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Understanding Black Single Parent Families: Stresses and Strengths

Micheline R. Malson

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UNDERSTANDING BLACK SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES:
STRESSES AND STRENGTHS

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Understanding Black Single Parent Families: Stresses and Strengths

In 1979, when I began working as a research associate at ^{the} Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, I managed a research project interviewing 60 Black women in dual earner and single parent families in the Boston Area. The project's purpose was to describe how social support systems helped women function in their "new roles" in two worlds of work: employment and family life. This project "Black Women, Work and Family Life," has thus far resulted in written work about Black families' child rearing support systems and Black women's sex role ideology and behavior.

Thirty women in this study were Black women single parents. But they were unlike Black women heading households as typically portrayed in the literature. The most noticeable difference was their diversity: their socio-demographic characteristics were much more variant and less homogeneous than often assumed. There was not a uniform or typical, or maybe I should say stereotypical single mother headed household in the sample. Some were employed, others received AFDC. Some at age 20 were beginning their lives as single parents. Others, nearing middle age, had been heads of households for longer periods. Some had occupations which gave them incomes above the median for Boston area families. Others had incomes that impoverished them. Still others were employed but barely making it in low status, low paying jobs.

But the biggest difference that I observed in this sample was one of perspective on family life, a difference that I have come to refer to as heartiness, strength, and resiliency. The women that I interviewed, whether on welfare or in the labor force were struggling and not dependent, were proactive and not reactive, and were involved on a daily basis trying to solve the problems -- or in my words, developing strategies, -- to manage and cope with the dual responsibilities of functioning as breadwinners and parents.

I began to wonder and to question the invisibility of these Black single parent families in the literature. Even if they were the exception to the norm it was important to tell their story. These "exceptional" stories had significance in that they could be seen as the basis for models for strategies to be used for other single mothers. It was through this initial project that I began to conceive of Black women single parents in terms of the responsibilities they faced as homemakers and breadwinners and to think about discovering and documenting the strategies they used to fulfill their responsibilities and roles.

My examination was predicated on what sociologists and psychologists refer to as a functional/structural paradigm or model. Given that Black single mothers (and all single mothers) have the responsibility of fulfilling both economic and nurturant functions in their families, how do they approach and set about doing so? What do their attempts to fulfill both these roles alone tell us about the strengths, stresses, and needs for support in Black households headed by single women?

There are three bodies of literature that support a structural/functional paradigm of Black single parent life. The first is the work of Andrew Billingsley expressed in Black Families in White America, 1968. Billingsley described a typology of Black families that included nuclear two parent families, nuclear single parent families, and extended family forms. The range in structure and composition not often found in other families was described as a structural adaptation to the social and economic pressures Black families faced in America. It was argued that there were structural and functional differences between white families and Black families because Blacks had formed the family arrangements that were functional given their economic and social circumstances. Therefore, in two

parent households, Black women often work to contribute to the family income that Black men were not solely able to provide (Landry and Jendrek, 1978). Black women often head families as one consequence of the prevention of family formation and the separation of Black family groups during slavery (Gutman, 1976). Black families headed by women were a partial response to the under and unemployment of Black men (Wilson and Neckerman, 1984, Center for the study of Public Policy, 1984). Black families often existed as extended and subfamilies because of a culture that fostered social support systems and also to muster meager resources against poverty (McAdoo, 1978; Stack, 1974).

In Billingsley's paradigm, which was adapted from theories of Talcott Parsons, families have instrumental (economic) and expressive (nurturant) functions which they must master and fulfill. Black families have created a diverse array of structures and living arrangements to fulfill these familial roles and be functional. In Black families the roles themselves are often flexible and not as ascribed as in other families: women are often employed, men may contribute to household chores.

The second body of literature is the "strength" analytical framework for research on Black families. This approach developed in response to the plethora of problem oriented research on Black families in the sixties. In the Strengths of Black Families written by Robert Hill, 1972, the attributes of Black families previously seen as discrepant and divergent because they were not the practices of the majority of American families were reconceptualized as strengths which enabled Black families to cope and survive. Among the strengths of Black families were their social support systems, the role flexibility within families, their religious orientation, and their strong work orientation, particularly exemplified in dual earner families. Now these attributes are widely accepted, primarily because a wider number of American families practice them.

When Robert Hill proposed the strengths of Black families concept, it was a radical and innovative theoretical paradigm. It diametrically opposed the pathological and problem oriented research approach to the study of Black families that was prevalent in the sixties. Before the conceptualization of this paradigm, that Black families could be strong and viable was a rare postulate. Similar perceptions of Black single parent families exist today. While Black families headed by women have been considered, for the most part, a deviant family form, the idea that these families can be strong and viable is today gaining wider acceptance.

The third body of literature and knowledge is the new research on women. This research asserts that families headed by women are not inherently deviant because they diverge from a male dominated model (Brandwein, et. al., 1974). Examining issues from the perspective of women and from the context of women's roles is also part of this literature. Emphasis is placed on the importance of family work as well as paid work and on not taking family work for granted. In addition, the new research recognizes the possibility of combining roles, of having multiple ones and refutes the mutual exclusiveness of the realms of employment and family (Malson, 1983; Freeze, et al., 1978). The possibility that women can have both lends credence to their functionality as family heads. The new work on family roles examines the stressors as well as the benefits to women who participate in paid and family work and thereby tries to address unmanageable expectations.

The Strengths of Black Single Families Project was designed with the following goals:

- 1) To rectify stereotypes and misconceptions about Black single parent families by using up-to-date data to describe the range and diversity that exists among them;

- 2) To describe the internal functional dynamics of Black single parent life that is missing from the literature.
- 3) To identify the behaviors and strategies that Black women who head families use to manage and cope with the demands of paid work and family life.

This project is different and presents a departure, I think, from other projects on Black women single parents. Primarily it differs in approach. I am not looking at the problems in these families, or am I looking for what is wrong, except in the sense of trying to describe how a single mother goes about trying to solve a problem once it presents itself. I have targeted a particular set of issues -- trying to describe functionally and not the cause or the effects or outcomes of Black single parent families other than some mental health indicators. In this project and paper, I will try to describe some of the circumstances, processes and dynamics in these families using the point of view and the words of women interviewed as testimony.

To describe the work and family life of Black women single parents I will be using two kinds of data: national socio-demographic data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and data from 50 interviews conducted with Black women heads of households.

NATIONAL DATA

The increase in the past decade in single parent families, both Black and white, is well documented. The proportion of children living in single parent households doubled from 1960 to 1978 and increased 9 percent between 1977 and 1978 (Weiss, 1979). In 1984, 22.6 percent of all American families were headed by a single adult and some social scientist estimate that if current trends persist, by the turn of the century half of all white and 87 percent of Black 17 year old children, will have spent part of their lives living with one adult (Moynihan, 1985).

Changes in Black family structure have been more dramatic. In 1960 about one-fourth of all Black families were headed by women. By 1977 this proportion had risen to 39 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975: Glick and Norton, 1979). The increase in the proportion of Black families headed by women continued into the eighties and 1984 data indicate that 50.2% of all Black children under 18 live in a one parent family headed by their mothers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985a). (Insert Table 1 here)

Two other socio-demographic changes among Black single parent families were worth noting. One of the most salient changes has occurred in marital status. In 1970, among the 33.0 percent of Black families maintained by women, more mothers (17.7%) identified themselves as separated and separation was seen as the largest single factor contributing to the single parent status of Black women (Ross and Sawhill, 1975). In March, 1984, the 55.9 percent of women maintaining "one parent family groups" identified themselves as never married, separated, and divorced in the following proportions: 28.1%, 12.6%, 12.5%. Never-married mothers now maintain more one parent family groups than the two categories of ever-married mothers combined (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984b). (Insert Table 2 here)

The second change is the recognition of the various living arrangements among Black single parent families. Due to changes in Census tabulations procedures, the percentages of subfamilies among Black women single families is now more apparent and has doubled. Recent census data indicates that of the children under 18 years of age living with their mothers, 73 percent live in families where the mother is a householder; 21.4 percent live in another family group, usually a subfamily, a household where someone other than their mother is identified as the head. The likelihood that a Black single mother lives in a subfamily is related to her age and the

age of her child with younger women more likely to exist in subfamilies than older ones (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984a). (Insert Table 3 here)

If one considers the economic role as one way of describing Black women single parents there are at least two main categories of Black women who are single parents and may head households in the United States. One category is primarily dependent, relying on AFDC or other transfer payments either for long spells or for short spells (Bane and Celewood, 1984). There are the families that are primarily portrayed in the media. The second category of Black single parent families are primarily dependent on wages and salaries from employment (Woody and Malson, 1984). These are the families who are seldom portrayed or mentioned publicly. These are the families that my work focuses on.

While many people are aware of the high labor force participation rates of Black wives in dual earner households, few are aware of the experiences of Black single mothers in the labor force. Black women single parents are not commonly portrayed as workers or breadwinners even though they are economically responsible for their families (Malson and Woody, 1985). Contrary to popular assumption, except for widows, the majority of Black women maintaining families are in the labor force. This is true for every marital status. In addition, labor force participation is higher (60.3%) in marital status categories where there are children under 18 years of age thus reversing the commonly held pattern of work being deferred by childrearing demands. For instances, 54 percent of Black never married women with children under 18 years of age are in the labor force, a group often cited as being dependent on entitlement programs. Rates of black women who are divorced or separated are even higher at 72.9 and 62.9 percent respectively. On the whole, Black women single parents make less in effective earnings from their

wages since they are usually younger, have less employment experience, are usually less educated, and have more children as dependents than their white counterparts (Johnson & Waldman, 1983). (Insert Table 4 here)

One reason for confusion is the failure to make distinctions about poverty and dependency among women maintaining families. Recent reports examining the feminization of poverty discuss some of the conditions associated with poverty in female headed households. There is evidence that: (1) poverty status for Black women who head households increase as the number of children in the family increases; (2) it is more likely that Black families headed by women will live in poverty if the mother is not in the labor force. The assumption is sometimes made that Black families headed by women are poor solely because the mothers are often unemployed. Yet, these reports have also pointed out that even when a Black woman heading a family is in the labor force, she may still live in poverty, especially if she has two children (42.1%) or three children (57.2%) (Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). 1983.

The mean income for Black families where children were living with their mother only was \$7513 in March, 1984, less than the established poverty level income for a family of four (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984a). One of the reasons that many Black women who head households and who are in the labor force live in poverty is their concentration in low status and low paying jobs. In March 1982, 35.9 of Black women maintaining families worked in service occupations and were heavily concentrated in health services; 29.8 percent work in technical, sales and administrative support positions with most, 22.6 percent of this number in administrative support positions; 18.1 percent worked as operatives and crafts. But 14.4 percent worked in managerial and professional categories (Johnson and Waldman, 1983). (Insert Table 5 here)

INTERVIEW DATA

Sample Characteristics

Information from a sample of Black single mothers who were interviewed in 1984-85 will be used to illustrate and embellish national socio-demographic trends. All the Black single mothers who were interviewed were 20 years of age or older and had at least one child 12 years of age or younger. At the time of the interview 57.5 percent were never married and 42.5 percent were ever married mothers. (This differs from national data where the two marital status groups are about equal.) Equal proportions, (47.5%) of women 20-29 years of age and 30-39 years of age, were in the sample. These women were well-educated by national standards with 82 percent having completed high school and 52.5 percent with some college. (National data indicate that 68.89% have completed high school and 25.3% have some college.) In spite of above average educational attainment, 59 percent were employed and 41 percent unemployed with 16 percent of those who were unemployed attending school at the time of the interview. In addition a range of incomes was reflected in the sample. For instance 52 percent had incomes below \$9,900 per year about 15 percent of the mothers had incomes of \$20,000 per year or higher. (The poverty level income for a family of four is \$10,900.) (Insert Table 6 here)

Fewer women than reported proportionately on the national level (32.5%) had another adult living with them at the time of the study. 67.5 percent of the women interviewed had households where no other adults were present. Family and household size were consistent with national trends in that 61.5 percent of the women had two children to provide for 33.3% had one child. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984a).

Work Lives

We were very interested on this project in collecting data on labor force patterns over time, the quality of work life and the interface and conflict between family and paid work. All women were asked about their labor force patterns and work histories. The 59 percent who were currently employed were asked about the details of their work lives.

The majority of women reported being in the labor force for most of their adult lives. 59 percent said that they had worked full time except for periods around child birth. An additional 30.8 percent said that they had worked part time for most of their adult lives except for periods around the birth of their children.

Ninety percent of this sample of Black single mothers had their first jobs between 14 and 17 years of age; the other 10 percent reported entering the labor force when they were 18-21 years old. Seventy-five percent had an employment history of four jobs. Fifty percent had at least five jobs or more. But in spite of a history of labor force participation, labor force patterns indicated that employment had been successive but for short time periods. Job duration was frequently reported as lasting for periods of less than one year and for the most part in service and administrative support positions.

The 59 percent of the women who were employed were in one of three occupational categories. 47.5 percent were in technical, sales and administrative support occupations. Of the occupations in this category the women interviewed overwhelmingly worked in administrative support positions such as clerk and clerk typist. 27.5 percent of the employed women worked in managerial or professional occupations. This included women who were social

workers and teachers. 22.9 percent of the women held service occupations and worked in occupations such as teachers aides and cashiers.

While a quarter of the sample was not employed at the time of the interviews those who were employed worked long hours. Sixty percent reported working 40 hours or more per week. One fourth reported working more than 40 hours per week. These additional work hours sometimes reflected working more than forty hours on one job but also often reflected having a second job. In order to fulfill economic responsibilities some mothers in this sample resorted to working a full time job and a part-time job.

The majority of women interviewed, 80 percent, said that the overall quality of their work life was good (42.3%), or fair, (38.5%). Few had strong positive or negative evaluations of their work lives in that only 15.5 percent said that it was excellent and only 3.8 percent said that it was unsatisfactory. Their perspectives on quality of work life may have been partially reflected in the benefits received through employment. From a list of nine benefits that included health care insurance, child care benefits and sick leave, 50 percent reported having 7-8 of the benefits listed.

The quality of work life was also reflected in the accessibility and accommodation of family needs at the work site. Eighty percent of the women interviewed said that it was somewhat or very easy to talk to their children while they were at work. Fifty percent said that it was very easy to make appointments that had to do with childrearing (doctors, dentists, teachers) during work time. The largest difference in perceptions about work family interface at the work site was about children at the workplace. While 50 percent said that it was very easy to have children, if it were necessary, where they worked, 34 percent said that it was impossible or not easy at

all. The majority of women, 60 percent said that it was somewhat or very easy to make alternative childcare arrangements if necessary. (Insert Table 7 here)

Family Life

The section of the interview guide on childrearing and single parenting consisted of 55 questions. Topics that were included were fertility patterns, child care, children's activities, children's education, discipline, childrearing support, children's contact with fathers and other male role models, raising sons, raising teenagers, and attitudes about parenting alone. In this stage of the analysis I have chosen to look at family life in these families by examining the answers to five questions which indicate how women evaluate and think about their roles and responsibilities as single parents. This section will focus on the responses of three women who represent three of the main categories of women in the sample (I think).

The first is Ms. Duras who is in her late twenties, employed, has an income above the sample median, has a B.A., and one child 3 years of age. Ms. Duras is never married.

The second is Ms. Foster who is in her early twenties, unemployed but looking for work, has an income below the sample median, has completed high school, and has one child two years of age. Ms. Foster is a never married mother.

The third is Ms. Jordan who is in her mid thirties, is unemployed, has an income below the sample mean, has completed high school, and has two children, aged 13 and 3 years of age. Ms. Jordan is an ever married mother.

Although mothers come to single parenting in different ways, some by having a child without marriage, and others through marital dissolution, the majority of mothers in this sample had given birth to their first children

when they were teenagers, between 14 and 19 years old. Mothers were asked how they felt about having a child. Ms. Duras said this:

"The day I found out I was pregnant, I was very happy but ran into a lot of problems. First of all, I was told I could never have any children, so to pop up pregnant, that was a big shock. Living at home at the time, my parents said, "You don't have a child unless you're married." I, on the other hand, felt the child didn't ask to come here, I got pregnant. Let me go ahead and do my responsibilities and raise this child. His father, on the other hand, wanted me to have an abortion and I was just deadset against it.... went the whole nine months by myself, had to call a girlfriend from Cohasset because no one else would come to the hospital. Being my first child, I was very scared about delivery. My girlfriend came, which is my baby's godmother... at 12:30 at night, came and spent labor with me. (How long have you known her?) Seven years. (Kids?) She's got two... First, when my baby was born, he spent the first month in the hospital. That was my hardest part. He had an infection... I feel he got it from the hospital... I almost lost him when he was a week and a half old... and not even once, that whole month up there, nobody came to see my son but his mother, for that full month! Not his grandparents, his father, nobody."

Ms. Foster had this response:

"When I first found out I was pregnant I was confused. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. So I saw a counselor at Preterm and she told me different ways of handling it, that I could either have an abortion, give my child up for adoption, or keep him. I decided to keep him because I felt that at the time I really couldn't have an abortion, I didn't think that emotionally I was strong enough to go through that and I didn't think that I'd want to go through nine months of the pregnancy and then give my child up. So I decided to keep him."

And Ms. Jordan said this:

"After 10 years, it was quite a surprise. I hadn't planned on it. I always wanted a daughter but I wasn't gonna try again purposely, but here she came. There was no decision. When I found out I was pregnant, I was pregnant and that was it. There was no talk of, not even a thought of termination. I just was gonna take what I had to, have her -- and I knew I could manage."

Previous work indicates that Black single mothers are often part of an extended support system and often receive help with their children from

family members and others (Malson, 1983c; McAdoo, 1980). One indicator of childrearing support used in this study was the help mothers received immediately after giving birth to a child. The majority of respondents indicated that they had received this kind of help from family members. When asked who had helped most right after having her baby, Ms. Foster said this:

"My mother was the most helpful. At the time, I was still in school (a junior in high school) and she told me "the best thing for me to do would be to continue going to school. At first, I really didn't want to because I felt that I should be there with my son but after a while I thought that it would be best if I did finish high school, it would be better for both of us."

(Did she continue to help as child got older?)

"She watched him while I was in school and if I had a problem, if I didn't know what to do as far as my son was concerned, she would help me."

Ms. Jordan talked about the help she received and her relationship with her mother:

"Who helped most?"

"Mother, her father. I mean, when you have a new baby, it seems like everybody's reaching out. (Does your family live around here?) Yes, my mother lives right down the street, my brother lives up the street. We're all pretty close."

"After I had her, I went straight to my mother's house because of the Cesarean section, I was having a hard time so I stayed there for a few days before coming home. My mother helped me with money problems, with my older son, and basically giving me a hand."

"My mother... me and my mother's like two sisters, two best friends. She can sense something's not right here or everything is okay more so than I let her know. She knew when I had my daughter that it was going to be little tough because I was no longer married. So she was my back-up. But she's always helped."

"She's sent my son to private school ever since first grade...anything I'm not able to do, she's there."

Becoming a parent and especially becoming a single parent usually impacts on the goals or life plans of the mother. There is some indication from the women in this sample, that although becoming a single parent may be disruptive, it may also serve as a motivation to make a life style change because of the added responsibility of parenting. Ms. Foster said that having her baby changed her goals because "I knew that there was someone in my life that depended on me and that what I did in the future would directly affect him -- so it changed me a lot." Ms. Jordan said that she had been climbing the corporate ladder and was something of a swinging single. She loved her job and leaving it was heartbreaking but having the baby changed her lifestyle.

Ms. Duras made this extensive reply reflecting on the impact single parenting had on her life's goals, her feelings about single parenting, and her relationships with men:

"It changed me, it put things back a little bit. I had my reasons for really keeping this child. I looked at it, I was 25 years old, went to college, got a degree, I had a car, I had did some travelling, so I felt that I had did enough to hold me for a while. I knew having a child meant that everything I wanted or needed, being a single parent, I wouldn't be able to get. But I felt at that time of my life I had did things I wanted to and I felt that I had enough to give a child...and that I would be able to raise a child (tried to explain to parents, they mentioned that it would be an 18 year commitment) but I didn't see, I never looked at it like that. I thought I was ready to become a mother...(why she wasn't concerned with finding a husband). First, I never wanted to get married, still to this day, don't want to get married. I love children. I get stuff from my girl friends and my parents because how can you have a child and not get married? Well, I'm a very independent woman. I look at it, there's nothing that a man can do that I can't do for myself. As far as relationships, it's very hard to me to hold onto a relationship because I find that Black men don't like independent women and I let them know up front, You're not gonna string me. I can do for myself. I don't need somebody always telling me what to do. I find that I'm too independent. I don't think I'm the marrying type but I do love children. And even right now, I want a second

child...I mean, I would love to be married "cause at first, once I had my son, I really felt bad; cause I thought he didn't have a name but he has my last name, so... But the more I thought about it, what's a name?... a lot of women do that, get married just so the child can have a last name and to me, that's foolish... My son has just got to know his father within the last year. All of a sudden now, it's his son and that really burns me...now the job is done... You want to call yourself his father!... I had my ups and my downs but what really lifts me up is my child."

Mothers were asked how they thought parenting alone differed from parenting in a two parent home. Ms. Jordan said:

"I grew up in a two-parent home. It does feel more family-style, you know, "Dad's home!"...it felt more like a family. I'm not saying that we're not like a family but with the father there, it's more complete, I would say. But I don't see anything wrong with a single mother raising her family. (Advantages?) You make your own decision final. It's not, 'Go ask Dad.'"

Ms. Duras remarked:

"First of all, you don't have the "support" but you know, two-parent homes, sometimes you don't get the support. But I feel you do have the support in that you have somebody to depend on. Like I look at it, every time I want to go out, if it were the two-parent home, we could compromise, tonight I want to go out, tomorrow you go out (few babysitting worries). Even as far as the worries and things that I go through in there, I look at it, because that's my biggest problem. Outside of my pregnancy, I don't have somebody right here within my home to sit and talk to, to let them know how I feel. That's where I feel a two-parent home is better, as long as the two are working together. Just because it's a two-parent home don't mean everything is together."

"(Advantages?) In my instance, to me, it makes me a stronger person. It makes me very independent. I mean, I would love it if it was two, it would be so much easier but I feel it's made me a stronger person, more independent person knowing that I have responsibilities."

When asked the question what would make it easier to take care of your children, there was a similar response from unemployed and employed women alike. The two women who were unemployed both said that a full-time job would

make it easier for them to care for their children. The mother who was employed echoed the same theme when she said:

"If there was somebody to help and finances, that's my biggest problem. I live of seven dollars a week."

I have described what I know thus far as a result of this part of my analysis about the paid work and family lives of Black women single parents. I think managing multiple roles is a source of stress but also a source of strength in these families. To close, I am going to read a little from an article that will appear in the Radcliff Quarterly as part of Bunting's 25th anniversary. The article talks about women's multiple roles, stereotypical notions of super women and why Black women are not often considered superwomen.

If we define superwomen (in part) by multiple roles I think we should reassess who fits this definition. I think Black women in dual earner households and in particular Black women single parents not only fit the criteria for superwomen but should be considered role models for those who are novices at trying to strategize and balance the requisite tasks. Black women functioned in multiple roles when doing so was considered deviant. The labor force participation of Black women is a fact of the past, the present and the future. While the labor force events of the Seventies were revolutionary for majority women, they were common for Black women (Gump, 1980). The social and subtle revolution of women's work was therefore a revolution for some but not necessarily for all.

Black women who head families should be considered superwomen and role models because they have the responsibility of functioning both a childrearers and economic providers for their families. They are attempting to accomplish alone what dual earner couples often have a hard time accomplishing together. Husbands and wives faced with the same problems that

women heading families face have the resources of two adults and two paychecks, resources often used to purchase services that paid work leaves family members little time or energy to perform. Black women heading families face the same problems and obstacles that dual earner families face but they have to resolve their problems without the resources of another person or the resources of another paycheck.

Black women single parents straddle multiple roles at high "costs." National data indicate that they often live in poverty that is associated with paid work as well as welfare (Woody and Malson, 1984). Their work lives are often unrewarding because they are in low status and low paying jobs. In spite of work-filled existences their low incomes often do not afford them the necessities much less the services that would ease the demanding responsibilities of their lives. Because they are the sole adults in their households their work lives stretch into 24-hour days. The women single parents that I interview seem to work around the clock during the day at their jobs and at night in their homes. Because of the demands of the workplace and their homes their lives are often stressful (Malson and Woody, 1985).

My Bunting project is on Black women single parents because I think we can learn a lot by looking intensively at their work and family lives. Women maintaining families is one of the central issues of the next decade particularly for Black families. Black women will continue to function as breadwinners as well as homemakers and childrearers in the future. But while families headed by women have primarily been a concern for Black families, it is the forecast for American families as a whole. Demographers contend that if current trends persist one out of every two children will spend some part of his life in a single parent family (Moynihan, 1985). By the year 2000, one quarter of all American families will be headed by a woman. Teenage women

seem to be the mothers of tomorrow whether Black or white. The problems I have described are the problems of Black families today but the problems of all families tomorrow.

Table 1

Household Relationship and Presence of Parents
for Black Persons Under 18 Years of Age, March, 1984

Living with:

Both parents	41%
Mother only	50.2%
Father only	2.9%
Neither parent	5.7%

Adapted from Table 4, "Household Relationships and Presence of Parents for Persons Under 18 Years of Age by Sex, Race, and Spanish Origin: March, 1984," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March, 1984.

Table 2

Marital Status of One Parent Family Groups
As Proportions of All Black Family Groups with Children Present

One-Parent Family Groups

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1970</u>
<u>Maintained by Mother</u>	55.9%	48.7%	33.0%
Never Married	28.1%	16.3%	5.4%
Spouse Absent	12.6%	16.4%	17.7%
Separated	(11.5%)	(15.1%)	(14.9%)
Divorced	12.5%	11.7%	5.3%
Widowed	2.7%	4.3%	4.6%

Adapted from Table D, "Two-Parent and One-Parent Family Groups as Proportions of All Family Groups With Children Present, by Race: 1984, 1980 and 1970," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Household and Family Characteristics: March, 1984.

Table 3

Living Arrangements of Black Children Under 18 Years of Age
Living With Only One Parent, March 1984

Living with mother only	94.5%
Mother, householder	73.1%
Never Married	26.6%
Husband Absent	23.3%
Widowed	4.4%
Divorced	19.8%
Mother, not householder	21.4%
Living with father only	5.5%

Adapted from Table 5, "Presence and Marital Status of Parent for Persons Under 18 Years of Age Living With Only One Parent by Age, Sex, Race, and Spanish Origin: March, 1984," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Marital Status and Living Arrangements, March, 1984.

Table 4

Labor Force Status of Black Women Maintaining Families With Children Under 18 Years of Age

Black Women, Total	60.3%
Never Married	54.0%
^ Separated	62.7%
Widowed	39.4%
Divorced	72.9%

Adapted from B. Johnson, and E. Waldman, Table 4, Labor Force Status of White, Black, Hispanic Origin Women Maintaining Families, by Presence of Children and Marital Status, March, 1983, The Monthly Labor Review, December, 1983.

Table 5

Occupational Distribution of Black Women
Maintaining Families by Marital Status, March, 1983

Occupation

Managerial and professional specialty	14.4%
Technical, sales, and administrative support	29.8%
Service occupations	35.9%
Precision production, craft and repair	1.5%
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	18.1%
Farming, forestry and fishing	0.2%

Adapted from Table 3, Johnson B. and E. Waldman, "Educational Attainment and Occupational Distribution of Women Maintaining Families by Marital Status, Race, and Hispanic Origin," March, 1983.

Table 6

Selected Sample CharacteristicsMarital Status

Never Married	57.5%
Ever Married	42.5%

Mother's Age

20 - 29 Years of Age	47.5%
30 - 39 Years of Age	47.5%

Educational Attainment

Completed High School	82%
Some College	52.5%

Employment Status

Employed	59%
Unemployed	41%
Students	16%

Income

\$0 - 9,900	52%
\$20,000 or above	15%

Other Adult Present in Household

Present	32.5%
Not Present	67.5%

Family Size

One child	33.3%
Two children	61.5%

Table 7

Summary of Paid Work Patterns and
Paid Work Characteristics by Proportion of Sample

Labor Force Patterns

Full-time	59%
Part-time	30.8%

Age at First Job

14-17 years of age	90%
18-21 years of age	10%

Number of Jobs Held

4 jobs [?]	75%
5 jobs or more	50%

Occupation of Employed Mothers

Technical, sales and administrative support	47.5%
Managerial and professional	27.5%
Service occupations	22.9%

Hours Worked

40 hours or more per week	60%
More than 40 hours	25%

Quality of Work Life

Excellent	15.5%
Good	42.3%
Fair	38.5%
Unsatisfactory	3.8%

Workplace/Family Life Conflict

Somewhat or very easy to talk to children while working	80%
Easy to make childrearing appointments during work hours	50%
Children at work site	
Very easy	50%
Impossible/not easy	34%
Easy to make alternative child care arrangements	60%

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