

BLACK WEST INDIAN MOTHERING: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

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Raising a family in a society where the culture, values, and beliefs differ from one's 'home country', is a challenge for most immigrants. This is especially true for Black West Indian mothers as they try to raise their children in a society where race, class, and gender are forces of oppression and marginalization. This qualitative study examined the experiences of a small group of single Black West Indian mothers raising their children in a large urban Canadian city. Black Feminist thought was used as the theoretical framework to analyze critically the social barriers and supports impacting this group. The results revealed that while these women experienced negative attitudes when working with government workers, and differences in childrearing practices between West Indian and Canadian cultures; attending community parenting programs were a source of social support and relevant parenting information. Implications for health promotion initiatives and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The research that I have embarked upon has two points of interest. First and foremost the experience of single Black West Indian mothers raising their children in a large urban Canadian city is not well known. Many times individuals who are marginalized are not heard. As a Master of Nursing student, in addition to being a single Black mother, I have the opportunity to assist these mothers in giving them a voice to tell their story and to voice their concerns in a safe environment. Due to my privileged position as a Community Health Nurse I could then share the research findings with service providers that work with these families. This leads me to my second point of interest, that is, this research will contribute to informing community health nursing theory, practice, policy, and curriculum development in addition to other professional disciplines such as Child Protection workers. Learning about these single Black mothers values and beliefs as well as the everyday living experiences with raising their young children is essential to providing supports that are relevant to them.

Statement of the Problem

Raising a family in a society where the culture, values, and beliefs differ from one's 'home country' is a challenge for most immigrants. In addition to preserving their own cultural identity, immigrant mothers are often faced with the difficult task of mothering their children within a culture that is different from their own (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007). This is especially true for Black West Indian mothers as they try to raise their children in a society where race, class, and gender are forces of oppression and marginalization (Andersen & Collins, 2004). This is clearly illustrated by a number of single Black mothers raising their children, often on their own, in poverty, and in some instances, in violent neighbourhoods where,

among many other challenges, poor schooling environments are prevalent (Collins, 2000). Black people from the West Indies constitute a significant portion of the population of major Canadian cities. The 2006 Canadian Census reports that over 783 795 Black people (Black includes people of Caribbean and African origins and smaller percentage from other origins) lived in Canada of which 352 200 live in Toronto. Of the 352 200, over half came from Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and, Ghana (Statistics Canada, 2008). In particular, Toronto is experiencing a high school drop out rate of 40% among students from the English speaking Caribbean region (Schugurensky, 2007). Moreover, negative stereotypes related to single Black mothers are plentiful in the media which consistently influence the thoughts and behaviour of individuals towards them. These conditions invariably influence the values, goals, and behaviours related to mothering. Due to these sets of circumstances and my ongoing Community Health Nursing work with families who have young children, I plan to illuminate what these factors may mean in the lives of the young single Black mothers who were participants in my study.

Rationale and Purpose of Study

As stated earlier, Black West Indian single mothers are often an oppressed and marginalized group. Furthermore, there are persistent and erroneous societal stereotypes and myths regarding Blacks and more particularly Black women as mothers (Collins, 2000). A lack of understanding of conditions that may influence their mothering experiences present negative consequences not only for these mothers but also for their children. As a Black mother and Community Health Nurse, I am particularly concerned about this population due to the number of issues that are often associated with this community. Moreover, providing culturally safe care to this group necessitates taking into account the relationship between health and social conditions (Lynam, & Young, 2000) such as race, class, and gender that influence them.

Community Health Nurses provide services in public health and primary health care programs to assist these families in mothering successful, healthy children. Yet, barriers to providing culturally safe and appropriate services as identified by this community are complex and not well understood. There is a gap in the literature regarding what it may mean to be a single Black West Indian mother living in Canada. It is important to capture some of the experiences of these women as they face multiple forces of oppression while trying to raise their children. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a greater understanding of the mothering experiences of single Black West Indian mothers within the context of Canadian society from their perspective.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The following review addresses several themes found in the literature that pertain to mothering. I will analyze critically White patriarchal views of motherhood and stereotypes of black mothers. In addition, I will briefly illustrate mothering from the Black West Indian and Black American perspective, discuss dominant themes in the North American parenting research as it compares to the above, and lastly, discuss the usefulness of Cultural Safety in Health Promotion initiatives.

What are the Forces Black West Indian Single Mothers Must Confront?

Motherhood and family ideals within Canadian society have been defined predominantly by White patriarchal values. Green (2004) suggests that there are many images and messages that are widespread about what a 'good' mother is. She summarizes these major traits as: a mother stays home with her children while her husband supports her financially; she provides unconditional love for her children and husband; she never has any ill feelings towards her children; she is responsible for the care and nurturing of all her family members; she never gets angry, and most of all, mothering is the most important aspect of her life (Green, 2004). These stereotypical and patriarchal views demonstrate that a woman's whole being is assumed to be defined by the welfare of her children and that of her husband. In addition, these attributes define motherhood as oppressive work. The mother is no longer a woman; rather she is a being whose sole purpose is to care for her family.

These ideals are transmitted through mainstream media, advertising, and entertainment (hooks, 1992, Green, 2004). Mothers are frequently reminded about how to act and behave as mothers. Somehow these ideals deceive society, particularly women, to think that these traits and

behaviours are standards to which mothers must compare themselves. It's so apparent that these traits are self-serving to patriarchal ideals by promoting motherhood as self-sacrificing. Collins (as cited in O'Reilly, 2004) adds that this type of family, i.e., a stay at home mother and a father who provides financial support, is less applicable to Black families. Due to racial oppression, Black families historically did not have adequate resources to be in nuclear family households (Calliste, 2003). What is ironic about these values is that a significant number of White mothers can't even live up to these expectations, much less Black mothers. What does this mean for women who cannot reach these stereotypical and unrealistic socially organized ideals?

Mothers who cannot live up to patriarchal ideals of motherhood are labelled as "bad mothers." For instance, Green (2004) states that if a mother is not married or partnered with a man, if she is living on low income, or if she works outside the home, she is judged to be an "unfit" mother. In addition, Horwitz (2004) adds that mothers are solely responsible for the physical and the psychological well being of their children. Therefore, when a child is experiencing problems, it is assumed that mothers are to blame (Caplan, 2004). Furthermore, having this sole responsibility positions mothers to try to be perfect, which can foster feelings of guilt and incompetence in the mother (Horwitz, 2004). Few are able to conform and actualize these ideals. It seems obvious that these family ideals could lead mothers to feel a sense of failure or even low self esteem if they cannot meet these stereotypical expectations which are, in reality, not based on the wide and diverse ranges of women's experiences.

Another force that Black mothers must fight against is the negative stereotypes that describe them. There are several, but for the purposes of this study I will discuss the "matriarch" and "welfare queen" stereotypes. Because of my community health nursing and personal experiences and I find that these two stereotypes are applicable to the Canadian milieu.

According to Collins (2000), the matriarch, also known as the “bad” Black mother, is basically a mother who has failed to fulfil the traditional ‘womanly’ duties in the home. This failure allegedly contributes to the social problems Black families face because they work outside the home, which leaves limited time to spend mothering their children. This stereotype also conveys the notion that single mothers have emasculated their partners by being overly aggressive and unfeminine, thus their partners had a reason or right to leave and that means the woman is to blame for the conditions in which they live. In essence, if Black mothers were more subservient to their male partners these men would take responsibility for their family (Collins, 2000).

Rodman (as cited in Barrow, 1999) provides a West Indian perspective for male partners leaving their families. He believes that when a father or male partner is unable to provide economically for their family, they lose authority and self esteem, therefore seeking fulfilment elsewhere (Rodman as cited in Barrow, 1999). In addition, the high number of female single parent families in the West Indies is the result of the migration of men who are in search of gainful employment outside of their home country. These mothers then have to become more self-sufficient and take on more domestic roles as well as relying on extended family members and the community for support (James, Este, Thomas, Benjamin, Lloyd and Turner, 2010). These authors take into account other social and economic factors influencing the Black family within the West Indian context.

Furthermore, Collins (2000) identifies that the matriarch image is central to the intersecting oppressions of class, gender, and race. The matriarch is often blamed for the high level of poverty among the Black population. Collins (2000) argues “assuming that Black poverty....is passed on intergenerationally via the values that parents teach their children, dominant ideology suggests that Black children lack the attention and care allegedly lavished on

White, middle-class children (p. 76). Therefore, according to this dominant ideology, poverty can be overcome if Black children were taught good values at home. This view ignores the fact that many Black families live in less than ideal neighbourhoods, experience employment discrimination, and that their children may, in many circumstances, attend unsafe schools. Essentially, the gender ideology of the matriarch serves to blame Black mothers for their children's failure in school, and for high crime and poverty rates within the black community (Collins, 2000).

The latest stereotype of the single Black mother is the welfare mother or "Welfare Queen." Wane (2004) states that the dominant society degrades single Black motherhood and paints them as "welfare queens" (p. 237). This image is particularly prevalent in Canadian society. The welfare mother is portrayed as lazy and not wanting to work, and that she passes these unproductive values onto their children (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, when we think about a single Black mother living in low income housing, media portrayals conjures up many thoughts and questions such as: Why did she have children? Why did she have so many children? Where is the father? She is probably on welfare; she probably has no education; she has no ambition. These stereotypes and statements do not lead one to think critically about some of the many intersecting issues that underlie the experiences of these women.

These negative images discussed are just a few that Black women are bombarded with everyday. Collins (2000) affirms that these controlling images are intended to make social injustice, such as racism and poverty, seem natural or part of everyday living for these women. The heart of Black feminism is to fight against these images. By giving a voice to single Black West Indian mothers, one of the expected outcomes of this study is to challenge these images and to show a more complex and richer view of their experiences.

Mothering from Black American and West Indian Women's Perspectives

Given the above analysis, one might expect and may well find that the values and goals together with the lived experiences of mothers in the Black community are different from that of the dominant culture. For example, Collins (2000), Wane (2004) and Lawson (2004) reveal that there are many similarities between Black American and Black West Indian mothers. One central theme of mothering that both ethnic groups share is that mothering is not the sole responsibility of the biological mother. In the Black American and Black Canadian literature, this is known as 'othermothering,' and 'community mothering' (Collins, 2000; Wane, 2004; Lawson, 2004). Basically, the women who do this type of mothering raise children that are not their own by birth. The same love, nurturance, and work are given to these children as if they were their own and mothering is viewed as the responsibility of the community (Wane, 2004; O'Reilly, 2004). The same can be said of West Indian mothers. 'Child-shifting' is a strategy used by mothers when they are unable to care for their children due to poor living conditions, poverty, or leaving their home country (Barrow, 1999). To ensure that their children are taken care of, they are usually left with the grandmother, aunt, and/or another significant member in the family network. This practice is seen across various Black societies around the world (Wane, 2004). Sharing the responsibility of childrearing became a strategy to make sure that children of the community were cared for regardless of whether the biological mother is able or available to provide psychological and physical well being for the child (O'Reilly, 2004). Additionally, motherhood is highly valued within West Indian and African American cultures. Generally, these mothers define themselves through their mothering roles and their children's spiritual well being (Barriteau, as cited in Lawson, 2004; O'Reilly, 2004). Furthermore, when a West Indian woman

becomes a mother, she is especially respected, particularly when her children are brought up 'right' (Barrow, 1999).

The negative connotation of single motherhood that is prevalent in Canadian society is not shared by most West Indian cultures. Black family structures in the West Indies vary. Barrow (1999) presents a body of work in her book about Caribbean life. The following description in no way captures the full experiences of West Indian families but it provides a context to some of the economic and social factors that influence family life.

The nuclear family, which constitutes a mother, father, and children living under one household, is a valued structure of family life within the West Indies. This family structure is not attainable for most Black families because historically, the expectations are that husbands are to be the sole breadwinner of the family with a stay at home wife. With limited and uncertain economic resources many Black men could not afford to get married. These circumstances lead to the development and acceptance of alternative family structures such as non-legal unions and ultimately single motherhood. These other family structures, e.g., other-mothering, are seen as a cultural solution to unstable conditions of poverty and marginalization (Barrow, 1999). In addition to economic reasons, some West Indian women chose to be single mothers. Reasons range from maintaining independence from domestic responsibilities under the control of a male partner to experiences with domestic violence (Barrow, 1999). Naturally these values or behaviours may be carried with Black West Indian women as they settle into Canada.

Regardless of the mothering experience, Black West Indian mothers individually and collectively want the best for their children. They want their children to be able to live and succeed within a society where the odds are stacked against them. O'Reilly (2004) provides a compelling description of what is important for Black mothers to transmit to their children, i.e.,

“the focus of black motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect, and more generally, empower black children; that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them, and grow into adulthood whole and complete” (p. 171). More specifically, Calliste (2003) a Canadian sociologist, asserts that Black children need to develop a positive racial identity where being Black has negative implications, learn in an education system that ignores the contributions of Blacks to Canadian society, and cope with challenges that limit their access to mainstream Canadian life. These descriptions capture the central issue confronting Black people in a dominant White culture. Fighting against racism and fostering resilience within their childrearing strategies is deemed essential for the survival of the Black family.

Dominant Themes in Parenting Research

Thus far, what has been discussed are the North American ideological assumptions of motherhood, the controlling images and pervasive stereotypes of Black mothers, and the shared experience of mothering from the Black American and West Indian perspectives. What also needs to be explored is the prevailing themes in North American research regarding what is considered to be effective parenting. Much of the discourse of parenting in North American research revolves around parenting styles or exhibited behaviours of parents. Firstly, I would like to mention that the word ‘parenting’ is gender neutral. Gillis (2007) states that the gender neutral nature of the word ‘parenting’ classifies the work of childrearing as caring labour, and masks the obvious gendered nature of the work of childrearing. This term seeks to include fathers in the role of childrearing, but it also hides the fact that childrearing is still, in most instances though not all, the responsibility of the mother (Gillis, 2007). When the word ‘parenting’ is used, it really means mothering practices, but I will continue to use it to demonstrate the term used by the dominant group.

Research about parenting and child development from the North American perspective has primarily involved White middle class American families (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). They are often included in cross-cultural studies as a measuring stick to which other cultures are compared. Cross-cultural studies of parenting have substantiated two main cultural models; individualism and collectivism (Suizzo, 2004). Tamis-LeMonda, Wang, Koutsouvanou and Albright (2002) state that societies that endorse individualism, e.g., Western European, value the characteristics of self-achievement and self-maximization. Parents from these cultures want their children to become adults who are independent and economically self-sufficient. Therefore, these parents are most likely to prefer parenting strategies that encourage personal achievement and independent activities (Gross, 1996). Cultures that embrace a more collectivist ideal are from non-Western cultures such as African American, Hispanic, Asian, and the Caribbean. Suizzo (2004) states that the cultural views of these parents have been categorized as being 'inter-dependent.' Cooperation, respect for authority, and sharing are highly valued (Gross, 1996).

Many of the studies that investigate parenting styles use Baumrind's conceptualization of parenting, namely authoritarian and authoritative (Baumrind, as cited in Maiter & George, 2003). The differences among these two styles are the amount of warmth or nurturing a child receives and the control parents impose on their child's behaviour (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, Farah, Sakhleh, Fayad, & Khan, 2006). Authoritative parenting is characterised by encouraging firm control, a readiness to reason and discuss concerns, and demands for maturity (Rudy & Grusec, 2001). These parents impose a moderate amount of control and gradually allow the child to be more autonomous. Authoritative parenting has been associated with positive psychosocial development and is associated with individualist cultural groups (Dwairy et al., 2006) such as Canada.

Authoritarian parenting, which is associated with collectivist cultures (Gorman, as cited in Maiter & George, 2003) is characterized by valuing obedience and respect for authority, is less sensitive to the child's perspective, and show low levels of nurturing, warmth, and empathy (McCain & Mustard, 1999). A Canadian study by Rudy and Grusec (2006) show the contrary with regard to the negative effects of authoritarian parenting on children. For instance, they did a study examining the relationship between authoritarianism and parenting cognitions and emotion in Canadian mothers from collectivist and individualist backgrounds. Families from the Middle East and South Asia represented collectivist cultures and families representing individualist cultures were Western European. One finding of the study showed that cultural groups that endorse collectivism do not inevitably show low levels of parental concern and love for their children. Furthermore, although there were found to have higher levels of parental control in the collectivist group, the negative child outcomes normally associated with this type of parenting from individualistic cultures, was not found (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Additionally, authoritarian parents are inclined to use punitive and forceful measures when the child's behaviour conflicts with their expectations (Maiter & George, 2003) and this has been found to have a negative impact on socialization because it fails to encourage the child's feelings of autonomy (Baumrind, as cited in Rudy & Grusec, 2001) among other factors. These outcomes refer to individualistic cultures and are not necessarily applicable to other cultural groups (Sorkhabi, 2005). For instance, a study by Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997), found that physical punishment is less strongly associated with child negative outcomes such as externalizing disorders in collectivists as compared to those of individualist cultures.

Baumrind's typology of parenting styles has been based on research involving White middle class families (Abell, Clawson, Washington, Bost, & Vaughn, 1996). The outcomes of

authoritative parenting are viewed as ideal because they coincide with the values of individualist cultural groups. Sorkhabi (2005) states that the authoritative style of parenting is not always applicable or relevant to collectivist cultures. For example, Sorkhabi (2005) refers to a study done by Chao and Tseng which demonstrated that the benefits of authoritative parenting are not found to be applicable to families of Chinese descent. Furthermore, Chao (1994) declares that parenting styles such as authoritarian and authoritative which are developed from White North American families are influenced by their history and their beliefs about childrearing. Applying these styles to families that do not share the same history and values due to the cultural differences and nationality may not be appropriate (Chao, 1994). This and the other studies noted above (Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Sorkhabi, 2005 and Dwairy et al., 2006) support the point that research conducted with one cultural group cannot automatically apply to others. This has theoretical and practical implications for health care and other service providers who work families from diverse cultures. They are challenged to interpret the varying levels of strict parenting (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Furthermore, research on immigrant families is scarce in examining the roles that Andersen and Collins (2004) refer to as socially constructed categories such as race, class, and gender, play in the formation of parenting strategies and child development (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Perreira, Chapman and Stein (2006) suggest that research on parenting and child development in minority and immigrant families has been limited by a comparative paradigm that sees children of colour and children of immigrants as biologically or culturally deficient and contrasts their development with American born Caucasian children. Comparative studies frequently create “norms” based on White middle class families. Parenting behaviour, which has been found to be different from the dominant group,

can be labelled as discrepant or worse, indicators of pathology (McGroder, 2000) for families that do not exhibit parenting behaviours that are acceptable to the dominant group.

The literature review relating to dominant themes in parenting research demonstrates that using one theoretical perspective to measure effective parenting across a number of cultural contexts can be limiting in terms of understanding the complexities of interacting factors that influence parenting behaviours. It is important to note that, for example, when community health nurses are providing health promotion interventions that are centred on parenting, most likely they will be influenced by the dominant Western cultures' notion of individualism and the characteristics of authoritative parenting. These values and ideals are deeply entrenched in the North American parenting literature, and in parenting programs and services. Imposing these values on West Indian families without considering their applicability in differing cultural contexts can be problematic for those who do not identify with them. These parents might be caught between what they know and have experienced, and what they are told by others to change.

Cultural Safety

Providing care or services to people of diverse ethno-cultural and language backgrounds can be challenging for some health and service providers. "Cultural Safety" is a relatively new approach to providing care to individuals, families and communities. It was developed in response to the healthcare needs of the Maori people of New Zealand who were experiencing poor health outcomes related to inequitable healthcare delivery and inappropriate services (De & Richardson, 2008; Baker, 2007). According to the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2009), the definition of cultural safety is "the effective nursing practice of a person or family from another culture, and is determined by that person or family. Culture includes, but is not restricted to, age

or generation; gender; sexual orientation; occupation and socioeconomic status; ethnic origin or migrant experience; religious or spiritual belief; and disability” (p. 6). So in essence, cultural safety requires the healthcare provider to deliver care that is respectful of difference. It is more than gaining ethnospecific cultural knowledge; it addresses the unequal power relationship between the healthcare provider and the client (Papps & Ramsden, 1996). Another key aspect of cultural safety is that the client determines when the relationship feels culturally safe (De & Richardson, 2008). This type of relationship empowers the client to declare when an interaction feels unsafe (Papp & Ramsden, 1996).

Culturally safe care requires the health care professional to reflect on their own life experiences, cultural realities, and attitudes and how it may influence those they work with (McMurray, 2007; Lynam & Young, 2000). In addition, it encourages healthcare providers to acknowledge that they hold a certain level of power and that they should work towards balancing that power with their clients (De & Richardson, 2008).

Incorporating this approach to health promotion initiatives can potentially mitigate the occurrence of cultural groups feeling powerlessness and angry, which can often be felt when service providers do not take into account their clients identified needs (Lynam & Young, 2000). Health promotion initiatives are actions taken to strengthen the skills and capabilities of individuals as well as actions towards changing social, environmental and economic conditions to ease their influence on public and individual health (World Health Organization, 1998). These initiatives are frequently universal in nature and are often built upon the values and beliefs of the dominant group (Malone, 1986). As a result, people from diverse cultural groups may not access or accept programs or services (Lynam & Young, 2000). As an experienced Community Health Nurse, I have provided mandated universal health promotion initiatives. There were times when

these initiatives did not meet the needs of various cultural groups which in fact lead to the dissatisfaction regarding the services provided and in some instances a decrease in the numbers of clients attending community programs. Therefore, within a multicultural society and a profession such as nursing, the concept of cultural safety radiates with even more importance and urgency.

The findings of this study can add to the parenting literature by including the previously silenced (Andersen & Collins, 2004) or less visible experiences of marginalized populations as a starting point for analyzing the complex relationships that are part of the work of parenting, i.e., mothering. The intersections of race, gender, class, and culture need to be taken into consideration when working with Black West Indian mothers. This furthers the importance of providing culturally safe nursing practice.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Underpinnings

Black Feminist theory was used to form the theoretical basis of this research. Black feminism was developed in part as a response to White, middle class, liberal feminist discourse (Few, 2007). According to the feminist movement, gender was the central oppressive force that limited the freedom of women (Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2004). Black women did not readily embrace this movement because, for them, oppression was more than gender discrimination (Riviere, 2004). Collins (2000) presents a theory of Black feminist thought in which she asserts that the lived experience of Black women is influenced by the intersection of race, class, and gender as oppressive forces that influence their lives. Her work brings Black women's lives to the centre of one's thinking (Andersen & Collins, 2004). Moreover, Shambley-Ebron and Boyle (2004) indicate that this exploration permits self definition. Essentially, it legitimizes the experiences of Black women in the creation of knowledge (Stephens & Phillips, 2005). Although Black Feminism was born in the United States, it can be applied to women of the African diaspora (Few, 2007) here in Canada as well as elsewhere if and where relevant.

As an oppressed group, many Black women resist and take an active response to oppression, that is, its ideas and the practices that condone it (Collins, 2000). In addition, Andersen and Collins (2004) recognize that Black feminism not only drives the analysis of gender, race, and class relations as simultaneous oppressive forces, but it examines the production of knowledge from different social and political locations. The social theories that arise from Black women and other oppressed groups is intended to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose social and economic injustice. In essence, these theories reflect Black

women's efforts to come to terms with the lived experiences of the intersection of the oppressions of race, class, and gender (Collins, 2000).

To explore the phenomenon of mothering, Black feminist theory is pertinent to this study, as it will help to illustrate the social location of Black West Indian single mothers within a Canadian context. In addition, the use of Black Feminism will also help to analyse the meanings, values, and motives that influence the mothering experience. As a result, the mothering experiences of single Black West Indian mothers will be brought to the forefront of our thinking. Andersen and Collins (2004) state that by shifting our vision of society from one that is centred on the dominant group to those who have been marginalized, transforms rather than supports what is currently being upheld. This shift will assist in analysing the complex interconnections between race, class, and gender and to think differently about social relationships, behaviours, experiences, and institutions. Additionally, it will influence best practices in parenting programs such as high risk home visiting by community health nurses and community parenting groups.

Accordingly, part of the analysing process is to acknowledge that knowledge has been developed, for the most part, by the dominant group due to ease of access to and control of the education and communication systems (Andersen & Collins, 2004). By giving a voice and a space in the centre for our knowledge creation to single Black West Indian mothers, other members of society can know a different perspective and experience of mothering, and can gain a better understanding of what it may mean to be a Black mother who is silenced, marginalized, and devalued. Therefore, qualitative research is needed to understand experiences without preconceived assumptions and to build appropriate theoretical frameworks upon which to develop and "test" relevant interventions from the health promotion perspective. It is anticipated that the findings emerging from this qualitative study will inform community health nurses in

providing culturally safe care to the populations they serve such as single Black West Indian mothers.

Chapter Four

Philosophical Influence

Interpretive phenomenology, specifically the work of Hans George Gadamer (2004), was used as a philosophical and methodological framework for this study. Interpretive phenomenology is also known as hermeneutics, which is based on the work of Heidegger (Dowling, 2004). It is a philosophical method of inquiry which aims to reveal the meaning of being (Dowling, 2004). Hermeneutics is more than describing concepts and essences; it is a process of looking for meanings that are hidden in the lived experience or common life practices of human beings (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Gadamer furthered the work of Heidegger by describing the circular process of understanding. The process of understanding is an active hermeneutic undertaking of anticipating, modifying, or replacing already existing concepts. Understanding comes from what is already given to us historically (Phillips, 2007).

Consciousness is shaped by the individual's horizon or perception within the prejudices of history including those given by people or texts. As a result, consciousness is not independent of history (Gadamer, as cited in Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003). To look at it another way, 'preunderstanding' cannot be removed from understanding the phenomenon of interest (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003). Gadamer states that historical awareness or 'preunderstanding' of a phenomenon is valuable towards knowledge development and understanding. Although some researchers see this as a negative, Gadamer strongly believes that understanding is only possible through one's critical awareness of preunderstandings. If the researcher is not consciously aware of their preunderstanding, there is a possibility that one will fail to understand the meaning of the phenomenon of interest (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003).

Gadamer (2004) developed the phrase ‘fusion of horizons.’ The metaphor of horizon describes the span of cultural and historical preunderstandings that we possess in the process of understanding (Phillips, 2007). Horizons are connected to history and they shift as our situations change. As our perspectives shift and expand, we are then capable of understanding things differently at different moments in our history. Fusion of horizons takes place as a dialogical event when our horizon is expanded through the conscious integration of the horizon of another (Gadamer, as cited in Phillips, 2007). That is, we are willing to be open to and accept the meaning held by another person (or text) (Dowling, 2004). This doesn’t mean that we can fully know the other person’s horizon, because that would entail the person abandoning his or her own horizon and substituting it with theirs. Instead, fusion of horizons means to intentionally let into our being an awareness of something unanticipated, new or unknown, and importantly, to be aware of that differentness (Phillips, 2007). In essence, the hermeneutic process becomes a dialogical process where the horizon of the researcher and the phenomenon being studied are combined (Dowling, 2004).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a good fit with Black feminist research in that it complies with the lived-experience criterion of researching the lives of women (Fonow & Cook, 1991). It is supportive of investigating misinterpreted experiences because its purpose is to understand phenomena instead of explaining experiences in order to predict and control them (Garko, 1999) as in the positivist agenda. Using hermeneutic phenomenology will help to illuminate the experience Black West Indian women face as they confront stereotypes that are prevalent in this society and the multifaceted oppressive forces that are against them. Moreover, it will also help to address or illuminate what the literature says about parenting styles as it relates to collectivist cultures, i.e., Black West Indian culture. In essence, Black feminist theory

in combination with the hermeneutic phenomenology method will facilitate the analysis of the complex relationships that are part of the work of mothering.

Situating Myself as Researcher

My personal and professional experiences are relevant to the phenomenon of interest. My interest in the experiences of Black West Indian mothering grows from the apparent struggles of women in my family raising their children. This only became a realization to me as I contemplated my two daughter's places in this world. As a mother, I want my daughters to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. I am constantly thinking about how I can guide and support them. Sometimes I think of the family stories that I have heard over the years growing up as child, especially about motherhood and the challenges the women in my family faced. Sharing a piece of my mothers' journey to Canada, I feel is important for the reader to know because it will provide a context from where this research is coming. As well, presenting this journey provides additional content regarding my pre-understanding of the research topic.

My maternal grandmother, who is living in St. Vincent, was a businesswoman selling homemade baked goods "down the road." She would wear a basket on her head as she made her way around the neighbourhood selling fresh bread to villagers in the area. By doing this, she was able to earn and save enough money to build a "wall house," i.e., a house made of concrete, which is a significant accomplishment for any poor family to attain in the West Indies.

My mother gave birth to my older sister while living in St. Vincent. My grandmother encouraged my mother to immigrate to Canada, as living conditions were hard in St. Vincent. Canada was viewed as a land of opportunity. In 1969 my mother came to Canada as a domestic worker. Eventually my mother got married to my dad and she had three more children, and then

later sent for my oldest sister from St. Vincent. Even in the land of opportunities, times were hard financially for my parents. Both of them worked hard to provide for me and my siblings. In my opinion, my mother had more responsibilities because she had to work outside the home, together with taking care of us, and performing household duties. She missed having the support that she would have had, if she were living back home. “Back home” support would include receiving help from her mother or a family member to care for her children while she went to work, run errands, or just needing a break. I know that many West Indian mothers living in Canada have gone through similar struggles or are going through them now, like my mother did.

I was fortunate that when I had my daughters, I had the support of my mother and sisters. This was especially important due to the fact that I was single at the time. This support allowed me to pursue my career goals. I was able to get my Bachelor of Science in Nursing and I am currently pursuing a graduate degree. My daughters also benefited from this support because, like me, they too have been influenced by a line of strong, hard-working, and ambitious women. I want to continue this path with my daughters through to their adult life. As researcher, I would like to provide a place in the written text for others to learn about mothering from the Black West Indian perspective.

According to Gadamar (2004), bringing pre-understandings to consciousness is a necessary step as a researcher to examine its origin and truthfulness as it relates to the phenomenon of interest and the interpretation of the data collected. If my pre-understandings are not brought to consciousness, I, as the interpreter of the data, may not be able to look beyond them. My pre-understanding of the mothering experience of Black West Indian women comes from personal experience. Being of West Indian decent, my mothering experience is influenced by my cultural background and being a single mother at the present time. In addition, the

research process, particularly the literature review, broadened my understanding of some the various factors that influence mothering from the West Indian perspective. Therefore, my personal experience as a single mother with a West Indian upbringing, combined with the literature review, and my professional experience as a Community Health Nurse in Canada encompass my pre-understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Being consciously aware of my pre-understanding will now bring forth a new 'fusion of horizon'. In the next section, I will review my process of using Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutic in the research process.

It is noted by Fleming, Gaidys, and Robb (2003) that Gadamer did not develop a research methodology for gaining an in-depth understanding of text (text includes written word, taped word, and non-verbal expressions). Therefore, I integrated Fleming et al. (2003) who developed a guideline to assist researchers to incorporate Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy in their studies.

Identification of My Pre-understandings

Earlier I briefly outlined my pre-understanding of the experiences of single Black West Indian mothers. At this point I would like to provide a deeper description of the process I used to identify my pre-understandings. Having many discussions with my thesis advisor helped me to think about the pre-understandings of my research. According to Fleming et al. (2003), discussion with another colleague is a necessary step to reveal my deep understanding of the phenomenon. Once revealed, I then can reflect on my pre-understandings and move beyond my own horizon of understanding to a shared understanding of the phenomenon (Fleming et al., 2003). The process of revealing my pre-understanding was not static. Uncovering my pre-understanding took place during my preparation of my proposal, which took months, and I kept notes along the way. It was essential for me to do this before I conducted the focus group as

illustrated earlier. I have categorised my pre-understanding as personal and professional, and in my thinking and developing analysis as I reviewed the literature on this research topic.

My personal experience of the research topic is the result of hearing stories from family and friends who are single Black West Indian mothers in combination with my own experience as a single mother. When I think about and analyze their experiences including my own, I envision the qualities “strength and hard working.” Many times I have heard stories of the difficulties of raising children on their own. Examples include, the necessity of working more than one job, working and going to school part time to upgrade their education and skills (this is my personal experience too), the stress of travelling with their children on public transit during the winter, trying to save money to put their children in extra curricular activities, having disagreements with their children’s father, trying to make ends meet, etc. These are some of the day to day living experiences these women including myself had to endure. In addition, when I reflect upon what was said about their children, many were proud of the achievements their children made in school, sports, growth, and development. Some who were brave enough talked about the trouble their children were getting into, for instance, their sons stealing and keeping company with “bad” friends. I say brave because “raising your children up right” is highly valued in the West Indian culture. Disclosing the bad behaviour of your children to others puts you, as a mother, at risk for taking the blame. For me, “strength and hard working” embody the work and character needed to provide for and raise our children.

From a professional standpoint, I was drawn to the mothering or parenting aspect of raising children. I have been exposed to various parenting theories through training opportunities at my current place of work in public health and through my education in the Master of Nursing program. Reflecting on the phenomenon from this lens brought me to analyze

whether what I was taught or researched was applicable to Black West Indian mothers. I thought about the various West Indian families I worked with over the years either one on one or in a group setting. I remember feeling torn with the parenting information I was teaching in a group setting, knowing that some of these mothers, including other ethnic and cultural groups, were not going to follow through with what I taught. I felt torn because the strategies and the reasoning behind strategies did not always apply to the parenting values of the mothers. During this time I was new to group facilitation, and my skills and confidence to adapt the information to the needs of the group were limited. Was it my skills as a new facilitator or was it the information that was taught or a combination of the two that had led me to feel inadequate? Having this experience in combination with my knowledge of some parenting theories led to a literature review of parenting theories as it relates to West Indian culture.

Investigating mothering from the view point of White patriarchal values, forces of oppression influencing Black West Indian mothers, negative stereotypes of Black single mothers, mothering from the Black American and West Indian perspective and dominant themes in parenting research were important to understanding the experience of single Black West Indian mothers. Moreover, using Black Feminist Thought as the theoretical basis for my research is included as part of my pre-understanding of the subject.

Gaining Understanding Through Dialogue with the Participants and the Text

In order to gain an understanding of the research topic, a conversation is needed with those who are experiencing the phenomenon. The focus group method was used to gain information from the participants. This method is compatible with feminist research because it has the potential to address the imbalance of power between the researcher and the researched. It allows for the power of the researcher to be challenged because there is opportunity for the

participants to change the direction or challenge the research project (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006). This was exemplified by providing opportunities for the participants to comment, explain, disagree, and share attitudes and experiences (Curtis, 2007). As well, this method is conducive as noted in Gadamer's philosophy in research. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a good fit with Black feminist research in that it supports the lived-experience criterion of researching the lives of women (Fonow & Cook, 1991). It is supportive to investigating misinterpreted experiences because its purpose is to understand phenomena instead of explaining experiences in order to predict and control them (Garko, 1999). Therefore, through using the focus group method, Black feminism, and hermeneutic phenomenology, it is hoped that the experience Black West Indian women face as they confront stereotypes that are prevalent in this society and the multifaceted oppressive forces that are against them, will be illuminated.

The focus group discussion was audio-taped then transcribed by another person. These two forms of dialogue i.e., listening to the audio tapes as well as reading the transcripts, gave me the opportunity to clarify what was said in the audio-tape to what was written in the transcript. Many mistakes were found and corrected in the transcripts due to the accent of the participants and the speed of their speech, which being more familiar to me than to the transcriber, I can hear and understand.

To analyse the data, first, I listened to the whole tape recording on its own, followed by a full reading of the transcript. Then, I read and listened to the tape recordings together. My first impression of some possible themes emerging after listening and reading the transcript for the first time included, "fighting the system," "assumptions of being a young mother," "here and there," and "finding joy." I compared these with my pre-understandings and found some underlying similarities, for instance, the joy the participants and the mothers I knew (pre-

understanding) felt in watching their children grow. An emergent theme that was new for me, were the experiences of being young and pregnant “back home.” The next step was reading the transcript and listening to the taped recording in more detail. Themes and sub-themes were discovered. Again, I compared them to my pre-understanding as well as my first impressions from the first reading and listening of the tape recording. Once I felt that I had learned all I could from the data, as the last step, I read the transcript and listened to the tape recording as a whole and compared it to my previous learning. This process occurred over a time period of months. The Results and Analysis section will give more detail of the themes found and the analysis of the data.

Rigor

Trustworthiness is very important to this study as it ensures that the themes and major findings from the data collected is truly reflective of what the participants have shared. Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe the techniques of credibility and confirmability. Credibility refers to the activities the researcher has taken to ensure the findings from the data are credible. One way to establish credibility is to engage the data over an extended amount of time and for me, this process as noted earlier, occurred over a period of months. During the readings and listening to the taped recordings I kept notes to keep track of my thoughts and impressions of the data. I met and spoke regularly with my thesis advisor to discuss my findings and documented these discussions. This is a process referred to as confirmability, where the analysis process is documented. In addition, to ensure that the voices of the participants were evident in the findings I included several quotes from the data. Overall, the above steps taken will add rigor to my study which “is to accurately represent study participants experiences” (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007, p. 49).

Chapter Five

Methodology

In the following section, I will describe the process of locating participants and data collection for the study.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to locate participants for the study. This sampling method is applicable because it allowed me to engage participants who are experiencing the phenomenon of interest. I developed a flyer to be distributed in a community where a large number of Black West Indians live (See Appendix A for a sample of the flyer).

I chose a community in the North West end of Toronto where a higher population of West Indians reside. I spoke to colleagues of mine who work in this area and they gave me key contacts in the community with whom to connect. I approached these contacts who were in fact community agency leaders who were responsible for running parenting groups. I gave them a verbal explanation of my study, asking them if they would be interested in assisting me in locating research participants. When their responses were in the affirmative, I gave them flyers to distribute to potential participants. These community agency leaders were motivated to help me locate participants for my study and they assisted by collecting names and phone numbers of those who were interested. Some potential participants called me, but, for the majority, I made contact with those who expressed interest in participating in the study. I used a prepared telephone script when calling potential participants to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria and to provide an explanation of the study (see Appendix B). I was able to meet with 2 participants prior to the focus group to sign the consent agreement (see Appendix C) and to give a letter (see Appendix D) for an explanation of the study. In addition, four more women made a

verbal agreement to participate in the study. Only two of the four showed up at the focus group, for a total of four participants. The Consent Agreements and the Letter for Participants were signed before the start of the focus group.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants that were included in this study were single Black West Indian mothers who have at least one child 6 years of age or under. In terms of mothering research, it is strategic to focus on one area of child development, e.g., the early formative years, because mothering strategies are different for each stage. I am particularly interested in this stage of development because most of my professional nursing experience focused on families with young children. For the purposes of this study, single refers to a mother who is unmarried and/or not living common law with another man. Being partnered brings in other factors of family life that are not being investigated in this study, for example, the differing parenting styles of each member of a couple and so forth. Black refers to women of African descent. Participants also had to have been born in the West Indies and have immigrated to Canada less than 10 years ago. This time period was determined to minimize the effect of enculturation.

Data Collection

Demographic Data

Before I proceeded with the focus group and data collection, I received approval from the Ryerson Ethics Review Board in February 2009 and conducted the focus group April 7, 2009. I also applied for and was granted an extension in March 2010 to complete my research.

Demographic data was collected just prior to the start of the focus group (see Appendix E). The group consisted of 3 women from Jamaica and one from St. Lucia. In regards to the age of the participants, one was 37 and the other age ranges were between 19-22 years. I also asked

about whether they did paid work, their level of education attained, and yearly household income (one participant did not answer any of these questions). One participant worked part-time, the others didn't do paid work; all completed high school, and only one participant responded to the yearly income question, which, in this case, was less than \$20 000 per year.

Focus Group

To elicit the experience of these mothers, I used the focus group method of data collection. The focus group method produces data by gathering opinions articulated by participants individually or collectively. As well, the opinions and experiences expressed by the participants provide greater understanding into the motivation and reason for behaviours (Halcomb, Gholizadeh, DiGiacomo, Phillips, & Davidson, 2007) together with the opportunity to observe group interactions and understand shared experiences (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006). This method is conducive to representing and giving voice to those who are not often included in research and is particularly effective when the focus of the research is with women (Beck, Williams, Hope, & Park, 2001). In addition, this method will bring front and centre the experiences of Black women, which is often excluded and not legitimized as contribution to knowledge construction (Collins, 2004).

The focus group was held in a community centre in the North West area of Toronto. This centre was known to the participants and easily accessible by transit. This site was also selected because it had a play area for children. Moreover, I was able to arrange to have staff at this location available for childcare. The room contained comfortable chairs and a large table. The group consisted of four participants, myself as the researcher, a colleague of mine who took field notes during the focus group, and a social work student who had a clinical placement at the centre. A confidentiality agreement was signed by my colleague and the social work student (see

Appendix G). The participants were informed that the discussion would be audio-taped to which they agreed before the focus group began. I reviewed the importance of confidentiality and the participants were advised not to share what was said in the group outside of the group. I had an interview guide to assist me in facilitating the discussion (see Appendix F).

Childcare and fare for transportation was offered to allow for easier access to the focus group. Two out of the four participants brought their children and none needed fare for transportation. Food and beverages was also provided for the participants and their children. The focus group continued for 1 ½ hours and an additional, 20 minutes for eating their meal. At the end of the group, a \$30 gift card for Hudson's Bay Company, was given to each participant for their participation in the study. Due to the small number of participants, I was able to increase the dollar amount of the gift card from \$25 to \$30. Some were surprised to get this specific gift card, indicating that what they really preferred was a food gift card. I had considered giving a food gift card but thought that it might give the impression that food security was an issue and I did not want to insult them. I informed them that they could use the gift card at Zellers and that food items are sold there. The participants mentioned that they liked the discussion. One thought that this was an ongoing group and she indicated she was disappointed that it was not.

The field notes taken by my colleague consisted primarily of what was written in the transcript, but not in full detail. As a result, the field notes were not as helpful as I had originally thought. The purpose of the field notes was to capture details such as, body language and emotions, which could have been missed during the taping of the discussion. Perhaps I should have given more direction as to what I wanted. Furthermore, having someone else take field notes may influence the complexity of interpreting the data. I would have to take into consideration her pre-understanding and interpretation of the data of which I did not consider at

the time. Listening to the audio recording and reading the transcript and of course being present to facilitate the focus group provided enough data for me to analyse. I did appreciate my colleague being present as she was a source of support for me considering this was my first time doing research independently.

After completion of the focus group I sent the audio recording to a transcription service where a fee was paid. In three days I received the transcript electronically and was printed. Online security was ensured by the transcription service. I kept the recordings, transcripts, consents, and the completed demographic questionnaires in a locked cabinet in my home.

Chapter Six

Results and Analysis

After listening to the tape recordings and reading through the transcript many times, the lived experiences of these mothers that were shared during the focus group really came through. My goal as a researcher was to create an environment where these mothers felt safe in telling their story to a complete stranger. Although being a researcher sets me apart from them due to my educational attainment and employment status, taking the following steps can assist in balancing the power differential between the researcher and the participants as suggested by Jowet and O'Toole (2006). Firstly, I was similar to them because I too was a Black single mother of West Indian decent. I shared my personal and professional background with them before I proceeded with the focus group as I hoped that they would do the same and to relate to me on a more personal level. I welcomed many opinions and thoughts about any discussion point and I paid attention to making sure that everyone was heard and no one dominated the discussion. In addition, I dressed in casual clothing so as not to be perceived as too professional.

As a Community Health Nurse (CHN), I have had many opportunities to work with families who share the same cultural and ethnic background as I do. Many of these families came from various socio-economic backgrounds with varying mothering experiences. When I think of them collectively, the word resilience comes to mind. As you read along you will see why. Many of these families confront challenges that are common to most parents such as what first foods to feed their baby, coping with lack of sleep, coping with the “terrible two’s” and so on. But there were challenges that were unique to these families that other cultural and ethnic groups may not face on a regular basis. CHNs or other service providers may also have to deal with these same challenges as they try to support the families with whom they are working. In

this study, the participants shared their mothering experiences with me. Some of these experiences which were known to me due to my community work with families, my own personal experience as a single Black mother, together with the experience of single mothers in my family and my friends i.e., my pre-understandings. However, the participants also shared experiences that were new to me.

The three dominant themes that emerged from my analysis are: “All Up in My Business”, “Here and There”, and “Finding Joy”. These themes and another finding “Raising a Boy: Values that are Important” will be discussed in the following sections.

All Up in My Business

One of the major challenges these mothers faced was working with government service workers, in particular, child protection and social assistance social workers. As indicated earlier, most of the participants are young single mothers. These mothers felt that they were targets of child protection services due to their status of being single and young. There is a common assumption that young mothers are in need of “extra” support and that their children are in need of protection from them. For example, one of the mothers shared an experience of being in the hospital after she had her baby. She shared a room with two other women. She explained with pride how she was able to take care of her newborn daughter without the help of the nurse, e.g., feeding and bathing the baby. She mentioned that one of her roommates, an older white woman, was having a lot of pain and the baby was in the nursery for the majority of her stay in the hospital. Upon this participant’s discharge a Children’s Aid worker came to see her and her other roommate who was also a young mother. This participant stated that, “She comes to me then goes over to this next young mother that was there and then she leaved the room. Why? What about older people that was there” (Participant B). Clearly, from her point of view, the white

older woman's inability to care for her newborn should have been investigated or assessed by the Children's Aid worker. This situation was upsetting to this participant because she felt that it was unfair to target young mothers based on the assumption that they are in need of support.

Another participant had a negative encounter with a Children's Aid worker when she went for an obstetric appointment. She stated that:

When I was pregnant, the worker came when I went to Dr. (X) for spotting and there was a worker waiting for me there and she put me in a room and my baby father's mom was with me and she looked at me and she's like so are you planning on keeping the baby, you know, did you ever think about abortions... (Participant A).

This participant felt that the approach of the worker was discriminatory. She went to the doctor because she was concerned about her pregnancy and the bleeding she was experiencing, but was surprised to be questioned by a child protection worker. To presume that she could not take care of a child by asking her about the option of an abortion was an insult to her. She didn't acknowledge that she had a support person with her. Her baby's paternal grandmother had to speak up and advocate for her by saying "listen to me, [she] has a lot of support...her mom is not here but I'm her second mother" (Participant A). This statement was said in a stern way by the participant as she was restating her baby's grandmother's words. The support that she was receiving speaks to "other mothering" discussed in the literature review. The participant felt that if her support person was not there the worker would have kept "digging and pushing her." This grandmother realizes that Participant A was in is need of support in taking care of her own grandchild and was willing to help her. She also realized that the worker was treating Participant A in a discriminatory manner and needed to show the worker that Participant A is not alone and has reliable support.

Social assistance policy is currently influenced by neo-liberal ideology and practice (Breitkreuz, 2005). Neo-liberalism condones less government involvement in the provision of social welfare, promotes competition and individualism, and is market driven. This ideology created welfare-to-work programs across most Canadian provinces. These approaches emphasize personal responsibility for unemployment and punishing those who do not conform to the government initiated programs (Evans, 2007). What this means is that in order for a family or an individual to be eligible for benefits, a commitment to gaining employment is required (Pollack, 2009). This welfare-to-work model removes the gendered nature of work by putting men and women on an equal playing field in acquiring work. For instance, the idealized family structure is a nuclear heterosexual union where white men continue to be privileged over white women and women of colour in regards to their relationship with the state (Gazso, 2009). This means that the work of care giving is the responsibility of the family, namely women. Defining the market citizen as a self-sufficient adult worker, negates the reality of unpaid work (Gazso, 2009). This process makes paid work attainment even more difficult for single mothers as they are the primary carers of their children. Moreover, accessing childcare is a necessity for employment, education endeavours, and training opportunities, and childcare space and subsidy can be difficult to get.

All three of the younger participants expressed difficulty in getting either childcare or childcare subsidy. One of the participants talked about her experience,

...like the daycares are always full up and when you go to the subsidy office,...they're telling you that they can't do anything about it, you have to get on the list and the list is like a mile higher and like that's... when you're ready to go back to school. Now it's so late you have to be catching up on things (Participant B).

Furthermore, another participant mentioned that she could not go to school for one year because child care space was not available. Although welfare policy requires that recipients make efforts to enter the work force, current structures do not make it easy for single mothers to do so. To make access to opportunities equitable for those in need, it may mean treating individuals or groups differently to gain that access. There is this notion that providing services to everyone in the same way equals fairness for all. In reality, this is not the case. To make access to services equitable, interventions or programs must be reflective of the needs of the target population to meet the desired goal (Garcia, 2006). For example, some young single mothers may need to finish high school. Having child care available at selected high schools may make it easier for these mothers to get their diploma, compared to having them apply for child care and child care subsidy through the formal process.

Not surprisingly, given the above examples, participants complained about the treatment they experienced with social assistance workers. Those who required income support found that they were confronted with negative attitudes towards them. The dominant complaint of these mothers was the type of questions they are asked and the way they were spoken to when applying for and during their receipt of assistance. Most of the participants expressed that they were pressured to provide the names of their child's father for the purpose of taking them to court to collect child support. "...right now they even want me to bring him to court because he's not paying and I'm like well he doesn't have no income, he's not working. What do you want from me? As much as I'm gonna bring him to court, what is that gonna do?" (Participant A). Sometimes the questions the participants are asked were felt to be too personal. They do not see the relevance of the information asked in relation to getting assistance. One participant raised a question and statement saying, "What is my personal life have to do with you guys giving me

money? I don't have an income, I'm going to school, taking care of my pickney (child). I'm not understanding you know" (Participant A). Many of the participants agreed with her comment. Furthermore, one participant indicated that her worker was so rude, making the participant feel that she was asking for more money and not for legitimate reasons, i.e., LEAP for school. She stated:

When I first got my worker she was so rude to me. I am on welfare and when I wanted to go on LEAP. When I started the LEAP program I only did it to get a monthly pass to go to school. That's why I needed it (LEAP) because it's not a lot they give you, they only give you an extra \$200 so that's nothing. She had an attitude with me like the only reason I want to go to school is to get the extra money. She's like you have to be in school... and I'm like I was going to school like for four months before I even talk to you and I went every single day and I went to all my classes...and I passed all my classes without LEAP so why does she make it seem like that was the only reason why I want to go to school. (Participant B).

The LEAP (Learning Earning and Parenting) program is a program provided by social assistance for young mothers who want to attend school. An extra \$200 is given monthly for transportation purposes and other expenses. This particular scenario demonstrates that although programs are in place to support single mothers in attaining education, negative attitudes they are faced with by their worker can make it difficult to access. In my own professional experience, some families I have worked with have had similar experiences.

On the other side, social assistance workers also confront challenges in doing their job. According to Pollack (2009), welfare workers are under pressure to keep spending to a minimum when making approvals for benefits for their clients. This expectation creates variability and

subjectivity in regards to who obtains access to certain benefits. I would also like to add that social assistance workers are influenced by biases like everyone else. If the social assistance policy is built upon ideologies that de-value single mothers as not deserving of assistance, and are influenced by negative stereotypes spread by the media, then naturally those who work for the system are inclined to marginalize single mothers who are in need of benefits they are qualified to receive.

These mothers are well aware of the stereotypes that are pervasive in the media and beyond about being single Black mothers. Two stereotypes that came from the focus group are that of the “Welfare Queen” and the “oversexed black woman” or “Jezebel”. The last quote by Participant B really speaks to how misunderstood she felt when she asked her social assistance worker to be in a program that would help her financially in furthering her education. This mother has goals and being on social assistance is not one of them. She states, with determination that “I am not going to be on welfare forever” (Participant B). Hidden in the meaning of the interaction between the social worker and the participant is the assumption that this mother was trying to cheat the system. There is “this common knowledge” about social assistance recipients, that they are lazy and getting money for nothing. Add that to being a single Black mother and you become a ‘Welfare Queen’. The negative assumptions of welfare recipients together with the negative stereotypes of being a single Black mother create attitudes and behaviours that are, in many instances, hostile towards these mothers.

In regards to the oversexed or Jezebel stereotype, one participant shared her experience that she had when she went on a field trip. While travelling on public transit, a White woman was staring at her and her friends. As the White woman was about to leave the bus, the participant reported that this woman commented, “Young girls and having babies

nowadays...how much of you girls have been on Maury...do you know your baby's father?"(Participant B). These ideas or stereotypes about Black mothers are found in many facets of the media. They are perpetuated on TV, the news, print media, radio and so on. The Maury Povich show that was referenced in the quote is a good example of a show that perpetuates negative stereotypes about Black mothers. This American TV talk show focuses on broken relationships usually centred on cheating among dating or married couples. Many times this show has episodes about determining the paternity of children from Black mothers who are on the show. Often, more than two men are given paternity testing. Shows like these only continue to perpetuate existing and often entrenched socially organized stereotypes and assumptions about young Black women as mothers.

Recently, reality shows have become very popular. There seems to be an increased appetite to get an inside look into the lives of everyday people. What appears to increase ratings and sales is the reporting of stories of conflict, misfortune, and hurt among people. Whether it is the news, print media, movies, radio, and now the internet, these stories will get across to consumers. According to Henry and Tater (2006), those who determine what is broadcasted and printed are not immune to racial discrimination. Those who create what is aired and printed such as editors, journalists, camerapersons, producers etc., have a world view that influences the way they interpret images and events. In addition, stories are usually told in a stereotypical way and compared with "white behaviour" (Henry and Tater, 2006). So long as the status quo continues, stereotyping and negative images about single Black mothers will remain.

Combined with the negative stereotypes of Black single women, is the assumption of young mothers being unfit to raise their children on their own. One participant talked about her daughter exploring and running around in stores. When she allows her child to run around free,

she would get looks from patrons in the store and when she attempts to stop her daughters' behaviour by telling her 'no,' she still gets the same look. This situation and feeling of embarrassment is not uncommon to most parents. To these mothers, these experiences take on more meaning. They feel that others see them as unfit, for example, Participant B indicates:

They feel like we want to hurt our kids. Like they always feel like, they always want to check down on me. When you're a teen, like when a teen gets pregnant, it's like everybody just comes on down on that. That's the thing. They make it seem like we're gonna hurt our kids or we're gonna be depressed and this and that. Older women hurt their kids...look at the ones on the news. They were not young (Participant B).

This mother feels that they are unjustly stigmatized for being a young single mother. By raising the issues of postpartum depression and cases of child abuse that make headlines, demonstrates the awareness level of these mothers regarding the power of the media to influence the thoughts of individuals.

Here and There

There was a lot of discussion regarding the differences between raising a child here in Canada or back home. The discussion centred on differences in discipline, and the importance of respect, and the consequences of being a young single mother.

Discipline and the Importance of Respect

Spanking, as a discipline strategy, is commonly used in the West Indies (Evans & Davies, 1997). These mothers told stories of different personal circumstances as to why they got spanked and reasons in general why children were spanked. Some were reminiscing and laughing regarding the times they were spanked. Although some were hit with a belt, hanger, or the hand, all of these mothers felt that spanking was effective in changing behaviour, but it was not to be

used excessively. One Participant stated “I’m not saying it’s right to beat your kid, but if you give them a spanking once in awhile, cause I’m from the Caribbean and I got licks when I was growing up and it did work” (Participant C). These mothers are quite aware that spanking is culturally frowned upon in Canada. They have observed that Canadian raised children are less well behaved, as defined by them, compared to West Indian children. Respect for parents and adults is highly valued in the West Indies. It’s important for children to acknowledge and greet adults when you meet them in the community. Here in Canada, they hear children swearing at their parents and talking back. Back home, if a child is misbehaving or is rude to another adult and their parents are not around, another adult is allowed to discipline that child.

Say you know my mother really good and you see me doing something bad, you’re bum is slapped (claps). When you send me home then my mom says well tell me what happened, and I tell her, I get some more on top of it (Participant A).

Collectively these mothers feel that Canadian children have a lot of freedom to express their anger towards their parents and, due to the lack of physical punishment, the result are children having behaviour problems. This perspective is widely agreed upon in the Black community, not only in reference to their own children but Canadian children in general. Not surprisingly, valuing respect, good behaviour, and obedience are characteristics related to collectivist cultures. Authority figures such as parents, elders in the community, school teachers among others, are to be respected. Along with respect, obedience is valued (Evans and Davies, 1997).

Contrary to some existing stereotypes about young Black mothers being unable to care for their children adequately, these mothers found other ways to discipline. They made references to time outs, counting backwards to zero, and not giving attention to bad behaviour.

“What I’ve learned...how do you say it...if my son does something wrong - sometimes I’ll see him doing it - and I’ll just, I’ll look at him and then when he sees that you’re not acknowledging what he’s doing bad, he’ll just leave it, he’ll just walk away” (Participant A). These mothers learned these strategies from parenting groups they were attending in their community. Some have admitted to using both the ‘Canadian’ and ‘West Indian’ way of disciplining. It’s natural for parents to revert back to discipline actions that they experienced as a child, e.g., hitting their child. To learn new strategies and to use them on a consistent basis is an accomplishment and a credit to parenting educators and also to mothers who embrace a new way of doing things. I believe that if parenting educators are aware of the cultural differences in disciplining and understanding the reason behind those differences, parents are more likely to accept new ways. This is why cultural safety is essential. In addition, it would be ideal if the educator comes from a similar cultural background. This is evidenced by the positive response to teaching received by these mothers.

Consequences of Being Young Single Black Mothers

Another theme emerging from the data was the perception of the consequences of being a young single Black mother. The perception of young single motherhood, from the perspective of the participants, was shame. What was clear and unanimous, from the perspectives of these young mothers, was the damaging effect of being talked about by members of the community, i.e., those already known and by strangers. One participant shared the experience of her mother being young and pregnant back in Jamaica. Her mother when pregnant was talked about by the older people in her community.

After she had me, there was a lot of people talking and putting her down in Jamaica saying how she got a baby too young and that should not have happened. ...older people

feel that you don't know what you are doing because you're in Jamaica, when you're a young parent they feel that you don't have nothing going for you. She said she just keep her head high' (Participant A).

A young pregnant woman would go through different situations to avoid anyone from finding out that they were pregnant. Getting pregnant at an early age is looked down upon in the West Indies. Girls who are pregnant are not allowed to go to school. Some girls go as far as to 'hide the belly' in order to finish their schooling. Some even had their babies in the school washroom. Many girls were sent away from their home to have their baby..."whether you like it or not, you were not going to bring shame in the family...they're gonna send you to foreign or send you back to the country to have the baby and then bring you back to the city" (Participant D). Clearly, young single motherhood is not embraced or accepted in the West Indies. When asked if someone like me, who is an older single mother with another baby on the way, would get the same reaction, Participant C responded saying, "they don't care because you're big already...they will chat you, but it's not a big deal as compared to a young mother" (Participant C). What the participant meant by big is that I am an older adult not a young adult. The group agreed with this statement.

Currently in Canada, many young mothers, especially adolescent mothers, face the fear of having their young children being 'taking away' by Child Protection Services. One mother said, "In Jamaica we have the risk of being talked about or whatever, but up here the risk is also people saying that we're unfit mothers and having to worry about... they will try to take away our kids....we have more to worry about up here" (Participant A). There was a difference of opinion regarding which situation was worse, being talked about by others or the threat of their child

being taken away. Those mothers who had negative experiences with Children's Aid personally or through their social networks would feel that young motherhood in Canada can be fearful.

Raising a Boy: Values that are Important

During our conversation about values that are important to teach their children, one participant brought up the issue of raising a son. Although only one participant brought up this issue, it resonated with me because raising a Black son can be challenging due to entrenched social problems that afflict them. Being a single mother, combined with her child's father not being in her son's life consistently, will be more difficult for her to build characteristics that she thinks only a father can teach. Her main focus is to teach her son to have a mind of his own, "cause I'm gonna have to teach my son not to follow friends...if he's gonna follow other kids, he's going to be doing drugs" (Participant A). Raising children to be responsible citizens is important for all parents. According to this mother, the company a child keeps can influence the goals she or he may have for their life which in turn can determine the behaviours and choices they make to accomplish their goals. Many parents are concerned about the type of friends their children are playing or hanging out with, particularly when the neighbourhood they live in has a negative reputation for gun violence and drug activity. This is especially concerning for mothers of young Black boys. In general, the Black community is concerned about their sons. Frequently on the news, young black men are being portrayed as either being shot, killed, or arrested for crimes they allegedly committed. According to McMurtry and Curling (2008), Ontario is experiencing an increasing occurrence of youth violence including the serious nature of it. Some of the issues contributing to this trend are poverty, racism, family issues, and issues in the education and justice systems. Participant A is well aware of the potential dangers that her son could be exposed to. Although she may not have the full support of her son's father, she believes

that she is capable of instilling good values in her son. It can't be ignored that having a father involved is important to a child's life. His participation in childrearing and passing on positive values and beliefs improves child outcomes, in addition to keeping young Black men from getting into a life of crime (McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

Showing by example is another strategy for instilling good values. Values that are important for these mothers to teach their sons and daughters are respect for others and themselves, honesty, love for self, faith in the Lord, gaining a good education, and having career goals. One mom shared her view by saying "I have a career....when she grows up she's not gonna see me sitting down in the house not doing my share" (Participant B). Participant A added to that by saying "Show him how I am finishing school and go to college and see that education is the key." Being a good example for their children is very important to these mothers. They understand the difficulties of trying to make a living for themselves and want better for their children now and when they grow up to be adults. They realize that a safe and loving home environment sets the foundation for accomplishing career and life goals. Being good examples is not only good for their children but good for them as mothers and women making it on their own.

Finding Joy

When asked about the positives of being a Black single mother, the central focus of most of the participants was about being a mother. They talked about the relationship they were developing with their children. There was a sense of pride and gratefulness when they spoke about the growth and development of their children. One mother stated, "Just knowing that they're walking and they're talking and they're growing and repeating stuff. Singing and calling you mommy...you know that's that's the really good stuff" (Participant A). One of the mothers in

the focus group had five children she raised on her own. She was determined to not be on welfare so she worked at two jobs to support her family. Due to the difficulty of getting to and from work, she had to quit both jobs. One way to cope with the daily stress of being a single mother was to “stay focused,” meaning she doesn’t “like too much things get to her” (Participant D). Finding joy and comfort in caring for her children helps her to be positive, especially when negative situations arise. Another mother said that “my daughter is a positive...she keeps me company, I play with her. We have our movie nights and our popcorn so like just having her that’s, and yes sometimes it’s stressful, sometimes is harder, but it’s all good in the end” (Participant B). Collectively these mothers enjoy being a mother. Although they may experience many intersecting, and at times accumulating stressors, they find joy in watching their children learn and grow and developing a close relationship with them. This is a testament to how resilient these mothers are in the face of adversity.

This study provided a glimpse of the lived experience of four single Black West Indian mothers raising their children in a major urban Canadian city. They are often confronted by negative attitudes and assumptions by government workers. Negative stereotypes are pervasive in the media, which influences thoughts and behaviours of individuals. Contrary to the negative images that are so prevalent in our society about Black single mothers, this study highlights that while these mothers face some major obstacles and stressors, some of which are socially organized, they do manage to persevere and adapt to new ways of mothering. They are challenged to change their mothering strategies to adapt to Canadian laws concerning child protection. As reported by the participants, they don’t enjoy being on welfare and they don’t misuse program benefits. They are trying to be good role models to their children by working towards getting a career. Gaining this information should encourage CHNs and other service

providers to think about how it could influence future interventions with this population. In the Summary Implication and Recommendation section I will address this issue.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of my study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of single Black West Indian mothers raising their children within a major urban Canadian city. As noted in the findings and analysis section, these mothers are faced with many challenges being single mothers. In this section, I will be discussing the impact of the intersections of age, race, ethnicity, gender, and class together with dominant ideologies and stereotypes on the lives of these mothers as experienced by them.

When the participants talked about the challenges of being a single Black mother, working with government workers was a huge issue. Underlying those difficulties was the race, ethnic, age, and gender stereotypical attitudes they encountered when trying to access services. The obvious questions for me include: Why is this happening? Why is it allowed to happen? How is it socially organized and by whom? Who might be benefiting from these current practices? Who might be losing? What can be done about it? To answer some of these questions requires that we look beyond individuals to critically analyze the social influences that impact the everyday thoughts and behaviours of people towards Black mothers together with examining the new and unique perspectives discovered from this research.

An important lesson I have learned from this study, is the need to gain a better understanding of how ideology influences society and the everyday lives of people of colour, including Black single mothers. When I began to take a critical look at the Ontario social assistance program, it opened my eyes as to how important ideology is in influencing policy and program development. Ideology, as defined by Henry and Tator (2006), “is a set of beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and values that provide a group with an understanding and explanation

of their world” (p. 16). Furthermore, Henry and Tator (2006) state that “ideology influences the ways in which people interpret social, cultural, political, and economic systems and structures and it is linked to their perceived needs, hopes and fears” (p. 16). Essentially, ideology describes the interaction between our thoughts and what is occurring in society (Swift, Davies, Clarke &, Czerny, 2003). In regard to racist ideology, its purpose is to develop structures and systems of inequality and dominance based on race. Racism is found in the collective arrangement of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs in addition to individual attitudes and behaviours. Racist ideology generates and perpetuates a system of dominance centred on race and is then disseminated and reproduced through socialization and cultural transmission such as schools and universities, the media, and literature (Henry & Tator, 2006).

It is more than likely that the government workers and service providers that the participants worked with are also influenced by ideologies (as just described) like many others. Since the Ontario social assistance program is based on neoliberal ideology, its policies and programs will be shaped by it; their employees and most importantly the social assistance recipients will be affected by it. What this meant for the mothers in my study was the negative attitudes they experienced with government service providers. One mother refuses to apply for social assistance due to the negative comments and questions that were posed to her in the past. Those that are receiving financial support avoid them unless it is absolutely necessary. One participant said “I only call this lady for medical things...sometimes I have problems with the drug card” (Participant B). Instead of relying on their social workers as source of support they are perceived as adversaries. These are some of the experiences shared by these mothers with a particular government program. Just imagine what it might be like to be surrounded by all these ideologies that you have little control over, yet they impact you in your everyday experiences

and in your interactions with social services and health care workers; compounded by your wish to raise your children in the best way possible so they can grow to their fullest potential. Living in such conditions is challenging to say the least.

I also discussed the influence of stereotypes on some of the experiences of the mothers in my study. What became an overarching theme described by the participants was the issue of being a young mother and being labelled as unfit due to their age; in addition to the label of Welfare Queen and being considered oversexed due to their status of being a single Black mother. Lorraine Code, (1987), in her paper, “The Tyranny of Stereotypes,” analyzes how controlling and insidious stereotypes can be in a woman’s’ life. This further confirmed for me the importance of dispelling these stereotypes through my research. According to Code (1987), stereotypes are insidious because they are presented as truths about a group of people that are put into a category without any other characteristics. She argues that when a characteristic that is outside of that category is displayed by an individual or group it is seen as abnormal or uncharacteristic (Code, 1987). For example, one of the participants in the group talked about her difficulty in getting child care subsidy. It took a year to get it. This meant that she could not go to school or participate in paid work and therefore needed assistance to survive. You may see her during the day during paid work or school hours, with her child and her friends outside or in the mall. If your view about single Black mothers is that they are Welfare Queens, i.e., that they are lazy and not wanting to do paid work, you may assume that this mother would fit that category. Yet the ways these experiences are socially organized beyond the individual’s actual experience are seldom visible. This particular mother wants an education and a career and is working towards that goal. However, because of dominant ideologies about Black single mothers and the current government bureaucracy, she is confronted with so many obstacles to making her hopes

and aspirations for herself and her children a reality. This is just one example how people can be misjudged solely on the basis of the dominant ideologies and persistent stereotypes.

What makes stereotypes so hard to dispel is that when a stereotypical behaviour is displayed it only strengthens its hold on the minds of individuals, but when a behaviour that falls outside of that category becomes visible, it presents major challenges to existing ideologies which will take time and energy to alter that stereotype (Code, 1987). The communications media-television, radio, newspapers, the internet- plays a big role in this regard. I noted earlier about the role of the media in perpetuating stereotypes. Henry and Tator (2006) argue that “Because of the marginalization of racial-minority communities from mainstream society, many White people rely almost entirely on the media for their information about minorities and the issues that concern their communities” (p. 254). This statement captures for me the tremendous amount of power the media has in shaping the thoughts of its viewers, listeners, and readers. This impact is far reaching due to the various avenues the media has. If there were more diverse individuals, in terms of gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexualities, among other intersecting socially organized factors, working in the media at the decision making level perhaps what is shared with the public would be more reflective of the views of the diverse population that encompass the Canadian population. I would also like to add that not all White people and people of colour rely on the media for information about groups of people. The dominant ideologies and stereotypes that are pervasive do not fully represent how the general population may actually view groups of people.

Ideological assumptions are social, Swift et al. (2003) are that “in the sense that they are socially generated and widely shared and therefore serve to support the dominant structures of a society. The maintenance of an existing social order depends on the majority of people within it

subscribing to the main tenets of the dominant ideology (pp. 137-138). Knowing that the media is primarily owned and operated by a very small group of White people, their beliefs, values, and perceptions including stereotypes will continue to be the norm.

In any event, life doesn't stop because of stereotypes, racism, and ideology. Those who are negatively impacted by these forces find ways to fight and live within them as demonstrated by the mothers in this study. There was a scenario one of the participants experienced that I kept thinking about but didn't know what to make of it. This scene was part of the incident on the bus regarding the White woman making remarks about the participant not knowing who the father of her child was. To continue the scene, one of the participant's friends wanted to retaliate by telling off the White woman, but the participant encouraged her not to do so. Participant A stated "I just looked at her (i.e., her friend), and I'm like, it doesn't make sense because they're obviously stereotyping us saying that we're a young mother and whatever...Why are we gonna give them that type of satisfaction to show that we're vulgar" (Participant A). I recall thinking at the time, why didn't she want to put this woman in her place? This example demonstrates the existence of stereotypes and how they can impact on a person's perception of another without having direct knowledge of that person's life experiences. This participant did not want to perpetuate the stereotype of Black women being aggressive by allowing her friend to tell off the White woman. According to White, as cited in Collins (1991), stereotypes about Black women are warped images of their behaviour that are threatening to White patriarchy. Acting meek and docile meets the definition of 'femininity' as defined by the dominant group. Black women should embrace their assertiveness as it is needed to survive and rise above living conditions that are difficult (Collins, 1991). Collins (1991) states that "by defining and valuing assertiveness and other 'unfeminine' qualities as necessary and functional attributes for Afro-American

womanhood, Black women's self-valuation challenges the content of externally-defined controlling images" (p. 39). This quote demonstrates the importance of Black women regardless of race and ethnicity, to fight images that are not defined by us. Earlier I noted that stereotypes are difficult to dispel and at the same time I just said that there are behaviours that are similar to stereotypes that should be embraced and demonstrated. I just want to clarify this point. Black women need to really think about what the meaning and purpose of stereotypes are in our lives; those we should emulate and those we should run from. As an oppressed group, many Black women may not realize that they are being controlled by the many forces that surround us. They are often too busy trying to navigate the many systems that make our lives difficult.

Thus far I have discussed the insidious nature of stereotypes. The subtleness of its presence makes it almost invisible, like it's a normal part of everyday life. As I refer back to my pre-understanding regarding the stereotypes of Black women, I can identify with participant A's response to the White woman on the bus. Being a Black woman standing up for an issue that is important to you can be construed as being aggressive. From my professional experience, when I want to raise an issue or disagree with someone at a meeting, I am very aware of my approach due to the fact that Black women are labelled as aggressive, not only by members of the dominant group but also by Black men. Many times I have heard stories from my friends and family members about the men in their lives or out, telling them to 'tone it down' or 'stop being a bully'. Being passive in a society where forces of oppression are all around you as a single Black mother, decreases the potential of being successful in reaching personal and career oriented goals. Assertiveness is so necessary to cope with the everyday living for Black mothers. As service providers, how do we assist these mothers in rising above these harsh conditions?

How do we shape our interventions to meet the needs of these mothers? The next section will attempt to answer these important questions.

Chapter Eight

Summary Implications and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding of the mothering experiences of single Black West Indian women. I used Black Feminism (Collins, 2000) as the theory framing my research project. A clearer understanding of how race, class, gender, and negative stereotypes impact the lives of these women is needed. These experiences impact not only these mothers but their children as well by virtue of them being the primary caregivers. To gain a better understanding of these experiences, I used interpretive phenomenology from the perspective of Gadamer (2004). Using his philosophy helped me to explore my own pre-understanding of the research project and how I can comprehend the experiences of these mothers by including my pre-understanding during the analysis of the data. The focus group method was used to collect the data which was audio-taped. After repeated readings of the transcript and listening to the audio recording, several themes emerged- All up in My Business, Here and There, and Finding Joy and an additional interesting finding surfaced that resonated with me during the analysis: Raising a Boy: Values that are Important. In the discussion section, I examined the impact of how ideology influences society in particular government programs, i.e., Ontario Social Assistance program. I also discussed the insidious nature of negative stereotypes and the role of the media in perpetuating them. I will present suggestions of how to address these concerns in the Implications and Recommendations section.

Limitations of Study

This study has some limitations. The majority of the participants in this study came from Jamaica with one from St. Lucia. Participants from other West Indian islands would provide a

broader representation of experiences. The sample size of this study was small, consisting of four single Black mothers. Having larger numbers in the focus group would add depth and breath to the data. As well, conducting more than one focus group in different areas of a major urban city could also address this issue. Comparing the experiences of these mothers in relation to different geographical areas could illuminate the differences, if any, in the availability and relevancy of community supports. I would also recruit proportionate numbers of mothers from different age groups. The participants in my focus group were young mothers, with the exception of one who was 37 and therefore issues of being a young mother were more prominent in the focus group and the data collected.

Implications and Recommendations

So far I have provided a summary of my study and shared with you the experiences of these mothers including my analysis and discussion of the findings. So what does this mean for nursing theory, education, policy, and practice? Nurses, together with other health care professionals and social service workers need to be aware of the experiences of the clients they are working with in order to provide services that are relevant to them. This is not new. What I think maybe new to some nurses and other service providers is to critically think about their position as professionals when working with clients, families, and groups. What I have discovered is that Cultural Safety is a framework that is relevant to enhance nursing practice which, as a result, will improve the health of the diverse clients we work with. The Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada published 'Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety in Nursing Education: a Framework for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nursing (2009) in collaboration with Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing and the Canadian Nurses Association. This document discusses culture, cultural safety, a safe learning environment, and core nursing

education competencies, i.e., a curriculum framework for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis nursing. There are several outcomes of Cultural Safety outlined in this document. One of the outcomes is that it will assist practitioners to take into account concepts such as racism, discrimination, and prejudice. What I have learned from my literature review and the experiences of the participants in my study is that these concepts, including the negative impact of stereotypes, are so important to providing a basis or reference point to understanding the lived experience of people of colour, including Black single mothers. Incorporating these concepts into nursing education as it relates to nursing practice, I believe will further assist nurses to consider oppressive forces that impact the lives of their clients. For those experienced nurses and other professionals already working in the field, participating in professional development workshops, curriculum development, or community-based interdisciplinary workshops with community members themselves would also be beneficial. This is particularly relevant to nurses working in diverse communities such as in Toronto.

In the literature review about parenting, West Indian parenting or mothering would fall into the collectivist parenting framework where interdependence is valued (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, (2008). As the literature states (Maiter & George, 2003; McCain & Mustard, 1999), families from collectivist cultures for the most part exhibit authoritarian parenting style. The mothers from this study confirmed this notion. This is exemplified by the endorsement of spanking as a way to discipline and that respect and obedience is highly valued. Needless to say, not all parents of this culture would adopt these characteristics to the fullest extent. A good example is that Participant A wants to raise her son to be independent and not to be easily influenced by friends who would engage in bad behaviour. Respect and obedience are important values for her son to learn while at the same time she wants her son to demonstrate independent

characteristics that will protect him from getting into trouble. Collectivist values, i.e., respect, and obedience, and individualistic values, i.e., independence are at opposite ends of the spectrum in regards to parenting values. This speaks to the complexity of mothering and how social conditions influences the goals and values for their children. As well it demonstrates the importance of not categorizing individuals based exclusively on what the literature indicates. Future research exploring how social influences, such as race, class, gender, and negative stereotypes impact the mothering strategies of single Black West Indian women of varying socio-economic classes and to first generation Canadian West Indian mothers such as myself would be warranted. Discovering their experiences, values, and mothering strategies would add to the parenting literature and perhaps lead to the development of parenting frameworks for Black West Indian mothers living in Canadian society.

It is safe to say that Black mothers want to raise children who will be critically aware of the marginalization and oppression they will face as they grow up to be adults while at the same time building resilience to assist them in living their lives fully in the challenging social contexts they will confront. This also sheds light on the fact that individual characteristics and experience of Black West Indian mothers need to be taken into consideration when researching, planning, and providing services to them regarding parenting issues and concerns. This is where Cultural Safety is a valuable framework to use when working with families from the West Indies and other cultural groups.

Parenting groups can be an effective strategy in providing parenting education. Participants revealed that they were not only able to learn from the educator or facilitator but from one another. What makes a group successful is that the information provided or discussed is relevant to the parents attending together with critically informed and supportive facilitation

and culturally safe content. The mothers from my study were attending parenting groups. As mentioned earlier, they learned new parenting strategies and used them with their children, e.g., new ways to discipline their children, e.g., time out, which did not include hitting their child as they themselves had experienced as children. One mother mentioned that they discussed the issues of stereotypes impacting Black mothers. This was another useful strategy in addressing conditions impacting these mothers. Talking about issues that are unique to Black single mothers and women, addresses their needs. In addition, one mother came to the group to receive emotional support. She indicated, “When I come to the program here, I talk to the workers....I rather come and talk to the people here than talk to my family or friends” (Participant D). There is evidence that the workers developed a safe environment for this mother to feel comfortable talking about her parenting or personal concerns. The experiences of these mothers demonstrate the relevance of the parenting programs to the immediate needs of the community. As a CHN, I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from community groups that are successful in reaching mothers from various cultural groups.

As a result of the positive experiences the participants had with attending parenting programs, I recommend the integration of factors that influence the mothering experience of Black West Indian mothers in parenting program development. Examining oppressive forces such as negative stereotypes, racism, gender issues, and how they influence their everyday living would be a learning experience for the mothers and the facilitators. In addition, discovering what values are important to them and for their children to learn and to talk about ways mothers cope with stressors can be beneficial. To develop such a program, further research with this population is needed. I suggest using Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) be used. According to Israel, Eng, Schulz, and Parker (2005), CBPR is a partnership approach to research that

involves members of the community and organizations throughout the research process and all partners in the research project share decision making and expertise. The rationale for using this type of research design is to establish trust, share power, and build capacity between researchers and communities and to address needs identified by the community. To enhance the working relationship between researchers and community partners, the concept of cultural safety can be incorporated into the project. Cultural safety is apparent in the partnership when all partners are able to critically examine attitudes and beliefs they bring to the research project, members are tolerant of the differing views of others, partners are aware of social and historical influences and, decision-making structures and conflict resolution processes are developed by all (Crampton et al., 2003 and Ramsden, 1997 as cited in Isreal et al., 2005). As a result, the findings of the research not only improves its relevancy to community partners but can also be used to inform policy (Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005) and community program development. Potentially, mothers in this study could continue this work on their own. For example, some mothers who have been part of a parenting group themselves, could eventually become co-facilitators and/or facilitators of the program.

A more comprehensive and relevant social assistance program is needed for individuals and families who are in need of temporary financial support. The encounters the participants experienced with social assistance workers were, in general, negative. As illustrated earlier, negative stereotypes regarding welfare recipients and neo-liberal ideologies not only influences the workers themselves but also the way the program is structured (Evans, 2007). It would be worthwhile to obtain the perspective of these workers, perhaps by examining factors that influence the working relationships with their clients together with the experience of social assistance recipients. Gaining this valuable information can inform and influence the way social

workers and their clients work together and further examine the current structure and policies of the social assistance program. Conducting this research is timely because currently the Ontario Government is about to embark on a 12-18 month review of the current Social Assistance program. This type of research can also be applied to Child Protection Services workers and other government workers in relation to their program. Considering the negative encounters some of the mothers in my study experienced with Children's Aid, future research could explore the perspectives of these workers and other health care providers perspectives to gain a more complex understanding of the conditions under which these young mothers live and how we can better provide supports.

Conclusion

As a single Black mother, I have not encountered many of the hardships that the mothers in my study have experienced. I was fortunate to obtain my nursing degree which allows me to this day to financially take care of myself and my two daughters. I must also acknowledge that I received a tremendous amount of love and support from my family and friends. Although I am financially independent, having reliable family and social support is just as important. I knew that as a result of conducting this study, I was going to learn a lot about myself as a Black mother and as a nurse researcher. Using Black Feminist thought as a theoretical framework has encouraged me to examine oppressive forces influencing the lives of single Black West Indian mothers. This was a challenge for me, because before I examined my own life experiences as a single Black mother, I felt that I was not affected by these oppressive forces. I consider myself to be successful in my nursing career, I own my own home and car, and I am able to financially provide for my immediate family. These successes have somehow sheltered me from acknowledging oppressive forces. I am not saying that I did not encounter racist or sexist

attitudes and behaviours; I didn't allow it to hinder my success personally and professionally. I learned how damaging stereotypes, ideologies, and racism can and so often do affect our lives as mothers. As a Black woman, you would think that I would have been more aware of these oppressive forces. However, this was not always the case. I do know now more than ever, that oppressive forces are pervasive in all areas of our lives. According to Fonow and Cook (1991), consciousness raising is "a process of self-awareness" (p. 3). By virtue of conducting this research, my understanding of the powerful impact social structures and ideologies have on the lives of individuals and groups are life changing for me. I identify with Collins' (1991), "outsider within" standpoint. She argues that the 'outsider within' provides the Black woman with a unique perspective to analyze self, family, and society. "It is the 'outsider within' who is more likely to challenge the knowledge claims of insiders, to acknowledge the discrepancy between insiders' accounts of human behaviour and her own experiences and to identify anomalies" (Fonow and Cook, 1991, p. 3). This quote resonates with me because it captures my experiences as a Black nurse researcher and what I am trying to accomplish with this research, that is to dispel, what is known by the dominant group about single Black mothers. This awareness level will help me to think critically about why certain circumstances occur in the lives of Black people.

As a novice Black feminist nurse researcher my responsibility is to develop and share knowledge that is from the standpoint of Black women. My goal was to give voice to Black women who are normally silenced regarding their experience and knowledge development. Capturing the thoughts and experience of these mothers and documenting their meaning in combination with my own pre-understanding has expanded my knowledge of the lived experience of these mothers. Without a doubt, my work with this population in the future will be

shaped by this research project. Publishing this work is a goal of mine and will fulfill my commitment to sharing the experiences of single Black West Indian mothers to the public.

As I complete this research, I would like to give the final voice to these mothers. When I concluded the focus group, I asked the participants what they want the readers of this study to know about them. They indicated that they want the readers to know that they are not different from other mothers in that they want the best for their children. Their values and beliefs may be different from the norm, but it doesn't mean that their values are wrong. One mother said "We're human, we're just like you, treat us the same...." (Participant B). The general consensus among the group was that they want to be treated fairly by service providers without the negative attitudes and assumptions. As one participant said "We're very strong people, and we know what we are doing....we have people that's there for us, our mothers, our friends" (Participant A). This statement speaks to the strong ties that these mothers develop with other people in their community. They are resourceful and find ways to make things work when life becomes difficult. What was clear is that these mothers are capable of caring for their children. They are open to new ways of mothering as long as their knowledge and experience of mothering is valued.

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Appendix A

Black West Indian Mothers Needed!

Many Black West Indian mothers come to Canada for a better life for themselves and their families. Very little is known about their experience raising a family as a single mother within a Canadian context.

Are you a single mother from the West Indies?

&

Have at least one child 6 years of age or younger?

You are invited to have a group discussion about issues that influence being a mother.

Where: York West Ontario Early Years Centre (Jane Finch Mall)

When: April 7 2009 Start time 5:15 pm (Approx. 1-1 ½ hours)

*Free childcare, TTC tokens, light dinner and a \$25 gift certificate for all who participate

If you would like more information &/or would like to participate, please call me at 647 895

3515

Shauna Jackson - Master of Nursing Graduate Student
Ryerson University, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing, Toronto, Ont.

Appendix B

Telephone script for inclusion in the study

Hello,

My name is Shauna Grant. I am a master of nursing graduate student at Ryerson University, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing. The purpose of my research is to gain a better understanding of the experience of single black West Indian mothers living in Canada.

I want to thank you for showing an interest in participating in my research.

I have a few questions to ask you to make sure that you qualify to be in this study.

Is that Ok?

Were you born in the West Indies? **YES** or **NO**

Do you have a child at least 6 years of age or younger? **YES** or **NO**

Are you a refugee? **YES** or **NO**

Are you married or living in a common-law relationship? **YES** or **NO**

Are you in a lesbian relationship? **YES** or **NO**

Thank you for answering my questions and your interest in my study. What you have shared with me will be kept confidential.

(If the caller is qualified to participate in the study, I will invite her to be in the focus group. An appointment will be made to give a written description of the study and to get written consent. If the caller is not qualified for the study, an explanation will be given).

Appendix C

Ryerson University Consent Agreement

Black West Indian Mothering: A Canadian Perspective

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigator: **Shauna Jackson, RN**, Master of Nursing Graduate student, Ryerson University, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing

Thesis advisor: **Margaret M. Malone RN, PhD**, is an Associate Professor, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing, Ryerson University.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the experience of single Black West Indian mothers raising their children in Canada. The focus group will include up to 8 participants. Participants to be included are single Black West Indian mothers born in the West Indies with at least one child 6 years of age or younger.

Description of the Study:

On a separate form you will be asked questions in relation to your date of birth; place of birth; the length of time living in Canada; the age(s) of your child(ren); whether you work outside of the home; your yearly income, and level of education.

You will then be asked to attend a focus group discussion scheduled for April 7, 2009 at 5:15pm. The focus group will be held at the York West Ontario Early Years Centre (Jane Finch Mall) for approximately 1½ to 2 hours. A colleague of the investigator will be present to take field notes to help recall some of the experiences you have shared. In addition, the session will be audio-taped. You will be asked questions about your experience being a single mother in Canada, the differences between mothering here in Canada and back home, values that you want to teach your children, your experience in receiving services from various professionals that work with families with young children e.g., family doctor, social worker, Public Health Nurses and other open-ended questions (approximately 7 in total).

Risks or Discomforts:

It is anticipated that no physical or significant psychological risk will emerge from participating in this study. You will be asked questions related to your mothering experience in Canada. Sensitive issues may arise that may cause emotional upset. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the discussion, you may withdraw temporarily (you may just need a break and can return to the focus group) or permanently from the study. No questions will be asked about this decision. As well, if at any time you would like to discuss your concerns and/or any other issues that may emerge during the focus group the researcher will arrange for you to meet with an appropriate resource if needed. Most services are free of charge and support from the investigator will be offered to assist in making a referral if necessary.

Benefits of the study:

By participating in this study, you can assist the researcher to further understand what it may mean to be a single Black West Indian mother raising children in a Canadian society. An increased understanding can produce information that can be used to inform health care professionals, community leaders and other service providers about improving the services they provide to families with young children. As a healthcare professional, I have found that many women appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences with other women in a group setting. Having the opportunity to discuss your experiences with other women who may share the same experiences as you may demonstrate that you are not alone. This study may not benefit you directly. However, there may also be the potential that, through sharing experiences, new possibilities, new strategies, and new knowledge of community resources for dealing with various life challenges as single Black West Indian mothers raising young children may emerge from the discussions.

Confidentiality:

The focus group will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of the information collected and later to be transcribed (typed up) following the discussion. Audio-tapes will be destroyed once the research study is completed. Your name will not be used in the final report. Rather, a substitute name will be used in the transcription and final report to protect your identity. Upon request, you may have access to the completed transcripts and the opportunity to remove any sections you feel might be necessary. The content of the discussion as well as your specific identity and any identifying information will be held in the strictest of confidence. All study information collected will be stored in a secure locked location with access limited to the researcher and thesis advisor. The written notes and transcripts, which will not have any specific identifying information about you as a participant, will be destroyed after 5 years. The results of the study are to be used for research and future publications only.

Incentives to participate:

A \$25 gift certificate will be provided for your time for taking part in the focus group. Participants who withdraw from the focus group will still receive the gift certificate.

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:

During the focus group you will be offered a light dinner, refreshments, and tokens for public transportation. Childcare will also be available free of charge. Childcare staff are affiliated with the York West Ontario Early Years Centre (Jane/Finch Mall site). Childcare will occur in the play area of the centre, which is beside the room where the focus group will be held.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate in the study will not influence your future relations with any of the agencies servicing families with young children. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the research now, please feel free to ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:
Shauna Grant, (647) 895-3515

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human participant and subject in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time without any repercussion. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Agreement to audio-tape discussion:

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to audio taping of the focus group.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the subject named above. I have answered all questions

Name of Researcher (please print)

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D
Letter for Participant
Black West Indian Mothering: A Canadian Perspective

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Dear,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a discussion group about the mothering experience of single Black West Indian mothers. This letter will provide you with information about my research.

I am a Master of Nursing student at Ryerson University in the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing. The study I have asked you to participate in will contribute to the completion of my Master of Nursing Degree and to future publications emerging from this research only. The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding about the experience of single Black West Indian mothers raising their children in Canada.

The discussion group will include 6-7 participants. Participants to be included are Black mothers born in the West Indies who have lived in Canada 10 years or less and have at least one child 6 years of age or younger. The discussion will be audio-tape recorded to ensure accuracy of the information collected and later to be transcribed following the discussion. The tape(s) and transcription will be kept until the first publication of the study within a 5 year period and will be kept in a lock cabinet in my home office. Within this time period the audio-tape(s) will be destroyed. The content of the discussion as well as your specific identity and any identifying information will be held in the strictest confidence. A substitute name will be used in the transcription and final report.

After I obtain your consent you will be asked the following demographic information:

Your age; How long have you been living in Canada; Which West Indian island were you born; Number, age, and sex (gender is socially organized often based on the assumed sex of the child) of your child(ren); If you are doing paid work currently; Highest level of education; and Household income.

All participants will be asked to respect the privacy of others and not to identify and/or discuss comments made by other participants outside the group session. While I am likely to make direct quotes in the results of my study, a substitute name will be used in the results of the study. For example your name used during the focus group and any other identifying information used will be changed in any research reports.

This discussion group will take place at the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre (date and time to be determined) and may take up to 1 ½ hours. Light dinner, child care, tokens for public transportation, and a \$25 gift certificate will be provided.

Your participation is voluntary. You can refuse to participate, or if you choose to participate, you can refuse to answer any questions and can leave the session temporarily or permanently from the discussion group at any time without any questions being asked. If you decide to withdraw from the focus group it will not effect your receipt of the gift certificate or travel expenses.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Shauna Grant

Master of Nursing Student

Ryerson University, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing

Appendix E
Demographic Questionnaire

Date of Birth: **Month**_____ **Year**_____

In what West Indian Island were you born?

How long have you lived in Canada?

What are the age(s) and sex of your child(ren)?

Paid Work?

- No
- Yes

If yes, please answer the following questions

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Casual

What is your household yearly income?

- 20 000 or less
- 20 001 to 40 000
- 40 001 to 60 000
- 60 001 to 80 000 or
- Greater than 80 000

What is your highest level of education?

- Less than High school
- High school
- College
- University
- Apprenticeship Program
- Other _____

Thank You

Appendix F
Interview Guide

1. What are some of the difficulties or challenges you experienced being a single mother in Canada?

Probe: What are some of the positive experiences?

2. What are some of the stereotypes or images portrayed, for example, in the media about single Black mothers?

Probe: How do they make you feel? Who do you share these feelings with? What do you do about them?

3. When you think of raising your child, what are the similarities and differences between mothering/parenting back home and Canada?

Probe: How do you cope or adjust with the differences?

4. What are some of the values that are important to you that you want to teach your children?

Probe: What strategies do you use? How do you instill them?

5. Have you received services from professionals who work with young children, e.g., Public Health Nurses, social workers, family doctors, child care workers? If so, what has been your experience in receiving services from them?

6. If you were asked, what advice would you give to West Indian mothers considering immigrating to Canada?

7. What do you think is important for service providers to know about single Black West Indian mothers?

Appendix G

Confidentiality Agreement

Shauna Grant, a graduate nursing student from the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing will be holding a focus group called Black West Indian Mothering: A Canadian Perspective at the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre. As a staff person of this centre or affiliate with the researcher, I agree to keep any knowledge of the participants' identity and participation in this study confidential.

Name of staff or affiliate of researcher
(please print)

Signature

Date