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Single Mothers and Religiosity

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Sociology

by

Natalie Judean Sheets

May 2014

Dr. Kelly Foster, Chair

Dr. Joseph Baker

Dr. Martha Copp

Keywords: Mother, Marital Status, Religiosity, Economics, Parenting

ABSTRACT

Single Mothers and Religiosity

by

Natalie J. Sheets

This study examines single mothers compared to coupled mothers and the differences in their public and private practices of religiosity. Data come from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. The study explores the influence of marital status between single and coupled mothers by using regression models to control for income, age, education, and race. Findings suggest that, while there are differences in single and coupled mothers in both their public and private practices of religiosity, the cause of these differences is being driven by other social factors rather than marital status alone. Income, age, education, and race account for most of the differences between single and coupled mother's religious practices.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother, Bobbie Sheets

For supporting me in pursuing my dreams

For encouraging me and believing in me when I struggled to believe in myself

Your love and sacrifices for me made me who I am

You will always be the best part of me

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The role of a single mother can be very different from that of a married mother. Single mothers often have highly stressful lives, and one way mothers deal with negative situations is by using their religious beliefs and practices as coping mechanisms (Sullivan 2008). Single parents and coupled parents face different types of stress when it comes to parenting. When a child is sick and needs to be cared for at home, married parents have more flexibility because there are two people to share the responsibilities, while single parents are the sole caregivers and usually the only one bringing income into the household, so staying home with a sick child is not always an option (Vanden Heuvel 1993). For some mothers, spirituality offers an opportunity for them to get involved in supportive relationships with people through their church (Brodsky 1999). Pearce and Axinn (1998) find individual's social relationships are drastically affected by the extent to which they internalize their religion. Having supportive social relationships within their religious faith would possibly be an asset to single mothers. Literature shows that 7 out of 10 American adults find purpose and meaning in life because of their religious faith (Sullivan 2008).

According to Sorenson, Grindstaff, and Turner (1995) having a child within marriage is considered an expectation or social norm in most religious communities, and mothers who are married before having a child may face less stress than non-married mothers. Religion gives parents certain roles and encourages them to raise their children in a certain way (Pearce and Axinn 1998). As a result, parent-child relationships may be molded by religious teachings through private and public practices. Through these practices, mothers may be able to “socialize their children to believe and practice in ways similar to their own” (Pearce 2007: 1228). The purpose of this research is to look at the differences between married mothers and

non-married mothers with respect to religiosity. If there are differences present, this project will examine them to see if it is marital status or other contributing factors that have an impact on religiosity measures.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of Economics on Single Mothers

Economic Challenges for Single Mothers

There is significant difference in the average economic status of single mothers and coupled mothers. A single mother is more likely to be on welfare and work a low-skill job than a coupled mother (Edin and Lein 1997), and welfare is common among single mothers with and without a low income job (Harris 1993). In some “case work-based solutions,” such as trainings, childcare and insurance programs are used to protect the crucial benefits for these mothers (Edin and Lein 1997). There are also guidelines by which single mothers get benefits. For example, widows are the only single mothers who are allowed public benefits, and these benefits enable them to have full-time child care (McLanahan, Astone, and Marks 1989). Low-income single mothers end up being economically dependent on welfare for much longer time frames than other groups of the poor (McLanahan et al. 1989). Because of this, poor single mothers are often stigmatized as “welfare mothers.” Being a welfare mother comes with a certain stigma and disadvantage, and without a job these mothers are isolated from “mainstream society” (McLanahan et al. 1989). Neither welfare nor a low-income job typically provides the amount of money needed to meet household financial obligations (Edin and Lein 1997). If single mothers do not have the amount of money they need, their children are more likely to be worse off (Edin and Lein 1997).

Economic Stressors

Many components lead to stress in single mothers lives and economic stressors are a big part of those. Being unemployed and underemployed is related to the four big hardships that single mothers face: bill paying hardship, health hardship, food hardship, and a housing

hardship (Eamon and Wu 2011). Because of unemployment and being underemployed, around “60 percent of children living in mother-only families are impoverished, compared with only 11 percent in two-parent families” (Olson and Banyard 1993). Paying for and finding reliable child care providers are sources of stress for low-income single mothers, inevitably affecting their ability to sustain employment (Angel and Lein 2006). Mothers are more likely to be under stress if they cannot adequately provide for their family. However, it is not only unemployed mothers who are under stress. Parents who are employed have to take off work on occasions for multiple reasons involving their children (Vanden Heuvel 1993), which affects their income and causes stress. Single mothers who are employed are more likely compared to coupled mothers to have poorer health and to not do as well financially (Baxtor and Alexander 2000).

Using Faith to Deal with Economic Stressors

Many social factors are necessary to include when analyzing the mental and physical health of single mothers. This includes public assistance, employment, education, and employment benefits, as well as child care, neighborhoods, social support, and stigma (Broussard, Joseph, and Thompson 2012). Thirteen percent of white single mothers, compared to 8 percent of white women overall, suffer from depression (Davies, Avison, and McAlpine 1997). The increased chance of having poor mental health for a single mother is directly related to greater economic hardships (Broussard et al. 2012). As said by Jayakody and Strauffer (2000:617),

The likelihood of working is 25 percent lower for those with a psychiatric disorder. Mental health problems may prevent women from undertaking the

tasks necessary to find employment, or women with these problems may lack the self-confidence needed to take on new challenges.

Single mothers who do not have solid social support typically suffer from more stress, which leads to poor mental and physical health (Broussard et al. 2012). Because single mothers tend to be more socially isolated, they do not receive as much support in their parenting or for their emotional state. As a result they do not have as stable of a social network as married mothers do (Broussard et al. 2012). Studies show that the mental health of adult women is improved by them being deeply invested in religion (Sorenson et al. 1995).

In response to the economic, social, and psychological challenges faced by single mothers, some turn to faith as a way to deal with stress. Susan Crawford Sullivan notes in her study of single mothers that, “mothers found their faith to be a powerful tool in helping them to calm down and deal productively with rude customers or difficult bosses or co-workers” (2006: 106). Different types of stressors such as childcare, transportation, and housing are also dealt with through faith by mothers (Sullivan 2006). Having faith does not automatically mean the mothers regularly attend religious services, but faith can be used as an effective coping strategy in that the higher the attendance rate, the more stress is reduced (Sorenson et al.1995).

The Impact of Race, Education, and Age

Race

The single mothers who fall under the category of being underclass are usually disadvantaged minority groups. More black single mothers classify as underclass than white single mothers (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989). There is a drastic difference in the number of black children and the number of white children under the age of 18 who will be in a single

mother family at some point during their life. Andrew Billingsley and Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez (1998) argue that African American communities turn to the church when they go through extending crisis for different types of support. The African American church offers guidance and leadership both spiritually and beyond. It is also used as an important way to keep black families strong, promoting healthy relationships between spouses and teaching children how to be wholesome (Billingsley and Morrison-Rodriguez 1998). According to Mattis (2002) African American women use religion and spirituality to find meaning and cope with different situations in their lives. There are different ways African American women use religion and spirituality to accomplish this and they include but are not limited to acceptance, recognizing purpose and destiny, and confronting limitations. Prayer is used as an important coping mechanism for African Americans, but it is found that African Americans with poor health, with a low level of personal mastery, or who are women use it more (Ellison and Taylor 1996).

Education

Women who are enrolled in school are less likely to become a single mother than those who are not (Upchurch, Lillard, and Panis 2002). This is most likely because women try to organize their life and follow a certain sequence of attaining life goals because it is more difficult to take on the role of mother and student at the same time (Elder 1995). When looking at the life course patterns of women concerning education and motherhood, a few patterns emerge. When White or Hispanic women leave school at lower levels of educational attainment, they have a significantly higher risk of becoming pregnant than other White and Hispanic women who are still in school (Upchurch et al. 2002). The risk of a black woman getting pregnant before she is married is the same regardless of school enrollment (Upchurch

et al. 2002). Women who become pregnant before marriage are less likely to pursue higher education level.

Age

Along with race and education being factors of some single mothers falling into the underclass, the age of a single mother plays an important role in determining her likely economic status. Women who become single mothers when they are older are economically more similar to teen mothers than women married of the same age (Foster, Jones, and Hoffman 1998). White single mothers who are at least 25 years old or older, who did not have children when they were teenagers, are economically better off than other single mothers (Foster et al.1998). The age of a single mother when she starts having children is also related to the total number of children had throughout the life course. Women who had a child when they were teenagers and then had another child in their post-adolescent years have extremely low economic status and are more prone to have poor economic outcomes. According to Hoffman and Foster “more than half of these women have an income below the poverty line, and nearly half receive welfare” (1997: 140).

Using Religion to Cope with Parenting Stress

Poverty Related Stress

According to Broussard, Joseph, and Thompson (2012:191),

For poor single mothers, poverty-related stress includes worries related to work, housing, food insecurity, discrimination, stigma, exposure to violence, victimization, and illness...In short, low-income single mothers are a vulnerable population who are more likely than their married counterparts to suffer from mental and physical health disorders.

Lack of employment and cost of childcare are causes of poor mental health among single mothers (Broussard et al. 2012). The fact that more single mothers with a low economic status live in low-quality neighborhoods (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989) suggests that more single mothers are experiencing extra stress because of the potential risks involved such as violence and bad environment (Broussard et al. 2012). Another important stress factor is a lack of social support. Many components factor into this: Single mothers who are unemployed are less social, and ones who are in low-paying jobs have little flex time to be social outside of work (Broussard et al. 2012). To meet the expectations of being an employed single mother, women are forced to compromise their social life (Quinn and Allen 1989). Social ties are important for single mothers to maintain because they can act as a support mechanism. Churches can allow for beneficial social ties to be made with people of similar situations (Pearce and Axinn 1998). A consequence of single mothers being unable to make social ties is they may become isolated.

Isolation

The literature tells us that the isolation of single mothers goes beyond not having a job, but that it also involves where they live and what kind of place they live in (McLanahan et al. 1989). Single mother families are more likely to live in poor urban neighborhoods and are more susceptible to the social stigmas associated with living in poor neighborhoods (McLanahan et al. 1989). However, single mothers are more likely to move out of poor neighborhoods than they are to move into them (South and Crowder 1998). Two methods single mothers typically use to get out of poor neighborhoods are marriage and employment (South and Crowder 1998). In general, the stigma associated with living in poor

neighborhoods isolates single mothers. Some women use the church to help build supportive relationships with people, (Brodsky 1999) which may help them to not feel as isolated.

Poor neighborhoods as well as race play a significant role in poor single mother families. A much larger number of poor, black single mothers live in areas with higher numbers of poor families compared to white single mothers. As a result more black single mothers face isolation from the stigma associated with living in a poor neighborhood. Less than 5 percent of white single mother families live in a poor area, while 34 percent of the black single mother families live in poor areas (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989). This means there are more black families experiencing some type of isolation than that of white families (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1988). In general, black students in single mother homes end up in high schools that are not as good of quality as others (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1988). Also, black students have less of a problem with single women having babies than white students do (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1988). Both white and black children who are from a home with only a mother “are more accepting of the single-parent status than children from two-parent families” (McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989).

Material Hardships

Single mothers also face a material hardship as a result of unemployment and underemployment. The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) shows 41 percent of single mothers have a bill paying hardship, 38 percent of them had a health hardship, 33 percent had a food hardship, and 25 percent had a housing hardship (Eamon and Wu 2011). Single mother families who fall under these conditions do not live the expected life style of an average American family able to have their basic needs met, and they are at a higher risk of falling into the lower underclass (Eamon and Wu 2011). Material support from churches,

usually in the form of food and clothing, can help alleviate some of the daily stress imposed by these hardships (Brodsky 1999).

Daily Stress

Single mothers who have young children have very high levels of daily stress (Olson and Banyard 1993). There are different categories of daily stress that single mothers endure. Stress from their children was mothers' highest reported source of stress (Olson and Banyard 1993). These could be from different events involving the behaviors of the child such as defiance and rule violations. These stressors are more severe to single mothers because in a single parent home there is not the benefit of having a partner to share the responsibility of managing children. Some of the stressors mothers face such as financial stress, stress from the management of the household, and work stress will stay with them on into future relationships. For single mothers who face a variety of stressors throughout their daily lives chronic stress becomes an issue (Olson and Banyard 1993). Not only does religion play a role as a coping strategy for mothers to use to adjust to the stress of daily life through prayer (Sorenson et al.1995), it also helps by giving social support to mothers (Broussard and Thompson 2012).

Religious Involvement

Religious involvement can also help to strengthen family relationships and support close interpersonal relationships, as well as benefit the child. Research shows that youth benefit from being more religiously involved in many areas of their life including, diet, exercise, and sleep (Regnerus 2003). Youth become more religiously involved largely through their families. Brody and Flor (1998) found that maternal patterns were related to religious involvement because mothers who were more religiously involved had higher

mother-child relationship quality and had more maternal involvement in their child's school. Religious services allow families to have special time to spend together and provide them with a moral education for children (Edgell 2006). Religious involvement not only strengthens family relationships, but it also builds relationships outside of the family through social interaction with others who have similar values and shared beliefs. It is likely that mothers will develop social ties to individuals within the church who are similar to themselves. For instance, married couples will have social ties with other married couples and parents will have ties with other parents (Pearce and Axinn 1998). These new relationships can give mothers support, resources, and help in their parenting. To get the most out of these resources mothers may attend church functions more frequently and for a greater period of time (Petts 2012). By mothers attending church services more frequently, they are more likely to build up a support network that they can turn to for help in different areas of their parenting.

Parenting

Religion and Parenting

Religion tends to become more important to people after they have children (Sullivan 2008). There are many different reasons for this. One reason is having a religious institution to help in the upbringing of the child. As a result of mothers attending services more frequently and being more involved in a church, they are exposing not only their children to the religious teachings but also themselves. Because of this they may internalize these teachings and use them in their parenting (Petts 2012). Parents look to these institutions for help in teaching traditions, morals, and values to their children (Edgell 2006). The religious institutions also help to provide a sense of community for children (Sullivan 2008). Other

benefits parents seek are passing down beliefs from one generation to the next and teaching children how to cope with stress. According to the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC) the church is used to strengthen the black family (CNBC 1995). For the CNBC this goes beyond individual churches and spreads out to groups and communities of churches. The job of helping establish stronger spousal relationships, teaching abstinence, and counseling teen-agers is seen as a collective concern that takes more than one individual church (CNBC 1995). Children whose parents participate in religion are found to have better behavioral, emotional, and cognitive development compared to children whose parents did not participate in religion (Bartkowski, Xu, and Levin 2008). Sullivan found that mothers use religion to help build their children's self-esteem and give them "a sense of self-efficacy stemming from religious beliefs and prayer" (2008:170). The literature tells that parents with highly religiosity and also use high authoritative parenting tend to have children with higher levels of religiosity (Abar, Carter, and Winsler 2009).

Children of Single Mothers

As a whole, children who come from a single mother home are more likely to have lower educational attainment than children who come from a two parent home (Driscoll et al. 1999). Most teenage mothers are unmarried, but they still do not count as the majority of non-marital births. Only 30 percent of all nonmarital births are from teenagers (Driscoll et al. 1999). Most single mothers have their first child in their twenties (Driscoll et al. 1999). Marital births result in their children attaining higher education than that of parents who were never married, married before, or married after (Driscoll et al. 1999). There is a negative impact on children's educational attainment when they are raised in a single mother home from the age 0 to preschool compared to children who were living in a two parent home

during those years (Krein and Beller 1988). However, children who are raised to be highly religious in their life do better academically. They also tend to study better and are less likely to engage in behaviors considered risky than children who are less religious (Abar et al. 2009).

Single Mothers and the Church

Single parents who attend church are just as likely as other parents to involve their children in church activities. Single mothers who attend church want their children to be involved in church as well so they can be taught religious traditions and learn more about their own beliefs; however, according to Penny Edgell (2006) not all single mothers feel as if they fit into churches, which may keep them from involving their children more in church activities. In survey data Edgell collected about 22 percent of single parents felt that “if you’re not part of a married couple with children, you don’t fit in most churches or synagogues” (2006:56). This is a result of feeling as if churches cater more toward married couples who have children as opposed to single parents. Many churches are trying to reach a more diverse audience and appeal to more than just the traditional two parent family. Phrases used to invite people to gatherings are being changed to be more welcoming to different types of families including single mothers (Edgell 2006). For example, they are using community night instead of family night so that single parents feel more comfortable attending. A strategy used by churches to help bring different types of families in is emphasizing the idea of the church being one family and looking at the church as an extended family (Edgell 2006).

Single mothers face many different economic hardships in their lives (McLanahan, Astone, and Marks 1988). These hardships lead to stress that causes some mothers to turn to religion as a coping mechanism and as a way to help strengthen their family relationships

(Brody and Flor 1998; Sullivan 2006). While there is research on parents and single parents using religion and the church in their parenting, there is no research on the differences between married mothers versus non-married mothers in terms of their religious participation. This research examines the differences in married mothers compared to non-married mothers in terms of their formal religious engagements and their religious practices outside of the church.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Data Source and Sample

I analyzed data from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, looking specifically at differences between married mothers and non-married mothers and their religiosity. The Pew survey was conducted from May through August of 2007. The survey was conducted to see what Americans' religious beliefs and practices were and explored their social and political views. The Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) administered the surveys by telephone interviews to a sample of 35,556 adults. All participants were 18 years of age or older and lived in the United States. Random digit dial (RDD) methodology was used to get a nationally represented sample (Pew RLS).¹

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life was chosen for this research specifically because it was a religion based survey that included measures on how often respondents attended religious services, prayed, their beliefs on the Bible or other sacred texts, and how important religion was in their lives. The questionnaire also asked how often participants pray or read scripture with their children, how often they themselves read scriptures outside of religious services, and if they send their children to Sunday school or other religious educational programs. The Religious Landscape Survey also includes, marital status, gender, age, and how many children respondents have who are under 18 and currently living in their home.

¹ <http://www.religions.pewforum.org>

Analytic Strategy

My research focuses on married and non-married women who have a child under 18 living in their home. Using these measures, a variable for mother type was created. Preliminary analysis showed that there was a sample of 5,412 mothers in total, with 4,142 being married mothers and 1,242 being non-married mothers. The variable for non-married mothers included mothers who were never married, mothers who were divorced, and mothers who were separated. In order to avoid the data being skewed by mothers who were living with a partner, mothers who were widowed, and mothers who responded with don't know to the question regarding marital status were coded as missing. Widows were coded as missing because churches may respond differently to them than they would to a woman who was divorced or had a child before marriage, and widows receive economic benefits that other single mothers do not. Mothers who are living with a partner were coded missing because they will have a support system similar to a married mother in the home. There also may be stigma associated living with a partner outside of marriage that could skew the results, so I felt it was best to remove these individuals from analysis. I developed two hypotheses and they were tested using chi-square analyses to see if there are any significant differences between married mothers' versus non-married mothers in regards to facets of religiosity. OLS regression is then used to control for education, age, race, and income in order to see if marital status is the only contributor to any differences found. Lastly, binary logistic regressions were used to predict the odds of single mothers compared to married mother on being a member of a congregation, taking their child to Sunday school, and reading or praying with their child outside of a religious service.

Hypothesis 1: Single mothers will have lower levels of public religiosity than married mothers. These differences will be measured by looking at:

A: The differences in attending religious services.

B: Differences in being an official member of a church or house of worship.

C: Differences in participation in social activities or gatherings at a place of worship.

D: Differences in whether or not their children are sent to Sunday School or other educational programs.

E: Differences in participation in prayer and study groups.

This is based off of Edgells's (2006) findings that many single mothers do not feel as though they fit into churches because churches cater toward married couples. It is also based on the idea that non-married mothers may have a lack of help attending to the children when it comes to getting them ready for and to church.

Hypothesis 2: Single mothers are more likely than married mothers to engage in their faith and spirituality outside of the church. These differences will be examined with:

A: Differences in frequency of prayer.

B: Differences in how important religion is in their lives.

C: Differences in certainty of their belief in God.

D: The differences in frequency of reading scriptures outside of their religious services.

E: Differences in reading scripture with their children.

The hypothesis was formed because the literature shows that single mothers use private religion as a coping mechanism to handle the high levels of stress and deal with the extra responsibilities that come with being a single parent (Brody and Flor 1998; Sullivan 2006).

Outside of church non-married mothers may be more likely to use private religious practices

as a way to relieve some of the stress that comes from parenting (Sullivan 2008). Because non-married mothers do not have a partner to share in the stress of parenting, they may turn to prayer and reading scripture more often than a married mother to deal with their stress.

Measures Used

Independent Variable

The independent variable in this analysis is “Mother Type.” This is a categorical variable that was constructed using the variables for gender, whether or not the person had a child under 18 years of age currently living in her household, and marital status: (1) Married, (2) Not married.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables for these analyses include the following: 1. How often the respondent attends church: (1) more than once a week, (2) once a week, (3) once or twice a month, (4) a few times a year, (5) seldom, (6) never; 2. If the respondent was an official member of a local church or house of worship: (1) yes, (2) no; 3. How often respondent participated in social activities or other gatherings at their place of worship example: (1) at least once a week, (2) once or twice a month, (3) several times a year, (4) seldom, (5) never; 4. If respondent sends her children to Sunday school or other religious educational programs (1) yes, (2) no; 5. How often respondent participates in prayer groups, scripture study groups or religious education programs example: (1) at least once a week, (2) once or twice a month, (3) several times a year, (4) seldom, or (5) never; 6. How often the respondent prayed: (1) several times a day, (2) once a day, (3) a few times a week, (4) once a week, (5) a few times a month, (6) seldom, (7) never; 7. How important religion is in the respondent’s life: (1) very

important, (2) somewhat important, (3) not too important, (4) not at all important; 8. How certain the respondent was about her belief in God or a universal spirit: (1) absolutely certain, (2) fairly certain, (3) not too certain, (4) not at all certain; 9 How often the respondent reads scriptures outside of her religious services: (1) at least once a week, (2) once or twice a month, (3) several times a year, (4) seldom, (5) never; 10. How often respondent participates in prayer groups: (1) yes, (2) no.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Pearson chi-squared tests on all hypotheses indicated a statistically significant difference between married mothers and non-married mothers but only for some of the religious practices. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the percentage of married and non-married mothers in regards to different expression of religiosity. Table 1 reports the percentages of single and married mothers' public practices of religiosity. Married mothers attend religious services once a week 6 percent more than single mothers, but are only 2 percent more likely to be members of a congregation. Single mothers "never" participate in social activities at their house of worship 5 percent more than married mothers going from 16.7 percent 21.9 percent and they send their children to Sunday school less than married mothers. There were no statistically significant differences in mothers' levels of participation in prayer groups.

Table 1. Crosstabulations for Public Practices of Religiosity for Married and Non-married Mothers

Variable	Married	Not Married
Attendance***		
More than once a week	18.2%	17.8%
Once a week	29.3%	23.2%
More than once a week	17.2%	17.8%
A few times a year	16.9%	18.6%
Seldom	11.9%	15.3%
Never	6.4%	7.2%
Member		
Yes	67.3%	65.6%
No	32.7%	34.4%
Participate in Social Activities***		
At least once a week	14.7%	15.0%
Once or twice a month	26.8%	26.9%
Several times a year	24.6%	20.3%
Seldom	17.2%	15.9%
Never	16.7%	21.9%
Send Child to Sunday School*		
Yes	65.6%	61.7%
No	34.4%	38.3%
Participate in Prayer Group		
At least once a week	27.2%	27.6%
Once or twice a week	9.7%	10.9%
Several times a year	9.4%	8.4%
Seldom	16.5%	15.3%
Never	37.2%	37.8%
*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001		

Table 2 reports the percentages of single and married mothers' private practices of religiosity. Table 2 shows that single mothers pray several times a day at a significantly higher rate than married mothers, with over a 7 percent difference. Married mothers read scripture outside of religious services less than single mothers do, with a 3 percent difference in the categories of at least once a week, once or twice a week, and never. There were no statistically significant differences on how important religion is to the mothers, the mothers certainty of their belief in God, or praying or reading scripture with their children outside of religious services.

Table 2. Crosstabulations for Private Practices of Religiosity for Married and Non-married Mothers

Variable	Married	Not Married
Prayer***		
Several times a day	42.7%	50.1%
Once a day	22.9%	19.2%
A few times a week	15.7%	14.4%
Once a week	2.4%	2.5%
A few times a month	4.6%	4.9%
Seldom	7.5%	5.5%
Never	4.2%	3.4%
Importance of Religion		
Very important	63.3%	65.4%
Somewhat important	25.7%	25.0%
Not too important	6.7%	5.8%
Not at all important	4.3%	3.8%
Certainty of belief in God		
Absolutely certain	82.1%	84.6%
Fairly certain	15.6%	13.0%
Not too certain	1.8%	1.8%
Not at all certain	.5%	.6%
Read scripture outside of service*		
At least once a week	38.3%	41.0%
Once or twice a week	11.9%	14.1%
Several times a year	8.8%	8.2%
Seldom	16.6%	15.0%
Never	24.4%	21.8%
Pray or Read Scripture with Children		
Yes	69.5%	68.9%
No	30.5%	31.1%

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

In order to make sure the significant results from the chi-square tests were not spurious, and to see if it is solely being a single mother that matters for religiosity, or whether other factors like income are driving these relationships, regression models were used. A more detailed analysis is needed because a bivariate does not cover the whole. Linear regressions were conducted controlling for income, age, education, and race when looking at attendance, prayer, the importance of religion, how often the mothers participated in prayer groups, how often the mothers participated in social activities through the church, and how often the mothers read scripture outside of a religious service. Tables 3 through 8 show three different stages of models that add more controls with each stage. Model 1 controls for marital status alone, Model 2 controls for marital status and income, and Model 3 shows all controls used; marital status, income, age, education, and race.

After controlling for these factors, Table 3 shows the attendance of the mothers was found to still be significant when looking at their marital status. The effect for their attendance gets stronger going from .181 in model 1 to .304 in model 3. Table 3 shows that the attendance of single mothers is still lower than that of married mothers even after controlling for income, age, education, and race.

Table 3. Linear Regression for Religious Service Attendance of Married Mothers and Non-Married Mothers Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.760	2.845	3.322
Marriage	.181***	.144*	.304***
Income	–	-.006	.016
Age	–	–	-.015***
Education	–	–	-.065***
Black	–	–	-.638***
Asian	–	–	.337**
Mixed	–	–	-.142
Hispanic	–	–	.105

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the control for race

Table 4 shows the results of the regression model when considering prayer. Unlike with attendance, after income was controlled for, differences between single and married mothers prayer became insignificant. Table 4 shows that income has a larger effect on a mother’s prayer rather than her marital status alone. Mother’s marital status shifts from being highly significant to insignificant because it is poverty, not a mother’s marital status, that leads to higher rates of prayer among single mothers.

Table 4. Linear Regression for Prayer of Married Mothers and Non-married Mothers Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.622	2.185	2.794
Marriage	-.196***	-.083	.062
Income	—	.055***	.054***
Age	—	—	-.017***
Education	—	—	.012
Black	—	—	-.630***
Asian	—	—	.424**
Mixed	—	—	-.255*
Hispanic	—	—	-.050

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the reference for race

Table 5 shows the results of the regression model when looking at the importance of religion to mothers. The importance of religion to mothers was affected by the control, but still stayed significant. It went from being significant at the .001 level to significant at the .05 level. It also went from having significance as a negative to having significance as a positive showing that the suppressor effect is large.

Table 5. Linear Regression for Importance of Religion to Married Mothers and Non-Married Mothers Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.563	1.283***	1.263***
Marriage	-.042***	.029	.092*
Income	—	.036***	.023***
Age	—	—	-.006***
Education	—	—	.019*
Black	—	—	-.375***
Asian	—	—	.089
Mixed	—	—	-.074
Hispanic	—	—	.111***

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the reference for race

Table 6 shows that when looking at how often single mothers attend prayer groups, after controlling for income, age, education, and race the variable becomes significant. As a whole, single mothers attend prayer groups less than married mothers because of other factors. After accounting for other potentially confounding variables the differences between single and married mother is the effect of marital status.

Table 6. Linear Regression for how often Married and Non-married Mothers Participate in Prayer Groups Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.287***	2.680***	3.193***
Marriage	-.019	.144*	.332***
Income	—	.070***	.072***
Age	—	—	-.014***
Education	—	—	-.028
Black	—	—	-.892
Asian	—	—	.237
Mixed	—	—	-.227*
Hispanic	—	—	.022

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the reference for race

Table 7 shows that after controlling for income, age, education, and race, mothers' participation in social activities becomes significant. Single mothers participate in social activities less than married mothers. Model 3 shows the differences in education and race based on marital status. Differences between single and married mother is the effect of marital status.

Table 7. Linear Regression for how often Married and Non-married Mothers Participates in Social Activities Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.863***	2.883***	3.319***
Marriage	.081	.068	.182**
Income	—	-.004	.018
Age	—	—	-.004
Education	—	—	-.068***
Black	—	—	-.353***
Asian	—	—	.077
Mixed	—	—	-.269**
Hispanic	—	—	-.068

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the reference for race

Table 8 looks at how often single mothers read scripture outside of religious services. The table shows that single mothers read scripture outside of religious services less than married mothers once income, age, education, and race have been controlled for. The effect of marital status variable goes from negative and significant to positive and significant after controlling for race and income. That change in direction shows that what looks like a negative significant effect in bivariate context is actually a significant positive effect in the multivariate model.

Table 8. Linear Regression for how often Married and Non-married Mothers Read Scripture Outside of Religious Services Controlling for Income, Age, Education, and Race

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.915***	2.121***	2.759***
Marriage	-.145**	.080	.262***
Income	—	.092***	.084***
Age	—	—	-.018***
Education	—	—	.010
Black	—	—	-.872***
Asian	—	—	.345*
Mixed	—	—	-.197
Hispanic	—	—	-.038

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the reference for race

The effects of income, age, and race on mothers’ religious participation in the previous models suggest that older people, poorer people, and minorities have higher levels of religious practice.

Binary Logistic Regression tests were conducted in order to predict the odds that single and coupled mothers belonged to a house of worship, sent their children to Sunday school, and prayed or read scripture with their children outside of religious services. Table 9 shows that after controlling for age, income, education, and race single mothers' odds for belonging to a house of worship were neither higher or lower than married or coupled mothers. However, married mothers have 34.2 percent greater odds of sending their children to Sunday school than single mothers. Also, married mothers have 33.1 percent greater odds to pray or read scripture with their children outside of religious services compared to single mothers. Older mothers, mothers with less education, mothers with a lower income, and black mothers are all at higher odds to be a member of a house of worship than other mothers. When examining Sunday school attendance, older mothers are more likely to send their children to Sunday school, as are mothers with lower education, blacks, and Hispanics. Asian mothers are at lower odds of sending their children to Sunday school. They have 3.3 times higher odds of not sending children to Sunday school compared to white mothers. Praying and reading scripture with children outside of religious services shows that younger mothers are at higher odds to pray or read scripture to their children outside of religious services than older mothers. For each unit increase in income have 6.4 percent more likely to pray with their children outside of religious services than mothers with higher income. Mothers who are black also are more likely to pray and read scripture with their children outside of religious services, while Asian and Hispanic mothers are at lower odds of doing so.

Table 9. Binary Logistic Regressions Predicting Membership, Sending Child to Sunday School, and Prayer and Scripture Reading Outside of Religious Services (Odds Ratios Reported)

Variable	Not a Member	If child is not sent to Sunday School	Not praying or reading scripture with child outside of Religious Services
Marital	1.035	1.342***	1.331***
Age	.981***	.980***	1.011**
Income	.937***	1.027	1.064***
Education	.898***	.954*	.966
Black	.339***	.667***	.528***
Asian	2.365***	4.033***	1.434*
Mixed	.917	1.203	.904
Hispanic	.920	.747***	1.181*
Model Stats			
Constant	3.064***	1.542	.129***
Nagelkerke R Square	.058	.043*	.022*
N	4635	4636	4637

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Note: White is used as the control for race

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The data used to conduct this research come from a large and diverse sample of mothers who were asked questions directly related to religion. The main purpose of this study was to determine whether being a single mother affected a woman's religiosity. Table 10 summarizes the results showing that all variables tested with the exception of church membership and prayer, show that over all married mothers religious participation is higher than single mothers.

Table 10. Summary of Findings

Variable	Married	Single
Public		
Attendance	+	
Member	---	---
Social Activities	+	
Religious Education	+	
Prayer Group	+	
Private		
Prayer	---	---
Saliency	+	
Scripture Reading	+	
Pray with Child	+	

Note: + Participates more, --- No differences

The overall results support Hypotheses 1 that being a single mother does affect a mother's public religious participation. However Hypothesis 2 is not supported, single mothers are not practicing private religion more than married mothers. Overall married mothers participate in public and private practices of religion more often than single mothers. Findings suggest that marital status is not the main cause of single mothers' religious participation being less than married mothers, but income, age, education, and race are the driving factors. Married mothers are involving their children in religious participation more often than single mothers, through sending them to Sunday school and praying and reading scripture with them outside of religious services. Single mothers are involving their children in religious practices less because

of other factors beyond marital status alone. Considering that single mothers have less time, money, and social support than coupled mothers, they would also have less time to attend religious services or participate in other public and private practices of religion. With single mothers having highly stressful lives and lower economic status' they have more to worry about than coupled mothers and are not going to have the extra leisure time for extra activities. Much of a single mother's life is devoted to making sure that the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety are met, which may not leave a lot of extra time for structured religious activities with their children. Limitations for this research would include not having any qualitative data to show reasons why income, race, education, and age are causing such a difference in single mothers public and private practices of religiosity compared to married mothers. Additionally, as with most social science research, there is limited capacity to control for all possible spurious correlation and relationships in the data. Despite these limitations, there are a number of promising avenues for future research including the reason why income, race, education, and age are making single mothers public and private practice of religiosity less than that of a married mother. Future research should also look at the differences in religious participation between single and married mothers in different types of religious denominations. Different denominations have different beliefs, which could affect mothers' religious participation differently. Looking at different religious denominations when it comes to single and married mothers' religious participation would also be a good direction for future research. The findings presented here suggest single mothers have less time for extra activities so it would be exciting to examine how family support can mitigate the effects of single parenting. This could include economic support and help with transportation. The idea for this future research is based off Barbara Schneider and Linda J. Waite's (2005) study showing that mothers carry work spill over

home with them especially if they work a job where they have to conform to the work orientation. This complements the findings suggesting that mothers who are economically worse off have higher levels of stress and less free time, leaving them with less time to engage in religious practices. Based off the previous literature single mothers are worse off economically than coupled mothers and have higher levels of stress, so they would have even less free time and be less apt to participate in public or private religious practices.

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