldest of the ten. She was pregnant every other year while I was growing up so she was either sick from her pregnancy or she just was kind of a depressed person. My grandmother kind of filled that role for me, she was really accepting, affectionate and she was kind when she taught us lessons. So when I became an adult, one time I went in the hospital my Grandma would always come and stay with me and take care of my children and take care of me. She loved doing it. That was very special.

A newly found bond is illustrated here,

My mother, and that is because my father raised me. Me and my mother did not get close until after I was grown. I realize now that when I came back, divorced and everything, she was right there for me, no questions asked, I didn't ask anything of her, she kind of pushed me and gave me the confidence I needed because I didn't have any confidence in myself. She gave me motivation, she is a very strong person that she wasn't going to let anything tear me down or get me down, she was really building up my self-esteem back up.

Another AASM said,

My mother told me to hold my head high and love myself and just know that God would get me and my baby through whatever we would face. Although I was single and having a child out of wedlock, because of what my mama said from the onset, I was never ashamed of myself or my baby.

It is noteworthy to recognize that in every response, another woman was the special relative whom the AASM bonded with.

Dating

The final question in this section deals directly with the dating experience of the AASM. There are many different perspectives on this subject matter but one thread of commonality; the children come first. One of the responses is as follows,

It has not always been good, in the past has not been good, I have been in relationships and at one point I decided that it wasn't conducive for me to be dating and have a child because [with] most relationships there was always a conflict there with the child, in that either there was something about the person the child didn't like or the person didn't like the child, being a single mother the child always had to come first, so after a couple of relationships like that, it was more peaceful to just wait until the child is grown where if I am going to be in a relationship the child will not be a factor that is going to be there everyday. My child will always be my child if I do get involved in a relationship that ends in marriage that the child will just be someone who will visits us, my child. He is not going to be a part of the significant other's life. The other conclusion I have come to is that during that time in my life, I wasn't living biblically okay. I was involved in premarital sex, there is the child, that was an ongoing thing, and as I have spiritually matured and grown closer to the Lord, I found that I wasn't doing things the way that God would have me

to do them. So, at this point in my life, I am doing things the way that God would have me to do them and premarital sex is not a part of that so when the Lord brings someone into my life that is the way it is going to be.

Another perspective was,

To be honest, I hated it, I didn't feel like going through, going out there, listening to all this trash, I felt like there wasn't really anyone you could relate to anymore. As far as dating, I really didn't want to because at that point in my life my concern was getting me through, or getting my family through these hard situations that I was going through. I hated men then. The first 3 years I didn't want to be bothered. I was just mean.

The majority of the AASM's agreed that if they had it to do differently, they would have liked to raise their family with a spouse because of the obvious economical, social and emotional challenges. However, the findings suggest that along with the support from her family and friends, they were able to successfully parent her child(ren) as a single mother. Due to the enormity of raising a family alone, personal time was sacrificed.

The AASM's in the study concluded that they would have liked to establish more time for themselves in order to be more efficient in their care giving and for their own personal emotional health. The issue was conveyed because of the consistent response to the dating issue. For example, reactions to dating show that six of the ten AASM's in the study put off dating while raising her children because of the following reasons. Some stated that she didn't have the aspiration, there was not enough time, the desire and possibility of reconciling with the father, she did not want to appear to be an object of easy sex, fear that her child(ren) would be treated inappropriately, the stigma associated with the perception of dating a single mother would be a less than desirable woman because she was a mother with the responsibility of

children, and fear of more rejection. On the other hand, the women who chose to date while raising her child(ren), stated that it was a natural event in their lives but that their children were definitely a priority over her dating partner.

Chores for the Child(ren)

The question concerning household duties and regular chores expected of the children of the AASM generated a range of responses. Generally, every AASM assigned chores to her children. Chores were sometimes tied to an allowance but for the most part, they were an expectation and a required work in order for the single parent household to run smoothly. Schoolwork, cooking, cleaning and caring for younger siblings was an expectation. It was interesting that school homework was almost always included in the list of chores to be completed.

One AASM concurred that there was a general expectation,

He had to keep his room clean, do his homework, and when he started in Jr. High School, he also had to take the garbage out and wash dishes. He also started learning to cook and when I got home, he would have dinner ready, and later he learned to wash (clothes) and so laundry was a part of his job.

A similar approach by another AASM is as follows:

My oldest daughter was really my right hand person, because I had to work. So, that meant that she had to start homework, make sure her siblings got their homework done, maybe start dinner; I taught her how to cook at an early age because I had a 37-mile drive. By the time I got home, it was 6:00 she would have at least started dinner for me. My middle child was supposed to take care of herself and do what her older sister told her to do.

Another AASM had a slightly different method of handling children's chores.

They rotated, the person who had to do the living room was also responsible for taking out the garbage. So they vacuumed and take out the trash and the

other person had dishes to do. The dishes were the biggest deal. That was a real struggle at times. We had many discussions about how everyone had to contribute, even though they didn't contribute financially, they had to work off their share. So they had daily chores that they had to do. Sometimes it went smoothly and other times it was a challenge. So what I started doing after a certain point, was leaving notes on the refrigerator. They could argue with me, but they could not argue with the note.

Every household runs uniquely in its own way however, it is found that generally the children of the AASM are expected to contribute to the maintenance of the home by way of daily chores.

Family Tree

The in-depth interview included a question of knowledge of the child's family tree, how and why that may be important. Essentially every AASM relayed knowledge and offered opportunities for her children to know their family tree on both parents' side. Some participated in family reunions, others learned more about their heritage because of projects in school. There was one family that could trace their family heritage back to slavery. It is evident that the family history was deemed crucial knowledge for the children of the AASM. It did not matter whether the father was active or inactive in the life of the child for the AASM to assist in gathering the history and knowledge of her child's father's family tree.

Interaction Between the Father and Child

The question was asked whether the child of the AASM has interaction and communication with their biological father and what made it work or not work. The

responses were varied from no, never, to a constant on-going relationship to extreme scenarios.

No, well they tried, we all tried to keep an open door. It was the simple fact that he was promising things and never came through so of course the kids were disappointed. My middle child was definitely a daddy's baby and she tried to keep communications open, I tried to keep communications open, but it just wasn't there.

On the other hand another AASM simply did not pursue a formal, legal relationship between the father and her child.

Well, by the time he was born, I didn't go through the legal ramifications to get child support because I was able to do everything I needed without his assistance; which I've learned now, was probably not the right thing to do. I am just not a confrontational person. He spent summers with my son, he would spend Christmas break and if there was a long Easter break, he would go there too. He does have a relationship with his dad. What makes it work is that it is acceptable to both of them.

Role Models

The findings demonstrate that the community of the AASM's children incorporates a variety of elements, friends, school, neighborhood, family, religious affiliation, and internet friends. One of the questions asked was, "Are you aware of who are the most influential role models for your child(ren)?" One could say from the responses, that AASM's might try to learn more about who are the persons and what are the images that are modeling for her children. It is clear that this is an area of the unknown for most of the AASM in this study. One AASM responded with the following, "The church, myself, and as far as outsiders, I wouldn't know." Another AASM said, "their granny, as far as my youngest one, she has a few [role models that

I know about], my mother, her step-father now and her church family.” Yet another answer was, “Me. My daughter told me, ‘I don’t know what I would do without you.’” Another AASM mentioned talking to her mother about the misbehavior of her daughter, her wise mother shared with her, “she is trying to be like someone who we do not know.” The reality is that the AASM in this study really does not know who the influential role models are in their children’s lives.

Favorite Family Pastime

The question of favorite family pastime at different stages of the children’s lives generated many responses. They range from high levels of activity to quiet and thoughtful times. The findings proved that good times do not always have to be costly. Favorite family pastime included,

- ◆ playing with pots and pans
- ◆ board games
- ◆ Nintendo, play station type computer games
- ◆ competing with game shows on television
- ◆ reading
- ◆ traveling
- ◆ long leisure drives
- ◆ going to church
- ◆ snowball fights
- ◆ school athletics (football, baseball, basketball etc.)

- ◆ watching the Discovery channel on TV
- ◆ watching TV in mama's bed
- ◆ sledding
- ◆ Sunday dinner
- ◆ holiday gatherings
- ◆ talking
- ◆ card games
- ◆ going to the movies
- ◆ vacations

Nicknames

Nicknames for children were derived for many different reasons. They were not necessarily a part of the AASM sub-culture. One AASM said she experienced anxiety just at the thought of a nickname. Others used nicknames as readily as given names with great ease and comfort. Some nicknames were given because of their physical characteristics, such as booty, pooh, monkey (a climber), some children were nicknamed based on endearment like, honey pie, sugar, pooh bear some had numerous names. It was noted that for some, these names were only mentioned in private.

However, one AASM did not allow any nicknames because of her experience as a child, when she associated nicknames with name calling. She said,

No nick names and the reason why I didn't give them nicknames like I said, he (her father) always had nicknames, my dad called us ugly. Each one of us [had a nickname] I was pigeon toed so I was called pigeon toe, my brother had a large nose, he was noseey woozy, and my brother had real curly hair, he was

burr head. So it was like, no nicknames, and that is why I use no nicknames. I didn't allow name-calling because I know how detrimental it was for my self-esteem. So it was like, you don't call names, you got serious punishment for calling names.

The negativity this AASM experienced from Nicknames distorted her view of the common use of nicknames. She was belittled by more than a nickname, it was a form of psychological abuse. As a result, her children's family most likely will not engage in the practice of nicknames.

With the exception of one, the respondents were favorable about giving nicknames to their children. Generally the nicknames were positive and reinforced love and admiration. It was found that as the children got older, the use of the nicknames tapered off.

Pets

The question consisted of two-parts, "Do you children have pets? and Would you please share with me one special memory about each of your children [with their pets]?" Pets often have played a role in the upbringing of children. Pets have been known to teach responsibility and compassion to children. The purpose of this question was to determine if it was as common for the children of AASM to have pets as with other children. Each of the respondents had a pet story to share. Following are some of the special pet stories of the children of the AASM's.

My daughter's hamster lived quite a while. I remember one time they were in Detroit visiting their dad, that summer that I was telling you about and while they were gone, the hamster died. I was crying. I called them up because I didn't want them to come home to find the hamster dead. So I called Sarah (erroneous name) up to let her know, she said, "that's okay; she was old

anyway; we knew she wasn't going to last too much longer.

Another AASM had a hamster story, she lived in an apartment and one of the young ladies who lived in the apartment had an extra hamster and gave it to her son. Her son didn't mention it to his mother until the mother came home and saw it, she told him to get rid of it. Instead of telling the mom that the neighbor girl wasn't home, he put it in a McDonald's happy meal box and put it in front of her door. I am sure when she arrived, the hamster was probably out of the box and in the hallways. Another AASM shared, "I bought my kids a goldfish. The baby decided to put pink moisturizer in with the goldfish, that was the end of the goldfish."

Meaningful Advice

Certainly experiences with raising pets, special nicknames, and favorite family pastimes all influence how the AASM perceives her family. She also will ponder what she believes to be the most meaningful piece of advice she has passed on to her family. Here are a few of the responses: "I always told them to listen and to respect their elders. I feel it is important because the elders know, they have been through and they know." Another AASM said,

Concerning his spiritual walk, because if he can get that right, all the other things will fall into place. My favorite scripture, which was handed down from my mom concerning life is Proverbs 3:5-6, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding, then everything will fall into place.

Another perspective from an AASM is,

What I say to them all the time is that your children learn what you live, they don't learn what you tell them, they learn what you do. So you got to make

sure that you're doing things that you want them to do. Why it is so important is that it can make their lives pleasant or it can make their lives difficult and unhappy. If they are argumentative all the time, their children will learn to argue and have conflict. If they are loving and peaceful, then it's the same way. It is important that they model whatever they want their children to become.

Special Relationships

The question of special relationships the children of the AASM developed was presented. How the AASM monitored that relationship was also asked. The findings show that the AASM that surrounded her children with people she could trust, provided a potentially good experience for her children to be able to confide in someone other than herself. Following are a couple of responses to that question,

When he was young, the person he talked to was my younger brother. I didn't worry too much of him talking with him because my brother was pretty level headed and as a young man, my brother didn't make too many bad decisions in his own life so I always trusted that whatever advice he gave him would be on task.

Another AASM said,

Each one had a special girlfriend. I monitored it by letting their girlfriend come over so I could get to know them, learn what they are about, their parents. Each one had one friend that they confided their secrets with, but more so they confided in me. I always told them, I am here for you no matter what.

Allowance

It is often taken for granted the necessary respect for money and how it can influence your life. Included in the in-depth interview was the question that asked, did her children earn an allowance and how much at what age. That question spurred

a variety of responses. Five of the respondents participated in some form of an allowance system. The amounts ranged from \$1 per week to \$12 per week. All were based on completing chores or success in school. One AASM created a system where her children would lose a dollar when they did not complete their assigned household chores. The purpose was to teach the correlation between working and earning money, saving and having money. Here are some of the responses to the question,

Now that is a long time ago. They did earn an allowance, it was small, I think it was only a couple of dollars a week they might have start with. I think that is the way I started it, they would earn \$5 a week and they would lose a dollar every time they didn't do their chores. It was tied into giving and receiving.

Another AASM approached it entirely different, she said,

He thought he was earning an allowance; I'll put it like that. He had to have lunch money and I got paid every two weeks, so every two weeks he would get the exact amount he needed for lunch for two weeks plus \$5 and it ended up being \$21 for two weeks. So he had to budget accordingly.

Another AASM said, "Yes, it was \$2.50 a week; that was back in the day. It went up to \$7.50, then she got herself a job."

The AASM's whom chose not to engage in an allowance system did not for various reasons. Three respondents said they could not guarantee that they would have the money to pay an allowance on a regular basis, so it would not be in their best interest to start a commitment they may not be able to keep. Two of the respondents did not believe that children should get paid for the chores and homework assigned to them because they felt that it was part of teaching/learning responsibility.

Birthday Celebrations

The findings teach us that the AASM certainly does make merry over her children's birthdays in a celebratory manner. Depending on the age and the resources available to the AASM, the celebration can range from an at home party with friends and family to an elaborate event at a rented facility just for children. All of the respondents said they celebrated her children's birthday. This finding told me that the standards and expectations for the AASM family do not differ from the two-parent family.

The event was recognized with a birthday party, especially when the children were young. This event would include cake and ice cream. Some parties were as elaborate as gatherings at rented skating rinks, pizza parlors, bowling alleys, arcades , but also private parties at home with games. As children got older, settings changed. One of the more popular birthday celebrations for teenagers was going out to dinner with family and a special friend or two.

Favorite Foods

The final question in this section related to familiar and favorite foods of the children of the AASM. The respondents mentioned the following favorite foods:

- | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|
| *shrimp | *fried chicken | *orange chicken |
| *chili | *spaghetti | * hot watered corn bread |
| *pizza | *strawberries | *cold cereal with milk |
| * crab legs (known as chicken in the bone to one child) | | |

*Creole food	*welfare burgers	*macaroni and cheese
*omelets	*candied yams	*collard & mustard greens
*file' gumbo	*mash potatoes	*red beans and rice
*corn	*cinnamon rolls	*big & tasty (McDonald's)

The favorite foods are reflecting what the children are exposed to and it is important because it can reflect the culture that they embrace.

Education

The findings revealed that education and social acceptance were modeled before the children of the AASM. There appears to be a connection between the single parent household and the passionate embracing of education for the child(ren). Reciprocation by the child was clearly an expectation of the AASM as seen in the methods of paying allowance for the completion of homework and assigned household duties. Her children have been exposed to educated people in their village. The AASM was confronted with the fear that her children, especially her male children would be labeled in school as an underperformer. She knew that once that label was assigned to her child, it was a precursor to dropout status, delinquency and crime. Some of the AASM's in this study intentionally overcompensated with regard to the focus on education for what she perceived to be a discriminating educational system. Most of the children have been exposed to the college experience by visiting or attending programs at college campuses. The encouragement for the children to do well was demonstrated in various ways such as monitoring homework, studying with

her child, verbalizing the expectations of excellence are just a few examples.

Although the environment was supportive of the children's educational goals, the findings suggest that there needs to be additional support to aid in the educational goals of the AASM.

As one AASM put it,

It is emphasized a lot in our family. My personal educational goals are not being met. However, my youngest daughter, who is the only one left in school is doing very good. That is because I am staying on her making her study, staying involved trying to find out what homework she has, when the test are and we sit down and go through it. I plan to go back myself.

Here this mother responded to the question concerning her personal educational goals with an answer regarding her children's success. It appears that there is a tie between the aspirations of the AASM's educational pursuit and the success of her children's academic attainment.

In all of the interviews the AASM said that education played a high point in the lives of the AASM and her family. Many AASM's are not first generation college students/graduates. For the AASM's with a bachelor degree, they too would aspire to have achieved a different type of education because of the changing trends in the business world and the economy. As one AASM put it,

As you get older sometimes you wish you would have taken another career path. Sometimes I wish I would have gone into education. I probably would have gotten a master's or a doctorate in that area, but that is just one of those things. I think I am pretty much satisfied, but it is one of those back in the mind dreams.

Education is one of the many ways to give voice to the AASM.

Positive Changes

In response to the question that asked the question, "If you could personally make 2 or 3 changes that could positively impact your family, what would they be?" The following are the findings. For the AASM's that did not acquire the educational accomplishments that they would have liked to, going back to school was a major response for positive change. The idea of being a full time mother would be the idea setting for one of the respondents. Another answer is the idea of being unemployed while raising the family. One AASM relayed,

I would go back to the time my child was starting school, I know that I would be a little more stricter about homework and I would have been more involved in the school system as far as his education. It is all hindsight, I would be more active.

Other things mentioned were spiritual maturity; if she knew what she knows now, her life would have been more positive sooner, if the spiritual maturity were at the level it is now.

Experience That Could Best Impact Future AASMs

The AASM knows what she knows now because of what she has learned from her experience. How could she best impact the lives of future AASMs given her experience was asked, the findings suggest that there be a social mentoring system developed. As one AASM put it,

One [way to improve, impact and possibly even change society for future women in the same situation] would be "each one teach one" circumstance or situation. By me being able to share openly and honestly some of my experiences, that has made a definite impact on a number of different people that are

younger than me. I don't mean in age, but just in their experience and how I have handled some of my circumstances, for one spiritually and the types of prayers I pray. [Reflecting] my response to my children, my responsibility to the community. To be a genuine citizen, I don't believe that has to do with my job, my title, but as a single parent, there are a lot of women and men from my experience that can be impacted and have been impacted [by my implementation of reach one, teach one].

One AASM observed that obstacles that are stumbling blocks for the young AASM would be eliminated to best serve the family of the AASM. She referred to it as the stigma of being a single parent. She said,

If I could change society, I think I would change the stigma of being a single parent; it is still looked upon in a bad light. When you see young girls getting pregnant out of wedlock, there is the stigma placed upon them because of that. Me personally, I was just fortunate because I had family support. A lot of them don't have family support when they find themselves in this situation. I was already professionally employed and this didn't affect my employment. When in days past, that [out-of-wedlock pregnancy] could have affected my employment and then I would have not only had the stigma of being a single parent, but then I would not have been able to take care of him. I was blessed in that my being a single mother did not affect my employment and I was able to provide for him. Just remove the stigma.

Most Influential Person on Spiritual Issues

The AASM also responded to the question of who the most influential person on spiritual issues was in her life with family and friends. Those influential people had delivered by way of their life style, an influence and impression of how they too should live out their lives. One AASM mentioned several names of people in the community. She said,

A number of women that are Christians, they are mothers, community servants, they are real people that have put God first in their lives and just to be under that umbrella, that influence, through different circumstances has been a blessing. I have male friends that are Christians that tell me from a male

perspective, the mutual respect from that male perspective.

Another dimension comes from an individual person that most influenced the spiritual growth of the AASM; as one respondent addressed it,

My aunt, because I remember when we stayed with her, she is the one that started the family devotion. She helped us with study our Sunday school lessons. We would have family devotions where she would she would have devotional books, she would sit down with all of us children. I think that was that family spiritual leader at least for all the children, that was our foundation. When we would get in trouble, she would always have scripture for us, I can remember we were out in the backyard playing, my cousin did something to me and I called him a fool, you know she got the scripture and showed me that you're not suppose to call nobody no fool, Okay, that was that spiritual foundation from her.

Spiritual Base and Attendance

Most of the respondents were extremely candid in their answers concerning this section, they varied in responding to the question of what their spiritual base was. The findings show that unless there is a committed involvement in their spiritual base, they tend to respond with what their parents, or grandparent's spiritual foundation was. Those that actively practice their chosen form of spirituality typically attended services regularly. Following are some of the typical responses:

We are all Christian, we are all in different denominations, we all believe in Jesus, we have beautiful family gatherings, God is always in the forefront.

My brother was at one point and time practicing Christianity, at another point in time, Muslim, new age or consciences of revelation knowledge based on your own experience whatever that is. I don't know what degree he is or is not, but he is the one that introduced the Psalms in the Bible to me.

I attended a private Baptist private College.

I go to church, that is something my father instilled in me.

I attend church and I also believe there is a responsibility for the work of the church to be attended to in the community. Doing God's work means getting into the trenches with the people of God. The community is where you live, work, and play. It is not just a Sunday go to meeting responsibility.

We have a Christian heritage.

I visit the Himalayas Institute in Pennsylvania where the spiritual teachings of the east are brought together with the west. We have one that is Bahai faith, Islamic, African influence, two in the yoga base, one that is Confucius, Christian basically, it is a real mix and I think it comes from my mother exposing us to a lot of different things and a lot of reading and allowing us to make our own choices.

The attendance ranged from rarely to daily.

Older Relatives

The respondents in this study revealed that the close knit multi generation African American family is moving toward a thing of the past. Most AASM's referred to her family having a relationship with the children's grand parents, however beyond that, the bond was not close if immediate family members were not living in close proximity. Some of the comments were as follows:

We visit my mother, their grandmother, every day. That is because I didn't know my grandmother, so I wanted to make sure they had a relationship with their grandmother.

My children know my father's mother, my grandmother, she just turned 80 this year. We usually go on holidays and that is the frequency of our visits. I have older aunts that have met the kids, the relationships have not really been cultivated. I know names of aunts but I don't know who they are. That has been passed down from generation to generation.

My child does see both of his grandparents.

My children do not have any living grand parents or great grandparents. I maintain relationships with elder relatives that are living just so my kids can

have that special experience of influence from another generation than just mine. One year I planned a family reunion on my mother's side, the plan was to meet at a central location so all the family could come together, it was not received well by one of the elder members and the plan was squashed. It takes both the young and the old to keep the family heritage going.

Family Entertainment

The findings reveal that there are similarities in the family entertainment and the favorite family pastime recorded in the third section of this study. The respondents mentioned the following:

- ◆ Board games
- ◆ Sporting events (College and Professional)
- ◆ Television during the weekend old movies and science fiction
- ◆ Card games i.e., bid whiz, spades, 3-5-9,
- ◆ Arts (ballet, symphony)
- ◆ Cooking
- ◆ theatre (movies)
- ◆ backyard barbecues
- ◆ family gatherings
- ◆ Family dinners, parties

Family Reunions and Children Contributions

Most everyone would agree that it takes a lot of energy to put together a family reunion whether it is for a day or a week. This question pertains to how the entire

family meets the obligation of organizing an event of this magnitude. The findings reveal that there is an expectation for all members of the family to contribute. Some of the remarks were.

My mother's side does each year. They (the children) participate by going.

Not really, he wasn't old enough to take part in the arrangements. Now the one that is coming up in 2004, he is going to help. He will probably be doing some grilling and driving people places.

Nope, we don't. We have a very small family.

My children were involved in activities, a couple of years we had dancing, and they lead the putting that together.

Kinship Networks

The findings show that kinship networks are a serious strength in the life of the AASM. Female kinship networks play a significant role in the lives of the AASM. Her resources, emotional, financial, and social support are often dependent on the relationships fostered in her kinship networks. These networks include a variety of support systems such as the family of the AASM, the family of the children's father, neighbors, friends' religious affiliations, co-workers, teachers, and community organizations.

One way the kinship network benefits the family of the AASM is through her family. Her family can include her children's maternal and paternal grand parents, great grand parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-law relatives, nieces and nephews. Some of the relatives can be as close as first generation (i.e., first cousins) but often they can move through several generations. This appears to be the nature of the

family of the AASM in this study. It doesn't seem to make a difference whether the relatives are related to her or to her children when choosing her network. Close neighbors sometime play an extremely important role simply by the nature of proximity. However, it is evident that the term, "close" is defined uniquely by the AASM. It is defined, when she feels she has a thorough knowledge of her neighbor's morals and value system, and that usually is congruent to her standards and or the standards she is striving to achieve. Those non-related persons in her circle are often referred to as fictive kin. Additionally the findings show that exposure to different people is the determining factor for the development of fictive kin. The more secluded the AASM is, the less there is a tendency for fictive kin in her children's lives. The findings also revealed that the larger the family, the less likely for the fictive kin. For those that did experience this type of kinship, the children always knew that the relationship was not blood tied, but they treated the person just as if they were family.

A couple of quotes from some of the AASM's in this study show that some participate in this type of village and others do not.

We had uncle Jimmie and Aunt Janey that lived down the way, they were always someone real important, they were real supportive.

Yes, doesn't everybody!

It happened more so when I moved to Kalamazoo. My son had his non-relative grandma.

No, none of that.

Another one of the findings related to kin networks was the concern the AASM has regarding trust in those relationships. The reason for this emphasis is

because of the respondent's frequent mention of a betrayal of trust. The concept of betrayal was reflected in the relationships with their former spouse, significant others, family members, friends, social services and employers. An area of irreparable damage is the experience of sexual abuse. This form of betrayal and abuse was mentioned at great length by some of the respondents. It included incest, rape by an acquaintance, manipulation by men, and infidelity that led to sexually transmitted diseases. The sexual abuse experienced in her life set the tone for how she raised her family and conducted her life. The AASM's who expressed her experience about sexual abuse, explained that the abuse was executed by people considered either close to the family or in the family. The findings show that the outcome of the abuse is reflected in hypersensitivity toward childcare for her family and a tendency to not allow her children out of her sight. This awareness affected job stability and performance by way of child care issues. In such case, the perceived quality of childcare was the issue for her. During an interview, an AASM explained her day of activities that was dictated by the schedule of a good childcare provider. Because a safe child care environment was the most important factor for this mother, the job opportunities were reduced due to her unavailability. This concern minimizes her options severely. One could say that she chose to maintain those restraints on her mobility. The reality for this AASM is that the security and safety of her children weighs more heavily than prosperity in the work force. The findings uncovered that the AASM in this study felt that she was responsible for her children in all situations.

Family Traditions

The spiritual bases were the most frequently mentioned family tradition. One AASM said, "Faith in Jesus Christ is passed on from generation to generation, through word of mouth and lifestyles, the way you live." Family traditions second to spirituality were recipes and meals. For example, "Creole cooking, we are writing down recipes from long ago, all the things that are a Creole tradition and how to fix those meals."

Family Nostalgia

Some of the respondents did not think that there was anything that made them nostalgic about their family life with the exception of God and food. Here are sample comments:

Growing up in the country, being number two of ten siblings sometimes it was cramped and loud and my escape was going to the woods being adventurous. My older children also lived in the country and they would go off by themselves and learn from nature.

Being in my Baptist church, it reminds me of my father when I was a child, he took me to church and it reminded me of my church.

My grandfather was a tailor, my great grandmother she sewed for the people in the community, my mother she sews for the community, she does weddings, makes church robes. When I retire, that may be one of the rivers of sources of spending money. That is what my family has been blessed to do, so that makes me nostalgic for that.

Tragedies

Spirituality was the main tactic used while dealing with tragedies. A couple of

illustrations are as follows: “My grandfather died, my stepfather passed away and my son had a relationship with him, I had to explain to him that he was in heaven.”

Another AASM said,

One of my children’s friends was killed, I am not sure how the child was killed but I went to the funeral, we all did. I didn’t know what was behind it but, at the time, there is a need to talk about it, work through a loss. I guess I do believe in reincarnation, being a science major. My children talked about it and that is kind of what I related to my kids.

Still another AASM said, “Losing their grandfather. I had to explain it. When my father passed, they knew that he was sick, every time we visited, I explained to them that we were losing him, so they understood the process.”

Teaching About Racism and Sexism

Cultural enrichment was seen as an equally important element of her children’s life. The AASM’s in this study perceived herself to be a promoter of family and cultural heritage learned from past generations. Typically the topic of racism came up when her child was called a nigger. Unfortunately, it was the inevitable for this to happen to her children. From there, it was a daily chore to explain the biases that minorities experience on a daily basis. The explanation of ignorance and fear perpetuating the cycle of racism in this country was shown through many incidences that African American children experience.

Sexism was an issue that was taught when an obvious incident occurred. However, families that had both male and female households did not differentiate the chores based on gender roles. AASM’s with male children shared the dangers of the

African American male seeking the friendship of white females. The story of Emmett Till was mentioned on more than one occasion. The issue of African American males being profiled by the criminal justice system as well as the educational system was due to the sexism her male children experienced in combination with the racism. The AASM's of female children were schooled on the general perception that African American females were promiscuous thus often treated accordingly. She has the responsibility of maintaining a living standard that will eradicate that notion in the minds of her daughters. The issue of music videos was discussed and how the African American music videos are a detriment to the African American female because of the provocative depiction perpetually used in them.

Scents, Sounds, Sights Reminiscent of Child Rearing Days

There were many images that rendered memories of the period when they were raising children (see Table 1). The scents, sights and sounds mentioned above reflect many different responses for the AASM who is currently raising her family and the AASM who has finished raising her family. The recollection was usually a pleasant memory, however there were a few unpleasant memories for the respondents. An example of the impact these images had on one respondent was as follows. The scent of pies baking automatically reminded her of when her children watched her bake pies. She offered them the left over dough for them to make their own creation. From the look on her face, those memories brought much pleasure to her.

Table 1
Images Reminiscent of Child Rearing Days

Scents	Sights	Sounds
Pies or cakes baking	Children playing	Baby crying
Chicago smell	Chicago train	Sounds from the L
Baby powder	City of Detroit	Cussing/swearing
Fried chicken	Drinking & smoking	Music of that era
Chitterlings	Little league	Motown Sounds
Chlorine	Parks	Model train sets
Fresh cut grass	Frisbee	Children laughing

Perception of How Others View the AASM

It must be noted that because some of the AASM's in this study have finished raising their children, the perception is based upon the success of her now adult children. The other responses are based on the actual presence of the AASM in society and the role the children of all single parents play in the society. The other point that needs to be addressed is that the AASM's perception of how others' view her is dependent on how she perceives herself as an AASM. Generally, the AASM's perception is that some feel sorry for her and some admire her endurance. One AASM mentioned that other's told her that she talked too much and coddled her male child too much. Many respondents noted that they do not care how they are perceived

because they are simply doing their very best at what they are doing. Generally, the people in the “village” of the AASM look up to the AASM because of the obvious barriers the AASM must have triumphed over in order to succeed with her family.

Optional Question: Topics Mentioned by the Respondents

Most of the AASM felt that the in-depth interview was thorough, therefore they did not have any areas they would have included. Some of the AASMs chose to offer words of wisdom for this optional question. Following are the words of wisdom:

Be a mother and rely on the village with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help you. Don't take it all on yourself, trust God for the guidance.

AASM's have resiliency and tenacity and we need to recognize how strong we are and that we have managed to survive and thrive against so many odds. We need to remember to love ourselves, and to acknowledge our accomplishments and to not diminish all the things we have been able to do in spite of living in a racist society that doesn't approve of us, doesn't love us and does not support us and works against us.

Getting to know sister friends that are overcomers and survivors and we need to acknowledge ourselves for that.

The need and the understanding of how we emotionally, physically spiritually and socially, deal with the society as a culture as an African American woman.

Why don't we seek medical care, why don't we do self-breast exams, how important do we really believe we are not just to our children but to society in a whole and to other women. I think is really important to address.

The idea that I am strong and you never allow me to be weak is challenging. It is very hard because you are put on a pedestal, you're expected to continue to perform and operate to the level that you traditionally had either prior to children, or prior to being a single parent. Then becoming that single parent you still want to uphold that same persona or perception that people have of you and that gets tiring.

I think another thing that single mothers, single parents or African American women should do, we have to learn how to cultivate relationships with other African American women regardless of if they are single parents, or elders or colleagues. We don't know how to have genuine relationships with other African American women based on the fact that I am just an African American woman.

The next chapter will discuss the significance and implications of the findings.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The multiple roles the AASM played were supported by others in her network, specifically her “village” of friends, family, neighbors, and teachers. Thus, the help she relied on to raise her family was often unconventional. These AASMs depended on their jobs to attain an increasingly higher level of economic gain. They depended on their children to act responsibly to garner the respect of the community. Some of the respondents depended on God to give them the strength to combat the difficulty of sometimes being required to handle a multiplicity of responsibilities. Those responsibilities included earning money, paying for shelter, food, and clothing, raising the children alone, serving as chief negotiator, being the nurturer, acting as disciplinarian, and more.

Based upon the interviews, the respondents had a positive outlook of their condition and the future of her children. Candid discussions with her children about her goals for them as well as the obstacles they faced as an unconventional family, kept her encouraging and inspiring self motivation in her children.

Discussion

Format

This section will correspond with the three research questions from the methodology chapter along with the review of literature. Themes that were identified in Chapter III are tied into the three research questions.

The Research Questions

1. How does the AASM view her role? This question is related to the following themes: Emotional, physical, and social support, time management, organizational skills, reciprocating prospective, expectations of others, cooperation,

2. What does the AASM perceive her family and children to be? This question is related to the following themes: Education, cultural enrichment, mobility, security, community, social expectations, and bureaucracies.

3. How do we best give voice to the AASM about her experience? This question is related to the following subjects: Voice how much experience does she have being an AASM, voice about family dwelling place and voice about what her responsibilities are as an AASM?

A View of Her Role

Some of the literature states that AASMs are breeding criminals. According to Stringer (1995, p. 21), the lack of a father in the home is the reason for the rise in

violence in our communities. Kunjufu raised the issue of traditional sociological studies of the African American family. He reiterated Joyce Ladner in "Death of White Sociology" that the study of African American families have been focused on only poor families, the victim was blamed, the black middle classes were ignored and input from black families was not a practice in the research. From there, Kunjufu challenged readers to monitor one week's worth of any local newspaper, identify the articles about African American people and categorize them. He followed through this same challenge and discovered 20 out of 25 articles on African American's involved either crime or poverty (Kunjufu, 2002, pp. 170-171). It can be argued that the media has taken a similar position about the AASM. This study does not support the literature based upon the response from the AASM's in this study. The respondents in this research were not the typical candidates for a white sociological study. However, the AASMs in this research were trying to avoid the label of breeding criminals by enlisting in support systems to aid in the raising of her family. The AASMs in this study made every attempt to avoid that which the literature says is inevitable for the children of African American single female headed households.

The Emotional, Physical and Social Support

The respondents in this study knew that they had to rely on the assistance from others in order to accomplish all of the responsibilities she was held accountable for. The AASM's were satisfied with the fact that she could not accomplish many of her goals without the help of her "village." This support system is a direct contradiction to

a culture that has motivated the perpetual privatization (i.e., single family dwelling, private daycare, private schools, private entrances into homes, etc.) of the family (Collins, 2000). The respondents in this study did not embrace that aspect of American culture. The AASMs were accustomed to a more communal or cooperative style living arrangement (multi generational households, communal daycare etc.). Thus she was able to accept emotional, physical, and social support along with having the ability to have expectations and cooperation from those in her “village”.

The emotional, physical and social support rendered to the AASM also lent a positive note about her role. There was a common thread amongst the AASM’s in the study; they all had at least a couple of friends who were also experienced single parents. The mentoring process was so important when it came to raising children. It was not necessary for another single mother to do the mentoring but it was essential that a more experienced mother to teach her some of the lessons she would eventually need to learn. An illustration of that scenario is when one of the respondent’s teenage son was scheduled to go on his first date. The AASM was both excited and apprehensive. She was concerned with the lack of exposure to girls her son may have. This all created uneasiness and anticipation of the unknown for the AASM. A few conversations with a more experienced African American mother provided the emotional support from a woman who had gone through a similar situation. It was extremely comforting to the AASM. As for mere physical demands, there were always those times when physical strength entered into consideration when there was a need for example, to move heavy furniture or appliances. Knowing that there are people who are

sensitive to your physical limitations was reassuring when you must call upon them.

Time Management and Organizational Skills

The AASM's in this study were what Jacqueline Kirby called, "Adaptive Families" because the respondents had (a) more available personal resources which enhanced their coping effectiveness; (b) better family organization, which balanced household responsibilities and decreases task overload; (c) a positive family concept, which valued loyalty, home centeredness, consideration, communication, and closeness; (d) an ability to highlight positive events and places less emphasis on negative aspects of stressful events such as not enough money, and desire for equal opportunity; and (e) possessing less stress-producing, supportive social networks (Kirby, 2002). The AASMs in this study have unanimously made themselves available to whatever resources that could enable them to perform more effectively as a mother. Each family had their household chores assigned to their children in order for the home to run smoothly. The respondents all recognized that a positive family support system required loyalty, home life, communication and respect, otherwise her family could not exist in harmony without those mutual agreements. The AASM and her family recognized the importance to maximize the positive instead of the negative aspects of life. As a result, stress for the family unit was lessened and they purposefully tried to minimize the negative by adjusting their attitude in order to respond to negative situations from a positive approach (Kirby).

Much of the fulfillment in her life stemmed from her good organizational

skills (Kirby, 2002). She was responsible for managing the household expenses, planning and preparing meals, chauffeuring the children to and from numerous events and functions, to etching out quiet moments for her self. The AASM has been successful at balancing those responsibilities because she is organized by necessity.

Reciprocating Prospective and Expectations of Others

Some of the AASM's satisfaction with her role lies in the reciprocation from others in her village for the support she has given to them. An example of this process was when one AASM attended a ballgame with her children and invited some of the children in the neighborhood along. At some point, the parent's of those children would offer to do the same. This type of reciprocation helped the AASM to enjoy the benefits of her commitment to the village because she could expect the same from her peers.

Cooperation

Cooperation from her children, the village, and her employer lead to a satisfied AASM. The many issues the AASM had to deal with on a daily basis were so numerous that if not for the cooperation from her circle of friends and family, it would have been unmanageable. She was faced with many non-cooperative situations outside of her immediate circle. If she were continually bombarded with non-cooperation, her level of satisfaction as an AASM would have been extremely low.

Perception of Her Family (Children)

Education

The AASM perceives her children to be educated. However this country has over 44% of African American youth that are functionally illiterate. It has been speculated that this is the first generation of African American Youth that may not exceed their parents in academic achievement (Kunjufu, 2002).

The AASM has learned that she must take an active role in educating her children to avoid the pitfalls a racist educational system that unequally disseminates encouragement and gratuity to African American children. Most of the respondents indicated that their children attended public schools. A couple of AASM's proudly professed that their children attended private schools. In both cases, the partnership the parents engage in with the schools is essential for the success of the child. In "Countering The Conspiracy To Destroy Black Boys" Kunjufu showed how the school system slowly turned innocent, enthusiastic, trusting and willing black boys into passive, apathetic, non engaged students by the time they got to the fourth grade. He mentioned the overwhelming propensity to label African American children "educable mentally retarded" at an alarming rate (Kunjufu, 1982). The AASMs in this study were aware of the disparities in the educational system regardless as to whether their child attended a public or private school. These women were attempting to avoid what Kunjufu said has happened to the African American boys. Collins said, "African American women have long realized that ignorance doomed Black

people to powerlessness” (Collins, 2000, p. 210). The AASMs in this study embraced education.

Security

The AASM in this research felt that security came in many forms other than by providing appropriate food, clothes and shelter for her family. The literature supports that notion. Doug Stringer points out in, “The Fatherless Generation – Hope for a Generation in search of Identity” children have the need for intimate bonding with both parents, otherwise insecurity can develop (Stringer, 1995). Most of the AASMs tried to maintain a cooperative relationship with her children’s father for the benefit of the child. In most cases, the relationships between the father and the child were healthy and harmonious. In one case, drugs and alcohol did not permit a relationship to bond. In other cases, lack of a relationship was due to the premature death of the father.

Community and Mobility

Past African American generations invested in their own community by financially supporting African American owned stores, churches, banks and other commerce. The AASM’s in this study encouraged entrepreneurial adventures by words, but embraced employment as an employee by example. The AASM trusted that her family would have the ability to support themselves in American economy that is famous for discriminating against African Americans. In spite of this fact of life for

African Americans, the AASMs in this study felt that they prepared their family to achieve the mobility in the market as she has.

Bureaucracies

Some of the bureaucratic systems could often be considered an enemy to the family of the AASM because of the potential for bureaucracy to enter into the lives of the children in a detrimental way through the schools, a vindictive former spouse, a healthcare provider, or a misguided neighbor. The AASM's in my study operated cautiously when dealing with systems of bureaucracy. She perceived some types of bureaucracies such as "Work First" in the welfare department, the criminal justice and legal systems, and special education as threats to the well being of her family.

Cultural Enrichment

The history of the struggles of the AASM's forefathers was a topic of conversation between the AASM and her children according to the respondents. That cultural enrichment was passed on from one generation to the next by all of the respondents. The AASM's in this study were unlike what is captured in the literature. These were middle class mothers who were proud of their past.

Giving Voice to the AASM

According to Mark Orbe in his book, "Constructing Co-cultural Theory", he discusses the muted group theory, which basically means, the dominant group of the

social hierarchy determines the communication system by the means of language. Once the communication system is formulated, the standard has been set for the rest of society. Non-dominant groups like the AASM function with a different communication system, thus they are a muted group (Orbe, 1998). However, true that is, the purpose of this paper is to give voice to the AASM.

Voice About Family Dwelling

The dwelling place of the AASM gives voice to the experience of the AASM. A clean and healthy home whether it be an apartment or a house reflected the voice of the AASM. The respondents were cognizant of the impression her home would have on her children's experience with other childhood friends visiting or not. One respondent recalls her children's playmates referring to their home as a mansion because it was so large and inviting.

Voice About Experience Being an AASM

Two of the AASM's in this study experienced single parent status twice, as mentioned in Chapter IV. One respondent was divorced twice, another AASM bore a child out of wedlock and later married and later divorced, and still another was a widow. This is just one way of acknowledging that all AASM's are not the result of teenage pregnancies, but of a combination of reasons.

Voice About AASM Responsibilities

Based on the findings of this study, she was responsible for raising the children up to adulthood by any means necessary. If she did not appear to be managing her responsibilities in an acceptable manner, she could have been easily declared misfit as a mother and her parental rights stricken from her. She was responsible for ensuring that her children become educated in a compulsory public education system that was not interested or equipped to hold a child behind a grade if they were not demonstrating competency. However, the AASM was solely held responsible for educating her children.

Conclusions

The in-depth interview method of gathering data was a very productive approach to investigate the life of the AASM. The respondents appeared to openly discuss their life experiences with candor and deliberation. The interview format was a very pleasant experience. The respondents were satisfied with the format (one 4 hour or two 2-hour meetings). The majority of the respondents felt that the questions were thorough.

The participants were very busy women who sacrificed their time to assist me in this search for the voice of the African American Single Mother. These AASMs had a sincere interest in revealing their truth about their life as a single parent. The respondents unanimously agreed that their life would have been easier if they were not single while raising their children. My observation of the collective voice

represented a resounding warning for those who can avoid this particular lifestyle.

The AASM in this study demonstrated a positive self image and were generally proud of their parenting accomplishments. None of the respondents had ever been homeless, and none of the women ever lost custody of their children. Both of those scenarios unfortunately are quite common amongst the overall population of AASMs in today's society.

These women had skills that were not obsolete, as a result they were able to maintain stable employment. Without their tenacity to continually improve upon their skills, thereby maintaining competitive employment, they could have easily become residents in a homeless shelter, and fearful of whether a child protection agency would remove her children from her care because of their homeless status. The depiction of homelessness in the book by Jonathan Kozol, "Rachel and Her Children, Homeless Families in America" shows how easily one could slip into homelessness which eventually could lead one into hopelessness. As one homeless advocate stated in *Rachel*, "When they lose their homes, they start to lose their families too" (1998, p. 4).

The AASM has been labeled to be partially responsible for the criminals and derelicts of society. Statistical data corroborate that to a point. The literature says very little about her own views about her life. However it does assume the role of the voice of the AASM by implicating her voice from statistical data that says that 67% of children living in a AASM's home are poor. The AASM is not responsible for the social ills in American society. She is not recognized for the upright, hardworking

citizens that she raises against all odds. Her voice must be heard for the positive impact she has on society. This is more of a labeling issue than on the voice of the AASM.

It matters for AASMs to hear the voice of other AASMs. Collectively, their voice would ring louder than the multitude of scattered voices.

Overall, based on my study of the 10 AASMs, I conclude that the AASM's family is not broken, it is just misunderstood. Some of the misunderstanding is due to a double standard that exists. To compound the confusion, there are often opposite presumptions for those involved. An example is the contrast between the traditional family embracing the stay at home mom. On the contrary, the expectation for the AASM is to work otherwise she would be declared slothful and lazy.

Shortcomings of the Study and Suggested Changes for Further Study

1. The literature review lacked more traditional examination of the topic.
2. The topic could have been more precisely narrowed down. The latitude of the research questions were too wide in range.
3. I would have hired a transcriptionist to type the interviews at the onset of the study.
4. I would have used a different method to recruit the participants because essentially the AASM's in this study may not be as typical of the poor AASMs represented in the literature.
5. I would have saved data on a CD instead of a floppy disc.

6. I would find out the answer to this question: Realizing that one must have an audience to give voice, if the muted group theory is accurate, would it matter if the listener is also a member of the muted group?

7. Include comparative studies of lower class women.

Appendix A
Interview Instrument

African American Single Mother – An In-Depth Study

Interview Instrument

The demographic questions

1. (a) How old are you (b) how many male and female children do you have (c) what are their ages (d) please describe the duration of your single parent status (e) have you experienced more than one occasion in your life when you were a single parent (f) while raising your family were you divorced, widowed or never married (g) do or did you have sole or joint custody of your children (h) where do you live (i) do you rent or own your residence (j) are you expecting now (pregnant)?

Inquiry specifically focused on the perception of her life as an AASM (2-12)

2. When you became a single parent, what expectations did you have for yourself in your new position?
3. It is generally agreed that single parents play multiple roles in their life, could you identify all of the roles you play and elaborate on them?
4. The famous saying from Africa, “it takes a village to raise a child” is often quoted, please expound upon your village.
5. Please share your method of providing food, shelter and clothes for your family whether it be from employment, family support, savings, alimony, welfare, child support, inheritance etc.

6. Did any of your employment positions ever keep you from fulfilling your role as a single mother? Please explain how and why.
7. Did you have the support of your employer when you had family emergencies, such as e.g. a sick child, accidents at school etc.?
8. As the primary provider for your family, please expound upon your means/income and how it impacted on your ability to purchase food, clothes, transportation and shelter for your family.
9. As a single mother, what were three of the most difficult situations you where faced with and how did you respond to them?
10. Could you elaborate on a couple of the most important lessons in life that you have learned from being a single mother?
11. We all have one or two special relatives that we are especially fond of because of that; they have a tremendous amount of influence on our lives; would you share your experience and reasons for the unique bond?
12. As an AASM, what is or is not your experience with dating?

The Children of the AASM (13-25)

13. Please expound on your child's or children's role concerning regular chores and household duties for the family unit?
14. Do(es) your child(ren) have a knowledge of his/her family tree? How & why?
15. Do(es) your child(ren) have interaction and communication with their biological father? If so, what is the duration and frequency? What makes that relationship work or not work?

16. Are you aware of whom the most influential role models are for your child(ren)?
17. What are (were) your favorite family pastime while raising your child(ren) when they were (1) infants, (2) toddlers, (3) elementary school age, (4) middle school age, (5) high school age, (6) college age?
18. Did you give any nicknames to your children? What are they and please elaborate on how they were derived?
19. Do your children have pets? Would you please share with me one special memory about each of your children?
20. What do you think is the one of the most meaningful pieces of advice that you have shared with your child(ren)? Why do you believe it was so important?
21. Do you know if your child(ren) has developed a special relationship with a relative, friend or others with whom they could share their secrets? How do/did you monitor that relationship?
22. Did your child(ren) earn an allowance? How much at what age?
23. Do you/did you celebrate your child's (ren) birthdays? How?
24. What are the familiar or favorite foods of your child(ren)?

The entire family of the AASM (26-40)

25. What role does education play in your family? How would you like that to change e.g. is it emphasized enough, have the children excelled in education, are your educational goals fulfilled?

26. If you could personally make 2 – 3 changes that could positively impact your family, what would they be?
27. Given your experience as an AASM, have you thought about how you would improve, impact and possibly even change society for future women in your same situation?
28. Who is the most influential person to your family concerning spiritual issues?
29. What kind (if any) of spiritual base does your family adhere to?
30. Do you (now or in the past) attend any religious services on a routine basis; how often?
31. Do you have living older relatives (e.g. grand parents, great aunts & uncles) familiar with your children? How often does your family visit with them? Why?
32. What type and where was your major form of family entertainment?
33. Does your family have family reunions? How did the children contribute to this activity?
34. Do you have fictive kin (non-blood-related aunts, uncles, cousins, nana's, big Momma's, Pops, etc). Do(es) your child(ren) understand that he/she are not true relatives? Please expound.
35. What are some of your family traditions and how they are passed on to the next generation?
36. What are you nostalgic about as it relates to your family life?

37. Did any tragedies strike your family while you were raising your family? To whom did you explain the misfortune and how?
38. What discussions with your child(ren) about racism, sexism took place? When and why did it happen at that time?
39. What scent(s), sound(s) or sight(s) take you back to your child rearing days? Please describe the feelings they evoke.
40. What is your perception on how others' view your experience as an AASM?

Optional question (41)

41. Is there a topic that has not been covered in this interview of which you would like to share, and that you believe would be helpful in giving voice of the AASM?

Appendix B

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: October 30, 2002

To: Subash Sonnad, Principal Investigator
Donna Russau, Student Investigator thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Lagerwey".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 02-09-12

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "African American Single Mothers – An In-Depth Study" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 30, 2003

Appendix C
Consent Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
H. S. I. R. B.
Approved for use for one year from this date:

OCT 30 2002

Western Michigan University
Department of: Sociology
Principal Investigator: Sonnad Subash
Student Investigator: Donna J. Russau

x *Mary Laguerre*
HSIRB Chair

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "*African American Single Mother – An In-Depth Study*." This research is intended to study the lives of the African American single Mother from the voice of the subject being studied (ethnographic). This project is Donna Russau's thesis project.

You will be asked to attend one four-hour or two two-hour private sessions with Donna Russau, *the researcher*. You will be asked to meet Donna Russau for these sessions at a public place or at the campus of Western Michigan University, or at an agreed upon private location. The session will involve a taped interview during which you will be asked questions regarding the life experiences as an African American Single Mother. As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this project is that the topics could raise sensitive issues. You may always choose not to answer any question(s). If you should become upset by the content of the interview; Donna Russau is prepared to provide you with a list of agencies for crisis counseling for referral. You will be responsible for the cost of therapy if you choose to pursue it. Risks to subjects would include the inconvenience of taking time for the interview. The inconvenience of having to obtain childcare could be an issue for some participants.

One way in which you may benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about your experience, which is beneficial for individuals. Others who experience a similar life setting could benefit from the knowledge that is gained from this research.

All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name will not appear on any papers, or any audio tapes on which this information is recorded. The data will be identified by the date and time of the beginning of the interview. The data will be coded, and Donna Russau, the researcher, will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other data will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the Kercher Research Center on the campus of Western Michigan University.

You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Donna Russau, the Researcher at (269) 349-8029. You may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the Vice President for research at 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

Signature

Date

Consent obtained by: _____
initials of researcher

Date

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