SINGLE MOTHERS’ NARRATIVES OF STRENGTH, 
WITH A FOCUS ON RESILIENCY AND RESOURCEFULNESS 

by 

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Abstract

There is a substantial body of literature that focuses on the supposed detrimental impact of single mothers on themselves, their children and on society. The aim of this research is to bring more attention to the strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness of this population. This was done due to the fact that if single mothers and their children are viewed only as harmful to themselves and society as a whole, it can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despondency for these families. Despite the stigma, research is needed on the strengths of this population to provide a wider perspective of these women and their families. Other studies also recognize that there is significance in obtaining a greater comprehension of the strengths of single mothers as a whole, and note the lack of this in academic literature (Kjellstand, 2011; Smith, 2010). Throughout this research, there is an attempt to investigate strength-based narratives of single mothers using the principals of phenomenological inquiry. Through this examination, semi structured interviews are conducted with five women who identify as single mothers. Based on these interviews, certain themes emerge and interpretations are drawn. Through this exploration, it is my hope to add to the literature on the strengths of this population. Additionally, this research can offer useful information to those occupied in helping professions who are concerned with cultivating and developing the strengths of single mothers and their families.

Keywords: single mothers, strengths, resiliency, and resourcefulness, phenomenological inquiry
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Dedication

To all the single mothers I have met over the years, and the ones I hope to meet in future. It is my wish that you find the ability to take pride in identifying as a single mother and hold yourself in dignity with that title despite the negativity associated with it.

A quote that I have long held onto through the years is the one below by Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992). If single motherhood can be approached with the conscious awareness Estes suggests, it can offer the seeds of growth and expansion.

A brave woman a wisening woman will develop the poorest psychic land, for if she builds only on the best land of her psyche, she will have for a view the least of what she is. So don’t be afraid to investigate the worst, it only guarantees more soul power (Estes, 1992).
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Chapter One: Introduction

When the term single mother is mentioned, more often then not a myriad of negative associations are made. At times in the past and even now, single mothers are correlated with some of the most egregious ills of society. According to Sidel (2006) single mothers are not only burdened with the lone responsibility of nourishing, housing and emotionally supporting their children, generally with blatantly deficient social and economic resources, but they are also obliged to operate in an atmosphere in which they are continually being judged or disapproved of, in a social and political environment in which they are stereotyped, clichéd and even loathed.

Sidel (2006) goes on to ponder how this characterization by the broader culture effects single mothers. Does the interpretation by others and the definition the single mother has about herself interweave or entangle and if so, how? Do single mothers incorporate the vision that has been presented by the broader culture, or do they attempt to preserve a more equitable authentic perspective of themselves despite this? This “double consciousness” is a distinct perception for single mothers. They must live with the feeling of constantly viewing themselves through the eyes of another, and measuring themselves up to the views of a world that regards them with both delighted disdain and sorrow.

Sidel (2006) raises an important concern here. How do single mothers regard themselves despite the negative perceptions from society? Examining this component was a task of this research. These curiosities led me to inquire how single mothers move forward and retain a sense of integrity and self-worth within a disapproving cultural setting.
Focus and Purpose of the Study

Studies or research on the valuable aspects of single parenting are few and far between, with most focusing on the harmful components of these forms of families. (Chunn and Weiggers, 2015; Kaestle 2016; Kjellstand, 2011; Smith, 2010; Zartler, 2014) the topic of this research is intended to focus on the strengths of single mothers as it fills a gap in this area of research.

The terms strength, resilience and resourcefulness were chosen as they incorporate the broader descriptions that are generally not associated with single mothers but which, nevertheless, seem to resonate with most aspects of their lives.

Canadian Statistics on Single Parents

In terms of statistics, the reasons why single parent families have existed has dramatically changed over the last 100 years. In the past, it was not out of choice whereas now it largely is. According to Statistics Canada (2018) in 1931, almost 80% of lone parent families were made up of a widowed lone parent. By 1991, widowed lone parents were the deviation and represented only 10% of most children in lone parent families. Alternatively, 70% of children in lone parent families lived with a separated or divorced lone parent. By the year 2011, the mass of children in lone parent families lived with a separated or divorced parent and almost 40% lived with a lone parent that had never been married. According to Statistics Canada (2017) approximately two out of ten children were living with a single parent in 2016 with a strong likelihood of living with a single parent at some point during their childhood (Statistics Canada, 2017) This demonstrates the sweeping changes that have occurred in just under the last hundred years. We can assume that as social views of divorce and separation have occurred, so has the family.
Furthermore, it suggests a need in studying these forms of families, as this trend doesn’t look like it will reverse in the future.

**Summary of Research Literature**

In the literature review certain sources stand out as providing significant data in regards to the lives of single mothers. Firstly, Sidel (2006) lays the groundwork for much of this thesis. She provides an understanding of the lives of single mothers and lays some of the basic historical pieces out for examination. Then, Kaestle (2016) comes in with a critique of the nuclear family, demonstrating how single mothers are consistently pushed to the margins and “othered”. She relates how single mothers need to be examined on their own terms and not through a constant comparison to the nuclear form.

With the strength-based literature, Brodsky (1999) offers a practical view of how single mothers feel a sense of achievement by “making it” through day by day, and the rewards that can bring. Other dissertations that depict single mothers in a more favourable light included those which focus on single mothers and their experience in post-secondary education. Kline (2017) speaks of the mothers’ motivation to improve their lives by attaining a university degree. Her study focuses on what makes single mothers successful and what hinders them in educational settings. In that same vein, Houston (2013) also studies how single mothers attain their degrees to college completion. She focuses on the stories of single mothers and what in particular assisted them in surmounting impediments and obstructions.

Kjellstrand (2011) and Smith (2010) provided a large support for this study, with Smith (2010) focusing on low-income single mothers and Kjellstrand (2011) on mid-income. Found strong resiliency, competence and a sense of accomplishment were
prevalent among the participants in their studies. Both also assert the need for more strength-based research with this population. Smith (2010) states that a focus, which is grounded in strengths, is a crucial addition to the studies as the bulk of research highlights the adverse experiences of lone mothers. Kjellstrand (2011) also emphasizes that research that is centered on strengths could assist in identifying how single mothers demonstrate resiliency and success, and ways in which they are able to build on their past achievements. She further emphasizes that additional studies which are focused on the strengths of lone mothers can transform the focal point from difficulties and problems to benefits and advantages. Like Smith and Kjellstrand, this research focuses on the resiliency of single mothers, but also brings in the element of resourcefulness as an additional piece in understanding their capabilities.

The Importance of Research on Single Mothers

There is a need to examine the effectives of all parents, no matter what the family form, in order to raise well-adjusted children and future citizens in our society. It is of value to consider how effective single parents function and find ways that assist, motivate, and support these strengths so these parents are better able to manage challenges effectively (Kjellstand, 2011). Learning the approaches of effective single mothers can lay down a template or model for success that can be developed for all single parents.

In this study, a focus on strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness of single mothers was done in order to broaden the cultural perspective of single mothers and for professionals who work with this group to better understand their lived experiences.
Problem Statement

Research on single mothers seems to focus primarily on the deficiencies of these groups (Abramson et al, 2017; Brauer, 2018; Haider et al, 2017; Ifcher & Zorghamee, 2014). The main intention of this study is to add to the smaller pool of existing research that focuses on single mothers in regards to a strength based perspective (Chunn and Weiggers, 2015; Kaestle 2016; Kjellstand, 2010; Smith, 2010; Zartler, 2014) to provide some balance within academic literature available on this topic.

Nature of the Study

The intention of this qualitative research was to describe the lived experiences of single mothers through their own narratives of strength, from a phenomenological approach, with semi-structured interview questions. The interviews offered the participants a space to express their stories. From these interviews, themes arose and interpretations were drawn.

Phenomenology

A Phenomenological approach was chosen as this approach searches for an appreciation of our daily-lived experiences. It takes mundane experiences and attempts to consider them in new, distinct and unprecedented ways. Phenomenology that places emphasis on unearthing the lived experiences can bring about a more candid way of being in and with the world. Phenomenology can act as both a philosophical approach in addition to a method of research (Willing, 2013).

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:
1. What are single mothers’ attitudes about and explanations for the strengths, abilities, resiliencies, coping tactics and resources they utilize as successful and flexible parents?

2. What are solo female parents’ attitudes of and explanations of the strengths, abilities, resiliencies, coping tactics, and resources they utilize as successful and adaptive parents?

3. How have single mothers experienced personal strength, resiliency and resourcefulness as a single mother? (Cresswell, 2007)

4. What contexts or situations have influenced or affected single mothers’ experiences of strength, resiliency and resourcefulness as a single mother? (Creswell, 2007)

**Researcher as a Person**

I identify as a Caucasian, middle aged, cis-gendered woman. I am attracted to this topic of study as I am a single mother myself and have been for over 10 years. Additionally, I was formerly a member of a local single mothers support group and later went on to become a facilitator a single mothers’ group for around four years. I very much enjoyed interacting and engaging with the single moms every week, in addition to assisting them in developing connections and offering resources to each other. I left the group with many fond memories of the women and a strong affiliation to single mothers and their immense strengths.

After having read much of the literature available on the topic of single mothers while a grad student, a feeling of hopelessness overcame me. I began to doubt my own abilities and capitulate to some degree with the dominant academic view. This,
however, was not my lived experience as a single mother, nor was it of those who I knew who also define themselves as female lone parents. What I saw in these individuals was incredible resilience despite their life circumstances, in addition to a determination to make a stable life for themselves and their children. I couldn’t pin point exactly what these strengths were as I only had a sense that there was a drive and resiliency that kept these women moving along in their lives. I also perceived a well-developed resourcefulness in these individuals in order to manage the scarcity that they experience.

The intention of this research was not to diminish the more negative views, as these are valid in many cases; however, they neglect the strengths of this form of family and the impacts that has on the single mothers’ children, those around them, in addition to the broader culture. Offering the opportunity for the single mothers to represent themselves and their own experiences was my main motivation for delving into this area of study.

**Definition of Terms**

**Single mother**

A single mother functions as a caretaker of children who is deprived of the support of a live in partner or spouse. Single parent family homes contain, as a minimum, two individuals, a parent in addition to a child or children, differentiating them from a home where only a single individual resides (Chapman, 2014).

**Strength**

The capability to withstand being propelled or beaten by a force. The characteristics that supports an individual in dealing with difficulties in a decisive and effectual manner.

(Strength n.d)
Resourcefulness

According to Zausznieski (2011), resourcefulness is an assemblage of analytical and behavioural abilities that are utilized to obtain, cultivate and reclaim one’s health. Resourcefulness comprises the capability to cultivate self-reliance in everyday tasks regardless of the likely detrimental circumstances, and to pursue support from others when one is not capable of functioning of one’s own volition.

Resiliency

According to Richardson’s (2002) met theory of resiliency, the resiliency process is a life enhancing approach which indicates that pressures and change offer opportunities for expansion and elevated resilient features, protective elements and spiritual resources. Resiliency theory implies that, for reintegration and expansion to happen, there is a necessity for vitality. Resiliency or vitality emanates from within the human spirit of the person and from external sources of strength (Richardson, 2002).

Assumptions

There is an assumption that participants will engage in the interview process and with interview questions in an open and honest manner. Additionally, it is expected that they will feel comfortable with being audio recorded and having their data utilized for the purpose of an academic study. I also presume that the participants will be able to offer a variety of strength based views about themselves and not only focus on the negativity of their life circumstances.
Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the research included single mothers who live within the Metro Vancouver area. These participants are not engaged in a live-in relationship with a partner. They may have a partner but not be cohabitating. The subjects’ racial identity, socioeconomic status and level of education were acknowledged but not the main focus of this study. The main intention with this study was to reveal the lived experience of single mothers who have exhibited strength, resiliency and resourcefulness.

Limitations

Findings of the study will be bound to the population of single mothers and they do not apply to single mothers who remarry or are in blended families. Moreover, this study is based on interviews and the reflections and perceptions of the participants and the information gathered therein. In this research, I am not able to control for the participants’ accuracy and their narratives presented during the interview process. Further, it was not in my control if participants chose to drop out or discontinue with the interview process.

Summary and Overview

This chapter presented the focus and purpose of the study in addition to a summary of the relevant research, problem statement, research questions, definition of terms, assumptions, scope, delimitations and limitations. Chapter two offers a review of the literature by first exploring the history of the lives of single mothers from a North American perspective. A large portion of this section focuses predominantly on deficiency concentrated studies which include: poverty, mental illness and negative
outcomes for single mothers. Cultural and feminist perspectives are brought in to the review to offer alternative views, and finally, strength-based studies of single mothers are presented.

Chapter three will present an overview the phenomenological methodology for the study in addition to information regarding the participants, data collection, analysis and credibility of the study. Chapter four then moves on to offer the findings and transcripts from the data, in addition to demographic information. The major themes that arose in the findings include: personal strengths, external supports, creative resourcefulness, resiliency and engagement and connection with children. Finally, chapter five provides interpretations of these findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The long-standing tradition of condemning single mother families is evident in the literature available on this topic. Historically, this form of family has not been viewed in as socially acceptable or even in a neutral manner. The fact that this family arrangement continues to exist despite the abundance of negativity from academia and the larger culture demonstrates its staying power in the midst of rejection and devaluation. Other more recent studies have chosen to acknowledge the strengths of this form of family despite the challenges, both on a cultural and individual level. (Chunn and Weiggers, 2015; Kaestle, 2016; Kjellstand, 2010; Smith, 2010; Zartler, 2014) These studies offer alternate perspectives and positive elements related to the capacities of single mother led families.

Content and Organization of the Review

This review will be broken into a number of sections. First, a look into the history of single mothers from a North American perspective will be explored. In addition, there will be a historical perspective of Canadian single mothers with a special emphasis on unwed mothers and media perspectives on single mothers in post war Canada. A special focus will be given to the treatment of single mothers in the United States (US) as much of what occurs on a cultural level in the US influences Canadian Culture.

Following the historical section, the more established deficiency concentrated studies are explored. This portion looks at the specific areas of poverty, mental illness and negative outcomes for children, as they seem to be themes that continually appear in academic databases. These studies are of importance as they show the establishment trend which focuses mainly on deficiency research of single mothers. The vast amount of
this literature demonstrates the necessity for greater exploration of female single parent families from a broader lens, so as to view them from multiple perspectives.

After reflecting upon the more established negative views, cultural perspectives are offered to assist with the broadening these perceptions. These views bring the larger culture and its influences into play. This portion also includes feminist perspectives.

Finally, an examination of the strength-based studies will be offered. This segment is divided into the common themes that emerge in this area. These include: African American single mothers, single mothers in higher education, and single mothers and resiliency and success.

**Review of the Research Problem**

There is generally a lack of studies done on the strengths of single parent families despite all the adversities they face. This is essential as these families endure and are increasing in numbers, (Statistics Canada, 2018). The pervasiveness of negative literature can create a sense of despair for these families. Since research is viewed with such authority, the findings often seep out into communities that surround the single mother and negatively influence her, how others view her, and how she perceives herself.

More positive strengths based research is required, not to negate the research that is done on the dysfunctional elements of this form of family, but to instil hope and courage in these families in addition to assisting professionals and clinicians to recognize their strengths.
**The Single Mother through Modern History**

This portion of the review will give some background into the lives of single mothers. This is done to demonstrate the shifts that have taken place in the lives of these families, and also to portray the marginalization and stigma of the past and how there are still lingering elements of these mischaracterizations that permeate through the broader culture today.

**Early History**

The history of single parenting is filled with challenges and transformations. According to Chapman (2014), lone parent families occurred historically because of a death of a parent. In the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries high death rates occurred as a result of wars and deaths due to complications during child birth. Lone parents were uncommon due to the legal, theological, social and civil disgrace and shame placed upon them (Chapman, 2014).

These mothers without husbands were perceived with wariness and antagonism since the time of the first settlers in North America and up to the present (Sidel, 2006). Early laws of the 17th century chastised and penalized single mothers, making a distinction between the worthy and the unworthy. Throughout the beginning of the 20th century, policies to assist the impoverished declared that only suitable and deserving women could obtain assistance, these for the most part, were widows (Sidel, 2006).

**Unwed Mothers in Post War Canada**

As time went on the behaviour towards these partner-less women continued to be problematic. In Canada’s own history, the treatment of unwed mothers in post wartime deserves examination. Women of this time who became pregnant were placed under
strict controls and ultimately forced to give up their children. This has placed a
devastating mark on the mothers and children of this time. Moreover, it has left lingering
attitudes on our present perceptions of lone parent families.

The Standing Senate Committee (2018), which was created to further probe this
time in Canada’s history, heard testimony from many witnesses who were part of the
coerced adoptions between 1945-1970. The emotionally devastating narratives reported
by mothers and adoptees offer disturbing depictions of this difficult time in Canadian
history (Standing Senate Committee, 2018).

Starting in the 1960s, the Canadian government allocated an annual fixed amount
of 25 million dollars to install and perpetually maintain the Canada Assistance Plan
(CAP), which was designed to assist provincial social assistance programs, connected to
the coerced adoption concern. The funds subsidized maternity houses for mothers who
were pregnant and not married (Standing Senate Committee, 2018).

These women, at the most defenseless point in their lives were deserted by family,
exiled from society and ill treated throughout their pregnancy and labour. Mothers were
often forced to agree to what they were told was the best option for the child (Standing
Senate Committee, 2018).

Between 1945-1971 approximately 600,000 babies were born to women who
were not married and noted by officials as illegitimate births. Young frightened woman
were forced to leave their communities by their own family members and religious
communities and were then sent to maternity houses that inflicted both emotional and
verbal abuse (Standing Senate Committee, 2018).
The pregnant women’s time at these homes was comparable to a prison term as they were mistreated and received inhumane punishment, which included both physical and sexual abuse (Standing Senate Committee, 2018).

Near the end of their pregnancy, unwed mothers in hospital were separated from married mothers and after their children were born there was zero contact with their babies. The mothers were not even provided the opportunity to see or engage with their child. Moreover, there was no information granted to these mothers in regards to their charter rights, and they were often not even given copies of the adoption papers. Finally, they were told to never mention or even think about these children but informed to “be good girls” or “get a puppies” to fill the overwhelming void they were left with (Senate Standing Committee, 2018).

The Senate Standing Committee (2018) came to the conclusion that it is necessary for Canada to take measures to make amends for the damage done to these women’s lives, to alleviate some of the grief and to support these women in understanding that their narratives have been validated and that the government apologize for what they had to suffer through (Standing senate committee, 2018).

The devastating situation with unwed mothers demonstrates a time in Canada’s history where single mother families were not granted a space to even exist. They were denounced, shunned from many aspects of society in addition to having their basic rights and freedoms torn away from them. Times certainly have changed but the enduring prejudices and stigmas of this time are subtly alive in our current culture.

**Canadian Perceptions of Single Mothers in the Media**
In terms of the perception of single mothers by the media and larger culture, unmarried mothers were looked upon as inferior, inconsequential, and for the most part held in contempt. The matter of illegitimacy was unthinkable in the Canadian media throughout the 1950s, and the representation of the unmarried mother as a righteous breaker of the laws was altered in the 1960’s to the unmarried mother as a social issue (Crawford, 1997).

In post war Canada, the image of the family was one of domestication, traditional values and life in suburbia. Babies were born at exceptional rates and brought up in families in which the sexual division of labour was inflexible. Mothers raised their children under the guidance of Doctor Spock and the father was the breadwinner in the family who attained the house in suburbia, the car, and the consumer goods, which presented the image of accomplishment and prosperity. Sex was only to occur within the sanctitude of marriage, and those who did not follow these rules and got pregnant were regarded with great disapproval. Additionally, the men were for the most part omitted and not considered to be part of the problems connected with pregnant unwed mothers (Crawford, 1997).

Unmarried women finally were allowed to keep their infants as a result of the sexual revolution in which there was a huge cultural perception shift in lone mothers from aberrant women to lone mothers as sexually liberated women (Crawford, 1997).

In spite of the abatement of public prejudice, unmarried mothers continued to confront bias and bigotry, most notably from the older segments of the population as they continued to view single mothers as mentally unsound, a perception that media presented during the 1960s. This was problematic as the older generation often controlled both
employment and housing. Owners of property and employers were unwilling to rent or offer jobs to lone parent mothers. Single mothers at this point in time were largely viewed as an economic burden, a belief that persists up to the present (Crawford, 1997).

**Canada Revenue Agency and the Single Mother**

Most recently, single mothers have experienced pressures from the federal government. These lone mothers were informed that they would have to repay or have their child tax benefit stopped. The child tax credit is a monthly payment offered to families to assist them with child rearing. This payment is based on parents’ income and is calculated yearly at income tax time. Not long ago, the CBC (Roman, 2017) obtained over 100 emails from single mothers making complaints about issues with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). The CRA was questioning the validity of lone parent status and cut off payments if they didn’t receive the correct proof. By CRA’s standards this usually involves a letter from an ex-spouse or letters from doctors, dentists and school officials vouching for their single parent status. Sometimes even when these documents were provided the CRA still refused payments and even demanded back payments. This had a devastating impact on the lives of these single parents who were largely female, often leaving these families struggling financially and having to divert what little energy they already had to contend with the CRA. Again, it was a policy which focused on single parent families and impacted them in devastating ways.

**Single Mothers in the United States**

Since what occurs in the US often seeps into Canadian culture, it is worthwhile to examine what has happened to single mothers in the last few decades in that country, starting specifically in the 1970s. Sidel (2006) writes of the predominance of conservative
beliefs in the United States. Accelerated changes in society in the 1970s and 1980s increased the number of single mothers, most notably those having children while not married. Additionally, at that time, there was a consequential hike in the pregnancy of teenagers, a persistently elevated divorce ratio, and elemental changes in the position and status of women. All these social issues are partly responsible for the unease around single motherhood. President Ronald Reagan’s vicious description of women in poverty as “Welfare Queens” was followed by considerable reductions in fundamental social services that affected impoverished women and their children (Sidel, 2006).

In media, single mothers were represented by a surprisingly strong female lead character in Murphy Brown. This was a TV comedy in the 1990s which confronted some of the negative beliefs of single mothers. The main character held a successful career as a journalist at the same time as autonomously raising her child. US Vice president Dan Quale at the time condemned the character for diminishing the need for fathers in raising children while US President, George W Bush, enacted a health marriage initiative in an effort to motivate single parents to get married for the welfare of their children, a belief that still lingers in people’s minds today. This crept into the larger culture and created more negative cultural views of lone mother families (Chapman, 2014).

Today in the US more of the population perceive lone parents as being adequate and capable, while others continue to carry a more negative perception of single parents. These unfavourable perceptions are most certainly a result of misunderstandings. These misunderstandings result in the general population being likely to connect single parent families with lethargy and aversion to work (Chapman, 2014).
Throughout the 20th century there was an increase in the number of single parent families. There was also an elevation in divorces and births to women who were not married, with the 1960s and 1970s having the largest overall increases in divorce rates (Chapman, 2014).

The lingering elements of history laid a framework for the views held against single mothers today. Since the history of single mothers is mired in negativity, it is worthwhile to examine the current literature that assists in perpetuating these beliefs.

**Deficiency Focused Literature**

Examining the studies that place an emphasis on the challenges and societal difficulties of being a single mother are indeed relevant and necessary. Research of this nature reveals a portion of the lives of these families, but not the totality of their experiences. For the purposes of this study, three major areas will be examined, these include: poverty, mental health and negative outcomes for children. These themes were selected as they were the most commonly occurring in the deficiency studies connected to lone parent mother-led households.

**Poverty**

According to Statistics Canada (2018) Starting in the late 1990s lower rates of income for single parent families began to decline due to more employment, in combination with increased child care support and the roll out of the national child tax benefit. In spite of this decline, about two in five children in single parent families lived in households that were low income in 2015. This ratio was almost four times higher than for children from married or two parent households. Furthermore, the greater number of children living in single parent households lived with their mother whose
income rate was about 25% lower than if they lived with a single father (Statistics Canada, 2018).

For the most part, the incomes of single mothers are unduly depicted among those in poverty. In homes led my single mothers in 1998, over ¼ lived below the poverty line. Just over 40% of children who live in single mother-led families were in poverty compared to only approximately 15% in male-led families, and just under 10% in married or couple-led families (Fetley, 2003).

With pay disparities between men and women, single mothers are more apt to experience poverty at considerably higher proportions than lone fathers. Indeed, single fathers were 44 points higher than single mothers in regards to the poverty line in 1990. It would seem that single mothers are at a disadvantage from two sources simultaneously, their income is less due to gender; in addition, they often have more children then single fathers (Bauer et al, 2016).

Another issue that increases poverty in single mothers is the lack of financial support from their ex-partner. Negotiations between the parent who has primary custody (usually the mother) and the non-custodial parent (usually the father) in regards to expenses and decisions around time allocation are often not easily attained or negotiated on either. As a result, the non-custodial parent offers less than adequate child support. Often times leaving the primary care giver without enough funds to spend on items or services for the child thereby committing most of their energies to labour and childcare. The implementation of liberal work benefits could considerably strengthen the income of single parents either by decreased income tax ratios or increased childcare contributions or the two together (Francescani et al, 2015).
Overall, single mothers have to deal more than single fathers with increased insecurity arising from poverty, and of course more than married or partnered families too (Maldonado & Nieuenhuis, 2015). Single and two parent families are different in numerous ways including the amount of obtainable resources in addition to the capacity to utilize those resources to avert poverty. These resources consist of: time, finances, number of adults that are able to be employed including the capability for partners to portion out and allocate responsibilities and duties (Maldonado & Nieuenhuis, 2015).

Being a single parent as compared to married or partnered parent is also considered to be a huge drawback. Partnered parents have more resources that do single family parents and single parents have inadequate protection around their income. They lack the second earner to rely upon and are not capable of sharing or distributing household and child care responsibilities with a partner (Maldonado & Nieuenhuis, 2015). Moreover, single parents have a deficiency in money and time, as they need to manage work and childcare responsibilities for the most part on their own (Cohen, 2014).

Outside of comparing single mothers with other families, there is also the constant refrain of the single mother and her reliance on welfare. The word that is connected with policies to relieve poverty and welfare to work initiatives is self-sufficiency (Rigaud, 2018). A Self-Sufficiency Matrix was developed in 2004 by the Snohomish County Task Force to calculate self-sufficiency using variables such as accessibility to services, occupation, poverty level, earnings, management of household, ability to set goals in addition to mental health issues and abuse of substances (Rigaud, 2018). This Matrix most often is used to assist single mothers in getting off welfare.
Single mothers who have young children frequently are long time beneficiaries of welfare assistance. Knoef and Van Ours (2016) sought opportunities to encourage single mother welfare recipients to work part time influenced by the self-sufficiency ideal. They felt this would encourage the single mothers not to abandon welfare benefits but to make finding a full time job less challenging in the future and as a result ensuring a self-sufficient individual (Knoef & Van Ours, 2016).

The policy makers who create social welfare programs view those who utilize these services in two categories, either they are worthy or unworthy. In general, those who receive welfare are viewed as having a low work ethic which is transferrable from the parents to the children. The suggestion is that welfare undermines recipient’s aspirations to become part of the work force and on their way to economic self-sufficiency. Welfare does not encourage economic self-sufficiency but maintains poverty from the current generation to the next (Rigaud, 2018).

Poverty and single motherhood is commonly linked. The image of the single mother on welfare still permeates much of the culture today. Compared to both father led and two parent led families, lone parent mothers are at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to income in these studies.

**Mental Health and the Single Mother**

In addition to poverty, single mothers are often associated with mental health issues, the largest being depression. The following studies explore these aspects and their impacts on single mothers.

Many studies (Brauer, 2018; Cunningham & Koestler, 2007; Landero-Hernández et al., 2009) noted that single parents encounter numerous difficulties and are at elevated
risk of having depression. Depression can be defined as mentally maladjusted afflictions such as unhappiness, lethargy, complications with cognitions and attentiveness elevated or decrease in appetite and number of hours of sleep, feelings of rejection and despair and occasionally suicidal ideation. It varies from person to person. It may be short lived and fleeting in some but more relentless and long lasting in others. It also tends to be more common for women (Depression, 2017). Various elements add to this elevated risk for depression among single parents including increased economic pressure, caregiving responsibilities and decreased social support (Brauer, 2018; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Weiss, 1979).

Single mothers endure unreasonably elevated proportions of physical and mental health issues when contrasted with married parents. Furthermore, they have larger than average ratios of depression due to the increased vulnerability to stress that they endure which is related to their current as well as past life experiences (Boyle et al, 2003).

Stress seems to be a significant element when taking into account the differences in mental health problems among single and married mothers. The demanding nature of being the exclusive caregiver of a child or multiple children likely restricts connections with friends and social environments in addition to restricting involvement in voluntary communal organizations. This social seclusion that single mothers experience could consequently create feelings of anguish and melancholy. The lack of networks of support can also create increased emotional distress for single mothers (Boyle et al, 2003).

In a study that compared married and single mother’s well-being, Boyle et al (2003) used variables on current life events, childhood hardships, social supports, social engagement and amount of social connection these mothers experienced. They
discovered that stresses that were social have the greatest effect in terms of linking depression to single parenting.

In another study utilizing a sizable national sample of Canadians, Avison et al (1999) discovered that single mothers were two times more likely to have endured an incident of major depression in the former year than married mothers.

Hilton and Kophera-Frye (2006) also found when comparing depression in single mothers and fathers that single mothers disclosed notably higher rates of symptoms of depression than single fathers. It was also found that single fathers had remarkably more social connections with friends than did single mothers. From this, they concluded that single mothers have fewer connections with friends and therefore greater levels of depressive symptoms (Hilton & Kophera-Frye, 2006).

Other research, amalgamated in Canada and other western countries, demonstrated that single mothers endure weaker mental health than married or partnered mothers. Colton et al. (2015) utilize Robert Putman’s (1993) term of social capital to measure the social connections of their participants. Putman defines social capital as “features of social organizations such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination for mutual benefit” The authors (2015) found that single mothers were more than double the amount of times more likely to disclose fair or poor self-rated mental health when contrasted with mothers who were married or partnered. These discoveries additionally suggest that single mothers’ low rated mental health may be attributed to their greater restricted accessibility to social economic and social capital resources (Colton et al, 2015)

Single mothers also seem to have general lower levels of happiness and contentment. Single mothers demonstrate lower levels of happiness when compared with
all other female groups. In a study (Ifcher & Zorghamee, 2014) that compared the happiness of mothers with all other female groups they found a deficit in single mother happiness. In general, single mothers are not as happy as women who do not categorize themselves as single mothers, all single women without children and all mothers who are married (Ifcher & Zorghamee, 2014). This study gathered research from the General Social Survey in the United States and compared differences from 1972-2008.

Single mothers and level of mental health indicate depression, stresses and social isolation as key themes. Furthermore, there is an implication that the lives of single mothers are miserable and bleak overall.

**Negative Outcomes for Children from Single Parent Families**

In North America, the consequences of single parenting on children can be placed into two groups. First, those ascribed to the low income of single parents and secondly to the outcomes that come post-divorce. Four issues can be foreseen as to the adaptability of children to divorce. These include: the course of time, the nature and characteristics of the relationship with their main guardian, the degree of discord between the parents, in addition to the economic level of the primary parent (Feltey, 2003) Children are likely to experience many difficulties in single mother families. According to Fetley (2003), after a couple of years prior to divorce, the children show increased amounts of antisocial behaviour, hostility, nervousness, and difficulties at school, more so than children from two parent households. Moreover, children are more likely to suffer both short and long periods of emotional difficulties, increased rates of absence at school, decreased level of education, and increased ratios of incompletion of high school. In addition to this, they are more likely to engage in reckless behaviour which includes substance abuse and
addiction (Abramson et al, 2017). Furthermore, children being brought up in single mother households are more apt to have health problems due to the deterioration in their standard of living than their married or partnered counterparts (Fettle, 2003; Haider et al, 2017)

Moreover, research has deduced that people who are raised in families with two parents have greater behavioral and cognitive abilities than children from mother led households (Abramson et al, 2016; Haider et al, 2017).

As children enter the teenage years they are also more apt to experience difficulties. Youth of single mother led families had high disagreeableness, qualities of introversion, antisocial tendencies and more evasiveness to experience than with families with two parents. This contributes to greater prospects of psychopathology, antisocial behaviours, and narcissism. These children tend also to demonstrate belligerent and anatomic personality traits (Haier et al, 2017).

The connection between the fathers who have not been present for much of their children’s lives can also be problematic and tense. Fathers frequently lack interest and are indifferent to their children. The missing male income in the family can have even more dire consequences. This lack of financial resources, in addition to other causes for tension and pressure are some main reasons for the difficulties endured by single mothers and their children (Feltey, 2003).

Later in life, when children from single parent households are adults, they are more apt to get married, have offspring too young, and then perpetuate the cycle by divorcing and becoming single parents themselves. This was even more likely with female children of single mother families (Feltey, 2003; McLanahan & Booth, 1989).
Examining the areas of poverty, mental health and effects on children cannot be refuted or ignored. The research presented is valid and of importance. However, these perspectives fail to offer a comprehensive understanding of these families as a whole and often single parents become relegated to abnormal and dysfunction forms of family. It is also worthwhile to note that academics who participate in research concerning single mothers’ lives are linked to the creation of these narratives. Published academic research is usually the space where these narratives are gathered, inspected, critiqued and distributed for utilization, and all for the most part without the engaged involvement of the single mothers themselves. Even though there are vast amounts of literature available on single mothers, their voices are largely excluded from the research. This reflects the omission of lone mother voices from many facets our culture and society (Gustafson et al, 2016).

In society, the numbers for single parents are not diminishing (Statistics Canada, 2013). Therefore, they are a form of family this is likely to remain a part of our culture. In that case, it is worthwhile to examine areas that the deficiency concentrated studies often overlook.

In the next section, the views of lone mother families will be explore from more expansive outlooks which put into question the view that the nuclear family is the only true and functional model to which all others must be compared.

**Questioning the Dominant Cultural Views of the Single Mother**

Studies on children of lone parent families have chiefly examined adaptation and consequences with a concentration on the deficits of being raised in a single parent family for the development of children, and on an array of interacting dangers and determinants
of protection. This view is created principally in terms of deficiencies and adverse circumstances correlated with moralistic undercurrents. The vilification of single mother led families is related to the over deification of the nuclear two parent family. This tends to create a huge distance between the two, leaving the single mother family to carry the stigma of not being a complete family form (Zartler, 2014).

Families that did not conform to the conception of what a nuclear family was were viewed as a danger for the working of society. Even though these families are acknowledged today as a real family, moralistic undertones have not yet vanished from the media or intellectual literature. Furthermore, single mothers are to a strong degree conforming in regards to the ideology of the nuclear family (Zartler, 2014).

Based on the foundations of normalcy, nuclear families are viewed as the more beneficial arrangement and are allotted with abundant advantages. Single parent families are generally speaking, “self labeling” as inadequate. This combined with efforts to create invisibility of this form of family may increase the chance of marginalization and add to an atmosphere in which assisting these families and their children could no longer be perceived as relevant. Supporting efforts to critically consider the nuclear family system and to develop beneficial narratives and versions of single parent families could add to, and be instrumental in, enhancing these families living circumstances (Zartler, 2014).

It is crucial for cognitive and physical well-being that professionals in the field who work with single parents acknowledge that single parents and their children are at risk of encountering feelings of deficiency and inadequacy as a result of constantly being compared to the nuclear family form. To assist these families, it is salient that they
cultivate an image of themselves and their families as affirmative and worthwhile (Zartler, 2014).

Cultural norms have a great impact on the well being of single mothers. Fetchenhaur & Stavorova (2015) show that a country’s norms concerning the importance of two parents in bringing up a child are important in understanding the well-being of single parents and their experience in parenting at the micro or macro levels of society.

Collectivist countries show a greater predominance of families with two parents and a common belief that being raised by a single parent creates problematic children in addition to miserable single parents. In these countries, (Ukraine and Turkey) motherhood was connected with an inferior life satisfaction and more negative emotions. In contrast, parenthood had almost no impact on the well-being of individuals who were partnered. Single parents represented the non-standard or a non-intact form of family and could be subject to social criticism in addition to condemnation or exclusion (Fetchenhaur & Stavorova, 2015).

Alternatively, individualistic countries, such as Norway and Denmark, where single parent families experience more social acceptability, lower levels of well-being were not different from those parents who have partners. Specifically, parenthood was not connected with any added adverse consequences for single parents. This is compelling as it offers some parameters for the commonly held beliefs that single parenthood is more destructive to emotional well-being. These results demonstrate that in certain situations single parenthood does not hurt single parents at all. In countries in which parents are free from the cultural obligations to offer children a traditional nuclear
family, the psychological strain of being a single parent was diminished (Fetchenhaur & Stavorova 2015).

The views of single mothers and the lack of support they receive speak more about the culture itself than these forms of families. Two of the principle reasons that western society is prepared to place so much blame on lone mothers for almost all of the difficulties encountered by the North American family, is the fictitious myth that people are able to control their own fate, and that those single mothers in poverty are just plain lazy. Instead of simply condemning these individuals, there needs to be a recognition that the behaviour of single mothers is powerfully affected by ubiquitous economic or social movements and trends. If there is truly a desire to bolster and assist both married and single parents, there needs to be recognition that both these forms of family need to be supported by the broader culture. In addition, there finally needs to be an acceptance of the single parent family as a valid and acceptable family form (Sidel, 2006).

**Feminist Perspectives**

Feminist influenced reforms connected to families have “politicized the person” and added to more equality for women over time. In the past, maternal feminists assisted to make women visible in the eyes of the law as mothers and wives, with the enactment of laws and policies giving these women custody rights, economic support and property ownership. Modern day liberal feminists have assisted to establish official legal equality of women with men in the family through legislation which is unbiased by gender and policies pertaining to custody and property (Duffy & Manell, 2005).

The repercussion of the liberal feminist inopportunity to sufficiently theorise women’s work at home, in addition to the work force were understood only as time
passed. Merely relocating women into paid work did not create freedom as frequently they had to manage with a “double day” filled with low-paid service or office work in the “pink ghetto” and voluntary domestic work to care for their children. The importance of the diminished nature of women’s labour in the public and private realms was excruciatingly exposed when the divorce rate in Canada escalated skyward after the establishment of “no fault” basis for divorce in 1968 and once more in 1985 divorce restriction eliminated “fault” as a basis for divorce completely (Duffy & Manell, 2005).

The unparalleled ratio of divorce since the 1970s has significantly aggravated the poverty of women. When making decisions regarding spousal support and property entitlement, courts have often not considered the significance of women’s voluntary work to family and social reproduction in addition to the influence of non-standard work on women’s capability to attain financial independence. For example, not taking part in the labour force due to the care of young children has a major damaging impact on women’s chances and progression in the paid labour force. Determinations by judges in regards to spousal and child support and property often lack acknowledging and dealing with the fundamental inequality in the financial lives of men and women after divorce. Courts are inclined to deduce self-sufficiency not in terms of previous standards of living, but in terms of income of any kind (Duffy & Manell, 2005).

It is deceptive and biased to portray single mothers as a demoralized group who have lost faith in their own abilities, assuming society will care for them. In spite of insecurity, volatility, and the pressure and stresses in their lives, single mothers are vigorously opposing any enticement to meekly relinquish accountability for living their lives. Both legal and social policy, based on distorted postulations about the character of
single mothers, ought to be substituted by tactics which facilitate and promote the positive choices and decisions that they have made in the past to help foster great self-efficacy in the future (Duffy & Manell, 2005).

Challenging gender norms in the family gives an opportunity to examine and transform existing power structures that socialize future generations in addition to perpetuating the oppressiveness of these structures. This is due to the family being so fundamental in terms of its socialization process (Kaestle, 2016).

Feminist scholars have disputed conventional research on families by including families that do not conform to the norm. They do this by first prompting gender awareness to research on families, then by increasing consciousness around intersectionality, and finally by employing research to fundamentally revise family life to advance more justice and impartiality (Kaestler, 2016).

In our current family landscape, change is still evidently slow in coming. Many contemporary children’s picture books continue to depict a normal family as Caucasian, middle to upper class, partnered, heterosexual gender clichéd and married. All families that do not fit this image are considered less than or outside of the normal family. As a result, those placed in the category as “other” are frequently represented as inferior to, or on the margins of society in contrast to the nuclear family, which is most often viewed as the reference group through which all other families are compared. Those families considered as “other” are for the most part ostracized, rejected or diminished to substandard clichés (Kaestler, 2016).

Leaving behind the notion of the nuclear family as a reference group for all other families is imperative. Feminist scholars argue that diverse families such as single parent
families must be examined on their own terms and not through constant comparison to the nuclear or reference family merely because it is a practiced academic tradition. (Kastler, 2016).

Rather than constantly focusing on the negative aspects of single mother-led families, it is worthwhile to consider what works for them despite the challenges. In their study on single mother’s dealing with stigma, Chunn and Weiggers (2015) emphasize that single mothers were grateful for the absence of conflict, the stable emotional environment they lived in, the close relationship they had with their children, and not having to concern themselves with the care taking of a partner. They reported how their children enhanced their lives and brought them courage, delight and a great sense of pride. An interesting finding in this study was how the connection with children seemed to offer a buffer or protection from the cultural stigma that surrounded the single mothers (Chunn & Wiegers, 2015).

**Strength Based Research**

Expansive views, like those previously mentioned, assist in bringing into awareness the larger forces at play in the lives of single mothers. From this place a strength based perspective will be presented. The amount of literature in this area is much smaller in scope than the deficiency focused research. It does exist however, and seems to be growing in numbers. Most of the research in this area was done in the early 2000’s to present. A vast majority of the supportive literature is concentrated in three specific areas which include: studies that centered on African American single mothers and resiliency, in addition to positive outcomes they have with their children; secondly,
single mothers attaining post-secondary education, and finally, resiliency and successes of this form of family.

**African American Single mothers**

It was uplifting and poignant to find research in support of African American single mothers. This seems to be in reaction to the heavy and daunting amount of literature that is devastatingly negative towards this group. The focus is largely on the resiliency of this family form in addition to the close connection and the positive influence they have on their children.

In their study on how African American single mothers influence their son’s academic performance, Robinson and Werblow (2012) note that high functioning African American males ascribe many of their accomplishments to the direction, instruction and assistance they obtain from their single mothers. They characterize their mothers as having high standards, assisting their children with dreams of college, offering encouragement, having meaningful discussions and acting as a strong presence of authority in their child’s lives.

The themes that emerged from Bustamante et al.’s study (2016) on resilient single African American mothers and their successful sons were also insightful. The study found that mothers understood the significance of education in their children’s lives and felt deeply attached to their sons. They somehow managed financial hardships, found support through both through their families and religion. Furthermore, all of the participants showed resilience and capability to utilize resources and persevere despite the challenging life situations they faced (Bustamante et al, 2016).
How African American single mothers “make it” is a daily endeavour. Brodsky (1999) found that balancing of pressures and resources was an everyday part of African American single mothers’ lives. She noted that to be successful the mothers employed certain techniques. First, they had the capacity to be grateful for resources and achievements. They also were able to re-examine stresses in ways that prompted action rather than diminishment. Finally, they were able to find, acknowledge and make use of resources from assistive supports to manage the pressing demands, and to hold on to and tackle new objectives and intentions for themselves (Brodsky, 1999).

The majority of the women did not have a sense that they had “made it” as a single mother. However, “making it” was a term that was more relatable to their lives as it was in their daily practices and the end results that defined resiliency in these women (Brodsky, 1999).

**Education and the Single Mother**

In terms of more positive research on aspects of single parenting many PhD dissertations were written on the topic. Most were focused on single mother and a post-secondary education attainment (Goldsmith, 2009; Houston; Kline, 2017; William, 2018).

For Williams (2018) in her research, she looked at factors like family and friends that supported single mothers through education completion and degree attainment. She noted that forty percent of single mothers had moderate levels of support to help them with completing their degree.

In Kline’s (2017) study she discusses how the mothers in her study worked towards their goal of higher education using a step-by-step approach. She uses terms like “will power” and “way power” to describe approaches the single mothers took. Kline
defines will power as a determined intention and ‘way power’ as the capability to maneuver around barriers and obstructions. For the lone mothers these included positive attitudes, inner strengths and a strong belief that they could surmount the difficulties that would be presented to them. She also noted the resiliency of this group of individuals and how the refusal to quit was always at the forefront (Kline, 2017).

In Houston (2013) an examination significant themes were presented regarding single mothers and education. These themes included possessing a support system, motivational elements, having confidence in the ability to be successful in college, managing the barriers and difficulties, self-control, and management of time. Moreover, three secondary themes arose that included governing numerous concerns such as organizational abilities and spiritual beliefs and practices. These crucial factors were noted in the success of these single mothers.

In Goldsmith’s (2009) study in how single mothers managed through the patriarchal system to higher education, the participants spoke most often of a motivation for independence by their desire to succeed and by the incentive of their children. They discussed post-secondary education as being a means to develop and enhance their lives overall.

These dissertations were strength focused and demonstrate a strong amount of resiliency in these single mothers in their journey through higher education and the challenges that they faced there.

**Resiliency and Success of Single Mothers**
There were additional studies which concentrated on the resiliency and success of single mothers. They were divided into two categories: those in the lower classes and those in the middle to upper classes.

Smith (2010) uncovered perceived strengths and successes of low-income single mothers. She discovered what these women believed to be their strengths and what assisted them to be successful. These strengths were split into three groups: “self-reliance, parenting competence and accomplishments.” In terms of self-reliance, the participants in the study spoke about doing everything for themselves and taking pride in that ability. They also reported staying strong and preserving by being dependent on their own strength and tenacity when dealing with challenges and stressful incidents in their lives.

With parenting competence, the participants stated how important the relationship was with their child/children. They noted how children are the most important part of their lives, stating that they value the strong well-connected relationships with their children. They also mentioned the importance of imparting their values and being a good role model for their offspring. Finally in Smith’s study (2010) the mothers noted their accomplishments. These being the pride they take in the raising of their children, the ability of making good choices for themselves and their children and overcoming the challenges that they endured. There was great satisfaction in persisting and overcoming all the challenges they had to deal with in addition to an understanding and acknowledgement of all the effort on their part (Smith, 2010).

Looking back at the history of single mother families, there have been marked transitions through time. No longer are these women forced to give away their children
or be rejected and shunned by family and the larger culture. Despite this, the lingering elements of the past still trickle down to the present. This is evident specifically with the large concentration and focus on deficiency based research of lone mother led families. There is research however that questions the validity of these studies and attempts to offer alternative views on family and specifically how it is viewed and normalized in our culture. Additionally, there are studies that are strength based. These are smaller in number but are creating an impact. They offer alternative views and demonstrate other angles of this family form that have been ignored for decades.

We need to keep in mind Chapman’s (2014) view that the current bulk of children brought up in single parent families are healthy functioning adults. In addition, people and families are progressively becoming more complex. Consequently, knowing the elements that are responsible for healthy growth is crucial for all the families of the future, not only the traditional nuclear form. Wahler (2002) emphasizes that it is worthwhile to investigate the single mother as one possessing resilience and wisdom and even learning from this form of family to better understand parent effectiveness in spite of challenges and adversities (Wahler, 2002).

Historically, this form of family has been viewed as dysfunctional. The fact that this family arrangement continues to exist despite the abundance of negativity from academia and the larger culture demonstrates its staying power within our culture. Other more recent studies have chosen to acknowledge the strengths of this form of family despite the challenges that present themselves both on a cultural and individual level. These studies offer alternate perspectives and positive elements related to the capacities of single mother led families.
Upon completing an examination into the background and academic literature available regarding single mothers, an introduction to the methodology utilized in for this research is presented.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Following a comprehensive search and subsequent examination of the literature on resilient and resourceful single mothers, only a small amount of research was discovered that was related to this subject. Furthermore, the literature on this topic was very specific in terms of its focus and often failed to include the category of resourcefulness. In addition, the topic area is still overwhelmed by the literature that paints a more negative view of single mothering.

This study is broad in nature and examines the lives of single mothers specifically at points of tremendous challenge and how they were able to develop the courage to overcome the difficulties through personal strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness. Chapter three focuses on the methods used to conduct the study.

This chapter is comprised of the following components: (a) qualitative enquiry, (b) phenomenology approach, (c) participants, (d) informed consent, (e) structure of the study, (f) instrumentation, (g) data collection, (h) data organization and analysis, (j) trustworthiness and credibility (k) summary of the chapter.

Qualitative Inquiry

For the purposes of this study qualitative research was implemented. Qualitative research is interested in meaning and concerned with how people understand the world in addition to how they experience occurrences or happenings in their lives. Therefore, qualitative researchers are interested in the characteristics, features and texture of experience as opposed to identification of cause-effect connections, as is done in quantitative research. Moreover, qualitative enquiry takes the stance that the meanings
that are ascribed to events are done so by the research subjects themselves as opposed to the researcher (Willing, 2013).

**Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenological inquiry is the main form of qualitative research that will be utilized for this research. The intention of phenomenological research is to generate knowledge in regards to the subjective experience of research participants and to understand the “essential” meaning of something. (Van Manen, 1990; Willing, 2013; Zahavi et al, 2018)). The main aim of phenomenology is to condense individual experience with a phenomenon to an account of a “universal essence” (Willing, 2013). The researcher then accumulates data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and cultivates a synthesized account of the essence of the experience for all of the persons involved (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology’s intention is to comprehend experience as opposed to determining what is happening or what generates the psychological or social events to occur. The purpose of this form of research is to come as close as possible to the research subjects’ experience, and to join them in their work by walking in their shoes and perceiving the world from their point of view (Willing, 2013).

**Background of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology was initially developed by the philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl expanded ideas and approaches of modern science to involve the study of consciousness, greatly affecting philosophy, humanities and the social sciences during the 20th century. This work was a challenge to what was viewed as dehumanization in
psychology, and provided unique research and theory that realistically reproduces the unique features of human behaviour and first person experience (Wertz, 2005).

What made this method so progressive was that with Husserl’s new philosophy, objective understanding of things- objectivity- could be acquired through an examination of the qualitative features of our conscious experience of things- subjectivity. That objectivity was to be discovered and reliant on subjectivity was a distinctive separation from the standards of the more established philosophical methods to understanding. Even though phenomenology is manifold and diverse, as there are numerous phenomenologies, the belief in acquiring objectivity by way of subjective experience is recognizable to all (Shudak, 2018).

To understand a thing or a phenomenon, Husserl recommended that we come back to the things themselves by way of a phenomenological inquiry. Administering such an inquiry is no effortless task. On Husserl’s conditions, a phenomenological inquiry necessitates an individual to arrest, bracket or curtail their biased ideas which may lead to a misrepresentation of the thing itself; it necessitates a decontextualizing and depleting of oneself so as to return to the thing of inquiry. A phenomenological inquiry is a returning to a thing by going back to one’s intimate, mindful, bodily, and lived experiences with that thing. It is a manner of understanding by means of evaluating the amalgamated “first person” experiences regarding how the thing presents itself to the individual (Shudack, 2018).

Heidegger, a previous student to Husserl for a short time while attending the University of Freiburg in Germany, came up with a different view of phenomenology. For Heidegger, phenomenology inquiry necessitates that one’s context should be
considered when seeking to study a phenomenon. In this way there is no requirement to bracket out the world, a presuppositionless attitude is beyond the bounds of possibility when examining phenomenon. For Heidegger, phenomenology is not so much an examination into experiences of consciousness with things in order to understand the essence of that thing, as it is an examination of, and an investigation into, our conscious and yet highly contextualized and reciprocal experience that produce a thing by virtue of knowing the human being. Heidegger’s is a philosophical path to studying what it means to “be” or to exist as a human being by way of interpreting our experiences and connections with those things with which we have conscious interactions. (Shudak, 2018)

What makes phenomenology rather unique is that it opposes methodological codification, while at the same time advocates depend on familiar approaches to obtain and examine data. A number of those methods comprise of the creation of research questions that are grounded in experience, the utilization of interviews to unearth experience and supply data, attempts at bracketing, recognizing units of meaning by transcription, clustering the units in affiliation to the research question, and the recognition of reappearing themes to assist in making sense of the experience of that phenomenon (Shudak, 2018).

**Descriptive and Interpretive Phenomenology**

There are distinctions to the degree in which phenomenology examines meaning of experience that are used in current scholarship. A certain number of phenomenological researchers adopt to concentrate on the description; whereas, others desire to comprehend more about its fundamental or underlying meaning. These approaches in phenomenology diverge from descriptive to interpretive (Willing, 2013).
Phenomenology that is descriptive has a particular approach. It is also much closer to Husserl’s view as it is interested in seizing experience and obliges researchers to get as close to the data as attainable without ascribing meaning that is external to that of the description (Willing, 2013).

Interpretive phenomenology, on the other hand, is different from this, as it does not take description of experience completely at “face value”. This view is more in line with Heidegger as it attempts to comprehend the meaning of a description of experience by stepping outside of the description and contemplating on its position as a description and its broader cultural, psychological and social interpretations. As a result, interpretive phenomenological research attempts to produce understanding about the “quality and texture” of experience in addition to its meaning within a specific cultural and social frame of reference. Interpretive phenomenologists do not accept that it is possible to generate a purified description of experience, and that description invariably includes a degree of interpretation (Willing, 2013) This form of phenomenology is also known as Hermeneutics, which is derived from the Greek term meaning interpreting, interpretation and interpreter. It was considered to be connected to the messenger god, Hermes, from ancient Greek mythology (Schmidt, 2006). For the purposes of this study a more interpretive phenomenological approach was utilized.

Participants

The participants who took part in this research were female single mothers who ranged in age from 30-65. Individuals had either small children in addition or adult children. They lived in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, British Columbia and were not limited by ethnicity.
Before beginning this process of selecting participants, permission to engage with the project was done with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at City University of Seattle. After receiving an approval (see Appendix A), the search for single mother participants began.

As a means to obtain my sample, a local single mother’s support group network affiliated with the YWCA in Vancouver, BC was contacted. According to Bateman (2014) at the YWCA in Vancouver, in giving a description of these single mother support groups stated that:

These groups run weekly and are a chance for single moms to get together, share resources, support one another and build a community. Free childcare is offered during the meetings and groups are made up of moms who become ‘members’ and commit to coming each week. Groups are run by a facilitator and cover everything from the serious to the silly.

These groups are the ideal place to find single mothers from various backgrounds and situations located in Metro Vancouver. The following is a copy of the email that was sent out to the YWCA Single Mothers Groups in Metro Vancouver:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Laura Bowie from City University of Seattle in Vancouver. This research is working towards the completion of a Master in Counselling. I am asking you to take part in this study because I am trying to learn more about the strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness of single mothers. If you are interested, I will take about an hour of your time asking you about your stories of strength, resilience and resourcefulness as a single mother. All information will be kept in confidence.
and anonymity. Your participation is voluntary. There are no anticipated risks or benefits to your participation. I will offer a Starbucks gift card of a small amount for your contribution in the study. Please contact Laura at:
lbowiecityu@cityuniversity.edu if you are interested

A manager of the program was contacted and the nature of the study was and conveyed. The management were pleased and agreed to send out the email regarding recruitment for the study. Participants were also acquired through “snowballing” (Creswell, 2014), which refers to the selection of a sample where possible participants are asked if they may know of other individuals with applicable attributes and experiences who could be approached for or made aware of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Qualified participants met certain criteria: first, they identified as single mothers, and second, they felt that they were able to overcome certain challenges they faced as a result of being a single mother. For this study, participants could range in age from 25 – 70 and had children. The children did not need to be living with them at present. For this study a total of six single mothers were chosen. According to Englander (2012) phenomenology as a method suggests that a minimum of three participants be part of the research. The number of five participants is suitable as it offers a variety of different perspectives, which are full and textured.

**Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

When contacted by individuals who were interested in participating in the study, they were informed that the researcher is a student at City University of Seattle in Vancouver, and is currently in a Master in Counselling program. Each individual was made aware that a research study on the strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness of
single mothers was being conducted, and that for this study five participants will be interviewed. The participants were informed that through these interviews the researcher will attempt to find commonalities between the participants and their life experiences. Additionally, the subjects were informed that in order to participate in the study, they needed to sign a consent form, but that their contribution is completely voluntary and they can withdraw from the study whenever they wish.

Participants were also assured by the researcher that their personal information will be kept in confidence and they will be granted anonymity, and given a pseudonym for the purposes of the study. Finally, they were given the opportunity to ask any questions or relay any concerns they may have in regards to the study and their part in it.

Risks are minimal for this study. However, participants may feel some re-traumatization in the telling of their lived experience. Participants were made aware of this before engaging in the interview process and offered information regarding free and low cost counselling services should they require them. Some of the counselling services offered included: Moving Forward Family Services, Family Services of Greater Vancouver, and Oak Counselling.

For this research, participants were protected by not disclosing their identity on any documents. Additionally, they were given a pseudonym immediately after the data was recorded on the researcher’s phone and later on their computer. These were then transcribed with the pseudonym into a word document. All data is kept on the researcher’s secured home computer and any hard copies of the transcripts are kept in a locked filing cabinet.
Interview Process

Before engaging in the interview process with any individual, the researcher had a phone conversation with the research participants. The confidentiality agreement was emailed to participants and checked carefully, giving them space and time to ask any questions that may arise. The participants were given time to think about the process they would be engaging in before the next meeting where interview questions would begin. Before asking any questions, the researcher reconfirmed to see if the participant had any further questions or concerns in regards to confidentiality. As the process continued, the subject was again informed that they are not required to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with. They were also reminded of the researcher’s responsibility to maintain anonymity and confidentiality and their importance in the practice of a researcher.

The interviews were semi structured and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. While interviewing participants, the researcher engaged in active and empathetic listening to glean as much as possible from the participants. The setting of the interviews was either in a private office space located at a local neighbourhood house or at the participants’ home. This was done to allow for a quiet space, confidentiality, and comfort and to avoid disruption.

Structure of the Study

A small amount of participants were chosen. In total five single mothers were chosen. The women were interviewed and invited to fill in a questionnaire with some demographic information. The single mothers were asked questions and invited to give extensive answers on their strengths, resiliencies and resourcefulness as a single mother.
**Instrumentation**

The interview process was created to investigate data connected to single mothers’ views their own strengths, sense of resiliency and resourcefulness. One-on-one interviews were made up of open-ended questions, which included some prompting to expand the discussion around the topic. Interviews were conducted in sessions at a small counselling space located at a local neighbourhood house or at the participants’ houses. The central research question was:

What are single mothers’ attitudes about and explanations for the strengths, abilities, resiliencies, coping tactics and resources they utilize as successful and flexible parents?

**Questionnaires**

A demographic questionnaire was offered to the single mothers and was utilized as a tool to gather data related to age, number of children and children’s ages, father involvement, employment, length of time as a single mother, ethnicity and level of education. Please see Appendix B and C for the demographic questionnaire and interview questions.

**Data Collection**

The main source of the data was focused on the spoken word through the interview process. A locked mobile phone’s recording device was used to record all of the interviews. Also, during this process, notes were taken, but most of the time was devoted to connecting with the participant and being fully present to allow them to engage and share as much as possible on the topic.
The interviews were recorded on a locked mobile phone and then transferred to a locked/coded computer. They were listened to and transcribed by the researcher into word documents on the same computer.

**Phenomenological Data Organization and Analysis**

In the realm of phenomenology, the approach with which the analysis was done was with a combination of Hermeneutic and Interpretive methods. Both of these theories of approach bring the researcher into play and understand that interpretation, on some level, is always a part of the analysis of data.

According to Landsat and Norberg (2004) when interpreting the texts of our participants there are three methodological procedures that should be followed. First, the data is read over numerous times in the “naïve reading” stage. Here the researcher does this with the intention of understanding its meaning in its totality. The researcher must allow themselves to be affected and moved by the text as in phenomenology this aspect leads to the truth of a life or lived experience (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Noon (2018) suggests listening and reading the transcripts simultaneously to get a closer connection to the data. He also recommends making notes in regards to deliberations, observations and reflections about not just what was said by participants, but how words were conveyed through tone and emotionality (Noon, 2018).

The next step is the “structural analysis” where themes or “emergent themes” (Noon, 2018) are pulled out from the data or from notes or comments on the data. One identifies a theme as it is classified as expressing an “essential” aspect of the lived experience. Unearthing these themes can be done through posing questions to the data and collecting the parts of the text that give a response to those questions. Another way is
through separating the text into “meaning units” which can be a complete sentence or part of a sentence, many sentences or a full paragraph that expresses one meaning. (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) These themes and sub themes are then placed on a table with the data from the text next to them (Noon, 2018).

These “meaning units” are reread and given an opportunity for reflection going back to the utilization of the naïve understanding. Following this, they are summarized and read once again to find similarities and differences. These can then be further categorized and reduced to form ‘sub-themes” which can be categorized in themes and later develop into main themes (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Once the sub and main themes have been located, the researcher can move onto “comprehensive understanding” interpreting the texts and coming to a broad understanding not by utilizing rigid methodological procedures, but through imagination. The concentration should not be on what the texts say but on the possibilities that they open up. (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) Finally, the results are conveyed in regular language and as near to the lived experiences as attainable. Even the use of poetic language can be utilized to interpret the meaning of the overall text (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Data Organization and Analysis for this Study

Van Manen describes “Hermeneutic phenomenology as attentive both in terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterested phenomena (Van Manen, 1990). The data was collected through interviews
with participants, which was accomplished with all participants in person. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. They were then read through in the naïve reading process to allow the researcher to be affected or moved in some way. Following this, the data was analyzed by looking for “significant statements” which were either statements or quotes that gave an understanding of how the subjects experience strengths, resourcefulness and resiliency. Next, the data were drawn into particular themes or “clusters of meaning”. Lastly, the “essence” of the strengths, resourcefulness and resiliency was uncovered and presented (Creswell, 2007). According to Van Manen “the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something. The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflecting appropriately, of clarifying and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience.” This is precisely the attitude that was employed when working with this data.

**Trustworthiness/Credibility**

To check the efficacy of the study, credibility and trustworthiness are required. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative validity is the process of checking for correctness or accurateness in regards to the findings by utilizing certain processes or techniques. Qualitative reliability shows how the researcher’s approach is undeviating from other studies and research projects in the field (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, member checking was utilized to check back with participants into certain aspects of their transcripts. Particular themes that arouse needed more information and further comments. This aspect of member involvement also allowed an
opportunity for participants to comment on the findings and their own reflections (Creswell, 2014).

It should be noted that for this study, the researcher presents themselves as a bias. Since the researcher is herself a single mother in addition to being a facilitator of single mothers groups for a number of years in the past, there is a bias as certain conclusions were drawn about this segment of the population. While engaging in the interviews and data analysis sections of this study, the researcher had to be aware of their own bias throughout the study. This was done not to diminish the researcher’s own understanding of single motherhood, but to have the willingness to avoid coming to quick conclusions, and to broaden and expand views as a result of the interviews offered by participants.

The researcher also involved a peer debriefer to assist in building accuracy around the accounts and findings. A colleague from City University of Seattle in the Master in Counselling program assisted in the process of providing valuable support in terms of bringing an outside perspective to the understanding of the data. This assisted in drawing in overlooked pieces within the data as the other set of eyes offered a new perspective and interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

**Summary**

In chapter three, an account of qualitative and phenomenological methods was introduced. Design of the study was presented and information related to the selection of participants, informed consent, and structure of the study, instrumentation, and particulars concerning the collection, organization and analysis of data was offered. Additionally, topics related to trustworthiness were presented which included member checking, bringing forth perceived bias and involving a peer debriefer.
Chapter 4 Findings

This section will focus on the major themes that were drawn out from the data analysis through a phenomenological lens. First, a composite description is given with demographic information about the participants which includes two tables with data that were collected through a questionnaire. Following this, the major themes will be explored with quotes taken from the audio transcripts of the interviews with participants.

Composite Description of Demographic Information of Participants

The participants were chosen at random with only the limited criteria of being a single mother for more than two years. As a result, the study has participants across a variety of ages, the youngest being thirty-nine and the oldest being sixty-five. Although this can be viewed as too broad of a variable, I felt in this case since I was quite broad in my criteria that the age range could fit. It can offer a range of perspectives of strength and resilience. At the same time I acknowledge that studying single mothers of a similar age range would offer more focus on a more specific perspective of single motherhood. The number of children also ranges by participants with one child being the most dominant in the study.

Father involvement was low overall, very limited or not at all. When it comes to ex-partners, four of the five participants mentioned having difficulties in communications with their ex-partner. Participant four mentioned that it wasn’t so much that her ex-partner was the problem, but rather the disease of addiction and how it impacted and changed him. Participant two’s ex-partner is not involved at all with the child but pays full child support without an issue. Participant one’s partner was no longer living in the country and Participants three and five had had multiple partners.
All of the participants are, or were, employed with one being retired (she was a former nurse for many years). For the most part they seemed quite self-sufficient and managing on their own. The years of single motherhood varied with the average being 6 years, with most reporting fewer than ten years. Ethnicity for the most part was Caucasian with one participant of an Asian background. All participants reported having some form of post-secondary education with two of the five participants holding a Bachelor Degree. Please see table one for all demographic information concerning the participants.

Table 1.a. Demographic information of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Father involvement</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very limited</td>
<td>nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Credit coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>Hair stylist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Teacher/ facilitator/ artist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.b. Demographic information of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years as a single mother</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Bachelor or Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes

Through the process of data analysis certain themes were uncovered. The focus of this research is largely on drawing out the strengths, resiliencies and resourcefulness of single mothers so the data was configured in that direction. The data collected around the themes was expressed by each of the participants in their own unique way. The themes were similar but the way the participants expressed those themes was unique to their situation and life experience. The themes that arose are as follows:

Themes:

Theme 1 – personal strengths

Theme 2 – external supports

- Subtheme 1 – individuals, family and friends
- Subtheme 2 – counselling
- Subtheme 3 – support groups
Theme 3 – Creative Resourcefulness

Theme 4 – Resiliency

Theme 5 – Engagement and connection with children

**Theme 1: Personal Strengths**

All of the mothers in this study were able to recognize the strengths they had in regards to how they were managing in their lives. Participants experienced this in their own way. The various ways that strength was expressed came out as: resilience, acceptance, determination, patience, positivity or having the ability to see beyond the dominant culture.

P 1. I am resilient. I don’t say no easily. I remember I was telling my counsellor at school. She asked me what keeps me moving. I told her that every day when I wake up I tell myself one more day, one more step further.

P 2. Sometimes I’m just really good at accepting how it is or how things are. I feel like at some point in my life I was beginning the stages of grief, and acceptance just clicked in one day, and it is a lot more peaceful. I feel like that is a strength of mine that I can just accept what is and move forward. In some aspects I can be persistent as well, because I reached out for help.

P 3. I’m pretty stubborn. I don’t know if it’s such a strength. Maybe determined might be a better word. I’m like a dog with a bone. I’m kind of type A personality. I’ve loosened up a little bit over the years, but when I want to accomplish something I keep at it.
P 4. I feel my inner strength of being patient helped a lot. I had to remind myself that my life is not a made-for-TV movie. My son and I are in our own place and happy. I (also) feel my inner strength of being positive enables me to always look on the brighter side of things when life gets challenging. I don’t like to stay in problems too long as I like to find solutions to problems as they arise.

P 5. I am independent and I can be alone and I buck the status quo. I have this ability to see the flip side of things, for instance issues like female culture, male culture, and patriarchy. I see how it plays and I’m a player on that stage, so not to buy into the propaganda.

### Theme 2: External Supports

All the participants mentioned that they had supports outside of themselves that greatly assisted with life as a single mother. External support was too broad of a category so it needed to be divided into sub themes. These subthemes include: (1) Individuals, family and friends, (2) Counselling, and (3) Support groups.

### Subtheme 1: Individuals, family and friends

Individuals, family and friends were key supportive elements that assisted the single mothers in moving on through difficult times. They note individuals in childcare settings, neighbours, extended members and friendship groups or close friends.

P 1. My social network was important because my daughter’s daycare. I had to get up really early and go to my practicum for nursing. So, the daycare teachers allowed me to drop off my daughter at 5 am in the morning, which was a big deal in the winter. She had to go there, and then she would fall asleep again at 10 am
in the morning, so her life was turned upside down too. They charged me five
dollars an hour which was really cheap. Also my neighbours helped out with
childcare.

P 2. My cousin supported me. She wasn’t a single mom but she and her partner
were both helpful and supportive and always willing to help me. It was always
“anytime you need us just let me know, just give us a call”. She was very
supportive and non-judgmental.

P 4. My girlfriends that are in loving relationships (were supportive). They never
talkedbadly about my partner, but they knew what I was going through. They
didn’t cut my ex-partner down. They just would say, “You know, you’re doing
the right thing” and then believe it or not my son too. My son says to me “Oh I’m
so glad you did what you did (ending the relationship) “This is so much better.
My girlfriends and my family back East were supportive of me and they weren’t
angry at him (ex-partner). It was separate, so that really helped a lot.

P 5. I had a couple of really dear friends. They saw more than I could recognize
in myself. One was a friend of my husband too. My husband buggered off and
his friend sided with me. He was always really supportive and kind, and he was
like an uncle to my kids. He reflected back to me my strength which was really
nice because I trusted he and I could confide in him. My other friend was a
prof. We became buddies and he was like a dad. He became a friend that I could
trust him to tell me what to do. He had so much admiration for me and what I
was doing with the kids and going back to university.

Subtheme 2: Counselling
All of the mothers noted that counselling had often been a great support. Often times in assisting them in coming to terms with their life situation and finding effective ways to embrace their strengths and move forward. The ways it most powerfully influenced these women were through empowerment, supporting attachment connections with children, coming to terms with the dominant discourse and its impacts. Participants also noted not taking the blame for ex-partner behaviour, exploring their past and feeling validated.

P1. (Counselling) made me feel empowered. It was the first time I felt to be single and independent and do everything by myself. Making progress to the point where I finally can be employed. So the counsellor was a great help. (The) counsellor asked me what the most important thing in my life is. I said my daughter, and then the counsellor was silent and said “isn’t it you, yourself. You’re the most important person in your life”. That was the first time I had heard about this. That rang a bell. It was like wake up call. Not really a wakeup call. It was a different perspective.

P 2. They (counselling center) did counselling with us (mother and daughter) together, with her (daughter) alone and then I had a couple by myself. I learned when to connect with kids: right before school or right before bed so I took advantage of that. I was like, okay so the bedtime would work. So that’s when I would try to connect with her more (daughter). I knew that my daughter needed me to connect with her and the counselling really helped.

P 3. I was able to have a therapist help me. After two sessions she asked me why I had come to see her. I said because I figure I keep getting into the wrong
relationships and I’m the bottom line. She said, “What makes you think you’re the bottom line?” She said “didn’t it occur to you that abusive men might be the bottom line. In our society there’s a lot of misogyny and a lot of abuse and you are just part of the society. You don’t need therapy”, she said. I don’t think you’ll ever do this again (get into an abusive relationship)” She was right.
P 4. Going to private counselling helped a lot in overcoming and being resilient. Helping me think about what I want for my future. Thinking this is what I want, and these are the steps. I had a vision of what I wanted to have. So going to private counselling and also learning about the disease of addiction. Learning that is has nothing to do with me. I can’t cure it. My therapist was super excited for my future plans and my goals. I had goals in mind and steps to take those goals.
P 5. I realized that I had to go to counselling. I reached out and that was a real learning experience for me. It was one of the first times I got to talk about what happened to me as a kid, as I’ve never really explored that in depth. It started making sense why I was in the same situation I was in. Counselling really helped me put a magnifying glass to some issues and beliefs that weren’t really normal because that’s not what you do to children (speaking of her own mother). My counsellor was really nice to me. I had never been able to share some of those stories. I hid them. It was nice to go to counselling and be allowed to say all these things. To be believed and not disbelieved really validated me. I could trust the counsellor and I could talk about some of the really ugly stuff and I felt safe. It never really felt safe with anyone, so that was new for me.

Subtheme 3: Support Groups
Groups were another strong component to offering support to these single mothers. All the participants mentioned some connection with groups and the support they offered. These groups were local single mothers’ support groups and twelve step groups. Within these groups the participants were able to find resources, feel heard, build trusting relationships, explore the past, gain strength, express vulnerability and collaborate with others.

P1. I joined a single moms’ group which was a great support to voice my concerns and get resources. Sometimes I would get gift cards or bus tickets. I made lots of friends from the group and we are still friends today. It was a place where I felt safe to voice my concerns and share my experiences, ideas and resources like what you need to do to prepare for court or how to deal with children’s behavioural issues.

P2 I stumbled across (a local) single mothers’ group which was great. At first I wasn’t sure about it but then I was like, I like these women. It was super fun and I was always grateful for that resource with the single mothers’ group I felt just a little bit more heard, like I could relate to people. I wasn’t the only one having the same kinds of struggles. It was nice to know that I wasn’t alone and that I had extra support for different things in my life, for an emergency or what have you. This definitely helped me build my roots (in Vancouver) which I think is important. I reached out to a (local) mental health support and did an 18 week treatment program, I did that every Friday for 9 months. I persisted in this program even though it was difficult.
P 3. I started going to 12 step meetings and I would talk to people and share. I didn’t have the interference of the husband saying ‘oh that’s not right”. I started going to (a 12-step meeting) and I started learning. I started having flashbacks (about the past) I really had to deal with what had happened to me (as a child) at some point. I started talking about it (my past) in 12- step meetings and that really helped me, as there were people there who really listened to me.

P 4. Al-anon was a very supportive place for me when I was separating from my husband. When I go back I can see how far I’ve come. I attend now to be more supportive of others and to keep up my connections with people in the group.

P5. I joined (a local) single mothers’ group. It taught me that I can fully disclose safely and other women were being helpful to me and not trying to harm me. When (competitiveness) was set aside and everybody was being collaborative, I knew I could do this and I could help others. I’m showing up to be present because my support counts. When I heal, I heal others.

**Theme 3: Creative Resourcefulness**

The participants of this study were resourceful in very unique ways. Depending on their personality, they managed to develop ways of coping and managing that worked for them in their distinctive situations. The ways of developing this resourcefulness were expressed by being and feeling more competent in legal matters, engaging in mental health programs, traveling, cooking or creating communal dinners

P 1. I think I was very resourceful. The reason being, I was my own lawyer to fight for all my court cases. So as a single mom you almost always have to go to
I went to court. I remember telling the judge that I would represent myself. So, I learned what to say and what not to say, to not be emotional. Slowly I educated myself. It felt good to represent myself and I learned how the legal system works. Since that time I have never feared the legal system and would not be afraid to stand up for myself again.”

P2. My daughter is part of a group called Job’s Daughters. She loves the program but it costs money to do various events. I decided that she should do some chores around the house to earn money to help pay for the program. She gets paid every second week and needs to use the money to help pay for some of the events. She went camping and they needed thirty dollars for the event so I paid half and so did she. I think this helps her learn work for play.

P 3. I started traveling with the children. Christmas came around and one year I thought we could just go down south. We could go to Disney land. I said to my children “you got a choice, we can spend the money on gifts and food and all this kind of stuff or we can drive down south and go to California and go to Disney land”, and so we started going every year. We also started camping. I got a camper van and we were camping in the summer time and then going down south in the wintertime. It was very positive and I’m still doing it to this day. I still go down south and sometimes the kids (most are adults now) come with me and sometimes they don’t.

P 4. I cook. I make meals for people and I make an income from that and this is something I love to do. I would not have done this if I were married. I love
cooking. I thought okay, well I have this time at home and I love to cook and people are asking me for my food and jokingly they were saying I would pay you to make my dinner. I put my music on and chop chop chop I make these great meals. I wouldn’t have done that before so it’s been amazing making these dinners and making an income off them. I don’t feel like it is a chore because I love to do it.

P5. I had large celebration dinners with extended friends. So the kids were involved in decorating, cooking, setting the table and organizing. We invited all our "orphan" buddies and sometimes the apartment was filled with up to 30 people. This made for great connections for the kids and myself. Everyone brought food and we all caught up on life together. This resulted in my kids now being super good at hosting their own events.

**Theme 4: Resiliency**

Resilience again was expressed in a multitude of ways and depending upon the personality and situation of the participant. Key topics that came out of this theme were maturity, taking on the full demands of being a lone parent, managing life, moving forward, intuition and hopefulness.

P1. I maxed out on all the help I could get: friends, connections, neighbours, schoolteachers, the principle, the school counsellor, and my teacher. There was only so much I could do so I just learned to be resilient. I believe that during that time I grew up a lot. You have a different perspective on life and what is important and what isn’t important. What to focus on and not to waste energy on.
P 2. I kind of want to rock it (being a single mom). To me it (resilience) means bouncing back. I think I just kept going on. I feel like staying present is so helpful. I watched my mom and my best friend have these men control them with money and I was like no, I want to be in charge. I found a good job and I stuck with it. Also, I’ve gotten really good at breaking things down and doing one thing at a time. I feel like I have found a good way to manage things.

P3. One of the challenges of being a single parent for the woman you have to be the both the father and the mother. There is a balance there when the father is involved. When the father is gone sometimes it makes it easier like my ex and I because we were not on the same page. I found it really difficult to parent when my ex was there. Once he was gone it was a lot easier but I had to play more the heavy sometimes and that required strength and determination on my part to figure that all out.

P4. I have learned to let things go, pick my battles and not worry about being judged. I have learned to do what I have to do to survive. I don’t let the judgment of others influence me. I just follow my intuition and ask myself: Is what I am doing right for me? Am I doing what is right for my family?

P5. I think learning to overcome the hurt and loneliness and not to succumb to the sadness of being alone. It hurts your heart to be so isolated and having to do it all. I just believed that I was going to have a better life. It was being very hopeful even though none of what I thought might happen I would get. Emotionally the grief of the sense of isolation is very temporary, so it’s okay tomorrow will be a better day. That was my source of resilience.
Theme 5: Engagement and Connection with Children

All of the participants mentioned the connection with their children being of importance in their lives. The focus of the engagement concerns good connection, being open-minded, having frank discussions about sex, providing encouragement, developing mutual trust and developing strong work habits.

P1. I have a good connection with my daughter. We like to play and laugh together. Sometimes we just smile at each other for no reason. We had some amazing trips abroad together too. It’s really important to me that she is open minded. We traveled to many different countries and she was able to see how other people live and we were able to see each other differently too. I do push her to work around the house. We work together in the kitchen making dinner a lot. I think this makes us closer and more like a team.

P2. I will be totally open and honest about sex with my daughter. I took the shame right out of talking about sex. I want her to be able to come to me and say I want to go on birth control because for me it was all secretive and we never spoke about sex with my parents, not once. Now my daughter feels comfortable coming to me when changes start happening to her own body. The more open we are the fewer secrets, and that’s a good thing.

P3. I always encouraged my children no matter what they want to do because that is what a parent should do, they should encourage their children. Children need to be cherished and encouraged. I also tend to notice when people have gifts so was able to notice my children’s talents. I think the beauty of parenting is that you
never know what you’re going to get with your children. You need to get them to where their strengths are and to encourage them.

P 4. I think I have a good open connection with my son. He tells me a lot of things and we are very close. My son thinks life is better since we left his dad because I create a stable environment for him. He feels safe, stable and can trust me. I trust him too.

P 5. If I was in school and I was working hard and providing for them, the same expectation was on them. My job is to parent you and provide for you. Your job is to go and work just as hard to get good marks and to do well for yourself. So we were a real team. The result is that they are all really close and they’re super tight and bonded emotionally. Now the kids are really supportive of each other and they’re all finishing up university.

Summary

Chapter four presented demographic information regarding the participants in addition to the most common themes that arose from the interview process. The goal was to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon related to strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness of single mothers.

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed five major themes which include: personal strengths, external supports, creative resourcefulness, resiliency and engagement and connection with children. External supports also included the subthemes of (1) individuals, family and friends, (2) counselling, (3) support groups.

Chapter five will move on to explore an interpretation of the findings.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The intention of this research was to examine and comprehend the lived experiences of strength resiliency and resourcefulness of single mothers. The purpose was to describe the meaning of those experiences. Abundant descriptions of their experiences were derived from face-to-face interviews with five participants. These interviews lasted 50 minutes to one hour and consisted of open-ended questions. I used phenomenological research to analyze the data. The criteria for participants include being a single mother for at least 2 years. Major themes and subthemes materialized from the analysis of the interviews and are as follows:

Theme 1 – Personal Strengths

Theme 2 – External Supports
- Subtheme 1 – Individuals, Family and Friends
- Subtheme 2 – Counselling
- Subtheme 3 – Support groups

Theme 3 – Creative Resourcefulness

Theme 4 – Resiliency

Theme 5 – Engagement and Connection with Children

Phenomenological Hermeneutical Interpretation

In every respect phenomenological human science analysis attempts are essentially examinations into the form of the human lived world. A world which is lived through experience with everyday situations and relationships (Van Manen, 1990).

The text or script from the interviews in chapter four in a sense “interprets the interpreter” As a result, the findings are utilized to assist us and others to achieve
awareness of the world of single mothers and ourselves. Their world can hopefully be perceived from a new vantage point. When our viewpoint on phenomena alters, our behaviour has the possibility to likewise alter (Landsat & Norberg, 2004).

In this study, the use of phenomenological intention is to impart truths about the fundamental meaning of existence in the “life world”. There is not an anticipation of finding a distinct central truth, as the complete truth cannot be totally known. There is more a probing for feasible meaning in sustained process. (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004)

Klem (1983) contends that the most foreseeable explanation of a text is the one that makes sense of the vast number of details as they correspond into a whole and one that yields all that can be derived from the text.

These ideals, inherent in the phenomenological process, were utilized in analysis of the data of the participants involved in this research study.

**Interpretation of Findings**

**Theme 1 – Personal Strengths**

It is worth noting that many of the participants struggled in recognizing strengths within themselves. There were long pauses from the participants and often space, safety and validation were needed for them to express what they viewed as positive and empowering in themselves. From my perspective, as an interviewer, it came across as being an idea that the participants had hardly thought about or considered. This could be due to the fact that single mothers seldom receive any external validation for the strengths they possess.

My own interpretation of this difficulty in expressing strengths is related to what the broader culture holds as valuable, which is not customarily the strengths of lone
female parents. There may be a tendency for mothers to refrain from noting their own strengths as there is a high likelihood they will be judged or dismissed.

According to Janice Lee (2019, May 6), manager of Single Mothers’ Services for Metro Vancouver, when she first meets these mothers she notes that “when the moms come into the group seeing the validation and acknowledgment is often huge for many of them and this tells me they don’t give themselves credit and they lack the support that would acknowledge their strengths and resourcefulness”. Zartler (2014), emphasizes this lack of self-value by pointing out that it is crucial these families have an image of themselves and their families as positive and valued in order to function more effectively. Part of that would be to recognize and value the strengths single mothers bring to their families.

For the most part, the societal narrative is that single parents are deficient. Kaestle (2016) asserted that this form of family is recurrently “othered” and generally reduced to a negative stereotype. Additionally, many scholars contend that this kind of family suffers more from depression than empowerment (Brauer, 2018; Cunningham& Koestler, 2007; Langero-Hernandez et al., 2009).

Despite this cultural narrative, during my interview process with participants, they were able to come to a place to recognize their own strengths. They reported persistence and finding their own way to manage life as significant. They also reported finding ways to move forward despite the obstacles they faced. They all defined strength as distinctive to their own life situation. For one participant, it concerned coming to a place of acceptance around life situations. Another remarked that it was about seeing beyond the dominant discourse from society. From my standpoint, there seemed to be a positive relief in being able to express their strengths and have them considered as valuable by
academic research. Knowing that their stories would be recorded and their strengths valued and placed in academic literature assisted in bolstering and bringing validity to their sense of strength and worthiness in themselves.

According to Coleman and Karraker (1998) educating single mothers to recognize themselves as competent and capable, in addition to engendering a sense of hope for the future, can be a significant safeguard against hardship, reducing internalizing symptoms and empowering parents to promote, in the most favourable manner, the welfare of their children.

**Theme 2 – External Supports**

**Subtheme 1 – Individuals, Family and Friends**

Both Houston (2013) and Williams (2018) point out in their research on single mothers that family and friends are vital supports in single mothers’ lives. All of the participants of this study noted supports from community members, family and friends. These relationships provide a space where the participants feel supported and validated. Whether it be from those who supported with childcare, to those friends and family that offered understanding, validation and a safe space to express their challenges and struggles without the fear of judgment, all were crucial in offering encouragement and assistance. What stood out in this portion of the data was that immediate family was not the dominant marker of support. The assistance seemed to come from relatives, but not the immediate family.

Murry et al. (2001) emphasize friendship support trumping family support. They point out that promoting friend support could have significant ramification for the welfare
of single mothers, especially as friend support might create less emotional stress than family support.

**Subtheme 2 – Counselling**

All participants mentioned the positive effects of therapy and all highlighted positive experiences. They all came to the realization that mental health support was a vital ingredient to healthy living.

The use of counselling provided assistance in many areas such as with coming to terms with out-dated beliefs, or the impact of societal values on their own belief systems. Being witnessed in counselling sessions offered them a space to consider their strengths, or decide how they might improve relationships in their lives. The therapist was a huge ally in the participants’ lives, most significantly in assisting the participants in coming to terms with life situations and drawing out their strengths.

**Subtheme 3 – Support Groups**

Support groups of various forms were noted by all participants as offering assistance. Two of the participants mentioned Twelve Step groups as being helpful in their lives as they either assisted in dealing with issues from their own past or in managing an ex-spouse with addiction issues.

The three other participants mentioned attending single mother support groups. These groups not only offered a mirror where the participants could recognize themselves, but a place to feel a sense of belonging and safety. As single mothers’ generally feel “othered” (Kastler, 2016) this environment provided a setting for participants to break that sense of isolation by connecting with others who are similar to them. These groups also place single mothers in the unique situation where they can both
offer and receive support and guidance, creating a deeper sense of connection and belonging.

Manager of Single Mothers’ Services at the YWCA in Vancouver, Janice Lee (2019, May 6) points out the benefits of single mother support groups by noting three key points on their journey. The first is often when single mothers have reached their limits. Lee highlighted that single mothers are often made to feel like they are not smart, not resourceful, not knowledgeable or not strong enough by the larger systemic forces such as the legal system, educational system, mental health services and social policies. Lee goes on to emphasize how amazed she and her staff are at what single mothers have accomplished on their own despite larger cultural forces against them. When the single mothers become part of a support group there is a space where they have the opportunity to feel validation, acknowledgement in addition to, gaining resources and practical knowledge. This is the point where the mothers realize that what they are experiencing is not about them personally, but is systemic and that most single mothers relate to their own experience. The single mothers also begin to break free from self-doubt and start to formulate a greater sense of trust within themselves. They can begin to move forward with personal goals and growth. At the end of the two-year involvement in the program, the mothers demonstrate more stability and have greater trust in them, and most importantly they have the ability to recognize their own strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness.

According to Freeman and Dodson (2014) involvement in programs of this nature may enable single mothers to forge social networks that supply much needed mentoring and emotional support. Additionally, they can offer a sense of relying on others for
assistance when needed. This can be monumental when little or no family support is available.

Theme 3 – Creative Resourcefulness

Single mothers can be some of the most resourceful individuals in society. This often comes from a place of desperation as personal resources can be insufficient and whatever is found can often contribute to the wellbeing of the mother and her children. As a result, single mothers can often become experts when it comes to seeking out and finding resources in their community.

Resourcefulness is an area that has not been studied in-depth in regards to single mothers. As this form of family does not fit within the usual conventions, there can be a search for new and unique ways to function as a family that lie outside what normally occurs. This is why the term creative resourcefulness is used here.

Be it either due to their financial situation, or because they lack a father figure to offer additional support, the challenges are legitimate. For all the participants in this study resourcefulness was fundamental to their wellbeing. Again, how it was implemented by each participant was distinct. For the participants, it often meant learning a new skill or expanding one in order to make additional income. Furthermore, the participants demonstrated resourcefulness that involved influencing their children in travel, chores or involvements of a larger community.

The mothers came up with their own unique ways of being resourceful. These tended to either come about through recognizing that something was needed or missing in their lives. A gap needed to be filled. To me, it speaks of an intuitive sense of how to
draw certain elements out of themselves or utilize the environment around them to create more meaningful or sustaining lives.

**Theme 4 - Resiliency**

Throughout much of the literature that offers a strengths based perspective on single parenting, resiliency was another central component. Sidel (2006) points out that myths often portray single mothers as lazy and poor. It takes great resiliency just to deal with mythologies and stigmas such as this, which are covertly present in single mothers’ daily existence.

Smith (2010) and Kjellstrand (2010) also emphasized in their studies that resiliency was a central component in the success of single mothers. Additionally, Wahler (2002) reported that the resiliency these women possess would be a worthwhile endeavour to study and learn from, so as to apply knowledge gleaned from this group to all forms of families, to enhance family resiliency as a whole.

I allowed the participants in this study to define the term of resiliency however they choose and how it resonated with their lives. There were various definitions of it and how it showed up in their lives. For some, it meant figuring out what is important and staying focused on that. For others, it was being present, connecting with feeling and moving forward with hope for the future.

Through the challenging process of being a lone parent, the participants each found ways to keep going and get back up despite life circumstances. Resiliency became defined as the stripping away of the unnecessary, managing life in a way that works, finding balance, learning when to fight or when to retreat, or living with grief but still...
managing to find hope. Having children to raise often left these parents feeling like there was no choice for anything other than to move forward.

**Theme 5 – Engagement and Connection with Children**

Chun and Wieggers (2015) point out that for single mothers’ life with the children is more under their control and this can often be very beneficial as single mothers can define that relationship on their own terms and they don’t have to concern themselves with the caretaking of a partner. This leaves room for the single mother to create a relationship with her children in ways that resonate with her own values and not necessarily those of a partner or of the broader culture.

Children and connection to them are crucial to these participants. The participants also stated that it is important that they are able to pass on their values to their children. For the participants, this came about by connecting through doing household chores, teaching values around sexuality, or being open, honest and genuine.

The hierarchy that may be present in the traditional nuclear family takes on a very different form in the lone parent household, as the relationship develops in a more egalitarian manner.

**Implications**

This research offers a fresh perspective on the lives of single mother-led families who view their lives through a more positive lens. What can these participants offer the broader community in terms of knowledge about their lived experience? A number of implications come to mind such as the promotion of the strengths of single mothers and the importance of counselling and support groups.
Promotion of the Strengths of Single Mothers

It would be beneficial if professionals who deal with this population acknowledge their strengths. Training for professionals who work with single mothers would improve how they are treated both interpersonally and within clinical environments. Professionals engaging with single mothers should do their best to recognize their fortitude and resiliency when engaging in assessments. When professionals demonstrate and comprehend these women’s experiences, they will be more capable of establishing rapport and formulating suitable interventions to assist these families in bolstering their overall welfare and increase their resilience (Smith 2010). As we know, this only reinforces their own sense of positive regard for themselves and their views about how they function as a parent and in society. This then influences their children’s’ self-esteem and can impact future generations.

The Importance of Counselling

It was clear in this research that counselling was useful to all single mothers. Therapy was often a respite for these mothers and the counsellor’s office was a space to explore strengths and emotional issues. The therapist was viewed as an ally and someone who could assist in empowering single mothers. This demonstrates the significance of counselling for single mothers as an influence that additionally promotes strengths. Single mothers often feel separate and isolated from the larger culture as a whole and need support in recognizing their own strengths. Counselling therefore can be an important piece in offering a stronger self-perception and reinforce the concept of the single mother as beyond that of the cliché or myth.
It would be useful to consider implementing distinctive programs that focus primarily on counselling single mothers and the issues they face. In her study on single mothers and counselling, Von Hayek (2004) notes that single mothers have better outcomes when they engage with counsellors who can build a strong therapeutic working alliance, offer effective interventions and validate the strengths the single mothers posses.

**Support Groups**

These groups offered a space to feel validated and understood. The mirroring of seeing oneself in another often helped to break a sense of isolation. The groups also provided an environment to share resources, build connections and foster empowerment.

Mostly these groups provide a space to both get support and in turn provide it to others. In this group space there is an equanimity where one can feel a sense of belonging as one is both helped and then in turn offers assistance to others.

There could be more government funding for groups such as these in local communities. The only known group in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC) to offer these groups is the YWCA. If funding could be more available, it would be possible to spread these groups to outlying areas across BC and possibly across Canada. This organization offers weekly support groups for two years where single mothers can share resources and be of support to one another. There is free childcare offered in addition to a facilitator to manage the group. This kind of long-term support gives these mothers a chance to breathe and figure out where their next best step might be. The organization also assists with support for individual mothers such as resources concerning education, employment, parenting, the law, housing and violence against women.

(YWCA, 2019)
In a culture where the normative family is defined as nuclear, single parent families may struggle by not feeling mirrored in society. Support groups for these women that focus primarily on the status of single mothering can offer a space for women to share the reality of their situation, obtain resources and form friendships that can be long lasting and beneficial.

Limitations

This study offered a window into the lived lives of single mothers. There are a few shortcomings and areas where the research could have been more extensive. The limitations of the study include: sample size, age range, number of children, income, and ethnicity.

Small Sample Size

The small number of participants who took part limited the study. With only five participants it is difficult to make broad statements about single mothers as a whole; however, it does offer a window into the lived lives of this form of family in a more in-depth manner.

Age Range

The study also may have been too broad in its scope in terms of participants ages range. Working with participants who ranged in age from 39 – 65 was quite broad considering the women are at different stages in their lives. On the other hand, I found that having this wide age range was also rich as it provided perceptions of a wide range of experiences as a single mother.

Number of Children
The participants also had different numbers of children. Although most of the participants had one child, one participant had seven and another had four. This also likely created a different experience as a single parent as the needs and demands would have been stronger on those participants who had more children.

**Income**

The variable of income was not included in the demographic information. This could have added more crucial information into the lives of these participants as the economic situation of single mothers plays a crucial role in their and their children’s overall wellbeing. Most of the mothers in this study, I would assume are from middle to lower class, but since I do not have the data to back up this information it is left somewhat in the dark.

**Ethnicity**

In terms of ethnicity, the study largely focused on a Caucasian Canadian population with the exception of two participants who were from an ethnic background. The participant who was Italian grew up mostly in Canada so had no problem with the language or culture. I only had one participant who did not have English as a first language as she was born and raised in China and only came to Canada about 8 years ago.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One recommendation would be to expand the research by studying the effectiveness of groups that specifically support single mothers. These groups offer a secure long-term space for single mothers to experience respite and decide their next steps. I am curious about what the short and long term benefits of being in a group such as this would be, in addition to how being a member of such a group assists in promoting
strong single mother led families. It would be interesting to ascertain the kind of narratives the single mothers demonstrate both pre and post group involvement and whether their opinions of themselves and their overall life situation altered in a more constructive manner as a result of group participation.

An additional recommendation would be to increase the sample size. The study would offer more data if the sample size were as large as 15 or 20 participants. This could provide more views on the lives of single mothers.

Furthermore, factoring in age and more specifically income would place the participants in a more specific demographic and offer more information. A study could be done on younger lower income single mothers for instance and older middle-income single mothers and then comparing the two groups.

Single fathers who have limited involvement with their children would be interesting to research. What are the ramifications for them? There seems to be little known about the lives of these parents. Also, it would be worthwhile to investigate single fathers who co-parent or have at least half or more of the time in a caretaking role. What are their experiences and how do they compare with single mothers?

Diverse ethnicities are another aspect of this form of parenting to be considered. Research could be done by focusing on specific groups such as Chinese or Asian single mothers or include a group of single mothers who are mixed in diversity.

**Personal reflection**

This section offers a space for personal reflection as a student, a researcher, and a single mother. My experience over the last ten years has been decidedly challenging, but one that has also offered me the opportunity to meet many other single mothers and come
to a greater understanding of lone female parenting as a whole. At first, I was resistant to take on the label of a single mother; however, the more I learn about the diversity and strengths of these women, the more I embrace the title and consider myself a full member as well as an advocate.

During this study, I have come to a whole new level of appreciation and respect for single mothers. The participants demonstrated such amazing resiliency and strength in the face of obstacles from many levels, yet they still drew on the internal capacity to meet these challenges. They were able to manage their lives in ways that work for them while at the same time doing their utmost to create a loving and caring environment for their children.

For me, the writing of this research has brought me full circle. I started out as a struggling single mother myself and then moved on to becoming a supporter of single mothers through facilitating a single mothers’ group. Now, I have completed this study as a researcher who examines the lives of single mothers. It has been through the process of doing this research that my own strength, resiliency and resourcefulness have grown immensely.
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The Snohomish County Self Sufficiency Task Force (2004) Self Sufficiency Matrix

An Assessment and Measurement Tool Created Through Collaborative Partnership of the Human Services Community in Snohomish County


11 (3), 253-254


YWCA Metro Vancouver single mothers’ support services (2019, May 2) retrieved from https://ywcavan.org/programs/single-mothers-support-services


Appendix A

Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Approval

IRB ID# Bowie_Hardy091318

Principal Investigator (if faculty research):
Student Researcher: Laura Hardy
Faculty Advisor: Bruce Hardy
Department: Master of Counselling

Title: Single mothers’ narratives of strength with a focus on resiliency and resourcefulness.
Approved on: September 13, 2018
Renewal Date: September 13, 2019

☐ Full Board Meeting
☐ Expedited Review (US)
☒ Delegated Review (Can)
☐ Exempt (US)

Date of IRB meeting: _______________

CERTIFICATION
City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Bruce Hardy and the student researcher Laura Bowie have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents.
Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the IRB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.

Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, RCSW
Chair, IRB City University of Seattle
Appendix B

Demographic Information Questionnaire

1. Age:_______________________

2. Children and children’s ages

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3. Father involvement:

________________________________________________________________________

4. Employed: yes/ no Kind of employment:

________________________________________________________________________

5. How long a single mother: ________________

6. Ethnicity :________________________

7. Highest level of education: ________________
Appendix C

Interview Questions

The questions included in the one on one interviews are as follows:

1. How long have you been a single mother?
2. How did you become a single mother?
3. What challenges did you face?
4. What personal strengths helped you deal with these challenges?
5. How did you overcome these difficulties that you experienced? Or how were you resilient despite the difficulties?
6. How have you been creative or inventive in how you have taken care of yourself and your family?
   b. In what ways do you feel you have been resourceful especially when comparing yourself with married mothers?
7. What places or spaces supported you in feeling strong, resilient and resourceful?
8. Who supported you in feeling strong in your role as a single parent?
9. Could you let me know why you wanted to be a part of this project with me?
10. Is there anything else about your life that you would like me to know that I have not asked you about that are connected to this topic?