

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MAKING IT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RESILIENCE AMONG SINGLE MOTHERS RAISING DAUGHTERS IN RISKY NEIGHBORHOODS

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Most prior research has identified only pitfalls for urban, low-income, African American, single mothers. This qualitative study focused on resilient single mothers and using semi-structured interviews allowed participants to define and describe their own experiences, both stresses and strategies for coping. Ten women who had been single mothers for at least two years were identified as resilient by school-based key informants and participated in two hour-long individual interviews. The risky neighborhoods in which these women live are urban neighborhoods characterized by poverty, violence, crime and drugs. A literature review and focus group were utilized to develop initial interview topics and coding formats. Interviews were taped and transcribed, and coded using an open-ended recursive template. Participants described a unique balance of both the stresses and resources existing in eight dimensions in their lives: self-attributes, role as parent, family, friends, male significant others, money, spirituality, and their neighborhood. Each participant had a balance based on a unique person-environment fit. Resilience or "making it" was found to involve both the attainment of goals and the constant process of reaching further. Participants were able to both appreciate their current status and were motivated to strive for more. The findings reported present a more heterogeneous and emic picture of urban, low-income, African-American, single mothers, shed light on the processes of resilience, and also have implications for the design and implementation of intervention to support further successes among other women in similar situations.

MAKING IT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF RESILIENCE AMONG
SINGLE MOTHERS RAISING DAUGHTERS
IN RISKY NEIGHBORHOODS

by

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Several times a week for five months, in the winter and spring of 1995, I drove the twenty minutes from my home in a racially diverse, middle and working class suburban town to the community of Clements Park¹, a largely African-American, relatively poor section of a large Northeastern city. People who asked where I was doing my research would nod seriously with a slightly worried look on their faces at the very mention of the location to which I traveled. Its name conjured up an image, more homogeneous than the area actually is, of urban violence, danger, poverty, despair and failure. My goal in traveling to this area, geographically near, but in many people's views, a world away, was to explore the instances of success in an area stereotyped by failure. I wanted to enter the neighborhoods of Clements Park where the risks were real, not just reputed, but focus on the successes rather than the failings which stereotype the entire community and its residents.

Resilience

Resilience was the cornerstone of my conceptualization of this project. Rutter (1987) defines resilience as individual (successful) variations in response to risk². "At-risk" designates an individual or group whose predicted probability for

¹ Names of places and people have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants. In most cases, adult participants have chosen their own pseudonyms, as well as that of their children. Descriptions of people, places and circumstances are accurate in vital details while still protecting identities. Some details beyond names were changed as necessary to protect participants. These additional changes were necessary because the information contained in this dissertation will also be disseminated to the participants and community settings which were involved in recruitment.

²From its epidemiological roots, risk is technically the threat of some occurrence to a group and its members based on their membership in some group, while the term vulnerability refers to "the susceptibility of an individual to negative outcomes" (Masten and Garmezy, 1985.) However, in the risk and resilience literature the terms are often used interchangeably, and a semantic debate regarding proper

some negative outcome is above the base line probability for that outcome (Masten and Garmezy, 1985). It important to keep in mind, however, that while risk represents an increased potential for some outcome, it by no means represents a certainty for that outcome (Brodsky & Lorion, in preparation.) The successes of resilient individuals, which occur out of seemingly unlikely circumstances, are actually the rule and not the exception (Werner, 1984.)

From Moynihan's 1965 characterization of Black female-headed families as one of the major social ills of that era, until the present, research and other social science writing on the subject of single mothers, especially poor, minority single mothers has focused almost exclusively on the risks of, and to, single mother households (e.g., Thompson & Ensminger, 1989; Lindblad-Goldberg, Dukes, & Lasley, 1988; Rodgers, 1986; McLanahan, 1985; Kellam, Ensminger & Turner, 1977.) In risk research, those who do not present the negative outcome for which they are at-risk are frequently labeled "false-positives." However, recognition of the fact that these "false-positives" are the majority rather than the minority, has implications both for the specification of research hypotheses and for the design of remedial interventions. (Brodsky & Lorion, in preparation.) The reasons why this change in focus, from risk to resilience, is important are threefold. First, psychology, as a field which is interested in health and strength can contribute toward health and strength by seeking to understand and identify the successes as well as the pathology and weaknesses. This approach adds to our understanding of within group differences, which are often ignored in studies focusing only on between group differences. In addition, information about within group successes can be empowering

terminology is ongoing (Brodsky, 1992.) In this study the term risk will be used because the participants will be identified based on their group membership as urban, African-American, single-mothers living in dangerous neighborhoods.

to both individuals and the group(s) to which they belong. Second, by carefully identifying how people successfully manage in a potentially damaging setting, we can more accurately identify particular stresses and risks thus avoiding the risk of overgeneralizing about the entire setting and population. This might give important information regarding where and when interventions might be most needed. Third, an understanding of "spontaneous prevention" i.e. prevention which occurs without extra-systemic intervention has implications for the design and implementation of preventive intervention strategies (Brotsky & Lorion, in preparation.)

For these reasons, the questions I was interested in exploring in this study related to resilience and coping in the women I interviewed both as individuals and as parents. To understand these issues, however, I first needed to understand how women describe and define their lives under such challenging conditions. I needed to appreciate their goals for themselves and their children, the pros and cons of the environment in which they live, and the other people and agencies in their lives who operated as both help and hindrance. As a researcher, I entered this community as an outsider but with some hunches about the stresses and coping skills in the lives of urban, low-income, single-parent, African-American women. Application of a qualitative methodology provided participants with an opportunity to speak for themselves and define their own experience. As an "outsider", I entered this study with definitions, ideas, and assumptions of my own. These were based on my personal experience with similar communities and people, my internally held beliefs and values (conscious and unconscious), and the literature, some of which I agreed with and some of which I disagreed with from the beginning. An important goal of the methodology is that definitions and assumptions of the "outsider" are stretched and changed by the descriptions and interpretations of the participants. The differences

between this emic and etic perspective will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters which follow.

Qualitative Research

Although there is a fair amount of research on single parents, much of it focuses on divorced, white, middle class, suburban families (e.g. Compas & Williams, 1990; Hanson, 1986). Systematic research on urban, poor, predominantly African-American women raising children in dangerous neighborhoods is limited. Even less available are studies looking at how women in these situations succeed as individuals and as parents. This lack of previous inquiry, in fact, also supports the need for a qualitative study, that is one whose goals are identification, description and explanation-generation, the defining criteria for a qualitative methodology. (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 6.) Although qualitative research is most often associated with anthropology, there is a strong qualitative tradition in the discipline of psychology as well. This tradition dates back to Wundt's introspection method in the 1880s (Hothersall, 1990), includes Freud's case studies in 1900 Vienna (Freud, 1923), Erikson's developmental psychological anthropology on American Indian Reservations in the 1940s (Erikson, 1963), and Piaget's (participant)-observation of his own children in the 1930s (Ginsburg & Oppen, 1979.) In recent years there has been growing appreciation and application in psychology of the additional information available through qualitative methods (Orford, 1992.)

As suggested, an important reason for choosing a qualitative methodology was my feeling, confirmed by the literature, that outside researchers, theorists, and public policy makers have yet to determine directly what is important in the lives of poor, urban, single mothers. Instead social scientists have generally identified what

we think is important. Qualitative methods provide a vehicle for a more emic perspective, that is an emphasis on the "actor's meanings" rather than the observers meanings (Agar, 1986, p. 44.) Qualitative research methodology is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological, multisystemic approach to studying and explaining behavior by stressing the importance of context. Qualitative studies typically use purposely chosen, small samples. In doing so, qualitative research closely examines a wide range of experience, including the context in which experience occurs for a select group of participants. (Crabtree and Miller, 1992, p. 33.)

The empowerment and emic values of community psychology wherein power and action are maintained within the community and the individual, rather than emanating from an outside expert, are also mirrored in qualitative methodology. The qualitative researchers enter with a theory which is flexible and the conclusions which result from qualitative research are based on grounded theory, that is theory which is developed from the data itself (Glaser and Straus, 1967.) What this offers the social scientist is a methodology which has the potential to respect the experience of the research participants. Participants are empowered in that they actively create a theory which is emic in perspective, rather than proving or disproving an etic, or observer based assumption. The result of an ethnographically informed qualitative study should "ring(s) true to (both) natives and colleagues in the field" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 21.)

It should be noted that this study is referred to as a qualitative study instead of an ethnographic study as a function of its depth both in terms of the range of people interviewed and the amount of time spent in the setting. An ethnographic study takes a holistic approach, attempting to explain the entire system in depth and typically requires years to complete. Since this dissertation was necessarily time-limited, an ethnographic study was not feasible. An ethnographically informed qualitative study

however, provides many of the benefits discussed above from which to gain information, description and theory-generation (Fetterman, 1989; Weiss, 1994.) It is hoped that the findings will add to the current literature and catalyze future work.

Researcher as Outsider

It has been important for me to think about the effects my being an outsider to the Clements Park area has had on this research. Since the experimenter is the primary data collection and analytic instrument in qualitative research, evaluation of both my etic perspective and the possible reactions of participants to my outsider status must be considered if one is to understand and evaluate the reliability and validity of the data I collected and the interpretations I made.

The most visible sign of my outsider status as I entered Clements Park was that I am white. I was often the only white person I saw during my visits and almost always the only white female. I had many conversations about the meaning and effect of my race, both for myself and for the members of the community who participated in my research. These conversations occurred with friends, colleagues and members of my dissertation committee - both African American and white- with key informants in the community, and with some of my participants. I assumed that the people I related to directly were not blind to my color. For example, when I would participate in the "closing circle"³ at the afterschool program at one of my research settings, the children who were leading the circle would sometimes add "white brothers and sisters" to the line they all chanted about caring for their Black brothers and sisters. On one occasion when this happened, a girl of about 11, who had

³ An activity used to symbolically close the day's program.

taken a particular liking to me began to argue that I really wasn't white. I interpreted this as her attempt to avoid this sign my difference. In some interviews it was also clear that the women I was talking with were not sure if I would understand an in-group reference. In those cases they took great pains to explain to me how things worked in the Black community. Sometimes my being white appeared to allow, or perhaps even motivate, them to criticize their African American community; at other time, it seemed that some things went unsaid because of my obvious outsider status.

There were other differences which set me apart from the members of this community which, although less visible, are potentially equally important. I was also an outsider by virtue of being middle class, nonreligious, currently suburban, a graduate student, and not a parent. About these other differences I remember few conversations. Perhaps there was an assumption that discussions of race covered discussions of class, education and neighborhood. Once in a while a parent would ask if I had children, but most assumed, incorrectly, that I was younger than I actually was, and correctly, that I did not have children. Despite the fact that I spoke with many women about religion and spirituality, the fact that this is not a daily part of my life did not come up either. Although I sought out people to talk with about issues of race, I did not do the same about religion or non-parenting status. I shared very little information about myself in interviews unless asked and so my less visible differences may not have affected how community members interacted with me, but I do not know if I may have prompted different responses from my participants had I shared their feelings or experiences of religion or parenting. In addition, I do not know if I had had more similarities to share and done so, if I would have received very different information. I am also struck by the multitude of ways my perspective may have effected how I understood their experiences. I mention these issues in the

introduction not as a caveat to what follows but rather as a crucial piece of this research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there has been little previous research exploring resilience in urban, African American single mothers, a wide variety of writings on the lives and experiences of women and parents, the urban poor, and African-American communities suggested a number of theoretical concepts which formed the basis of this work (e.g., Dill & Williams, 1992; Edelman, 1992; Kotlowitz, 1991; lone, 1991; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Coles and Coles, 1989; hooks, 1989; Belle, 1982, Stack, 1974.) These concepts include the areas of risk and resilience, stress, social support, single parenting and in particular single mothers, childhood, urban environments and poverty. A review of writings regarding qualitative methods was also crucial to the development of this study. Because qualitative research is iterative in nature (Crabtree & Miller, 1992), the literature can only suggest where the researcher might begin to look for answers but not necessarily where she will find them. For this reason, a literature review continues to take shape throughout the qualitative process. This chapter summarizes the literature which informed the design of this study. Any literature which relates to the themes and issues which unfolded with the data will be presented in later chapters.

Before reviewing the findings in each of the preliminary categories it is important to comment on a pattern of "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971) which is reflected in much of the research on urban single motherhood and risk. While I am critical of this pattern, there is also a logical hole in attempting to credit mothers for successes (resilience), while not blaming them for failures. This is a problem which arises in crime victim empowerment programs as well. How do you teach someone to protect themselves from harm in the future without implying that they were to blame for the harm in the past? It is a circular argument, because while the outcome of

walking down a dark street alone should not be mugging, one can protect oneself to some degree from mugging by avoiding walking alone in such settings. Thus, the victim may not have deserved the outcome, but in some way their actions may have contributed to its occurrence. The same circularity applies to single mothers. I obviously cannot and will not argue that mothers do not have the potential to harm their children and themselves, but I disagree with the weight of the blame which is placed on mothers.

There are three ways in which I have tried to look at this circle of responsibility. The first is that a broad band of adequate maternal care exists; above which might be the resilient mothers I talk about here, and below which might be harmful mothers. My argument in this case is that most research looks at mothers below the adequate level while most mothers are at least adequate and some are more than adequate. Even those functioning adequately may experience family and personal problems, but these problems may be correlational, not causational as the literature suggests.

The second possibility is that positive and negative mothering are unequally weighted. In a stressful, low resources environment it takes a lot more input to produce a positive response than it does to produce a negative one. Visually this would look like an uneven seesaw in which a mere tap would bring the longer side down, but much more effort would be necessary to tip the shorter, positive side. This would take into account both the power of mothers to affect outcomes, and the situational weighting against them.

The third possibility is that while mothers have some responsibility for and some do cause negative outcomes, research and public attention is unduly focused on this small segment of the population. This same phenomenon occurred in the recent report that almost 25% of young Black men have some contact with the justice system

(Mauer, 1990.) What has not been stressed is that over 75% of young Black men do not. What this dissertation will show is that risk (and resilience) is more complicated than one or two shared commonalities and that broad generalizations of expected outcomes may not be so easy or accurate to make.

The remainder of this chapter reviews the literature and concepts which informed the design of this study: social support, single parenting, stress, resilience, neighborhoods, and poverty.

Social Support

Malson's (1983) review of the literature on social support systems in Black families calls McAdoo's (1978, 1981) work crucial to the field because of its consistent emphasis on the importance of social support in the functioning of Black families. While there has been much study of the support of kin, Malson reviews research which looks at other important details and sources of social support. For instance, Stack (1974) and McAdoo (1978, 1979) have substantiated for Black women findings previously seen among white women, that women's important social support systems are primarily composed of other women. In addition to female kin, co-workers and fictive kin are also included among the supportive networks of Black families. In a study of women who were slightly above the poverty line and 64% white, 25% Black and 13% Hispanic, D'Ercole (1988) found that supportive relationships with friends and co-workers contributed more to mothers' well-being than task-related family support. Malson further describes the reciprocal nature of social networks and the fact that they are often formed around feelings of responsibility for children. Malson reports that child care and childrearing, economic assistance, and psychological well-being are the most often cited function of social support in the literature. In addition Malson found that the provision of

economic assistance does not seem to be related to income. Both disadvantaged and middle class families provided and received economic assistance through their social support system. Malson reports that most research on social support in the Black family has focused on families with small children, and one parent families. It has been assumed that both family structures demand more support. Most grandparents, regardless of whether they were living with their child or grandchild, provided help with child care and in one study most grandparents preferred that their grandchildren lived near, rather than with, them. In the chapters which follow, this issue of living with next generation relatives will be seen to have both positive and negative implications for mothers as well. Compas & Williams (1990) found that while single mothers rely on different types of coping strategies, both single and dual parenting mothers rely on social support.

Lindblad-Goldberg et al.'s (1988) findings on social support in Black, single parent, low income households include a result rarely seen in other studies. They report that the most stressed single parent families had more involvement with families and relatives. Although they mention non-reciprocity as a possible mechanism in their findings, it is unclear from their finding why their single parent participants experienced predominantly nonreciprocal, stressful social support. This finding suggests that there may be an as yet unexplained mechanism which affects the usefulness of social support. This finding also supports the notion that rather than a unitary construct, social support is actually a more complicated multidimensional construct which includes amount, type, sources and structure of support as well as the number of people in a network and the perceived support. (Thoits, 1982; Schaefer, Coyne and Lazarus, 1981 in Martin, 1989.)

Research on social support within single parent families indicates that single parent status does not necessarily mean parenting alone. Among a group of single

mothers, interviewed in 1980 and described as functioning well, Malson found that social support systems were quite large. Pelto et al. (1982) suggest a useful perspective when they write that without strong, consistent, dependable social support systems, "single-parent households are simply lacking sufficient adult 'personpower'" (Pelto, Roman & Liriano, 1982, p. 55.)

Overall these studies seem to suggest that social support may not be a unitarily positive factor in the lives of African American women or single parents, especially if the support is nonreciprocal (Lindblad-Goldberg et al. 1988.) They do suggest however that particular people play an important social support role for some women. These persons include grandparents, female kin, coworkers, and fictive kin (Malson, 1983). In addition, findings suggest that particular types of support including economic assistance, task-related assistance, child-care, emotional support (Malson, 1983), and the provision of extra adult "personpower" (Pelto, Roman & Liriano, 1982, p. 55.) may be crucial. The questions the literature raises for this study include whether women will indeed be the primary providers of social support to the women interviewed, whether childcare and economics are the crucial avenues of support for these women, and whether the social systems of resilient single mothers will indeed be seen as supportive.

Single Parenting

Pelto et al. (1982) give a concise historical review of writing on single mother households. In the 1960s this family pattern in African-American households was traced to the experience of slavery (Frazier, 1966.) At about the same time, writers like Nathan Glazer (1966) were describing single mothers as a "pathological sign of social disorganization" (Pelto et al., 1982, p. 41.) By the end of the 1960s writers such as Nancie Solien Gonzales (1970, in Pelto et al., 1982)

were pointing out the successful and adaptive nature of single mother households. Peltó et al. note that the problem with any of these views was the homogeneity of experience and outcome that was assumed. Their research explored variations in ecological settings and carefully placed their findings in the context of the Hartford, Connecticut Puerto Rican community. Their study compared psychological pressures among dual parent families with at least one employed parent, dual parent unemployed households, and single parent unemployed households. While single parent unemployed families had the lowest socioeconomic status, dual parent unemployed families had the highest levels of psychiatric problems. This finding supports the idea that for some women single parenting may be a positive adaptive choice, since despite the fact that single parent families were poorer, the female respondents in dual parent unemployed families reported the highest levels of distress.

Confirmation of positive elements of the single parenting experience itself is found in Malson's high functioning respondents who reported that they felt "pretty happy, often felt proud or pleased with themselves, and felt things would turn out well for them" (Malson, 1983, p. 51.) Mednick (1987) reports that single parents generally like parenting, are satisfied and feel competent. D'Ercole (1988) also found that positive self-esteem directly affects the well-being of single mothers, but notes the possible confounds in her measurement of self-reported self-esteem and well-being. These findings suggest that resilience in the women to be interviewed in this study may be related not only to how they handle the negatives in their lives but to their awareness of its positive elements.

In an interesting approach to the study of value transmission and intergenerational stability among poor, African-American, single mother households, Page and Washington (1987) looked at family proverbs. Their findings indicate that independence and family security are important in viable alternative family forms.

Another important finding in terms of resilience was that transmitted values placed less emphasis on self-esteem and ambition, but rather emphasized "independence from the affective control of the dominant culture and from the need to control outside events" (Page and Washington, 1987, p. 58.) This focus on internal rather than external resilience makes sense for families interacting with a society which is seen as severely interrupting, rather than fostering, efforts at success. Given this lack of external support it is not surprising that another transmitted value was found to be the belief that "what goes around comes around." (Page and Washington, 1987, p. 58.)

Gravett, Roger & Thompson's (1987) qualitative study of the child care decisions made by single mothers of school aged children used a theoretical sampling model based on five dimensions of contrast: race, financial security, presence of other care givers in the home, number of children, and ages of children. In keeping with findings that stress and coping within several years of marital separation may be different than long term adjustment (Compas & Williams, 1990), Gravett et al. limited their sample to parents who had been single for at least two years. Findings included the fact that most of the women who were at least partly dependent on welfare became so because of the competing demands of work and childcare needs. Network information about child care options was crucial to the decisions regarding childcare made by participants. In cases where childcare was provided by friends and acquaintances, reciprocity was essential and discharge of this obligation for reciprocity occurred through provision of childcare, payment, or occasional gifts. Gravett et al. conclude that "(w)omen functioning in the environment of forced choice are the women who experience child care as the greatest problem." (Gravett et al., 1987, p.80.)

In an ethnographic study of single mothers and their children in a middle class day care setting, Woodhouse (1988), also stresses society's role in single mothers' functioning. Woodhouse finds that while women were historically kept dependent by their lack of power and their subservient role in relationships, today dependency is "defined as the gap between what the culture provides and what the individual needs" (Woodhouse, 1988, p. 383.) That is, despite societal changes which may provide for a new independence, there is actually a gap between what women, especially mothers, need to fulfill their independent potential and what is available in their environments.

Schilling, Kirkham, Snow and Schinke (1986) found that one difference between single and dual parents of handicapped children is in their appraisal of the situation, even when they are objectively matched in terms of circumstances. Lindblad-Goldberg et al. (1988) also found that a critical factor in the impact of a stressful event on a family is the family's perception of that event. In a comparison of clinical and nonclinical family populations she found that nonclinical families were less likely to agree with the objective rating of negative events. These families were more likely to "perceive life events more positively" and "tended to highlight positive events" (Lindblad-Goldberg et al., 1988, p. 117.) This finding again raises the question of how action, cognition and attitudes are related to resilience.

An important direction taken by research in the field of single parent families is the differentiation of family typologies. Instead of treating single parent status as synonymous with single adult status, researchers such as Kellam et al. (1977), Vosler & Proctor (1991) and Gravett et al. (1987) looked at functional differences based on family structure. While these typologies look at a greater range of single family subtypes than are considered in this dissertation, they nonetheless point out that even single parent status is more complicated than is often assumed.

As noted, findings from these studies on single parenting raise many important issues which are explored in the study reported herein, including the idea that being a single parent is not necessarily a negative event and that externalizing the stresses (including looking at society's role) and bolstering internal competence may be important in successful coping. This literature confirms the heterogeneity of life which is characteristic of single parent status and experience.

Stresses

In a study of coping looking at predominantly white collar working mothers, Anderson-Kulman and Paludi (1986) found few differences between single and married mothers. Role strain was related to the demand on all mothers to coordinate work and child-rearing roles. Positive coping related to less family conflict, greater family participation in intellectual and cultural activities, and greater job satisfaction.

In earlier interviews with high functioning single mothers Malson (1983) found the amount of stress among these women varied. The levels differed consistently, with mothers who had been previously married reporting more stress. Income level was also significantly and negatively related to stress levels. In this work, the major sources of stress were identified as income, housing, and work. Malson notes that little stress was associated with either parenting or other personal relationships. Mednick (1987) also reports that higher income is associated with indexes of well being and satisfaction and lower reported levels of depression and stress. These findings raise a question as to whether income, housing, and work as opposed to the demands of parenting will be the key stresses for the high-risk resilient mothers in this study. It might be expected that the dangers to children in

high risk neighborhoods may make parenting a greater stress for the women interviewed here.

Consistent with Malson's (1983) findings, Pagelow's (1980) observed that three common concerns among single mothers were custody, housing and employment. Worrell (1988) has found the major sources of stress for the women in her study to be economics, social isolation and role overload resulting from balancing family and work roles. Worrell(1988) views the role strain as being the result of systemic problems, such as lack of child care and income supplements rather than some shortcoming on the part of the women. Statistics such as those showing the 1985 median income for single parent families as 1/3 that of two parent families underscore the economic strains on single mothers (Worrell, 1988, p.8.) Pagelow (1980) notes that single mothers face additional stresses from child care, for example when the school calls a mother at work because her child is sick. Norwood⁴ (personal communication, 1993) also noted that mothers worry about maintaining their own health in order to be able to care for their children.

Mednick (1987) notes that the social stigma attached to single motherhood may also add to the health problems of these women. Worrell (1988) notes that several sources of stigma are faced by single mothers. Single mothers, for example are viewed as having violated morality codes; sex-role codes, including attempting to raise sons alone and juggling mothering and work; and are further victimized by being blamed for their situation. Worrell suggests that researchers add to these myths and stigma by the questions they choose to study. Independent of the stigma,

⁴ Pam Norwood, LCSW was, at the time of our communication, Parent Coordinator for the Violence Prevention Education Project, a community based parent education program based at Bowie State University, Bowie, MD. Ms. Norwood spoke with me as both a professional in the field and a single mother herself. With her help I was able to test a preliminary unstructured interview format, develop interviewing strategies and identify issues and concepts to explore in the literature and in future interviews.

Mednick, in keeping with Peltó et al.'s (1982) findings, notes that under some circumstances, women may choose single motherhood as a positive alternative.

Fine & Schwebel (1988) reviewed the literature on racial differences in reaction to single parenthood. In 1984, nearly three times as many Black children under 18 were living in single parent homes as were white children, proportionally. Black single parents also remain single parents longer than do whites. While most research finds that single parents experience more depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, and less life satisfaction, Blacks appear to be more successful in replacing the income lost due to the father's departure, have higher self image, and experience less role stress than their white counterparts. In addition, single parenthood was found to have less damaging effects on Black adolescents' self-image as compared to that of white adolescents. Fine and Schwebel (1988) explain these racial differences using an emergent model which recognizes the positive features of alternative family structures. The emergent model is based on an understanding of the role of African cultural heritage in African-American communities. Among the most important traditions are "the importance of the tribe's survival and oneness of being...(which) manifest themselves as a prime form of cohesion...promoting a sense of social solidarity and extending the family beyond traditional blood lines to the community as a whole" (Fine & Schwebel, 1988, p. 8)

Fine and Schwebel (1988) also report findings that African American single mothers may function at a level higher than white mothers due to the values placed on mothering in the African-American community. In a study comparing Black and white married women, Black women report more satisfaction in their maternal role than their marital role. This pattern is reversed for white women. Fine and Schwebel also assert that mothering is a valued role in the African-American community regardless of single or dual parent status. In addition, they present the

view that there are no "illegitimate" children in the Black community because children belong to and are valued by all community members. These approaches to mothering and childhood would help explain both the lower stress for African-American single mothers and the higher esteem for African-American children of single parents. Finally, supporting the focus of this dissertation, Fine & Schwebel point to the many examples of successful single mothers in the African-American community as a reason for the greater acceptance of single mothers.

Fine and Schwebel's thesis regarding community concern and presumably involvement in the lives of single parents and their children was examined in this study. While perhaps supported by some of the more positive social support literature, their hypothesis of community acceptance and involvement in parenting responsibilities is not in keeping with Page and Washington's (1987) writings about the needs for single parent families to counteract negative societal pressures through their value transmissions.

In her study of healthy divorced and separated single parent families, Hanson (1986) found that self reported physical and mental health of parents and children was correlated with a number of behavioral variables. Of these variables, social support, communication, and religiousness in children were all correlated positively with health. Interestingly, boys mental health was found to be higher than girls and additionally to be higher when living with single mothers rather than single fathers. The lowest mental health among children was found for girls living with their fathers. Another finding of interest was that mother's mental health was generally lower than that of their children, while that of the father was higher. This finding seems to support the self sacrificing stance of single mothers noted by Norwood (personal communication, 1993.) Of interest in the work reported herein was how the mothers

interviewed balanced outward appearances of success with inward sacrifices of their own needs.

Norwood also mentioned how time was part of self sacrifice. She stated that many single mothers' time is easily filled with the demands of work and home, leaving no personal time (Norwood, personal communication, 1993.) In a study of time differences between single two parent families, Sanik and Mauldin (1986) categorized time demands in terms of household tasks, child care, personal care, social and recreation, and volunteer work. They found that employed single mothers have the least amount of time for household tasks, child care, personal care and volunteer work. In keeping with other findings about the overall amount of work entailed in mothering (McLanahan & Adams, 1987), recreation time was equally low for both employed women in both single and dual parent families. Consistent with Norwood's comments, Sanik and Mauldin report that "(i)n order to meet the time demands of her family, it is the single employed mother... who sacrifices time in personal care activities, including sleep and rest" (p. 56.) In keeping with this pattern of findings, McLanahan & Adam's (1987) review of the literature on parenthood and psychological well-being found that the differences in psychological well-being between parents and nonparents seem to stem from the additional economic and time pressures on parents. Examined in this study was the question of whether resilient single mothers have found a way to overcome the pressures so that they can meet more of their needs, whether they have found a way to function successfully despite unmet needs or whether they merely appear to function successfully despite unmet needs.

Issues of stress and coping in parents can have interactional effects on children as well. Meyer (1985) points out that children are only as well off as their mothers. Given that mothering is assigned a low status in our society to begin with,

single mothers and their children are at even greater risk for social and personal problems (Meyer, p. 250.) Even though some see mothering as more highly valued in the African-American community, society at large takes a toll on mothers and children through this mechanism.

As an example of such risk, Calabrese, Miller and Dooley (1987) found that the parents most alienated from their children's school were unemployed single mothers of girls who themselves had few perceived friends. Since parental involvement is an aid to school attainment (Sattler, 1988) and school attainment is increasingly a necessity for social attainment (especially given the increasing loss of jobs with livable wages available even to high school graduates), this finding shows the possible roots of an intergenerational pattern of alienation and risk. As mothers interviewed in the study reported herein were recommended by school based key informants who know them through their children, it was interesting to note if they were involved in their children's lives and particularly in their schools.

Schlesinger's (1982) review of the literature on children of single parent families reports findings that in cases of divorce children's stress may not be the result of the single parent status, but rather the "turmoil involved in parental conflict" (p. 6.) Schlesinger found that children of divorce were quite resilient. Since a number of the families participating in this study will have always been single parent families, rather than divorced families, it may be telling to note if there appear to be any differences in stress levels between always single versus once partnered single parents. This difference could point to stresses associated with changing role rather than merely single parent status.

Resilience

The preponderance of research on resilience has focused on children (e.g. Anthony, 1989; Rutter, 1979, 1987; Cowen & Work, 1988; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1982.) In much of this work factors related to resilience fit into one of two categories: individual factors and environmental factors. (O'Leary, Ickovics, & Ryan, 1992.) My master's research indicated that those non-individual factors responsible for children's resilience may include parental discipline, attitudes towards their children's behaviors, and parental involvement. (Brodsky & Lorion, in preparation) It follows that just as children are in many ways only as well off as their mothers (Meyer, 1985), they may, in many ways, be only as resilient as their mothers. This is one reason that this study takes a step back from childhood resilience to look at parent functioning. In looking at resilience in women, O'Leary et al. (1992) consider resilience to have both public and private dimensions, that is to involve both external behavior and internal functioning. In dividing private and public, O'Leary et al. make the point that behavioral resilience does not need to be synonymous with lack of internal distress. This more realistic definition parallels Masten and Garmezy's (1985) comment that the term "invulnerable" carries with it expectations of some type of unrealistic super-human response to adversity. The current study may be able to shed some light on this dichotomy of public versus private resilience by comparing key informant recommendations with the thoughts, behavior and feelings of the participants themselves.

O'Leary et al.'s conception of resilience in women is situation-specific, includes the ability to cognitively control stressful situations, and is the result of an "interactive developmental process" (O'Leary et al., 1992, p. 8.) Their proposed model of resilience includes biological (e.g. temperament, immune system), individual difference (e.g. attitudes, self efficacy, attractiveness, hardiness),

environmental/social interpersonal (e.g. social support, poverty, race) and organization cultural systems (e.g. sexism, racism, opportunities and access to services) as factors in the development of public and/or private resilience. (O'Leary et al. , 1992, p.20.) All of these factors were touched on during the interviews.

Inhinger-Tallman (1986) presents a general model of member adjustment in single parent families which also takes a developmental-interactional perspective. She includes four structural events: 1) critical events that produce a single family, 2) the restructuring factors that go into producing new norms and rules for a single parent household, 3) community factors such as social support and other resources, and finally 4) temporal factors such as time-since-critical-event and time spent with children. Interacting with these structural elements are three variables: 1) economic resources, 2) psychological attributes of family members, and 3) community resources. Inhinger-Tallman sees these three variable as interactional rather than merely summative factors. This model offers a means to identify differences in single families on many levels, as opposed to assuming homogeneity in condition and outcome. As such, it may be a useful organizing model for the interview data in the study reported in the following chapters.

Neighborhood

Neighborhood and setting are important for the study discussed herein at the most basic level in which we understand that "human development is a product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979.) Bronfenbrenner makes the strongest justification for a qualitative naturalistic study when he characterizes "much of developmental psychology, as it now exists is the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time."

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 19.) Consistent with qualitative researchers from other disciplines (Glaser and Straus, 1967; Agar, 1986) Bronfenbrenner stresses that experimental method is important not only for "verification of hypotheses; [but]; it is equally and perhaps even more applicable to their discovery" [emphasis added](p. 20.)

The framework which Bronfenbrenner uses to organize the discovery of theory is a nested ecological environment composed of four structures. The microsystem consists of the activities, role and relationships experienced directly by the individual in a given setting. The mesosystem is defined as the interactions of two or more settings in which the individual actively participates (e.g., school and home, work and home.) The exosystem involves one or more settings which affect the individual, even though they do not directly interact in and with these settings (e.g., for a child: a parent's workplace, for a parent: a child's classroom.) Finally, the macrosystem is defined as consistencies in the three lower-order systems which result from the subculture or culture as a whole (e.g., beliefs, values, lifestyles.) Thus for the participants in this dissertation, the microsystem includes their activities, roles and relationships as mothers, women, employees, friends and relatives. The mesosystem includes the interaction of home and work, their family of origin and their work or their current home. The exosystem includes those settings they don't directly interact in such as their child's school, their child's daycare setting, or their male friend's job. Finally the macrosystem includes the input into their life from such sources as their community, religion, and society at large. The advantage in Bronfenbrenner's typology is that it provides a framework which describes the interactive processes of individual and environment.

Another way of thinking about women in urban settings in particular is presented by Wekerle (1980) who denotes three paradigms: 1) the dichotomy

between private and public space, 2) the fit between women's activities and the environment, and 3) women's right to equal access to good and services. The importance of attention to the first paradigm is stated by Williams (1992) who explains that women have been ignored in urban ethnography because of researchers' reliance on locating participants in the public domain (e.g., bars (Anderson, 1978), street corners (Liebow, 1966)) while women are predominantly isolated in the private domain (i.e., at home.) The second paradigm is evident in the fact that "disorganized" urban neighborhoods lack the very services most needed by mothers: jobs, child care, housing, and shopping. The third point is evident in housing and job discrimination against women and especially single mothers. Wekerle points to findings that EEOC laws which should make housing available equally are ineffective in counteracting the effects of the stereotype of single mothers as irresponsible parents and tenants. The result is that despite legislation to the contrary, single mothers are often refused housing due to concerns that they and their children will make poor tenants (Wekerle, 1980.) These three paradigms offer a relatively concrete means of looking at the issue of neighborhood as a source of resources and stresses. It will be interesting to note if these particular issues appear salient to participants in this study.

Cook's (1988) study added gender and marital status to the demographics usually looked at in neighborhood satisfaction scales. Satisfaction for urban, low-income, single mothers was correlated with neighborhood maintenance, quietness, and nearness to child care. Personal and child safety were also critical to satisfaction. Interestingly, especially in light of the social support evidence cited above, knowing people by sight in the neighborhood and being satisfied with children's friends were not significantly related to neighborhood satisfaction. This study did not give detailed information regarding the race of respondents, raising questions about the

relationship of this finding to the importance of community connections for African-American society (Fine & Schwebel, 1988.) While the findings on neighborhood satisfaction are interesting, the question is raised as to what affect neighborhood satisfaction has on overall functioning. This study obtained some information concerning these factors and how they may be related to issues of overall coping and resilience which will be discussed in the chapters which follow.

Furstenberg's (1993) study entitled "How Families Manage Risk and Opportunity in Dangerous Neighborhoods" is an example of combining ethnographic methodology with many of the environmental approaches discussed above. Past studies by Furstenberg are consistent with my findings (Brodsky and Lorion, in preparation) that family members and especially parents play a major role differentiating children who "make it" from those who don't (Furstenberg, 1993.) Furstenberg makes the point that in middle class families, parents often subcontract parental duties (e.g., school, day care, camp, private tutors.) Even so, few studies have looked at the reliance of parents on outside sources of child parenting support, nor the effects of the community on these sources and choices. Furstenberg used open ended interview techniques to try to understand the link between family and community in high risk neighborhoods. This link included objective as well as perceived resources, risks and opportunities.

Furstenberg compared neighborhoods in terms of level of poverty, level of social disorganization and racial make-up. Findings showed that parents with the most stress-coping capacity were creative and persistent in seeking solutions and were more easy going and positive when faced with problems. Furstenberg, like Norwood (personal communication, 1993), noted the willingness of parents to sacrifice for their children.

Furstenberg also found that many women were parenting in isolation with very little social support. About a woman raising her children in "the projects" Furstenberg writes, "Leah's acquaintance with her neighbors and neighborhood is much greater than she admits to, but her pretense of ignorance regarding her neighbors is an accurate expression of her feelings about the impoverished social work in and around the Projects" (p. 8.) He states that the mother's desire to move from this neighborhood undermines any sense of community. In addition, Furstenberg found that resourceful parents in other risky settings tend to segregate their children from the community, noting that unlike the collective parenting styles described in the social support literature, individualistic styles of family management, where one relies only on one's own parenting resources, are seen as most adaptive. Many parents are described as using a "lock-up" strategy to buffer their children from the environment. Furstenberg does however report finding some informal referral systems which are used to find friends for otherwise isolated children. An example of this is taking the word of one's relatives that it is "OK" to associate with a particular family (Furstenberg, 1993.) This finding of an overall perceived lack of social support, as previously mentioned, will be an important issue in the study reported herein.

Among the iatrogenic effects of parents' attempts to protect their children by severely limiting their activities is that they may keep their children from taking steps to escape poverty. Furstenberg found that many of the parents interviewed were equally distrustful of institutions outside their community which might have helped their child (e.g., social services agencies, scholarship programs, recreational centers.) This raises an important question about the protective action taken by participants in the study reported herein. That is, are there any observable iatrogenic effects of mother's current apparent resilience? In the less

interpersonally isolated neighborhoods, Furstenberg found supportive, active, highly involved neighbors and neighborhoods. On the negative side, what seemed to hold these settings together was an "us versus them" mentality built on racism. In transitional neighborhoods, Furstenberg found the primary family management strategy was moving out. In these neighborhoods the interactions shifted from community based to individualistic. Overall, Furstenberg concludes that where parents live greatly affects how they parent. This conclusion supports the need for this present study, which purposely looks at risky neighborhoods. Furthermore, while our cultural ideal of parenting is very autonomous, Furstenberg points out that a more collective approach to raising children may ease the burden, strengthen the family and both result from and in stronger communities and cultural institutions (Furstenberg, 1993.) Whether this is possible given the isolationist tendencies described by Furstenberg's participants remains a question which is also addressed in the chapters which follow.

Poverty

Brett Williams (1992), an anthropologist, points out three scientifically dangerous trends in the last ten years of research and writing on African-American women and urban poverty. The first trend is economists' erroneous reliance on "obscure speculations" gleaned from "increasingly technical and obscure measurements" (Williams, p 165.) While most ethnography about poverty dates from "pre-crack, pre-AIDS, pre-Reagonomics America" (p.165) she sees economists "believe[ing] that one can infer the behavior of all poor people by extrapolating from census data and imagining what their lives might be like" (p. 166.) The second trend Williams sees is journalists stepping in to do ethnographies of the underclass. While they have brought important issues to the attention of a

mainstream audience, Williams sees such authors as Ken Auletta, Leon Dash and Alex Kotlowitz as "relying erratically and selectively on social science" while "presenting detailed portraits of behavior gone awry" (p. 166.) Finally, Williams sees such publications as William Julius Wilson's (1987) The Truly Disadvantaged, which labels female-centered households as being examples of self-destructive behavior, as representing a trend in research which is "(p)rofoundly sexist in defining pathology largely by the reproductive decisions of adult women" (p. 166.) These critiques also support this study, which does not rely on assumed risks and negative outcomes, but talked with real people and sought to present positive rather than negative portraits.

After a comprehensive review of the psychological literature on single mothers, Mednick (1987), concurring with William's conclusion, found that psychological research also views single mothers as deviant and transitory. In addition, Mednick notes that full time employment often doesn't raise the economic status of single mothers above the poverty line because women's work is undervalued. D'Ercole (1988) cites evidence from the Women's Economic Agenda Working Group that the majority of occupations typically held by women do not pay at a level which supports a family above the poverty line. The emotional risks associated with low economic status in women are documented in Bebbington, Tennant and Hurry's (1984) study of psychiatric disorder in South London. They found that working class mothers of young children were less resilient in responding to misfortune than middle class women and thus were at greater risk for emotional problems.

In her qualitative study of poor, young, single mothers, Polakow (1992) places their economic and societal struggles in a broader historical context in which society has both undervalued and attempted to control mothering specifically, and women generally. In this context, public policy should address poverty by being proactive and responsible to its citizens, rather than dismissing it as a private

individual failure. Polakow sees the most important economic risks to young mothers and their families as including low wages, lack of medical care, and the high cost of child care and housing. The women she writes about however, are resilient in their efforts to make ends meet, achieve educational goals which can provide access to higher paying jobs, and gain access to the services which are available to aid families at-risk. Balancing the stresses of economic hardship with the abilities of some women to access resources was an important issue for the participants whose interviews are discussed in the chapters which follow.

In addition to methodological criticism of Wilson's approach to poor women, Williams criticizes Wilson for having "taken on the mantle of the ethnographer" (p. 166) while relying on large scale surveys administered by hired interviewers. Her criticism is in keeping with other methodological writings in which the basis of quality qualitative research starts in the reliability and validity inherent in data collection. Williams feels that Wilson's lack of interaction in the field makes his findings as an ethnographer questionable at best. To correct the biases she sees in current research, Williams calls for several new approaches to be taken by the field of applied research. Among these is the need to do work which does not assume that "we" know "the poor" (p. 167), and for research which does not promote the idea that certain behaviors and family configurations are "required" by social contract. Williams also sees a need for ethnography to "dismantle the widespread notion that the poor, especially the "underclass", compose a homogeneous mass across the nation, and that their behavior is predictable and uniform" (p. 168.) Finally, Williams writes that poverty research should be feminist, interdisciplinary and attentive to the policy implications stemming from it. Worrell (1988) also calls for prevention and intervention research which seeks to identify strengths and well-being among single mothers, as well as validating a wider variety of family structures as legitimate and

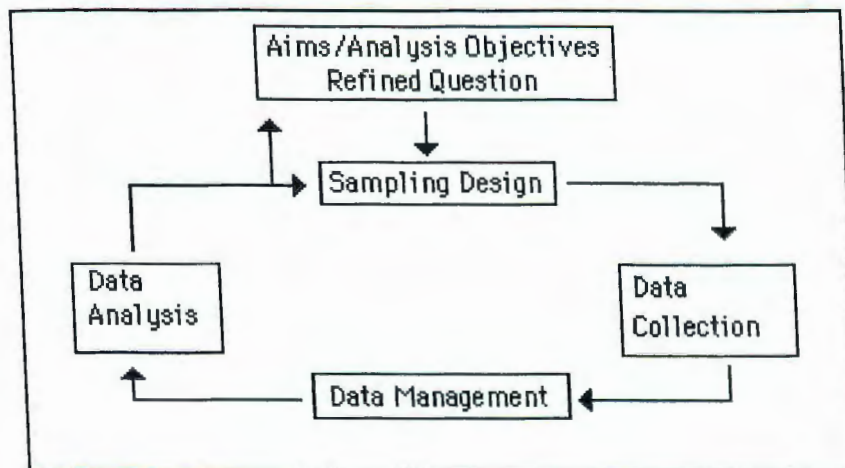
desirable. In the study reported herein I have attempted to not repeat the mistakes William's sees in past research. Instead, by integrating the recommendations of many of the researchers discussed above, this study is intended to present findings which shed light on the heterogeneity and strengths of urban, low-income, single parent, African-American women.

The literature presented above suggests both potential answers and questions concerning the stresses and resources present for participants who were interviewed in this study. The literature, however, is but a starting point. As will be seen, my experience with this study suggests that qualitative research, not unlike other field based studies, follows the adage: "life is what happens while you are making other plans."

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research has the distinctive feature of being a recursive, iterative and cyclical research method. Data collection and analysis occur concurrently within a feedback loop whereby initial analyses can, if indicated, promote change in sampling and data collection (Crabtree & Miller, 1992.)

Figure 1: The Qualitative Research Process



(Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. xv.)

This recursive model is clearly reflected in this dissertation. Multiple design changes occurred between the original proposal and the actual study. As originally designed, this study was to involve sampling from a single setting, interviewing and analyzing interviews with 15 mothers, their preadolescent daughters and a female elder who provided some support to the family. A snowball sampling design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, Patton, 1990 in Kuzel, 1992) was proposed; the initial group of 5 participants were expected to recommend a second group of five, who in turn would recommend a third group of five. As depicted in Crabtree and Miller's (1992) model (See Figure 1), data collection, data management, and data analysis of the initial five interviews led to refined research aims and related changes in the sampling design. A

major contributor to changes in the design was a budget cut which closed the original setting where I conducted the initial wave of interviews with mothers and daughters. Other factors necessitating changes included: a) the scope and mass of information obtained from interviewing mothers, b) the reported lack of support people in the lives of many of the women I interviewed, c) participants reports of isolation from other successful mothers which made a snowball technique unusable, and d) the fact that all but one of the women recommended by a participant refused to participate.

Research Design

With the continued input of my dissertation committee, the research design evolved to its current form. The study began with a focus group whose purpose was to test language, concepts and interview techniques. The focus group was composed of seven mothers who lived in neighborhoods similar to those of the individual participants. The group was recruited from a community based outpatient drug and alcohol treatment program and six of the seven women were in recovery (the seventh was a staff member.) A discussion concerning the use of women in recovery as a pilot group for a study on resilience follows in this chapter.

Participants were recruited from two Clements Park settings: Fresh Horizons, an after-school program located in King Elementary school, and Carver Elementary School. In each setting, five single mothers with at least one daughter in grade 4,5, or 6 agreed to be interviewed. Of the five participants from Fresh Horizons, three participated in two hour long interviews, and the other two women participated in one interview. All five identified daughters participated in 1/2 hour interviews. At Carver, all five women were interviewed twice and four of five daughters were interviewed.

In addition to the seven members of the focus group, the 10 single mother participants and the nine daughters providing information to the researcher, a key informant from each setting was interviewed regarding their recommendations of resilient mothers. A neighborhood assessment was made by way of my own driving tour of the area as well as a taped interview and neighborhood tour with a Clements Park resident who acted as a key informant regarding the neighborhood. Three other interviews were held with women who did not fit the exact criteria for participation, but added to my understanding in various ways. Each part of the study is described in more depth below.

Focus Group

After identifying the particular setting in the Clements Park area⁵ from which to recruit individual participants, but prior to beginning interviews, a two hour, tape recorded focus group was conducted. In this focus group seven mothers with experience living in Clements Park neighborhoods with reputations for violence and associated dangers, shared their experiences and concerns as urban mothers in risky neighborhoods (See interview outline in Appendix B).

A major advantage to the use of focus groups is the potential for efficiently gaining a wide breadth of personal experiences in a short time (Jarrett, 1992, 1993; Crabtree, Yanoshik, Miller & O'Connor, 1993.) Jarrett (1992, 1993) provides an excellent overview of the advantages and specific considerations involved in conducting focus group research with low income, minority populations. Knodel (1993) also provides a cogent overview of the steps involved in the design and

⁵ The general setting of Clements Park was chosen with the help of Tony Whitehead, a member of my dissertation committee who generously introduced me to some of his community connections who, along with my own community liaisons, were crucial in facilitating entry.

analysis of focus group research. As was the case in this dissertation, focus groups have been useful tools for polishing the research questions and data collection.

(O'Brien, 1993)

Focus group participants were recruited from a community based short term drug and alcohol treatment program and were paid 15 dollars for their time. All but one participant was in recovery at the time. The non-recovering participant was a staff member of the program. My initial concerns about the possible confounds of recent drug and alcohol abuse in focus group member's conversations about parenting seem to have been unfounded. Participants appeared to have given a great deal of thought to the stresses and responsibilities they faced as parents and to the issues involved in making life better for themselves and their children. They talked convincingly about variations in their abilities to manage parenting and safety issues. Although the intent of the focus group was to identify themes, issues and language and not necessarily to deal with resilience, my original concerns reflected my assumptions that the themes may differ for women whom I did not perceive as resilient. I learned that in spite of their problems with drugs and alcohol, these women had varying degrees of strength and resilience in the ways they had led their lives even while addicted. Their resilience was also evident in the fact that they had faced their addiction and sought treatment and recovery. The information gained from the focus group was helpful in corroborating themes from the literature as well as in identifying further directions of inquiry. The group also provided insights into the language used by women in this neighborhood to describe both their positive and negative experiences. What was learned from the focus group substantially refined the original interview structure and content.

Individual Participants-Fresh Horizons

The first wave of participants were recruited with the help of Peter Stargel⁶ the director of Fresh Horizons, a municipal government funded afterschool program based in a neighborhood elementary school. Peter and another staff member identified 8 women who they viewed as successful single mothers. Some women were initially contacted either through a letter describing the study which was sent home with their daughter (See Appendix A.) This contact was followed up by informal introductions of me by either Peter or their daughter when they came by to pick up their children from the center. Other mothers were phoned by the staff member who gave a brief introduction and then put me on the phone to elicit participation. Interviews were scheduled with five mothers. All but one mother kept the initial interview appointment and that one interview was subsequently rescheduled. All five mothers participated in tape recorded interviews lasting approximately one hour. The five daughters also participated in 1/2 to 1 hour interviews during after-school hours⁷. One to four weeks after the initial interviews, three out of five mothers were interviewed for a second tape recorded hour. The initial interviews with four of the mothers and all the daughters were conducted in the school based office of Fresh Horizons. One mother was interviewed in her home for both interviews. The remaining second interviews, scheduled after the program closed, were conducted in a meeting room of the local public library. All participants were given a \$25 gift certificate to a restaurant of their choice for their participation. Each participant

⁶ For the protection of participants, Mr Stargel's name and that of the afterschool program are pseudonyms.

⁷ For this study, material from the daughters' interviews were used solely as a validity check.

was also entered in a drawing to win dinner for four at a local restaurant. The winner was chosen after all interviews were completed.⁸

Supporting interviews for this first wave which served to triangulate information were held with Peter Stargel as a key informant, and with the identified support person of one mother. As reported earlier, only one such support interview was completed.

Neighborhood Assessment

During the first wave of data collection I also made a relatively informal neighborhood assessment using techniques suggested by Warren and Warren (1977) which included driving around the schools and participant's neighborhoods noting geography, landmarks, economic development and services, activity levels, school locations, outdoor space used by women and children, housing types, and areas which appeared to have particular safety issues. This information was useful in gaining a feel for the area as well as being able to converse knowledgeably with participants about their neighborhood. After exploring the area on my own I also enlisted the help of Ron Lerner⁹. During a tape recorded two hour driving tour of the community, Mr. Lerner gave me a historical, economic and sociopolitical grand tour of the entire Clements Park area as well as the particular neighborhoods around the two school setting. Findings from the neighborhood assessments are included in the Setting section below.

⁸ The dinner for four and a number of the other gift certificates were generously donated by area restaurants. Proceeds from a SPSSI Grant-In-Aid-Of-Research and matching funds from the Psychology Department, University of Maryland paid for the non-donated certificates.

⁹ Mr. Lerner, a pseudonym, is another community associate of Dr. Whitehead's and is a longtime resident of Clements Park who has worked with many agencies as a community activist and organizer.

Individual Participants- Carver Elementary School

The closing of Fresh Horizons and the failure of the planned snowball recruiting technique led to an unplanned delay between the first wave and second wave of interviewing while a new setting was sought. After several other unsuccessful attempts, entree into another elementary school was facilitated by contacts from the setting of the focus group. This second setting, Carver Elementary is located in another Clements Park neighborhood similar to the neighborhood in which the first interviews were conducted. In fact, this second school had been the site of another Fresh Horizons Afterschool Program. The principal of Carver Elementary, Ms. Gloria Stevens, sent my information letters home with approximately eight 4th through 6th grade girls whose mothers she identified as resilient. Six mothers were ultimately interviewed, including one woman whose responses were not included in the main findings of this study. Her interview was not included because although she considered herself a single mother, her husband, the father of her children, lives with her. Her identification as a single mother is related to his reported disability by a degenerative disease. All of the Wave 2 participants participated in approximately 1 hour long tape recorded interviews which were conducted in classrooms at Carver. Four of five daughters also participated in approximately 1/2 hour interviews. Ms. Stevens, the principal, participated as a key informant in a taped interview in which she talked about her reasons for suggesting the participants.

In addition to the extra interviews described above (one with a participant's recommended support person, and one with the 6th mother from Carver Elementary) which were analyzed separately, a second interview was conducted with the staff participant from the focus group who did not meet criteria for inclusion because she lives in another section of the city. Information from all three peripheral interviews

was useful in testing the limits of participant themes and will be discussed as they relate in Chapter 5.

Reliability and Validity

While qualitative research can not be described in terms of the traditional psychometric quantitative indices of reliability and validity, there are means within qualitative research for examining these aspect of one's findings. Multiple steps have been taken in the reported research to address these issues. Although qualitative research methodology does not pursue "absolute" truth it does pursue objectivity in its findings. Kirk & Miller (1986) explain objectivity as follows:

"The assumptions underlying the search for objectivity are simple. There is a world of empirical reality out there. The way we perceive and understand that world is largely up to us, but the world does not tolerate all understandings equally." (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 11.)

Reliability, that is the replicability of findings, is a prerequisite for validity. Kirk and Miller see reliability as an often ignored issue in qualitative research. However, they also point out that it should be recognized that reliability is not synonymous with validity. In their view reliability is best approached by a careful description of the research methodology and by the researcher's vigilance in thinking about how and why the data looks as it does. Two other traditional means of presenting reliability in qualitative findings include giving a careful description of the researcher and her/his biases as well as the use of field notes (Kirk & Miller, 1986.) Fetterman also notes that the search for patterns in ethnographic research serves an important role in checking reliability (Fetterman, 1989.) Steps to address reliability taken in this study include an in-depth description of the methodology, the use of second interviews as a form of test-retest reliability, field notes, and a description of my etic perspective.

The validity of qualitative methodology has been questioned as well. As Borman, LeCompt and Goetz (1986) point out there is an assumption that the research is too subjective to be valid. They respond that there is a difference between "etic or research-imposed, and emic or subject-generated meanings" (Borman et al., 1986, p. 51.) The integration of emic and etic perspectives offers the possibility for a validity check in qualitative research (Borman et al., 1986.) Triangulation in which different sources of information are tested against each other is also a major means of testing validity in qualitative research. (Fetterman, 1989.) In this study triangulation occurred through the multiple conversations with mothers, comparing their interviews to the demographic questionnaire, interviewing their daughters, and talking with the key informants about each participant. Asking questions which prompt participants to be as concrete as possible in their responses is also a form a validity check which was utilized in this dissertation. (Weiss, 1994.)

Another validity check involved the active role of the dissertation committee. To counteract the charge that qualitative research relies too heavily on researcher subjectivity, external critiques are used by researchers in addition to "disciplined subjectivity" as a means of ensuring rigor. (Borman, LeCompte and Goetz, 1986.) Members of the dissertation committee listened to tapes and gave feedback, met individually with me to discuss findings and dilemmas, and participated in several review meetings in which themes and ideas in progress were discussed. In addition to the role of the dissertation committee, various members of the community provided ongoing feedback which was important for maintaining accurate interpretation of data and an emic perspective (Fetterman, 1989.)

Settings

Clements Park

Clements Park is a predominately residential 3,693 acres with a population of 72,924 which sits at the southernmost border of a large northeastern city (_____ Government, 1992a.)¹⁰ Housing varies from detached houses, some dating from the early 1900s, to row houses, garden apartments and flats. As of 1991, 21% of housing units in the area were government subsidized including a number of public housing complexes and low income complexes which have some of the worst reputations for disrepair and violence in the city. Tax assessments of single family units show that 68% are valued between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a figure lower than the average for single family homes in the city at large.

Commercial districts are limited to strip development on main routes and two relatively small concentrated commercial blocks. In some neighborhoods, a corner store may be the only commercial establishment within walking distance. Along the active commercial areas, there are many empty and boarded store fronts including several restaurants and an old movie theater. Most open establishments have heavily barred windows and doors, and gang graffiti is evident on most commercial establishments and school grounds.

In 1940 40% of Clements Park's population were African-American, two decades later, that proportion exceeded 67% (_____ Government, 1982.) Currently, 97% of the population is African American versus 66% for the city at large (_____ Government, 1992a.) This area has traditionally been seen as a poor and declining portion of the city. Although the neighborhoods where this

¹⁰ Demographic references whose titles would disclose the location of this study have been disguised to protect the identity of participants.

research was completed do fit the traditional and predominately accurate view of Clements Park, it is worth noting that this area also has neighborhoods where African American professionals in the middle and upper middle class income brackets live in “brick colonial houses with spacious yards and tree-lined, gently curving streets.” (Local Newspaper, 25, August, 1988.)

The Neighborhoods

Statistics from the 1990 Census (_____ Government, 1992b.) give one picture of the neighborhoods in which my participants are raising their families. The women I spoke with live in 7 census tracts located within a 1.5 mile radius. In these neighborhoods, 1990 median household income ranged from \$16,200-\$25,662 with between 38% and 17% of the populations living below the poverty line. Between 13% and 19% of households were categorized as overcrowded by virtue of having more than 1 person per room. In terms of educational attainment, high school graduation rates for persons 25 and over ranged from a low of 49% to a high of 61%. Between 72% and 91% of births are out of wedlock, 52%-65% of births were without adequate prenatal care and 73%-85% of youths in these neighborhoods did not live with both parents. Crime statistics as of 1990 reported between 17 and 41 violent crimes per 1000 residents.

According to the City Police Department the violent crime rate increased between 1990 and 1994 in all but one neighborhood. In both 1990 and 1994 half of the neighborhoods had violent crime rates at or just below the city average and the other half had rates above the city average. (_____Government, 1994.)

When I first started going into the Clements Park area, I found myself hyper-vigilant, wary of its reputation for drug dealers, drive-by shootings, car jackings and the other dangers associated with inner city neighborhoods. Initially I also felt

guilty about my fears because I had the luxury to come into the neighborhood for relatively short periods of time, usually in the daylight (although not always, especially in the early sunsets of winter) and then most importantly, go back home again to my own relatively safer neighborhood. Meanwhile, the women and children who shared their lives with me had no choice but to face the risks and fears of this area all the time.

I was also concerned about the reaction Clements Park residents might have to my clear outsider status in this community. I wasn't sure if it might increase my danger or make me seem more of a threat to the community. I remember once, early in my visits there, when I was early for an appointment (having imagined this area to be much farther away from my own home than it actually was.) I spent the extra time driving around some of the streets off the main roads I had explored so far. I was not sure if any of the back streets I was exploring were more dangerous than others, and I didn't want to get lost or too far away from the site of my appointment so I made a lot of U-turns and passed a lot of locations more than once. I was sure that the people I was passing multiple times in my circular route were going to get suspicious of my presence and also convinced that the various police cars I was passing were going to pull me over to ask what I was doing there.

As time passed and I had more experience coming and going in many parts of the neighborhood, I lost the feeling of hypervigilance and came to enjoy many parts of driving through the streets of this part of the city. I became familiar with the particular mood and activities of certain corners. I came to expect the group of young men who set up folding tables to sell T-shirts, incense and seasonal holiday items on the corner parking lot of what was once a 7-11 was but now a generic, nonfranchise convenience store. I also learned that although there were always people milling about on the streets and sidewalk of the reported drug corridor I had to drive through

in the projects around King Elementary, no one paid any attention to my presence. When my neighborhood key informant, Mr. Lerner, an African-American male drove through in his Volvo, however, a number of women attempted to solicit him.

Overall, I became more comfortable when I realized that no one on the streets seemed to be paying any attention me, my gender or my skin color. While I definitely did not put myself in dangerous situations, I also encountered no reason to fear in the time I was doing this research. I never heard the gunfire my participants talked about, never was confronted by anyone in the times I walked to my car in the dark; although I did have a school custodian yell at me for leaving my car where I did when I'd have to walk to it after dark. The one time I saw a man walking obviously angrily away from a crowd down the block, and towards my car while flicking his switchblade open and closed, I merely delayed my exit from the car until he walked past, seemingly oblivious to my presence in his focused anger on those he was leaving.

Despite my increased comfort, I could never forget where I was. I consciously chose not to honk at the cars stopped in the middle of the road in front of me while they conversed with each other, because I didn't want to interrupt a drug deal. I paid attention to activity on the street when I got out of my car or left the school buildings. I haven't completely lost the feeling of guilt at my reaction, but as I heard many women talk about some of their own fears in these neighborhoods, I felt less like I was merely buying into a stereotype, and more like I was being realistically cautious. Taken as a reasonable response and not an unthinking stereotype, my response is also a small sample of the constant stress that people in these neighborhoods cope with on a daily basis. This stress was not lost on the mothers who talked about their strategies for keeping their children safe and it was not lost on the daughters, many of whom, when asked what they would choose given three wishes, told me they'd like the violence to end and that they'd like to live to finish junior high and high school.

The Schools

Participants lived in neighborhoods of Clements Park which were roughly grouped around each of the two elementary schools. The schools themselves were located in fairly similar neighborhoods about 1 mile from each other. Both elementary schools were located on quiet blocks, but within short radius of busy and dangerous drug corridors. Both had an almost exclusively African-American student body and staff, both drew children from a range of home settings and housing situations ranging from single family detached homes to project housing. Almost all of the daughters of my participants walked to school, many accompanied by their mothers.

King Elementary, the site of the first wave of recruitment and interviewing, and Carver Elementary, where the second wave was conducted, are both large, four-story structures. Almost all of the windows in these buildings are painted over and enclosed with steel security mesh. Both schools have a pre-K to 6th grade enrollment of approximately 400 students. The grounds of both schools are a mix of asphalt playground and grass fields which have an urban roughness. The grounds are sometimes littered with glass, litter, and on occasion, discarded household items. Graffiti including gang tags and R.I.P. messages (informal memorials to local youths who have died, usually violently) are evident on both school buildings. Both school grounds give the impression of being dangerous places after dark and in fact shortly after I finished interviews at Carver, a body was discovered in a back playground one morning before school.

The differences in my entree into each school seems to have affected my relationships within the schools and probably the women who were recommended and who participated from each school. As described above, my entry into King Elementary School came through the child and family services agency which was

contracted to run Fresh Horizons. I knew a number of agency administrators through a summer internship which I held at one of their service settings when I was in college. A series of phone calls put me in contact with Peter Stargel, who was directing Fresh Horizons at King Elementary. Because my entry into the school was through an after school service vendor I had little contact with the school personnel themselves, only with after school program director and staff. This became a problem when the program's funding was cut mid-year and it proved impossible to gain the cooperation of the school principal despite an introduction and recommendation by Mr. Stargel. While she initially agreed to speak with me, she canceled our scheduled meeting at the last moment and then did not return approximately 15 subsequent phone calls. In the end this inability to make a connection with the principal may have been a good thing because as I heard more of parent's attitudes about this principal it became clear that she may not have been a good key informant due to the fact that she was not well liked by many of my original participants. As Agar (1980) points out, it is important to determine the quality of the relationship between the entree person and the parts of the community one wishes to interview. It may be that had I recruited Wave 2 participants with her help they may have looked very different from the mothers suggested by Mr. Stargel who were very attached to the after school program but critical of the school and the principal. This may have been neither a good nor bad outcome, but may have led to different information.

Fresh Horizons provided a voluntary, free, academic and enrichment oriented after-school program to approximately 50 3rd through 6th graders. The students were recruited into this program for various reasons. Some, for example, were recommended for participation by their teachers because of academic or behavioral difficulties in school and benefited from homework tutorials, adult attention and

participation in a bereavement group. Others were placed in the program by their parents as it provided an enriching environment of tutoring, Afro-centric activities like African Drumming and Black History Lessons, and various community trips. For other parents Fresh Horizons was most important as a safe place for their children to be after school and one of the few affordable aftercare alternative for working parents. The children whose mothers participated in this study were in the program for the same range of reasons.

Fresh Horizons was closed with four days notice to staff, family and children during a municipal budget crisis. After nearly two months inability to find a setting from which to recruit Wave 2 participants, entry into a second setting was facilitated by a staff member in the drug rehabilitation center where the original focus group had occurred.¹¹ At Carver Elementary school, Ms. Stevens, the principal, took an interest in my research and was directly involved in recommending, recruiting and monitoring the progress of the study. There are a some overall differences between the women in Wave 1 and Wave 2 which may be explainable by the differences in the position of the key informants vis a vis the school settings. One of the advantages of having the full support of the school principal was that I had more contact with school personnel. While I didn't have this contact at Fresh Horizons, I did have a lot of interaction with program staff and children as I did some tutoring in my free time and hung out quite a bit talking with children and staff while I waited for participants.

¹¹ Again I owe thanks to Dr. Whitehead for introducing me to his field contacts in Clements Park.

Participants

Key Informants

After the focus group, the key informants were the first participants in each wave of this study. In many ways both Peter Stargel and Gloria Stevens were what Agar calls the "professional stranger handler(s)" (Agar, 1980, p. 85.) According to Agar, the first connection made in a community is often with someone who may be deviant in that they are willing to interact with a stranger and are able to straddle the cultural differences in order to provide entree. Both key informants are African-Americans with experience in this community and similar communities in the city. As college educated professionals in positions of power vis a vis families and children, they both straddled insider and outsider status. While Agar does not discount the great utility of the professional stranger handler, he notes that often their views and opinions may not be the same as other members of the community.

Both Mr. Stargel and Ms. Stevens seemed to be highly respected, admired and liked by the mothers and children with whom I talked. Admittedly this is a rather circular finding, since it seems likely both would have recommended participants with whom they were on good terms and participants would have been more likely to agree to participate if they had respect for Mr. Stargel or Ms. Stevens. It still seems important to note that even when participants had seemed to be past the point of mere politeness in interviews, they still spoke highly of the key informants.

There are a number of important differences between the two key informants which undoubtedly affected their recommendations and their ways of viewing the issues of resilience. Peter Stargel is a 31 year old African-American who dresses in comfortable, urban contemporary clothing, drives a jeep and wears his hair in dreadlocks. He grew up in the inner city and expresses considerable empathy for the

families and children with whom he works. He sees his role in this community as extending beyond the requirements of his job at Fresh Horizons. As an example, he would engage the young men hanging on the streetcorners around the school by playing football on the school grounds as a way of, as he explains it, making some connection in their alienation.

When describing what he saw as resilience in the mothers with whom he worked, Peter pointed to basic building blocks. He noted that resilience began with a mother taking pride in her appearance and that of her child and the children's good attendance. Additionally, the women he recommended had children who were happy, themselves had positive energy and a determination to offer something better for their children than they themselves had. He reported that they all taught their children that the way their lives were going was not the only way, and that their children could choose different circumstances:

Well I mean you have to unpack what "mother" means to folks, I guess. I make the assumption, let me say, that when you talk about mother you're talking about someone who's taking responsibility for another one who is unable to make choices and decisions for themselves and I see these women as people who are trying to help and encourage their children to make positive choices, to make better choices than they made for themselves.... I'm defining the word [mother] as someone who made commitment to this child and who's going to care for them as best they can despite, in spite of, whatever laundry list you want to use, you know, poverty, financial circumstances, unstable relationships, substance abuse, histories of domestic [violence]... and of course it's going to impact the child but I think all of the women that we've talked about are at least trying to lessen their own particular issues, the impact of their own particular issues on their children and trying to let the children, you know, at least put their foot at the door. That's why they're quote, unquote making it to me.

Many of the women he recommended volunteered their time to Fresh Horizons, either by chaperoning trips, attending meetings, or being active voices in the community. Peter also pointed to their ability to listen to someone else's opinion and a receptiveness to help as being important elements in their resilience. Finally, he saw these women as having a rare commodity in the community, hope:

I think there is an overwhelming lack of hope that has to be talked about when you talk about folks who find themselves in these kinds of circumstances... and I think to have hope despite that shows something interior or whatever you want to call it that these people have that is transcending their situation, you know, and they are able to impart that on their children and I think that that is probably the most important thing that they are doing....I think these women have said, yes these things are going on but that is no excuse not to aspire and I think that that is remarkable.

Ms. Stevens is a career educator who has been in the public school system for 35 years, and a principal for 10 years. She gives the appearance of a “no-nonsense” educator who cares deeply for her students and their success, and expects much from them in return. It is reflected in the atmosphere of the school and in the deference with which the staff treat her that she is both respected and in full control of her school. The students, while respectful, also appear pleased to see her and she is often seen talking with them in the halls and classrooms.

Her ideas about what makes a successful single mother are much more educationally oriented than Peter Stargel's. The women she sees as resilient are involved with their children's education by being available for parent-teacher conferences, make frequent visits to the school, attend their children's activities and volunteer in the school. Ms. Stevens also notices a parent's responsiveness and ability to listen to, both their child and the teacher when conflicts arise in the classroom. Ms. Stevens also judges how well the parents are doing by how well the children are doing in terms of being responsible, helping out in the school, getting along with peers, acting appropriately, and striving to achieve their academic potential. When asked what a single mom needs to do to make it in this neighborhood, she explained:

They have to number one, be focused themselves, because there's so much out here in the environment that could be a deterrent. For example, there --drugs are here. All right. They have to be focused in terms of being able to -- to couple the working and the providing for their children together.

For example, you know, aftercare, beforecare, weekend care, so that the children don't get caught up in what's going on in the environment.... So you've got to be able to couple the two and work them together, the job and the home, and meeting the child's needs. Giving the child the kind of comfort and support that the child needs. All of the children that you have worked with, uh, in my opinion are children that are, I would say normal, healthy children who have healthy minds.

The Mothers

General requirements for mother participants were part of a wide net sampling approach in which very few requirements limited participation. The existing literature on single parents did suggest several characteristics which were used as parameters for participation. Participants had to have been single mothers for at least two years and had to be recommended by the key informant in their setting because of their positive coping. The two year limit is in keeping with the divorce literature reviewed above which notes differences in initial and subsequent adjustment to single parent family status (Compas & Williams, 1990.) Positive coping was defined by the key informant and revised in the same iterative process as all theory building in this project. To be defined as a single parent they needed to be the sole parent in the home, but not necessarily the sole adult. For purposes of this study, parent was defined as a biological parent. Grandmothers who are serving as the primary parent were not eligible for this study. To provide some comparability across parenting issues and stresses participants needed to have at least one daughter in the fourth, fifth or sixth grade. These children were old enough to be interviewed and lend another perspective to that of their mothers, but not yet dealing with the height of adolescent issues.

The ten participating mothers ranged in age from 26 to 46. One was as young as 14 and another as old as 24 when her first child was born (See Table 1 below.) Participants had been single mothers from between 6 and 26 years. Family size

ranged from one to four children and the ages of the children ranged from 3 to 26. Four of the ten have a minor child who lives elsewhere with a relative. In two cases this child is an adolescent son. In one case this arrangement is due to lack of room in the home, and in the other it allows the child to attend a better school. Four of ten were single mothers due to divorce and three of the four reported that they had separated from their husbands due to the husband's drug use, alcohol abuse, or domestic violence. Three had left school before completing high school, with one of these women currently working on her GED. One participant had stopped school after high school graduation, one had completed trade school, five had attended some college with one of these women having completed an associates degree and two still working on their college degrees. Four of the ten participants currently received some form of public assistance and of these four, three also had part time jobs on the side and one was in a job/school program. The remaining six women had full time jobs, and two of the six had part time jobs in addition to their full time job. Three women are known to receive some form of child support, two others had taken the fathers to court but were still not receiving child support. Seven of the ten have male friends¹² involved in their lives and of these, two live with the women at least part time. Six of the ten women live with family or have family living with them at least temporarily. In two cases living with family is integral to childcare and financial stability. In three cases participants are taking care of family members by sharing living quarters.

¹² This is the term used by the women themselves to refer to their significant other.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (Part I of II)

Mother	Wave ¹³	Age	Highest Grade Completed	Source(s) of Income	Number of Children	Gender and Age Ranges (Not in home)
Diane Martin	1	31	Some College/ Trade Schl.	Public Assistance / P. T. Jobs	4	M: (14), 9 F: 11, 10
Teresa Brown	1	33	Some High Schl	Public Assistance / Looking for Job	3	M: (14) F: 11, 10
Candy Johnson	1	31	12th/ Trade Schl.	Public Assistance / P. T. Job	4	M: 3 F: (9), 11, 12
Grace Roberts	1	46	11th(?)	F. T. Job	3	M: (26, 24) F: 11
Carolyn Small	1	43	12th	F. T. Job	3	M: (26) F: 24, 11
Kristina Stuart	2	26	Some College	F. T. Job	2	F: 11, 3
Tina Jordan	2	32	Some High School/ In GED program	Public Assistance	3	M: 18, 3 F: 12
Yolanda Williams	2	35	Some College	F. T. Job / P. T. Job	3	M: (19), 16 F: 12
Catherine Clark	2	32	Associates Degree	F.T. Job	1	F: 8
Sonya Thomas	2	33	Some College	F.T. Job	1	F: 10

¹³ Wave 1 participants were recommended by Peter Stargel, Wave 2 by Gloria Stevens.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (Part II of II)

Mother	Age Became Mother	Number of Years Single Mo.	Why Single Mother	Support from Fathers	Male Friend Involved?
Diane Martin	20	6.5	Divorce	No	Yes Live In
Teresa Brown	19	14	Not with Father	Fathers visit	2+ years Yes Live out
Candy Johnson	19	12	Not with Fathers of daughters	No	6 years Fiancé Live In
Grace Roberts	20	18?	Divorce	No	No
Carolyn Small	17	26	Not with Father	Monetary	No
Kristina Stuart	15	11	Not with Fathers	No	Yes Live out
Tina Jordan	14	14-18	Fathers denied paternity	No	No
Yolanda Williams	16	7	Divorce	No	Yes Live Out
Catherine Clark	24	8	Not with Father	No- Taken to court	No?
Sonya Thomas	23	6	Divorce	Yes	Yes Live Out

Interviews

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured, open-ended interview which began with general, nonleading questions (See Appendix C.) This approach allows participants to lead the discussion as well as allowing for rapport building rather than launching right into meaningful and perhaps threatening lines of questioning. (Mischler, 1986; Weiss, 1994; D. Belle, personal communication, July 27, 1994; L. Benkov, personal communication, August 11, 1994; Agar, 1980.) Agar in particular suggests attention be paid to Whyte's typology of interview directness which starts with words or gestures which express interest, followed by reflective responses and finally probes (Agar, 1980, p. 60.) This respectful and measured approach seemed especially useful given my outsider status and the possibility for there to be suspicion about my intentions and biases in this study.

The primary direction of the interviews was to gain information about how participants define and describe their lives as single mothers in risky neighborhoods including the stresses in their lives as well as how they cope. Roles and rules concerning parenting were also important. I began with a list of topics which the reading and personal discussions suggested may be important to explore. These topic areas were touched upon either spontaneously by participants, or probed as necessary by me. Knowing that second interviews would be available to pick up on loose ends and missed themes allowed for a more open initial interview and the benefit of following up on questions which appeared on reflection after initial interviews. Second interview were also used to allow participants to confirm or disconfirm my interpretations, and to ask them about themes which arose in interviews with other participants.

Agar (1980) suggests a number of useful interview techniques for furthering information acquisition, theory building, and testing assumptions about meaning which I attempted to utilize. He recommends the use of distribution checks, contrasts, linguistic links, entailment and case grammar. Distribution checks clarify information by having participants estimate the qualifiers they use (e.g. some, many, none, few.) Asking contrast questions helps to form ideas about the differences and similarities between situations and people. Linguistic links involve paying attention to four particular connections between words and contrast. The researcher is looking for the following patterns of association between items, situations or events; 1) x is a kind of y, 2) x is used for y, 3) x is part of y, 4) x is a stage in process y. Entailment, like linguistic links, also focuses attention on the connection between two variables. The concept of importance is whether x is a sufficient condition for y; that is whether x entails y. With case grammar, the researcher focuses on the verb and questions who or what the agent is and what the instrument is (Agar, 1980, pp. 94-100.) Another methodological suggestion which I utilized in some interviews was recommended by Norwood (personal communication, 1993) in which participants were asked what advice regarding rules for living they would offer their favorite movie or music star if she moved into their neighborhood.

One of the most important interview techniques is to pull for specific examples and concrete stories (Mischler, 1986; Weiss, 1994; D. Belle, personal communication, July 27, 1994; L. Benkov, personal communication, August 11, 1994.) Such questions as "Tell me about the last time that happened?", "Have you always done it that way?", etc. were used to ensure a useful level of detail. Deborah Belle (personal communication, July 27, 1994) cautioned that an interview in which the participant merely spouts morals and generalities tells little about what is actually happening and gives little proof as to what the individual is really doing. She

noted that it is the researchers job to draw conclusions and make connections based on concrete data from participants. Allowing the interview to be filled with philosophy which is not backed up with concrete examples is not effective nor wholly analyzable.

At the end of the first interview a short demographic questionnaire was given to participants to fill out before they left the interview (See Appendix D.) The questionnaire was used to collect some basic comparable data about participants and was given at the end so as to not set a response bias.

Daughters were interviewed between first and second interviews for Wave 1 and after second interviews for Wave 2 (See Appendix C.) While these interviews will not be discussed in detail in this dissertation, they served as reliability checks on mother's reports of their rules, coping strategies, social support etc. In all cases few major disagreements between mother and daughter reports were seen. The one area of difference was that some daughters reported that their mother's male friend was more involved in their mother's lives than the mother's themselves reported. This issue of male involvement in the lives of single mothers will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Analysis

All interviews were taped except for one in which there was technical difficulty. For this sole non-taped interview, content notes were written right after the interview. These interview notes were analyzed with the interview transcripts but they were tagged to designate that the quality was not as high as the actual transcripts. Interview tapes were professionally transcribed into a word processing program and then the transcripts were double checked against the tapes by undergraduate research assistants. In addition, I spot checked transcript corrections for accuracy. Printed transcripts were coded by hand in the manner described by

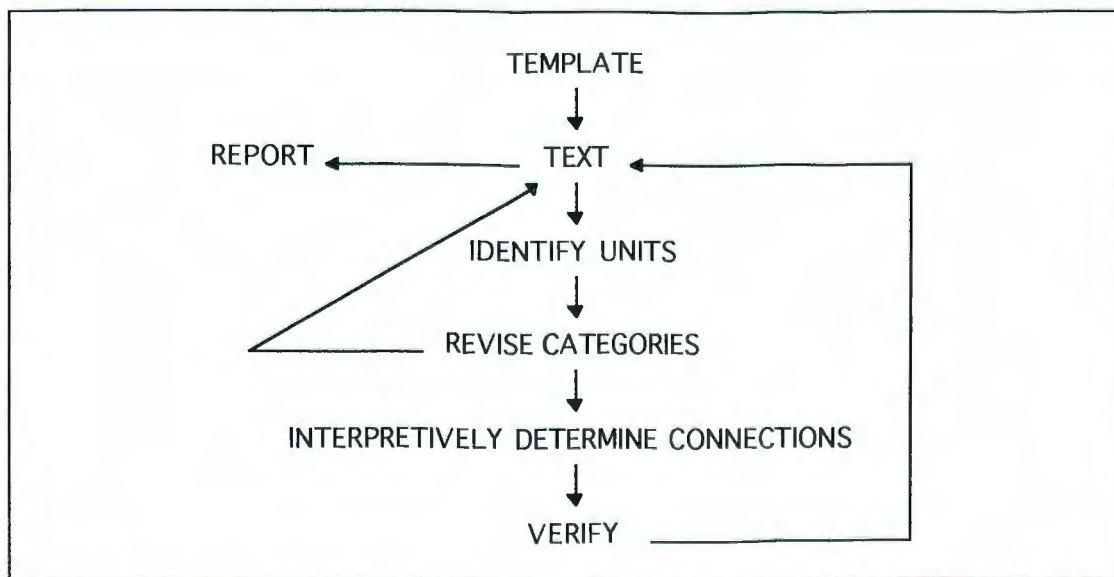
Weiss (1994, pp. 154-156) in which marginal notes are used to code categories, similarly coded sections are then sorted together in a new data file and the new data file is organized into observations in a way which creates what Weiss calls "local integration" (Weiss, 1994, p. 158). The final step is the production of "inclusive integration" in which the excerpted material is fit into the whole. Although Weiss uses different labels for his steps, this is the equivalent technique to Agar's "breakdown resolution."

Analysis in qualitative research, as mentioned above, occurs concurrently with data collection and is also an iterative process. Agar (1986) describes ethnographic understanding as a process. According to Agar, ethnographers concentrate on differences between the culture of the researcher and the participant, and between researcher's expectations and reality. These differences are referred to as breakdowns. Agar writes that a breakdown is "a lack of fit between one's encounter with a tradition and the schema-guided expectations by which one organizes experience" (Agar, 1986, p. 21.) After a breakdown, the researcher attempts to come to some understanding by which the breakdown is no longer surprising. This process of coming to an understanding is termed resolution (Agar, 1986.) A successful resolution will end in coherence. As Agar explains; "A coherent resolution will 1) show why it is better than other resolutions 2) tie a particular resolution in with the broader knowledge that constitutes a tradition, and 3) clarify and enlighten, eliciting an "aha" reaction from the members of different traditions that make up the ethnographic encounter" (Agar, 1986, p.23.) In addition, a coherent resolution will be applicable to other breakdowns which might follow. All of the techniques for interviewing which are mentioned in the section above (i.e. distribution checks, contrasts, linguistic links, entailment and case grammar) help to identify both breakdowns and coherent resolutions. When the researcher is no longer surprised by

the answers to queries such as does x entail y , then a resolution has been found for this particular set of information.

There are a number of ways to do the qualitative analysis which leads to coherent resolution. Some methods are more quantitative and a-priori in their style while others are more intuitive, existential techniques (Crabtree & Miller, 1992.) This study uses a style which bridges the gap between entirely subjective and entirely quantitative. Template Analysis Style applies an open-ended, recursive template to the text. This template may be designed a-priori based on theory, pre-existing knowledge or an initial reading of the text, but it undergoes revision at points of breakdown. Once cohesion is reached, a more interpretive/subjective style is used to determine connections and verify that the resolution fits other breakdowns (Crabtree & Miller, 1992.) The figures below shows diagram of Template Analysis Style:

Figure 2: Template Analysis Style



(Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 18.)

As explained above, the production of coding categories and the coding of transcripts was an iterative process. The initial coding template used was based on the general topics included in the interview formats which was developed from the literature and the focus group. This included content issues such as role strain, economics, child care, social support, child protection, time, stresses, coping strategies, etc. Content codes were revised and amended simultaneous with transcript coding to address the spontaneous conversation of participants. First interviews with each participant were coded prior to the second interview in order to identify the themes and topics to follow up on in the second interview. At the completion of all data collection the transcripts were all recoded using a final list of coding categories which took into account the overall data collection process. As the principal researcher, I did all the coding as Weiss makes the point that because the coding process is ongoing and in dynamic interaction with the data, coding cannot be delegated to research assistants (Weiss, 1994, p. 156.)

Field notes and personal diary entries were also sources of data. Among the most important information contained in field notes is specific, focused comments regarding observations, speculations, and ideas to follow up (Agar, 1980; Fetterman, 1989.) Agar (1980) believes that overzealous field note-taking can interfere with actually learning from the setting, because a researcher is too busy writing to look, listen and learn. The use of a personal diary to keep track of "mood, attitude and prejudice during a specific stage of research" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 108.) is also recommended to serve as both a record of context and a quality control device. (Fetterman, 1989.)

CHAPTER 4 THREE STORIES

As Dill (1994) points out in Across the boundaries of race and class, her qualitative study of Black female domestic workers, the analysis of themes across particular life stories, while enlightening overall, "does not do justice to the women as individuals" (Dill, 1994, p. 43.) While there is an obvious benefit to drawing general comparisons and conclusions across a number of life stories, this approach does not give the reader a cohesive picture of life in its complexity. This chapter will present more cohesive pictures of three of the participants' stories, as they unfolded in the interviews. I choose these three stories for a number of reasons. They present a range of experiences and in some ways are representative of the remaining seven women, but in other ways are solely unique as are all of our lives. They were among the most open and honest interviews, in which the participants felt comfortable to discuss their lives, choices and dilemmas in their complexity, rather than presenting a more condensed and circumscribed version. I felt I learned enough about these women to attempt to put the pieces together, rather than to merely pull out the themes. These three women were also people whose stories immediately changed my thinking. They were the ones who, as a side effect of who they were, how they described their inner and outer world, or even where they fell in the interviewing order, in Agar's terms, caused a breakdown, but in less technical terms stretched my understanding and assumptions.

Even as the stories below fit together to give a coherent picture of three lives, they also introduce many of the themes and dimensions which will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6. These include the stresses associated with living in a risky neighborhood, the conflicts which come along with family support, and the differing levels of monetary problems; from not being able to afford college to not

being able to afford food. The importance of religion as a source of support comes up for two of these women as does the need to balance reliance and independence in intimate relationships with men. Not unlike the other participants, these three women have differing amounts of social support in their lives, both from family and friends. In addition, themes of isolation and independence are common in these stories as well as those of the other women.

All three women speak of a central role in their lives, being a parent. They are fairly typical of all participants as they talk about the need to protect their children from neighborhood dangers, while also making sure that they are preparing them to take care of themselves in the future. This is accomplished by spending time with their children, talking with them, stressing the importance of education, teaching them values and morals, and balancing a wish to provide for all their needs while not wanting to fulfill all their wants. Another important issue for many mothers is the risk associated with having a daughter who appears physically more mature than her age. All of the mothers who participated think about the risks of adolescent pregnancy and are concerned about keeping their daughters from this not uncommon outcome.

It will be noticed that these three women are functioning at different levels and have quite different resources on a number of dimensions including social support, money, food, education, and time. Despite these different levels of "success", all three see themselves as "making it" in one way or another. The ability of even those with the least resources to see some success in her life seems to be the result of another important theme shared by both these women and the other participants: social comparison. What most participants express is an ability, at all levels of functioning, to see people who are doing even worse and be thankful for whatever positives they do have in their lives. This ability to see the positives

relates to the ability of many of the participants to volunteer their time to help out others and to gather the strength to fight for more in their own lives. Through their knowledge that they are doing better than someone, an outcome many define as being blessed, they seem to find that element which Peter Stargel noted was too often missing: hope.

Kristina Stuart¹⁴

At 26, Kristina Stuart was the youngest mother interviewed. She was 15 when her first daughter was born. Keona, who is now 11 has a younger sister, Jessica, age 3. Kristina, a high school graduate, has completed some college and plans to return to school in August. Currently she juggles the demands of raising two girls alone, a full time job doing clerical work at a local school and of a part time job. Despite having been a teenage mother, Kristina finished high school and pursued her goals for herself and for her children because, as she describes it:

I refused to be stereotyped. Okay you're a teenager and you have a child, so this is the way your life is supposed to be. "Oh, no." That's where it started. I said "Oh, no" to that and I've been living that "oh no" since....

It's taking me a little longer, but it does not mean we will not have...It may take me a little longer, but I will be at that point. It's just that I, um, have to start right here and take care of some things first. And that thing, right there is my kids. Have to stop and give them what they need. And you know then slowly but surely I'll get everything that I want for myself too.

From the beginning, her family of origin has been supportive of her and her children. Kristina has also worked hard to be independent. She returned to high school one month after giving birth to her first daughter and found a baby sitter and a part time job "because I didn't want my mother to, uh, raise --to feel financially obligated to my child."

¹⁴ Once again, all names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Most mothers chose a first name for themselves and their children. I randomly chose other's first names and all last names.

Despite the fact that she is currently making it as a single parent she is critical of herself for becoming a parent so young:

I'm not going to pretend like..it was okay to get pregnant at, you know, at a young age. It's not. And I'm not going to pretend that it doesn't bother me sometimes. It does. Not that often, but it does, you know, when ...I say, "Oh, I could be doing this now" Yeah. But, um, hey that's my life....I made it, I have to live with it....If I had to do it all over again, I would not be a mother as a teenager. But because I was, I accepted it. I knew that, you know, this child is going to depend on me. This child's going to need me. Okay. I got pregnant...Now it's up to me to give her the life she deserves. And she deserves a mother.

Kristina does not blame her own mother for her early pregnancy. She does however see how her mother missed the signs that although Kristina was bright, strong, independent and doing well in school, she could not handle some social challenges:

And I think that, um, kind of made my mother feel, maybe a little at ease about me. When she, maybe she shouldn't have been. And she would've saw certain things coming at me, coming my way, [that] I didn't know how to handle.

Kristina's experience as a teenager makes her resolved to stay on top of things in her own daughter's life:

So, as a mother and with my experiences, I know that even though Keona's doing...fine...I still have to watch out for little things that are creeping up that she may not be able to handle...That's why I ask her what's going on with her, what happened in school...We talk about premarital sex a lot. I really don't want her to fall into that preteen, teenage pregnancy category. I just don't want her to fall by the...wayside.

Kristina's sister, brother, mother and grandparents play important roles in raising Keona and Jessica. As a family they help each other out with childcare, with material needs, and with emotional support. Kristina's mother takes Keona and Jessica on business trips with her sometimes to give both the children and Kristina a vacation. Their mutual support network is exemplified by Kristina's loaning her brother her car after his was totaled in a recent accident. She described how he takes her car in the evening to get to work and when he finishes his nightshift at 5AM he picks her up at home, she then drops him off at his home, and picks up her sister.

Her sister drops Kristina off at her work and then takes Keona and Jessica to school. At the end of the day, her sister picks up the girls and baby-sits until it is time for her to pick up Kristina at work. Despite the seemingly smooth cooperative effort Kristina admits that they do best when not living under one roof and appreciates the balance of her family's support while also having her own space.

Kristina considers herself blessed with the support of many good people in addition to her family. While the girls' fathers provide some financial support, Kristina names a full network of friends, coworkers, and even ex-high school teachers who provide her with other kinds of help. Her supervisor at work is an important support because he is family oriented and understands that as a single parent "there are just days where I have to be there for those kids." Kristina also derives support from the members of her church family saying she "can always call someone up, you know just to talk to."

One other important person in her life is her male friend. It is important to her that any man in her life also be involved in her children's lives. Kristina and her friend are talking about marriage and she has been explaining to Keona that she does not just want a man in their lives to be a father to her children but to care for and love her and at the same time it will be good for the children too. Right now he is involved in their lives although he is also busy as a single parent himself. While Kristina is careful not to depend on him for things, she also greatly appreciates his help, even in simple things like going shopping with her and helping carry the grocery bags up to their fourth floor apartment. When asked what might be hard about no longer being a single mother, she noted that while the support will be appreciated, she is used to making all the final decisions and that it may be a hard transition to share decision making.

Characteristic of many of the women interviewed, religion is an important part of Kristina's life and of the lives of her children.

"The number one thing is to just to have a good relationship with God, cause that's the key to everything to me. I do a lot of praying. And I teach my kids to pray, to be thankful for everything that they have. Everything. Every--everything."

For Kristina, religion is a source of spiritual support. Through people in her church it also provides social and moral support and overall provides a guide for her everyday life:

I believe in the Bible and what it has done for me is..it's eliminated a lot of confusion and ..helps me to stay focused and I'm on a straight path because I'm not confused...It just eliminated so much of the other crap that, you know focus on this and it makes it easier in making my decisions in life.

Kristina described the biggest issue she faces as a single parent in her neighborhood as:

I don't want Keona to think that some of the things that she sees in the street is okay...And by me being a single mom I have to watch over everything she does and, if it's possible, to see and know everything that she's learned and picking up.

For Kristina, the most important things to teach her children are responsibility, independence and strength. She talks about teaching them right from wrong and instilling values and morals which will help guide her daughters through the risks in their lives. Kristina also feels that her children need to experience life to learn from it, and so does not try and shield them from the influences around them, but rather constantly uses what they see around them as a lesson:

Like I'm saying, you can't hide anything from them. She must see. And that way, um, she can form her opinion and what she thinks....I mean it's like she's going to grow up and there will be a time she's on her own and um, I want her to be familiar with the things that go around so that she can make the best decision for herself. For instance if I never let her see what's going on then how would she know what is right and what is wrong for her and why...I talk to her about everything. But you have to use appropriate words, you know. ...We'll be walking down the street and I see a group of teenagers... just carrying themselves in a way that I know they wouldn't act in front of their

mother, I'll point it out to her. And I'll say Keona, that you know... that isn't cute.

Compared to other participants and their families, Kristina, Keona and Jessica live in a safer neighborhood with a relatively low percentage of the population living below the poverty line and only 17 violent deaths per 1000 compared with 41 per 1000 in the most violent neighborhood¹⁵. Kristina reports that she doesn't worry about the violence in her neighborhood in particular, although there are shootings. Instead, she sees violence as being a problem everywhere. As she explains:

It's not scary...Because it's a way of life now. The violence is everywhere. You have to accept it... you just can't ball up under a desk and live like that for the rest of your life. You have to go on. And then like I say, pray.

Like many other women I interviewed, Kristina appreciates even the small successes in her life and is aware of the advantages she has compared to others around her. She also shares this perspective with her children:

I'm happy. Um, as long as I'm not aching inside. As long as my kids are being fed and we have a roof over our head, we have a bed to sleep in, um, I have a job to go to, I can provide for my kids, everything's okay. You're living. And see, I talk, and I say, let's look at our situation. Now let's look at someone else. There are people who are -- don't have mothers -- kids who don't have mothers. There are kids that are not being fed. Kids that are, you know, their parents, uh, they don't spend time with them. They don't take them out. They don't cook for them. They don't go over their homework. They don't do their hair in the morning. They don't, you know, take time to see what they're putting on and make sure they take a bath. Those things should mean a lot to you. You have a lot. Um. It's so much. So much for her to be thankful for. There's some families that don't have homes. Some families with their parents are on drugs.

While she acknowledges the role that the various supports play in her successes she thinks it is important to remember that there is always a way to get where you are trying to go. She sees other parents failing when "they settle for less...They take the easy way out instead of dealing with the struggle. That's what it is. You know. They

¹⁵ It should be noted that this rate compared to a rate of 3 per 1000 in a predominately white area of the city.

give up.” Kristina also recognized ways in which being a parent has helped her to grow:

I used to think, you know, saying no hurts people's feelings. Instead of me thinking about myself I'm always thinking about someone else. Forget that. No. No. No....There are just some things that I will not do and cannot do because of my children...if you care anything about your kids, then, if it's something that's going to affect your kids in a negative way, you don't do it. You don't tolerate it. You don't put up with it.

Teresa Brown

I met with Teresa Brown on one of the coldest days of this past winter. She arrived for our interview having traveled cross town by public transportation, after dropping off some job applications. Teresa was wearing walkman head phones, although she had neither batteries nor a tape in the walkman, because it was all she could find to keep her head and ears warm in the subfreezing temperatures. Teresa was probably the most destitute of the women I interviewed. That she looks well over her 33 years attests to her difficult life so far. But she was also most cognizant of the blessings she has in life compared to some other women and families she had seen.

I might sit and [think about] my problems and things, but I fail to realize that there was somebody that is doing worse than me....See my grandmother died when I was young, but she had always told us you not the only one doing bad, there always somebody out here that's doing worse than you.

It is to this very attitude that she attributes to her ability to make it as a single mother:

I feel that I done got farther than some because I have struggled and plus I have helped someone else that was doing worse than me even though I was doing bad, I seen myself doing good all at the same time.

Teresa's ability to help out others despite her own problems was one of the reasons Peter Stargel had recommended her. The list of risk factors that he saw her dealing with was long, including where she lived, a past history of substance abuse

and domestic violence, having two children in special education and a teen age son who now lived with his father after some brushes with juvenile court. Despite all of this, what he saw were happy, clean, attentive children and a dedicated, positive attitude in Teresa. In fact, she volunteered a portion of her time to Fresh Horizons and set an example for all, even the staff, in terms of energy, initiative and having a kind word for any child.

I only met with Teresa one time because her phone number was changed and unlisted by the time I tried to schedule a second interview, and although I sent out a letter, written in the simplest language I could, I knew from our initial meeting that she probably could not read well enough to respond to the letter. Teresa and her two daughters, Dawn, age 12 and Emily, age 10 live in the public housing complex up the street from King Elementary School. They live one block from the main drug corridor I drove through to get to the school. And it is down this corridor that the girls walked to and from school each day. Like Kristina, but unlike many other mothers, Teresa lets her children play outside. She does have rules for where the girls can play, feeling that down the block is much safer than up the block. Overall, she thinks that the neighborhood has actually improved since last summer when a lot of the young men who used to deal drugs on her block got arrested. She reports that it is a lot quieter now that the drug traffic has moved around the corner. Although the father of one of her daughters was robbed at knifepoint one night when he was coming to visit, Teresa herself has never had any problem. She attributes this fact to having lived in the neighborhood for 10 years and being known by everyone.

The dudes, they might be out there doing wrong, but they know me....I'm not saying nobody will bother me because you know you can't say that, but so far since ten years I ain't had no problem on the street or nothing. No problem.

There are still risks however, like when she threw the drug dealers out of her hallway:

I have as far as took a chance and some people was in my hall doing a little thing that they shouldn't of been doing and the kids was walking up the steps. I took it upon myself and said "no y'all getting out my hall doing that", you know. Not knowing what one of them might have or what they might have did to one of my kids coming up the steps or nothing....I said "don't come back in the hallway no more selling drugs in our hallway". But I took that chance. See they could have rebelled on me and did anything to me you know.

AB: How did you feel when you did that? What was that like?

I feeled good cause I got them out of my hall. I wasn't thinking at the time you see, I wasn't thinking they could have did something to me. See I was just saying respect the kids you know because they got to come up and down in these hallways you know.

The neighborhood also offers mixed results in terms of social support. In some ways neighbors can lean on one another:

It is, it's a struggle. It's a struggle where I you know had as far as asked the neighbor for a stick of butter you know and stuff like that. You know you don't want to do it but you know you have to sometime. And if you got very lovely neighbors and ya'll borrow from each other.

But it doesn't always work that one has "lovely neighbors":

Well, I mean we all in my building used to be real close but everybody fell apart. I don't know what caused that but its like for one thing the summer did it because where I was working I was being down the school at the program and it was like my neighbors was just like he say, she say. Until like now... I've been in the house like a whole week because we had this bad cold from the weather... and my girlfriend she just seen me... "Where you been, I ain't seen you", you know and I'm like "I been in the house" you know. "I ain't been hiding I been in the house." So we get along as far that much but I really now just don't be bothered with too many people in the building. I speak and just keep on going

Despite the tensions and the suspicions involved in many interactions, sometimes neighbors do come through for one another:

It's like cause my girlfriend was telling me today...[t]he girl I was telling you, I ain't seen in a couple [of days], she said, "I got some stuff for you, some towels, washcloths and sheets." I said, "For real and you know I been missing a lot of my washcloths. I need some", I told her just like that.

She said "Oh, I'll bring all that stuff to you tomorrow." Cause see she work at the hotel that I think I'm getting ready to start at and they give them a lot of all that stuff they just throw away.

Parenting for Teresa means spending time with her children, and she describes evenings as time spent together:

And as far as that then maybe about 7 or 8 we'll like sit down, all of us and I got a VCR we watch some movies or we would watch the TV. Its a lot of different shows that we sit down and watch together.

AB: Like what?

Like, um, I getting ready to see it wrong, New York City Under Siege. They like that and they, everybody like Bart Simpson. I don't know who don't hardly. We watches that together. We watch Martin together

Teresa is also aware that she is on the edge of a major change with her preadolescent daughters. Dawn, while almost 12 acts young for her age, as Teresa explains:

[S]he not into a sexual life. I mean she, she still growing up as young because she's not really onto to boys like this. She'll pick up her dollbaby and toys, you know. She's not...I'd rather have her playing as long as she can, you know. Not to grow up too fast

This immaturity does not mean that Dawn is safe, however:

I mean she got a little girlfriend that they be going to little GoGos... because our rental office be having them like every other weekend and she's old enough to go but I'm like if, you know, she go and by 10 o'clock I'm walking up there to meet her, you know, or something, because I feel that's my responsibility. I stay in there with her just so she can have a nice time.

Money is a major concern for Teresa and her family, often to the point of not having enough food:

I been through a lot of ups and downs now. Far as like income stops and then you have to think about where your next meal is going to come from... I mean I'm on public assistance but I don't get no child support from the fathers. I mean if you get \$420 a month, your rent \$230 something and then you got to pay electric and if you got a telephone what little bit you got left you got to buy some food until you get some stamps and then the kids one of them or two or both of them might need a pair of shoes or tennis shoes or something. So its like you got to budget this the right way in order to really have anything. Then

during the rest of the month you really ain't got nothing, you know. You just got to deal with what you got.

Teresa's male friend of three years provides spontaneous help to the family, but she reports that she would never ask him for help:

I don't ask him to pay none of my bills or nothing but he come through, I'll be shocked, and like if he come over there and if he want something to eat or something he'll go to the grocery store and bring bags of food in the house and say fix us something to eat, you know and I would probably do it because you know he buying food but other than that I don't ask him to... pay my bill or nothing like that, you know.

Like a number of other participants, Teresa is conscious of balancing her needs in terms of male companionship with her children's feeling on the subject, as well as balancing his role as her companion, but not the children's father:

My friend...that I see, they don't have a problem with him. They don't, you know, argue....But it's just that he hasn't took the role of their father. He just you know come to see me and if they ask him for a dollar or something you know or something, he will give it to them but it's not like he took the role to tell them; I still tell them what to do and stuff like that. So at first I thought it had a toll on them you know and I like talked to my two daughters you know and what not and they said "Momma that don't bother me" you know and I was asking them, you know, to see what was up because sometime he come over and stay the night, you know. Me and him watch TV late and stuff like this. But they don't have no problem. I guess you know it don't really bother them.

Teresa wasn't always totally dependent on welfare, but like many single mothers she had difficulty juggling her work schedule, public transportation and caring for her children:

I was working general maintenance for a long time and the job was nice. I liked the job. I liked everybody that worked there. Where they had me at was pretty far but I had my friend and he did agree that he would sit in the house with them cause I didn't want to leave them by thereselves. But you know, as far as they knew how to come in and eat the dinner and take their own baths. I had to be at work by 6 o'clock to 11 and it was like if I'm not on the last subway I wouldn't have made it home....The last bus runs at a certain time and if you stand out it ain't nobody on the street hardly up that way because all the restaurants and stuff close early up there, you know. But I hung in there for a while and then the kids had start getting sick. It seem like you get good with them, and the kids start getting sick, and you know. Then I had start having little problems you know with public assistance you know.

She explains further the double bind of welfare:

I had ran into this lady that was telling me about going back to this school but it's like, I guess in my case it didn't pay, I have to pay you know them to go to this child care class and you know I'm not in a situation right now to pay to go there then got to get the bus fare, come home, take care of the kids, pay my bills, you know. So see, and then public assistance would feel if you got money to take out like that to pay a grant certain amount you know you don't need this and that cuts back. See the faster you get up a step they will take you down a step see.

Although Teresa describes her mother as important in terms of material concerns, her mother is described as not emotionally supportive and Teresa did not name her as a support person in her life:

I called her one day and said Ma I didn't get my check, I tell you I don't have nothing to eat you know and she the type of mom, "if you got some rice, oatmeal you know, you got anything in the house you know you got something to eat." It's like I'm panicking because I'm like "I ain't got no food, I ain't got nothing to eat" but not thinking about putting together a little something with biscuits and some rice you know and she just called me up there and told me come up there and she took to some places that gave out food in [her neighborhood], you know and that made a meal you know for a couple of days. You see if it was just me I would have like, I was panicking.

I don't really have a conversation like this or any other conversation with my mother cause she can't stand to hear nobody complain... She know what she been through raising five kids alone so it was like, I guess she don't want to hear what I'm going through you know....The only thing I've ever, "Mom you got some money" or "Mom I don't have so and so can you get it?"

With relatively limited resources to cope with the stresses in her life, Teresa describes five means of coping that were named by many of the mothers with whom I talked: cigarettes, music, solitude, tears and religion:

I used to scream and holler. I mean a lot of times I mean I have sit and just listen to certain music and just relax and smoke a cigarette just so. A lot of time I just told the kids, go outside, leave me alone and I just sit and cut off all the lights and just sit. And you know tears come out and I be thinking about different things that, am I going to make it and you know and who can I get to help me, you know, and it's just things that be dawning on me and I be just crying. But other than that it works out like my mother said, I mean I had to learn. She said thank God for each day you get up in the morning. Cause I mean he ain't gotta even make you to wake up in the morning.

Despite the stresses and limitations in her life Teresa manages to hold her life together for her children, and to look out for others in her neighborhood. As mentioned above, this was one of the reasons that Peter Stargel gave for recommending that I speak with her. It was clear from a story she told me about taking in a young child in the neighborhood:

OK, I have, well she's not my friend or nothing, but her name is C and um, she's in a real bad drug habit. She shoot up and her kids, she got about 5 small kids and it's like her older daughter is 11 be with Dawn, they real close you know and it's like I used to see the kids come over to my house and it was like when I'm feeding Dawn and then you know you can tell when a child hungry cause its not that they will walk away. They just stand there and look at the other kids eating. So it was like I figured if they hadn't ate you know because Dawn be giving her some off of her plate you know. I said you ain't got to do that its some more in there. You want something to eat and she be liked scared to ask and that's when I first met the little girl.

And then she had like she bought her little sister over there about 4 years old one day and the little girl's hair was all over her head and her little clothes real filthy... So ...I did her little hair in plaits....Because her mother she got AIDS and um, she been going in and out of jail and it's like when she went to jail the last time the little girl, 4 years old, she said I want to go over Teresa's house. She wouldn't stay with nobody. The social worker brought her over my house. She said "um, do you mind, cause they was trying to split them up and put them in foster care." But they couldn't find...everything was booked up, but the mother had went to jail and left the kids, they was in the house for a whole week and nobody knew and the 11 year old was taking care of all the rest of them. So, I kept her for a couple of weeks and stuff and finally they let the mother out of jail to see if she could straighten up and take care of the kids.

This caring for those around her will be seen to be a theme in the lives of many of these women including Grace Roberts.

Grace Roberts

Grace Roberts, 46, is the mother of three children; Matt, 26, Thomas, 24 and Marie, 12. Grace has been a single mother at two different times in her life. She divorced her son's father when he got involved with some men in the neighborhood who Grace saw as influencing him away from being a responsible father and husband

and towards hanging out and drinking and setting a bad example for his sons. They had been together 13 years, since she was 17:

Okay when I separated from their father he was drinking, he had lost his job hanging with the neighbors downstairs and upstairs... [W]e had a good relationship. You know, he would take care of the kids. We'd cook, take them for rides at night, you know we'd play cards and then the guys next door, they come.... Then we'd get into it. I'm not trying to tell you what to do. You're your own man. I'm my own woman. I'm lettin' you know these people mean you no good because they're not helping home.... I said "Martin, this is not you." It got to the point he was drinking all the time, he lost his job. I said "I'm a tell you, you have two boys that you have to set example for. They don't need to see you drunk every day. This is not this I can't deal with this." He's not payin' the rent....I said no more. It got to the point I told him I can't deal with it. I can't live with this....So I moved out.

Then I felt so bad and my kids wouldn't speak to me for months. They say it was my fault.... So then I had a cousin talk to me. He said... "what's the use of going back? And if you're miserable they [the kids] still going to be miserable. It still not going to be anything." So I said, "you're right I'm not going to do that" and I made the right choice because as my kids got older...he'd call, "I'm comin' to get you [the kids]." He wouldn't show up....And then he's going to ask me [if I turned the kids against him.] I said "see, I didn't have to do this...you did it to yourself." They found out, you know, I never turned them against him or tell them to don't love their father or whatever. "You did it to yourself."

Grace separated from Marie's father for different reasons:

I left Marie's father...when she was 4...because he was completely different. He was abusive he wanted to hit and smack up. No, no I never had that and wasn't going through it. No that was a completely different story. But he did for the kids and he loved Matt and Thomas... [A]nd he's done more for Matt and Thomas than he's done for Marie and that's his own daughter you understand. You know. So they could go to him and ask him for anything and he would bring it.

Although she is a single parent Grace is not the sole adult in the home. She and Marie live in Grace's cousin's apartment in an arrangement which provides both support and stress:

But basically it's rough, you know, being the parent and like I said I have to wind up being the bad guy the majority of the time because my cousin is spoiling her, you understand. But I have to work and I have to have a baby-sitter... and in this day and age you have to leave your child with someone that you can trust and she's not charging me. And I know she's well taken care of so in that point of view I'm like, how do you say it, I'm in between a rock and hard place.....

We got into an argument, a real serious one one day and I told her I, I appreciate all you doing and this and that, but that's my child, what I tell her goes. So now she knows I'm not playing. And it's like that.

This issue of spoiling a child was a particular concern of many mothers and it is a major stress with her cousin, as Grace explains:

[L]ike I said she's very very close to my cousin because she spoils her rotten. She just gives her anything. And working is hard because I work in the day time and I cook at Tony's Pizza and the standing is constant and I try to let her have things, you know I try to get her things that she need not that she want.... You know, like I tell her "you're not getting everything and anything that you want" but I try to give her something when she does something good to let her know that I appreciate it and I know that she can do it.

It's like "mommy I want this" and it's supposed to fall off a tree and see this is where it comes into conflict with my cousin because... like I try to tell her if you're giving her everything she wants when you're not around and I can't give it to her you don't know what she'll go out to do to get this. You've got to let her know she's not going to get everything that she ask for.... You know I had to, I don't like being like that but you know it's bad and you got so many bad people out here enticing these kids, you know.

Parenting also entails pushing Marie not to repeat the mistakes Grace feels she made, this includes getting an education:

Then, I'm always fussing at her to do better, to do this to do that but like I told her Marie it's not that I'm fussing always harping on you I want you to have more. I want you to be better than what I am. I don't want you working in somebody's kitchen for the rest of your life. You have the potential to be something and if I have to stay on you that's what I do.... [B]ut I'm lettin' her know you're gonna make it one way or the other I don't care what I have to do you're going to make it you know and you're going to have and she has so I've done in my heart some things I've done some things I don't know if I've done right you know now I wish that I had finished school and I didn't do that but I wish I had done that....

I impress upon her I want her to be something. I want her to have something. Education is... you know, you have to impress more than anything now-a-days you have to keep this on. But like I told her now-a-days it's hard. You have to have all the schooling you can get. You know, I said once upon a time you could - you can't even get a job digging a ditch anymore without a high school diploma. You can't get in the army anymore without this.

Preparing Marie for the future also includes preparing her to interact with a world bigger than her neighborhood:

It's like a whole lot of these kids in the neighborhood they've never been out of the neighborhood, given a chance....You go to these kids in these middle class, upper middle class neighborhoods, in these white neighborhoods, these kids...have been taken out to restaurants, they know what fork to eat at whatever. They go to plays. Our kids wouldn't know what a play was. I've taken Marie to the museum. I try to take her places to learn, you know. Buying books, books open worlds for kids, you know. You learn something different every day when you read you know. You learn the meanings of different words when you read, you know.

And like I impress upon her, she has a little group of girl friends...and I guess we all went through that laughing and giggling and all that. I say Marie you're starting to become a young lady right now....it's time now Marie that you bring yourself across as a young lady. People already stereotype us. We're in a black community number one, you're a black young lady number two, I said you're overweight number three. I said now you have to learn how to project yourself as a young lady. You're intelligent yes but you cannot go out here to a job and "yeah man so this that" rap, "let's get down" and no baby you're not going to get a job like that. You have to come across as a very intelligent young lady because you're dealing with these three strikes as it is and, I said #4, things are getting really really bad. I said your verbal skills, ... you really need these and it's time that you start practicin' and you know you have to start her off now before things really get bad.

Grace also worries about Marie's safety because of their neighborhood, because Marie is a girl and because she looks older than her age. Like many mothers her response is to keep Marie in safe places off the streets:

I'm just over protective and as I say she's a girl and I want her to, you know, you have to watch them now a days because so many young kids now are doing things that when we were growing up that we never thought about. Drinking, smoking, having sex, no that you know, that never crossed our mind....

OK, now as far as the neighborhood, you can't escape crime. It's everywhere. Its just more prevalent in this neighborhood. But basically she's home or across the street at her brother's um, girlfriend's, at their mother's house or she's here...

You, in this particular neighborhood you have so many drug dealers....You have so many young guys standing on the corners. Like it's on the corner there is...one crack house. Around here that you know you just got to worry.

Not only that I worry because by her being big for her age. She's only 11... but she look like she's 14 or 15. I worry about young guys approaching her or saying something to her. You understand what I'm saying? I worry about her getting hooked up with the wrong people, you know. So that mainly. And you've got shootings all the time. Shootings. Well she's not out after night anyway unless she's going somewhere or she's in car or we're going across the street to her other, her uh, brother's girlfriend's mother's house but that's as far as she goes. But you know it's that.

And then she tends to, she has a lot of "mommy can I spend the night at this ones house" OK I'll say no. I mean, I don't know, maybe it's just me. If I don't know anything really about you or your, no I can't deal with that. I don't know who is running in and out of these peoples homes. "You don't let me do this". I'm sorry the answer is no and I'm adamant about that. No. So, you know, those are concerns I'm worrying about.

It is also clear that for Grace being the parent of young adult males is no less stressful:

I'm constantly with problems by like I said... having two young sons at that age and every day you're picking up the paper where someone got killed and one got shot because this one said this or they go out there and deal with drugs. At night if they not home, well, neither one lives with me but if they are not home or I don't know where they are I worry. You know are they all right, you know. It is a constant struggle and the, the youngest one he does shows and I you know "call me when you get in I don't care if it 3 or 4 to let me know that you got home". People just do some st., you know. And then the oldest one, you know it just worries you. It's a constant struggle.

While we hear a lot of the special stresses for young mothers, the worries Grace has regarding her children's future are also affected by being an older mother:

It's different, as I'm getting older it's difference because now I'm constantly worried. I ask the good Lord every night to let me live until I see her at least graduate from high school. You know and I worry about if something happens to me you know who should I leave her with or you know, what's going to become, I worry....I've always said nobody is going to take care of your kid like you do. They might love them but still there is no one who's going to take care of your child like you. It's just as you get older it's a lot of things you just start to think about. You sit down and really realize it, you know. When you are in your 20s and your 30s you like you know I'm immortal you know, you live forever. But after you pass that 40 mark it starts to really sink in when you're almost 50 it starts to sink in, you know and I'll be 47 in two months and it's like you know, 50 is coming up and you are not here forever. It's a lot. It's a lot.

Money is also another stress and especially when it comes to having enough money to cover medical expenses:

Being able to be able to make enough money whereis, well I've always liked to work so anybody that knows me will tell you I will work. Just say well, maybe this week I need a week off and I don't have to worry about not getting my pay to pay the bills and I can just sit here and say I need this day off and I'm not going to work, I'm going to sit home. Being able to say well my child's all right, you know, when I can't even afford health and my family doesn't have health plans and she is always hurting herself, always breaking

something or spraining something or falling at school and uh, with no insurance it's hard.

AB: ...[W]hat do you do when that happens?

I just take her and then I have to pay the bills and if it get so many of them they're garnishing my check and like it's hard, it's really hard and you can't afford it. I don't want welfare. I'd rather work. I can't sit home and wait every week for a check. But I went and applied for a Medicaid card for her and they told me I made \$1.38 too much. And like I told them I'm not asking for food stamps, I not asking for a check. I just need a Medicaid card. I work. I'm not asking for anything but I mean hey give me a break, you know. But it doesn't work like that. It's really rough. And now-a-days to make it you need more than one person in the household. So, basically I'm making it now because me and my cousin, I stay with her.

When I met with Grace for our second interview she had given notice to her job, which she had had for eighteen years on and off. She had to give it up because they were garnishing almost all of her check to pay the medical bills, and she couldn't afford to work and receive no pay. The last time I spoke with her, she still had not found another job.

When it comes to support, although Grace has disagreements with her cousin, she is a necessary help with Marie and also in sharing living expenses. Grace's sons also help with Marie when needed. As one of the most important people in her life, Grace names her friend Beverly who is her son's girlfriend's mother and lives across the street. Beverly is available for Grace and Grace returns the favor for Beverly:

[I]t's like she's always been there for my son, for me, for all of us. And its like whatever I need of her if she can do it she'll do it...she's there for whatever I need and I'm there for her. And I can talk to her and I'll let it out and then she'll talk to me. Like the other day she was having a crisis and I knew something was wrong, I said "Uh, uh, I have to come over there because you don't sound right." We're there for each other.

Having this type of dependable, reciprocal relationship with a friend was actually spoken about relatively rarely by other mothers. Beverly is also important to Grace for having re-introduced Grace to religion as a source of support:

[W]e were born and raised Catholic and like the girlfriend I said I'm close to she has a little church you know...that preach and sing every Sunday in her house across the street and you're sitting down and you know how you've read the Bible or whatever and you sit down and you read and ...since I've known her now I'm reading it more with an understanding more things. I'm learning, getting into it. I'm thinking of things in another way. The way I'm analyzing stuff and it's sinking in more and I'm like dag all this time it was right there I never really paid attention to it or whatever, you know. You went to mass you came home that was it, you know what I'm saying?

...[A]nd then their Pastor, his name is Bishop Jones and he breaks it down to you and, uh, like when you have a problem and... you can call anytime day or night whatever. He'll talk to you and when you sit and think about it and he's always right (laughs). I have to get Marie involved more. That's one thing I regret I didn't have my kids involved in Church as much you know... [B]ut like...I've come to learn in my life I tell Marie, I'll tell anybody, I don't care how old you live to be you can learn something new every day, you can learn something everyday and you do, you really do, you really really do

Other than religion and her friend Beverly, like a number of the women I spoke with Grace copes with the pressure in her life on her own and prefers to spend time alone:

[I]t's like now coping with this, as I'm getting [older], my nerves are shot sometimes and I don't drink and I don't smoke so it's really, you know, I get very stressed out sometimes.

AB: What do you do?

I'll read. I'll go sit to myself and read...When I'm really really tight I'll go to Bingo. I go to Bingo maybe once a week or every other week I might go twice. That releases me. Because I don't go out. She asked me the other day she say "mom, why don't you go out sometimes?" I say "Marie there's nothing out there. Go out for what? There is nothing I want to do."..But, I've never been one to really like, when I was younger I never really liked to go out. When the boys were young, like if my family had something whatever if they weren't invited I didn't want to go either. So it was a cardinal rule to invite me, you had to bring my kids. Because I never liked to leave them with anybody unless it was an emergency. So it's, it's I've never liked it where its a lot of crowds people and crowds and my girlfriends they was all "I'm not going to ask you to go anywhere because you'll say you going and you won't". It's just not me. I just, I just don't like it. I never have, you know. So I guess they say you're just a stick in the mud so a whole lot of them stopped calling because they know better than to call, I wasn't going. It's just I don't like to, you know?

Another aspect of parenting which Grace shares with many other participants is putting her children first, as seen above in not wanting to leave them alone, but also in how she chooses to spend her money and energy. This attention to one's children does not always come without reaction from other adults in the neighborhood:

I had an old man tell me one time. He said "you know what, you're gonna have a lot of problems in life. People gonna try to turn you against your kids or your kids against you because you care about your kids."...[A]nd as my kids have come up and whatever, it's all "oh she think her kids are this or she think"... It's not that. I worked every day to keep clean clothes on my kids. My money went on my kids. I'm not a materialistic person. I don't care how I look. As long as I'm clean and I impress upon them, this name brand thing - no. Long as you are clean and your clothes are ironed and looking good. I kept my kids clothes, my kids clean before anybody. I'm not out there to impress and I let them know. I don't, I don't impress anybody and I let them know that you don't have to impress anybody but yourselves. That's all you have to impress is yourself. You're not out here to please anybody but yourself and it, I try to impress this upon them. It's only one person that you have to answer to and that's the Lord when you die and go away from here, you know. I don't have to I don't care how I look. I'm not out here trying to make Annie or Joe or whoever think, well see, I don't care. I worry about me and how I feel about myself. And it's always been like that and I try to teach them that too.

Despite Grace's preference for keeping to herself and avoiding the neighborhood games, she does her part for the school, for the neighborhood children and for her community:

You know, we don't come out to vote for who we're supposed to. Like we don't have a active participation. We'll sit and we'll wait and this one is elected to this post or this one. It doesn't make sense but did you get up and go out there to make an effort to change anything. But you can sit back on the bench and bitch about it, you know. Your voice has to be heard....

AB: Can you give me an example of what you do to do that?

... I'm on the restructuring team here for things to get for school. Like when we first started here, it's been two years now, last year and the year before last we wanted to get people involved in the community so one day I walked through the neighborhood to get businesses to adopt the school and I got \$375.00 from the different things and then I did it again. Then I got the guy around the barber shop... to, if the kids, the boys got so many good grades, all "Bs" or all "As" on their report card they would get a free hair cut....

So now I have to get a letter and Wednesday I'm going out to different book stores to see if they have any books for us because the books we have here in the school they are so outdated for our kids. We need books that the kids can learn and read and really get into. You know, so it's things it's just a lot so you try to get a lot done. I don't know.

... But I've always been, from day one, I've always been involved in school with her. I've always been here. They know me when they see me coming. They know me. When my boys were coming up they wanted me to be a volunteer, one of the parents where you got paid. and I told them no because I didn't want to have to be there if, when I didn't want to come. But I might as

well because I was there everyday. I was working at night, there's a difference because I always worked at night with them. But, with her I came on day shift by her being a girl.

AB: How come?

By, it was like I wanted to be there in the evenings with her. It was different. With the boys their father was there then. You know, so they were all right. So, I was there everyday with them.

This commitment despite the odds seem to relate to that sense of hope that Peter Stargel mentioned in making his recommendations. But more than a passive hope, Grace uses a sense of how things could and should be to motivate action:

You know, you have so many things coming to you at one time... when you're a single parent tryin' to do this and you're tryin' to do that and sometimes all you have is hope. And then you have to realize it's not hope. You gotta pray to God. You know, the Lord is the one who's gonna help you. But..and then a whole lot of people they just give up. And you sit there and what am I gonna do? You're making yourself sick, you're givin' up. It's nothing gonna happen if you're not gonna get up. It's not going to walk to you. I'm going to have to go out and look for it, it's not going to come to me, you know, it's two ways to look at that... Talking is not going to get anything you've got to do something about it. That's it you have to do something about it you know. It's been many a times I didn't know which way to turn but, hey, you know if I was maybe I would have committed suicide who knows but you have to keep on. You know? It's not going to get better you just sitting there saying what am I going to do, just get deeper and deeper in depression and it's not going to work you're giving up on yourself. Nothing's going to be handed to you. You have to get out and make it happen. You know you'll get a couple of doors. I know I'm not gonna get it right then and there, but I know I'm gonna get something, cause if I sit here now I'm not going to get it. What am I going to do you know. You know. ... [Y]ou just sit there and say well, we not going to do anything. You get it so deep into your head and you feel it so deep and then you'll say what's the use? And that's how that works. It's just a cycle. It's just a cycle, you know. But you can't just let yourself get down into that rut. What's the use, no you can't give up because I went out today and I didn't get it because I went out a week and I didn't it doesn't work like that. If you give up then that's it there's nothing to look forward to. It's nothin' else.

CHAPTER 5 RESILIENCE OR MAKING IT: AGAINST WHAT

Making It: 'The Word'

I originally used the term “making it” as a colloquialism for resilience. The term resilience seemed too academic to be meaningful to the women I was planning to interview. For that reason, with the input of others, the term “making it” was chosen to communicate the outcomes represented by resilience; achieving or approaching success out of unlikely or risky circumstances. To ascertain that “making it” was an appropriate term for the study sample, I asked the focus group about the meaning of the term “making it.” For them “making it” had to do with moving forward:

Yeah, “making it”, the word, is good. We not just stuck on just doing what we got to do to get by. We here to do more, you know, a little more than whatever it takes...

For the women in the focus group, making it included being independent, being responsible and becoming a better person: “[w]hether educating yourself, whether you’re being a better parent, whether you being a ...member of society and all these things in conjunction will tell me that I am making it.” The success came in both attaining future goals and in being able to work towards them. Depending on one’s starting place, the forward movement of making it was different for each person.

Donna, a member of the focus group described “making it” as:

Two days ago I had sheets that didn’t fit the bed...and...an iron with black tape that shocks you every time you turn it on...You want to take you money and buy drugs instead of going to get the real things that you need. So I was at K-Mart, bought \$24 in sheets...a \$12 iron. I even bought bedroom shoes; I don’t have to walk in two different color socks- and that’s important. I’m even saving the receipts. But you can see that you went from here to here. And that’s a big difference. That’s what I call ‘makin’ it.’ I don’t have to turn the iron on and all the lights go off.

For Tracy, the staff participant, making it was striving beyond the basics:

Well you want to have a viable life...I know I want to be at the point where I am comfortable and I have put away a little bit in the pension and the girls got a little bit going on in terms of their college education so I want to move beyond this struggling bit.

Nicole, another focus group participant, also described “making it” as a process that begins where one is:

So I just call “making it” living one day at a time, knowing that, you know, your bills are paid, your kids doing alright, you know, you ain’t got to be all over the top, you know try to get a Mercedes... I do one day at a time and eventually I’m going to get up there.

The focus group confirmed that as a replacement for resilience, “making it” was a term that had salience and utility for the interviews which were to follow. What was not expected was that the descriptions of “making it” which came from the individual interviews also fit a definition of the verb ‘to make’: “to create by putting together component parts” (Berube et al., 1982.) Making it, both the process and the attainment of the goal occur when women are able to put together (make) and utilize resources in a variety of dimensions in their lives. The concept of resilience as a process was first suggested by Rutter (1987) who views successful adaptation in children as the result of a protective process. The dimensions which the women in this study utilize are no different than those in many lives: self attributes, role as a parent, family, friends, men as significant others, money, religion, neighborhood. And as for many people, there are both sources of stress and sources of support in each of these domains. The women I interviewed worked to compensate stresses in one dimension with supports from other domains. There seems to be two keys to “making it”: 1) the ability to find a point beyond where one is currently and reach for it, and 2) the ability to find satisfaction in where one currently is so that one has the confidence to strive for more. This striving is called different things by different women, but Peter Stargel called it “hope”. What follows in this chapter is a look at

the stresses against which the women I interviewed are "making it" and how they do so. The following chapter identifies the supports with which these women "make it."

Making It: Against What

It does not make sense to talk about how someone is resilient or making it without first understanding the challenges confronting them. These challenges make up the stressful elements in life which threaten their survival, mental health, goal attainment, and happiness. Thus before exploring "making it" I needed to understand against what issues participants strove to make it. The interviews often began with the question "What are some of the things you need to deal with as you raise a daughter in this neighborhood?" Participants' responses to this open ended question generally fit into six of eight dimensions: neighborhood, parenting, family, friends, men as significant others, and money. Of the remaining two, religion was not described as negative, and self attributes were not described by themselves as a negative, but more likely as a reaction to another dimension (e.g. "I get depressed over money and that makes it hard", rather than "I get depressed alot and have to deal with that.") It is not surprising that the same dimensions which are described as means of making it can also be stresses against which one struggles to make it. What may be surprising is the vast range of thoughts and feelings which are expressed. While some responses are specific to the neighborhood, to being a single mother, to being relatively poor, or to the individuals themselves, other responses seem no different from those that could be expected of other woman, other mothers, other city residents. In addition while some themes and stresses are common among participants, others are unique to individuals. Overall I believe, the feelings and concerns expressed are broader and more varied than is the current image of inner city, African-American, single mothers.

Neighborhood

As was hypothesized when this study was purposely set in risky neighborhoods, the women whom I interviewed reported that living in their neighborhoods was a challenge against making it. However, not everything said about their neighborhoods was negative. As Teresa described her own experience in the last chapter, many of the women had never had a problem in their neighborhood. Agreeing with Teresa, Grace attributed this to knowing people, explaining that people would say: "Man, there go Matthew's mother. Y'all leave them alone. Don't bother that lady." While noting that it was the need for affordable housing that initially led her to her neighborhood three blocks from Carver Elementary, Catherine Clark commented: "...this crime that's out here...it doesn't matter what neighborhood you live in.." However when she tells people where she does live, she continues:

...people go "aah"...and then you know, you find yourself being really defensive...because, um...like I say it, it really is a blessing, um, as far as my block is concerned, to even the connecting block. Um, it's OK. It's fine.

The fact that her block is "fine" does not keep her from being concerned about all that surrounds her, as she explains:

Let the drugs come around and let the shooting start. Let me hear one person getting shot. I will be giving up a thirty day notice. And I have already told my mother, you know, "if it get crazy Mom, I'm coming back home"... So if it means I have to ... give up my privacy, you know, my own place and go back home with my mother until we find somewhere, so be it."

Diane Martin lives one block from the major drug corridor that runs through the public housing complex near King Elementary school. She described how she and her three children listened to an hour of various caliber guns firing on New Years Eve. She explained to her scared children: "Well baby, now you know you live in the projects." Despite this apparently dangerous location, she also differentiates the neighborhood at large from the area she considers home, her court:

OK, my court is really quiet because I live there with one of the ladies that's...in the resident counsel...its a lot of older people in my court...not... a lot of young people just doing nothing and I'm satisfied with it. It's a nice little area and I'm not having any problems, but getting to me is a problem because you gotta come through all this to get to me. But I understand that it's like that. You know, sometimes you have to look for something positive in the negative. That's what I tell my children.

Despite reportedly being able to separate themselves and their families from some dangers in the neighborhood, these women still worry, particularly about their children. Threats include things that can happen to their children as bystanders and the opportunity to and peer pressure for their children to actively participate in risky behaviors. Drive-by shootings, gang members in speeding cars, drug dealers who take quick offense and respond violently, armed robbers, child molesters and kidnappers are examples of the first risk category. Joining a gang, getting involved in violent crime, dealing drugs, using drugs, underage drinking, smoking, hanging out, skipping and dropping out of school, and teenage pregnancy exemplify the second category.

Sonya Thomas, a 33 year old divorced mother of one daughter, returned to the neighborhood she grew up in to care for her critically ill mother. She works full time in an office 45 minutes from her mother's home and relies on her mother and unemployed sister for childcare. It is probably not a coincidence that Sonya is one of the few women who has lived with her daughter in safer neighborhoods outside of the city and is more vocal than most participants about the dangers of her neighborhood near Carver Elementary. Not only does she worry about the physical danger to her daughter but also about the risks to her daughter's sense of what life has to offer and what one has to work towards:

I'm always scared. Um, if I could pick her up and take her home or just take her to school, um I would feel a little more safer. But, like I said, being outside playing and if these crazies are driving by and all of a sudden they see somebody they don't like and they want to shoot, what if that person

ducks and a child gets hit? "Oops, I'm sorry." No they don't say that. They keep on going...

...I would like for her to be brought up in a more mixed community to see how a lot of different people live...she sees a lot of negative things. And I don't want her to feel that everything in the Black community is negative. I don't want her to think that's the way it is all the time. And basically I don't want her to feel...that she should have to live that way.

While there are deeper philosophical issues involved with balancing buying children what they need versus what they want which are discussed below, another consequence of living in some neighborhood is how it limits what one buys for children. Candy Johnson, the mother a 3 year old son and three daughters, 9, 11 and 12 years old, explains that she cannot give her children all she had as a child, not only because of money constraints but because of fear:

I mean, how many times have you heard on -- on the TV and -- or -- or the radio in the last ten years where there's a child been shot or beat because of a jacket or a bicycle, or shoes or something.

AB: So you mean it's not safe for them to have everything they want?

I don't think so. Well, the things that I would like them to have. Cause it's -- it's, you know, it's certain things that I don't buy them. Like the girls are, you know -- even though a lot of girls wear those earrings with the name in 'em. I would like them and they want some, but I won't buy 'em cause of where we live, you know. People are crazy.

AB: Um. And so [if] they get them -- someone will try to take them from them?

That's what I think. Even though it may not happen. I mean, the little girl across the street has them, and nobody's tried to bother her, but, I don't know. I don't -- I don't want to do it and then, it'll -- you know, it'll happen.So I just -- I don't do certain things.

For Sonya, the neighborhood constrains her daughter's activities for example:

She wanted to continue the after-school program they had here...[but] it ended at like six in the evening. At that time it was dark. And I'm like "no way." I'm not going to have anybody come out of their house just to walk up to the school and pick you up with all these nuts out here.

Some mothers protect their children by keeping them in the house (as Grace explained in the previous chapter), by limiting where they can go in the neighborhood

(as Teresa described above), or by watching them when they are outside, as Catherine explains:

...when she's outside playing, I'm sitting in the living room and I have a window, I look right out my window and be looking at TV--back and forth at the TV and her. And you know...it's um, sad when you have to live that way to where you can't let your child go out...without you having to worry.

While these neighborhoods certainly are not the only ones where there are issues particular to protecting young girls, concerns for their daughter's safety as females are primary in the minds of many mothers. This is especially true of those, like Grace, whose daughters are physically mature for their ages. As Diane explains it:

But...you see how big Kenya is. Okay, physically she's built. And she's, her body is more mature than her mind. And I don't wanna focus on the body so much. I wanna focus on the mind. So I felt like... she needs conservative-type [clothing]...where I'll be happy with it where my daughter doesn't look like a slut.

When she walks outside, and she'll get respect. They won't be like, "hey girl", they won't be on her behind so much. They'll be like, well, you know, I gotta talk to this girl first. See where she's coming from. Cause... what you wear reflects how a person approaches you in our community. Okay?

Yolanda Williams has related concerns for Garnete, her 11 year old daughter:

Okay. She's a big girl for her age, and I try to tell her about people touching her and men thinking that she's older than she is. You know. And getting into situations you can't get out of. Um, she -- she's more in the neighborhood than I am. And I have to try to tell her, you know, be close to the house. Let us know where you are. And you can't go in Mia's house cause her mother has, you know, boys. And boys, you know, touch girls. I have to tell her that. You know, what you gonna do if you get stuck up in there and you can't get out. So, certain places she understands she can't go, after I explained it to her.

It should be noted that boys and young men are not necessarily safer than girls and young women. In the last chapter Grace described her concern for the safety of her grown sons. As another example, Yolanda's 19 year old, eldest son has been robbed at gun point. Yolanda's 16 year old son is presented with an additional risk of

being a young Black man in his neighborhood; Carlton is often stopped and searched by the police. Yolanda is torn between two ways of thinking about this:

Sometimes I don't mind it. But then sometimes you feel like, you know, your privacy is being infringed on, but what if they stop my son and then next to him they stop a guy with a gun. Then that's good because he could have been tryin' to rob my son...

Protecting children from the bad influences in a neighborhood who might entice them to put themselves at risk is as important as protecting them from things that can happen to them as bystanders. To the mothers I spoke with, seeing what other children in the neighborhood are doing is a constant reminder to be concerned. They do not dismiss what they see as only a problem for other mothers. They see it as a reason to fear their own abilities to control their children's behaviors and to counteract the images and examples in the neighborhood. Grace is not unlike other participants in the fact that at the same time she works to protect her daughter from neighborhood violence, she herself threatens violence in order to keep her daughter from acting like other kids in the neighborhood:

[Y]ou got so many bad people out here enticing these kids, you know. I see so many young girls out here when I'm going to work in the morning. They are drinking beer, they are smoking and I mean they are 12 and 14. They're having babies....I don't want this for her. Like I told her, you know, I'll never, I'll beat you to death first, I'm not going to have you like this, you know. It's not like that. But it's a constant struggle. It really is.

Diane worries about similar influences for her younger son, threatens the same response, and talks about the difference between raising boys and girls in her community:

[M]y baby son, now ... he knows everything that's going on out there in the streets. And he was getting very disrespectful. And I had said a statement to him.... Before I see my son standing on that corner smoking blunts, drinking forties¹⁶ and selling crack, I'll take his life....

I had to do it like that because he's a Black male...in our community. And, if you look at the news, Black men are a commodity. They're either dying

¹⁶ Blunts and forties refer to marijuana cigarettes and malt liquor.

or they're incarcerated....But I was letting him know, don't push me to that point. I will kill you. Be waiting on Five-O¹⁷ to come. Get locked up and take the death penalty before I see you standing on that corner being another Black statistic.

And I told him that. You're not -- I'm not gonna lose you to the street. You're gonna stay in school. You're gonna get some knowledge. If your friends call you nerd, fuck your friends. A Black man in this society needs some knowledge. First of all, you're Black. Then you're male.

AB: Are your fears really different for your sons than your daughters?

Yes. It's a whole lot different for Black -- Black men than Black women. We got our own thing to struggle with. But you know, you got the stereotypes because you're male. And if you don't have any book smarts to go with the street smarts, it doesn't do you any good. You see what I'm saying?

One last central issue that the participants make it against in their neighborhoods is the interpersonal relationships among neighbors. While some of these relationships are supportive, and will be discussed in the next chapter, the participants spoke of the need to carefully navigate neighbors in order to avoid at minimum disappointments and at most outright conflicts. A number of women commented on the fact that it used to be that people in the neighborhood would not only watch out for one another's children but also for other adults. Candy explains:

Back then...when your kids went outside the whole block watched each others kids. Know what I mean? And if one parent got on you, then you go home and got your tail beat too. But now, nobody -- it's like nobody cares. Nobody looks out for each other like they did back then.

Nobody wants to get involved. Know what I mean? You can go outside and you can see a woman getting beat, and nobody will get involved. You know, someone might go in the house and call the police....Years ago, you know, somebody would say, "Man, why are you beating on that lady?" Or, you know, "Why are you doing that?" And then they would try to stop it, but not now.

AB: How come?

People don't care....People shoot you these days, step on their feet.people just mind their business.

Now, however, watching out for someone else's child is dangerous and many of these women live in isolation from their neighbors, as Catherine explains:

¹⁷ Five-O refers to the police.

I don't associate with the adults in my neighborhood. I really don't cause they have a whole different attitude as far as raising their children are concerned....We all supposed to look out for one another children out there...But it's so now to where if you go out and correct someone else's child today, you know, you mind your business and then you have two grown adults out there fighting over some children...

However, when it comes to protecting their own children, many of these mothers have had to confront other children and adults, just as Teresa did with the people dealing drugs in her hall. But as she talks about her role on resident council, Diane describes there is a fine line that one has to walk:

If it's important to the upkeep of my home I think that's important. Okay, now, they say that they want you, like, if you see drug activity, things like that going on, they want you to report that....But just like I tell them, I'm not gonna come and call no 911 and 411 if I see somebody selling some drugs out there. That's not my business. As long as they're not in front of my door disrespecting my kids, I can't -- save the world. Okay? There's nothing I can do about that. That's that person's life. If they want to destroy it, let them destroy it. As long as they don't come into my little corner of the world and try to upset it. See, it's a certain way that you have to -- you gotta live with these people....

Okay, now, if I see, like they say well if you see, um, abandoned units in your court. Okay, I'll call in that. Abandoned units, if I see that, um, people are starting to go in make it a crack house, I'll call about that. Eyesores, things like that, you know, that makes the little area look bad. Now things like -- I'll call about things like that. But drug activity, people selling drugs and stuff like that, I'm not going to call about that. Because that's only gonna bring problems to my little corner of the world...So that's -- you know, that's how I try to stay, you know, those boundaries.....

I saw a lot of things that was going on in our neighborhoods that I want to clear up, but you just can't go out and be one person trying to clear up something because you gonna hear about that on the 10 o'clock news that one family is going to be dead. So you have to walk carefully with what you doing. Because everybody is not trying to do that and it's a lot of dealers out there and its a lot of users out there who going to protect the dealers. So it's like a tangled web you know, it's all mixed up.

The negative influences in the neighborhood can affect adults as well as children and some of the participants talked about their own need to remember that there is more in the world than they see outside their doors. As Sonya says: "...if I looked at what was around me and tried to live from that, uh-uh. I'd be in a world of trouble." Carolyn Small, who is a full-time city government employee who works

downtown and has very little contact with her neighbors explains: "clearly this area is ghetto but my thing is you can be in the ghetto but the ghetto ain't got to be in you. So just reflect sometimes."

It is difficult to completely distinguish the stress of living in these neighborhoods from the demands of parenting in the African American community and in society in general. Additional issues related to neighborhood are included in the discussion of parenting which follows below.

Parenting

Generally, the women I interviewed talked about parenting as a very positive and important role in their lives. They did not talk about the stress involved as often as I might have guessed. When one looks at all that they are juggling, and the pressure to keep their kids on a positive path and provide for them despite the odds, it is hard to imagine that parenting is not sometimes a stressful activity. This is not to say that the discussions about parenting were all positive. However, in general the women I talked with were very positive and upbeat about their role as mothers. As will be discussed in the next chapter, I think one of the reasons the participants did not talk more about the difficulties involved in parenting is because they are successful at it.

It is thus important to keep in mind that the descriptions of parenting which follow in this section should not all be viewed as being stressful parts of these women's lives. There may be instances in which the outside reader questions the reported lack of distress. There are other cases where the participants themselves do label certain aspects of mothering as stressful.

The Basics

For all of these women, parenting involved at the very least providing a roof, food and clothing. For some mothers, (e.g. Teresa) even these basics are a struggle. Other mothers too have struggled; Diane, Tina, and Yolanda, have all been homeless in the past. Diane and Tina have lived in shelters with their children. Yolanda was able to provide shelter for all members of her family only by having some stay with friends and other stay with family. The monetary challenges faced by these women are discussed in the next section. Beyond meeting basic needs and protecting their children (as was discussed above), each of the mothers interviewed described the need to teach their children the behaviors, values and morals that they need to survive.

Four Tenets

For each of the mothers I interviewed responsible parenting, past the basics, could be summarized with four tenets: putting their children first, being involved in their children's activities, spending time with them and talking with them. As Carolyn put it: "[b]e about your children, don't be about your man first and your children second...Be about you, be about your children. Be about your children first." Putting children first often meant sacrificing a parent's needs and wants. Grace and Candy both talked about this in terms of clothing. As Candy explains:

Well being a mother takes a lot of sacrifices. Because it's been times when I wasn't able to buy myself anything. I mean not shoes, coats, nothing. Because the kids were always needin' something and boy that was hard back then. Which wasn't that long ago....I just don't feel right if the kids need something or there's something I think they should have because of the weather or you know school or whatever, I'll, I'll spend the money on them first before I spend it on me and then I'll look back and say well I don't have anything...but...at least I know that the bills are taken care of, the kids are fine and yea I can go out and have a nice time I just don't have anything to wear (laugh). But...I always, I said, you know, even if I don't look like nothing, my

kids gonna look like a million bucks. So, you know...I try to, well I do, I do a lot for the kids, you know....

So, I don't know, I just want them to be comfortable and you know cause I know kids that do bad in school not because they don't understand or because they not learning but because they being teased about what they have on or the shoes aren't right, but when you see the mother, she's dressed to death....I don't want people to look at my children and say, you know, because when it comes to the kids, whatever your child is doing or wearing or saying it reflects on the mother. You know the first thing they say like if something happens to a kid on the news...is where was the mother. So I don't want people to look at me or look at the kids and say "well you know your mother's not doing anything for y'all." I mean I just want them to be comfortable.

Grace, talking about how it was with her sons, now in their mid-twenties, says simply:

I didn't care what I looked like or what I had long as my children were clean. It doesn't take anything to get in there. I washed on a scrub board on my hands. My children were clean every day and matched. If I chose to take my money to buy my kids clothes so they could look neat, that's what I chose to do.

Being involved in children's activities means attending PTA meetings and school performances but also doing enjoyable activities together. PTA and school involvement for many of these women is a way of both supporting their children and keeping track of what is happening to their children at school. Another advantage of school involvement, as Yolanda explains is: "...I think sometimes the teachers care about your kids when they see you...not just at the PTA meetings." When I asked Candy why she was involved in her children's elementary school even though she had little faith that her voice would count in other parts of society, such as voting, she answered:

...just to see what's going on and see what I can maybe do to make a difference...Just to keep my face known down there so they know not to, not to mess with my kids...I have three kids down there...To me the kids get lost. At some point they get lost, cause, I mean you as a parent aren't there to see what's going on for your child....I just do what I have to do for mines.

Catherine also expressed that she is active with school in the hopes that then her daughter will want to do more. Involvement in her daughter, Marie's, school reflects

both Grace's desire to show she cares and her wish to do for her children what wasn't done for her as a child:

I feel better as a parent that I'm participatin' because I see so many kids who come in there, their parents don't care one way or the other what's going on with them in school what's happening. They don't show up for any of the meetings. They don't do anything they, you know. They don't care you know. And it's bad enough when I was comin' up I felt neglected because I didn't have my mother and father you understand. Somebody has to take a stand sometime and care.

Grace is active and involved in spite of being a rather shy and reticent person:

It's for the kids you know, for the chi...anything that has to do with this school I'm involved I'm involved in for them yes, but other than that, no, I just, just don't, I just stay to myself. I don't know why. I've always been like this. I don't know why.

Being involved in their children's organized activities as a way of keeping an eye on what their children are doing and supporting and encouraging their positive activities is but one way of spending time with their children. Other ways of spending time together are also important in building relationships. Sonya expressed:

...you have to be active in a lot of the child activities. You know you have to sometime come off of that adult pedestal...I mean...you're a parent twenty-four seven regardless, but in order to have that real relationship with your child you also have to know how to be a...kid.

As examples of this, Teresa watches TV and videos with her daughters, Grace and Carolyn take their daughters to museums, movies and restaurants, and Kristina plays with her daughters at home and takes them to the airport to watch the planes take off and land. Yolanda goes bowling and to parks with her children, Catherine plays educational and board games with her daughter and often loses to her, and Sonya also talked about playing make believe games at home with her daughter and daughter's friends. Each of these women hope that taking time now will pay off in stronger relationships later when the children are older and potentially more resistant to their guidance and support. As Catherine explains: "...that's why I try to develop the

relationship that her and I have now. It's so that...when we get older, when she gets older anyway, she can still feel free to come and talk to me about anything."

It's not only the time spent with their children, but also talking to them which is important. Diane told how, when her children were preschoolers, she would sit them around her as she did household chores and talk to them about what she wanted in life for them. She now both talks to them and tries to set a behavioral example as well:

AB: It sounds like you gotta keep saying it

You've got to. You've gotta keep-you've got to. You've gotta keep talking it. You gotta keep saying it. And then you gotta practice what you preach.

As described in the previous chapter, Kristina uses examples that her older daughter, Keona, sees around her to talk about right and wrong. Sonya does the same with her daughter, Talamika:

So, you know, like I said, trying to use horror tales as an example. I guess, in a way, I'm trying to scare her to say hey, this is not right. Look at this. So she can say, "Oh, I know I'm not supposed to do that", and she'll go the other direction.

Yolanda uses examples from her own family to teach her children:

I don't want them to get lost. I have a brother who's been on drugs and he's just in a cycle. He's just -- I have a uncle that drinks constantly and -- and I try to tell my kids, I say you look at them. You don't wanna be like them. You know. Cause they're lost.

Talking also involves being honest with their children as Yolanda remarks, "I try to be honest, um even though things might not be right."

Many of the women, especially those with older children, acknowledge that all the communication in the world will not enable them to totally control how life will go for their kids, nor the decision they will make on their own. As Catherine says: "...you can only tell a child so much. Or you can tell them all you want to tell them but as young adults they tend to do what they want to do..." Yolanda also acknowledges

that communication is only a beginning. A mother can't say for sure what her child is and isn't doing:

...if you keep telling a child to shut up, shut up, they're goin' a keep it inside and, who knows. They're going to go talk to somebody else. And that might be that drug dealer down the street....You don't know. Um, I have no idea if...my kids are into that, but I try to do things to make them not be into it. I can say what I feel. I feel like they're not. But you never know.

Carolyn Small, the mother of three children ranging from 26 to 11, who presented in our one interview as calm, collected and in control and who was described by Peter Stargel as a strong parent who commands respect from the children at the after school program, has learned over the years that what she does as a parent may not be enough.

I used to think that if you raised your children right they wouldn't stray far from that. But I've seen different now so I'm not too certain about that now....I just know that to a degree you can only do so much for 'em. Once they are grown and can think a minute or can't think a minute, you never know what will happen.

Grace Roberts who also has children ranging from 26 to 11 concurs: "[d]own in my heart I feel like I did the best I could do as far as raising them, [but] you can't say what your child gonna do."

Eight Major Values

In addition to the basics of shelter, food, clothing, protection and the relationships built around communication and shared time, there were eight major values which were common to most participants. These eight values formed the basis of what participants, as parents, were striving to teach their children. The eight values included teaching their children: a) to distinguish between wants and needs, b) to be independent, c) to care for their siblings, d) to respect their parents and their home, e) to avoid being teenage mothers, f) to value education, g) to strive to reach goals which will better their lives, and h) to appreciate what they have.

Making the difference between needs and wants clear seems to be both a crucial lesson to teach children and a crucial parenting tool for maintaining control of one's child against the enticements of peers and others. As Grace described in the last chapter:

It's like "Mommy I want this" and it's supposed to fall off a tree and see this is where it comes into conflict with my cousin because...like I try to tell her, if you're giving her everything she wants when you're not around and I can't give it to her you don't know what she'll go out to do to get this. You've got to let her know she's not going to get everything that she ask for.... And when I tell her, I say "she's not going to get so and so" now she knows I mean "don't bring it in here, cause you'll take it back." So now she knows. You know I had to, I don't like being like that but you know it's bad and you got so many bad people out here enticing these kids, you know.

Yolanda hopes that by helping Garneta identify the difference between wants and needs she can break some of the peer pressure towards material items:

So she, she has her, you know, her wants, but I try to ask her, "is that a want or a need?" And I make her think about it. I make her think. Hopefully she'll continue to do that before she'll say I want this or I need this. I got to have it cause the other little girls....

Yolanda has been trying to teach her 19 and 16 year old sons the same lesson:

Yeah, it's hard because every, they think their wants are their needs. They just gotta have. Like I just got to have that shirt. You know. That's what's in, so they feel like they really need it. But a clean shirt is just as good as a shirt with a emblem on it or something. It's hard though...

Sonya has spent a lot of time helping Talamika understand the difference between wants and needs and why it is important to keep that difference in mind. For Sonya, being able to wait for what you want is a sign of self-esteem that she wants to instill in her daughter. As a side benefit, this also means that she can comfortably take Talamika to a mall and know that she will be well behaved:

Definitely. My daughter is always, ooh mom, [I] want that. Ooh mom, [I] want that. And I keep telling her, the things you want can wait. You will not die. Okay. The things you need, it's a difference. You need clothing. You need food. You need shelter. You need water. You don't need a doll baby. What can that doll baby do for you. Gives you entertainment. But when that doll baby breaks, then what? You're going to want another one which still

can't do anything for you. You need to go to school to get a good education. You need a good job to survive in this world. You cannot sit home and collect welfare. I will not let that happen. Okay. To me, a person on welfare is -- they have no self esteem. Okay. I want her to have self esteem so she can say, oh, well I want that but, uh, I can wait. Okay. You need to pay your rent. Okay. Or else you'll be in the street. If you're in the street you have no shelter. That's one thing you need. Okay. Um, basically, I taught her that -- I think a lot earlier than a lot of children because I guess when she was about four or five, maybe even six.

...I'll take her to the mall anytime. I'll let her rip and run. And I tell her, if your name is not on it you do not touch it. One time she came to me and she asked me for something. And I said, oh Talamika, I'm sorry. I can't get that right now. I don't have the money. She said okay. One time I went and I bought something, and I was like, oh, that's nice, I'll get this for you. She says, but ma, I don't need that. I said, no, but I want you to have it. She says, okay, but you said. I said, yeah, I said, it's a difference between needing and wanting. Okay. As far as I'm concerned, you take care of all your bills first. Whatever you have left, as long as you're in a range where it's, hey, I can splurge a little. Then you go ahead. And I told her, this is one time I could splurge a little for you and I want to do this and I want to do that. And she's like, oh okay.

By not responding to all of her daughter's wants, Grace also wants to instill another value in Marie:

You know, because they get, they value nothing, you know, she will have no values for anything because "will you get it for me" [gets it]. Yes, it's alright to get them some things. But you know they have to learn to earn these things.

This lesson was expressed by Diane as well:

So I'm just trying to teach her everything in life is not free. Everything is not handed to you. You have to work for what you want if you want a good life.

As discussed in the next section, independence is an important issue for most of the women, for themselves as well as for their children. Their valuing of independence seems to reflect the belief that there is really no one out there to depend on and that when you are dependent you can not advance towards your goals. Before their children are of the age to be independent, many of these women give a lot of thought to who would be able to care for their children if they were gone. This is one

of the factors which motivated Grace to care for the children in her neighborhood over the years:

...I'd be at home and it's like I'd get a call from the school and the people say "Well, Miss 'So and So' gave your name for to come and get their kids." I mean my house was just the house for everybody's children... It was just like that. I always had 2 or 3 kids in my house where "my mom told me to come here" or whatever and it was just, it was one of those things (laughter).

AB: Did you like it when it was like that?

I didn't mind because, you know, I've always figured, I never know if something was to happen to me and I had to you know, be somewhere and I needed someone to watch over my kids.

Grace still worries about what would happen if she had to depend on someone to finish raising Marie:

...[A]s I'm getting older it's difference because now I'm constantly worried. I ask the good Lord every night to let me live until I see her at least graduate from high school. You know and I worry about if something happens to me you know who should I leave her with or you know...become, I worry....It's just, it's just worriation. And I know there somebody, I know people. I've always said nobody is going to take care of your kid like you do. They might love them but still there is no one who's going to take care of your child like you.

Sonya also thinks about her life in which there is no one on whom she can depend. If anything should happen to her, Sonya wants things to be different for her daughter

Talamika:

...I mean...I'm like, gosh, if something happened who could I call? I don't know. I really don't. So in case of emergency contact -- I leave it blank. I have no one. So I just said if I'm dead, fine, just leave me alone. I don't know. I just don't have anyone.

AB: Would that be a goal...[for Talamika]

Definitely. My daughter will definitely have someone she can turn to at all times. If, I told her if I'm not around go to your father. If your father's not around think of someone in church you can turn to cause she definitely will not get...the best advice from her grandmother or her aunts. And I told her, whatever you do don't listen to your little friends. They will definitely guide you in the wrong direction. So, basically, the two ladies that I've talked about. I'll tell her in a minute, you call one of them. If they're not around I've got somebody else in the church that can guide her in the way if I don't guide her correctly. So she'll always have someone. I'll make sure of that. Definitely

will make sure of that. I told them, if I'm dead and gone, hey look, you watch over her until you leave. And then guide her to someone else. But, um, she will always have someone she can turn to at all times. Yes.

It should be noted that for many of these mothers, it is not a given that they will be able to be there for their children. It seems doubtful that one would see a similar awareness of mortality in other segments of society.

Given concerns that there are so few people to depend on in the world, striving to make their children as independent as possible seems an understandable value. As Candy expresses:

Mainly I don't want them to have to depend on anyone else. I mean it's alright to ask somebody for help but I want them to be able to put forth the, the most effort they can on doing it themselves.... I've been teaching them since they were like him (referring to her 3 year old son) cause you know there's no guarantee that I'll be around forever and I want them to be able to take care of themselves.... You know when the time comes and they get older and go out on their own they'll know how to take care of home. You know then they'll, they'll know the responsibilities of just being able to take care of themselves.

Yolanda has similar values:

What else do I want them to know? Not to depend on other people for things. You know, learn how to get up and go get it yourself. Or learn how to change your own things, cause sometimes we feel sorry for ourselves because we don't have a -- a better job or a better place to stay. That's what I want them to do. Learn how to make their own way.

AB: So independent of -- I mean, does that include family and friends or --

Well not -- not all the time, but lean on people when you have to, not just because you can. You know. You know, I really would like for them to try to do things on their own. And then if they need help, then try to, you know, get somebody to help `em, but not forever and ever and ever, try to, you know -- like borrowin' money. You know, I got to pay my bill this week and then next week you go an buy some shoes and you know you have a bill. Not to keep, you know, doin' that. But try to do it themselves before they ask somebody else to help them.

Independence for some women also seems to be related to their feelings about welfare. Participants expressed a range of emotions from sadness and compassion to anger directed at the people in their neighborhoods whom they see as dependent on

welfare. Carolyn grew up in a working, two parent family. She has never been on public assistance and stated:

I don't know, like you got a cycle of mothers on welfare. I could not begin to tell them what to do, you know, except for get off and I'm not sure, that's not an easy thing to do...Because to me, from what I can see, you just fall deeper and deeper. You're dependent number one and the longer you're are on the more dependent....I just think you can do better. I can't imagine what welfare life is like.

Although currently on public assistance, Candy states that part of wanting her children to be independent is for them "not getting caught up in the system and stuff like that. I don't want them to be on welfare."

Teaching their children to care about their siblings is another important aspect of parenting, perhaps related to issues of isolation and independence. Many of the women interviewed commented that all their children have is each other and that they need each other to watch out especially "on the streets." Candy addressed this issue most directly:

But I try and make them understand that, you know, we are all, we are all we have. Know what I mean? You know, if something happened to me, all you have is your, your sisters and your brother. And I try to get them, you know, to love each other....They look out for their little brother. And I know on the street they look out for each other. So I guess it's sinking in.

Tina Jordan, who has three children, two boys 18 and 3 and Judith age 12, also views her children's closeness as being a kind of safety net:

...I have seen kids, I mean families sit out there and, sister and sister get out there and fighting, brother and brother. I want my kids to be all close to one another so just in case I ever, if I should ever pass on, when I do they'll be together. Helping each other. Cause me and my sister and my brother, we really help each other out in a lot of spots that nobody else could help us out in....My mother taught us to be close.

Grace, Carolyn, and Kristina are pleased that their children are close to one another. Grace and Carolyn depend on their grown children to help them with their younger daughters.

Respect is another major issue for the women I interviewed. They expect their children to respect them as parents, to respect their homes and to respect (with some variations) other adults. For Candy, like many women (especially those raised in the south or rural areas), showing respect involves old-fashioned values and reflects directly on her as a mother:

...I've tried to instill "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am", and you know, that kind of thing in em. And they slip up and don't say it sometimes, but... how to treat elderly people or, you know. Just how you treat people in general when you're out. When you're home for that matter. I mean, cause all that kinda stuff comes from home. How polite you are or, you know, how you speak to an adult, or you know....[t]heir mannerisms. Their -- you know, when they're not with me and they're with someone else, how they act and what they say, and you know. Just them as individuals... Cause I, you know how people say, that child had no home training..

Respecting others also involves self-respect, as Catherine states:

...I teach my daughter to respect adults, you know, um to respect herself, uh to have pride in what she does, um to not do something because somebody else does it or because somebody else want you to do it.

This balance of giving kids a sense of self as well as a sense of responsibility to others is described by Diane:

And I give them a voice. I let them know they have a voice in our house. But you have to give me respect with that voice. Just like I respect you. I don't curse you out, I don't call out your name, I speak to you and from you I expect that. Now when you can't live with the way I'm saying I will help you to relocate and then you can live the way that you choose. But as long as you're in my home we're going to respect each other.

When asked what her children need to know to make it in the world, Yolanda answered similarly: "[r]espect and..geez, I really want them to, to be respectful of other people and have an open-mind." It's also a pretty basic requirement for Carolyn who grew up in Georgia:

She's a pretty good kid and I think you, you kinda raise kids the way you were raised. I guess that's all you can do. As long as she don't become disrespectful to anybody then, like I said, keep a perspective for what's right

and wrong, and I know she knows right from wrong. I wouldn't do much different with her. I wouldn't do a whole lot different with her.

Teaching children to respect their homes is teaching them to take pride in their surroundings and to help around the house. Many mothers made comments similar to Diane's explaining that keeping up home life is everyone's responsibility:

I try to make my home comfortable; I keep it clean; I keep it neat; I keep my kids clean and there's certain people I don't let in my house and some of their little friends...if I see a bad child that child does not come in my house because you are totally abruting what I'm trying to instill in my kids and don't associate with it... So I t[ell] my kids...enjoy your home...You know, home life. Because there's nothing on the streets.....

You gotta give em a voice in the house because they do live there. You know? You gotta let them know, yes, we're all striving together to make our home better... You want your home to look nice so when you invite your friends you're not embarrassed. You know? But you gotta work with me. I'm not going to go out here and work myself to death to give you the things that you ask for -- and if I ask you to wash a dish I gotta fight with you. It's not gonna be like that in my house. If you see something dirty, go over there and clean it up. This is your home as well. I shouldn't have to tell you these things. You're old enough to see something dirty. Pick it up. Why should I have to go out here and work, okay. I gotta work for you. I gotta buy your clothes. I gotta buy your food. I gotta keep you clean. Okay. And then I gotta come behind you and pick up too? No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I'm not your maid. I'm your mother.

Attempting to reduce the possibility of early pregnancy was a very common parenting issues raised in the interviews. This was important to women who themselves had been teenage mothers as well as to women who had been married and in their twenties when they became pregnant. The mothers viewed teen pregnancy as an obstacle to their daughters reaching higher goals. As Kristina said in the Chapter 4, if Keona were to become a teenage mother she would risk "fall[ing] by the wayside." To help their daughters avoid pregnancy, these women talk to them a lot about this possibility. Some begin such discussions when the girls are as young as 8. The mothers try to limit where their daughters go and with whom. Mothers also try to limit how their daughters dress and how mature they look.

In talking to her daughter, Kristina gives her examples from real life, including her own life, for why she should avoid being a teen mother:

As many times we have to keep reminding her. You don't want to get pregnant as a teenager. You don't want to. That's your child. You got to take it to the baby-sitter. And you've got to get up. Your child needs medicine or your child has to get, get his shots today. Or your child needs some shoes or needs some milk. You're out of milk. You've got to the store to get it. You know...Um, oh, I give her all the reasons in the -- in the world why she doesn't want to take this path. And most of the time -- see, most of the time my examples to her come as the situation as, uh, uh -- as we're faced with the situation....And I say Keona, you see how I'm trying to go to school and spend time with you and work. It -- it's not easy. I say, um, it doesn't have to be this way but because I had a child at such a young age this is why it's like this for me.... Um, or I'll say, um, you see how you want to just go off with your friend? You want to go over to her house and spend the night. You know if you have a child you have to worry about this child first. You just can't run off and do this or do that. But you're free to do things as a child. Do those things.

Other mothers, such as Sonya, make sure that their daughters understand the pressure that guys may soon put them to have sex:

...in Sunday school they teach you a lot about the so-called young men out here. They just want certain things. They're not really thinking about you. And once they get what they want they're gone and you're left broken hearted. What do you do? You don't sit there and cry. You just make that decision, hey...I'm not going to try this. If you really want me that bad, you'll wait. If you can't wait then you don't need me.

Tina, who at this point is more worried about getting her 18 year old son back into a program to finish school, knows she can't ignore Olivia as she enters her teen years:

I'm not going to leave her out cause she's the one that bring the babies home. So I have to stay up on her too....It's just the hard-head boys that I have to worry about too.

Yolanda has decided to quit her second job so that she can spend more time with Garnete, her 12 year old:

Maybe after I let this second job go I'll have more time to do stuff...I'm going to let it go..my daughter is growing up and I need to be there, cause she's gonna be a young lady soon and I don't need to be off working while she's home, you know, trying to find trouble. I need to be there.

Not unlike many other mothers, Yolanda is careful to limit the men who are around her daughter and warns her daughter to make sure she doesn't get into "situations [she] can't get out of." As mentioned earlier, this is important because Garnete looks older than her age. Mothers are very sensitive to the possible consequences of looking mature and the pressure on young girls to grow up quickly. Many of the mothers talked about attempting to keep their daughters acting their own age as does Diane who explains that she's going to dress her 11 year old daughter "where she doesn't look like she's ready to sleep with somebody."

The sixth major value of parenting is to push their children to achieve academically. They could not speak enough about the pressures they felt to keep their children in school at least until high school graduation. A majority of the mothers were already explaining to their elementary school age children that they needed to do well enough in school to win college scholarships. There is no doubting Grace's feelings about education:

I want her to have something. Education is you, you know, you have to impress more than anything now-a-days you have to keep this on. But like I told her, now-a-days it's hard. You have to have all the schooling you can get. You know, I said once upon a time you could, you can't even get a job digging a ditch anymore without a high school diploma. You can't get in the army anymore without this and I said now anything you can do, get into computers, anything like that because everything is going to be machines afterwhile....I have to keep on her about that work, her school work. And then like I said sometimes if I get a bad grade from her it's "you're not going to do this or you're not going to be in that." I have to tend to be the bad guy but if that's what it takes to let her know that I'm not playing, I have to do this.

Tina, who is working on her GED, is clear that she wants her daughter to go further in school than she or her elder son:

...I figured by me going to school maybe that might help my daughter through school, you know....I really want to push her through school because I didn't go all the way...

Diane is currently working on her bachelors degree and planning to attend law school.

She is very clear about the value of education:

I want them to be successful people in society. I feel like if I go through with this law degree and become a lawyer and they've seen what I've come from and what I've achieved they are gonna to start to do the same. They know I'm very education oriented, I don't play when it comes to education, I get very upset cause I'm upset with my son now because of his little incident with his teacher and I'm gonna to deal with him when I get home, he's probably on pins and needles right now. I think the only way that you can better yourself in North America is through education. The more you learn, the more you know and the better you can better yourself. I want my kids to go to college. I'll take 10 jobs to pay their way; I'll scrub floors; I don't care. If they wanna to go to college and they know what they want to do I'll help them to the best of my ability. I'll die for my kids so they don't have to go through the things that I went through.

In looking at her own life, Catherine recognizes the importance of parents pushing their children to do more:

...because my mother wasn't, you know, totally "boom", you know. If you was, you know, if you wasn't going to school being a knucklehead, you were bringing in good marks, you know, you were happy --you know. And I didn't strive to do more. I'd just strive to do what was expected of me and not any more or no less, you know. Then maybe I could have gotten some scholarships and, you know, went to college and then a lot of other different things, than you know, even than what I'm doing now. But, um, you know, like I say, I just want something better.

Education is one way participants see for their children to better their lives.

The mothers also expressed a more generalized attitude towards success to their children. Catherine, who is already stressing the value of college to her 8 year old, explains how college is not the only means of measuring "doing better":

I don't want her to go solely because I say [go] to college. You know, because some people, um, they come out of high school per se and go straight to college. Some people can't deal with that, you know. And if she's not ready soon as she come out of high school to go to college that's fine with me, but you're going to get a job. And I mean a real job, not waiting behind anybody's counters and all of that, you know. And I can't put those jobs down either, because employment is employment. But, um, I guess that's where it comes to I want the best --for her. Um, and I don't mean to sit here and degrade those jobs. You know, because I did them in my, uh, high school year too, you know. But to come out there and have that as her sole breadwinner, you know, no. I don't want her to fall in that boat. I want her to always have a attitude as I can do better and I expect better of myself. You know, so that's how it is.... I just want better for her, and I want her to always feel that she can do better and expect better of me.

Yolanda also talks about conveying to her children that she is more concerned about how they do than what they do:

AB: What are your goals for your kids?

Ooo. To be successful. I told, um, them a long time ago. I don't care if you're goin' a be a bum, be the best bum. I don't care if you're goin' a be a garbage collector, be the best garbage collector. And you have to not worry about what people say about you. Cause there's always goin' a be somebody that doesn't like your hair, doesn't like the way you walk, the way you talk. Um, you just have to keep your head up and try to strive for whatever it is you want to do.

Grace often feels like she is the "bad guy" in the house because she is so often pushing Marie to strive for more:

Then, I'm always fussing at her to do better, to do this, to do that, but like I told her "Marie it's not that I'm fussing always harping on you, I want you to have more. I want you to be better than what I am. I don't want you working in somebody's kitchen for the rest of your life. You have the potential to be something and if I have to stay on you that's what I do." "You have some little friends that I know the mothers don't care where they are, where they go." I said "but that's not me cause I'm going to know where you are and where you going to be and you're going to finish school."

But being the "bad guy", she points out means she cares, unlike what she sees other mother's doing:

Well, people have always told my sons, "boy, your mom is strict, boy your mom is this" but they still like me. "Mom why you have to do that", I'm straight forward with what I have to say. "Ah, don't deal with my mom cause she will embarrass you." If embarrassing you in front of your friends is what it takes to let you know I'm not playing, I mean this. And they say "man your mom's strict, don't go around there" I mean this, if it keeps you from trouble or whatever, that's how that was. Let me be strict, I'm sorry. But I say look how many of your friends, I say take the guy next door. His mom cares about him nowhere. She don't care where he is or whatever. That's not me and it's just like that.

Participants expressed that another important value to convey to their children is an appreciation of what they have in life and that there are always others who are doing worse. For some women religion forms the basis for teaching their

children to be thankful for what they have. Other participants also teach their children to be appreciative, but do not base this on religion.

Candy and Kristina both express this awareness to their kids in terms of being thankful. Candy explains:

...like when the kids are begging for shoes or anything. Well, shoes for an example. And they already have decent shoes. And you go downtown somewhere -- most anyplace -- and you see, you know, homeless children or homeless people that don't have decent shoes. You know holey shoes or the sole is coming off or, you know, something like that. Or somebody with no feet on TV or something. Makes you appreciate what you have. You know, more....[I]t gets to em when they see stuff like that. So I use -- I use I guess their sensitivity towards it as an example. You know, I use some thing like that as an example, and say, you know, you all are blesse[d]. There are so many children you all age that, you know, don't have the things you all have. You all don't have a whole lot, but there's a whole lot of kids that don't have nothing. They don't have, you know, potato chips to eat every day or, you know, candy or milk and cereal, or, you know, don't have meat. They eating rice all day, or, you know, some type of barley or something. They don't get to go to school or they don't get to wear clothes. You know, the Guess stuff or the designer stuff, or whatever. So just be thankful and be satisfied with what you got. Be glad you got something. There's too many people that don't have nothing.

As Kristina says:

And see, I -- I -- I talk to Keona and I say, "let's look at our situation. Now let's look at someone else. There are people who are -- don't have mothers -- kids who don't have mothers. There are kids that are not being fed. Kids that are, you know, their parents, uh, they don't spend time with them. They don't take them out. They don't cook for them. They don't go over their homework. They don't do their hair in the morning. They don't, you know, take time to see what they're putting on and make sure they take a bath. Those things should mean a lot to you, Keona. You have a lot." Um. It's so much. So much for her to be thankful for. There's some families that don't have homes. Some families with their parents are on drugs. For instance, a neighbor of ours got put out because her mother's drug habit and she's not paying her rent. "Look at that", Keona. "And then you look at your situation. You have a lot to be thankful for."

Even though she and her children do not have much, Teresa tries to teach her children to appreciate what they have:

...never say you ain't got nothing to eat you know, cause it's some people who don't have anything. That's what I have to really teach my kids because they, like if they don't see the things that they want to eat in the refrigerator, it's like it's nothing there to eat mom you know. I don't want

that it ain't nothing here to eat, you know, and I'm like it's something to eat in there.

Single Parenting

Surprisingly, little was said about the specific pressures of being a single mother. Carolyn does not appear to allow anything get in the way of what she wants for her child, including being a single mother:

I guess I want for her what every parent wants and if a family of two can do it I don't know why I can't. I just don't think, she shouldn't have to settle for less. So I don't.

Catherine did note that sometimes it would be nice to have someone else to help:

That's a difficult time too, for a single parent, where sometimes, um, you can—it's necessarily that you depend on the other person to where if that child has to --a--a setback of something like that and you've done all that you have done, it's like, you know, it's sometimes I've heard parents say, "I've talked to him." You know, I—I just can't talk to him no more. What do I do? I mean when you're the only person. --who do you turn to?

For Candy, being a single mother means one is always in demand, "that will be the time when the kids will want to come in and watch this and watch that and 'Mommy this' and 'Mommy that' and that'll be the time that I'll want to run away." Yolanda also talked about the difficulty of finding any time when she wasn't wanted by a child: "It's hard to find that time where you can just go in the bathroom and, 'Mommy, Mommy, Mommy' just don't hear it. It's hard not to hear it."

A positive aspect of being a single mother, which was common to other women as well, was explained by Kristina:

Yeah, I get to make all the decisions. Not to answer to anyone. But it would be helpful, um, if someone else was in my life to help me with things, but I've gotten used to making all the final decisions that--that's the only thing. Otherwise I prefer not to be.

Candy addresses the issue of whether there is any difference in being a single mother, versus a mother period:

...I mean moms have to -- they have to feel secure. They have to, you know -- if -- even if they're not secure financially or anything like that, if they're secure with themselves then, you know, they can keep their children secure too. And it's like -- cut off the head the body'll die. Know what I mean? They're moms. Single moms. Mostly married moms too. Once you become a mother you just gotta do everything. Even if you're married you still have to do everything cause the husband's at work or in front of the TV, or bending his elbows. So still everything's on you.

Positives of Parenting

Most participants stressed the positives of being mothers. As speculated above, there seems to be a connection between feeling successful and seeing the positives in parenting. Part of this positive attitude is reflected in many of the women's comments about being pleased with how their children were doing overall. While not everyone is as emphatic as Sonya, who says simply about her daughter Talamika, "[s]he's perfect," these mothers had generally positive things to say about their children. Candy, for example, says about her children: "[b]ut they're OK. I think they'[re] coming along pretty good." And Grace, although not exactly effervescent in this quote, nevertheless expresses similar sentiments: "if I had it to do it again...I would finish school and,...yes,...they get on my nerves sometimes but...I like them, I wouldn't give them back. I'd still have 'em."

Another positive aspect of parenting is found in how these women feel being around their children. Diane describes "basically I live around my kids, what makes them happy, makes me happy. I get my happiness out of the children, that's how I am." Carolyn observed, "...I'm at my best when...she's there. I'm at my best."

Kristina talks about how much she enjoys the role of mothering, even though becoming a single mother at 15 has affected the course of her life in profound ways:

But see, I just love being a mother. You know...So it just --it doesn't phase me one way or the another. If--if--if--if my life is --if I-- if I'm to be a mother for the rest of my life -- a single mother, then fine. You know. I'm not going to sweat it. But I don't want to. Uh, so, I'll take it either way.

For Tina, being a single mother has been a positive experience because it has encouraged her to grow and has given her strength she didn't have previously:

And then living as a single parent. Whew. It really makes you change a whole lot. I mean I feel like now I got a sense of --a sense of mind. I can think better now...Cause I never, when I were young, When I was young I never thought about rules. I never thought about responsibility. I never even thought about--I didn't even really care about nothing when I was young. So now that I done got older it's more on me now. You know. I gotta find out how to raise my kids the best way that I can be, you know, that I can raise them, because I was never truly raised right.

AB: Where's your strength come from?

The heart. Not only that. It just come from inside of me, you know. I mean I have to be strong cause if I don't my kids will run around wild just like I used to be. So the strongness come from the heart [laugh]. It has to. You have to be strong. Cause at one time I used to be -- I used to be out there having a good time, laughing and smoking and drinking little beers when I thought that it was something cool but it wasn't. It just made me lose control out of school. I didn't -- just didn't care. So now, I done got older, then I had more kids, and it make me strong....It's just making me stronger.

Money

Although the balance between positive and negative aspects of parenting can be debated, there is no doubt that financial demands represent a major challenge to "making it". Money was discussed early in many interviews, as it was in my first interview with Candy:

AB: What else makes it tough?

Money... house note, gas, water, electric and you still got to find money for clothes and food and shoes, you know, the other necessities. So money makes it hard. But I do a lot of praying. So, I guess between knowing what I know and praying I, I make it.

For some mothers, like Tina and Teresa, money pressure involved meeting basic needs. Tina explained, "I just get tired of living the way I'm living. You know. I mean I have to scrape for a dollar to get a loaf of bread and stuff like that." In addition to pressures around food, clothing is also a worrisome expense for Teresa:

The kid's feet are the same size as mine. You got to deal with shoes. The bigger they are the more they cost...and if you going to get something that they really need, that will hold, it's going to cost money.

Teresa was also dealing with a broken washing machine in her apartment:

I'm in a little bind because the kids are big now and you know my washing machine had broke on me and now I went out looking for a, you know, washing machine and it's like... it's a lot I have to do in the house and then turn around and we be washing clothes by hand and what not. I was just, it's just all that just get on my mind. The money don't stretch enough to really just go out and get a washing machine that you want, you know, but I get through it.

Diane who currently does not have to worry about feeding her children, talks about what comes next, "I'm determined to have a better life and be where I don't have to worry about every bill. You know? I don't wanna be rich. I just want to be comfortable." Carolyn who was perhaps one of the most economically comfortable women interviewed said that although everything works out, it still takes some effort to make ends meet:

You allow, you adjust. You save and you do, you save, you layaway, you rain check, you coupon you do all that kind of stuff and it just falls into place. That's what I have to do.

Yolanda explains how her children have noticed her stress over money in particular:

And, and one time my son said, "well, Mom, you don't laugh anymore." And my mind was on a lot of other things. You know, Gettin' the bills paid. Making sure they had clothes. Stuff like that

Like many other people in today's economy, changing job circumstances have caused economic problems in some participant's lives. As Catherine explained, prior to replacing her lost job with her current, lower paying position, "my unemployment was more than I'm making now." For Catherine, this decrease in family income makes child-care an overwhelming expense, "[w]ell, number one, child-care is very expensive out here...fifty-five dollars a week as opposed to my salary, that was a bit much."

Another major monetary problem for the women who are handling the basics, but still struggling, is medical insurance. Between our first and second interview, Grace had to quit her job because she couldn't afford the amount being withdrawn from her checks to recoup medical bills for her daughter Marie. Catherine also gives an example of this issue:

...medical is...blowing me out the, the water right now....once I was laid off...I did get...it through COBRA....And...just recently they told me...it would be expiring....so right now what I have to do is, um, drop mine and keep hers....Cause I can afford her but I can't afford me....So it's like I'm a walking around now until September...without medical insurance.

Talking about issues of money inevitably led to discussions of welfare.

Opinions of welfare varied greatly among the women interviewed. As discussed earlier, the women who were not receiving welfare expressed opinions ranging from jealous and disdainful to sympathetic and supportive. A few of those who received no subsidies had tried to get some form of assistance (e.g. Medicaid or free lunches) but were refused despite the fact that they felt they really needed the help. Grace, who just quit work because of medical bills, described what happened when she tried to get Medicaid, just for her daughter:

It's really rough and uh. I don't want welfare. I'd rather work. I can't sit home and wait every week for a check. I have to have my own. But I went and applied for a Medicaid card for her and they told me I made \$1.38 too much. And like I told them I'm not asking for food stamps, I not asking for a check. I just need a Medicaid card. I work. I'm not asking for anything but I mean hey give me a break, you know. But it doesn't work like that.

A few shared the sentiment that government aid should be a true subsidy to give a little to help all, rather than what they saw as a dependency system in which too few got too much. As Catherine explained:

Yeah, and then another thing that, um, I would like to see more done...with the, um, AFDC program. That whole program needs to be revamped.

AB: Hm. How so?

How so? To the point to where you don't make the women or the people dependent -- totally dependent. I think AFDC, if I'm saying that, uh, correct, um, initials, need to be a subsidized program only. Only subsidize. Not totally taking care of families out here. Because what happens is for these parents that are on there and getting the full benefits of the program....I feel as though if they had programs that subsidized...this shouldn't be only entitled, uh, to single parents. It should be entitled for anybody that needs it whether you have a two parent family -- because you can have two parent families at home that still didn't make [enough].... So where the subsidy comes in is at, you know, where you can't pay for all your medical insurance or they can give you some kind of plan. You know, get another plan going on out here to where it's not necessarily with these private, uh, medical firms but with another program that it -- it -- it offers just about the same benefits but is subsidized. And that would be almost like that group rate thing again. You know, the same is with, um, childcare. The same thing. You know. Now how they, AFD, sit up here and send these, um, mothers to school, they pay for full childcare, uh, before and after if you need it now. Um, you're still getting your -- your -- your -- your cash money. You're getting your food stamps. Your getting your Medicaid. Come on.

Among those who did not receive aid but were sympathetic to those who did, there was a shared perception that women on welfare were really stuck and an incredulousness that they could make it on so little money. Yolanda explains:

One thing I never did, I never got, um, aid. My family was there to help me so I didn't have to get. And I feel bad for people that live off of it.

AB: Hm. How come?

Because I feel they could do better. I really do. I feel they could do better. You know, aid is, is to help you. It's not to keep you where you are.

Carolyn too, stated:

How can you live off \$400 a month? I just cannot see it. My rent is double that. How can you do that? I mean why would [you] want to just have that. Surely it can't last 15 days of the month, [let alone] 30 days.

One of the criticism of aid and the people receiving it was that families on aid were getting an unfair advantage and had resources working folks didn't. As Yolanda remarked, "And a lot of them have more things that I do. Material things. And you know, they get free money so they don't have to pay taxes or anything like that." Sonya, too, has this impression of welfare, but nevertheless works hard because as a parent, that is the example she wants to set for her daughter:

Um, to be honest, I prefer to sit home and baby-sit than to work because look at my tax dollars paying for all these people on welfare who are living better than I am...But yet I have to go out here every day to go to work. They sit home and do whatever. Okay. Look at all these people out here doing drugs, living better than me. But I prefer not to live that life....Um, a lot of times I get frustrated and I'm like, everybody else sitting home doing nothing. Why can't I? But then I look at my daughter and I'm like, God know I don't want her to grow up and say, "shh, I don't need nothing in life. I'm going to sit home and be a slum too." Uh-uh. I want her to make something of -- in her life. If she can make a statement in this world some form or fashion, I want her to do it. So I don't want her to look at me saying, okay, well it's fine for my mom and my aunts to do it, it's fine for me to do it. No, it is not fine. Uh-uh.

Interestingly, some who were receiving aid, such as Diane, pointed to ways that other recipients were getting over on the system while she was being punished for trying to do the right thing. In addition, in spite of providing help which she needed, she saw it as limiting her independence rather than helping her advance:

Once I got the GED then everybody tell me that they didn't have no money. I wanted to go to college, nobody had any money. Now it doesn't make any sense for me because if I was a junkie out here they would give me a check and leave me alone. Cause I seen that happen a lot... [They] will pay you as long as you're in a rehab. But that's not any good. If you're addicted to a drug you can still go get that paper signed, get your money and still get high. But see, me, I was trying to be on the up and up. Do everything legit, legitimately and I still got screwed...

Teresa is also unable at this point to take a course that would help her get a job and off welfare:

See...this lady...was telling me about going back to this school but it's like, I guess in my case it didn't pay. I have to pay, you know, them to go to this child care class and you know, I'm not in a situation right now to pay to go there then got to get the bus fare, come home, take care of the kids, pay my bills, you know.... So see, and then public assistance would feel if you got money to take out like that, to pay a grant certain amount, you know, you don't need this, and that cuts back. See, the faster you get up a step, they will take you down a step, see...

But see they don't realize the other little things you got to do too. You don't know when your child might get sick. You got to have cab fare or stuff like that. You don't know when I mean. Maybe you might, well, maybe your child might need a black dress to go here or a blue and a red colored something. That little change you got to take out. They might knock a hole in a pair of jeans or grow out of their clothes you know...

In Diane's opinion, to make it financially she has had to supplement her aid income in ways which if known could result in a loss of aid. In addition, working multiple jobs has caused strain in her own family:

I'm not asking you for a hand-out. I'm asking you to help me help myself. It's not like I can't go out here and do it myself. Because I do work. Cause they have recouped me for not telling them that I've worked....Cause I've worked two, three jobs at a time. And my kids it had gotten to the point sometimes whereas... I'll give you an example. One time I had locked myself out the house and I had worked an 8 hour shift, got off, came home, cooked dinner, made sure they ate; went and worked my part time job and forget my keys and I had to knock and she was kidding with me and she said "do you live here", cause I was never home.

But that's what you gotta do and sometimes I don't report it, because I know they gonna cut back the money but I need it. In order for you to raise your kids the best way you can; to have them look decent, look like you care, because what the child wears you feel like the mom.... But it costs, I've got 3 kids.

Family

Although proponents of family values, as well as much of the social support literature, would suggest otherwise, for many women I spoke with family was a source of stress rather than support. While three participants did talk fondly of positive, supportive, equitable relationships with their families, the rest spoke of a number of stresses inherent in family involvement.

For some women, problems with their families began when they themselves were children. This is especially true for those who now have conflicts with their mothers. In many cases, their mothers were minimally involved in these women's childhoods. Some of the women were raised by aunts or grandmothers and grandfathers; others lived with relatives for part of their lives, and still others had mothers who were alcoholic or otherwise unavailable for other reasons. Not surprisingly, for many, this early discord continues to affect their relationships.

In addition to conflicts with mothers, conflict with sibling is another major source of stress. Many of the women interviewed described interactions with their siblings as one-way, in which they do all of the giving and receive nothing in return. For at least two women this is a result of their sibling's drug addiction.

Candy expressed her feelings about family explicitly:

I have two sisters and three brothers. But we're not real close. I mean, you know, we get together. And one of my sisters lives here with me. But, you know, me and my family do our thing and she does her thing. So, you know, I don't see my mother often. And, you know, I just kind of -- most people didn't know or wouldn't think I had so much family right in the area. I don't deal with them cause your family will get you faster than a stranger will. So....Excuse my language. The family will fuck you. They will. They'll get you. At every opportunity they can see, they'll try. So I be unbothered.

Sonya, who moved back home to care for her dying mother, is a good example of someone who has had longtime conflict with her mother and feels she is giving more than she gets in her relationships with her mother and with her two sisters, who live next door:

I never had my mother around me when I was young. My aunt raised me. And I don't know, sometimes I'm like, why am I back here taking care of this woman if she never took care of me...? [W]hen my father left me I felt that was the end of my world.... I never got the support from my mom, my sisters, or my husband. I just wrote 'em all off.

My sisters and them hated me because I got my father's car. I'm sorry. Nobody [else] drives. Who was supposed to get the car? I got my father's bank account. Why? Because I had to rip and run throughout _____ County, going to court, trying to become the, uh, head of his estate because he left no will...I had to bury my father. Okay. Financially, spiritually, and emotionally. [I said] "What do you want daddy to have on?"... "What kind of coffin do you want him to have?" And I'm like, the only thing they ever [cared about was the car and money], and this was the hardest part. Why should I give you all anything? Quote unquote selfish. Okay, that was the love of my life, and I kind of regrouped. I'm like, was he not your fathers. I mean, or was he just my father? Tell me, so I won't feel so bad when I hate you people.

[Then it was] [w]hen are you gonna get the car, you know, fixed? I'm like, I need money to get the car. I need tags, taxes, insurance. But no one said, I know you're having a hard time, here's five dollars. Here's ten dollars. Here's something. You know. It was always, oh, the car's still parked out back. Well, when you gonna get it running...? And just as soon as I got that who was there. "Aw, can you take me to the store." "Oh, I need to go here." And I'm like, nobody ever volunteered for gas, changing the oil, helping me with tires or any type of mechanical reasons. So, I kind of like distance

myself. And I look at it, yeah, I'm better than them because I'm trying to survive in life and they're just taking it as it comes.

Grace expressed some degree of balance between support and conflict in her relationship with the cousin with whom she now lives and who provides childcare for Marie. As Grace notes, however, maintaining the balance is not easy:

...like I said I'm in the middle like I'm the bad person cause I'm the one giving out the discipline. You know we've had a few arguments... and when she was younger she knew... how to play us against each other... If I'd say Marie "so and so" [she'd say] "Aunt Blanche can I..." I'd say "I'm your mother, I said it and that's what I meant."...

[I've had to say to my cousin] "I mean what I say so don't, let's not fall out about this." She's getting to the point that where she respects what I say because she knows I'm not playin' because I really went off one day about a year ago. "Yes, you take care of her for me when I work and I appreciate it and I love you dearly but that's my child what I say go." "When I say no she's not going to have anything. That's what I mean." That's the main problem right there. But she's seeing this also like I said since we had that big blow up it's come to the point she knows what I mean. When I say no I mean it, you know. So that's it.

For many of the women I interviewed, sharing quarters with members of their family is a major problem. Tina, for example, moved into a shelter with her three children rather than remain in her mother's house. Candy reported that after her first child was born, "I was at home with my mother and she really got on my nerves." She is currently biting her tongue a great deal and hoping that her sister, who is staying in her home after leaving an abusive boyfriend, soon finds a place of her own. Grace describes living with her cousin in similar terms:

And now-a-days to make it you need more than one person in the household. So, basically I'm making it now because me and my cousin, I stay with her. But sometimes I say I just need my own place. You know for my space and peace of mind and I know she's getting older...but then I feel guilty, like would she feel like I'm leaving her. You understand what I'm saying. And then I say I wished there was a way that I could make more money where as I could move but I'd still be able to help her. So it's always something going on. It's never a dull moment.

Even Kristina, who describes the most loving, supportive and equitable relationship with her family admits: "... we can't live together. We have to have our own headquarters."

It is important to keep in mind that, like Kristina, a number of other women have supportive relationships with their families. This point is clarified in the section below in the participants' comparisons between depending on family and friends. Positives aspects of family are also discussed in the next chapter where it will be clear that each women seems to find her own balance of support from all of the possible dimensions. As was mentioned earlier, many dimensions are sources of both stress and support, and the balance between these may change at any time.

Friends

As was the case for family, there were a number of ways in which friends were described as being sources of stress. As a result, a majority of participants found themselves, either by choice or necessity, dealing with their lives in relative isolation. One reason given for strife between friends was jealousy and selfishness. In a community where resources are limited, Candy explains:

No. Some people are just -- there are some that no matter what you do, you know, they still put you down. You know, it's never, you know, I'm happy for you or. You know, it's none of that. It's just -- I guess it's their own insecurities....And then there's some people who will be so so happy for you, but at the same time be envious. So, that's why I don't -- I don't just don't deal with people. Not a lot of people. Or there's some -- some people, well I don't deal with a lot of people anyway, but it's a person or two who I don't tell when something nice happens because they can't handle it...So basically I just -- I stay to myself. If it's not, you know, me and the kids or me and Joseph, maybe me and my friend, Crystal...but that's about as far as that goes, or we talk on the phone. But I stay to myself, rather than to be bothered with these silly people out here.

When I asked Yolanda about this she responded:

AB: ...Some of the moms I've been talking to have said, you know, it's hard to find people who are not gonna get jealous or...

Selfish...Um, yeah. There are people that do things for you and want something in return. I try to stay away from them. Um, most of the time, like say if somebody gives you a ride. If I have it I'll -- I'll offer it to them. But some people take advantage of...another person's kindness, and I try not to do that. And there are a lot of people that do. You know, give me, give me, give me, I'll take everything, but don't be really, um, thankful for it. And if -- if somebody passes something to me I can might pass it to somebody else. You know, like recycle.

Grace also talked about trying to cut back on what she does for others after feeling taken advantage of:

I'm tired of going out, I just got tired of it. You know, I got tired of doing this for people and doing that for people and I could never get anybody to do anything for me. You understand, so I said no from now on I'm not doing this. But I will go out my way to help anybody if I can, but I've learned to draw that fine line.

Some participants report being relatively isolated because of the need to avoid bad influences. As Diane puts it, "[i]t's not too many positive people who come into my life at this state where I'm at." Catherine has chosen to spend time alone rather than get involved with negative influences since high school:

I was never a party animal person. Um, I was never one that had to be with my -- even, this is even in high school. Uh, the majority of my friends when I left them on Friday in school, I didn't see them again until Monday... And it's because I chose not to hang with them because I didn't like what they was doing and I wasn't doing what they were doing, so I didn't associate myself with them.

Candy explains that she looks at life differently than most of the people with whom she comes in contact:

I don't have many friends. I have some friends, a couple, but I don't have many friends because I just can't deal with people like that...most people I know, I've met and that I know since I've been here it's like they don't have any hope. It's like they not optimistic, nothing. Just like this is it and this is what I'm going to settle for.

Catherine reports the same experience, "I don't associate with the adults in my neighborhood. I really don't cause they have a whole different attitude as far as their

children are concerned..." Yolanda points to the transitive nature of the neighborhood as another reason for not having support there:

AB...Do you have any friends who are in the neighborhood?

I used to. One, one lady moved away. She and I had, um, our oldest sons were kinda close and she and I would get along....Used to be where the neighborhood was kind of stable, where you knew everybody. But now people move in and move out so fast. So you kind of just keep off to yourself.

This does not mean, however, that Yolanda has never had friends who were supportive:

When, um, I was working my other job I was kinda like the young person in the office and, um -- yeah. It was support like that. They would always ask me how the kids were and I have one lady at work that I really felt good about talking to her. And, um, I would tell her something and she'd say, well why don't you try this. You know, see how that works. And, um, she was just giving me advice because she had girls that were older and she had raised her girls without a father. You know. But, yeah. It's -- it's a lot of things. Because I can't say -- they'll -- some people even help, you know, by saying oh, Beverly, I know somebody that has some clothes for the kids or for you, or -- little things. Little things.

Another issue for Yolanda, for example, is having the time to keep up with any friends:

So much to do... I end up doing things, like late at night. Sometimes when I -- I want to call my friends and talk to my friends it's too late, cause I'm already doing something else. So I kind of put them on hold or not know what's going on with my family and my friends, cause I'm always juggling stuff.

Many of those interviewed reported that they had always been relative loners and liked it that way. As Grace comments:

But basically it's like that and a I've always been, I guess I've always been a loner. You know, I'm the type person that if I get it I'm your friend, I'm your friend and if you cross me I don't want to deal with you.

Candy says something similar

But I stay to myself, rather than to be bothered with these silly people out here.... I just -- I like being alone. I mean, not alone but I could sit in here all day by myself and be fine. And then sometimes I want to get out, but not to get out to really be around people. Just get out and maybe go shopping or something. But I don't -- I don't need to be around a lot of people to be content. You know how some people -- they just have to be out there.

Sonya, too describes herself as a loner:

So I'm -- I'm -- I'm a loner actually. I really am. I'm a loner because, um, I think it -- it really first started like when I found out I was pregnant and I, um, talked to, you know, Precious' father and the way he had act with the whole thing -- I think a lot of me withdrew ever since that point...because it was like, all right now Sandra, it look like you may be doing this all by yourself...

Consistent with her style throughout the interview, Carolyn is matter of fact about the whole issue: "I just don't have anybody to really depend on. I guess that's it. So I handle it. That's all you do, you just handle it."

Diane distinguished between being alone by choice rather than by necessity:

No. It's a difference. Cause when I want people around me I know where to go get them, you know, to have people around me for, um, moral support or emotional support, or if I just want to talk to somebody about something that's bothering me. But, basically, I'm a loner-type person anyway. So it doesn't really bother me at all.

She does acknowledge that the choice she makes is not a superficial one:

I talk a lot to my kids. My one sister, I don't have friends because I don't trust people. I deal with people because I know I have to. I don't have a choice but I keep them at a distance. I don't let anyone get in. Maybe that's my fault. Maybe that's good, maybe that bad. I don't know but I know it's a defense mechanism. The further you are away the harder a time you have to hurt me. If I don't give you anything to hurt me with you can't.

For other women, not having friends to provide support can be a source of pain and worry. Teresa described, "And you know, tears come out and I be thinking about different things that, am I going to make it and you know and who can I get to help me...." Sonya also gave a clear indication of her isolation:

AB: ...do you ever feel isolated? Like there aren't a lot of people you can dependon...

All the time [laugh]. All the time. Um, just like I said. Who can I depend on? Okay. Um, I look at it, you know, when you fill out applications it says "contact in case of emergency." What do I do?

As discussed below, Catherine deals with a lack of friends in part by drawing on the resources of her family:

Although sometimes I may yearn for that -- you know, to have that girl -- girlfriend friendship and, um, they may have children and you know, we can get out the kids together and go out and do things. I'm always more or less doing something with my family, you know, far as to have cousins -- I mean, my cousins, they have children. My aunts that have young children. And, um, you know, that's about it. We, you know, my sisters. The city, we always do things together but far as a, um, a person aside my family. No.

Men

Not surprisingly, the men in these women's lives were source of both support and stress. This duality has to do both with characteristics of the men themselves and with the ways in which the women's past experiences have shaped their present expectations. The women interviewed discussed two groups of men; the fathers of their children, and their "friends", the men with whom they were currently in an intimate relationship. For most of the divorced women, memories of early happy times together with their children's father(s) were clouded by later problems involving their ex-husband's drug and alcohol abuse, physical violence, and neglect of family responsibilities. Many participants expressed the feeling that, from their perspective, even married mothers are in actuality single mothers. Yolanda describes the transformation in her ex-husband:

...he was the best person, the best father...I don't know what happened...but he started doin' drugs. He didn't want to work....He would follow me...he wasn't the person that, that um, I married. And then I started saying well, I'm , I'm doin' this by myself. I might as well be by myself.

Sonya, who's separation from her husband was not the result of substance use or physical abuse said simply, "[Laugh], Number of years I've been a single mom. Good question. Let's see. With or without my husband?"

A major issue for many of the mothers interviewed is the lack of support they get from the fathers of their children. For some women, the concern is primarily economic. Others are concerned about the fact that the men provide little attention and emotional support to their children. Other women interviewed distinguished

between providing for children in a responsible and predictable way and intermittently and unpredictably providing money or attention. Sonya describes this as the difference between being a "daddy" and a "father":

...anybody can be a daddy. Okay. All these young boys out here going around popping these little girls and they got babies and they're like, oh yeah, I'm a daddy. I've got a little boy. But to me a father is the one with responsibilities. Okay. Um, we've been through some problems. Um, we had some verbal agreements before as far as child support was concerned. [But] he wanted to play that type of a role. And I told him, you're messing with the wrong person. So instead of him keeping his contract verbally we have to take him to court and drag them through all this mess. And then they want to get all upset. Tell me why you have to do this. Why you have to do this. I said look, I don't have time for this. If you want to be a daddy you go ahead on and come and see her whenever. But if you want to be a father, be responsible....Okay. Take care of your child the way you're supposed to, not just, oh hi, how're you doing, I'm your father. Uh-uh. I don't need that. I can find plenty of daddies for her if that's the case. But being a father, some of them just don't want that role.

Although Judith's father provides monetary support, Carolyn has basically written him off for his lack of responsibility:

AB: So is he involved or would be if you needed him to be.

...I could take her to her father. That's not a problem. I just don't.... Would be if I needed him to be, yeah if I needed him to be or if I wanted him to be. Yeah, Let dead logs die. Let dead dogs lie.

....I just don't like him. I know that shouldn't have anything to do with Judith but I can take one issue and make a big thing out of it. You know one day he said he was coming to get her and he didn't come so. I don't need another reason. So that's why I ain't with him. But money, yea, all the time money. We talk about money. If we not talking about money we not talking anything and that's the way I am with him.

...he takes care of Judith But he doesn't see her and I'm fine with that. He's not so fine with that. I'm comfortable with it. All she knows is he takes care of her. That's how we go until she decides that well maybe I do wanna stay a while with him and then we'll deal with that.

Catherine's frustration at Precious' father is compounded by the fact that they had a good relationship until she had an unplanned pregnant at which point he left the relationship and his child. She has never taken him to court because:

I chose not to take him to court or none of that business because he knows she exists. He knows what it takes to raise a child...he's not that

dumb....[Plus] the court, they just have you up in a uproar and they all in your business.

Even if he knows what it takes, he is not helping:

You know, then it -- it's -- it's also, um, it gets frustrating because you sit up there and say I'm the one that has to do everything by yourself, as opposed to the other person that's involved, her father. Um, it makes me really mad, okay, because I have to do everything, you know. And he doesn't have to do anything. Or he's not doing -- it's not that he doesn't have to, but he chooses not to.

Given experiences such as these, it is understandable that the women I interviewed would be cautious about the other men in their lives. Yolanda says about the man she has been seeing for 5 or 6 years:

I'd always say, well, it's only for the moment. It ain't going to last forever. Because you have, you know, you get people into your life and then you care about them, and then they're gone, or they abuse your feelings. Take advantage.

Candy explains that although she has a male friend she feels she's on her own, "I mean, I have help. I have a friend, I'm engaged. He's been around 6 years now, so. But most of the time I still feel like I'm by myself...it's hard."

Maintaining independence is extremely important. As Catherine puts it:

I would be harder if he wasn't, you know, uh, giving me the assistance that he is giving. You know.... He, he does help out but, um, you know like I say, um, you know, before he came along or to say that he'll be here today or tomorrow we'll never know. So, you know, that's why I keep, uh, doing things on my own. Um, because if anything should ever happen to us or to him then I don't want to be left out here with not used to paying the bulk of the bills. You know. Because I have mine, he has his. So, um, yes he does help. And, um, it's only because I'll allow him for him to do only but so much.

Even Teresa, who, of all of the mothers, could most use the help, maintains independence from her male friend:

I don't ask him..."well can you pay my bill?" or nothing like that, you know. I guess I have been like that, you know, so long I'll pay my bills [even] if I don't have no money at all, you know.

As mothers of daughters, there are other good reasons to be careful about the men with whom they get involved. Diane explains:

I don't feel that I should have to go out and just give somebody, just give them all of me and then I bring another person into my home with my children and I'm all upset and hurt and my kids gonna feel that. I'm very cautious with the men in my life. I stand back, I watch 'em all. Celibacy, and I'll stay that way forever if I have to because I'm very choicy and I'm not going to bring anything into my home around my daughters because you got a lot of child molesters out there and I will kill a person, straight up, I will go to prison and spend the rest of my life in jail if a man touches my daughterI have daughters so you have to be selective.

Sonya too, thinks about the effect on her daughter when she considers how to fit relationships with men into her life:

Um, being a single parent, I do not date zillions of men. Okay. One is because that's what my mom did. I saw her coming and going with all these different men and I'm like -- and as I grew up I'm like, that's not right. And being divorced, I was like, oh God, what do I do. I mean, am I supposed to just be companionless or what. So I chose not to do what I see other people doing. They have a man here in front of this child and the next few weeks there's a different man...in front of this child. I'm like, no. That's not the way. If I have to be alone I just have to be alone. Um, I've dealt with one guy for five years, and basically, she's ten so she's known him for five years so she sometimes call him daddy. But she knows what's what. She knows who her father is but...[w]ell, she's never seen me with anybody else and I was hoping she never would see me with anybody else. But, um, I don't know. Maybe as I grow older I'll settle down, but right now it's just -- I'm just basically trying to focus on her to -- I guess you'd say, mold her right now.

Tina reports that her past experience has shown that it is safer to leave men alone, and she is currently content to do so and concentrate on taking care of herself and her children's goals. She points out, however, that there are some men in her community who are trustworthy:

I mean it's some good fathers out here, cause my sister's husband has been with my sister since, you know, her first child. And, you know, they got married and everything. But it's some good men out here but these other ones, I don't know what to say about them. I really don't.

This chapter has highlighted many of the stresses participants are "making it" against, but also some of the resources which exist in those same dimensions. The next chapter deals more directly with those resources and how the women I interviewed utilize them to make it.

CHAPTER 6 RESILIENCE OR MAKING IT: WITH WHAT

Towards the end of each first interview, I told participants directly that they had been recommended because Peter Stargel or Gloria Stevens, (depending on the setting), thought that they were “making it” (See Appendix C for Interview Formats.) The women’s responses gave some indication as to both how they defined “making it” and whether they agreed internally with the external perspective of the key informants. Their definition of making it was very similar to that of the women in the focus group, having met some success and striving toward more. As Teresa explains:

AB: Well, one of the reasons Peter suggested I talk to you is that he said that you are being successful as a single mom. Do you feel that way?

Uh huh. I feel that I done got farther than some because I have struggled and plus I have helped someone else that was doing worser than me even though I was doing bad. I seen myself doing good all at the same time.

Grace articulates the fact that making it is an ongoing process:

It’s been good days but it’s been bad days also and I’m quite sure it’s many more good and many more bad. But like I said, one day at a time, one day at a time.

When I asked directly what helped them cope, or be successful in making it, there were two kinds of responses: one having to do with concrete activities or behaviors and a second having to do with resources in those eight dimensions. The most important among these resources included self attributes, spirituality, family, and men.

Activities and Behaviors

A frequently reported means of dealing successfully with the stress of being a single parent in their neighborhood was spending time alone. Calming, solitary

activities included smoking, taking baths, listening to music, writing, as well as crying and screaming. Diane describes what helps her:

You just have to sit back; you count to ten a lot. I take a lot of deep breaths. I drink a lot of diet Coke, I smoke a lot of cigarettes; which'll probably kill myself. But it's hard....I go in the house and just go and take me a nice hot bath and I like jazz and I turn it up as loud as I can get it and just drown everything out.

Candy also relies on cigarettes, writing, and even Nintendo:

AB: What do you do to cope.

Hmmm, smoke Newports (laughs) and sometime on occasion I may have, I may drink some Jack Daniel's. That's only like my birthday or maybe New Years or you know something a special occasion. Or, I write uhm.

AB: You mean like a journal?

When...I'm not one for talking and I think that why me and my friend stay at it a lot because I don't talk. But I mean it was me and the kids for so long. Till they weren't you know they weren't old enough to understand how I was feeling so I kept a lot of stuff in and rather than talk to somebody I would write down how I felt. So I do that a lot and I like to sing and me and the kids dance around the house. And uhm, late at night, like last night I couldn't sleep so I did a little writing and I came down and I played Nintendo for like five hours (laughs).

For Teresa music and cigarettes, as well as crying are means of coping:

AB: How do you, What do you do to cope with the stress as far as you know?

I don't know, I mean sometimes I used to scream and holler. I mean a lot of times I mean I have sit and just listen to certain music and just relax and smoke a cigarette just so. A lot of time I just told the kids, go outside, leave me alone and I just sit and cut off all the lights and just sit. And you know tears come out and I be thinking about different things that, am I going to make it and you know and who can I get to help me, you know, and it's just things that be dawning on me and I be just crying. But other than that it works out

Grace, who doesn't smoke, has found another means of relaxing:

...my nerves are shot sometimes and I don't drink and I don't smoke so it's really, you know, I get very stressed out sometimes.

AB: What do you do?

I'll read. I'll go sit to myself and read, and I. When I'm really really tight I'll go to Bingo. I go to Bingo maybe once a week or every other week I might go twice. That releases me. Because I don't go out. She asked me the

other day she say "mom, why don't you go out sometimes". I say Marie there's nothing out there, go out for what there is nothing I want to do.

And when Bingo doesn't work sometimes screaming is a good release:

Sigh (pause) What else. I don't know. It's just so many things, you have so many things working. You know, like you said you have sometimes you just need someone to say just well I'm here for you call me, tell me, take out your stress, let me know what's going on. Just scream. Sometimes I'll just go in the bathroom and shut the door when nobody's there and just scream and I'll feel better. You know, it's, it's just so many

For Yolanda being alone means not being with her children:

Yeah. But I -- I have time for me. At one time I didn't but now I do, you know....having a friend that say, wait a minute. You're doing this, you're doing this, and you're doing this and you do this for other people, now what do you do for yourself. So -- and we go to the park. We don't have to spend a lot of money. Um, I've explored so many parks in this area that I didn't know were here free....Different things they would not have done just sitting in the neighborhood. Bowlin' is ended so now golf is startin'. We're learnin' how to just leave them and just go off and --

AB: Is that important, to do stuff for yourself too?

Yes...Cause I -- you go crazy and you get stressed out. You get really stressed out. The other day I was, um, I wasn't fussin' at my daughter. She said, mom, what's wrong with you? I said I'm just trying to stay calm because most of the time I'm arguing at them or fussing at them to do different things. So I just said I'm goin' to -- I'm goin' to do it nicely so she won't get upset. So she thought something was wrong with me because I wasn't fussing.

Sonya finds that Gospel music in particular helps her deal with problems in her life:

AB: What do you do for yourself to cope with all this?

Cry. [laugh] Um, I don't know. I get in my car. I turn on my music. And just listening to the music, like I say, I -- I listen to a lot of Gospel music and a lot of Gospel music just, when I'm down, it perks me up. And it makes - it gets me through the day until I get back in my...But, um, a lot of Gospel music gets me through the day because certain songs, I'm like, oh God, they're talking about me.... Yeah, they're talking about me and this is what I should do, or they're telling me this is what I should do.

Resources

Self Attributes

Reports of their activities and behaviors provided a partial understanding of the nature of making it for the women interviewed. Beyond these there are the internal coping strategies that often weren't directly named in response to questions on coping and making it. These resources, which stem from self attributes, were sometimes explained consciously as means of coping. More often they were not directly named by participants, but rather came up indirectly. A starting point for making it seemed to be some sense of contentment and appreciation for one's current situation. For some women this was expressed in terms of how their children were doing, for others it was a more global assessment of their lives. Catherine expressed this well:

AB: Well, one of the reasons that Ms. Williams said I should talk to you is cause she said that you were a single mom who was making it.

...Yeah. [laugh] I can say so. I'm proud of what I'm doing, you know. Um, it may not be, how do you say, uh, you know, what you want but it's maybe what you need...You know...That's pretty much what it is to me, um, right now. It's -- it's -- I have everything that I need and there's some things out here that I want but I just haven't gotten them yet.

Kristina articulated similar feelings:

So I like where I am now. And I think it's a -- it's a result of, um, Keona, having Keona at such a young age. So I'm just going to leave it. Well I have no other choices but to leave it, but you know. I don't know. I don't know how --how it would be, what my character would be like. I wonder. Who knows?

As Carolyn simply explained, "I'm real content."

Beginning from this sense of success, these women push on to do more. In spite of liking where she is, Kristina explains, "you know, I don't feel -- I don't ever

feel like, um, I'm stuck at one point. Never." Sonya described the transition from finding positive aspects in her present situation and then striving for more:

... I wish I had more strong positive family-type of relationship where there was a lot of different type of guidance. Um, I wish I would have a more spiritual setting. Um, basically I think if those few things would have changed I'd be a much happier person today. Definitely.... I'd be happily married with children. Heh, heh.

Now I'm not happily married but I have a wonderful child. That's the only thing I will not ever regret or change or speak badly of. Um, that's my purpose in life. Her. Um, she -- as far as I'm concerned she's my special gift. Cause losing my father, if I didn't have her I wouldn't be here today. I know that for a fact. I know that for a fact. I wouldn't -- no. Leave me here with these people? Oh, God. No. Uh-uh. No. I'd -- I'd wrote a letter asking forgiveness. I don't know. But I would have killed myself long ago. Definitely. Definitely. Five years ago. Definitely...

Me being the person I am today, striving I guess, um, gives me a momentum of say, hey, I know I can do it. I'm going to do it. So, um, just trying to keep her on the path and I let her know I'm there for her. But, um, that's basically it. Those are the only things I'd probably change. Yeah. I'd changethose.

The ability to appreciate their present status seems to be facilitated through social comparison. Just as they are trying to teach their children, each of these women described their awareness that things are worse for someone else and thus they value what they have. As Grace explains:

AB: Well, one of the reasons Rob recommended you is because he said you were one of the successful single moms.

I try...Uhm, not, I wouldn't call myself successful I'd just say I, I, I, I'm making it day to day. It's not that, I wouldn't say that I'm successful, it's my mind's in the right place. I have been, I've been blessed with not being one, I don't knock these people, I've always had a philosophy...I don't knock these people who are alcoholics, I don't knock these drug people...Like I said I don't judge anybody because I could walk out here today and something could happen in my life to make me drink, the only thing to satisfy me, or make me take these drugs, to get. Anything could happen. I never say what I'm not going to do. I always ask the good Lord let me not have to do this. This is what you have to do.

Candy describes how she keeps her life in perspective:

I don't know, it's times when, I don't know, I feel insecure with myself because you know there was things that I wanted to do but couldn't, but I still have it in me to want to do it so, you know, I, you know, feel insecure

sometimes when I feel like that. But it's OK. I mean, you know, we're not starving or homeless or nothing like that so we're OK.

Social comparison also motivates these women to strive to improve their future.

Grace observes:

So I wouldn't say that I'm a successful single mother I'm just saying I'm just making it day by day. But, like I say with only God's help. You know, cause it's been many times I've just said I just felt like giving it up. I don't care anymore but then I'll, I'll hear something or I'll read in the paper where someone is this or I'll see something on the TV and I'll say to myself, you're sitting here worrying about this and these people is, you know coping with something like this. Then I'll just I'll say "hey, it's got to be better."and it evens out. You know. So I say at least I have somewhere to lay down, at least I have something to eat, at least my kids are healthy. You understand what I'm saying. So it's like that. But you constantly go through some changes. You know, it's so I would just say that I'm trying. You know, I'm just trying. It's a struggle.

The same is true for Diane:

...but when you go out here you try to reach people. A lot of people don't want it because they so; they at the end of their rope, you know in their lives and they really don't care anymore and you just can't just put a person down because you don't know what that person's a victim of. You don't know what made them the way that they are because life is harsh. Everyone is not born with a silver spoon in their mouth; some people got to work for what they get and then some people work and work and still don't get anything. That's got a lot to do with drug addiction in the Black community. You know a lot of people, they do so much; they try to strive to meet, they do so many thing and they have doors slammed in their face and they just give up. But I'm not gonna give up.

On a less philosophical level, how and why they can strive for more is expressed for many of them by the saying "Just do it." As Catherine declares:

How I really deal with this -- it's -- it's no way of really saying how. You just do it because...you know, it's one of those situations to where, um, um, regardless, it's gonna be there. You know. It's like the rent has to be paid. This has to be done. It's not a coping with it. It's a more or less of a dealing. It's -- it's like it's a, um -- I don't want to use the term duty but, you know, it's -- it's -- it comes with the territory in other words. You know.

Carolyn also explains:

If I don't do it who will? There's nobody else to do it. So I just have to do it and then my kids are "mom can do it". That's just it, she can do it. And I guess that's the image I project to them. Because a lot of times I don't want to

do it, but I do it and it could be something, I've always said mothers can do anything. [Laughs] They can do anything because you have to. Every single mother, I guess if you're about your children, you will so that's what you do. You just do it.

AB: I['m] struck by how very calm and sort of placid you are about this sort of thing, I mean about everything.

I guess so. Yeah, I don't know what else to do. I think anything else wouldn't be me. I try not to, I don't like to get upset. I don't like to get bothered. I deal with things as they come.... I just do. You just do. I don't know how you do but you just do. If it comes it comes and you deal with that now. Not tomorrow, not later but you deal with it now. That's what I'm used to doing. I don't have anybody to really depend on. I guess that's it. So I handle it. That's all you do, you just handle it...I'm not for good putting things off if they bother me. So, now I'm just accustomed to handling it.

When I was growing up my father handled it and that's all I know. You just do it. You just get up, you gotta go to work. You just get up and go to work. You don't think about cause you got to go to work and that's how you handle it.

Sometimes I just get wore down. That's all I know, you just get wore down. I guess maybe someday you just don't wanna do it but you do it. I just don't know and if it sounds like I don't know [it's] because I don't know.

Tina knows why she does what she does: "I got to be the leader 'cause I'm the mother." Similar to Kristina, who in Chapter 4 explained that she was not going to let the stereotype of a teen mother dictate her life, Diane is motivated to fight what she perceives as society's negative expectations for her life:

Strength, basically is what keeps me going. Sheer, I run off determination. I'm determined for nobody to make me less of what I am. ...Yup, just determination. You're not going to make me less than what I am. I'm gonna prove you wrong. That's just off the adrenaline. That's just me...

But I'm not gonna give up. I just don't feel that opportunities are not for me. I just don't feel that way.

It should not be inferred that it is easy for these women to "just do it," nor that success comes or is expected all at once. Because it is hard to "just do it" some women do not "make it" according to Kristina:

AB: Where -- what goes wrong for -- for other folks do you think, that they can't....

What goes wrong? They settle for less...Um, and they -- they take the easy way out instead of -- of dealing with the struggle. That's what it is. You know. They give up. They take the easy way out. You know.

And as Diane explains, it is a process:

AB: One of the reasons that Rob recommended that I talk to you is because is that he said you are one of the single mothers who is making it. Do you agree?

...I take steps, you got to crawl before you can walk. I try to plan every step that I take.

Finally, Diane also points out again that striving for more, while based on some wish and expectation that one can get more -what Peter Stargel referred to as hope- is different than mere hope:

AB: ...a lot of people have sort of talked about issues that sound like having, having hope...Is that important?

Yeah, Yeah. Not so much as hope, determination is what I use. That's my work. I'm determined to have a better life and be where I don't have to worry about every bill.

Spirituality

Spirituality is an important coping resource for many of the women interviewed. For some this involves a private relationship with God and a set of values which help dictate behavior. For others it involves a relationship with a church and ministers and members of a congregation. For Grace, it is important to describe the relationship between hope and spirituality:

You know, you have so many things coming to you at one time...when you're a single parent tryin' to do this and you're tryin' to do that and sometimes all you have is hope.. And then you have to realize it's not hope. You gotta pray to God. You know, the Lord is the one who's gonna help you... [A]nd then a whole lot of people they just give up...You're making yourself sick you're givin' up.. It's nothing gonna happen if you're not gonna get up. It's not going to walk to you. I'm going to have to go out and look for it. It's not going to come to me, you know.

What is most striking, is that similar to hope, God, prayer, spirituality, values and belief also inspire action. Kristina explains this in terms of her children:

AB: ... what do your kids need to know to make it in the world?

First God. Second, that they can do anything they wanna do. Anything. Um, three, um, there's a way around everything. If you get stopped here, back up, think about it, go another way...And you'll make it. Um-hm...So don't ever, you know, put any walls around. Knock them out. Knock them out. Get out. If you got to climb over it and punch them out or however, and you'll get through them. Um-hm.

Grace describes the connection between faith and action:

You've got to have that faith... you have to believe. If you constantly doubtin' and doubtin' yourself it's not gonna happen and now something's got to give, you know. I'm not saying I'm not going to worry, you know, but something's going to give yeah....Yes you've gotta keep trying because when you give up that's it. If you give up that's it. It's just like sayin' it's over. You just quit, it's finished, just die. I'm not ready to do that. I'm not ready to do that. So I just have to keep trying. I know it's not going to be easy but I'm not giving up either. Something's going to come through I just believe it is.

Sonya and Candy also are clear about how faith helps them do what they have to do.

Sonya explains, "I pray, uh Lord, just give me the strength cause it's hard." And

Candy comments that one way to cope is to:

Pray. And just do what I gotta do for me and the kids. Me and my family.

AB: So it's like you can't depend on anything else out there?

I don't try. I just do what I gotta do.

Just as Kristina commented in the Chapter 4 that spirituality eliminates a lot of confusion, for Diane too, a relationship with God helps her decide on her behaviors:

... a lot of people just look at me and tell me I'm deep. They say you have it, you think. Yes I think because I want to go to heaven I don't wanna go to hell because, hell, I'm living in hell as far as I'm concerned. I know when I die I got to go somewhere better. It can't be no worse than what I am living in now.

That's why I don't let what people say or do bother me. As long as you don't physically touch me you can say whatever you want to do... There's only one person or one spiritual being that has made all of this and you have got to go to him or her or whatever it is but I know its there. What the people on the earth say doesn't matter. This is how I look at my life. What people on earth say to me does not bother me. Whose eyes I wanna look the best in is my Creator....

I've seen a lot of things, you know, I've seen people shot right in front of me; I've seen people cut, slit your throat and just walk away and I'm like "Damn, you just did that and you have no feelings about it; do you think you're going to get away with it; what is God going to say to you"; "Aw shut up Pat". All my life that's what they said "aw shut up Pat," but I'm tired of being quiet....

I'm making it. I'm going to be who I am and I'm going to be proud of myself and when my day of recognition come with my Creator, I'm not going to hell because I know I didn't do anything intentionally to harm another human being and I try to keep that thought. That stops me from doing a lot of deceitful things. Because no matter what dirt anybody does when the day of recognition come we all going to be accountable and to me that's where I keep my mind.

For some participants, another important aspect of spirituality comes from organized religion and the relationships they have developed through the church. As Kristina describes:

Sometimes when I'm down I say, oh, call one of my friends and say give me something in the Bible I can read, you suggest something. And we'll open the Bibles together while we're on the phone. We'll read and then we'll talk and we'll pray.

Grace receives similar support from the Pastor of her church:

And then their Pastor his name is Bishop Jones and he breaks it down to you and, uh, like when you have a problem and he'll call you can call anytime day or night whatever he'll talk to you and when you sit and think about it and he's always right [laughs]

Candy comments on the difference between how people in the church act, versus her neighbors who she described as uncaring:

AB: Hm. Is it different in the church? The way people treat each other...

Um-hm. Big difference.... They look out for each other. They care. I mean, they genuinely care. Um -- it's the different atmosphere. It feel good.

Just as in other dimensions, there can be stresses as well as supports in the relationships in the church. Sonya describes one of each:

I can call people at church to talk to them but, quote unquote, being a true Christian and seeing how these people act, I say I don't want to be a true Christian. If you're a true Christian, you're supposed to be true day through day, not five minutes the sermon is read here. Ten minutes afterwards you're outside arguing or fussin' with someone about a small problem. Uh-uh.

But...[m]y daughter's choir director and my choir director, they're sisters, and if I called them, I don't care what time of day or night, they'll talk to me. Or they'll say, come on over....Um, they're very loving, very loving. And, um, they know what I've been through. They know what I'm going through, so they're there for me.

These interpersonal problems keep Yolanda away from church as well as PTA:

But I used to be involved in the PTA but I got out of that...I didn't like the way things were going. You know. And if you're not -- if your opinion is different from a group of people and, you know, majority rules....Some PTAs are very structured and they're good and they try to do good for the school. And some PTAs are good just for the kids [whose] parents that are involved and that's not right....It's supposed to be for all the kids. Not just because I'm coming to the PTA and you're coming, but the other little boy's mother isn't coming so we're only going to do stuff for this group.. And that's why I got away.

That's how come I got away from church too, but I need to probably explore different religions and get back into it. I thought about that. I think, um, other than -- I don't know, I think that's one thing that's probably missing in our spiritual and commitment. I don't -- I don't have that right now. I need to but I don't. I think that's what's missing

On the positive side, churches also provided material support to some of the women I interviewed. Tina explained:

Well, we have a lot of -- we have a church around our way that usually give out, like, food and clothing and everything. And I ain't -- I -- well, my neighbor usually give me things from the church cause she's been going to that church since she's been living there. She's a much older lady. But she usually give me things from a church. But the last time I got things from a church was when I went up my mother's house. My mother had got some stuff from a church and she had told me about it. And I knew my stamps had ran out and I didn't have any money. So I went up to the church and they gave me a whole bag -- two -- two or three bags, but they told me they, you know, they don't usually take from out of the area. But it helped. It helped the rest of the week. It helped.

Another benefit of the church for Sonya is its various programs, "But it's a lot of different programs that's going on in church, and depending on what the program is, I'm going or she's going with me."

Social Support

Although the last chapter attested to the fact that sometimes what seems like a resources (e.g. family, friends, men) may not be, the women I interviewed are adept

at balancing stress and support across dimensions. For some this means finding support in a relationship with a male friend, but avoiding family, for others family is a source of support, but friends are to be avoided, etc. Kristina expresses this balance between self and family for herself, but also talks about searching for a balance in general:

I just do it. There's no question about it. You just do it. And most of the time with me everything just falls -- happens to fall in place. Sometimes I can't plan but so far ahead. But I don't worry because I know when I get to that point I will find a way. I will find a way. Um. Uh-hm. Um, I get a lot of support also. I'm blessed. I get a lot of support from my sister and my mother and my brother, my, um, coworkers, my supervisors. I get a lot of support. I just happen to be one of those folks that are just blessed with people who help, who helps me out.

If you do not have the support it's a little harder, but you -- there's still, you know, if you don't have the family support, there's still support out there. Um-hm. There is. But you can go on. And even if you don't have the support, you can do it. You can do it. Just find a way. There's a way. There's so much out here. There's so much out here. You can find a way to do whatever it is that you want to do.

Carolyn also expressed the belief that there are ways to get support if one wants it:

Do better because you can do better. To me as far as I concerned all you have to do is ask and somebody help you. I know they will. I know they'll help you.

AB: Can you give me an example?

You'd probably help somebody. Wouldn't you?

AB: I hope so. You're talking on an individual basis not on the organizational or social agency.

Yeah, because all the time it doesn't come from an agency. It doesn't have to come from an agency. You might know somebody who needs somebody to do a days work, whatever. I just think you can do better.

Teresa is able to use supports in her life in a way which Peter Stargel spoke about being indicative of those who are making it, listening to advice:

But I had to do a lot of growing up you know as far as learning different things. That's why, why I say, I never really, I listen to any older person or younger

person than me when you talking to me and you talking some sense, I listen to you.

Sonya too attempts to gain something in this way from her family even though they don't provide much other support:

Um, I guess, like I said, I try to learn from other people's mistakes. And seeing my sisters and them not really trying to make it, I'm like, how are they gonna live? You know. They don't have a life.

Family

The family, described negatively in Chapter 5, also provides support to some participants. Families provide material, economic, emotional and child-care help to a number of the women. For some like Kristina in Chapter 4, and for Tina whose quote follows, they are the primary support: .

I deal with my family, my kids, my mother, and my sister. Like I was telling you last time, my sister's like -- just like my best friend, so I talk to her. And she's into church. Her and her husband. They really into church and they give me -- you know, I talk to them so by me talking to them they give me a lot of strength too, from them.

AB: This is the sister where your daughter stays?

Yes. Yes. She's just like my best friend. I can count on her before I can count on anybody....

How I make it? Um, how do I make it? Um, I don't know. I just -- just try to pay all my bills, whatever I can pay. And, like, in my stamps, my food might run out in the middle of the month. I call my family and they usually bring something over for me. So I just make it with my family. Try to make it out with them. They never try to let me down or, you know, whatever. Especially my kids, they always look out for my kids. So, my sister. [laugh] My sister, I can depend on her cause for one thing she -- she works. But she has her own family too. But she love her little sister. So.

Yolanda's aunt has made an enormous positive difference in her life:

[After giving birth] I finished school and I went to college a little bit. Um, my aunt kept Wayne. That's my oldest son. And it's like we kind of grew up together. Um, I would ride the bus to school. Um, she would pay for the baby-sitter. She would pay for whatever we needed...I love her to death to this day because my mom died when I was younger. And, uh, whatever I can do for my aunt now I try to do it...Because when Garnete gets out of school that's where she -- you know. My aunt is there. She's home most of the time.

I think that makes a difference too. Because there are a lot of kids running out in the street. Um, not teenagers, little kids. All hours of the evening. They don't have anybody to tell them, put that coat back on, you know, when it's cold or, you know. A -- a meal and not just going to the ice cream truck. It makes a difference.

In thinking about the issues of whether family was a stress of a support I asked Kristina, who had described a very positive relationship with her family, if there was something different about her family to explain how well they get along:

Um, as opposed to what I see go on in, uh, some families? Yes. Yes. They are because, um, a lot of people -- a lot of friends of mine, they look at our relationship and -- and they always have positive things to say about it. Cause, you know, there are a lot of selfish sisters and brothers. I don't think my sisters and brothers are selfish. You know, from what I'm exposed to -- the people that I'm exposed to. Yeah. My family's unusual in that way cause we are there for each other. And, um, we just care about what happens to each other.

It is important to keep in mind that even these positive and supportive family relationships were not without conflict or free of demands. Just as Kristina and her family knew that they needed to live separately, other women gave balanced portraits of their families. Catherine, for instance, explains:

My mom, um, when I first had her [Precious] I was ready to go back to work after six weeks cause by then I was just tired of sitting at home. And I hadn't found childcare for her and my mother took off two months off, off her job without pay and watched my daughter for me. And then, uh, she helped me find somebody, which was a good friend of hers. So, you know, she's good.... I mean, uh, she -- my mom has been there drastically for me. She really has. She really has.

I mean, um, sometimes I wish, you know, she would butt out [laugh]. But you know, mom's going to be mom....I get a lot of support from my grandmother, my mother, um, and say my sisters. That's something I'm not lacking at all. No.

Grace too certainly recognized the positives in her conflictual relationship with her cousin:

But I have to work and I have to have a baby-sitter and uh and in this day and age you have to leave your child with someone that you can trust and she's not charging me. And I know she's well taken care of so in that point of view I'm like how do you say it I'm in between a rock and hard place.

Men

Relationships with men is also a dimension which provides support as well as stress. One important type of support provided by the men in their lives is money. For Catherine, this means she doesn't have to take Precious' father to court for child support:

...I think the other reason is like I said, because I'm blessed to the point to where I do have someone helping. Now...I'm sure if I would have been out there probably all alone now, I probably would've done something but, um, I've had friends and -- and have heard of people that deal with that whole child support, you know, payment -- that whole child support system period.

Candy's fiancé helped her purchase her house and also helps her buy things for the children: "like my friend, he gives me, he might come in and give me \$500 and say go buy yourself something and I'll go spend it all on the kids." In Chapter 5, Teresa also described that while she would never depend on him, her male friend sometimes provides the household with food and small change.

The men in some of their lives also provide emotional support as well, as Candy explains:

Uhm, when I say I'm not paying any bills this month, I'm going to buy myself something, he'll pay all the bills. Or you know if I say I need or I want, he gives and when I want to vent and I don't want to holler at the kids I can holler at him and cuss him out, and beat him up and stuff. He's pretty goodtoo.

It is important to note that this does not totally erase the hesitancy to become attached or dependent as Candy goes on to explain:

... if I need to, to depend on somebody, I depend on him more so than my family.

AB: Is it easier with him in your life than it was before?

Um, somewhat. Somewhat -- not --yeah, somewhat...I mean, even though -- Thomas'd do anything in the world for us. But I guess I -- it's been so long so, you know -- I don't know. I'm just independent I guess. Some things I don't want him to do. But he'll do anything. And I protest cause I want to do it. It might of took me longer but I wanted to do it. But if we gonna be

together I guess, you know, there's some things I'll be able to do and some things he'll be able to do --

For some women like Catherine there are mixed feelings about the support coming from a man who is not her daughter's father:

...I have a friend which, um, we've been seeing one another now for nine years, actually. Since her seventh month, since she was seven months old. Anyway, and uh, he's been there for us. He's more or less the father. But she knows he's not her father. But, you know, he does a lot for her. I mean he's in her life, you know. Um, he does things with her. I mean, he's actually her father but he's just not her birth father. So -- I mean I -- I don't -- I don't -- of course I would prefer it to be the other way but it's not. So you have to, you know, just go on.

Yolanda, despite not wanting her male friend to know how important he is, for fear of getting hurt, nonetheless appreciates the many things he does to support her and the family:

He helps me take them to different places. He, um, shows me a different way when I'm doing things, you know....He gives me a outside opinion because, you know, I'm so close to the kids. He said, well you don't see this. And you need to, um -- what did -- what happened -- report card came around and my son got a good grade. And he said, well you need to do somethin' just for Carlton. Don't do it for him and Garnete. Like sometimes we'll go out to dinner. That -- that's special for report cards when they do good. And he said, well no, leave her. Just you and him need to go. And sometimes I don't see that. And sometimes he'll talk to them or they'll go somewhere without me and leave me home. And I'll take a nap or -- yeah, it's different. And just like I said, um, parks. We go to the park. He said, well let's go somewhere. Let's just not sit in the house tonight...

It is important to recall that parenting, which was covered in great detail in the previous chapter, seems to be one of the most important dimensions which underlies the success of the women with whom I spoke. It is their role and responsibility as parents and the joys they receive from this dimension which help many of them locate the positives where they are and motivate them to strive for more. The last chapter, which follows, will pull together the positive and negative aspects of these women's lives, look back at the literature from which this study

began, chart the components and processes which come together when one is making it, and discuss the implications of the findings.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Making It

For these single mothers raising their children in risky neighborhoods, making it is the result of balancing the stresses and resources which arise from eight dimensions of their lives; self attributes, neighborhood, parenting, family, friends, men, money and spirituality. Each woman strikes this balance in her own unique way. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of person-environment fit is one way of understanding the uniqueness of individual resilience. While the dimensions which make up their environments are similar; that is each one has self attributes, lives in a similar neighborhood, has a family of origin as well as children, has friends, has one or more men who are or have been involved in their lives, relates to their children's school settings and their own past and/or present work settings, and confronts monetary struggles, each of them is a separate individual interacting in a specific and particular environment. Despite sharing many experiences, values and goals in common, their experiences are not homogeneous. Some of the women, like Teresa, struggle just to feed their children. Others, like Catherine, worry about medical insurance rates, yet others, like Sonya, are concerned with the stresses of their family of origin. Thus their unique person-environment fit leads them to define the stresses and resources in individual ways. As O'Leary et al. (1992) points out resilience is "dynamic and interactive" (p. 3) process. It is therefore not surprising to find that there is not a singular combination of stresses and resources which is shared by all.

What these women do share in their resilience are three skills: 1) the ability to reframe some of life's stressful aspects into positives which allow them to accept where they are, 2) the ability to reframe some of the stressful aspects into

motivators, and 3) the ability to exploit the resources of supportive dimensions in order to deal with the demands of stressful dimensions. O'Leary et al. (1992) have previously suggested that there is an important cognitive component to resilience. Garmezy, Masten and Tellegren (1984) have also noted that stress itself can often promote resilience in much the same way that immunizations protect from disease. For the study reported herein it appears that these three skills are the component parts, the mechanisms, of the process which is called resilience or making it. This process of resilience has two steps which build directly on these three mechanisms. The first step is being able to find satisfaction and comfort where one is. The second step is finding the sense of potential and the motivation that leads one to strive for more. This two-step process describes the heterogeneous experiences and functioning of the women in this study, from Teresa who was currently struggling with the basics, to Tina who still had some struggles for the basics but was working on moving up through getting her GED, to Kristina who had the basics under control but wanted to better her life through finishing college.

No matter where they were starting however, each appreciated the level at which she and her family were currently functioning. By means of social comparison each could see the way in which others were worse off. Each also continued to anticipate making it to the next step. The mechanism for accepting and even appreciating where one is currently is the ability to reframe negatives into positives. The mechanisms for looking forward and striving for more includes the ability to reframe stresses into motivators and the ability to find and apply the resources necessary to sustain forward momentum. Having made it to the next step, the whole process starts over again as that success feeds the sense of potential and motivation to strive for more. In fact a stair case provides an effective visual image for this model. Each woman is at a different step and striving to move forward and up. None of these

women feel that they have "made it" in a finished sense, rather making it is a day by day process. It is both the process and the outcome which thus defines making it.

The apparent similarity in the internal process of "making it" for each of the single mother's interviewed exists despite the differences in perspective of the two key informants who recommended the participants. The two key informant defined "making it" from seemingly different perspectives but recommended women who, based on their interviews, were similar in both expressed values and internal processes. Peter Stargel made recommendations based on the mother's ability to meet the basics and instill a sense of hope and a vision of a better life. Gloria Stevens based her recommendations on the child's behavior in school and the mother's interest and involvement in her child's education. And yet both groups of mothers valued school and both were focused on helping their children and themselves work towards better futures. In fact, for most participants a better future was predicated on education and so school and hope were closely related concepts. In addition, what was not articulated by the key informants, but common to each of the individuals whom they recommended, were the mechanisms and processes of resilience.

This sense of a constancy of effort which Grace described as "I'm trying" is consistent with O'Leary et al.'s (1992) description of a split between public and private resilience. Making it for the women interviewed is not necessarily reflected in the internal sense of feeling fine, nor in the feeling that a problem has been permanently resolved. Rather, it is in continually striving to better their life and that of their children. If something goes right that is fine but there is always the next step to be accomplished. From the outside, this slow but steady movement may look like success, but at times this constant awareness of the next step and constant push to do more may internally feel otherwise. Many times, not trying would be easier and might even feel better, at least in the short run. Kristina made this point when she

noted that what others who are not making it do wrong is to give up and not struggle. The three mechanisms that facilitate the process of resilience work alongside the constant struggle to make it. It is the ability to reframe negatives into positives, to reframe the struggle itself into a motivator to do more, to appreciate progress, to apply social comparison, to successfully exploit resources so that one is satisfied with one's efforts and to hope that even more is obtainable that all lead to a continued motivation to keep making it.

Resilience, as portrayed by the women interviewed, is not a dichotomous, all or none, construct. These women are not invulnerable. And from my etic perspective I could see some examples of their continuing struggles. Diane, for example, came to our first interview with alcohol on her breath despite her report of being in recovery. Carolyn who appears to be successful with her children, having one daughter in college and a second reportedly doing well in 6th grade, also has an older son whose whereabouts is unknown. From her response to my question about him I assumed that he was involved either in drugs or crime. Other mothers spoke of their reliance on corporal punishment (and its threat) to discipline their children. For many participants physical discipline is in keeping with emic traditions in the African-American community and may be in keeping with emic concepts of resilience. While not abusive, this approach clashes with the etic value system of parenting experts (e.g., Ginott, 1969), Child Protective Services and causes me to try and balance my child clinical training with an understanding of cultural traditions and values which may differ. Within the interviews there were some discrepancies which lead me to hypothesize that living up to their ideals is not always an obtainable goal. Saying that they are not invulnerable is not intended as an indictment of the women interviewed. Rather it is intended to point out that they are not superhuman and, like

many of us, experience both successful and unsuccessful attempts to make it through life.

This study did not discover a "magic bullet" which, if applied to women's lives, would lead to success. These single mothers struggle to make it everyday, take time to appreciate where they are and push themselves to keep moving. That they are not perfect means that others could be like them with appropriate internal and external resources. The magic perhaps lies in the women's ability to see past themselves and to reframe experiences, in their faith and hope that there is something better out there, that they and their family deserve it, and that they can reach it if they work hard enough. It seems likely that this collection of factors combined with a strong sense of religiously based morality (for most participants) also motivates them to stick with legitimate means of "making it." There are plenty of people who can see there is more in the world and want it, but lack the faith that they can obtain it through their own legitimate, socially-approved, efforts. Some may even lack the faith that they truly deserve it.

The fact that making it refers to a multi-tiered, non-dichotomous state in which one can start at any level and to a process which involves continuous struggle also explains why the women in the focus group, although recovering drug abusers, were in retrospect, a useful starting place for this research. Although perhaps starting at a lower place on the stair case, they too described seeing beyond the despair which contributed to their drug addiction and setting their sights on the next step towards a better life, towards making it. They described the same process, where advancement is seen in buying new sheets or matching socks, and they appreciate the progress reflected in their decisions to spend money on necessities rather than drugs. Appreciation of the incremental improvements in life described by the focus group members is the same first step of the process which is operating

when Teresa appreciates having enough food to feed a neighbor child with less, or Grace when feels thankful that although she can not keep her job, she has a place to stay and does not have to worry about paying a mortgage. For focus group members, looking ahead to plan a celebration for each sober month applies the same sense of potential and motivation that leads Grace to look ahead and plan how she will fund Marie's college education.

The remainder of this chapter a) reviews some of the themes which, based on interviews, appear to play a crucial role in the process of resilience for these participants, b) compares these findings to the literature, c) discusses the implications of these findings for public policy, and d) examines the researcher as outsider.

Themes

In addition to putting researcher and reader in a position to expand and revise their original expectations and assumptions, qualitative research may also differ from the available literature. While some of the findings reported herein supported the existing literature, some of the most notable findings in terms of what these single mothers are coping against and with are those findings which are in some way unique from the existing literature.

Findings relating to social support were one area in which this study differed from some of the literature while supporting other past studies. Unlike the findings of Stack (1974) for example, social support was unexpectedly lacking in these women's lives. In fact, this lack of social support may reflect their tendency to limit social contacts in general. When present, social contacts are often nonreciprocal and stressful for these resilient women. This is more in keeping with Lindblad-Goldberg et. al.'s (1988) findings that increased contact with one's family of origin can be

associated with increased stress in Black, single parent, poor families. In this study, however, it was not merely contact with the family which was stressful but also contact with neighbors, friends and men who did not share these women's values and goals.

A second unexpected difference from the literature was that while McAdoo (1978, 1979) has found that most social support is given by women, in this study, where social support was reported as part of making it, in many cases men were important providers. This pattern does supports findings reported in two other studies cited by Malson (1983, Malson 1980, & Weiss, 1980), in which men and older children are acknowledged particularly as providers of transportation and aid with child care arrangements. The overall result, however, is that many of the single mothers I interviewed live relatively isolated lives. Even for those with social support, maintaining their independence is an important goals.

Independence and isolation are important themes in this study. Albeit not the same thing, independence and isolation are closely related concepts. For some participants, isolation reflects a need to avoid the stresses and demands of social interactions with family, friends, neighbors, and/or men. For others, isolation reflects less their own active avoidance, than the absence of positive people with whom to interact. For some women, independence is a conscious goal which is necessary because they are isolated. For other women independence is a choice even in the presence of people on whom they could rely. For some women, the need to be independent seems so strong and the fears of falling into dependence so distressing that it may lead them to isolate themselves more than is necessary. Isolation is related to independence in that many participants reframe isolation, which could otherwise be seen as a stress, into independence, which is a positive term. It is important to remember that while isolated, these women are not alienated. They do not see

themselves as "disoriented, passive and helpless" as Toch (1979, p. 3) describes Durkheim's conception of the insulated and alienated individual. While they maintain their independence and isolation they are also active in the world around them, especially their children's schools.

The isolation which was so prevalent among the women interviewed is also seen by many of them as the result of a lack of community supports. This perception does not support Fine and Schwebels' (1989) argument that a sense of social solidarity exists in the Black community which supports single mothers and their families. Other than that which was found in the church by a few of the women interviewed (e.g., Tina and Grace), these single mothers rarely reported a sense of community support. Only some women reported that friends, neighbors or coworkers offer useful advice or material supports and this comes infrequently (e.g., Yolanda.)

As reported by Furstenberg (1993), there were occasions when it seemed that participants reported more independence and isolation than may actually exist. One area in which this occurred was in discussions about the role of men in their lives. In a few interviews, such as Kristina's, it became clear in the second interview that her male friend played a larger role in the house and with the family than she had initially reported. This was true of women on public assistance who could have been economically hurt by telling the truth to a stranger. It was also true for women who were economically independent. Descriptions of the roles of men in their lives was one of the few discrepancies which occurred between mother's and daughter's interviews. A few, such as Diane's daughter, reported that her mother's male friend was more present and more involved in the home than mothers had reported.

This trend by single mothers to minimize the importance of the men in their lives is not surprising. Aside from the possible economic implications for mothers on welfare, one explanation is that it is a psychological necessity to feel that the men are not needed given the negative past experiences most have had with the father(s) of their children. Another explanation involves the fact that these women reported that even with a husband in the home being a mother entails being the primary parent. Whatever help they receive from their male friends does not begin to decrease the amount they themselves do as mothers. A third explanation is that because this study was directly aimed at being a single mother participants were focused on that aspect of their lives and not on who provided parenting help. Although it is not possible in this study to accurately measure the true independence and isolation of participants, independence is obviously a strongly held value. This seems an expansion of Page and Washington's (1978) findings that an important value to convey to children was a sense of independence.

It seems that independence is one means of avoiding the stresses and demands which come with social interactions. The women I interviewed also use independence and isolation as a way of avoiding the potentially negative influences, attitudes and behaviors in the neighborhoods. Not only do they avoid certain physical risks by spending time in the safety of their homes and not getting involved in the neighborhood scene, but they also avoid the same types of negative peer pressure from which they seek to protect their children. Thus to make it in a community where the most visible examples are ones of failure seems to require that one withdraw from others, set up protective barriers and fight through on one's own.

Recognition of this pattern raises the question of how many other women are invisibly trying to do the same thing. Those who are making it, if they are using isolation, become unavailable as images to break the stereotype and also inaccessible

as positive role models. One wonders how many more resilient women and families live in the neighborhoods where the women interviewed live. One also wonders how much more hope might exist in such neighborhoods if many visible examples of people with hope were available. But, if people were more visible with their hope, they might be more open to ridicule, envy and possibly requests for help from others which in turn could undermine their resilience.

It was striking to me, especially in the early stages of interviewing, that although the women I spoke with reported being very isolated, they rarely described themselves as lonely. Instead, being relatively alone was described as a state preferred since childhood (e.g. I've always been a loner.) This satisfaction with being alone is in stark contrast with the reports of the women in Rubin's (1976) World's of pain. Loneliness in that study was a major complaint for working class wives and mothers. There are a number of possible explanations for this difference. First, the women in my study seem to appreciate the benefits of their isolation. Second, as single parents, (and for most working single parents), they interact with many people during the day and even though they may not receive support from them, are much less isolated than the mostly housebound women interviewed by Rubin. Third, the women in this study seem satisfied with where they are and thus have found a way to express satisfaction even if to an outsider it would appear a lonely life. Fourth, perhaps truly being loners is what protected and protects them from the additional stresses and influences in the neighborhood which would impede their resilience.

Within this discussion about isolation and independence, it is interesting that while the mothers often described their own family and siblings as sources of stress and not support, they attached a strong value to family and encourage closeness to siblings in their children. This pattern seems to support the hypothesis that despite the positives attributed to isolation and independence, this positive reframe does not

eliminate a wish for family closeness and support. Although many of them cannot or do not depend much on their own families, they seem to want something different for their own children.

In support of Furstenberg (1993) conclusions, a number of participants commented that they would be helped by more community organizations such as support groups and by knowing other women in the neighborhood with whom they could share parenting tasks. While in the field, I was struck by the sense that I was talking separately with this group of relatively isolated women who felt they had little in common or to share with the people around them. Yet so many were saying similar things to me and lived in close proximity to each other. I often wondered if an effective intervention would be to introduce them to one another. On further reflection however, I wonder if their deeply ingrained need to be independent and not to trust others would undermine any attempt to establish a communal approach. In addition, there is such a strongly held conviction among many participants that each is doing something truly different and better than other mothers around her. This feeling, although perhaps isolating, may be a source of pride and motivation. Thus, as Furstenberg (1993) found, there seems to be an iatrogenic effect of isolation and independence in that the value placed on independence actually keeps participants from using social support to escape isolation and its related stresses.

Independence and isolation play a role in mediating the stresses and risks of the neighborhood by keeping the women and their children separated from its dangers. Yet for some, like Teresa and Grace, relationships with, and knowledge of, other residents seem to be protective. Although Cook (1988) found that knowing people by sight in the neighborhood was not related to satisfaction, for participants in this study knowing and being known may be interpreted as at least protective and reassuring.

Apart from issues of independence and isolation, the interviews reported herein also support Polakow's (1992) findings that low wages, lack of medical care, and the high cost of child care are important stresses for single mothers. Polakow included the high cost of housing in her findings, as did McAdoo (in Malson, 1983.) Participants in the study herein hardly mentioned housing except when talking about their past experiences of homelessness. In addition to housing, McAdoo (in Malson, 1983) suggested that single mothers found money and work to be stresses while parenting and personal relationships were not. In this study, money was an often cited source of stress. Although parenting and personal relationships are certainly a source of support and parenting is also a motivation to succeed, they are not exclusively positive dimensions. Thus in this study, parenting and personal relationships were also sources of stress for many single mothers in risky neighborhoods

Most of the women interviewed for this study would agree with Anderson-Kulman and Paludi's (1986) findings that there are few differences in terms of role strain between married and single mothers. Many participants saw little difference in other strains (including monetary stresses) between being married or single mothers.

Although all participants self-identified as single mothers, it does not seem that all participants are parenting alone to the same degree. As Kellam et al. (1977) point out in their discussion of family typologies, a number of single family patterns can be identified in these families including: a) live-in relatives who provide direct child care (Grace and Yolanda); b) live-in male friends who provide parenting support (Candy); c) live-in relatives and live-in male friends who provide little to no reported parenting support (Sonya, Carolyn, and Diane); d) mothers with available live-out support from family (Kristina, Catherine and Tina); and e) those

with live-out support from men (Yolanda, Kristina and Catherine). Given the conflict and stress that Grace describes as relating to having a live-in relative versus the satisfaction that Kristina reports from having live-out help from her family and male friend, it does not seem that more and closer support are synonymous. Nor does it seem that more or closer support is necessarily better. While there is no way in this study to determine if the range of typologies are representative of the population of urban single mothers at large, this does challenge the presumed homogeneous nature of single motherhood.

It seems clear that, as Peltó et al. (1982) suggest, single parenting can be an adaptive and positive decision. Many of the women in this study reported that they felt like single mothers even when married. Many also reported that, given their former husband's drug or alcohol abuse or violence, they were better off alone. Participants also fit Malson's (1983) and Mednick's (1987) description of single parents as generally being satisfied, proud, competent and hopeful. Just as Peltó et al. (1982) concluded, the impact of stressful events for the women I interviewed seems to be mediated by their perceptions which include their ability to compare their situation to others who are doing even worse. This is an example of how resilience is related not only to the resources one can exploit in order to handle the negatives in one's life but to having an awareness of the positives as well.

Implications

The findings from this study have a range of implications. The stereotype of the lazy inner-city single mother who sits at home collecting welfare with no future plans other than to have more children in order to increase her welfare check does not describe the women I interviewed. Most of the mothers who participated in this study are employed and all of the women I spoke with would probably agree that welfare

reform is needed. They recognized the threats of welfare dependency, but not dependency on a life of luxury and leisure. Rather welfare dependency refers to a life lacking in hope of a better future. The monetary pressures faced most profoundly by those on public assistance, such as Tina and Teresa, were striking. So too were the systemic double binds which a number of participants saw as standing in their way of advancing towards economic independence and a better life. These double binds are a perfect example of Woodhouse's (1988) conclusion that the dependence of women in today's society is maintained by the gap between what they need and what one's environment provides. This is true for Teresa who couldn't keep her evening job uptown because she was both a woman who couldn't safely stand out on deserted streets waiting for transportation that ran infrequently at that time of night, and a mother who had to care for her children when they became sick. Child care, job training and incentives to save money are three welfare changes which would help these women reach independence.

Economic pressures were also striking for women who are part of the working poor. They are able to feed their families but not provide medical coverage. They are able to provide a roof but need to rely on family and friends for help with childcare. In this context Catherine's story of having to choose between medical coverage for herself or her daughter becomes lucky rather than tragic. At least she can afford to cover her daughter. Grace can't even do that. It becomes clear that the pay check from the jobs available to people without technical job skills is not enough to cover the expenses and thus not the incentive which keeps these women working. They work out of a sense of the value of having a job and the fact that welfare is not any better. As a society we need to recognize that getting a job, even holding a job, is not enough.

As these women see it, one solution for their own children is to encourage them to stay in school and not become teenage mothers. One can only hope, given

current trends, that society will have adequate paying jobs available for inner-city high school graduates. An important finding from this study is that while early single parenting is certainly a resource drain on an individual in terms of both continued self advancement and economic strain, it is hard to ignore that one of the motivators for the women I spoke with is their children. Many of them report that they pulled themselves together and began striving to make it only after they found themselves responsible for their children. It would be interesting to compare success rates for matched mothering and nonmothering women coming out of risky neighborhoods.

Another stereotype that does not hold true for these mothers is that of the inner city single mother raising her children in an atmosphere of moral decay. While they too worry that the images most prevalent in the community around them are ones lacking in values and morals, these women are raising their children with firm values and beliefs. Their social isolation and independence protects them and their families from the threats of the negative atmosphere they see around them. If it is true however, as suggested above, that there may be many more families living isolated, resilient lives in these neighborhoods, perhaps the negative, hopeless atmosphere is merely most visible but not most numerically prominent in the community.

Despite earlier comments about the need for independence possibly interfering with the effectiveness of community supports, there are many resources which could help women who, like those I spoke with, are trying to make it. Many of the women do interact with people who can help them find resources. Diane, for example is active in her neighborhood council because it affords her first knowledge of trips, food supplements and community resources for her children. Grace and Catherine both spoke about a wish for a community center for mothers and daughters which would combine support for mothers, mother-daughter conversation groups and enrichment

activities which would take both parent and child outside of their neighborhoods to cultural and enrichment activities. The strongest economic need voiced by participants was affordable child care and health care. In addition, funding for their children's higher education would make a world of difference in setting the next generation up for making it to an even higher step of achievement. Given that even middle class families are struggling to pay for college, the road that these parents will travel to get their children through college will be formidable. The women I interviewed are well aware of what it takes to make it in their neighborhoods as well as in society at large. If policy decisions afforded them the resources they needed: affordable child care, health care and education, they and others like them would use such resources in wise and cost-effective ways which would benefit not only these women and their families, but in the long run, society in general.

Researcher as Outsider-II

As I moved from the previous chapters where participants words stood practically alone and spoke for themselves, to this chapter where I presented my interpretations and conclusions, I was struck by a deep sense of responsibility to my participants. I feel honored that the women I interviewed trusted me enough to allow me to present and interpret their stories. The intersection of etic and emic perspective has certainly already occurred many times in this study. The questions I asked and the ideas I followed up on versus the paths I discarded as tangents were based on my perspective. Each of these decisions affected this study's direction. When I decided how to code the transcripts, organize the chapters, and what quotes I would use to illustrate what points, I also further influenced the study's findings.

Many themes which arose have not been discussed in this report. The effects of racism on resilience is but one example. It is not included because the women I

interviewed had little to say about this issue as it related to making it. Yet I wonder if this reflects its relative unimportance, or the fact of my being an outsider and being white. If the latter, my presence certainly affected the content of the interviews. I have no way of knowing if this was the case, or what other themes may potentially have been affected.

When I was working to integrate information into a coherent picture of the lives, concerns and actions of my participants as representatives of (although not necessarily a representative sample of) resilient, urban, low-income, African-American, single mothers, I was again aware of the potential differences between my perspective and that of the women I interviewed. It concerned me that because of this emic- etic split, I was going to draw interpretations and conclusions without a sense of confidence that I was qualified to do so. My best answer to this concern was to remember that I arrived at this integration through a careful and methodical reading and coding of the data, and that it is my responsibility to do something with what was shared with me. I had a concern from the start of this project that, as with all research, the findings could be interpreted and utilized to justify programs or program cuts which, as I would see it, would hurt women like my participants. Thus it is my responsibility to make the interpretations which I see as most fitting the information I have learned and which could lead to understanding and interventions which would be most useful to and needed by single mothers in risky neighborhoods. This is not to say that the findings have been manipulated in an attempt to give single mothers what they want, but rather, as these women do in their own lives and with their daughters, they have, hopefully, been analyzed and interpreted in a way which presents a realistic picture of what they need.

What I gained represents a number of snap shots. In addition to my role in the interaction, our conversations were affected by the fact that the women I interviewed

were in a particular place in space and time when we spoke. That place affected the stories they told of both the past and the present, the interpretations they made of their lives, their feelings about where they and their children were and even their hopes for the future. Without a doubt there were also stable characteristics, ideas and stories and it is these long term factors which caused the key informants, who had longer term experience with each women, to recommend them for this study. That I can not be sure what details are "state" and which are "trait" relates to, but does not undermine, the validity of these findings. Life is not a static experience. By learning what works in particular situations we may begin to put together the whole complicated picture. There is no reason to believe that we will ever boil down experience into a static fact. Not only is this simplistic, but it would ultimately freeze some people at negative places and others at positive. Life is much more frenetic, and in that movement comes hope. These women saw the moment that they were currently in and appreciate the gifts of that moment but never lost sight of the next moment in which they could look forward to more.

I left Clements Park with the feeling that I had received a brief, but rich glimpse into the lives of resilient urban, African-American, single mothers and their children. I also left with the feeling that we have so much more to learn both about life for women and families in inner city neighborhoods and generally about making it in risky settings. Profound expansion of our knowledge can come if we allow the true experts, our participants, to share in and frequently lead us in our discovery. Together, the insider who knows where to look and the outsider who has a different way of looking at the information can be a powerful team.

APPENDIX A

Recruiting Letters

The Single Mothers Project

(Wave 1)

1. Why is this study being done? A lot of people are talking about single mothers, but very few single mothers are being asked for their opinions. The aim of this study is to learn from single mothers themselves how they are successful in living and raising pre-adolescent daughters in neighborhoods that pose risks to both themselves and their children. Through interviews, I hope to learn how different people define success, what stresses and problems they need to overcome, and how they cope with these stresses and problems. The findings may be helpful in painting a more accurate picture of single mothers and in helping other single mothers.
2. Who is doing this study? The interviews will be conducted by Anne Brodsky who is a graduate student in Clinical/Community Psychology at the University of Maryland. This study will be written up as a dissertation to fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D.
3. What will be involved in participating? I want to interview you as mother, your pre-adolescent daughter and someone (such as a grandmother, godmother, family friend) who provides some support or guidance for you and your child. For mothers, the interviews will last around 2 hours. With daughters and your designated support/guidance person, the interviews may be shorter. The interviews will be scheduled after the holidays at a time which is convenient for you.
4. What information will be collected? I am interested in learning your opinion on what mothers have to deal with, what works for you, what stresses there are and how you cope. I also want to hear the viewpoint of your daughter and your designated support/guidance person. I will tape the interviews so I can remember all that you say, and make transcriptions of the tape recording. You will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire about yourself. Your name will not appear anywhere with the information you share. Your identity will remain anonymous.
5. What are the benefits of participating? People sometimes find participation in an interview enjoyable because it gives them a chance to reflect on their lives and talk about things that matter to them. Your participation may also help other single mothers and their families. In addition, to thank you for your time and help, the project will offer gift certificates for dinner at a selection of restaurants.

If this sounds interesting or if you want more information:

Call Anne Brodsky at (301) 405-5881. Please leave your name and phone number and I'll get back to you. Thank you for your time in reading this. I hope to have the opportunity to speak with you further.

The Single Mothers Project

(Wave 2)

1. Why is this study being done? A lot of people are talking about single mothers, but very few single mothers are being asked for their opinions. The aim of this study is to learn from single mothers themselves how they are successful in living and raising pre-adolescent daughters in neighborhoods that pose risks to both themselves and their children. Through interviews, I hope to learn how different people define success, what stresses and problems they need to overcome, and how they cope with these stresses and problems. The findings may be helpful in painting a more accurate picture of single mothers and in helping other single mothers.

2. Who is doing this study? The interviews will be conducted by Anne Brodsky who is a graduate student in Clinical/Community Psychology at the University of Maryland. This study will be written up as a dissertation to fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D.

3. What will be involved in participating? I will schedule two interviews with mothers at a time which is convenient to them. The interviews will last around 1 hour. In the future I may also ask mother's permission to interview their pre-adolescent daughter as well.

4. What information will be collected? I am interested in learning from single mothers about what mothers have to deal with, what works, what stresses there are and how mothers cope. I will tape the interviews so I can remember all that is said, and make transcriptions of the tape recording. Participants will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire. Names will not appear anywhere with the information that is shared. All identities will remain anonymous.

5. What are the benefits of participating? People sometimes find participation in an interview enjoyable because it gives them a chance to reflect on their lives and talk about things that matter to them. Participation may also help other single mothers and their families. In addition, to thank participants for their time and help, the project will offer gift certificates for dinner at a selection of restaurants.

If this sounds interesting or if you want more information:

Call Anne Brodsky at (301) 405-5881. Please leave your name and phone number and I'll call you back. Thank you for your time in reading this. I hope to have the opportunity to speak with you further.

APPENDIX B

Consent Forms

GROUP CONSENT FORM
Being a Single Mother in Risky Neighborhoods

1. Why are we meeting? This group discussion is to help us learn what single mothers have to deal with in their neighborhoods, what issues are important to mothers, how they cope with the stresses and problems, and what makes a difference in their lives. Your ideas will be used to help design interviews with other single mothers.
2. What do I have to do? We will talk as a group about issues of importance to mothers. The group will last about two hours. We will tape the interviews and make transcriptions of the tape recording. We will also ask you to fill out a short questionnaire.
3. Who will know what I say? Only Anne Brodsky, the primary interviewer, who is a graduate student at the University of Maryland and people who are working with her on this project will have access to the tapes, transcripts or questionnaires. Your name will not appear on the tape, transcript, or the questionnaire. Of course the other women participating in our group discussion will know what you have said.
4. What will I get out of this? People sometimes like participating in a group discussion because it gives them a chance to think about their lives and talk about things that matter to them, as well as learn from other group participants. Your participation may also be beneficial to other single mothers and their families. In addition, you will be paid \$15 for your participation.
5. Is there anything I need to be concerned about? After we meet no one will be able to identify what you have said because no one will know your name. Tapes, transcripts and questionnaires will be kept in a locked office and any identifying information will be changed if what you say is included in a written or published report.

Although we, as researchers, will do our best to protect your confidentiality, in a group setting there is always a risk that other members of the group may mistakenly break your confidentiality. For this reason we suggest that you do not tell the details of personal stories or name other people if it would cause a problem if what you say were to become public.

One other time we couldn't protect your confidentiality is if you reported that you were planning to hurt yourself, someone else or that your child was in danger of being hurt by you or another adult.
6. What are my rights? You may ask as many questions about the discussion group as you need and they will be answered as fully as possible. You may stop talking or leave the group at anytime. Your participation is voluntary.
7. What will you do with what we talk about? This group is the first step in a study which will be written up as a dissertation by Anne Brodsky. It will fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. in Clinical/Community Psychology. In the future, results and conclusions may also be shared with the public through lectures, community talks and publication. Once again, your identity will not be known.

8. Whom do I call if I have more questions? This study has been approved by the University of Maryland, College Park Psychology Department Human Subjects Review Committee. Anne Brodsky can be contacted at (301) 405-5881.

I have read the above, understand it, agree to participate in this discussion group and have received my \$15 for participating.

Anne Brodsky, Principal Interviewer

Participant (Initials)

Date

CONSENT FORM
(Mothers- Wave 1)

The Single Mother's Project: Making it as a single mother in risky neighborhoods.

1. Why is this project being done? A lot of people are talking about single mothers, but very few single mothers are being asked for their opinions. The aim of this project is to learn from single mothers themselves how they are successful in living and raising pre-adolescent daughters in neighborhoods that pose risks to both themselves and their children. To do so, I will interview about 15 single mothers and a number of their daughters and an important woman in their life who provides support or guidance. The findings may be helpful in painting a more accurate picture of single mothers and in helping other single mothers.

2. What is involved in participating? I will schedule one or more interviews with you at your convenience. For mothers, the interviews will usually last between 1 and 2 hours. With daughters and female supports, the interviews will be shorter. I am interested in learning your opinion on what mothers have to deal with, what works for you, what stresses there are and how you cope. I also want to hear the viewpoint of your daughter and your designated support/guidance person. I will tape the interviews so I can remember all that you say, and make transcriptions of the tape recording. You will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire about yourself. Your name will not appear anywhere with the information you share. Your identity will remain anonymous.

3. Who will know what I say? Only Anne Brodsky, the primary interviewer, who is a graduate student in Clinical/Community Psychology at the University of Maryland and people who are working with her on this project will have access to the tapes, transcripts or questionnaires. Your name will not appear on the tape, transcript, or the questionnaire.

4. What are the benefits of participating? People sometimes find participation in an interview enjoyable because it gives them a chance to reflect on their lives and talk about things that matter to them. Your participation may also help other single mothers and their families. In addition, to thank you for your time and help, the project will offer gift certificates for dinner at a selection of restaurants.

5. Is there anything I need to be concerned about? I do not foresee any risks to you other than the possibility of a break in confidentiality. To protect against this risk, your name will not appear on any of the tapes, transcripts or questionnaires. In addition, all material will be kept in a locked office and any identifying information will be changed if what you say is included in a written or published report.
One time I could not protect your confidentiality would be if you reported that you were planning to hurt yourself or someone else, or if you reported that a child was being hurt or in danger of being hurt by you or another adult.

6. What are my rights? You may ask as many questions about the project as you need and they will be answered as fully as possible. You may withdraw from the project at any time or choose not to answer any question. Your participation is voluntary.

7. How will findings from this project be used? Findings will be written up as a dissertation by Anne Brodsky. It will fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. in Clinical/Community Psychology. In the future, results and conclusions may also be shared with the public through lectures, community talks and publication. Once again, your identity will be protected as discussed above.

8. Whom do I contact if I want more information? This study has been approved by the University of Maryland, College Park Psychology Department Human Subjects Review Committee. Anne Brodsky can be contacted at (301) 405-5881.

I have read the above, understand it and agree to participate in this study.
I further give permission for my daughter _____ to participate.

Anne Brodsky

Participant

Date

Address

Phone Number

CONSENT FORM
(Mothers-Wave 2)

The Single Mother's Project: Making it as a single mother in risky neighborhoods.

1. Why is this project being done? A lot of people are talking about single mothers, but very few single mothers are being asked for their opinions. The aim of this project is to learn from single mothers themselves how they are successful in living and raising pre-adolescent daughters in neighborhoods that pose risks to both themselves and their children. To do so, I will interview about 15 single mothers and some of their elementary school age daughters. The findings may be helpful in painting a more accurate picture of single mothers and in helping other single mothers.
2. What is involved in participating? I will schedule one or more interviews with you at your convenience. The interviews will usually last about 1 hour. I am interested in learning your opinion on what mothers have to deal with, what works for you, what stresses there are and how you cope. I may also ask permission to interview your daughter to hear her viewpoint. I will tape the interviews so I can remember all that you say, and make transcriptions of the tape recording. You will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire about yourself. Your name will not appear anywhere with the information you share. Your identity will remain anonymous.
3. Who will know what I say? Only Anne Brodsky, the primary interviewer, who is a graduate student in Clinical/Community Psychology at the University of Maryland and people who are working with her on this project will have access to the tapes, transcripts or questionnaires. Your name will not appear on the tape, transcript, or the questionnaire.
4. What are the benefits of participating? People sometimes find participation in an interview enjoyable because it gives them a chance to reflect on their lives and talk about things that matter to them. Your participation may also help other single mothers and their families. In addition, to thank you for your time and help, the project will offer gift certificates for dinner at a selection of restaurants.
5. Is there anything I need to be concerned about? I do not foresee any risks to you other than the possibility of a break in confidentiality. To protect against this risk, your name will not appear on any of the tapes, transcripts or questionnaires. In addition, all material will be kept in a locked office and any identifying information will be changed if what you say is included in a written or published report.
One time I could not protect your confidentiality would be if you reported that you were planning to hurt yourself or someone else, or if you reported that a child was being hurt or in danger of being hurt by you or another adult.
6. What are my rights? You may ask as many questions about the project as you need and they will be answered as fully as possible. You may withdraw from the project at any time or choose not to answer any question. Your participation is voluntary.

7. How will findings from this project be used? Findings will be written up as a dissertation by Anne Brodsky. It will fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. in Clinical/Community Psychology. In the future, results and conclusions may also be shared with the public through lectures, community talks and publication. Once again, your identity will be protected as discussed above.

8. Whom do I contact if I want more information? This study has been approved by the University of Maryland, College Park Psychology Department Human Subjects Review Committee. Anne Brodsky can be contacted at (301) 405-5881.

I have read the above, understand it and agree to participate in this study.
I further give permission for my daughter _____ to talk with Anne Brodsky.

Anne Brodsky

Participant

Date

Address

Phone Number

CHILDREN'S CONSENT

The Single Mother's Project: Making it as a single mother in risky neighborhoods

You are being asked to talk to an interviewer. An interviewer is someone who asks questions and is interested in learning what you think about some things. This interviewer's name is Anne Brodsky and she is interested in hearing about how your mother takes care of herself and you, keeps you both safe, and how you help her out. Your mother has already talked to me and has given her permission for you to talk to me, but I also want to make sure that you are willing to talk to me. Below are some things you should know before you agree:

1. Your mother was asked to talk to me because she is a successful mother, that means she is doing a good job as a mother.
2. By talking, you can help me understand what makes some single mothers successful mothers
3. If you agree to talk with me, the two of us will meet and talk for about 1/2 hour. What you say will be tape recorded so I can remember everything and then it will be typed up.
4. The only people who know what you said will be me and some people who are working with me at the University of Maryland. Your name will not be on the tape or the typed copy. No one in your family or any other people who are interviewed will hear what you have said without your permission. What you say may be included in a paper I write, but no one will know that it was you who said it.
5. There are some things you might like about talking with me. Some people like talking about their lives and about their mothers. Your talking with me might also help other kids and their mothers.
6. One thing you might not like is if someone heard what you have talked about. To keep this from happening the taped and typed version of your interview will be kept in a locked office. Your name, address and other things that could tell who you are will be taken off the taped and the typed copy.
7. The only other way someone would hear what you have said is if you say that you are planning to hurt yourself, or someone else, or that an adult is hurting you. If you talk about any of these things then an adult who could help protect you, or the other person, would be told what you had said.
8. One other thing you should know is that some things you think of to say might make you feel sad or scared or some other unhappy feeling. Your mother or someone else you trust might be a good person to talk with if you get this feeling. If you ever want to stop talking you can just tell me.
9. You can ask as many questions as you want about the interview, you can choose not to answer any question and you can tell me you want to stop talking at any time.

I understand what is written above and I agree to be interviewed

Anne Brodsky

Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Formats

FOCUS GROUP

CATEGORY I: Mothering in risky neighborhoods

OBJECTIVE: To ascertain what issues are of importance to mothers in this community, if they differently impact mother vs. child, if there is a difference for boys vs girls, different ages, if there is a difference between mothers and why.

- 1.1 What do mothers have to deal with in your neighborhood?
- 1.2 What do they have to do as "mothers"?
- 1.3 What do they have to do for their children?
- 1.4 What do they have to do for themselves?
- 1.5 Is it different if they have sons versus daughters? How?
- 1.6 Is it different depending on the age of the children? How?
- 1.7 What do they have to watch out for?
- 1.8 Do some mothers have to deal with different things than other mothers? What? Why?

CATEGORY II: Coping

OBJECTIVE: To illuminate modes of coping used by mothers

- 2.9 How do mother's cope?
- 2.10 Is it hard to cope?
- 2.11 What do they do?
- 2.12 Who can they depend on? In what circumstances?
- 2.13 Who can they turn to? In what circumstances?
- 2.14 Do mothers share their experiences with each other?
- 2.15 Do they cope in different ways than men? Than partnered mothers?
- 2.16 Do you know mothers who you think are coping well?
- 2.17 What are these "copers" doing?

CATEGORY III: Making it

OBJECTIVE: To ascertain the words for "making it"

- 3.18 What does it mean to be "making it" as a single mother?
- 3.19 What are you doing if you are making it?
- 3.20 What do people see from the outside if you are "making it" ?
- 3.21 Does making it mean by any means necessary?
- 3.22 Is there a difference between "making it" in the community and "making it" by the standards of, say the mayors office or outsiders who speak about and judge your community
- 3.23 Is there a better word to describe people who are "making it" (our definition)

CATEGORY IV: Things that make a difference

OBJECTIVE: To learn what might explain the difference between "making it" and not

- 4.24 Among mothers who you know who are making it, what makes the difference?
- 4.25 Are mothers who are "making it" doing something different? What? How?
- 4.26 Is the situation different for mothers who are "making it"?
- 4.27 Do people around these mothers do something different?
- 4.28 Do the children of these mothers do something different?
- 4.29 Are the children of these mothers somehow different?

INTERVIEW OUTLINE- WAVE 1 MOTHERS

There has been a lot of press about single mothers and their children, in neighborhoods such as yours. Peter recommended you as someone who could talk with me about your experience as a single mother in this area. I am interested in hearing your ideas about what single mothers have to deal with, the stresses and problems you face as a single mother and what you do to not only cope with these pressures, but be successful for yourself and your daughter.

- What do you have to deal with as a single mother
- How do you cope
- What do you see other single mothers doing to cope
- What is it like to be a single parent
- What is "making it"
- Peter described you as someone who is making it. Do you agree
- How would you describe yourself to you?
- What would you tell Whitney Houston so that she could make it if she suddenly moved here

Topic Check List

- Social Support- Friends, Family, Father of children, Community, Agency
- Economic Support- Friends, Family, Father of children, Community, Agency
- Instrumental Household Help- Family, Friends, Father of children, Children, Community
- Violence- Community and Household, Current and History, Concerns for self and children
- Child Rearing/Care Help- When: Emergency, Daily, To give Mother a Break
By Whom
- Father's Support- Economic, Emotional Support, Child Care
- Why single parent- Choice vs nonchoice
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with parental role- any fun in role or in life
- Relationships
- Parenting Philosophy
- Household/Family Norms and Rules
- Employment- present and past
- Family of Origin- class, race
- Setting- Housing, View of Neighborhood
- Sources and Perceived Level of Stress- Social Prejudice, Time, Health
- Religion
- Public vs Private resilience
- Goals for the future-self and child

INTERVIEW OUTLINE- WAVE 2 MOTHERS

What do you have to deal with as a single mother in this neighborhood
How do you cope
How is it different being a mother in this neighborhood
How is it different being a single mother
Why single parent
What is "making it"
Ms Stevens described you as someone who is making it. Do you agree
Whitney?

Topics Original
Social Support (include organizations)
Economic Support
Father's Support
Violence
Child Rearing/Care Help/Philosophy
Household/Family Norms and Rules
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with parental role
Relationships
Employment
Family of Origin
Public vs Private resilience
Goals for the future

Topics II
Religion
Other Worse Off
Hope
Isolation and Jealousy
Wants vs Needs
Community Involvement
Care of Self/Care of Child

INTERVIEW OUTLINE-WAVES 1 AND 2 DAUGHTERS

There has been a lot of press about single mothers and their children, in neighborhoods such as yours , who are not making it. Your mom was recommended as a single mother who is making it. I am interested in hearing your ideas about the stresses and problems your mom faces as a single mother, and how you see her coping both for herself and for you.

Topic Check List

- Do you agree she is "making it"
- How does it affect you
- What does she do
- What are the most important things she has to worry about
- How does she solve those problems
- How is it different in your house/with your Mom than for some of your friends
- What do you do to help
- How would you describe your Mom to a friend, a teacher, yourself
- Do you do things for fun
- Who else helps your Mom- w/ you, if she has a problem, w/money, w/friendship
- Your Mom mentioned _____, how do you see it
- Violence
- Money
- Friends
- Father- contact, support, role,

APPENDIX D

Questionnaires

QUESTIONNAIRE (Focus Group)

Please take a moment to answer the following questions. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer. The responses will be used to draw a general idea of who participated in this group. They will not be used to identify individuals. Please do not put your name on this sheet.

What is your age: _____

What is your ethnicity: _____

How many children do you have: _____

What are their ages: _____

Number of Sons: _____

Sons: _____

Number of Daughters: _____

Daughters: _____

Are you a single mother: _____

If yes, how many years have you been a single mother: _____

How many of your children live with you all or most of the week, currently: (Please circle)

All Some None

How many of your children have lived with you most or all of the week in the past:

All Some None

What is your zip code: _____

How long have you lived in your neighborhood: _____

What is/are your source(s) of income: (Please circle all that apply)

WIC Disability Significant Other Full Time Job
AFDC Family Part Time Job Other: _____

How far did you go in school: (Please circle)

Elementary School	GED	Some college	Some graduate
Middle School	High school	Two year degree	Graduate degree
Some high school	Trade School	Four year degree	

Are you in recovery: Yes No

If yes, how long have you been in recovery currently: _____

Have you been in recovery in the past: Yes No

If yes, how long were you in recovery in the past: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE (Mothers)

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer. Please do not put your name on this sheet.

Age: _____ Zip Code: _____
 Ethnicity: _____
 Number of years you've been a single mother: _____

Children: Initials	Age	Gender	Do they live with you all or most of the week?	If not where do they live?
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Who else lives with you most of the week?	Do they help with house chores?	Do they help with your kids?	Do they help w/ money
Initials Gender Relationship	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Do you rent or own your home? _____
 Number of bedrooms in your home: _____
 Number of years lived in your current home: _____
 Number of years lived in your current neighborhood: _____

Source(s) of Income: (Please circle all that apply)
 WIC PA Significant Other Part Time Job Full Time Job
 AFDC Disability Family Other: _____

How far did you go in school: (Please circle)
 Elementary School GED Some college
 Middle School High School Degree Two year degree
 Some high school Trade School Four year degree
 Some graduate school
 Graduate degree

About Your Childhood:
 Where did you grow up: _____
 What parents or other adults were in your home as a child: (ex: mother, father, grandmother, uncle) _____

What parents or other adults were involved with you but didn't live with you: (ex: grandfather, aunt) _____

Who paid for what you needed as a child: _____

What was their source(s) of income: (Please circle all that apply)

WIC AFDC	PA Disability	Significant Other Family	Part Time Job Other: _____	Full Time Job
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About your Brothers and Sisters:

Do they help you with:

Do you help them with

<u>Initials</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Where are they</u>	<u>Kids</u>	<u>Money</u>	<u>By Talking</u>	<u>Kids</u>	<u>Money</u>	<u>By Talking</u>
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