

APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES FOR SINGLE PROFESSIONAL FEMALES TO
RAISE ACADEMICALLY MOTIVATED MALES

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, there has been a significant increase in the number of children raised in single-mother-headed households with boys underachieving academically. Mothers' education has a positive influence on academic achievement of children. However, minimal research has focused on single professional females raising male children. Using the human ecology and self-efficacy theories, a grounded theory qualitative study explored what approaches and strategies single professional mothers utilize to facilitate academic motivation in their male children. The two main research questions explored include what processes and challenges did single professional mothers utilize to raise academically motivated males and how does a professional single mother's education assist her in raising an academically motivated male. Ten single professional female participants who have raised or are presently raising male children were interviewed in this study. Through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the findings indicated raising an academically motivated male child is dependent on prioritizing education, including instilling the value of learning; studying academics daily and providing academically stimulating activities, having financial resources, and being a role model. Spending time with the child and instilling discipline and responsibility are additional variables noted. This study recommended policy makers to provide financial incentives to single mothers to pursue a college degree. It also offered single professional mothers approaches to facilitate academically motivated males, thereby enabling millions of male children raised by single mothers to become motivated, projective, and creative contributors to the society.

APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES FOR SINGLE PROFESSIONAL FEMALES TO RAISE ACADEMICALLY MOTIVATED MALES

There were four purposes for this grounded-theory study. The first was to explore what approaches and strategies single professional females use to raise an academically motivated male. The second purpose was to contribute to the sparse body of literature and research available on ways in which single professional females can raise academically motivated males. The third purpose was to benefit society by enhancing male academic achievement, and the fourth purpose of the study was to bring to light the positive contributions made by single women as they raise children who may be the critical thinkers needed for the continued success of U.S. society.

An increase in the number and proportion of children born outside of marriage, a rise in divorce rates, and a decline in first marriages have contributed to a threefold increase in the proportion of children growing up in single-parent families since 1960 (Parke, 2003). The single-mother head-of-household population in the United States increased from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003 (J. Fields, 2004), putting the future leaders of U.S. society in the hands of this growing population of women. However, much of the literature on the topic tends to identify negative consequences of being raised in a single-mother family.

This article includes the highlights of the study as well as an analysis of the findings. Within this discussion, characteristics of single professional mothers who raise academically motivated male children are considered in the context of a grounded theory. The literature has shown an increase in the amount of negative educational consequences

of single parenthood throughout the world. Therefore, in keeping with the tradition of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) the theoretical framework and germane literature are compared and contrasted with the findings of the study, thus aiding the discussion rather than guiding and directing its outcome (Creswell, 2003). In addition, recommendations for policy makers, single parents, and educators in the field of education as well as future research practices are included. A discussion of how the study may create social change as well as a section on the researcher's reflections relative to the study and conclusions drawn from the research are also included.

Discussion of Findings

Ten culturally diverse females from five different countries, all professional, single, and raising or having raised a male child, participated in this grounded-theory research study. From a purposive snowball sample, the researcher qualified each potential participant over the phone. The confirmation process included the women confirming they were single and professional by the definition noted in the study and they had raised or were raising a male child. After qualifying the mothers, the researcher reviewed the Academically Motivated Male Checklist (Appendix A) with each potential participant to ensure their male child qualified.

Two main research questions guided the study. The first asked what processes and challenges did/do single professional mothers utilize to raise academically motivated males. The second asked how and why does a professional single mothers' education assist her to raise an academically motivated male. These two questions are the focus of the grounded theory posited by the researcher. However, to explore answers to these overarching questions, eight sub questions were posed following a comprehensive

literature review of the challenges for single females raising children. The topic areas for the sub questions focused on the professional single mothers' employment, supportive services, socioeconomic factors, scheduling, entertainment for their son, being a role model, discipline, and challenges encountered.

Many researchers have studied the challenges associated with raising children as a single mother; however, they have focused on the negative consequences of female-headed households with little attention paid to group variation (Marks, 2006; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Sandefur & Wells, 1999). The two main research questions guiding this study included why does a professional single mother's education help her to raise an academically motivated male and what processes and challenges did/do single professional mothers utilize to raise academically motivated males. The researcher organized the data collected in chapter 4 to capture the essence of each participant. To this end, primary approaches and strategies are noted for raising academically motivated males. However, there is evidence in the study that participants felt strongly about the need for additional approaches and strategies to raise academically motivated males; thus, secondary approaches and strategies are presented.

The primary approaches and strategies include prioritizing education, the main strategy, which includes focusing on academics daily, instilling the value of learning, and providing academically stimulating activities; financial resources; and being a role model. The secondary approaches and strategies include instilling discipline at an early age, instilling responsibility, and spending time with my son. One hundred percent of the participants identified the primary approaches and strategies, with 80%, 50%, and 70% of the participants, a mean of 66.6% of the participants, identifying the secondary

approaches and strategies, respectively. The primary and secondary approaches and strategies are noted in Tables 2 and 3, including the corresponding related research questions that prompted the participants' comments.

The primary approaches and strategies of prioritizing education (focusing on academics daily, instilling the value of learning, and providing academically stimulating activities; financial resources; and being a role model) and the secondary approaches and strategies that emerged (spending time with my son) are supported by Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979, 1986, 2005) through the microsystem and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1986) reported that income plays a role in family life, as financial resources are required for sustaining the health and well-being of family members as well as furthering the development of the child. In addition, as the significant person within her son's life, the single professional mother had an opportunity to develop a successful relationship with her child, including exposing him to the mother's personal, professional, and academic values.

Table 2

Primary Approaches and Strategies for Raising an Academically Motivated Male

Primary approaches and strategies	Related research questions
Prioritizing education:	How and why does a professional single mother's education assist her to raise an academically motivated male?
Focusing on academics daily	What scheduling strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?
Instilling the value of learning	What entertainment strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?
Providing academically stimulating activities	How does modeling support the professional single mothers' ability to raise an academically motivated male?
	How does a professional single mother's type of employment support her ability to raise an academically motivated male?
	Why do socioeconomic factors play a role in a professional single mothers' ability to raise an academically motivated male?
	What discipline strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?
Financial resources	What are the supportive services that may aid a professional single mothers' ability to raise an academically motivated male?

(table continues)

Primary approaches and strategies	Related research questions
Being a role model	<p data-bbox="657 365 1417 468">Why do socioeconomic factors play a role in a professional single mothers' ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p> <p data-bbox="657 510 1417 579">How does modeling support the professional single mother's ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p> <p data-bbox="657 621 1417 724">How does a professional single mother's type of employment support her ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p>

The mothers that identified the strategies believed their efforts of prioritizing education, including focusing on academics daily, instilling the value of learning, and providing academically stimulating activities; being a role model; instilling responsibility, instilling discipline, and spending time with their son would facilitate their sons' academic motivation and subsequent academic success.

Grounded Theory

An important aspect of the development of a grounded theory for this study is to determine the meaning behind the findings. The findings of the study highlighted primary and secondary approaches and strategies to raise academically motivated males. The message that the single professional mothers communicated to their sons was based on their personal experience through their education and professional development. Each mother conveyed her message through modeling the expected behaviors and creating an environment that created a path to optimize academic success each believed would facilitate academic motivation in their male children.

Table 3

Secondary Approaches and Strategies for Raising an Academically Motivated Male

Secondary approaches and strategies	Related research questions
Spending time with my son	<p>What entertainment strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?</p> <p>What scheduling strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?</p> <p>Why do socioeconomic factors play a role in a professional single mothers' ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p>
Instilling discipline	<p>What discipline strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?</p>
Instilling responsibility	<p>How does a professional single mothers' type of employment support her ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p> <p>What discipline strategies do single professional mothers implement to raise academically motivated males?</p> <p>How does modeling support the professional single mother's ability to raise an academically motivated male?</p>

There are numerous demands related to the process of raising an academically motivated male. The grounded theory that emerges from the study is that single professional mothers who raise academically motivated male children are dependent on prioritizing education, which includes instilling the value of learning; academics daily; and providing academically stimulating activities, having financial resources, and being a role model for their male child. Furthermore, there is evidence in the study that spending time with the male child and instilling discipline and responsibility are additional variables necessary to raise academically motivated male children.

The participants in the study believed they provided or are providing an optimal environment for their sons to thrive and achieve academically. In addition, each participant clearly noted the foundation for their success was rooted in their own personal educational level and career success. The findings of this study align with the research that identifies the mothers' educational level having a positive influence on the academic achievement of children (Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, and Hawkins, 2000; DeGarmo, Forgatch, and Martinez, 1999; Pollack & Ginther, 2003; Scott, 2004). Noack (2004) posited that a mother's influence occurs in various ways, including cognitive competencies, increased opportunity, transmission of parental beliefs, and attitudes regarding the value of education. Furthermore, the mothers' views may affect their children directly or indirectly while the parent is engaging them in cultural or educational activities. Randel, Stevenson, and Witruk (2000) posited the effects of the mother's attitudes and beliefs concerning education play a role in the motivational process of the child. In support of this concept, Vygotsky (1978) purported that children rely heavily on their parents for assistance for initial problem solving. During this

scaffolding interaction with their parent, the child acquires motivational beliefs and attitudes about the learning process, including responsibilities for successful academic outcomes. This role model acquired learning occurs throughout the observational process throughout childhood.

Carter (1999) reported that when parents have higher educational levels, they invest in their children by providing them with the economic resources necessary for academic achievement. Furthermore, parents who have attended college instill expectations for their children as well as provide them with a home environment that is conducive for academic success. In contrast, in less developed nations, children's academic performance did not appear to be related to the type of family in which they lived, which indicated that single parents are not the reason for children's academic performance (Schiller, Khmelkov, and Wang, 2002).

The human ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005) supports this grounded theory in many areas. First, the literature cites the mother's education as a variable for being the impetus for children achieving academically (Pollack & Ginther, 2003; Scott, 2004). The professional single mothers' education emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews for this study as noted by the data presented in chapter 4. The participants commented on how their education afforded them a career in a work environment that surrounded them with peer and social networks as well as other individuals that align with their professional and personal value systems. Subsequently, these professional single mothers have the opportunity to expose their children to other educated people within their exosystem, which offered their child positive influences throughout their development. In addition, because of their education and type of

employment, the financial resources of these mothers provided an opportunity to enroll their sons in quality schools as well as extracurricular activities because of the opportunities the neighborhood provided.

Although time is one of the greatest limited resources for single parents, it is also the most crucial element to facilitating greater academic achievement in children. The quality, not quantity, of time is what really matters. Seventy percent of the single professional mothers identified the value of spending time with their son despite the ongoing challenge in the hectic world in which they live. The schedule of each mother dictated the type and amount of time she was able to spend devoted to her son. However, the mothers commonly noted the time spent occurred while performing routine tasks such as food preparation and commuting. Although the participants came from varying cultures and had different careers, the participants' responses had a similar focus: the inherent challenges in scheduling many activities daily.

The one-on-one attention from a parent provides invaluable benefits to children (Hansen, 1999). According to Amato and Fowler (2002), close monitoring of children will maximize academic achievement, including the monitoring of children from single-parent structures. Gutman and Eccles (1999) underscored the advantages of parents spending time with their child and asking questions about their experiences and successes in school.

Rich (1996) identified children's curiosity as a major resource for parents to draw from to facilitate learning in children. Teaching and learning must not be isolated to school alone. Rather, the interactions between parents and children are ongoing teaching moments that parents need to capture in their daily lives. Parents need to learn to

empower their children through education, which begins at home. Parents should incorporate many strategies in their children's daily lives. Communicating with children is the most fundamental tool a parent can utilize to gain the ongoing educational process. Ask questions to children and then listen for answers. Engage children in conversation while transporting them, while waiting with them, at mealtime, and at bedtime.

The plethora of research identifying the negative affects of single mothers raising children (Klein & Pellerin, 2004; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) has contributed to the bias prevalent in society about the children raised by single mothers and the mothers themselves. The literature has cited single mothers as contributing excessively to the number of juvenile delinquents (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Sandefur & Wells, 1999). In addition, single mothers have been identified as the impetus for leading the nation in the number of high school dropouts (Marks, 2006).

Researchers have focused on mothers who use public resources to assist them in raising their children (Ackerman, D'Eramo, Umylny, Schultz, and Izard, 2001; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, and Miller, 2000; Teachman, Tedrow, and Crowder, 2000) to justify monies appropriated by policy makers. However, scholars and social scientists have been reevaluating the causes for lower academic achievement in children (Lansford, Ceballo, Abbey, and Stewart, 2001; Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson, 2003), with more data supporting other etiologies for these negative academic outcomes of children.

The literature has cited the benefits of the mothers' education (DeGarmo et al., 1999; Pollack & Ginther, 2003), although minimal research has focused on the application of this resource to facilitate academic motivation in children. The findings of

this study refute much of the research available that addresses the outcomes of children raised by single mothers. The participants in this study consistently identified the approaches and strategies necessary to begin changing the statistics regarding lower academic achievement in children raised by single mothers. Prioritizing education and being a role model are two of the points identified by the mothers to facilitate academic motivation in children. These approaches and strategies would be easily incorporated in the homes of single mothers.

The Researcher's Reflections

The researcher acknowledges the importance of maintaining objectivity throughout the interview and analysis process, including setting aside any biases that may affect the outcome of the study. Because the researcher's experience is very similar to the experiences of the participants in this study, it was easy to understand and empathize with the participants' points of view. Subsequently, it was imperative that the research process be void of contamination from the researcher. It was a challenge not to mix personal experiences with those of the participants. The researcher took extreme caution not to offer any communication including verbal comments or body language that may have tainted the data, including nodding of the head or smiling when the researcher heard something that aligned with her own experience. To attain this goal, the researcher advised each participant prior to initiating the face-to-face interviews that she would focus on their comments rather than engage them in a dialogue, as any exchanges would detract from the vital information they were going to provide.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher held back tears of empathy as the participants often cried while telling their stories. Following the first interview, the

researcher considered maintaining a log throughout the study of her own personal reflections; however, for the optimal outcome of the study this was not performed. The researcher realized logging her own perspectives may reveal feelings relative to each interview and her own views on the topic may influence the direction of the impromptu questions or analysis, thereby lessening the objectivity of the data. As a means to manage her own views following each interview session, the researcher spoke into the digital voice recorder commenting on her own perceptions regarding the success of procuring information objectively as well as any adjustments needed regarding the process utilized to maximize the comfort of and comments from each participant. However, the researcher did not listen to her own voiced comments in the recorder; rather, she placed the recorder in a safe place for future listening upon completion of the study for consideration in future studies.

After analyzing the data, the researcher spent time reflecting on her experiences raising her 9-year-old son. Like many of the mothers in the study, the researcher holds prioritizing education as the path to facilitate academic motivation in her son. Like the participants, the researcher instills the value of learning, focuses on academics daily, and provides academically stimulating activities. In addition, the researcher presents a clear role model for academic success as her son observed the researcher complete two doctoral-level degrees simultaneously, a Doctor of Physical Therapy and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education. Furthermore, the researcher aligned with the other outcomes of the study, including instilling discipline and responsibility. In contrast to the participants, although the researcher considers spending time with her son a possible variable to facilitate academic motivation in the male child, there are slight differences regarding

what occurs during this special time. The researcher agrees with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) concern regarding the lack of time available to parents to reinforce desirable behaviors; however, unlike some of the participants, the researcher speculates about the importance of the activity occurring during the time spent. Rather than scheduling a particular activity such as an academically stimulating activity or another type of activity, the researcher considers the activity irrelevant. Instead, the focus must be on getting to know who the child is, how he thinks, what is important to him, and what a mother can do to facilitate his success.

In considering a sample population based from the literature, the researcher expected a homogeneous response from a particular culture. Therefore, for optimal application of the study results, it was imperative for the researcher to have a diverse sample. After reviewing the themes, the researcher was surprised to learn, regardless of culture or geographical location of the participants, the commonality within the sample was their educational and professional backgrounds that prompted the recurring responses.

The researcher's perspective as a single professional mother did not significantly change as a result of the study, although it did confirm ideas about what is needed to raise an academically motivated male child. In addition, it raised the researcher's consciousness about the commonality shared by single professional mothers raising academically motivated sons, as the researcher often felt alone in her quest. Therefore, the study results offered the researcher a sense of approval for present child-rearing practices implemented to raise her own son.

Implications for Social Change

The single-mother head-of-household population in the United States increased from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003 (J. Fields, 2004), putting the future leaders of U.S. society in the hands of this growing population of women. Furthermore, variables such as a lack of financial support, a lack of supervision, and the child spending time with a single mother have been identified as resulting in a direct relationship with lower academic achievement in children (Klein & Pellerin, 2004; Marks, 2006).

This study is a much-needed addition to the literature due to the vast amount of literature identifying the negative academic and behavioral consequences of being raised in a family with a single mother as the head of the household. Although the literature noted the benefits of a mothers' education negate some of the consequences of being raised in a single-mother household, the literature is sparse regarding the way in which single professional females raise males. Therefore, the study was designed to explore the process and challenges of single professional mothers who raise academically motivated male children.

Although the basis for this study was related to the value of the single professional mothers' education to raising academically motivated males, the findings are applicable to all parents raising male and female children. All single mothers, single fathers, traditional or alternative family structures, including happily wed, divorced, or widowed parents, must first have the skills necessary to be a good parent, as marital status clearly does not bestow the knowledge necessary for raising successful children (Bromfield & Erwin, 2001; Drexler, 2005). In addition to having the developmental skills to raise a child, having additional skills to overcome the negative outcomes of children is

vital for the social change needed to further the global economy and success of the human race.

The negative outcomes regarding males include the underachievement of males in high school, which resulted in a male dropout rate of 11.3% in 2003 and in 55% of state prisons and 59% of federal prison inmates being high school dropouts (Harlow, 2003). Clearly, the statistics are worthy of society's attention. According to the U.S. Census Bureau Report released December 19, 2006 (Bergman, 2006), women made up 56% (about 8 million) of the undergraduate student population and 59% (about 2 million) of the graduate students in 2005 in the United States. In addition, adults age 18 and older without a high school diploma earn an average of \$19,169, whereas those with a high school diploma earn \$29,448. Furthermore, adults with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$54,689 in 2005 while advanced-degree holders, which includes adults with master's, professional, or doctoral degrees, earned an average of \$79,946 (Bergman, 2007).

Having four times the earning power with an advanced degree affords an adult a myriad of opportunities when compared with a high school dropout. Therefore, all parents need to enhance their child's academic success in the elementary school years as academic motivation has been positively related to children's achievement and effective school functioning, which predicts subsequent motivation (Gottfried, 1985) possibly as a lifelong learner. Parenting consists of a series of skills that can be developed, learned, and improved throughout the childrearing years (Bromfield & Erwin, 2001). The grounded theory developed from the themes that emerged in this study offers parents worldwide an

opportunity to facilitate academic success in their children, which will provide societies a pool of critical thinkers to manage ongoing global challenges.

Recommendations for Action

People need to be problem solvers to manage the many challenges facing them daily. To acquire the skills necessary to think critically about viable solutions to problems throughout life, people need to be lifelong learners. Single professional mothers' input concerning what approaches and strategies are necessary to raise an academically motivated male is important as scholars, educators, and parents grapple with the underachievement of males raised by single mothers globally.

Public Policy Makers

The public policy implications of this research study concern creating policies that facilitate the academic success of children from single-mother head-of-household families. Students' perception of parental academic expectations is one of the most important predictors for academic success (Shim, Felner, and Shim, 2000), while education is the first step on the path to individual socioeconomic status, social success, and adult social performance (Riala, Isohanni, Jokelainen, Jones, and Isohanni, 2003). Therefore, single mothers need to acquire the tools to build the educational foundation necessary for their children to acquire the socioeconomic opportunities available. Funding an educational program such as the Parents And Schools Together (PAST) Program (Broide, 2004), which is a program concept created to educate single parents to encourage, support, and facilitate higher academic achievements in their children by fostering an environment of maximal learning at home, is a vehicle for single mothers to acquire these critical skills. PAST is an acronym for Parents and Schools Together,

emphasizing the importance of the alliance between parents and schools to maximize the academic success of children. This educational concept for single mothers is vital to provide them with the tools to facilitate academic motivation in their children.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) was enacted to ensure all children have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education to attain proficiency standards set by each state. However, with single mothers earning slightly more than \$21,000 yearly (Teachman et al., 2000), the neighborhoods and the quality of the educational institutions available to children raised in these households are severely limited. Policy makers must equalize the educational opportunities for students slated to attend schools with traditionally lower quality education based on the neighborhoods where the schools are located. In addition, monies must be available for children raised by professional single mothers who need additional academic challenges due to their academic success that was facilitated at home.

Policy makers must consider the benefits of encouraging and financially enabling single mothers to pursue a college degree or advanced degree to further their professional earning potential and growth. The findings of the study add to the existing research that demonstrates mothers' educational level shows a direct association with children's academic achievement in the United States (DeGarmo et al., 1999; Pollack & Ginther, 2003; Scott, 2004) and internationally (Riala et al., 2003; Schiller et al., 2002).

Additionally, policy makers must consider the need to offer single mothers trying to escape poverty affordable childcare to allow them an opportunity to pursue a college degree to enhance their economic status (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Offering single mothers an educational opportunity sends a clear message to society, namely, that society holds

great value for education. Such action by the government would allow single mothers to be part of the solution by raising academically motivated children, rather than part of the problem.

Single Mothers as Well as All Parents

Infants and young children are driven by curiosity with a basic need to explore, interact, and make sense of their environment (Green, 2002). The connection between parental involvement and children's success in school perpetuates children's ongoing interest and curiosity. As a result, parents can play a key role in assisting their elementary school children to learn. The importance of parental involvement in children's educational achievement has been cited in recent literature (Scott, 2004). However, children face many challenges that prevent them from attaining their full academic potential.

Positive parent-child interactions at home can contribute to children's school success. Exposing children to an enriched home learning environment will benefit the child throughout the classroom experience. Students who have positive interaction with parents do better in school than students who receive less parental support and attention. Single-parent families face many challenges, including limited time to spend with their children due to full-time work schedules as well as restricted resources (Ermisch, 2001; J. Fields, 2003; Parke, 2003). Most parents, including single parents, want to do the best for their children. However, some parents feel they lack the material resources to help their children succeed in school or are unsure what to do to help their children learn at home. Although time is one of the most limited resources for the single parent, time is also the most crucial element to facilitate greater academic achievement in children. The quality,

not quantity, of time is what really matters. The one-on-one attention from a parent provides invaluable benefits to children (Hansen, 1999).

Parents can implement several approaches and strategies within their household immediately. Although the study focused on single professional mothers, all parents can use the information from the study to facilitate academic motivation in their children. First, parents can prioritize education in their homes by instilling the value of learning, focusing on academics daily, and providing academically stimulating activities. Second, parents need to secure the financial resources necessary to provide the child with the academic resources to facilitate learning. Third, parents must be role models for their children by modeling the expected behavior for their children, including reading, pursuit of education and lifelong learning, and responsibility. Fourth, parents must instill discipline in their homes to expose their children to the rigors of adulthood within the workplace and their personal lives. Fifth, parents must prioritize their schedules to include designated time to spend with each child, which affords an opportunity for further communication while educating the child.

Within the approaches and strategies that emerged from the study, the participants identified a number of recommendations. These recommendations are categorized into two groups, information to be imparted to their male children and general recommendations for single mothers. The information to be imparted to their male children includes the need for parents to share their own experiences and goals with their children. This includes delivering the need to put forth one's best effort at all times, being diligent with tasks, being focused, planning, sacrificing brings benefits at a later time, the value of hard work, and the importance of education.

The general recommendations for single mothers included the need for them to establish realistic and consistent family rules by identifying specific consequences that create security and a sense of security and stability; create schedules and let children see their single mothers read. In addition, single mothers should read to their children often; teach them to do and think for themselves rather than do the work for them; and create a reasonable and consistent schedule for jobs around the home that their children can perform to contribute to the workings of the home. Lastly, single mothers need to create a special study place for the child to complete homework; consider themselves as coaches when it comes to homework assisting, supporting, complimenting, and praising their child when inspecting the assignments; and ask open-ended questions relative to their child's school day.

The interactions between parents and children are ongoing teaching moments that parents need to capture in their daily lives. This study highlighted that single professional mothers from diverse backgrounds empowered their children through education, a lesson that may benefit all parents regardless of their cultural background. In addition, parents need to encourage, support, and facilitate higher academic achievements in their children by fostering an environment of maximal learning at home.

Educators

Schools are sensitive to the rapid social and economic changes occurring within the United States. Schools have little time to prepare for changes in the complex 21st century society. One of the major factors affecting society is the number of children raised by single parents, with single-mother families in the United States increasing from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003 (J. Fields, 2004). In addition, research notes

children raised in single-parent households are likely to have lower than average levels of academic achievement (Klein & Pellerin, 2004; Marks, 2006), with boys underachieving on standardized tests (Pollack & Ginther, 2003). Children raised in single-mother families face many challenges that prevent them from attaining their full academic potential, including the emotional adjustments that may be necessary to accommodate their changing family. In order to bring critical changes in the future leaders of our societies, educators need to collaborate with parents by building the foundation necessary to prioritize education in the lives of children.

The media have supplied U.S. society with a vast amount of fodder concerning the condemnation of single mothers. In 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle criticized the television character Murphy Brown, a professional single female who chose to raise her child alone (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). In 2006, one of the cover stories in *Newsweek* magazine read “The Boy Crisis, At Every level of Education, They’re Falling Behind. What to Do?” (Tyre, 2006). This sensational front page brought the lower academic success of male children to the attention of the magazine’s readers.

Educators must look to the research concerning the educational achievement of children raised by single mothers. The single professional mothers in this research study had raised or are raising academically motivated male children, clearly supporting the research of Scott (2004), Pollack and Ginther (2003), and DeGarmo et al. (1999) who posited mothers’ educational level shows a direct association with children’s academic achievement. These positive findings present another side to the ongoing negative outcomes often presented by the media, which tarnishes the positive outcomes of single professional mothers. Therefore, educators must take the time to develop relationships

with all parents despite the challenges that are present in scheduling time to meet with single mothers. Schools were created to prepare future leaders to carry on with the work of the society, and education is the foundation for the development of societal change. When educators develop a working relationship with single mothers, they build an alliance for the betterment of the educational success of the future leaders and decision makers of society.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study contributes to the sparse research available concerning how single professional mothers can have an impact on the academic achievement of their sons. In addition, this grounded-theory study opens the door for further studies regarding the impact that professional single mothers have on the academic outcomes of their children. When considering further research, several areas need consideration. A related opportunity for study includes focusing on single professional mothers and approaches and strategies used to raise academically motivated females as well as the approaches used by single professional fathers to raise academically motivated males or females. In the studies concerning single fathers, two different studies would maximize the results for greater application.

Comparative studies exploring the differences of childrearing practices between single professional and nonprofessional mothers and between nonprofessional and professional fathers or a combination of single professional or nonprofessional mothers with nonprofessional or professional fathers are needed. These studies would allow exploration into any differences that may be inherent in the professional and nonprofessional parent related to gender.

Another area of study for consideration includes the age of the single professional or nonprofessional mothers or fathers relative to the academic success of their male or female child. The participants in this study varied in age from 36 to 56 at the time of the interviews; however, there may be a correlation between the ages of the single parent and the academic success of the child. In addition, further study may be indicated regarding the single parents' ethnicity and culture regarding children's academic success. In addition, a quantitative study concerning single professional females raising academically motivated males would provide further data to support the qualitative data noted within this study.

It is clear from this and other related research that society cannot continue to cling to the traditional view of children raised by single mothers. Accordingly, research must continue to produce data that are amenable to the family living arrangements that currently exist, rather than to the forms observed in the past. In so doing, society will advance its understanding of the influences affecting children, which will ultimately allow policy makers to promote children's educational welfare.

Conclusion

The family unit has endured tremendous economic demands since hunting and gathering societies began. The research has clearly shown that children from single-parent family structures have lower achievement in schools. Therefore, society faces daunting challenges as schools' administrators, educators, policy makers, and parents work to improve the academic outcomes of children raised in single-mother head-of-household families.

When single mothers encourage children, particularly in the face of early failure, the children are more likely to persist with the task to the point of mastery compared to children who are not encouraged to persist. By demonstrating the warranted behavior and providing hints, feedback, and suggestions to be successful in a task, single mothers teach their male children how to achieve levels of academic success beyond the negative statistics in the literature. Behavior that is rewarded has a greater likelihood of being repeated than those behaviors that go unrewarded.

Single mothers believe they know what their children need to become successful. However, as noted by the staggering statistics concerning lower academic achievement in children raised in single-mother households (Klein & Pellerin, 2004; Marks, 2006), only a few are putting theory into practice, namely the single professional mothers interviewed in this grounded-theory study. These participants were committed to their sons' education by nurturing them with love and discipline while prioritizing education in their lives. Clearly instilling the value of education daily was critical for their sons' to acquire the academic motivation that ultimately allowed for academic success.

Single mothers have a responsibility to work toward developing the next generation of critical thinkers to solve the challenges that face society. In an era where economic demands continue to face families, single mothers may have the greatest challenge (Baugher & Lamison-White, 1995; Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). Education is the key to developing the skills to problem solve. Single professional mothers are having a positive effect on the academic motivation of their male children. The data gathered in this study offer society positive academic outcomes for children raised by single professional mothers. However, further research is needed to explore how this unique

growing population of mothers is contributing to increasing the percentage of critical thinkers around the world, thus offering hope for reasonable solutions to the never-ending challenges of society.

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APPENDIX A: ACADEMICALLY MOTIVATED MALE CHECKLIST

The following checklist is a way in which to determine if your male child meets the criteria of an academically motivated male child thereby making him eligible to participate in the dissertation study entitled, A study of the process and challenges of single professional mothers who raise academically motivated male children.

Before responding, please think about your son's behavior and academic performance relative to the following questions:

	Yes	No
1. Expresses curiosity about many things	_____	_____
2. Exhibits persistence when completing a task	_____	_____
3. Verbalizes or demonstrates an interest in learning challenging tasks	_____	_____
4. Has a sustained attention span to complete a task	_____	_____
5. Did/does your son pay attention to the teacher while in class	_____	_____
6. Did/does your son volunteer answers in class	_____	_____
7. Did/does your son turn in complete work	_____	_____
8. Did/does your son select challenging courses	_____	_____
9. Did/does your son engage in learning activities beyond requirements	_____	_____
10. Did/does your son verbalize that he enjoys school	_____	_____