XHOSA SINGLE MOTHERS:
REASONS FOR REMAINING SINGLE

by

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study seeks to identify the situational and cultural influences related to single motherhood among a specific population in South Africa. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this thesis reveals the life stories and experiences of the women utilizing the Salem Baby Care Centre. Hopefully, this contributed to a better understanding of these Xhosa mothers’ reasons for remaining single. These single mothers are caught in a cycle of poverty. They often begin having children at a very young age, leading to children with different fathers.
This differs from traditional family systems where women and children are protected. Women are often solely responsible for the physical care of their children. Additionally, in recent years AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases have risen drastically. These factors, combined with the poverty of their partners which limits their ability to pay lobula, distrust of men, apartheid, and urbanization, are all explored in this study as reasons for these mothers remaining single.
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Chapter 1

Research Problem and Significance of the Study

Abundant research shows that single mother households are more often victims of poverty than two parent homes. Interestingly, in South Africa many mothers remain single even though it perpetuates their poverty. According to the 1999 October Health Survey (OHS) less than half of all Africans or Coloureds of marriageable age had ever been married. Conversely, over 80% of the Asians and Whites reported being married. Birth rates in South Africa remain consistently high, along with high rates of unemployment. While reviewing the relevant literature, there are evidences of disruptions to traditional family structure leading to South African mothers remaining single.

This situation cannot be understood without a comprehension of the volatile history and native cultures of this country. Traditional family systems cared for mothers and children. However, apartheid, the urbanization process and AIDS all altered these systems. By better understanding the history of South Africa, the factors contributing to the disruption of the family systems can be recognized. Apartheid, a system of governmentally enforced segregation enacted in 1948, stripped the black majority of all resources, including land on which to live. There were also laws regulating migration and urbanization that split families apart and created impoverished townships (Appolis, 1996). The current situation of many South Africans remains one of poverty and limited educational and employment opportunities. Additionally, in recent years the death rates from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases have risen drastically, changing
family and social systems. These factors, apartheid, urbanization, and AIDS, are all reasons identified by the literature as reasons for alteration in family structure leading to single motherhood.

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes leading to Xhosa mothers remaining single. In South Africa there is a great deal of unmarried young mothers, unemployed fathers, and children without homes (or with absent parents). Although study of all of these groups is outside the scope of a single paper, by understanding the factors associated with single Xhosa mothers not marrying, I sought to understand one way that the family structure in South Africa has been affected by apartheid. Since poverty in South Africa is so prevalent and the population continues to grow, mainly through the births to unmarried mothers, I was interested in exploring the reason Xhosa mothers remain single.

The individual reasons and complex stories of mothers who remain single contribute to an understanding of the process leading to single motherhood. This allows a better ability to identify ways to improve their situations. The stories of individual single mothers provide depth to the way single motherhood in South Africa is understood. For this purpose a specific population in East London, South Africa was studied. The women utilizing Salem Baby Care Centre, a place where mothers come for a meal, to bathe their babies, and basic skills training, were interviewed as I engaged in participant observation as a volunteer from September through December 2001.
Chapter 2

Disruptions to Traditional Xhosa Family Structure Leading to Poverty

Traditional Xhosa family structure provided a system to care for all members, including mothers and children. This system was disrupted leading to the current situation of increasing single motherhood. At least three factors influencing the dissolution of traditional family systems among the Xhosa are the effects of apartheid, urbanization, and sexual practices resulting in early pregnancies and AIDS. With this disruption, familial systems no longer care for mothers and children leading to poverty.

Tönnies’ theory of community, or Gemeinshaft, can be used for greater understanding of Xhosa traditional structure. Tönnies’ argued that in places where people are bound together through kinship and tradition, they comprise a single primary group (Tönnies, 1887). Xhosa history describes a group of people settling in the Eastern Cape region before the fifteenth century. The Xhosa exterminated, enslaved, or peacefully assimilated the current inhabitants, thus becoming an extremely diverse group. “Most Xhosa lived by cattle herding, crop cultivation, and hunting” (Byrnes, 118). Prior to urbanization, the social roles of the Xhosa people were well defined and extremely family oriented. The idea of community was important.

An example of the importance of community to the Xhosa is the Cattle Massacre. During 1856 and 1857, a young woman prophesied that if the Xhosa would destroy all their crops and sacrifice their cattle, their ancestors would return and deliver them from the colonial rule of the invading Europeans. This caused an estimated 40,000 deaths
from starvation, and another 40,000 were forced to work in the colonial economy. This was the end of Xhosa independence (Chidester et al, 143).

**Traditional Family Structure**

Descent in the tribe was traced through patrilineal lines. Females married outside of their kinship group and all children belonged to the husband’s lineage. The family was an “isolated as well as a self-contained unit” (Mair, 9). Marriages were arranged and acted as alliances between families. The woman’s role was to produce children and continue the family line. The man paid the woman’s family lobula, which is payment of cattle to secure her responsibilities. If the wife was unable to have children, the wife could be returned for a ‘refund’ on the lobula. Because of this traditional system, all members clearly understood their duties. “The husband’s right to enforce his authority by beating his wife was recognized, though she could appeal to the protection of her own people if he abused it” (Mair, 17).

Family is an important agent of socialization in all societies and certainly is a means to higher quality of life in South Africa. However, family structure is changing. In 1999 a reported 49% of South Africans over the age of 15 have never been married (OHS 99). This can be compared with the 2000 US Census data which reports only 25% of American women over 15 who have never been married (census.gov/2000). This is strong evidence of the lack of marriage among South Africans. This change in family structure has important implications for socialization of children. Fathers are not present to contribute in the socialization of their children.

Many black South African women are raising children as single mothers, but not necessarily by choice (Preston-Whyte, 1993, 63). One reason is the practice of bride
wealth. In traditional black South African culture, a man must pay lobula (or bride wealth) to a woman’s family in order to marry. Due to high unemployment rates, men are unable to pay lobula, thus, they cannot marry their girlfriends. As a consequence, women in South Africa have children with boyfriends who do not assume responsibility for the children because they are not married to the child’s mother. Traditionally, there was also a payment required of the father should a child be conceived out of wedlock. However, due to the dire economic state of the majority of South Africans, this payment is rarely given. Thus, the woman/mother is financially responsible for herself and her children and sinks further into poverty.

Kinship relations tied villages together. Open communication led to disputes being settled among the entire group. Children looked to all their elders as having the right to discipline them in the same way as their parents (Mair, 19). The Xhosa family had a structure that connected people together and defined social roles. With the coming of the European settlers, many of these roles were forcibly and unnaturally changed by apartheid and urbanization.

**Apartheid**

Apartheid practiced by the South African government has had destructive consequences on black families. The Republic of Southern Africa has a tumultuous history. Early tribes were often at war with each other over land. White settlement began in 1652 with the arrival of the Dutch, or Afrikaaners, followed by British settlers who began arriving in the early 1800s. With their greater technology, these ‘white tribes’ were able to gain control over the native peoples and forced them into submission.
order to maintain this lifestyle, the ruling whites installed a set of discriminatory laws known as apartheid, established in 1948 through the Bantu Acts.

The institution of apartheid forcibly changed the social roles of South African blacks. Legislation caused fragmentation of the black family through the Pass Laws and Homestead Act. The Pass Laws were designed to allow only those blacks working among the whites to live within the vicinity of cities (normally in townships). Land was given to the blacks as part of the Homestead Act, but it was very poor and families could not survive working it. Eventually, starvation drove many illegally into the townships. Soon both parents were working, often multiple low wage jobs, leaving children without supervision.

The purpose of the Bantu Acts, a major set of laws defining Apartheid, was to keep the native population in subservience. Heavy taxes were imposed on governmentally assigned tribal lands, called homelands, in remote areas of South Africa. These areas were assigned under the guise of helping the tribes since they delegated 13% of South African land for use by specific tribes. However, the soil in these largely uninhabited, desert areas was very poor and unable to provide for the needs of the people. Thus, many men left the reserves to find work in the urban areas, but their families were forced by law to remain in the homelands. The South African government established men-only hostels for the workers, which led to high infidelity among the men, primarily because their wives were far away in the reserves. Many men started pseudo “families” in town with girlfriends, thereby increasing the number of single mothers among the black in South Africa (Appolis, 92).
This forced divisions of families led to weakening family bonds. Thomas stated:

Broken marriages and desertion and faithlessness are distressingly common, and
the reason is clear…African relationships, as in all culture, depend on loyalty and
affection. These bonds in turn depend upon mutual support and comfort, on
shared experiences and responsibilities, and companionships. All these must be
sacrificed when the man goes away for long periods… (Women, 2)

Along with the Homestead Act an additional law further ensured the
fragmentation of black South African families. The Pass Law, put into place in 1952,
required all non-whites to carry a “Reference Book,” a pass specifying tribal origin,
family, work, and place of allowed residence (Appolis, 94). This law was instated to
keep blacks from setting up a permanent place of residence and to keep their numbers
low in white areas. Townships were removed from the white areas, and there were
curfews that specified when blacks had to be back in the townships. In order for a black
person to qualify for a pass to live in the townships, it was essential to have a job in the
neighboring city.

Nelson Mandela discussed the pass laws and their effect on family structure in the
following:

Pass laws, which to the Africans are among the most hated bits of legislation in
South Africa, render any African liable to police surveillance at any time…Pass
laws keep husband and wife apart and lead to the breakdown of family life.
Poverty and the breakdown of family life have secondary effects. Children
wander the streets of the townships…this leads to a breakdown in moral standards,
to an alarming rise in illegitimacy, and to a growing violence…
African men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work, and not be forced into an unnatural existence in men’s hostels. African women want to be with their menfolk and not be permanently widowed in the Reserves (Mandela, 44-45).

Although blacks were not allowed to live within certain distances of the city, on the edge of that enforced barrier, those who worked in the city squeezed into very small areas of allotted land. Apartheid kept the family in its fragmented state by only allowing those with work permits to live in townships surrounding the cities. The rest of the family members had to remain in the homelands, areas of infertile land in the far northern areas.

These laws restricting families from settling in townships were broken constantly as families tried to unite, and starvation drove many illegally into the townships. The police raided the townships regularly to punish offenders. People lived in constant fear of being sent back to the homelands to starve. Life in the townships was marked by chaos. “Their family members were either on the run from police, in jail, detained, unemployed, or absent from the home in search of employment in the cities” (Appolis, 81-90). In 1972, Coen Kotze, head of the Bantu Affairs Department in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, said of the government’s efforts:

We are giving them a choice: they must send their children back to the homelands themselves…The law states that they are illegally in the area, so they have to go. It’s as simple as that (Women, 1981, 1).

Under apartheid there were no rights or job security for blacks. Many men lost their jobs as factories and mines modernized. Women began to support their families.
Men began to drink, unable to live with the fact that they were incapable of supporting their families. Fortunate women were able to get jobs as domestic workers in white families. Others sell fruit in roadside stands or do custodial work. The increasing reliance on women as providers meant that they assumed responsibility for the material needs of their entire household in addition to the domestic labor performed for others. This increased the incentive for mothers to remain single because although the men were unable to find work outside of the home, after circumcision they refused to help with household chores.

Circumcision

Speaking with many men in South Africa, it became apparent that circumcision was, and is, critical to understanding gender and thus, the family. At around 18 or 19 years old, males in the Xhosa tribe are circumcised as a rite of passage to become men. This continues today as in traditional settings. With this distinction come certain characteristics. Before circumcision, boys are required to help clean, cook, and tend younger children. However, after the ceremony has been performed, doing these activities would be considered disgraceful. Aside from having children, women are expected to take care of these chores. “Xhosa men were characterized as ‘managers of production units,’ taking the credit for their wives work” (Carstens, 505-522). In the traditional society, the man took care of the material needs of his family and the rest of the family took care of domestic needs.

In the book *Kaffir Boy*, by Mark Mathabane, the author writes autobiographically about the situations he encountered growing up in a township outside of Johannesburg where tribes had intermixed. There were a lot of abusive situations ranging from police
brutality to domestic violence. One of the most well known psychological explanations for family abuse is that it is a result of a threatened ego or a lost sense of identity with the abuser’s culture. Mathabane’s life illustrates these symptoms. Mathabane’s father was head of a family, yet was unable to provide for them. This was not because he was unwilling to work hard: jobs were not available. For a man deeply entrenched in tribal culture it is understandable that he would feel a threat to his manhood when his wife was forced to support his family. He was constantly made to feel inferior by those around him. Because of these factors, he lost his identity as a man. By moving to a township where his tribe, Venda, was a minority, and being married to a woman with a different tribal background, he felt lost. Those men who feel that their ego is threatened and they are losing absolute control tend to be more abusive and addicted to alcohol. Thus, women’s experiences with absent men can contribute to mothers deciding to remain single rather than subject themselves to bad relationships.

When Apartheid officially ended in 1994, the economic situation of most black South Africans was dire due to the overwhelming lack of resources, and for most the situation has yet to improve. The restrictions once placed upon blacks’ legal living areas were eradicated. Yet this merely led to shack-towns moving closer to the cities. The poverty cycle continues. Men are unable to marry due to financial restrictions, and their children are then raised in poverty, only to also be limited as they grow up by their lack of financial resources. Education is not governmentally funded, and the stratification of educational opportunity is apparent. Education in townships is referred to as “Bantu Education” reflecting the poor quality and lack of resources resulting from the Bantu Acts. As of the 1998 Census data, in the Eastern Cape area of South Africa 15 percent of
women and 13 percent of men had no formal education. More men finished through high school than women, although less than five percent of the black population certified through grade 12 or had higher education.

With the dismantling of apartheid, the South African government is attempting to create a more equal society. The government is concerned about social and economic planning, including population control (Chimere-Dan, 1993, 31-40). Having children influences a woman’s ability to make life choices. There are population policies being enacted by the South African government. One goal is to reduce the number of children to 2.1 children per mother. Statistics show that in South Africa the “total fertility rate of whites was 3.5 children per woman, compared with an average of 6.5 for the other racial groups” (Chimere-Dan, 31-40).

When an impoverished woman has many children, those children grow up mired in poverty, continuing the cycle of poverty. The sons are unable to marry their girlfriends and additional generations of single mothers emerge. In addition to the cyclical factor of raising children in poverty, women who have children are less able to participate in the labor force (O’Connor, 1988, 15-28). The black community remains mired in poverty created by Apartheid, specifically from the results of the Homestead Act and Pass Laws.

Urbanization

Urbanization of the Xhosa of South Africa has had various stages. Pre-apartheid urbanization occurred as Xhosa moved near cities for work. Then, with the passing of the Pass Laws and Homelands Acts under the apartheid government, migration to the cities was interrupted as families were split and many were sent back to the homelands while others created townships. With the end of apartheid, thereby ending restrictions on
black migration, townships grew and cities became crowded and surrounded by squatter camps or shack towns. This process of urbanization has disrupted traditional family systems.

Social disorganization theory can help explain the disintegration of traditional family structure. This theory explains deviant behavior as a result of the social structure. As urbanization occurs, Tönnies’ single primary group was split up and smaller units come into contact with strangers. This breakdown in community feelings is connected to a decrease in social harmony. Thereby social control is weakened (Goode, 82-85).

Urbanization also contributed to the breakdown of tribal cohesion. Marriage occurred across family lines. Prior to urbanization, the entire family was involved in choosing marriage for their members. This structure fell apart as families split into nuclear units and role expectations became confused. Neighbors were no longer family, and animosity grew out of misunderstandings and lack of the open discussion among tribal members. Families were no longer governed by traditional structures of control.

The migration to the city and the fragmentation of the family associated with urbanization contributes to the increasing trend of single motherhood. While it is difficult to see direct causality from apartheid, the resultant changes in Xhosa culture and traditional family structure are apparent. Apartheid in South Africa altered the sexual norms for Xhosa people. “The system upset the marriage market and created a scarcity of marriageable men in the former homelands. A general result of this…is the relaxation of norms governing non-marital and extramarital sexual relations” (Chimere-Dan, 1996, 4-9). Apartheid separated families and relaxed sexual norms of fidelity as a result. It became normal for girls to have children out of wedlock, and thus the stigma was no
longer a social control factor. The consequence was an increase in the number of unmarried mothers.

Sexual Practices and AIDS

The age of these mothers is quite young, many having their first child while under the age of sixteen. One explanation for this is pointed out by Zabin and Kirangu (1998, 211): “Beliefs promoting female sexual submissiveness, male dominance, and sexual violence reduce the likelihood that a teenage girl will refuse sexual relations.” The Xhosa culture is very patrilineal; with a norm of male superiority. It is understandable that many girls are unable to say “no” when socialized to accept male dominance. This traditional belief of masculine rights fostered by apartheid created a sexual culture that has kept women single. The sexual practices that have emerged also contribute to the high level of AIDS and STDs reported in South Africa.

Family planning is rarely practiced among the Xhosa. Women are having children, with no way to support them given that the unemployment rate is over fifty percent. The black South African population is growing and the townships and squatter camps do not have enough room to hold them. As visibly evident, the families with any degree of wealth were having children at a much slower rate than those in the highly impoverished areas. Thus, this trend will continue as those in poverty will continue to spend their meager resources on numerous children.

Poverty

It has been shown that in many different countries and cultures, poverty is most prevalent in single mother homes (Starrels et al, 1994, 590). Births to women who have
never been married are correlated with welfare, unemployment, and low income (Driscoll et al, 1999, 178). The feminization of poverty has occurred among the Xhosa people. In spite of this, Topouzis (1990) argues that women are often neglected when studying African poverty. She contends that the feminization of poverty shows that in economic development poverty has shifted, changing both family and socio-economic structures in Africa. Women constitute almost two-thirds of the population of poor Africans and this trend is growing due to structural problems such as inability to marry due to financial strain, male migration to cities leaving female-headed households in rural areas, poor agricultural policies, high levels of population growth, and little available land (132).

W.E.B. Du Bois, an African-American sociologist, discussed the implications of the similar “false social system that deprived [the nanny] of husband and child” of America after the Civil War which served as a hindrance to economic opportunity and broke down the structure of black families (Lewis, 1995, 294). A similar breakdown was occurring in South Africa. As slavery in America broke apart families by forceful separation, apartheid in South Africa similarly separated husband and wife. Du Bois explains that this is largely a result of economic need. Since black men make well below average wages, and openings for women in domestic work were numerous, the men stayed in the country while women went to the cities. He also predicted that as black women become more economically independent, more black families would be broken up (Lewis, 1995, 309-311).

This theory is relevant to South African blacks as well as African-Americans. The fortunate women who were able to get work during apartheid were domestic servants in wealthy white homes. The men began to drink, unable to live with the fact that they
were incapable of supporting their families. With the increasing reliance on the woman providers, women began to take care of the material needs of their entire household in addition to the domestic labor. As domestic servants, these black women were often nannies for the wealthy white families. Thus imitating the societal problem described by W.E.B. Du Bois of African-Americans.

During apartheid, wealth among the white population increased dramatically. The vast majority, the blacks, was supporting a small minority. The national currency, the Rand, was equal to an American dollar. This allowed South Africa to gain status as a first world country, although most of the population lived in third world conditions. With this wealth came increased modernization. Increased efficiency occurs along with modernization, decreasing the number of men needed for the mines and factories. There were no rights or job security for blacks. Many men lost their jobs.

Wilson describes how this process has occurred similarly in America with the shift to the service sector from manufacturing. While the situation in South Africa obviously differs from that in America, there are similarities allowing correlations to be made. As the number of factories decreases, young black inner-city males are hit hardest. They are not qualified for anything more than low-paying service jobs and these are disproportionately held by women (Wilson, 1996, 30-32). In the inner-city of Chicago, almost 60% of the black adults have never been married, while among the white population surveyed in the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study only around 20% have never been married (Wilson, 1996, 89).

According to American data, only one-tenth of children living in dual parent homes lived below the poverty line in 1993, compared to over one-third of those living
with divorced mothers and of those living with mothers who had never married the proportion of children living below the poverty line were around two-thirds of the total. Furthermore, there is research showing that these children coming from single mother households have higher dropout rates and are more likely to have lower paying jobs and be welfare recipients later in life (Wilson, 1996, 92).

In a study on the “socioeconomic and marital outcomes” of those who give birth during adolescence it was found that these women were the poorest throughout life regardless of whether they later married (Teti and Lamb, 1989, 203). However, single motherhood has become more common and as a result has become more accepted in society. This increased tolerance would lead to the expectation that women are having more children outside of wedlock than in the past.

Within the African-American community, rates of marriage and levels of education are positively correlated, while the opposite is true of white women. This is partly due to the very low percentage of less educated black women that get married (Wilson, 1996, 88). Rational choice theory suggests that with increased knowledge of the consequences of single motherhood, and greater education regarding how to avoid this, women will choose to avoid having children before marriage. Education obviously plays a more direct role in income, although in South Africa there is so much unemployment that even educated men and women are unable to find jobs.

Unemployment has also increased in urban areas since women generally work in informal sectors where wages are paltry, when they can find employment at all (133). What makes this structural feminization of women so disturbing is the resulting increase in “maternal and infant mortality rates” and the decreasing education for girls. Women
are four times as likely to be illiterate as men (134). Some policy issues recommended by Topouzis (1990) include a realization of the mistakes made by early developmental planners who barred women from access to aid by assuming that all households were headed by males and an accompanying need for reforms to allow access for women to essential tools to “break out of the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment” (134). Therefore, it is essential that the factors associated with single motherhood are identified in order to better make policy recommendations to break the circle of poverty.

Based on this review of literature, the factors that I wanted to explore were the effects of apartheid, urbanization, and sexual behavior on women remaining single, leading to poverty. These factors are shown in the following model.

![Diagram of factors expected to influence single motherhood]

**Figure 1: Factors expected to influence single motherhood**
I have long been fascinated by Africa. With my childhood eye, I envisioned a vast land where wildlife roamed free and the primitive people lived in huts. While growing up, I read anything I could find that described the wonders of Africa. Music and dance are two of my favorite things. As I have studied both extensively, I am constantly intrigued by how much of our dance and song comes from African roots. This contributed to my desire to go to Africa.

As I got older, I began to realize that the African continent was not exactly the unadulterated place I had envisioned. In recent decades the world has become increasingly aware of the hunger, disease, and crime that haunt Africa.

As an undergraduate sociology major I became interested in stratification and inequality. I became more aware of how social structures in society create discrepancies in opportunities between groups. Women and children are often the greatest victims of poverty in stratification systems. While research has showed the reasons for South African women remaining single, little research has focused on single mothers and their distinct reasons for not marrying.

I decided to go to South Africa with a field study program and study this agent of stratification. While preparing for this experience I spent months in the library reading anything on the Xhosa people whom I would be living among. I studied South African history and politics. I also spent hours watching movies and documentaries based on South Africa. During this preparation I designed a study to explore the reasons why
single mothers were not marrying. Having studied stratification and the feminization of poverty, I thought that single mothers would desire marriage as a means to avoiding this problem and was interested to discover that many mothers remained single.

After my first week in East London, a city in South Africa, I realized how idealistic I was in my preparation and that this experience would profit me more than I would be able to help any of the women I was studying. I learned to recognize my ethnocentrism and gained a little understanding of devastating poverty. This made me appreciate how in recent decades humanitarian aid programs have focused on learning about the cultures of Africa and how to truly help these people.

South Africa is a very diverse country with numerous tribes or groups that rarely intermarry. South Africa has eleven national languages. Their national anthem is a mix of more than five of these languages. As a sociologist, the defined stratification between the groups that constitute South African society is intriguing, especially since the end of enforced stratification occurred recently.

With such a diverse population in South Africa, generalizing from a small study in East London is difficult at best. However, due to the residual effects of Apartheid and the changes in traditional tribal cultures to emergent township cultures, situations in the townships have created commonalities between historically varied tribes. I lived in a providence called the Eastern Cape that spans the coastline between Cape Town and Durban. The Eastern Cape is primarily inhabited by Xhosa people. They were brought down from the north to provide a barrier between the English living in and around Cape Town and the Zulu people who lived further up by Durban. The Xhosa are generally shorter and have darker skin than the Zulu.
While reviewing the relevant literature, I found many plausible reasons why South African Xhosa women remain single. An interesting trend was the population growth while rates of marriage decrease. This fueled my curiosity regarding cultural reasons that may lead to this adaptation of the familial situation. A better understanding of these single mothers and their reasons for remaining single will enrich the capacity to aid them. Many of these Xhosa women have children fathered by several men, their first child often born while the mother is still in her teenage years. The South African government and other aid organizations have been implementing various programs to help these women. I feel that an increased comprehension of the cultural situation of these women will lead to more encompassing research to allow programs to target the specific needs of single mothers.

The main objective of the study I conducted in South Africa was to identify the reasons why many South African mothers remain unmarried. As mentioned, families headed by women are very susceptible to poverty, and South African women are no exception to this trend. From this exploratory research I hope to identify the current situations of single Xhosa mothers and their feelings towards marriage to increase understanding of the reasons they are choosing to remain single.

I spent time learning as much about the culture as possible before leaving for South Africa and during my stay while working at Salem Baby Care Centre. I kept field notes about the time spent at Salem Baby Centre and what I learned there. I included overall impressions and the general ideas that were patterns in all the interviews. This way I will be able to clarify specific attitudes and factors leading to single motherhood, while remaining sensitive to my own ethnocentrism. To keep a record of these
impressions, I kept a journal of my personal reactions to cultural information, thus being able to spot where I was, and at times continue to be, biased.

**Cultural Understanding**

I focused on the Xhosa unmarried mothers living around East London. Before collecting data in South Africa, I spoke with students who had previously studied in East London. Based on this information and the information found at the university’s field studies office, I chose Salem Baby Centre, an in-take center for single mothers providing maternal health care and education, as a site to study single mothers. I also spent time in East London learning about the Xhosa culture.

**Research Site**

I contacted the women I wished to study by volunteering at Salem Baby Centre. The criteria for women allowed to go to Salem include a lack of fiscal support from any man. However, this criterion is not difficult to meet since the unemployment rate in the Eastern Cape Province is about fifty percent, and those figures count all persons living in the suburbs and cities as well as the townships and squatter camps. These women all have children under the age of two and are required to use birth control in order to utilize the centre.

**Women Studied**

I studied 39 mothers who came to Salem Baby Care Centre on the border of the shack-town, Duncan Village, and the city of East London. Of these mothers, 38 were Xhosa and one was Coloured. Five were married, two were separated, and the other 32 were single mothers. These women have remarkable resilience and have learned to make the best of their situations. For many, a change in their current situation is unforeseeable.
and yet they continue to try to help their families and care for their children. For a brief
description of each of these women, please see Appendix A. Pictures are also attached in
Appendix B.

**Interaction**

My primary methods were participant observations and semi-structured
interviews. Through interaction with the mothers at Salem Baby Centre, I was able to
build rapport and friendship, enabling frank discussion about their personal family
structures and decisions to remain single while having children. I started by spending
time with the mothers, and became acquainted with their individual situations when
volunteering in the workshop, teaching mothers how to sew. I also helped teach a
literacy class. Through these experiences I learned more about these women, their
culture, and their current life situations. As I continued to explore the dynamics of their
lives, I discovered certain elements that seemed consistent in their diverse situations. I
volunteered at Salem every week day for a period of just over three months.

I disclosed the purpose of my study to the leaders of Salem to gain their aid and
support. I was able to get basic demographic information from records at the Centre
which furthered my understanding and aided discovery of similarities among the women.

The qualitative data gathered from research conducted while volunteering at
Salem in East London during the end of 2001 was analyzed in several stages, beginning
as I was in South Africa. Initial participant observation led to several discovered
promising patterns in the exploratory research. The initial interview questions were
based on prior research and these observations. The information gathered from reading
relevant literature before I went to South Africa acted as a departure point (Strauss, 205).
I then sought to verify my observations through interviews and additional questioning. I created a questionnaire to understand the backgrounds and feelings of these women better (See Appendix C for an English version and Appendix D for one in Xhosa).

To write up the data from the semi-structured interviews, I followed the advice of Lofland and Lofland. They recommend taking notes during the interview and afterwards writing down impressions and feelings to get a better sense of the situation and to begin recognizing factors that could become codes for further analysis (88). As I wrote about the interviews at the end of each night, I was better able to identify and question the women concerning emerging trends.
Chapter 4

Findings

Qualitative analysis is difficult as it is complicated to narrow and focus four months worth of impressions, observations, and feelings. I had expected that all of the single mothers I studied chose to remain unmarried. However, I found that this was not always the case, and many of these women actually desired marriage. Thus, my analysis had to include both of these different attitudes. During interaction with the women I noted several reasons that mothers reported about why they remain single. Some of these reasons are similar to childless women remaining single, while others specifically apply to single mothers. These include: AIDS, lack of married role models, bad experiences with men, poverty from unemployment and limited education which results in the inability to pay lobula, and different fathers of their children stemming from young sexual activity, lack of education about birth control, and rape. Many of these reasons are related and, in large part, stem from the disruptive influences of apartheid. The following model includes the factors expressed by these women to be reasons for remaining single.
Figure 2: Factors found elaborating influences on single motherhood

AIDS and STDs

It has become impossible to study South Africa without including the devastating effects of AIDS. AIDS and STDs were factors leading many women to remain single mothers. AIDS truly permeates everyone’s lives.

When I first arrived and met the staff, I asked the woman who worked in the washroom if she had a child in the crèche (preschool). She just glared at me and said no. I realized that that might not have been an appropriate question, but couldn’t figure out why not (and this was after I was trying so hard to be culturally accurate). I later found out that her son had just died of AIDS. He was five. She looked to be one of the healthiest women. She was 23 and full of life. Two weeks after I began work, she died, also from AIDS (personal field notes, Sept. 2001).

I loved to visit the crèche and play with the children. One little boy was three and weighed about the same amount as a teddy bear. Because of AIDS his body felt empty when I lifted him; I could easily pick him up with one hand. His nose was constantly
running and he had difficulty breathing during naptime. The only way to get him to sleep was to rock him. He was afraid to lie down because he would stop breathing. His mother was involved with the training workshop, but she was quiet and shy. As the other mamas would sing and joke, she would sit quietly and work on sewing her quilt squares. Her uncle had raped her, resulting in a son. The other mamas didn’t want her son in the crèche with their children due to fear of transmission of AIDS, and she was shunned. He died a few weeks after I returned to America (personal field notes, Dec. 2001).

HIV quickly progresses to AIDS in children who contract it from their mothers. Their young, undeveloped immune systems cannot fight the deadly virus. However, HIV lives in those who contract it at an older age much longer before manifesting itself. Many do not even know whether they have HIV and can often be HIV positive for 20 years before showing the symptoms of AIDS. Tobeka, a teacher at Salem, told me that many “don’t want to know. If they do, life just won’t be as happy. If someone finds out they have it, they will just want to live it up until they die. That just means infecting more people.” She told me of one man in her neighborhood who had been HIV positive for over 20 years before AIDS began to affect him. During that time he had numerous girlfriends, spreading the deadly virus.

Although the situation is improving, information about AIDS is often inaccurate, and misinformation is perpetuated by the lack of education (even by the government) and the teachings of the sagnomas, or witch doctors. For example, many sagnomas teach that having sexual intercourse with a virgin cures AIDS. While I was in South Africa, it was reported that numerous men with AIDS had gang raped two baby girls seeking to be cured. Several of the mamas said that this occurs with greater regularity than is reported.
No one wants to talk about AIDS, but it is killing people at a rate faster than the highly publicized crime.

Abstinence is rarely even considered an option to prevent AIDS. Thus, some desire to be married to their partner as a means of avoiding STDs. One woman who desired marriage with the father of her only baby said: “I already have his baby so we can trust each other. We mustn’t be infected with other disease.” Yet, there are some that do not wish to be married because they don’t feel that men are honest about their sexual practices. It really is a gamble. Those whose infection is known are shunned, yet many refuse the tests and spread disease. AIDS and the fear of AIDS have a significant impact on sexual culture and marriage among the Xhosa people.

**Lack of Married Role Models**

Although the majority of the women’s parents had traditional marriages, only three of the thirty-five unmarried women were raised by both of their parents. One woman defined her parents’ marriage as a Xhosa traditional wedding “where-by there are no wedding rings, no marriage certificate, and you can divorce him without going to the court.” Many were raised by one parent, or by a guardian, usually an aunt, uncle, or grandparent, because many moved into the townships at a young age from the homelands. Their family experience has provided limited experience with positive married role models.

One woman that I interviewed was 19 years old with a five year old child and a little baby. Her parents had been married until her father died when she was just a few years old. As a result, she did not think that marriage was important. She said that her mother had been okay without her father around. Plus, she did not think that the people
she knew who were married were very happy. Although her children have the same
father, she does not want to marry him because she does not want any more children—
and that would be expected if she were to marry him. She lives with her mother who is
not happy about her having children. Her children’s father, no longer her boyfriend,
comes to visit once a month but does not really want the children. This woman does not
even want a boyfriend again. She would like to just go to school and get money to
support her children. At only 19, she has decided that she will avoid men.

Very few of these women had parents that stayed together. If the woman was
raised by one parent, it was in all cases the mother. Several reported that their fathers had
run away. “When my mom got pregnant, he ran away.” Another woman said she will
not marry because she cannot trust that a husband will stay with her. Additionally, she
said that her parents “were married at first, but then my mother got pregnant and my
father ran away.” Still another woman reported that her parents didn’t marry because of
a lack of fidelity. “Because my father was always going out with other ladies, so they
didn’t get married.” These experiences with their fathers made it hard for these three
women to trust men. Thus they feared marriage.

**Bad Experiences with Men**

Many of these women had little experience trusting men. Since the majority was
not raised with their fathers, they did not have parental role models for marriage. There
were many women whose past experiences with men led to distrust and fear. Bad
experiences with men led many to a pessimistic attitude towards marriage.

Due to the lack of parental or other role models and personal bad experiences with
men, women often had mixed feelings about marriage. They desired to have a good life
for their kids, and to be respectable mothers. However, they did not trust men. This was a result of their fathers’ treatment of their mothers as well as marital relationships they saw among their peers. Often the women would tell me the relationship stories of the other women at Salem, and mention how they would never want to be in a relationship like that. However, those that were married were often more highly respected. On one hand many women wished they could have that kind of family life, but on the other never wanted to get married. This conflict stemmed in part from bad experiences. Several women had children with men who were already married. One very young girl had been raped by her uncle, who was married. She reported: “I don’t want to get married to this guy because he is already married to someone else.” Others reported different reasons for not marrying:

I don’t want to get married to this guy because he is not a good person for me.

I don’t want to get married to him because we don’t have the same ideas.

I do want to get married to this guy but he is always in jail all the time.

Some women questioned the ability for men to be honest. Several men ran away after impregnating the women. Others broke off the relationship. Several women mentioned being afraid of divorce:

I don’t want to get married because I’m scared of the divorce that other people are experiencing from their husband.

I don’t want to get married because you get married today, tomorrow again is a divorce so I just see this as a waste of time.
There is also a great deal of crime, alcohol and physical abuse committed by unemployed Xhosa men. One woman reported regular physical abuse as a reason for not marrying her current boyfriend, but she still lived with him because they shared a shack. She did not want to marry him because “this guy is abusing me physically. He doesn’t want to look for a job, so even if we can get married we are going to struggle forever.” Another said: “I don’t want to get married to him because he is an alcoholic.”

Bad experiences with men, often starting with their fathers, led many to statements such as:

I don’t want to get married because I experience this from other people that the guys are not honest, they are coming late home. Sometimes they are not coming anymore; they are going out with another woman.

I don’t want to get married because I’m not very much interested…most of the guys are not honest at all.

Although multigenerational observations are beyond the scope of this project, general indications were that the older generations had closer ties to tribal traditions and were more likely to desire marriage. However, the traditional cultural norms still affect young women today and many still see marriage as a means to being dignified and respectable. The problem for many of these women arises in the conflict between seeking this respectability and yet not trusting men enough to marry them. This lack of role models from their parental generation, as well as the inability to trust the men in their own relationships leads to internal conflict and mixed feelings for many of these women.
Poverty

Limited education and high unemployment leads to an inability of men to pay lobula and are thereby factors contributing to women remaining single. Although lack of financial resources is by far the main reason the women that I worked with are unable to continue their education, the increased pressures of having children as single, very young mothers adds to this inability. Women who have children at a young age are not as likely to get an education as those with no children. Several women reported dropping out of school because they were pregnant. However, the biggest factor restricting their ability to finish school was repeated by several women, and was similar to this: “My mom didn’t manage to take me to school anymore because she was suffering financially.”

Although many realized they would be unable to become employed without an education, there were differences of opinions about returning to school. Some saw education as a means to a better situation, and others desperately sought employment to take care of their children. However, education is not mandatory, and, in large part, receives little government support. Therefore, those without financial means were caught in a difficult situation. They realized they needed more education, but without the money to return to school, they saw no foreseeable way to seek employment. One woman stated: “Yes, I do want to go back to school one day because ever since I was struggling I’m still struggling even today.”

Many stated that they could not return to school because they needed to care for their children. Reasons for not going to school are illustrated in the following quotes:
I can’t go back to school because I’ve got two kids and my mom’s two kids also [her parents are both dead and she’s raising her two teenage brothers], to make four kids already.

I don’t want to go back to school because I want to look for a job so as to be able to support my kids.

I don’t want to go back to school because I want to look for a job so that I can be able to support my child.

I haven’t got money, and I also have kids that I need to support.

Women are often not as likely to get an education merely because of gender discrimination. Some of the women reported that there was not enough money for all their siblings to go to school and thus their brothers were given priority. However, since the men were not financially supporting their families, this education seems to exacerbate the current situation of poverty. “Denial of equal educational opportunity on account of sex is still widespread. The access of women to education, especially higher education, is either denied or restricted, in comparison to that of men” (McDougal et al, 1975, 498).

Race is also a major determining factor in educational opportunities. The opportunities to get a university degree and therefore increased opportunities decrease drastically if the person is black (Hare & Savage, 1979, 339). The situation described in these sources from the 1970s remains true today. Black women are being kept in poverty due to their inability to get an education.

The unemployment rate in the Eastern Cape is, as mentioned previously, over fifty percent. Schools all require a fee be paid which makes education beyond the grasp
of most. While I saw that some young people were gaining a high school education, others were dropping out. Impoverished young girls become pregnant, yet the lack of employment and resources leads to inability to marry. Lobula cannot be paid; most women do not want to marry a man without a job and very few men are employed.

Most men are unable to find employment. Although men are, on average, better educated than women, the economy in South Africa is in dire straits. There simply is little work to be found. In the city of East London there was one small factory and lots of odd jobs. Without jobs these men are unable to pay lobula and cannot support their families. The resultant attitudes of the women are expressed in the following quotes.

I do want to get married to this guy, but he is not working.

I don’t want to get married because this guy I’m with hasn’t got progress.

We do want to marry each other, but the problem is that he hasn’t got the money, the lobula for my parents.

I don’t want to get married to him because he is not working.

I don’t want to get married [she’s separated] because boyfriends don’t want to pay lobula, they don’t want to support the kids. Even the in-laws don’t help.

I do not want to get married to this guy because when I was pregnant he didn’t pay for that and even now he doesn’t want to support the child, so I don’t think he’ll pay for lobula too.

The poverty cycle then continues with these uneducated mothers’ children, who are also unable to obtain an education, employment, and, for the sons, ability to pay
lobula. The poverty in South Africa is devastating in its effects on family and culture, leaving little stability.

**Different Fathers**

An unexpected finding was the significance of a reason that a number of mothers gave for remaining single: their children have different fathers. In Xhosa culture a man will often not accept children that are not his own. Thus, he will not allow those children under his roof. Many mothers are unwilling to give up their children for marriage. Early sexual activity, limited birth control practices, and culturally accepted rape all lead to women having children with different fathers. When a woman had all of her children with the same father, she was likely to desire marriage:

I want to get married especially to this guy because I don’t want my kids to stay with someone who is no longer a father to them because by so doing that I’m just giving them problems.

Yes, I want to get married to this guy especially because all these kids are his and I don’t want to have kids to another man.

Yes, I do want to get married to him so that my kids can stay with both parents.

Yes, I do want to get married to the father of my kids because I want my kids to stay with their real father forever.

I want to get married because I want my kids to stay with their father so that we can give them their happiness they deserve.

As illustrated by these comments, those women who had children having the same father thought that marrying would benefit their children.
A rejection of marriage appeared among those women whose children came from different fathers. Then mothers feared they would be harming their children by marriage. Examples of these fears are:

No, I don’t want to get married because he is not going to accept the other child that is not his child.

I don’t want to get married because my kids have different fathers, so the other is not going to be accepted.

I don’t want to get married because I’ve got two kids with different fathers so I want to build them a house of their own. I’m scared that if I die before my husband, the one who is not his is going to have problems.

I’ve got two kids with different fathers.

I don’t want to get married because the father of my second child doesn’t like my first child.

I don’t want to get married because my kids have different fathers, so maybe I can experience some problems with the ones that are not his. [She is staying with her baby twins and their father. Her other four children are with her mom in the Transkei.]

I don’t want to get married because I am already old and I have many kids… I don’t want to get married because my kids have different fathers.

One of the women I interviewed had three children, the oldest was 17, then 14 and the youngest was a baby. The older two children were both unintended pregnancies. She was recently married and was forced by her husband to have the baby. Her new
husband did not accept her other children, and they stayed with her mother in the homelands. Her husband does not want to support them and lives in Durban. Due to this conflict over her children, she is getting a divorce. Incidentally, she was raised by her mother and sister, since her father was married to another woman. This woman says that she has learned her lesson and she will never marry again. She does not trust men and says that they will just run out. Her husband promised to pay lobula but never did.

For those women whose children had different fathers, marriage is unattractive. Many women were afraid for their other children if they were to marry their current boyfriends. Some women lived in a shack in Duncan Village, while their children from earlier boyfriends lived with other relatives in the Homelands. Several factors contribute to women having children from different fathers.

*Early Sexual Activity*

Early sexual activity is the main reason these women have children with different fathers. These women had grown up in a township where there was little activity for children, and many were not attending school. Many kids began having sex at a very young age because there was little else for them to do. In townships, people live in very tight quarters which lead to increased physicality and decreased personal space. Many of the women reported having sex for the first time when they were only 10-11 years old. While sex before marriage is still often defined as traditionally wrong, it appears to have become culturally accepted.

While in South Africa I experienced several occasions in which the lack of personal space showed an increased physicality. For Heritage Day, a national holiday, I sang in a festival as a member of a township choir. The festival was held in Pretoria, the
capital, which was a fourteen-hour drive away from East London. The choir took a large tour bus to Pretoria. I learned very quickly that to those living in townships, there is no ‘personal bubble.’ At first it was a bit disconcerting to be touched so much. For example, Xhosa people hold hands when they converse and like to have constant physical contact. Thus, many times I would be a bit startled when hands would grab my shoulders from behind in order to get my attention. There were also no restrictions on changing clothes in public. One man got hot while on the bus, so he took off his pants and sat around in his underwear. There really is no concept of privacy in townships because people are crammed into such tight quarters.

Another example of the lack of personal space in South Africa is the black taxi system. The formal taxi companies in South Africa are very expensive. With such high unemployment and low resources, blacks created a system of taxis similar to a paid carpool. If you wanted to go somewhere, you could walk in the direction you were headed, and if a car came up with a taxi sticker on it, you point in the direction you are going and, if they have room, you’ll be picked up. For a small fee, they’ll take you to certain “taxi rinks” or drop off points. Those are also the most common places to get a ride. Riding in the black taxis was an experience in closeness. They would cram six people into a five seat car, often removing the armrests in the back seat to allow more room. We literally would sit on top of each other. This lack of personal space found in all aspects of Xhosa life, combined with the lack of activities in townships, appears to contribute to the increase in sexual activity among young Xhosa people.

One woman became impregnated at 14 years old when she had sex with her boyfriend. Before that she had been a virgin. She said they were bored and decided to
try sex. She had to drop out of school. Another also became pregnant by accident at 14 years old. She too dropped out of school. Teen pregnancy is associated with long-term lower socioeconomic status and this is often seen as a result of disruption of schooling that limits employment opportunities (Macleod, 647). However, in the case of these women, many were financially unable to attend school before becoming pregnant. Early sexual activity and unplanned pregnancies resulted for many from having lots of time with nothing to do while living in crowded areas.

*Birth Control*

Another reason women have children from different fathers is their birth control practices. Surprisingly, over half of the women I studied were using some form of birth control prior to their last pregnancy. They did not expect to become pregnant. In order to utilize the services at Salem Baby Care Centre the women were required to have a hysterectomy (several had) or to be taking birth control pills that were distributed through the centre. When I worked at the front desk, I was required to check their current number of pills and make sure they not only had enough, but that they were taking them regularly. Before coming to Salem, some of the women said they used the pills only sporadically. Several reported discontinued use because they felt sick. Still others relied on methods employed by the witch doctors or just hoped they would not become pregnant.

The government and other organizations are attempting to teach safer sexual practices and preventative measures. However, in one circumstance condoms were handed out with the instructions for use stapled through the condom. Condoms also are in some ways culturally taboo. In order for a boy to become a man, they go through a circumcision ceremony that includes a spear. They do not want to use condoms as they
feel that it takes away from their manhood. Recent efforts have focused on female condom usage, yet even that is negatively viewed within Xhosa culture. Therefore, the lack of knowledge about birth control leads to early pregnancies.

Rape

Townships are places plagued by violence. The house where I stayed was owned by a Xhosa family. Their maid’s two year old daughter would come and stay with us on weekends and, when we would watch violence on the television, it would not affect her at all. She was completely desensitized to it. There are places in East London where it is known that if a woman walks there alone she will be raped.

South Africa has so much crime that in many cities house doors are locked with electronic keys and windows have bars. Once I left a pair of soaking wet shoes by the front door of the house where I stayed. The house was surrounded by a thick wall with gates for the driveway. When I returned after one hour, my shoes had been stolen.

Within townships there are sections or districts. Within the township you ride a taxi and only go into your section or into another section if you are with a resident of that section. If you go alone, it is assumed that you will be raped or killed. At a taxi rink in the local township, there was a knife war where thirty people were killed—the day after we had been there. With millions of people living in close proximity with scarce or no resources, violence is everywhere. Traditional Xhosa culture is changing, and the emergent norms are often seeped in violence. One of these emergent norms is the practice of rape.
Rape is a factor leading to young girls becoming impregnated which can lead to having multiple fathers for their children. An example dates back to 1850. A woman was raped by a hired hand on her farm. She sought out the law and the rapist was sentenced to death. The judge later rescinded the death sentence when it was found that the woman was coloured. Scully (1995) stated that this is one way that “colonialism created conditions that authorized the pervasive rape of black women” (335-359). In the emerging Xhosa culture, it is in some cases becoming culturally acceptable for a family member, such as an uncle, to take a female relative’s virginity. As stated earlier, some witch doctors advocate rape of virgins as a means to cure AIDS. These changing norms supporting violence creates serious problems.

With changing sexual norms and culturally accepted gender inequality, AIDS and STDs are being spread to young girls who have little control over their sexual relationships, as explained in the following.

Economic and social inequality and age disparity between partners can create a situation of unequal power within the relationship.

Culturally based gender roles that reinforce male control over sexual and reproductive decision making may contribute in an important way to young girls’ inability to make decisions about condom and contraceptive use, and to their vulnerability to the risk of unintended pregnancy and STD’s, including AIDS (Gage, 155).

Rape leads to pregnancy among very young girls, often under 15 years old. Also, the emergent norm of rape within family leads to a fear for some women that daughters from different fathers could be raped by their husbands if they were to marry their current
boyfriend. Thus, women are becoming pregnant at a very young age and are not marrying because of the desire to keep their children together and safe.

**Cultural Values**

Although there are many reasons for mothers remaining single, there is still a cultural desire for marriage and family unity. Thus, despite the above mentioned problems, with this value placed on marriage there is hope that, if some of these factors could be controlled through education and different sexual practices, the number of unmarried mothers could decrease.

**Desire for family unity**

Although some women were unwilling to marry because of bad experiences with men, others still desired marriage for the cultural acceptability. Culture pressures these women to get married. Although their parents were not role models concerning marriage, these women learned through social interaction that marriage is desirable. Several women noted that marriage would keep the family unified. Several women made such comments as the following.

Yes, I do want to get married especially to this guy I’m with because we are already staying together and I know what he likes.

I want to get married so I can stay with my husband nicely.

I do want to get married because I want to start my own family.

I want to get married so that I can stay with my family.

I want to get married because I’m already staying with him.
Yes, I want to marry him because we are already staying together.

I want to marry because I want my kids to stay with us: father and mother.

I do want to get married especially to this guy because he is the father of my kids.

A 25 year old woman who had two small children and was also raising her teenage brothers since the death of her parents wanted to get married for the following reason: “I do want to get married because I haven’t got parents. I want to start a family of my own.”

Desire to be a good parent

One woman who really wanted to go back to school reported that she wanted “to be a dignified mother.” Others saw that marriage would help their children. This was not the case for the majority or for those with children from different fathers. However, those who had only one child or the same father for all their children often reported that marriage would improve their children’s futures.

Yes, I want to get married so that I can start my own family and to build a bright future for my kids.

I do want to get married so that I can build a bright future for my kids.

The majority of these women had children as a result of unintended pregnancies, and yet they devote their lives to their children. Those who thought that marriage would help their children were willing to marry, even though they often had similar fears of those who did not desire marriage.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusions

Apartheid and urbanization have undermined traditional systems of support for mothers. The theory of social disorganization can be used to explain the disintegration of traditional family structure explaining how urbanization decreased social control and contributed to the breakdown of tribal cohesion. W.I. Thomas’ theory of social interaction also contributes to an explanation. Thomas argues that social situations that individuals define as real are real in their consequences. The mamas believed that there was little that could be done to better their situation. With little economic development, these women are isolated from educational and economic opportunities.

These single mothers are caught in a cycle of poverty. They often have children at a very young age, leading to children with different fathers. This factor combined with the poverty of their partners and thus inability to pay lobula, the fear of disease, lack of trust, and other factors lead to their remaining single. Thus, while poverty is one of the underlying factors leading to unmarried mothers, poverty also is a factor correlated to mothers remaining single. Social stratification is very apparent in South Africa even though apartheid has ended. There are layers of segregation that run deep and make research difficult. Segregation occurs across race, age, family, and income groups. Government and social programs have not been able to facilitate these mothers ability to escape poverty. Over sixty percent of the African population in South Africa is living in poverty. Of this, the Xhosa are hit especially hard. The Eastern Cape Province has the highest unemployment rates; there was only one factory in the East London area.
In the past several years, various international and non-government associations have begun research projects designed to better understand the cultural reasons for the low number of South Africans using birth control or protection, the spread of AIDS, community understanding of AIDS, and sexual violence against young women. These were all factors contributing to the Salem mothers’ remaining single.

A report issued in 2001 reported a significant drop in South Africa’s fertility level to 2.9 children per women. At first glance this statistic seems to report progress. However, the main causes for the drop were “poverty, racial and gender inequality and the fragmentation of society…Women are bearing the brunt of the AIDS epidemic” (Thompson, 2001). There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy combined with men’s refusal of protected sex. This leaves these young women vulnerable. South African culture places the responsibility of raising the children solely on the mothers. The Womens’ Health Project is an organization dedicated to helping women take control of their reproductive behavior (Thompson). The women at Salem were being taught empowerment in their relationships and I saw many begin to realize that they had choices regarding whether or not to become mothers. With disease rampant and young pregnancies leading to children with different fathers, these mothers were not marrying.

Salem Baby Centre required the women to prevent their next pregnancies by teaching correct use of birth control pills. Since 2001, there has been a push in South Africa to educate women about protected sexual practices. There is a growing interest in the female condom, where women can control their risk of infection and pregnancy. Young girls between the ages of 15 and 21 are still not accepting of the female condom because they find it unattractive. However, for the target audience of women between 24
and 30, the female condom has allowed greater control over sexual practices for the women (South, 2003). By teaching women how to avoid unwanted pregnancies, single motherhood may be reduced.

Another factor leading to single Xhosa mothers with children from different fathers that is currently being addressed is sexual violence toward young women. Four professors, two from the University of London and two from the University of Natal have created a research project designed to stop the spreading of HIV caused by sexual violence in schools. Female pupils are often victims of sexual violence committed by “male pupils, male teachers and outsiders from the schools” (Hosken, 2001). Recognizing the sexual violence against young women and attempting to prevent it, groups like this are indirectly limiting the number of single mothers who will have children from different fathers.

Maternal education is important in any society as a means of empowering women and benefiting future generations. Thus, although economic opportunities may remain unaltered by increasing the educational opportunities for mothers, the benefits resulting from being able to read and understand sources of available resources and the ability to better educate children would outweigh the costs. Many American studies show that marital status makes a huge difference in poverty and as such, African-Americans are often shown as being more impoverished due to the high numbers of single mothers. Brown et al (2003) argue that this poverty results from lower access to public cash transfers rather than purely matrimonial status (100). I feel that these two factors interact in the case of the women studied for this research. The single mothers interviewed were
not able to access government funding offered due to their inability to read. This inability is associated with their race and economic situation.

In summary, although many factors lead to Xhosa mothers remaining single which leads to poverty, there are groups seeking to improve the situation of women and protect these women. Additional longitudinal studies would enhance understanding of these women. Also, a study of the men involved and their perspectives would allow a deeper understanding of single motherhood. I loved the experience that I had while in South Africa, and learned so much from these women. They were in terrible situations and yet were able to be positive. On my last day, a group of the women had me sit in a corner and they sang and danced for me. Knowing that I would be going home to college and a future filled with opportunity, I was impressed with the resiliency of these women. Although there was no foreseeable end to their poverty, they remained optimistic and giving. As I listened to them sing for me, I realized they were giving me the only thing that they had to share.

On a trip to Mdantsane, the local township, I brought some sausage and bread to share with the family that I was going to visit. They invited all their neighbors over. The Xhosa people may be impoverished, but they taught me a lot about sharing and looking after the needs of those around me. I felt so strongly that this giving nature was a part of their culture that had withstood the powerful influences of apartheid. Other areas were not able to emerge as unscathed.

In conclusion, the reasons for mothers remaining single include the following: AIDS, lack of married role models, bad experiences with men, poverty from unemployment and limited education which results in the inability to pay lobula, and
different fathers of their children stemming from young sexual activity, lack of education about birth control, and rape are all factors leading to mothers not marrying. Many of these factors stem from the devastating poverty resulting from apartheid and the related urbanization. The government is setting up programs and grants to aid single mothers, but many are ineffective in the face of such extreme poverty.

Although there are many factors leading mothers to remain single, the interviews with these women revealed that many still desired marriage. Culturally families are still valued. Based on these findings, for these women, better access to education in addition to more knowledge about birth control and family planning practices would have delayed pregnancies and perhaps allowed these women to avoid their current situations. They love their children and would not give them up. However, most admitted they wished they had not become pregnant so early. These women need to feel empowered to avoid situations that further limit their opportunity.


Appendix A

Khuntulwa is a 33 year old Xhosa woman with four children, ranging from nine years to seven months. She had no intention of becoming pregnant with her first, didn’t use birth control and was not married to the baby’s father. The father did pay for the child. All of her children have the same father. She didn’t intend on getting pregnant with the youngest child, but still wasn’t using any form of birth control. She wants to get married to her boyfriend because he has fathered all of her children and “doesn’t want [my] kids to stay with someone who is no longer a father to them because by doing that I’m just giving them problems”. Khuntulwa doesn’t have a job and lives in Duncan Village in a shack with her mom, sister, brother, and children and has for the past eight years. Her family living with her doesn’t help with the finances. She lived with her grandmother while growing up. Her parents weren’t officially married, but they did have a Xhosa traditional wedding where there are no wedding rings, no marriage certificate, and you can divorce without going to the courts. Although they are both still alive, they don’t live together. She doesn’t live with the father, and although he paid for the baby, she doesn’t receive any financial support from him. She sees her boyfriend at least 2-3 times per week. She finished standard 7 in school and then had to quit because “my mom didn’t manage to take me to school anymore because she was suffering” and doesn’t feel she can go back to school because she cannot afford to pay for school and has kids that she needs to care for.

Nomthanidado is a 25 year old Xhosa woman with one child who is seven months old. She wanted to get pregnant and was therefore not using any birth control. She is not
married to her son’s father; he did not pay for the child and is currently offering no financial support. Nomthanidado doesn’t want to marry him. She just wants to “build a home for [her] child” because she feels that “my home looks different from the other houses”. She didn’t respond to the question about how often she sees the father of her child. She was able to finish schooling up through standard 10, but doesn’t have the money to finish her studies. She doesn’t want to go to school now because, although currently unemployed, she wants to find a job to support her baby. Eventually she would like to go back to school when her child is old enough to leave alone. She has lived with her uncle and his wife in a shack in East London for the past three years. Her parents both died when she was very young, and she was raised by her father’s sister.

Lindiwe is a 26 year old woman with two children, three years and five months old. She was not married or using protection at the birth of her first child, and reported using protection when she became pregnant with her baby. Her boyfriend did not pay for either child. Lindiwe would like to marry her boyfriend because “this guy likes his children very much” and because “we are deeply in love”. She is currently living with him and sees him everyday. He is currently not offering any financial assistance and they have lived for the past four years with her boyfriend’s brother in a shack in Duncan Village. None are able to offer any financial assistance. She dropped out of school in standard 4 because she was pregnant and cannot return because she “hasn’t got the money”. Lindiwe would like to go back to school because she feels that “you can’t get a job if you’re not well educated”. She was raised by her grandmother because her parents, who were never married, had a fight and broke up. They are both still alive, but don’t live together.
Nozukile is 31 years old and is one of the few married women who came to Salem Baby Care Centre. She had her first child when she was 17, but was married at the time and thereby not using any protection. Her husband paid for the children and they live together in a shack in Duncan Village, where they have lived for the past six years. She has four children, ages 14, 10, 5, and 7 months. Her husband is not contributing financially because he is not working. She was unable to attend school and only completed sub A level schooling. Rather than desiring to go to school herself, Nozukile would like to take her children to school. She feels that she has a poor memory and by the time she’d be able to go back to school, she’d be too old. Her parents were married and she was raised living with them. Her parents no longer are together since her father passed away.

Zodwa M. always tried to speak English to me, and wanted to respond to the questionnaire in English, but ended up filling it out in Xhosa. She is 24 and has one child who is three months old. She didn’t want to be pregnant but wasn’t using any kind of protection. She is not married to the father of this child, but would like to be so “I can stay with my husband nicely”. However, she is currently no longer seeing the father of her baby, who didn’t pay for the baby or currently provide any financial assistance. Although they don’t see each other anymore, she wants to marry him. Her reason: “I want to get married to this guy. I already have his baby so we can trust each other and we mustn’t get infected with other disease”. Zodwa currently lives with her baby and her brother in Duncan Village and has for the last five years. She was raised by her grandmother. Her parents were married, and only one is still alive. She finished Standard 8 in school but there wasn’t money for her to continue. She would like to go
back and get an education so that she could get a job more easily, but there is no one that could watch her baby.

Ntomoizonono is 34 years old and has five children. The oldest is 19, making her just 15 when she had her first child. The other children are 17, 9, 8 and 2 months respectively. With her first child, she did not want to become pregnant and was using birth control. She was not married and the father did not pay for the baby. Her children have different fathers. She is no longer seeing the father of her baby, and that child was also not planned, though she wasn’t using birth control. That father didn’t pay for his child either. Ntomoizonono lives with her sister and children in Duncan Village in a shack, and has for the past 11 months. She didn’t want to get married because she said: “I am already old and I have too many kids….My kids have different fathers.” Her parents were married, and while growing up she was raised by her mother. Both parents died when she was still very young. This made going to school difficult, and she quit after standard 6. She doesn’t want to go to school because she is suffering financially, but would someday like to go back. However, she doesn’t know if that is possible.

Nomuola is 31 years old and has two children ages five and 1 year-18 months. Neither child was intended nor was she using birth control at both conceptions. The father is the same for both children, but didn’t pay for the kids. He currently provides some financial support, though she later contradicted that statement. The live together in a shack in Duncan Village with their children and have lived there for the past seven years. She wants to marry her boyfriend because he really loves their kids and she loves him. She was raised by both of her parents, but only her mother is still alive. Her parents were married. She finished standard 2 in school and then had to quit because she was suffering
financially. She doesn’t think that she’ll go back to school because she wants to look for a job to support her kids.

**Nosisa X.** is 23 and has two children, ages six and one. She didn’t intend on becoming pregnant either time, and wasn’t using protection. The father of her children is in jail all the time, so although she’d like to marry him, it is difficult. She also reported the inability to pay lobula as a reason for being unable to marry him; he doesn’t have the money to pay her parents. He does contribute some financially. She visits her boyfriend in jail regularly, but has lived in a shack in Duncan village for the past seven years with her mother, sister, brother, uncle, and her children. She lived with her uncle while growing up. Her parents are both alive, but never married for reasons unknown to Nosisa. They don’t live together.

**Ntombethemba** is 22 years old and has a two year old son. She wanted to become pregnant and wasn’t using any birth control. However, she doesn’t want to marry the father of her baby because he hasn’t “got any progress.” He didn’t pay for the child, but currently provides some financial assistance. She dropped out of school after standard 9 because she was pregnant. She’d like to go back because she really likes schooling and feels that it is really important nowadays. She lives with her child in a shack in Duncan Village where she has lived for the past 13 years. She used to live with her grandmother. Her parents are married, but only her mother is still alive. Although she doesn’t want to get married to her baby’s father, she’d like to get married someday to start her own family.

**Thobeka D.** is 34 and has two children, ages 12 and 2. At the time of her first child, she wasn’t married and didn’t intend on becoming pregnant, though she wasn’t using birth
control. She married that man and had another child—this one was planned. The father paid for both children. He currently lives in the West Cape, so they don’t see each other anymore. He is not working. She lives in a house in Amalinda, a nearby town and has lived there with her brother, his wife, and her children for the past six months. She was raised by her parents who are married and still remain together. Thobeka completed training and received a senior primary teacher’s diploma. She doesn’t have money to further her studies, but would like to go to school because jobs are very scarce, especially for the uneducated.

Nolundi is 33 and has two children, ages eight and two. She intended on becoming pregnant with the both and wasn’t using protection. The father paid for both children and currently helps with finances. She lives with her boyfriend and their two children in a shack in Duncan Village, where they have lived for eight years. She’d like to marry him because “when I look at my kids they seem happy to be with him” and “because we are already staying together and I know what he likes”. She grew up with her mother and her parents were married, but only her mom is still alive. Nolundi attended school through standard 7 and had to quit because her parents were suffering financially. She’d like to go back to school because she is struggling financially and thinks she will continue to do so unless she gets more education.

Nosisa M. is 25 and has two children, ages six and two. They have different fathers; neither paid for the babies. She wants to marry her current boyfriend because they “have a baby”, but “he is not working.” They live together with both her children in a shack in Duncan Village, where she has lived for the past five years. Her parents are both alive and are married, but no longer stay together. Nosisa was raised by her grandmother. She
finished school through standard 8, and was unable to continue because “there was not enough money for me.” She’d like to go back because she is still young, but she doesn’t have the money right now.

**Boniswa S.** is 23 years old and has two children, ages six and two. Neither child was planned for although Boniswa was not using protection. The father paid for both children. She has lived for “many years” in a shack with her boyfriend, whom she sees daily, and children in Ziphunzana. She would like to marry her boyfriend because he is the father of her kids and she wants her children to stay with their mother and father. Boniswa finished school through Standard 5 and dropped out because she was not able to pay. She would like to go back to school because she feels that “you can’t get a job if you are not well educated” and she wants to improve her English to get a job. Her parents were married, but are both deceased.

**Zoliswa M.** had a hard life. She was raped by her uncle, and as a result became HIV positive and pregnant. She is 22 years old and has a three year old son. She still sees her uncle sometimes. Zoliswa was raised by her grandparents and continues to live with them and her son in a house in Duncan Village. She doesn’t want to go back to school because she doesn’t have anyone to pay the expenses and she wants to look after her grandparents and child. Zoliswa had to drop out of school in Standard 8 because she was pregnant. Her parents were married, but passed away. She doesn’t want to marry her uncle—he is already married. She also doesn’t want to get married ever: she has seen through the experiences of other that men are dishonest; they come home late and sometimes just stop coming—often they are seeing another woman. Her son died of AIDS shortly after I left South Africa.
Nomsa T. is 35 and has three children. They are ten, four and two years old. They all have the same father and all five live together in a shack in C.C. Lord where they have lived for many years. The children were not planned, though she wasn’t using protection. Her boyfriend paid for the children and currently provides a little financial assistance. She would like to marry him because the children are all his and she doesn’t want “to have kids to another man.” She’d like her children to stay with their father to give them the happiness that they deserve. She was raised by her parents, who are married and still live together. Nomsa would like to go back to school to have a bright future and increase her ability to get a job. She dropped out of school after Standard 7 because she was pregnant.

Victoria Zakade is half-Xhosa, half-Coloured. She is 29 years old and has two children ages 13 and 4. Neither child was planned nor protection used. The two children have different fathers, and Victoria doesn’t want to get married because the father of her baby would not accept her older child. She doesn’t see him anymore. Neither father paid for their children. Her older child doesn’t live with her currently. She lives with her aunt and baby in a shack in Duncan Village where she has lived for the past four years. She was raised by her mother. Her parents were married but her father is no longer alive. Victoria would like to go to night school so she could work during the day to be able to support her children. She’d finished through Standard 7 and dropped out because there was no one to take her to school.
Appendix B

PICTURES!!!

The difference in education is shown in the township school to the left and an expensive school above—had a cheerleading squad.

Below are some pictures from more rural areas.
This is the choir from the local township taken in Pretoria.

These are the women who staff Salem Baby Care Centre. Right to left: Diddy, Tina, Ria, Dorothy, Paula, Patience, Tobeka, and Ronit.

Below: The mothers who utilized Salem tended a garden in the front lawn which added vegetables to the meal provided by Salem.
**Literacy Class:** Taught by Leslie-Ann Gibson (above left). Vuyiswa demonstrates how to make sherbet in a business class (above right). Below: literacy class students.
The mothers did various crafts and I taught several how to use a sewing machine. Nosisa (right) became very good.
My favorite place at Salem was at the Crèche with the children.
Appendix C

PARTICIPANT: ................................................................. NO.: ......................

Self:

• How old are you? ..............................................................

• How many children do you have? .....................................

If only one child, fill out the section for “Youngest child” and skip the “Firstborn” section.

First born: Name/Age ..............................................................

• Did you intend on becoming pregnant with the first born? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Were you using birth control? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Were you married to the baby’s father? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Did he pay for the child? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Other children:
  • Name/Age: .................................................................
  • Name/Age: .................................................................
  • Name/Age: .................................................................
  • Name/Age: .................................................................

• Do your children have the same father? Yes ☐ No ☐

Youngest child: Name/Age ............................................................

• How old is your youngest child? ...........................................

• Did you intend on becoming pregnant? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Were you using any birth control? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Are you married to the father of this child? Yes ☐ No ☐
• Do you want to be? Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, why aren’t you? If no, why not? ............
............................................................................................................................ ............

• How often do you see the child’s father? .................................................................

• Does he stay with you? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Did he pay for the baby? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Does he provide any financial assistance now? Yes ☐ No ☐

Schooling:

• What is the last standard you completed? .................................................................

• Why did you stop going to school? .................................................................

• Would you like to go back to school? Yes ☐ No ☐ Why? ...............................

• Do you think you ever will go back to school? Yes ☐ No ☐ Why? .............................
............................................................................................................................ ☐ ☐

• Do you have a job? Yes ☐ No ☐ Where? .................................................................

Accommodation:

• Where do you live? .................................................................................................

• Type of dwelling? .................................................................................................

• How long have you been there? ............................................................................

Extended family:

• Do you have other family members living with you? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Do they help with the finances? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Please list the people who stay with you (ie Mom, Dad, 3 children… etc.):
............................................................................................................................ 

• Whom did you live with while growing up--guardians? ........................................
• Were your parents married? Yes ☐ No ☐

• If no, why not? ...........................................................................................................

• Are both of your parents still alive? Yes ☐ No ☐ Only one ☐

• If yes, are they still together? ......................................................................................

If married:

• Does your husband live with you? Yes ☐ No ☐

• Does your husband work? ...........................................................................................

If unmarried:

• Do you ever plan on getting married? Yes ☐ No ☐

• What are your main reasons? ........................................................................................
  ........................................................................................................................................

Thank you so much for contributing to this study! Your input is greatly appreciated.
Appendix D

Igama lakho: ................................................................. NO.: ......................

Self:

• Mingaphi iminyaka Yakho? .................................................................

• Bangaphi abantwana bakho? .................................................................

Ukuba unomntwana omnye, bhala le yomntwane wokwgqibela uyitsibe le yomntwana wokuqala.

Umntwana wokuqala: Igama neminyaka yomntwana .................................................................

• Ubumfuna umntwana? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ubucwangcisa? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ubutshatile notata wontwana? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ukuhlawulile? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Abanye abantwana onabo:

  • Igama neminyaka yomntwana: .................................................................
  • Igama neminyaka yomntwana: .................................................................
  • Igama neminyaka yomntwana: .................................................................
  • Igama neminyaka yomntwana: .................................................................
  • Igama neminyaka yomntwana: .................................................................

• Abantwana bakho banotata omnye? Ewe □ Hayi □

Umntwana wokugqibela: ................................................................................

• Ubumfuna lo mntwana? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ubucwangcisa? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Utshatile nalo tata walomntwana? Ewe □ Hayi □
• Phofu uyafuna ukutshata naye, ukuba uyafuna ngoba, ukuba awufuni ngoba? ..........................

• Nibonana nini notata womntwana? ...........................................................................................

• Nihlala kunye? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Wayekuhlulile? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Uyondla ngoku? Ewe □ Hayi □

Isikolo:

• Uphele kubani esikolweni? ....................................................................................................

• Kwakutheni uze uyekke? ...........................................................................................................

• Uyafuna ukubuyela esikolweni? Ewe □ Hayi □ Ngoba? ..........................................................

• Ucinga ukuba kwiminyaka ezayo ungbuyela esikolweni? Ewe Hayi □ Ngoba? .............................

• Uyaphangela? Ewe □ Hayi □ Uphangela phi? ............................................................................

Indawo yokuhlala:

• Uhlala phi? ...................................................................................................................................

• Uhlala egalini okanye endlini? ........................................................................................................

• Kulixesha elingakanani uhlala apho? ..............................................................................................

Abanye abantu ohlala nabo:

• Bakhona abanye abantu bakowenu ohlala nabo? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Bayakunceda ngemali? Ewe □ Hayi □
• Bhala abantu ohlala nabo umzekelo, umama wakho, utata wakho, abantwana njalo-njalo…

• Ngokuya ubumncinci ubukhulela kubani? .................................................................

• Abazali bakho babetshatile? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ukuba babengatshatanga kwakutheni? .................................................................

• Abazali bakho basaphila? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Ukuba basaphila basahlala kunye? .................................................................

Ukuba utshatile:

• Ingaba usahlala nomyeni wakho? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Uyaphangela umyeni wakho? ........................................................................

Ukuba awutshatanga:

• Unazo lnjongo zokutshata? Ewe □ Hayi □

• Zeziphi izizathu ezibangela ukuba ufune okanye ungafuni ukutshata? ................

Thank you so much! Enkosi!