

THE USE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AS  
A MEANS OF COPING AMONG SINGLE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

A DISSERTATION  
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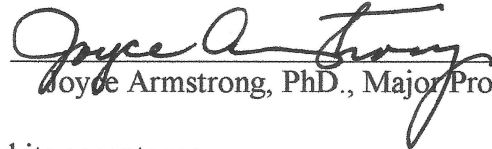
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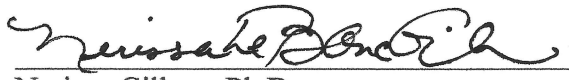
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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Symionne Quarles entitled "The Use of Religion and Spirituality as a Means of Coping Among Single African American Mothers." I have examined the dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Studies.

  
Joye Armstrong, PhD., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

  
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Accepted:

  
Dean of Graduate School

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to the woman who taught me the power of prayer and having a personal relationship with my “Higher Power.” She instilled in me strong religious values and spiritual practices that I continue and share with my children. To my grandmother, Juanita Taylor Quarles, I know you are in heaven looking down on me with pride.

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## ABSTRACT

SYMIONNE QUARLES

### THE USE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AS A MEANS OF COPING AMONG SINGLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS

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The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the lives of single African American mothers and how they utilized religion and spirituality to cope with daily responsibilities. Risk and resilience and attachment theory were used to create a theoretical lens. The researcher examined how religion and spirituality served as support systems in order to help the mothers cope with balancing their responsibilities.

Fifteen single African American mothers residing in Dallas/Fort Worth region were interviewed. Participants were asked 14 open-ended questions. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Data were coded for themes. Five themes emerged which included one overarching theme. The results showed that these single African American mothers were very resourceful and resilient.

Five themes emerged which included one overarching theme. The overarching theme was connectedness. The participants felt connected to external and internal factors in their lives. Other themes in this study were instilling beliefs, resiliency, and coping strategies and external resources utility. Coping strategies had four subthemes: prayer, listen to music, read the Bible, and attend religious services.

The need for the church to develop programs for this population is very important. Also, the need for collaborations between faith based and family educations organizations in order to provide enrichment programs. Lastly, there is a need for networking opportunities for these women in order to meet other mothers.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Religion and spirituality are very important to African Americans. The African American church has a history of introducing members to rituals, beliefs, and values which were used in their daily lives (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). Consequently, some scholars have indicated that “African Americans have been raised with and have a internalized sense of spirituality” (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993, p.461).

Littlejohn-Blake and Darling (1993) stated that the African American church also provided community support for families. Support systems developed due to their participation in religious and spiritual activities. Members of the support system may include coworkers, college friends, neighbors, and church members (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). These support systems assist with caring for children, coping with daily tasks, and listening ear. In the African American community some of the members of the support system are fictive kin. They are often called brother, sister, aunt, or uncle (Malson, 1982).

Approximately 60% of Americans consider religion to be very important based on Gallup Polls in 2006 and 2013 (Newport, 2006; 2013). In the 2006 Gallup Poll (Newport, 2006), there were numerous findings. Religion was viewed to be more important by

females and older adults. African Americans stated that religion was “very important” to them. The ratings were higher than any other race (Newport, 2006).

According to a Gallup Poll (2003a) more than 80% of Americans believed in a Higher Power and the power of prayer. Newport (2011) reported 91% of Americans believed in a God or universal spirit. Approximately 75% of people surveyed viewed spirituality as being personal and done privately. Many viewed spirituality as a relationship with their God, or living their life to the fullest (Gallup, 2003a).

Single African American mothers often rely on religion as a means of coping on a daily basis in order to fulfill their roles. Mendenhall, Bowman, and Zhang (2013) recently conducted a national study using secondary data to learn if religion assisted in the resiliency of single African American mothers. The sample size consisted of 812 single African American mothers whose ages ranged from 18-101; the majority resided in urban areas. Mendenhall et al. (2013) found that religion resulted in higher levels of self-esteem, better quality of life, and the ability to accomplish goals.

Many use *religion* and *spirituality* as interchangeable concepts (Taylor & Chatters, 2010); however, the definition of these two distinct concepts has changed over the years. In previous years, *religion* was defined as seeking the sacred (Pargament, 1999). Today the definition has evolved to mean the institution, rituals, religious practices, and organized religious groups (Pargament, 1999; Taylor & Chatters, 2010). When one uses that term the “religion” today it refers to group practices. Previously religion encompassed the sacred, individualism, and group practices (Pargament, 1999).

According to Pargament (1999), *spirituality* means seeking a higher power which includes an individual's quest for the sacred, practice alone by participating in private rituals that attempt to help one get closer to Deity or Higher Power (Pargament, 1999; Taylor & Chatters, 2010). Some researchers use the words interchangeably (Stringer, 2009).

Religion and spirituality are in contrast to one another. Religion refers to groups, and spirituality is individualized (Pargament, 1999). Religion is considered to be regimented, and spirituality is individualized. Religions consists of rituals, beliefs created by institutions, and religious practices. Spirituality is seeking the sacred based on the individuals' beliefs and desires. Religion consists of seeking many important objects while spirituality focuses on only one (Pargament, 1999).

Pargament (1999) explained that the heart of religion is spirituality, and that searching for the sacred is the primary purpose of religion. He further stated that whether spiritual or religious, one uses prayers and other religious practices in order to obtain the sacred. Research supports similar findings as found in Stringer's (2009) study on how African Americans seek experiences that influence and inform them through faith experiences and, as a result some consider themselves religious and spiritual.

The importance of religion and spirituality in the African American community has been researched in social sciences over the years (Brodsky, 2000; Stringer, 2009). Brodsky found that African American single mothers saw church as a place of support. Half of the women who participated in the study attended church regularly and reported



that they gained positive results from their religious involvement. The participants also revealed that their personal relationships with God and religious beliefs gave them skills needed to cope (Brodsky, 2000).

Pargament (2007) stated that spirituality is often used as a source of coping by many people. It is used during times of stress for guidance and support. He further stressed that people use spirituality in their daily lives which includes participating in religious practices.

1. Many Americans use spirituality during times of major stressors or problems.
  2. Human limitations are accepted through spirituality.
  3. It can help solve problems.
  4. By looking at their problems through spiritual lens, they are able to see their lives from a broader perspective.
  5. Their problems take on a different meaning and are able to find viable answers.
  6. Finally, spirituality can provide a support one cannot get from others
- (Pargament, 2007, p. 11-12).

Sullivan (2008) developed a theoretical model stating that mothers of lower income use religion as a resource in helping them become better parents. The author continues by stating that religion can be viewed two ways: first, the institutional resource deals with religious affiliation, organizations, and church; and second, viewing religion as a cultural resource such as rituals, symbols, and beliefs (Sullivan, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The 2010 U.S. Census (2012) indicated that 15.3 million households are headed by women in this country, and African American women are three times more likely to be the head of the household than their white counterparts. The U.S. Census (2012) also revealed that in most cases the children were biologically related to the head of household. For single African American mothers, this can be stressful due to the lack of a mate to help them deal with daily activities in their lives (Sullivan, 2008). Single mothers have a higher chance of being unemployed or underemployed. This may result in the mother having to rely on subsidy programs to help maintain the household (Mather, 2010).

The current study is important because of the vulnerability of this population. Single mothers often bring home less money and often have difficulty providing and paying for necessities (Mather, 2010). According to the Population Reference Bureau data states (Mather, 2010), 66% of the children living in low income single mother families are African Americans as compared to their white counterparts.

In a study performed by Sullivan (2006), it was discovered that low income mothers relied on religion and spirituality while working low paying jobs. Religion and spirituality helped them cope with work related stress. However Brodsky's (2000) study stated that participants relied on religion for personal growth, and protection for their families and themselves.

This is a problem because single mothers have to learn how to be resilient and overcome many obstacles. These mothers have actually taken on mother and father roles since there are not fathers in the households. Having to bear the burden of being mother and father can often cause problems for them. African American single mothers are often faced with several problems: living in risky areas, unemployment, and making lower wages (Mendenhall et al., 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain more information about African American single mothers and their use of religion and spirituality on a daily basis to assist with coping. The purpose of studying religion and spirituality is to determine if both are important in the lives of single African American mothers. Being a single parent can often be very difficult due to the lack of support from the noncustodial parent. Research has shown that religion and familial relationships are important to African Americans (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). Using the risk and resilience theory and attachment theory as the theoretical lenses, the researcher examined (a) the role religion and spirituality play in African American mothers' lives; (b) the importance of support systems; and (c) how religion and spirituality are used to assist with coping.

### **Significance of the Study**

While exploring empirical research on religion and spirituality for this study, the researcher reviewed articles in several different disciplines: psychology, religion, mental health, and health sciences. The quantitative research in this area focused more on coping

with medical conditions. There was limited qualitative research on religion and spirituality used as a method of coping among single African American mothers. In order to add to the body of knowledge more research must be done in this area. This study will give insight to practitioners and begin a conversation on the need for further research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This phenomenological study utilized two theories: the risk and resilience theory and attachment theory. The risk and resilience model was developed by health scientists and has become part of human development (Keyes, 2004). Psychologists interested in child development introduced this model to better understand child development (Keyes, 2004). Norman Garmezy (Masten, Nuerchterlein, & Wright, 2011) has been given credit for studying risk and resilience based on investigations of children with mental illness and how they overcame obstacles. His work was continued by many of his students (Masten et al., 2011).

The attachment theory was used in order to understand the mother's relationship with her Higher Power and if there is an attachment present. Also, the researcher wanted to know if the members utilize religion and spirituality as a means of communicating with their Higher Power in order to gain validation, to ask for things, or protection for her family.

### **Risk and Resilience Theory**

The risk and resilience theory was chosen because single mother households can be at risk because of negative factors such as low income, risky neighborhoods, and

unemployment. This study looked at religion and spirituality as protective factors that can help single African American mothers be resilient when faced with possible challenges.

Risks are negative factors which often cause negative outcomes. These negative outcomes can result in changes in behavior that impact development. According to Orthner and Rose (2009) resilience gives the person the ability to overcome and exceed situational and societal expectations. Orthner and Rose (2009) further state that protective factors help the individual maneuver in the risky situation. Yoo, Slack, and Hall (2010) suggest that there are three important parts to this model. First there must have been a crisis or life change. Second, there must be adaptation to the change and third, there must be factors that help them overcome the adversity (Yoo, Slack, & Hall, 2010).

This current study used the risk and resilience theory as one of the theoretical lenses as the researcher looks at this issue from two perspectives. Firstly, how does religion and spirituality help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis? Secondly, what religious and spiritual practices help African American single mothers cope with single parenthood? This model served as a guide in the research. In this study, single parenting was viewed as the risk. The protective factors giving them the ability to become resilient are religion and spirituality.

In this study of the risk and resilience theory was used in order to gain better insight into this phenomenon. This theory helped answer the question: How does religion and spirituality help single African American mothers manage on a daily basis? This study was an exploration of how religion and spirituality has helped the subjects

overcome their adversities and maintain themselves on a daily basis in order to care and protect their children. Keyes (2004) discussed how protective factors can be multi-level, which can include the individual, family, friends, and community.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is the second theoretical lens used to study religion and spirituality. Bowlby (Granquist, 2012) has been noted for developing the attachment theory. This theory addresses the relationship between an infant and the primary caregiver which is often the parent. The child looks to the caregiver for protection and guidance. If the caregiver does not act positively towards the infant's actions, this often causes a disconnect between the infant and caregiver. If a parent reacts positively to the infant's actions, the infant forms a bond and is comfortable exploring and seeking independence knowing the caregiver is close by (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 2005).

We typically think of attachment theory as infant and caregiver, but for this study we will view it from an adult and Higher Power perspective. Lee Kirkpatrick has been credited with the way attachment theory has evolved to include an adult and God relationship (Granquist, 2012). Kirkpatrick's (Granquist, 2012) work has influenced research in the area of psychology of religion and spirituality. Hill and Pargament (2003) discussed how a person's relationship to God is similar to a mother and child relationship. The person seeks God for safety and refuge during trying times. The individual also relies on God for strength and encouragement. Hill and Pargament (2003)

showed how this relationship can be viewed using an Attachment Theory lens (Hill & Paragament, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How does religion help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis?
2. How does spirituality help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis?
3. What religious practices help African American single mothers cope with single parenthood?
4. What spiritual practices help African American single mothers cope with single parenthood?
5. How do support systems help single African American mothers cope?

### **Assumptions**

The researcher assumed the following about their study:

1. Participants were not coerced into participating in study.
2. Participants were truthful about information provided.
3. Being a single mother is stressful.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following concepts and definitions guided this study.

1. African Americans- A group of people residing in the United States and who are of African descent (US Census, 2011).
2. Attachment- A close relationship to a person or deity (Kirkpatrick, 1992).

3. Child- Biological offspring residing in the household between the ages of newborn and 18.
4. Coping- One's ability to handle stress during difficult situations (Stringer, 2009).
5. Fictive Kin- Relationships with people who are not blood related but are considered relatives and take on family roles (Stewart, 2007).
6. Religion- The participation in religious practices, rituals, ritualized beliefs and religious programs (Pargament, 1997).
7. Resilience- The ability to overcome negative factors in one's life (Orthner & Rose, 2009).
8. Risk- Negative factors which often cause negative outcomes (Orthner & Rose, 2009).
9. Single mother- A woman living with her child(ren) assuming the role of head of household with no other adults residing in the household (Mather, Rivers, & Jacobsen, 2005).
10. Spirituality- The search for meaning in one's life and search for a Higher Power (Pargament, 1999).
11. Support system- A group of people who provide support (emotional, spiritual, financial or material) to an individual or family (Thoits, 1995).

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations were identified in this study.

1. This study focused on African American women who stated they were single, divorced, separated, or not cohabitating.



2. This study involved women who self- identified as having children ages 0-18 residing within their home.
3. The study took place in Dallas/Fort Worth region.

### **Researcher as a Person**

The researcher is a 44 year old, African American divorced female with three children. The researcher became a single mother several years ago and relied on religion and spirituality in order to overcome stressors associated with divorce and single motherhood. The researcher has a background in counseling and is currently employed as a guidance counselor in the Dallas/Fort Worth region. All of her counseling experience has been with religious organizations. In addition, the researcher attends church regularly and is active in several ministries. She is also a member of professional and social organizations which help her grow professionally and personally.

### **Summary**

The U.S. Census (2012) reported that the number of African American women head of households is higher than their white counterparts. Mather (2010) of the Personal Reference Bureau stated that this group is vulnerable because of their lack of income, which may result in them relying on state and federal assistance to support their families. This can often cause stress for this particular group of women. Several researchers have found that African American single mothers utilize religion and spirituality as a means of coping with daily activities (Brodsky, 2000; Sullivan, 2006).

Exploring how African American single mothers use religion and spirituality as means of coping will give insight into this phenomenon. This research will add to the body of knowledge and hopefully begin a dialog among researchers, clergy, therapists and lawmakers.

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the topic. This chapter outlined the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, assumptions, and definitions. The delimitations of the study were also discussed.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will discuss factors that may help single African American mothers cope with daily stressors they may endure. This population can be very vulnerable while facing many obstacles. The purpose of this study is to investigate some of the possible benefits of religion and spirituality in their lives. Two theoretical frameworks will be used to gain a better understanding in order to answer the research questions. Key components of religion and spirituality will be discussed, as well as parenting, support systems, and fictive kin that may be of help to these single mothers.

During this literature review, articles were reviewed from several disciplines including social work, religion, psychology, sociology, and medicine in order to gather data on religion and spirituality and single mothers. The researcher used risk and resilience and attachment lenses to look at the literature. These theories were chosen because of how single African American mothers are often faced with obstacles. The risk and resilience theory discusses how a person faced with negative circumstances can have positive outcomes when supported by with positive influences in their life (Yoo et al., 2010). The attachment theory was used in order to study if these women rely on their High Power like a child does to their caregiver for guidance, protection, and decision making.

Single African American mothers can be faced with stress due to parenting alone. Hatcher, Rayens, Peden, and Hall (2008) performed a qualitative study of predictors that can be the cause of stress for low-income African American mothers. The sample group consisted of 98 single African American mothers with children between the ages of 2-6 residing with them. They used secondary data to answer their research questions. The authors assumed that economic and social obstacles were causes of stress and possible depression within this group. They found that these women showed higher levels of depressive symptoms due to low income and limited resources.

Pargament, Smith, Koenig, and Perez (1998) performed a quantitative study that consisted of three sample groups. Group One consisted of congregants from two churches in Oklahoma City who were familiar with the Oklahoma City bombing and knew someone involved. Group Two included 540 college students who confessed to being Christians and experiencing a traumatic event in their lives, and Group Three included 551 hospital patients dealing with medical issues at two Oklahoma City hospitals. The participants were asked to explain the role religion played in their lives. A series of instruments were used in order to determine the importance of religious coping in assisting them with overcoming major stressors in their lives. The researchers found that participants who utilized positive religious coping had lower levels of depression and higher levels of cooperativeness.

Sullivan (2008) studied low income mothers and how religion was used in helping them raise their children. Several of the mothers believed that religion and religious

practices would assist them in raising their children. Earlier, Brodsky (2000) interviewed 10 African American single mothers ages 26-46 residing in risky neighborhoods. Half of them had an appreciation for religion because of the positive affects it had on them. They liked the helpful church members and positive activities for them and their children (Brodsky, 2000).

Being a single mother can be very stressful. According to the Population Reference Bureau (Mather, 2010), this population often experiences a higher unemployment rate, lower wages which may result in relying on public subsidies to provide for her families. In addition, lack of support from fathers is problematic because of the limited assistance many of them provide. Only 35% of households headed by single mothers receive child support according to 2000 statistics provided by the Public Reference Bureau (Mather et al., 2005).

### **Risk and Resilience Theory**

Rutter (2006) defines *resilience* as the ability for a person to overcome traumatic experiences that could lead to negative outcomes but instead have positive outcomes. In order for there to be resilience there must be risks. Risks are negative factors that can cause family dysfunction. They can impact the family psychologically, financially, and socially. Protective factors are used to help reach the point of resilience (Yoo et al., 2010). Religion and spirituality are the protective factors that will be explored.

## **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is based on the premise that a strong parent-children relationship must exist in order for the child to feel safe and comfortable to explore its surroundings (Ellison, Bradshaw, Kuyel, & Marcum, 2012). The child must have a sense of security with the parent while venturing into new experiences. This relationship will have an effect on the child in years to come. If the child feels secure, he or she will become independent and comfortable to try new things because of the security net provided by the parent (Ellison et al., 2012)

Ellison et al. (2012) reported that there is limited research on attachment theory and religion. Granqvist, Mikulincer, Gerwartz, and Shaver (2012) stated that people are more likely to be attached to their Higher Power during times of distress and trauma. Lee Kirkpatrick (Granqvist, 2012) has been credited with connecting attachment theory with religion and spirituality. He realized that people who consider themselves religious utilize their Higher Power for security and insight (Granqvist, 2012).

Religious attachment is very acceptable in the Christian culture due to belief in God as loving and helping. Many other religions see God as a positive and good being that is there to help (Ellison et al., 2012). In adults, the Higher Power is seen as the secure base which allows them to endure and step out on faith. They use prayer, meditation, and reading sacred text as a means of communicating and staying connected with Deity in order to seek peace and reassurance in their lives (Ellison et al., 2012).

## **Religion**

Today religion is viewed as an institution instead of individualized. Religion is viewed as attending church, participating in religious rituals, and anything else relating to group participation (Pargament, 1999). This study looked at church attendance and how it can be helpful to this population.

Pargament (1999) discussed the evolution of religion and how its definition has changed over time. Spirituality has taken on the meaning of religion as we knew it and religion has a new meaning. He stated that due to the increase of Eastern nontraditional religions becoming prevalent in the United States, there was a need for redefining terms to become more inclusive of these religions (Pargament, 1999).

According to a 2010 Gallup Poll (Newport, Agrawal, & Witters, 2010) people who considered themselves highly religious dealt with depression less than their nonreligious counterparts. The poll also reported that very religious people are more positive and deal with negative emotions much less than those who reported being moderate and nonreligious. While analyzing data, Newport, Agrawal, and Witters (2010) discovered a relationship between high religious participation and low levels of negative emotions. They hypothesized that highly religious people often turn to religion which is why they suffer less from stress, depression, or other mental health issues (Newport et al., 2010).

## **Religious Attendance**

Tabak and Mickelson (2009) explored if church attendance helped the reduction of mental health issues and if race was important. They continued by discussing how attending church regularly and participating in religious services gave attendees emotional benefits. Data from the National Comorbidity Survey was analyzed. Results showed that African Americans attended church at a higher rate than any other race. Participants who attended weekly service had lower levels of stress. Also, African Americans and Hispanics gained several benefits from attending services including (a) financial support, (b) support in dealing with inequalities they faced, and (c) strategies applicable to their daily lives (Tabak & Mickelson, 2009).

Rutledge (2010) investigated if church attendance is a true predictor of membership. A church in suburban England with more than 10,000 members was chosen in order to collect data. Attendees were asked to complete a census. The study was conducted over four years. The first collection period consisted of four weeks and the second period was five weeks. The response rate during the first period was 90% and 85% during the second period. He found that one's name on the membership roll did not mean they attended regularly. It was discovered that many attendees attended regularly but were not members. During both collection periods there were more women attendees than men (Rutledge, 2010).



### **Support System (Organized Religion)**

Newport et al. (2010) discovered that people who participate in religious activities often show lower negative emotions due to personal and social support received within religious organizations. Maton and Wells (1995) explored how the church is a support system for parents. The church offers parents opportunities to receive counseling, attend parenting classes and enrichment programs. While participating in the programs offered at the church, parents are able to develop friendships and support systems that can help them become better parents and strengthen them emotionally and spiritually (Maton & Wells, 1995).

Church members' support can help one feel a sense of belonging. This can help people cope because of the sense of love received from members. Attending church and participating in activities can also help with healing and dealing with difficult times. The church also gives financial support to families in need and other services that the family may need (Brodsky, 1999; Maton & Wells, 1995).

### **Spirituality**

Littlejohn-Blake and Darling (1993) explained that African Americans are very spiritual beings by nature. Their spiritual roots were born out of African customs, traditions and religions. Spirituality has become an integral part of African Americans passed down by their African ancestors (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993).

Brodsky (1999) performed a qualitative study on single African American mothers in order to gain an understanding as to how these resilient women were able to

overcome negative factors in their families. One of the research questions was: “What and who helps you cope” (Brodsky, 1999, p. 152)? For several of the women spirituality was a very important factor in helping overcome negativity. One respondent stated that it helped her stay focused on the important tasks and achieve her goals (Brodsky, 1999).

### **Prayer**

The Gallup Poll (2003b) reported that during the Iraq War that 52% of Americans turned to prayer. They also reported that more Americans pray during national crisis. Women and people with incomes less than \$50,000 per year were more likely to pray (Gallup, 2003b). During prayer, 80% stated they feel peace and comfort during trying times. Some of the respondents described the following results from prayer: supernatural presence, divine instruction, answer to prayer request, and biblical and spiritual insight (Gallup, 2003b).

Mendenhall et al. (2013) stated there are four different types of prayer: (a) meditation; (b) conversations with a Higher Power; (c) special requests for things, people, or needs; and (d) prayers that are from books, rituals, and memorized recitations. Prayer can be used to help alleviate stress by allowing a Higher Power to handle one’s problems. The person believes by praying, one will receive the help they need to deal with their situation. Prayer is very important to African Americans (Mendenhal et al., 2013).

Greer (2002) interviewed 35 female inmates in order to understand how they handled their emotions while in prison. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. During their interviews, a majority talked about how they utilized prayer to help

them handle their emotions while incarcerated. Prayer seemed to be their coping mechanism and allowed them to deal with their feelings privately. Sullivan (2006) found that half of the participants in their study used prayer to help them with work issues. Even though some did not participate in religious activities, they did rely on spirituality and internal practice.

Mendenhall et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study using secondary data from the National Survey of Black Americans. The sample consisted of 612 mothers. Their ages ranged from 18-101 and 80% lived in urban areas. The researchers used the life course and role strain lenses to gather information. The research was developed in order to gain a better understanding of family and how religious beliefs helped the mothers in being resilient while taking on the role of both parents. They found that religion and family relationships helped with self-esteem and their ability to accomplish goals (Mendenhall et al., 2013).

Incarcerated African American mothers in Stringer's (2009) study discussed how prayer helped them while serving time in prison. One participant stated prayer gave her a positive outlook on things, and she used it to protect family and herself. Another participant used prayer to have a better outlook on life and live her life better (Stringer, 2009).

Baker (2008) hypothesized that women, people of lower socioeconomic status, and African Americans pray more often than their White counterparts. These particular groups pray in order to cope with their situations. Secondary data from the Baylor

Religion Survey was used. Participants were asked how often they prayed and focused on prayer while alone. Baker (2008) discovered that women and African Americans prayed more than any other group. Participants younger than 40 utilized prayer the least and persons over 70 prayed the most; people from the South prayed more than people in other regions of the country (Baker, 2008). While praying, African Americans are more inclined to seek help with finances and health compared to Caucasian respondents. Women prayed more for their family's well-being than concerns for themselves (Baker, 2008).

### **Parenting**

Parenting for single African American mothers can be difficult but Fine and Schwebel (1987) discussed how this particular group of mothers was very adaptive. He focused by discussing how they utilized their family, community, and fictive support in order to accomplish tasks necessary to maintain their families and help them maintain balance in their lives (Fine & Schwebel, 1987). McLoyd, Jayaraine, Ceballo, and Borquez (1994) conducted a study in order to understand the link between a parent's work status and emotional state and how it affects parenting of an adolescent child. They hypothesized that the parent's employment status affected the adolescent socially and emotionally indirectly and the parent child relationship was strained because of parental stress. A total of 241 families were interviewed. The results showed that employed mothers with positive support systems were less likely to use punishment as a form of discipline and viewed parenting in a more positive light (McLoyd et al., 1994).

In a mixed methods study performed by Kelley, Power, and Wimbush (1992), 42 African American low income mothers with children ages 3-6 were interviewed using semi-structured questions and close-ended questions. They learned that African American low income mothers parent differently compared to middle class African American and Caucasian women. Low income mothers often are concerned about the surroundings they live in and have different expectations for their children because of the negativity that is prevalent in their environment. In concluding, the researchers also discovered that religion plays a role in how this population disciplines their child (Kelley et al., 1992).

### **Fictive Kin Support**

Fictive kin support is prevalent in African American families (Malson, 1982). People outside of the family take the role of family members. These relations are often formed as a means of support for one another. This type of support system can be very useful to single African American mothers because of the responsibility they must take on maintaining the role of both parents. Services rendered in these relationships are child care, finances, trading of services, and anything else deemed necessary to maintain the home. Members may call themselves sisters, brothers or cousins within this fictive relationship (Malson, 1982; Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994)

Stewart (2007) researched the definition of family from an African American perspective. A qualitative ethnography was performed using 25 open-ended questions. Forty-two people were interviewed with their ages ranging from 15-80. Many participants chose to be interviewed in their homes instead of choosing public venues.

Grounded theory was used in order to analyze data. Transcripts were transcribed using a computer program and transcripts were reviewed several times for themes. Results showed that people of higher socioeconomic status did not see the relations as definitive compared to respondents of lower incomes. Also, people became part of families due to romantic relationships with family members, need for family support or church attendance (Stewart, 2007).

### **Summary**

A review of literature was performed and several topics were reviewed. Religion, spirituality, parenting, and fictive kin were reviewed because the researcher was researching areas that provide positive results in the sample groups' lives on a daily basis. The risk and resilience and attachment theories were used to look at different aspects of religion and spirituality that may have a positive effect on this possibly vulnerable population. Support systems were explored because of the importance of relationship among African Americans. Parenting was discussed in order to assess if single African American mothers parent differently or encounter difficulties because of their status.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY  
**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research gives social scientists different approaches to understanding other people's realities in society (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). They are often consumed with understanding how men and women define life. Qualitative research attempts to do the following things: Study participants in their environments, allows the researcher to become an active participant, subjects are influential in determining topics, preserves integrity of participant communication, and results are instantaneous and help to solve current issues (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007).

After reviewing literature, the researcher selected qualitative research in order to gain a better insight into this particular group of women participating in this study. The purpose of this study was to explore whether religion and spirituality are used as coping mechanisms among single African American mothers. Collecting data from individuals in person and documenting their reactions to open-ended questions allowed the researcher an opportunity to witness body actions and hear influxes in the tone of voice that will allow for further documentation and findings (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a wealth of information about a smaller group of

people. It allows the researcher to go in-depth and detail and become a participant (Teedlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The open ended questions used in this study allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' environments and situations (Patton, 2002).

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach which is used in order to make meaning of one's reality in order to help others understand it. When one performs a phenomenology study, one is concerned with what it means to be in that situation or that person that has been involved in the area of study (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009). Data are collected through observations, interviews, and stories from participants (Connelly, 2010). The researcher used a descriptive phenomenology approach which attempts to expel any biases or prejudgments about the population or phenomenon before the study starts (Connelly, 2010).

The goal of this research was to gain insight into this phenomenon. As a result, a phenomenological perspective was used. Patton (2002 and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated that phenomenology allows the researcher to gain insight into the problem or issue being researched. It is assumed that single African American mothers use religion and spirituality in order to cope. When researchers use phenomenology the intent is to make a person or persons' experience understandable to those who would not ordinarily understand the experiences (Patton, 2002).



### **Interview Method**

Jackson et al. (2007) defined interviewing as the method used in qualitative research in order to collect data from groups and individuals. The researcher used semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to be flexible and aware of patterns emerging within the interviews (Jack et al., 2007).

The researcher used open-ended questions in order to gather data. Open-ended questions allowed participants to give their perspective on a concept and helped the researcher understand and draw them into the person's reality (Patton, 2002). The researcher chose open-ended questions because they would give participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings. This also created neutrality from the researcher.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

In order to check the validity of a qualitative study, credibility and trustworthiness must be verified. The researcher used triangulation and member checking in order to assure there were no biases and credibility (Jackson et al., 2007). The researcher took additional steps to ensure trustworthiness and credibility by debriefing sessions, investigator reflection, and researcher training (Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation is checking for consistency and objectivity within the researcher's findings (Patton, 2002). The researcher recruited a fellow researcher who has completed Texas Woman's University IRB certification to verify the findings within the study. The colleague provided feedback with special emphasis on themes and coding. The person was given a copy of the transcripts. No identifying information was provided. Each participant was given an identification number which allowed anonymity. Each was asked to complete a demographic form. The researcher met with the colleague to discuss findings.

Member checking is a common technique used to test credibility and trustworthiness of a study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Member checking was performed in order to ensure the quality of the research study. The researcher consulted with participants to verify accuracy of statements and phenomenon being researched (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). During data analysis participants were contacted for clarification purposes. Twenty percent of the participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy.

Shenton (2004) stated that debriefing was a way to increase credibility in a qualitative research study. The investigator met with her major professor periodically in order to discuss the direction of study. During these sessions the researcher was able to discuss any obstacles that were faced. While collecting data the researcher periodically reflected on the experience by writing in a journal. According to Shenton (2004), this helps decrease research subjectivity and allows for documentation of interviews and

recording of patterns. The investigator's training and qualifications were important to a study (Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). Training assures that the investigator is following procedures and causing no harm to participants. The researcher completed two trainings through the Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board. The investigator is also a single mother and very familiar with this particular population.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Snowball sampling was used to recruit 15 participants. The researcher chose to recruit 15 participants because this was a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling is the solicitation of others in order to recruit participants. An email containing a research flyer (Appendix A) was sent to friends, family, and colleagues. The recipients was asked to recommend people or organizations that have access to individuals that meet the participation criteria (Patton, 2002). The researcher also sent an email containing the research flyer to TWU Family Studies students and posted research criteria on Facebook.

Once contacted by potential participants, the researcher screened them to verify that they qualified for the study using Suitability for Participation Script (Appendix B). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggested that the researcher have a debriefing with the potential participant. This included discussing the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality, and explaining the discontinuation of participation. Also emphasized that having participants sign an informed consent form helps them to better understand

confidentiality and reiterate that their participation is voluntary (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Description of Participants**

The researcher focused on participants who resided in the Dallas/Fort Worth region. All of them self-identified as African American and marital status of single, separated, divorced, widowed, or not cohabitating. Participants also classified themselves as Christians. Each woman had at least one biological child age 0-18 residing in the household.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. This process allowed participants to tell their stories. Participants chose the locations for the interview. The researcher allowed the participants to choose the location in order to gain their trust, allow for privacy, and perform the interviews in a setting that would be comfortable for them (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) stated that using an interview guide will assist the researcher to better utilize their time during the interview. The researcher used an interview guide to interview participants. It consisted of 14 main and 5 ancillary questions. The ancillary questions were developed in order to help the interviewer when the participant was non-

communicative. All ancillary questions will be used during the interviews. The researcher decided to use these questions in order to gain more insight.

### **Interview Process**

The researcher contacted potential participants to verify that they met the qualifications. The primary investigator used a checklist to assess them. Once qualified, the researcher set up a meeting with the participant at a location determined by the participant. Then confidentiality and anonymity were discussed and an identification code was assigned which was used during the interview and analysis process. The researcher reviewed the consent form with the participant, answered any questions, and had the participant sign the form before starting the interview. Each participant was given a referral list (Appendix D) of counseling services if she desired to seek assistance. Next, the participant completed a demographic form (Appendix E) which was used during data analysis.

Before beginning, the participant was told that participation was voluntary and she can stop at any time. She was made aware of the opportunity to take breaks if needed. All interviews were audio taped. The interview started with a basic question and followed with interview questions. At the end of each interview the participant was asked if the researcher could contact her for clarification and review the transcripts for accuracy. The following list of questions guided the semi-structured interview (Appendix F):

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Introduction Question**

1. Tell me about being a single mother.

Interview questions addressed four areas (a) religion, (b) spirituality, (c) support systems, and (d) additional probing questions:

### **Religion**

2. How do you define religion?
3. Describe your religious beliefs prior to becoming a single mother.
4. What religious activities did you participate in before and after becoming a single mother?
5. Describe your religious beliefs after becoming a single mother.
6. What church activities do you participate in alone?

### **Spirituality**

7. How do you define spirituality?
8. How does spirituality relate to your role as a single mother?
9. Discuss a particular moment when spirituality has helped you deal with the change of becoming a single mother.
10. How often do you participate in religious activities in your home?  
What are some of the activities?
11. How do you relate to a “Higher Power”?

### **Support System**

12. Discuss your relationship with your support system.
13. Describe your support system and its significance in your life as a single mother.
14. Does your support system include fictive kin or a religious community?

A list of probing questions used by the researcher is as follows:

1. Tell me more about that.
2. What would you like to add?
3. Can you give me an example?
4. Can you repeat that for me?
5. What do you mean by that?

Very few notes were taken during the interview. The entire interview was audio recorded. Notes were written after each interview. All documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The researcher followed policies and procedures implemented by the Institutional Review Board at Texas Woman's University (Appendix G) and the Graduate School. The researcher contacted single African American mothers who had shown interest in participating. The purpose and qualifications of the study were discussed. Women who met the qualifications and were willing to participate were given a letter of intent stating purpose of study, confidentiality, and possible risks involved in participating. Prior to

interviewing the participants signed letters of consent allowing the researcher to use their information in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher reviewed the audio recording of each interview (Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2013). Interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio tape and reviewed by the researcher several times for accuracy. Participants were also involved in the reviewing process. They were called for clarification and three of the fifteen participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy in order to increase credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004).

Transcripts were reviewed several times for emerging themes. The researcher's colleague received transcripts which were only identifiable by the participant's identification code. She was asked to review and code transcripts. After coding was completed, the researcher and colleague reviewed and discussed data and emergent themes. Lastly, the researcher reported findings based on data collected (Patton, 2002).

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated that coding is breaking down texting and grouping according to commonalities. The researcher performed several levels of coding in order to develop themes. Initially, the investigator reviewed each transcript for commonalities using a holistic approach (Saldana, 2013) highlighting for common words. The second round of coding utilized the eclectic approach (Saldana, 2013) highlighting



key concepts. During this round of coding, interview questions and participant responses were mounted onto poster boards. During the third round of coding, the themeing data approach (Saldana, 2013) was used in order to answer the research questions. Lastly, data were grouped according to corresponding research questions it corresponded to in order to develop themes. Saldana (2013) refers to this concept as structural coding.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the research method, interviewing process, and how data was analyzed. This study was conducted using the qualitative approach. A phenomenology was performed in order to better understand this particular group of people. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling via email, social media, flyers, and word of mouth. Potential participants were contacted and eligibility was determined. If they met the criteria, they were informed of the study and potential risks involved. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form before the interview began. Participants were reminded that they could terminate at any time and were allowed to ask questions before beginning the interview. The researcher followed Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board's guidelines for collecting and analyzing data.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of religion and spirituality among single African American mothers. The risk and resilience theory and attachment theories were used as the theoretical framework. The researcher examined how single African American mothers used religion and spirituality to cope on a daily basis. The researcher conducted fifteen face-to-face interviews with women who volunteered to participate and met the qualification criteria. The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings of this study which will include descriptive details of the participants and emerging themes.

#### **Sample Descriptions**

The sample of this study consisted of 15 single African American mothers whose ages ranged from 30-50, with an average age of 40. Over half of the sample group was divorced (60%) and 40% were single. This sample group was highly educated with 93% reporting some college to graduate degrees. The level of education varied as 53% had a graduate degree, 13 % had a bachelor's degree, 27% had some college, and 7% some high school. Over 80% of the women were employed full-time, with incomes ranging

from \$0 to over \$120,000 per year. The majority of this group self-identified as Christian (93%), while 7% identified no religious affiliation. All participants had biological child(ren) ranging from 3 months to 18 years of age residing within the household. The percentage of mother-child household composition varied: 53% of participants had one child, 33% had two children, and 13% had three children.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics (N=15)*

	<i>f</i>	%
Highest Level of Education		
Some High School	1	7
High School diploma/GED	0	0
Some College	4	27
Bachelor's Degree	2	13
Graduate Degree	8	53
PhD/MD/JD	0	0
Employment Status		
Full-time	13	87
Part-time	0	0
Unemployed (Full-time Student)	2	13
Annual household income:		
0-40,000	7	47
41,000-80,000	5	33
81,000-120,000	2	13
120,000 and above	1	7
Religious Affiliation		
Christian	14	93
Muslim	0	0
Jewish	0	0
Buddhist	0	0
Other	0	0
No preference	1	7
Marital Status:		
Single	6	40
Separated	0	0

Divorced	9	60
Number of biological children residing in household:		
1 child	8	53
2 children	5	33
3 children	2	13

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### **Participants at a Glance**

This section gives a brief description of the sample group used for this study. It includes the marital status, child(ren) age, level of education, and employment status.

#### **Participant 1**

Participant 1 is divorced with three children ages 17, 10, and 6. She has a graduate degree and is currently employed full-time.

#### **Participant 2**

Participant 2 is divorced with three children. Only her 6 and 5 year old children reside with her. She recently graduated with her Master's and is employed full-time.

#### **Participant 3**

This participant is single with two children ages 11 and 3 months. Her highest level of education is graduate level. She currently works from home full-time.

#### **Participant 4**

This participant is divorced, has a graduate degree, and is currently employed full-time. She has one child, age 11.

#### **Participant 5**

Participant 5 is a divorced mother who is currently a full-time student. She has one child age 6 who has special needs.

**Participant 6**

She is a divorced mother with two children ages 11 and 15. She has a graduate degree and works full-time.

**Participant 7**

Participant has never been married. Her two children reside with her and their ages are 8 and 12. She is currently employed full-time and holds a graduate degree.

**Participant 8**

A divorced mother of three children ages 15, 13, and 13. She recently started working full-time after being unemployed for several months and has a Bachelor's degree.

**Participant 9**

This participant has never been married and is the mother of three children. She resides with her 10 year old child. Participant 9 has some college and works full-time.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 is a single mother who has never been married. She lives with her only child age 18. This participant has some college and works full-time.

**Participant 11**

This participant is the mother of one child age 13 and never married. She is currently employed full-time and has some high school education.

**Participant 12**

A divorced mother of two children ages 14 and 11, she is currently in graduate school and working full-time.

**Participant 13**

A divorced mother of one child age 13, she has a graduate degree and works full-time.

**Participant 14**

A divorced mother of one child age 16, she is currently working full-time and has a graduate degree.

**Participant 15**

Participant 15 has never been married. She has two children residing in her home. Their ages are 16 and 12. The 12 year old is her biological child and the 16 year old is her cousin. She is currently unemployed and has some college.

**Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of single African American mothers and their use of religion and spirituality as a means of coping on a daily basis. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher interviewed participants in order to gain knowledge. The five research questions are as follows.

**Research Questions**

Research Question 1: How does religion help single African American mothers cope on daily basis?

Research Question 2: How does spirituality help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis?

Research Question 3: What religious practices help African American single mothers cope with single parenthood?

Research Question 4: What spiritual practices help African American single mothers cope with single parenthood?

Research Question 5: How do support systems help you cope with being a single African American mother?

The following interview questions were used to gather data from the sample group:

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Introduction Question**

1. Tell me about being a single mother.

#### **Religion**

2. How do you define religion?
3. Describe your religious beliefs prior to becoming a single mother.
4. What religious activities did you participate in before and after becoming a single mother?
5. Describe your religious beliefs after becoming a single mother.
6. What church activities do you participate in alone?

#### **Spirituality**

7. How do you define spirituality?
8. How does spirituality relate to your role as a single mother?

9. Discuss a particular moment when spirituality has helped you deal with the change of becoming a single mother.
10. How often do you participate in religious activities in your home? What are some of the activities?
11. How do you relate to a “Higher Power”?

### **Support System**

12. Discuss your relationship with your support system.
13. Describe your support system and its significance in your life as a single mother.
14. Does your support system include fictive kin or a religious community?

A list of probing questions used by the researcher is as follows:

1. Tell me more about that.
2. What would you like to add?
3. Can you give me an example?
4. Can you repeat that for me?
5. What do you mean by that?

Data were transcribed by listening to the audio recorded interviews. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times in order to find common concepts and terms. The researcher performed four rounds of coding in order to develop themes. The types of coding used were holistic, eclectic, themeing data, and structured (Saldana, 2013). The similar concepts and ideas were grouped together. Participants were involved in the



process. The researcher contacted them for clarification as needed. Several participants were given copies of transcripts to review for accuracy. Transcripts were given to a colleague for coding. The primary investigator and colleague discussed emerging themes. Data from the verbatim transcripts were used to support the themes. As a result, five themes with one overarching and four support themes for coping strategies. The themes: (a) connectedness, (b) instilling beliefs, (c) resiliency, (d) coping strategies, and (e) external resources and utility. The four supporting themes for coping strategies were: prayer, reading the Bible, listening to music, and attending religious services.

Table 2

*Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Themes*

1. Tell me about being a single mother.			
	Research Questions(RQs)	Interview Questions (IQs)	Theme
	RQ 1: How does religion help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis?	IQ 2: How do you define religion? IQ 3: Describe your religious beliefs prior to becoming a single mother. IQ 5: Describe your religious beliefs after becoming a single mother.	Instilling Beliefs  Connectedness

<p>RQ 2: How does spirituality help single African American mothers cope one a daily basis?</p>	<p>IQ 7: How do you define spirituality? IQ 8: How does spirituality relate to your role as a single mother? IQ 9: Discuss a particular moment when spirituality has helped you deal with the change of becoming a single mother. IQ 11: How do you relate to a “Higher Power?”</p>	<p>Coping Strategies</p> <p>Connectedness</p>
<p>RQ 3: What religious practices help single African American mothers cope with single parenthood?</p>	<p>IQ 4: What religious activities did you participate in before and after becoming a single mother? IQ 6: What church activities do you participate in alone?</p>	<p>Resiliency</p> <p>Connectedness</p>
<p>RQ 4: What spiritual practices help single African American mothers cope with single parenthood?</p>	<p>IQ 10: How often do you participate in religious activities in your home? What are some of the activities?</p>	<p>Coping Strategies</p> <p>Connectedness</p>
<p>RQ 5: How do support systems help you cope with being a single African American mother?</p>	<p>IQ 12: Discuss your relationship with your support system. IQ 13: Describe your support system and its significance in your life as a single mother. IQ 14: Does your support system include fictive kin or a religious community?</p>	<p>External Resources And Utility</p> <p>Connectedness</p>

### Themes

### **Overarching Theme: Connectedness**

The overarching theme of this study was connectedness. During the interviews participants discussed how being connected helped them cope. Participants felt connected by attending religious services and through spiritual practices which helped them communicate with their “Higher Power.” Interviewees also felt connected to the people they considered being a part of their support systems. Many of them may have met through church, work, college, or life experiences. Several of the sample group considered some of their support system to be family even though they were not related. These connections helped them to cope with being a single mother.

Participant 3: “Spirituality would be more about your connection to your Creator the things that um you participate in that help you to um be a better person um that things you participate in um it’s spirituality is more about the relationship the relationship with God and not about the practices.”

Participant 2: “If I didn’t have them I would definitely be and feel alone. So just knowing that they understand my situation they haven’t been through a divorce but just knowing that okay it’s no longer two people a mother and a father in the house. It’s just me they know that I need extra time or extra listening ear um just being there just being there for me they know what’s necessary in order to keep me strong.”

Participant 9: “... for me um it’s not really identifying with a certain religion but you have a connection or you feel connected to a higher power ...”

Participant 3: "...I actually feel like there is a connection there is a conversation and someone is gonna actively respond to what I'm saying everything is more meaningful."

### **Theme One: Instilling Beliefs**

Participants stated that being a single mother is hard, but all wanted the best for their children. This resulted in them introducing religion to their children. Several sample group members believed that religion helped them instill beliefs in their children, while some other participants believed that it was appropriate for them to instill beliefs in their children because their families did the same for them. Also, some mentioned that instilling beliefs in their children would help them to become better people. Two interviewees discussed how they were utilizing religion to help their sons become good men and husbands to their families. Lastly, some of the women believed that these beliefs would protect their children from negative factors.

Participant 13: "Um the most important part of it is just trying to raise my children to um have some spiritual connection some um understanding of religion understanding of God understanding of faith...."

Participant 15: "After becoming a single mother they were stronger um I think they became stronger because I see now I have two lives I'm accountable for so they definite have become stronger um just instilling what I know and to them of course when they get of age they'll make their own decision....."

Participant 3: "... having a mom I did the religious practices that were introduced to me as more of a traditional thing doing what I was taught to do..."

Participant 6: "...trying to help them understand what it's like to be a spiritual leader in your house and taking little pieces and helping them do that..."

## **Theme Two: Resiliency**

Religion and spirituality were used to overcome negative factors participants may have faced. Religion was considered a way of life for many participants. They utilized it in many aspects of their life. Many practiced alone and with their families on a regular basis. Participants discussed how they used prayer to help them make it through a day. Some talked about how they prayed in the morning before starting their day alone or with their children. Others discussed how they prayed at night or sometimes during the day especially if having a difficult time.

During hard times or handling being a single mother, relying on their religious beliefs have helped them endure and made their circumstances more tolerable. The participants experienced various life changing events. Some discussed how their previous relationships impacted them and made them seek their "Higher Power" even more. Another discussed how caring for her son with medical problems made her rely on God more. Several reported dealing with finances and trying to make sure the bills were paid was very difficult.

Spirituality was perceived as something that was done on an individual basis and privately. Most of the participants discussed how they engaged in spiritual practices

mainly in their homes. Each person's worship time was different, but never the less important to her. Their worship time was based on their personal and family needs. During this time some listened to music, prayed, or listened for God's voice.

Participant 2: "Religion is pretty much the center of I think everything people or should I say I guess myself and that foundation that I have I do off of..."

Participant 14: "I guess um I still believe in God I pray nothing has really changed. Um, I guess people will say my daughter goes to a private Christian school so she gets stuff from school and she gets stuff from church and myself so I don't know if I make a big deal out of it it's just our life that's just what we do."

Participant 5: "...I have learned is that I had to depend on my faith. I had to depend on God for everything and had to believe that whatever He says He's going to do..."

Participant 9: "the relationship between you and God through Jesus Christ it can be done successfully. When all else fails and when things are out of your control you can always rely on God because He's in control of everything. So that gives you hope and it gives you encouragement..."

Participant 5: "...I just know I had to hold onto faith more I had to have more faith to bring me out of this trial or this trial to carry me on through daily life."

Participant 1: "My religious beliefs are the same but I pray more and rely on God for when making decisions."

Participant 7: "... my spirituality helped me where when it's times when I feel like nobody understands or no one is there it helps me that there is a power and God is with me and I can get through this might be a tough day but tomorrow is another day."

Participant 4: "Um well I guess when it all happened I you know turned to God and I you know questioned why certain things were happening but then as I was going through those things and it became the past I guess God you know started showing me things that I can do..."

Participant 3: "Um the listening to religious music um my own private study whether that be uh my own um religious workbooks or I have a Bible app it tells sometime in the moment when I'm on it while in the by myself I may pull that um I do have devotional books um from um my faith that I will um look at some of their books about life and those a couple of oh and prayer those are the things that come to mind that individual time."

Participant 9: "Through prayer and worship I pray I worship and um oh read the Bible and um I relate to God in those ways but He also speaks to me so."

Participant 12: "I wake up with a song in my head and when whatever song it is I hear. I get up and put it on and I really meditate on it and say God give me something that is going to take me throughout the day..."

Participant 4: "...I pray in the morning and I pray in the evenings before I go to bed. And I you know a lot of time my prayers are centered around thanking God for waking up and you know just a place to stay you know just basic blessings..."

### **Theme Three: Coping Strategies**

Participants were asked questions about spirituality. The theme that emerged from this question was coping strategies and four subthemes. Interviewees defined spirituality as something they experienced alone. Spirituality helped them to endure certain situations and events with a different perspective. During their time alone they prayed, read their Bible, or listened to music. Attending church also helped them find balance. Their ultimate goal was to find inner strength.

Due to the end of a relationship or divorce, the participants felt they had to find inner strength in order to become better mothers. Spirituality has helped the participants seek within themselves to deal with life and situations that may arise. By having a relationship with their "Higher Power" they are able to get strength and direction to endure. This strength is found several ways: prayer, attending church, listening to music, and reading the Bible.

Participant 1: "As a single mother it ah keeps me grounded ...."

Participant 2: "Much needed because if I am not centered and peaceful then and happy and focused then nobody else is and it is hard to make decisions..."

Participant 13: "...I rely on my spirituality to help me get through tough



moments when I don't know what to do and don't know how to how to handle certain situations you know I know what to do and don't know how to how to handle certain situations you know I like for me and my son is getting older so I rely on my spirituality to guide me to not you know to help me maintain that calm and talk to him in a manner..."

Participant 2: "Just being able to remain peaceful and not be angry and upset about things that were not in my control."

Participant 7: "I think that it give me the empowerment that I can continue doing it cause it's not every day..."

Participant 5: "It relates because it helps me to stay sane, to not give up, to continue to push forward for a better life for me and my child."

Participant 15: "...I had to get to the point spiritually within myself to say that it's okay, and that I can still make it, and not have whatever happened then go so I can move on to my next blessing."

Participant 12: "...I have to dig deep and say okay God. I'm just going to take today. I'm just going to take this little snippet just a little bit."

**Prayer.** Prayer was very important to the research participants. More than half of the participants mentioned prayer at some point during their interviews. Many participated in prayer individually and with their families. During prayer they requested things for their children as well as themselves. Several believed that prayer was their way

of communicating with their “Higher Power.” Prayer often resulted in them getting answers or receiving the things they requested from God.

Participant 8: “Um we usually actually have pray together every night and um we’ll say grace together at the table whether we are out in public or if we’re at home...”

Participant 5: “I relate to a Higher Power um by talking having a prayer conversation with my Higher Power...”

Participant 6: “I pray and I ask Him for help. I ask him what I should, I read my Bible not as often as I should. Um there is sometimes I just have God on my mind.”

Participant 7: “...one of the biggest things is praying at night together and praying before we eat. No matter where we at whether it’s in a restaurant, over somebody’s house, it’s really important they give thanks to God for letting us to eat another meal...”

**Listen to music.** Music was utilized during private worship times. Participants talked about how they listened to music. No one discussed sharing this activity with their family. Two of the participants discussed how listening to music helped them cope and one usually started her day off with music.

Participant 12: “Oh every day at home I always wake up in the morning putting on Pandora YouTube and I am listening to my music. I always for some reason I

wake up with a song in my head and whenever song it is I hear I get up and put it on...”

Participant 3: “Um the listening to music um my own private study...”

**Read the Bible.** Majority of the participants saw the importance of reading their Bible. Some read it in order to get closer to their God. While some read to seek guidance in their situations. All participants saw the importance of the Bible and the necessity to read it alone, during church services, or both.

Participant 5: “...after I became a single parent my religious beliefs strengthened I had I developed a more prayerful life I developed a more intimate relationship with God I studied the Bible more and um I depended more on the Holy Spirit with decision making.”

Participant 2: “...um we read the Bible I have a Bible app on my phone so we will read the morning scripture that comes through and before we to work and school...”

Participant 3: “I have a Bible app it tells me sometime in the moment when I’m on it. While in the bed by myself I may that app up um I do have devotional books.”

Participant 14: “Um, I do a weekly Bible study...”

**Attending religious services.** By attending church services and participating in church activities, participants were given opportunities to fellowship with church members. These relationships began at church but often expanded into their everyday

lives. Church members assisted with the family's daily tasks and gave advice when needed. Also, being with a collective body helped the mothers learn religious practices that were utilized during their individual worship time and time with family.

Participant 6: "...its really become part of our lives and people who we know who are very close to us a lot of times those relationships started in church."

Participant 1: "Church it's around the corner so it makes it little easier and a lot of church members live in my area..."

Participant 9: "...the church community they give me that spiritual support that I need when um things get tough and you need somebody to help build you back up I can count on my church family for that."

Participant 2: "...my religious family I have a few people at church that I am really close to and just knowing I get to see them on Sundays and they're spending time with the kids too that's definitely a big plus."

#### **Theme Four: External Resources and Utility**

This particular group of women was very resourceful. They utilized the people in their lives to help with tasks since there was only one parent in the household. During the interviews it was discovered that having a support system was very important. Support systems helped the participants as well as the children. Their level of participation with the family ranged from listening, helping with tasks, and filling in the gaps when necessary. Many emphasized that they helped with daily tasks such as picking up kids

from school and cooking meals when necessary. Several participants reported they would not be where they were in life if it was not for their church members, family, and friends.

Participant 2: “My support system is definitely my parents. Um they I talk to them three times a day. They’re they live in a different city but I know anything that I need they’re there. They been married for almost over 40 years so just asking them you know bouncing things off of them. If I have any questions or you know things regarding the children I know I can always call on them and when I don’t when I need for anything for them they’re always there so.”

Participant 4: “... becoming a single parent um you know that support system helped me get through it and realize I am you know a strong person and I can I can survive the most difficult time and the most difficult situation you know that support system. Along with the belief in God that He can carry me through it you know any difficult situation so yea my support system is limited to a few people but those few people have gotten me through a lot of things.”

Participant 11: “I have a good support system. Ah especially since my mother died. My aunts have really rallied around cause I’m an only child. So they really rallied around me to make sure that not everything she would do but that I’m okay mentally and everything else.”

Participant 7: “...I have a select group of friends where we are single mothers and we’re able to talk and some of them have older children and they’re like you know what that’s just normal um you’ll be okay that all boys do that wait ‘til she

gets older so. It gives me a range of difference experiences and it helps me so I can check myself and think about things I'm saying or doing because you know there is not a manual for being a perfect parent and so with that being said it kinda let you see things in a different way or different viewpoint so."

Participant 6: "Hm well my support system is um um my mom, who is with the kids every day. Picks them up um after school and really helps if somebody got practice if somebody needs helps with that..."

Participant 1: " if I am sick I had a surgery or something they are going to you know have someone bring food for two weeks somebody's going to come by and check on the kids and take them out..."

Participant 13: "...I do have some friends I do rely on when I'm in a bind you know pick him up drop him off ...."

Participant 10: "...my daughter never had to go to daycare. Cause when my grandmother was living my grandmother kept her and then when she was old enough the uh lady who uh that picked her up picked her up picked her up from school and stuff ..."

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 discussed the findings of the research study. Demographics and descriptive of the participants were provided in detail. After reviewing audiotapes and transcripts, and categorizing collected data, five themes and four sub-themes emerged. The primary investigator used the participants' words to support themes. The themes

were (a) connectedness, (b) instilling beliefs, (c) resiliency, (d) coping strategies, and (e) external resources and utility. While analyzing data for themes four sub-themes emerged for coping strategies: (a) prayer, (b) listen to music, (c) read the Bible, and (d) attending religious services.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The risk and resilience theory (Keyes, 2004) states in order for resiliency to occur there must be negative factors impacting the family. Protective factors assist in protecting the family from negative outcomes (Orthner & Rose, 2009). The attachment theory discusses the attachment an adult has to a “Higher Power.” The adult often seeks guidance from the “Higher Power” in order to help make decisions, deal with traumatic events, and cope on a regular basis (Hill & Pargament, 2003).

This study supports Lee Kirkpatrick's (1992) view of the attachment theory. He discussed how adults are attached to their God and relies upon them similar to a child and caregiver (Kelley, 2009). The sample group felt connected and relied upon their God for various reasons. They believed their Higher Power would provide emotional support, financial support, and assist with decision making. The participants felt attached to religion and spirituality because it was a way of communicating with their God and in return it gave them the ability to cope with daily tasks and single parenthood (Kirkpatrick, 1992).

Findings supported the idea of single African American mothers relying on religion and spirituality to help cope with daily life experiences and traumatic events (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Religion and spirituality were used in order to teach participants' children morals and values. They are also used to help discipline their children and instill in them beliefs and practices that will help them make good choices in their lives (Sullivan, 2008). The participants utilized religion and spirituality for their own personal and family needs. The women in this research study often relied on their "Higher Power" for guidance, direction, materials, and finances.

Religious and spiritual practices often overlapped with this sample group. During religious services participants prayed and read the Bible with the collective body. In their homes, they participated in spiritual practices during their private times. These spiritual practices were praying, listening to music, and reading the Bible. Most discussed how they prayed with their children in their homes (Brodsky, 2000). The sample group



considered reading the Bible and praying as religious and spiritual practices. All of the participants saw these practices as ways of communicating with their Higher Power.

Support systems are instrumental in helping single African American mothers perform their daily parental tasks (Malson, 1982; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). This study also supported the current research that states that religion and spirituality are very important to African American women (Stringer, 2009). This chapter will discuss the results, conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations.

### **Results in Relationship to the Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the beliefs and assumptions of single African American mothers in relation to religion, spirituality, and support systems. As a result, the researcher developed five research questions used as the focal point of the research study. The research questions were developed using aspects of the risk and resilience and attachment theory.

#### **RQ1: How Does Religion Help Single African American Mothers Cope on a Daily Basis?**

Religion allows this particular group the opportunity to fellowship with people who believe in the same higher power (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). It gives them a foundation on which to rely on during difficult times and it is something that can be passed on through the generations. Rituals and practices are learned which can be facilitated in groups or alone. Religion allows for friendships and systems to develop which are beyond the confines of organized religions (Taylor et al., 2005).

Many discussed how their parents and grandparents introduced them to religion at an early age. Their view of religion may not have changed, but once they became single mothers they often relied on it more.

**RQ2: How Does Spirituality Help Single African American Mothers Cope on a Daily Basis?**

Spirituality was seen as internal and individualized (Stringer, 2009). Words used while discussing spirituality were: worship, internal, and prayer. This individualized time spent with their “Higher Power” gave them strength to endure the tasks ahead. Spirituality was expressed differently by each participant. Some women did not differentiate religion and spirituality. One of the participants viewed it as something negative, such as witchcraft.

**RQ3: What Religious Practices Help Single African American Mothers Cope with Single Parenthood?**

Reading their Bible was very important. The Bible was the sacred text of all the participants. The Bible represented God’s word and the rules and laws by which participants lived. Some attended Bible study, read alone, or read with family. Several of the respondents believed the Bible gave them answers and direction in their lives. Participant 5 discussed how she read her Bible. Several of the women participated in Bible study at their churches.

Attending religious services and participating in church activities also helped the women cope (Taylor et al., 2005). Participating in these activities allowed them to

communicate with their Higher Power with a collective body. These activities also gave the participants an opportunity to network with people of similar beliefs. Participant 6 discussed how many of the relationships with other families started at church.

#### **RQ4: What Spiritual Practices Help Single African American Mothers Cope with Single Parenthood?**

Prayer and listening to music were the spiritual practices discussed during the interviews. Participants prayed alone and with their families. Prayer was their way of talking to their God. It allowed them to speak to God and ask for guidance, financial and material things, and comfort (Baker, 2008). They believed that this activity allowed them to have direct access to their Higher Power and gave them strength because most believed they would get an answer (Stringer, 2009). Participant 8 and her family prayed together every night. Participant 5 viewed prayer as a means of communicating with her Higher Power.

Listening to music was another practice mentioned during the interviews. Twenty percent of the respondents talked about how listening to music was something they enjoyed doing. The music comforted them and helped them have a positive outlook. Participant 12 stated she wakes with a song in her head and listened to music every morning.

#### **RQ5: How Do Support Systems Help Single African American Mothers Cope?**

Support systems are very important to single African American mothers. The participants utilized their support systems as resources which helped them cope (Brodsky,

1999). This particular group assisted with meeting daily needs, children, provide emotional support, and material/financial support (Maton & Wells, 1995). The participants discussed how their support groups consisted of family, friends, and church members. Some of the non-familial people took on the roles of relatives and become very involved in the families. Participant 14's support system consisted of family and girlfriends she met in college and church. She considered them to be her sisters.

### **Relationship of Current Research to Previous Research**

This study supports previous research. While reviewing literature it was evident that African Americans are very religious. Mendenhall et al. (2013) studied resilience in single African American mothers and found religion had a positive effect on these women. All respondents discussed how religion has helped them in different aspects of their lives.

Pargament (1999) stated that religion and spirituality are used interchangeable. During the interviews some of the participants did not see a difference in the two. Some thought they were one and the same. All were able to define religion with ease but many had difficulty defining spirituality. Participant 10 "it's the same I describe religion it's spirituality it's within."

Tabak and Mickelson (2009) discussed how African Americans gain benefits from attending church. This research group discussed how attending church allowed them to increase their support system, and get help with their children. Participant 1 discussed

how when she was sick the church brought meals for her and the children. Participant 15 reflected on how church members have become mentors for her and her daughters.

Another finding was the importance of prayer individually and with their families. Most of the participants discussed how prayer was important to them. They used prayer as a way to talk to their “Higher Power.” Participant 12 prayed every morning while taking the kids to school. Participant 4 started her day with prayer and prayed every night before going to bed.

Stewart (2007) researched the definition of family among African Americans. They found that everyone included in the family is not blood related. People are included within the family based on marriage, religious affiliations, and support (Stewart, 2007). Many of the participants stated that fictive kin were part of their support systems and families. Participant 2 has play sisters and her kids call them auntie.

The research participants utilized religion to assist with parenting. Kelley, Power, and Winbush (1992), discussed how African American single mothers used religion to discipline their children. During their interviews the mothers discussed how they utilize religion as a way of teaching tradition and preparing their children for adulthood. Participant 12 discussed how she uses religion to discipline her daughters. When there is a problem she quotes scripture to them. Participant 7 discussed how being active in church is providing a foundation for her children.

## **Conclusions**

Several conclusions were drawn from this study. Other studies focusing on African American single mothers may have similar conclusions. The theoretical framework that was used in this study was supported by the findings. Religion and spirituality were used as protective factors for this population which resulted in resiliency. Participants sought comfort and guidance from their Higher Power which supports the attachment theory.

The terms religion and spirituality were used interchangeably by the single African American mothers in this study. They were viewed as being complimentary to one another. Religion was generational and spirituality was individualized and has no rules.

Religion and spirituality provided comfort to the single African American mothers participating in this study. Religious and spiritual practices were used as coping mechanisms. Regardless of level of education or income, all participants viewed religion and spirituality as important. Reading the Bible, listening to music, prayer, and attending church were used as means of coping for this population. Prayer was very important. It was a way of communicating with one's Higher Power.

Results from this study indicated the importance of support systems to this research group. Attending religious services and participating in religious activities gave the respondents the opportunity to foster friendships and increase their support system. Their definition of family encompassed relatives, church members, and friends.

This research group was very resourceful. They utilized internal and external resources to assist them. Internal resources (prayer, listening to music, and reading the Bible) were often used by the participants alone in their private time. These resources gave them inner strength and balance. External resources benefited the participant and their children. Attending church services and having a support system benefited the entire family.

### **Implications of Study**

The African American church has been very important in the community (Rubin & Billingsley, 1994). The church not only provides religious support but has been the center of activity for this community (Taylor et al., 2005). African American females participate in religious activities at a higher rate than their male counterparts (Newport, 2006). U.S. Census (2012) has reported the increase of single African American heads of households.

As a result, the church could influence this particular group. Due to their attendance of religious services and participating in activities, this population would feel a level of comfort and would be more inclined to participate in activities. Participating in classes taught by people are at the local church or faith based organization, they are more willing to focus and implement the information in their homes.

Participant 12: “I think I think our religious leaders should start doing more for families especially for African Americans. We, our culture was built around family but so much of I guess the new thing everything is all culture, all beliefs,

all families. Family systems on brakes (no morals or values), now for whatever that is, whatever your belief is your belief is your thought is however you think your family is defined. I think our leaders need to teach and talk more about how to embrace that teach single mothers. How to be you know single mom what does dating look like you know for a person who has children teaching us about you know boundaries and different things like that so. I think our spiritual leaders could help more uh because divorce is something that's happening. It's not something we can just say no you're a sinner, you're going to hell, or whatever you just it is happening and we have to start meeting people where they are not ask them."

Partnerships between faith-based and family education organizations would be very beneficial. The purpose of family education is to strengthen families and give them the tools to be successful (Goddard, Gilliland, & Goddard, 2011). Family life classes held in religious settings would increase participation. Parenting education classes which include financial management and time management skills would be very beneficial to this group of women. This collaboration would allow these mothers an opportunity to gain skills to help them become better parents, decisions makers, and utilize their time more wisely.

Opportunities to network with women of similar values and beliefs would be very valuable (Sullivan, 2008). These opportunities would allow help the mothers to meet others who are heads of the households. Networking opportunities would allow the



women to meet others who may be of value to them and increase their resource pools (Taylor et al., 2005). These opportunities can take place at child care centers, community centers, and faith based organizations.

Participant 7: “My support system is really important to me. Um, I think one of the reasons why is because many times for me personally, I just need someone to just bounce a idea about or just be able to like you know either its good. My support system encourages me with good things and bad things, but it keeps me level headed and keeps me to know that I have someone just to vent and talk to when I’m not talking to God.”

Faith-based organizations should provide counseling and coping skills.

Counseling in a faith-based setting would allow these women to discuss their religious and spiritual beliefs with someone who understands their mindset (Sullivan, 2008).

These organizations can provide comfort, and suggest coping strategies during challenging times which would encourage resilience (Maton & Wells, 1995).

Participant 9: “...the church community they give me support that I need when um things are tough and you need somebody to help build you up. I can count on my church family for that.”

Policymakers should utilize a different lens when developing programs that will impact households headed by African American women. Family educators should be consulted when developing policies that will impact families (Goddard et al., 2011).

Policymakers should focus on the resiliency of this group and develop programs to

continue this upward pattern. Collaborative programs with faith based organizations would be beneficial since research has shown that religion and spirituality are used as positive factors (Maton & Wells, 1995).

Participant 3: “I don’t know it’s interesting cause nobody have asked about single mothers. Cause it’s a unique experience um but nobody ever talks to you about that experience. I think there’s a lot of um judgment about single moms or how people think you got there. How people think you are a person or you are as a family and there’s a lot more support that we need and I think a lot of you really have to walk through on your own being a single parent...”

### **Limitations of the Study**

In an attempt to be unbiased during the study, the researcher used a reflective journal to eliminate researcher bias. The researcher reflected after interviews and documented any feelings or emotions. This process was utilized because the researcher is also a single mother and wanted to reduce any biases from the study.

This study has several limitations. This sample size was too small to generalize the findings of this research study. A pilot study was not conducted before collecting data. The sample size of highly educated single African American mothers with 93% of the sample group having some college. The majority of the women were employed. More than half were divorced.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

Recommendations for future studies are as follows:

1. Future studies should include the use of religion and spirituality from a single father perspective.
2. Consideration should be given to women of all races who identify as single mothers.
3. Researchers should investigate the use of religion and spirituality among married and cohabitating couples with children.
4. Women from other belief systems should be included in future studies. This study focused on women self-identifying as Christian.
5. A mixed methods approach study would be beneficial in future studies. This would add to the body of knowledge.
6. The majority of the women in the study had a graduate degree. In the future, more women of various education levels should be included.
7. A longitudinal study focusing on the use of religion and spirituality among single African American mothers should be considered.
8. Partnerships between faith-based and family education organizations would be beneficial.
9. Churches should provide classes to assist with raising children and maintaining a household.
10. Faith based organizations should provide counseling and coping skills.

### **Summary**

This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings and addressed how this information can be beneficial for the intended audience. It also shows a connection between current research and study findings. Conclusions were drawn based on research findings. The participants of this study were very resourceful and utilized internal and external resources in order to cope. Religion and spirituality were used as coping mechanisms. Support systems were very important to this group. Implications and limitations of the study were discussed. Lastly, recommendations for future research and practice were included which included researchers, churches, and faith-based organizations.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
RESEARCH FLYER

# Research Participants Needed

For a Texas Woman's University Dissertation Research study on Religion and  
Spirituality

The Use of Religion and Spirituality as a Means of Coping among Single African  
American Mothers

The purpose of the study is to explore how single African American mothers use religion  
and spirituality to cope.

General Participation Requirements

-Separated, non-cohabitating, single, divorced African American mothers who have children ages 0-18 residing with them.

-Reside in the North Texas Metroplex.

-Willing to participate in a 60-90 minute confidential interview.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Symionne Quarles at (469-xxx-xxxx) or [squarles@twu.edu](mailto:squarles@twu.edu). You may also contact my research advisor Dr. Joyce Armstrong (940-898-2690) or [jarmstrong@twu.edu](mailto:jarmstrong@twu.edu)

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time, for any reason. Thank you for your time and consideration.

\*There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions. \*

## APPENDIX B

### SUITABILITY FOR PARTICIPATION SCRIPT

### Suitability for Participation Script

1. Are you African American?
2. Are you a resident of the North Texas Metroplex?
3. Are you the only adult living in the household?
4. Do you have children ages 0-18 residing in your home?



5. Are you willing to participate in a 60-90 minute confidential interview?

If yes, to all of the questions:

When would be a good time to meet and where?

Collect prospective participant's personal information.

If no, to any questions

Thank you for your time and consideration, but unfortunately you do not meet the criteria for this particular study. One of the guidelines is that single African American mothers..... (question they said no to). Thank you once again for your time and cooperation.

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER OF CONSENT



## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: The Use of Religion and Spirituality as a Means of Coping among Single African American Mothers

Investigator: Symionne Quarles.....squarles@twu.edu 469-

Advisor: Joyce Armstrong, PhD.....jarmstrong@twu.edu 940-898-2690

### Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Ms. Quarles dissertation at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to determine if single African American mothers use religion and spirituality to cope with being a single parent.

### Description of Procedures

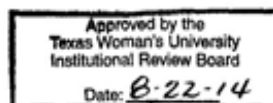
As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend 90 minutes in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. You may be asked to clarify information provided in the interview. This may require a phone conversation which may last up to 10 minutes. The researcher will ask questions about religion, and spirituality. You will decide on a location where and when the interview will happen. The interview will be audio recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. In order to be a participant in this study, be an African American woman, reside in the North Texas Metroplex, have biological child(ren) between the ages of newborn to 18 residing with you, and be the only adult living in the household.

### Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about religion and spirituality. The researcher will also ask questions about your support system and it helps you with coping with being a single parent. A possible risk of the study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview. If you feel you need to talk to a professional about your discomfort, the researcher has provided you with a list of resources.

Another risk in the study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held at a location that has been chosen by you. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. The tapes and the written interview will be stored in a locked cabinet the researcher's home. Only the researcher, her advisor, and a Texas Woman's University PhD graduate will hear or read the written interview. The tapes and the written interview will be shredded within 5 years after the study is finished. The results of the study will be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. "There is a potential loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet interactions."

Initials\_\_\_\_\_



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A third possible risk is fatigue. You will be allowed to take breaks anytime during the interview. You may discontinue the interview at anytime. Another risk in the study is coercion. No one will be directly asked to participate in the study by the researcher. They will be provided with the criteria and allowed to choose whether to participate in the study. You will be told that participation is voluntary and will not impact their relationship with the researcher. Family and friends will not be privileged to any communication with potential participants.

Loss of time is a potential risk of this study. You will be allowed to choose a time that will be convenience for you. Also, you will be provided with a copy of the findings upon request. Public humiliation or embarrassment is a potential risk of this study. You will be allowed to choose the interview location. This will reduce your concern about being seen by family, friend, and acquaintances in public while interviewing.

The last potential risk is coercion. You will not be directly asked to participate. A criterion will be given to you and you are allowed to choose whether to participate. Participation is voluntary and will not impact the relationship with the researcher. Family and friends will not be privileged to any communication with potential participants

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because of taking part in this study.

#### Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study we will email them to you.

#### Questions Regarding the Study

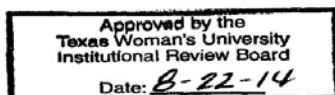
You will be given a copy of the signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via email at [IRB@TWU.edu](mailto:IRB@TWU.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email \_\_\_\_\_



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APPENDIX D  
REFERRAL LIST

## Referral List

The following organizations provide counseling referrals or services.

American Counseling Association  
Authority  
5999 Stevenson Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
1-800-347-6647

North Texas Behavioral Health  
1201 Richardson Drive  
Suite 270  
Richardson, TX 75080  
214-366-9407

Center of Clinical Social Work  
Clinic  
University of Texas at Arlington  
211 South Cooper Street  
Arlington, TX 76019  
817-272-2165

Counseling and Family Therapy  
Texas Woman's University  
Human Development  
Building, Room 114  
Denton, TX 76024  
940-898-2600

American Psychological Association  
<http://locator.apa.org/>

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

## Demographic Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer the questions by filling in the information or circling the letter next to the statement that applies to you. Please be sure to answer all questions.

1. Date and Time:\_\_\_\_\_
2. City of residence:\_\_\_\_\_
3. Age:\_\_\_\_\_
4. Highest level of education:
  - a. Some high school
  - b. High school diploma/GED
  - c. Some college
  - d. Bachelor's degree
  - e. Graduate degree
  - f. PhD/MD/JD
5. Employment status:
  - a. Full-time
  - b. Part-time
  - c. Unemployed
6. Annual household income:
  - a. \$0-\$40,000
  - b. \$41,000-\$80,000
  - c. \$81,000-\$120,000
  - d. \$120,000 and above
7. Religious affiliation:
  - a. Christian
  - b. Muslim
  - c. Jewish
  - d. Buddhist
  - e. Other
  - f. No preference
8. Marital status:
  - a. Single
  - b. Separated
  - c. Divorced



9. Number of biological children ages newborn-18 residing in home \_\_\_\_\_

10. Ages and sex of children \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND THEMES

1. Tell me about being a single mother.

Research Questions(RQs)	Interview Questions (IQs)	Theme
<p>RQ 1: How does religion help single African American mothers cope on a daily basis?</p>	<p>IQ 2: How do you define religion? IQ 3: Describe your religious beliefs prior to becoming a single mother. IQ 5: Describe your religious beliefs after becoming a single mother.</p>	<p>Instilling Beliefs Connectedness</p>
<p>RQ 2: How does spirituality help single African American mothers cope one a daily basis?</p>	<p>IQ 7: How do you define spirituality? IQ 8: How does spirituality relate to your role as a single mother? IQ 9: Discuss a particular moment when spirituality has helped you deal with the change of becoming a single mother. IQ 11: How do you relate to a “Higher Power?”</p>	<p>Coping Strategies Connectedness</p>
<p>RQ 3: What religious practices help single African American mothers cope with single parenthood?</p>	<p>IQ 4: What religious activities did you participate in before and after becoming a single mother? IQ 6: What church activities do you participate in alone?</p>	<p>Resiliency Connectedness</p>

	<p>RQ 4: What spiritual practices help single African American mothers cope with single parenthood?</p>	<p>IQ 10: How often do you participate in religious activities in your home? What are some of the activities?</p>	<p>Coping Strategies</p> <p>Connectedness</p>
	<p>RQ 5: How do support systems help you cope with being a single African American mother?</p>	<p>IQ 12: Discuss your relationship with your support system. IQ 13: Describe your support system and its significance in your life as a single mother. IQ 14: Does your support system include fictive kin or a religious community?</p>	<p>External Resources And Utility</p> <p>Connectedness</p>

APPENDIX G  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



#### **Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX  
76204-5619 940-898-3378  
email: IRB@twu.edu  
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: August 22, 2014

TO: Ms. Symionne Quarles  
Department of Family Sciences

FROM: Institutional Review Board - Denton

*Re: Approval for The Use of Religion and Spirituality as a Means of Coping among Single African American Mothers (Protocol #: 17724)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed and approved by the Denton Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 8/22/2014 using an expedited review procedure. This approval is valid for one year and expires on 8/22/2015. The IRB will send an email notification 45 days prior to the expiration date with instructions to extend or close the study. It is your responsibility to request an extension for the study if it is not yet complete, to close the protocol file when the study is complete, and to make certain that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Karen Petty, Department of Family Sciences  
Dr. Joyce Armstrong, Department of Family Sciences  
Graduate School