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Overcoming the Barriers of Poverty: Intersectionality and Single Black Mothers of P.T. Barnum

Apartments

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Abstract

This research investigated the ways in which intersectionality and various forms of support have influenced the ability of single black mothers to overcome the barriers of poverty. Qualitative research included analysis of three interviews of single black mothers from P.T. Barnum, a public housing complex located in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The use of an online coding tool, Dedoose, proved effective in identifying where various forms of support have aided these women. These supports included social and community supports. The women cited having various forms of social support, including informational, tangible, and emotional. They also cited having various forms of community support, including housing support, childcare, and healthcare support. Two interviews of women of other races from P.T. were also included in this study, to further explore how intersectionality plays a role in their ability to overcome poverty. It was found that they experience very similar difficulties as the first three women, and cited having the same struggles as well. The findings of this study provide pertinent information to social workers, philanthropists, and others in the social service field, by helping them best determine the types of support these women need to be successful in overcoming poverty.

Keywords: intersectionality, single, black, mothers, overcome, poverty, qualitative, interviews, P.T. Barnum, social, community, other races, social workers, philanthropists

Introduction

This study examines how poor single mothers overcome the obstacles associated with living in poverty. This problem is examined on the basis of a qualitative research study involving interviews with women who reside at P.T. Barnum apartments, a public housing complex in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Having this research on women living in PT Barnum

allows for an understanding of what women in poverty face and how they have been able to, and will be able to continue to, overcome these challenges. Further, over 90% of those who reside in PT Barnum are single mothers; this is a pertinent fact of this subsidized housing. These women face obstacles on a daily, monthly and yearly basis but have success stories in beginning to overcome those obstacles. Some women have businesses, children in higher-level colleges and universities, and are in college or have recently graduated from college themselves. To best explore how single mothers can maneuver out of poverty, it is best to explore the knowledge the women of PT Barnum have to offer. The welfare system is backwards; it claims that it will help people in need get back on their feet. However, once they begin to make money, welfare options are taken away from them, such as food stamps and Medicaid, due to that person making too much to qualify for that benefit. This, in effect, pushes them back into their previous state and in need of those resources once again. Therefore, this study will analyze the success of single mothers who live in affordable housing and use the welfare programs in order to show what these women have done and aid those who want to begin their own process of leaving the system.

History and Background

More than 20% of Americans use the welfare system, and the majority of those users head single parent households (Jarrett, 1994, p. 31). Also, "...demographic data indicate that the proportion of poor African-American families headed by women increased from 30 percent in 1959 to 72 percent in 1977- more than doubling in one generation" (Jarrett, 1994, p. 31). However, single mothers receive the least amount of benefits out of that 20% and, "...single mothers disproportionately come from racial and ethnically underrepresented backgrounds" (Beeler, 2016, p. 71). This, then, begs the question of what about single, black mothers? The

welfare system was created to benefit people as it provides necessities that would not be affordable otherwise. By having those necessities taken care of, to a certain extent, allows for people to find a job and begin making money. Once they make money, according to welfare requirements, that person will not need every resource they are allotted so they are taken away. Not having had enough time to save money and gain a stable financial backing, these people almost instantly go back into debt, as they have to spend all of their capital on what is no longer covered. This can include, but is not limited to, food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, and temporary assistance for needy families. Single mothers face the burden of not just having to take care of their own needs but also other's needs, being their children, all on their own. This includes their food, education, healthcare, and more. To pay for all of those necessities is extremely difficult and to then have welfare removed when making just enough money results in an ongoing cycle of challenges for these mothers. "...decreased benefit levels to lower the incidence of single motherhood, so the issue of the effect of welfare on single motherhood remains of considerable interest." (Blau, et al, 2002, p. 383).

Threats to having enough food, medical insurance, and a stable home and educational system are what single mothers must think about every day. Many single mothers who use welfare systems understand that there is no use staying within these systems, as it tends to work against them. Some systems help in the meantime, such as food stamps, but once they are removed it can be difficult for a mother to find enough food for herself and her children. This is why so many women either ensure that they don't make enough in order to keep those benefits, while others work to completely remove themselves from the system. The idea is that finding a consistent, stable job while not constantly relying on resources that can be taken away is a better option. However, this is an extremely difficult task, as money is not the only issue these mothers

may face. When reflecting on a study conducted by John Gilliom, a political scientist, of the lasting effects of welfare surveillance on poor women's lives, Solomon (2007) drew the information that, "... knowing the poor or the shame, stigma, and surveillance that comes with it [the label, welfare receipt] reveals the moral ordering of the society. Such a moral ordering reinforces the women's marginalization and fear..."

From stigma, to mental or physical disorders the woman or her child/children could have, to abusive relationships, to a criminal record, many women in poverty face several obstacles that would make it seem as if overcoming any of them is impossible. However, so many women do break these barriers down. Looking at our colleges today, we no longer see a typical college student who is between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two and lives on campus; we see older students who attend part time and live off campus. In the United States alone, 3.4 million undergraduate students are mothers, and 60% of that 3.4 million are single mothers (Beeler, 2016, p. 69). Single mothers who are part of the welfare system have received undergraduate degrees, created businesses, sent their own children to colleges and universities, and have slowly, but surely, made their way out of subsidized and affordable housing, as well as the welfare system entirely. In order to ensure that there are no other houses that are food insecure, lack safe conditions, lack medical care, and so on, it is important to focus on the ways in which single mothers, who make up a large portion of the low socioeconomic branch of the United States as well as a large portion of the welfare system, have overcome the obstacles. By furthering research to be less about why single mothers will continuously face hardship, the research should delve into the women who have been successful in removing themselves, and their family, from the cycle to provide better information for those who want to do the same.

Theoretical Framework

In order to better understand the obstacles faced by single mothers, especially black single mothers, understanding intersectionality is key. Patricia Hill Collins, a feminist theorist from Philadelphia, proposed Intersectionality, focusing on black women and the challenges they face due to stigma and oppression. She attempts to explain how various parts of one's identity can influence a person's life-chances and experience. Also, she asserts that stratification systems involve status differentials concerning gender, race, and class. Black, single mothers suffer disproportionately due to the fact that the society in which they live in is unequal, racist and patriarchal. For example, a black woman who is married has a very different experience from a black woman who is a single mother. Each woman is black, but another has other parts of her identity, such as being a single mother, that add to her personal experiences and life-chances. A person can face larger amounts of discrimination depending on what makes up his/her individual, socially imposed status. To add, a person's background also contributes to that person's individual experiences. Coming from a single mother home versus coming from a two-parent household will cause significant differences in a child's life chances. "Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children's academic" (Collins, 2000, p. 173). These overlapping identities can cause tension and confusion. They are forced to face multiple forms of stigma, stereotyping, or oppression.

In response to this, Collin's theory of intersectionality also included black feminist thought, or knowledge spoken by black women about their experiences. "Finally, Collins (2002) argues that black feminist intellectuals 'alone can foster the group autonomy that fosters effective coalitions with other groups' (p. 36)." (*Patricia Hill Collins: Intersecting*

Oppressions”, n.d, p. 7). She believed that black women needed to speak out and use their voices as only they could explain the hardships faced. Using this spoken knowledge, Collins was one of few social theorists who has been able to challenge the point of view of others in regards to oppression and, “...that not only has the possibility of changing the world but also of opening up the prospect of continuous change” (“*Patricia Hill Collins*”, n.d, p. 1). Collins believed that black women involved in community work have the ability to gain power in society. They will challenge stigmas and create the ideal image of a “...strong black women” gaining the ability to revitalize black neighborhoods (Collins, 2000).

Robert Merton’s middle range theory speaks to the idea of black women having the ability to revitalize their communities, and speaks to other changes that black women can create to better their life-chances, experiences, and children. Robert Merton, a Philadelphia born theorist, expressed through his middle range theory the idea that, “All social actions can have multiple consequences, either for the whole society or for just some individuals and sub-groups” (Dillon, 2014, p. 176). These consequences can be positive or negative. If a black woman has the ability to revitalize her community, what are the consequences that will follow? There could be multiple positive consequences, as Collins would think, and each of those consequences has the ability to effect change in society, individuals, and/or groups. Women who break out of poverty can positively influence other women in poverty. Further, he distinguished between goals, purposes, and interests that are considered culturally acceptable in society and the means to attain them. “... when a gap or discrepancy exists between the goals affirmed in society and access to the institutional means to attain them...individuals adapt their behavior, either rejecting the culturally acceptable goals, or rejecting the institutional means for their attainment” (Dillon, 2014, p. 178). Many women in poverty reject the use of assistance, or use the assistance for

other purposes; only they can understand what will benefit them and their families the most.

Many reject the cultural norm that many others follow in regards to obtaining an education, job, and so on. Merton (1968) states, “In no group is there an absence of regulatory codes governing conduct, yet groups do vary in the degree to which these...institutional controls are effectively integrated with the more diffuse goals which are part of the culture matrix” (p. 674).

Importantly, Merton believes that when one may not have access to obtain those cultural goals, such as economic success, many may turn to other forms of obtaining them, such as rebelling.

However, as an alternative to rebellion, black, single mothers may turn to innovative and creative ways of overcoming said obstacles, as turning to rebellion will increase the risk of needing to revert back onto welfare, especially if rebellion ends in incarceration.

Analyzing first-hand accounts helps to avoid those unnecessary alternatives to achieving cultural goals. It creates black feminist thought and a better understanding as to why it can be so difficult to have so many identities. This research begins the necessary conversation amongst black, single mothers, and creates the opportunity to see that overcoming the obstacles faced in poverty is not impossible.

Existing Studies

Wide ranges of studies have examined the problems and experiences of single black women who live in poverty. Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn and Jackson (2005) wanted to understand the effects that employment experiences had on single black mothers as well as their children. They asked three main questions within their study: who makes the transition from welfare to work, what is the mental health of women who transition off welfare to work, and what are the effects of low-wage employment on children? These three researchers obtained names of employed and non-employed mothers eligible for child-vouchers, and out of those names, 150

were selected. 95 ended up agreeing to be interviewed. These women were asked about their income, financial strains, depressive affects, and child school achievement. The results of this research indicated that attaining an education is important for mothers and their children, allowing for a higher chance of success for both parties. Women who do not have an education are more likely to experience joblessness. They also found that, while mothers reported higher levels of depressive effects, mental health was not a barrier in regards to entering the work force. Further, mothers that were employed reported significantly less depressive affects than mothers who were unemployed. Lastly, an interesting finding was that many of the mothers reported less financial strain than those who earn a higher wage or held a steady job; this could be due to the fact that the women effectively combine welfare and their salaries, even if it is a low salary.

Aurora Jackson (1998), a researcher who participated in the last study, wanted to study the role of social support in parenting for low-income, single, black mothers. She used data from an ongoing study of single black mothers to investigate the symptoms of depression and social support to parenting stress and children's behavior problems. She believed that social support would account for how poor, single black mothers manage their employment and parenting in those environments. By taking data from interviews of a sample of 188 current and former welfare recipients in New York City that were all single, black, in the age range of twenty to forty-five, and had an average of two children, Jackson determined that greater financial strain and less social support predicted symptoms of depression. These symptoms of depression then predicted higher parenting stress, and more child behavior problems. Employed mothers were more likely than unemployed mothers to also live with the child's grandmother; therefore, there was high income, from being employed, but no less financial strain, as they had to know support themselves, their child, as well as the child's grandmother. Lastly, this study also found that the

less contact children had with their nonresident father, the more likely they were to have behavioral problems.

Kay Cook (2012) wanted to look into social support and its role in a single parent's transition from welfare to work. To do this, she analyzed 16 qualitative articles that explore this transition. She analyzed social support in regards to coping, mobility, conflict, reciprocating, and dependence. She found that social support was often a necessary aid for survival rather than providing upward mobility. It was also found that working could often cause strain due to the fact that welfare is reduced when a single mother begins making more money, but she still relies on the original welfare provided for other facets of her life. Once the original welfare provided is removed she can only rely on that one income with no other assistance. This is why social support is very important when a woman is transitioning from welfare to work.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to determine how single black mothers could overcome the structural obstacles they face in poverty through analysis of interviews of women currently dealing with those obstacles. Many studies had been conducted describing the obstacles faced, but none ever spoke about how women could overcome them. It was hoped that research in this direction would produce knowledge that is useful both to other women facing these challenges and social service providers and others involved in working with them

The question posed was how do single black mothers in poverty successfully overcome the obstacles faced in order to improve quality of life? Women who have been able to succeed in the challenge of leaving poverty and the welfare system have a plethora of knowledge to provide to others. I hypothesized that single black mothers in poverty overcome the obstacles they face through community and social support, which create environments that aid in success; this

included, going back to school to earn a degree, working full time with growth potential, being able to afford the basic necessities, or even starting their own business. Sharing the stories of women who have been successful in overcoming the obstacles was extremely important, as it began the conversation for others on how they too can be successful. By shifting attention towards the ways in which women can overcome these challenges this research provides a new set of information for women who are tired of living in dangerous neighborhoods, worrying about food, water and shelter, and whether or not their children will be provided for the next day.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were predetermined, as the interviews had already been conducted. The interviews were collected in a service learning project by Dr. Gerald Reid and the students in his course on poverty and inequality in the United States at Sacred Heart University in 2014. Five recorded audio interviews have been analyzed. Three of the interviews included women of African America descent, one included a Caucasian woman, and one included a woman of Hispanic descent. The two women not of African American descent were included in order to further explore the theory of intersectionality.

The following includes the names and descriptions of the five women whose interviews were used. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity.

“Debora” is African American and was born in Jamaica in 1977. She moved to Bridgeport in 1991 due to her mother falling ill. Her father filed for her and her mother to relocate to the United States, where he had been located, and she has been at P.T. ever since. She lives with her three children. After graduating high school she wanted to attend college but couldn’t due financial reasons.

“Lorraine” is African American and was born in Bridgeport, CT in 1986. She has lived in P.T. since 2011. Her two children, ages eight and five, live with her. She was pregnant when she graduated high school, which caused difficulty in regards to finding a job and continuing her education. She is currently a bus monitor.

“Sherrie” is African American and was born in Bridgeport, CT in 1987. She has lived at P.T. Barnum for four and a half years with her two sons, aged four and eight. She graduated high school and did two terms in AmeriCorps. She is now self-employed and has her own general construction/cleaning company.

“Bethany” is Caucasian and was born in Bridgeport, CT in 1964. She has lived at P.T. Barnum for the last eleven years with both of her grandchildren, ages six and seven. She has six of her own children who are grown. After eleventh grade she dropped out of high school. She is currently working at Executive House.

“Emilia” is Hispanic and was born in New York in 1959. She resides in P.T. with her son, and has another daughter as well who lives elsewhere. She also plays a large role in raising her granddaughter. She used to work but has since gotten sick so she stays home to take care of her kids and grandchild.

These women, as mentioned, live at P.T. Barnum, public housing located in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The housing is part of a larger system called Park City Communities, who help 12,000 people obtain affordable housing options through their various housing opportunities. The Park City mission is to not only provide quality housing but to also empower its residence to obtain a level of self-sufficiency, and form partnerships with the communities to help revitalize their neighborhoods. P.T. Barnum is one of the housing opportunities that was built in 1950, and is geared towards families. It is the largest public housing complex in Connecticut, having 484

units spread throughout 22 buildings, and just about 90% of the entire complex is housing single mothers and their children.

Research Design

The research design was qualitative. It analyzed the content of interviews taken in the previous years by a professor and his students. These interviews were used in a class project but were analyzed for the purpose of this research.

Measures

While the interviews have already been conducted, analysis to identify key variables, relationships, and themes was done on the existing work. The independent variables were the community and social support a woman may have that impact the ability to move out of poverty. Those supports influenced the dependent variable, which was the likelihood of overcoming the structural barriers of poverty. Trying to understand how women have successfully removed themselves from the system required looking into their supports that made it possible. There is variation in regards to the terms social support and community support; it could include support from the woman's family, the welfare system, other mothers, community organizations, such as churches and non-profits, and the support of those running programs geared toward helping these women. The dependent variable, as stated previously, was the ability to overcome the structural barriers of poverty. Determining whether or not they have was deduced with outcomes such as, obtaining a job, getting an education, starting a business, moving out of subsidized housing, or sending children to college. Therefore, by establishing a relationship between the variables, I was able to pinpoint each woman's success and what contributed to reaching that success.

Basic demographic information was collected about the women who were interviewed, including gender and age.

Procedure

From the set of audio recordings of interviews provided by the professor, those with the most pertinent information for the purposes of this paper were selected. They have been transcribed; an original transcription, which includes all words and utterances spoken (such as “uh” and “um”), as well as a clean transcription, which removes unnecessary utterances, were provided. The transcriptions were entered into Dedoose, an online resource that aids in analysis of text, to begin content analysis. The analysis included picking out themes relevant to the research question.

Dedoose was used to analyze the interviews in the study in order to point out relationships between variables. By using Dedoose’s coding ability, I was able to create root codes, or labels, for large concepts. My two root codes were community support and social support. To further explain a root code, I made child codes, which acted as smaller units of the root code, allowing for more exact coding of the interviews. I was then able to excerpt the transcriptions, meaning highlighting where these themes occur. Once an excerpt is highlighted, I selected which root code and child code it pertained to.

The root code of community support had four child codes: School/Educational Program, Foundation/Association, Civic Group, and Youth Program. These child codes were chosen, as they are most relevant in the discussion of community support and poverty. Some child codes were mentioned multiple times, while others weren’t mentioned at all.

The root code of social support had three child codes: emotional, informational, and tangible. The child code of emotional support had its own child codes: family support, friend support, and partner support. The child code of tangible support had five child codes of its own as well: food programs, financial assistance, childcare, healthcare programs, and housing

support. The child codes of social support were created for the purposes of finding the theme within each support, and the child codes within those child codes were created to pinpoint exactly what type of support within that theme was being represented.

The quotes, along with their codes, can be found in the appendix of this paper. Note, some quotes are longer than others as some women felt more comfortable providing more information than others.

Results

Three interviews of single, black mothers who live in P.T. Barnum were analyzed in order to determine how these women have been able to overcome the structural barriers of poverty. Through the use of an online tool known as Dedoose, root codes and child codes were created to examine their stories to better understand how they have been successful. The root codes of community support and social support were further explained using child codes.

For all three interviews, the root code community support was mentioned a total of fourteen times; the child code school program was mentioned six times, foundation/association seven times, civic group one time and youth program was not mentioned (refer to chart 1). For all three interviews, the root code social support was mentioned a total of twenty-eight times. The child code of emotional support was mentioned six times, informational nine times, and tangible thirteen times. The child codes of emotional support were mentioned as follows: family support two times, friend support four times, and partner support was not mentioned. The child codes of tangible support were mentioned as follows: food program four times, housing support one time, childcare five times, healthcare program two times, and financial assistance was not mentioned (refer to chart 2).

Chart 1

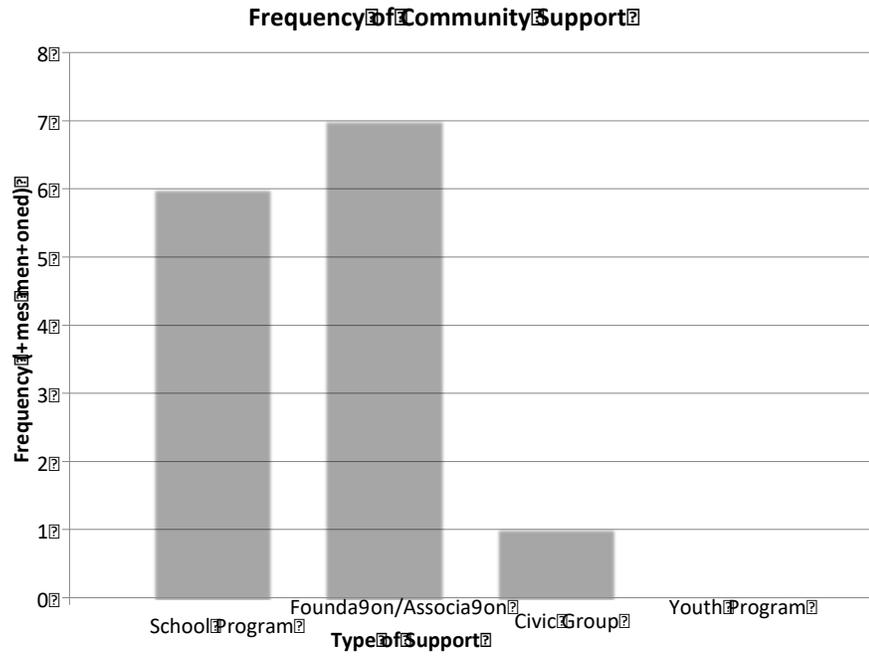
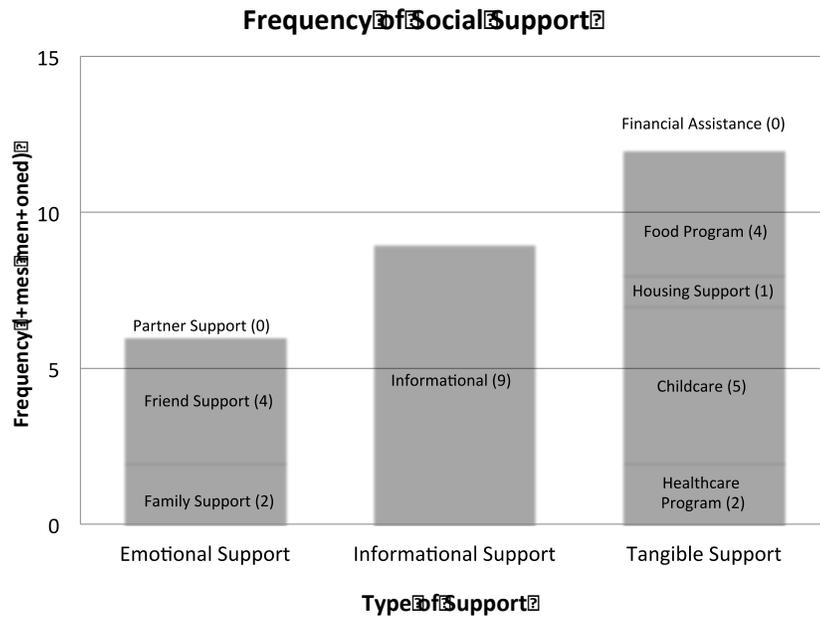


Chart 2



Discussion

It was hypothesized that single, black mothers overcome the structural barriers of poverty through community and social support, which create environments that aid in success. The results of the three interviews of black, single mothers confirmed my hypothesis, displaying the various forms in which support has been able to aid in these women's daily lives, allowing them to become successful long term. Each of these women has been able to be successful in various ways, however they still face obstacles everyday due to poverty and living within the welfare system. Debora has three children who are in high school, or about to graduate from high school, but she still finds it hard to pay the bills and hold a steady job. Lorraine has two daughters and is a bus monitor who believes P.T. Barnum is great when it comes to aid in finding jobs or going back to school, but occasionally finds it hard to pay the bills especially since she doesn't receive child support. Sherrie has two sons and is self-employed; she runs a cleaning company. She finds it very hard to pay bills being self-employed. While all of these women have things to be proud of in their lives, there are still struggles they face when it comes to living in poverty. Social and community support have helped these women's circumstances, but they have not fixed their situations.

Debora spoke of her experiences with P.T. Barnum, expressing how helpful they have been to her throughout living there. Speaking of the P.T. social worker, Kate Kelly, she stated, "...like any job I had from the time I moved here it was because of her." She also noted that a person could get any and all assistance that they need through P.T., whether it be information or access to their library. The use of medical assistance, as well as food stamps, breakfast served at school, and her father helping her out with finding housing, are all tangible forms of social support she had spoken of. "My father did help me out for awhile because he

was dabbling in real estate for a little bit, flipping houses and what not...” Debora mentioned community support and social support a total of twelve times during her interview. She mentioned how these forms of assistance have helped her find a job, work around her schedule due to her children, and helps her to maintain housing. However, even with these forms of community and social support, she finds it hard to make all of her bills sometimes, couldn’t go to college due to financial issues, and stated how she is not completely satisfied with her life in P.T. Barnum, “It’s supposed to bring you forward to something better but I think what it really does, it just helps you where you are now.” While she has been able to take care of her children and have a place to live with some support, she still finds that the barriers of poverty are holding her back (refer to appendix A, figure 2 to find the quotes from her interview).

Loraine finds P.T. to be a blessing. She had jumped from shelter to shelter for many years and found it to be a relief when she was accepted to live there. She believes that they help out a lot, “I look at a lot of stuff they post on the boards outside...I get emails for job openings, and section 8 and a lot of other things”. The food pantry is also something she spoke highly of, referencing how it is a safety net in case she can’t get food due to her bills. Further, she spoke highly of the educational opportunities afforded to her through P.T., “They have classes for computers so you could look for work online, or go back to school online for where it’s more convenient for you...” Other forms of assistance, such as medical, food stamps, and childcare, was also mentioned in regards to social support. Her largest form of support, though, was informational. Throughout her entire interview, she cited that having access to the information was extremely beneficial. This included information about jobs and career building, schooling opportunities, and community building. However, just like Debora, even with these forms of

social and community support, she also finds that it can still be hard to pay bills, specifically the light bill (refer to appendix A, figure 4 to find the quotes from her interview).

Sherrie started working when she was sixteen years old, and completed two terms in AmeriCorps right out of high school. She now runs a resident-owned business, sits on the board of the Resident's Association for P.T. Barnum, and takes care of herself and her two sons. She notes that being self-employed has caused extreme difficulty in regards to meeting her bill payments, "Last year, I got an eviction every month." In P.T., she works closely with Kate Kelly, explaining how being in a resident driven operation requires effort from the resident. The community in P.T. has also played a large role in her success story, "We have built a family of community here...I can honestly say that a family of residents that take on a lot of everyday life issues, situations..." Her mother has also played a large emotional support in her life as well, helping to take care of the kids and supporting her through her decisions. Further, after school programs was also a form of social support that has helped her through her self-employment, allowing her kids to be in a safe place while she was at work. She has stated that she will never leave Bridgeport, "I know that I am going to be something. I know I am going to be successful. I have to give it back; I have to...that's the only way people make it..." With all of these successes she still is not satisfied with her life in P.T., noting how some of the people hired to work there do not "have hearts" (refer to appendix A, figure 5 to find the quotes from her interview).

In addition to the three cases above, the cases of two additional women were examined to further explore the theory of intersectionality. Emilia and Bethany are also single mothers who live in P.T. Barnum. Emilia is Hispanic and Bethany is Caucasian. The theory of intersectionality proposed by Patricia Hill Collins states how various parts of one's identity can

influence a person's life-chances and experience. She asserts that stratification systems involve status differentials concerning gender, race, and class. A person can face larger amounts of discrimination depending on what makes up his/her individual, socially imposed status. These overlapping identities can cause tension and confusion. They are forced to face multiple forms of stigma, stereotyping, or oppression. It also included black feminist thought, or knowledge spoken by black women about their experiences. She believed that black women needed to speak out and use their voices as only they could explain the hardships faced. I believed that these ideas could extend out from black women and include of other races facing similar struggles.

Emilia lives with her daughter, son, and grandchild. She used to work in factories and super markets but became ill and had to stop working. She's been raising her children ever since then. She says that working with P.T. partners has had a positive influence on her life, allowing her to make friends and experience things she hadn't before. There has also been informational support given to her while living here, "Right now we got a counselor coming tomorrow to talk about community and what we have to do..." as well as tangible support such as food programs and healthcare programs that run through P.T. Barnum. She states feeling comfortable in P.T. as everything is close to her, such as the doctor's office and the supermarket. She does, however, state that it can be hard to pay the bills sometimes. From the light bill, to cable, to telephone bill, it can become overwhelming for her (refer to appendix A, figure 3 to find the quotes from her interview).

Bethany, a Caucasian single mother, lives with her two grandchildren at P.T. Barnum. She currently has a job at Executive House, an apartment complex nearby. She finds paying bills to be difficult sometimes, as she is trying to support three people as opposed to just herself and

finding jobs can be difficult as she didn't graduate high school. While she does receive state assistance for the kids, it does not suffice for the amount she has to pay in bills. She does, however, mention the help she has received in finding a job, "...they needed a person there in the office to work, so he brought me there and I've been working there for eleven years now." It is also helpful to her that they, "...helps out with rent...they pay 30% of your income." While she has found many benefits to P.T. living, she doesn't deny the daily struggle to make ends meet (refer to appendix A, figure 1 to find the quotes from her interview).

Collins' theory focused specifically on black women but I don't believe that it only pertains to black women. Single mothers who live in poverty, regardless of their race, face a multitude of difficulties due to their overlapping identities; being a woman, a single mother and living in poverty. While race may add another layer to that tension, it does not negate the tension felt by those who are not black but are in very similar situations. Collins' idea of black feminist thought can also carry to those of other racial groups; no one can explain the experiences of others, regardless of their race, better than the person in that situation. That is why it is important that all women share their stories and are heard. Not only will black women be able to release the stigmas surrounding them, but other women in poverty may be able to release the stigmas surrounding themselves as well. All of the women spoke of the perceptions they believe outsiders have about them, all of them negative. Whether it was the idea that they are dangerous people, or simply lazy people who don't work hard enough to make ends meet, all of these women face the stereotypes and assumptions of others. By coming together to express their hardships and speak of their experiences, all of these women will have a chance to break the stigma of being single mothers in poverty.

Robert Merton expressed through his middle range theory the idea that all social actions can have consequences. These consequences can be positive or negative. If a black woman has the ability to revitalize her community, what are the consequences that will follow? However, does it only have to be a black woman who can do this? I believe that women who are capable of overcoming the barriers of poverty can positively influence other women in poverty, and this can include any woman, of any race. By overcoming the barriers they can, in turn, become a social support to other women who are trying to overcome the barriers as well.

Study Limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations present in this study. The method in which data was collected proved to be a drawback, as I had no control over what was being asked and I could not interact with the women myself. In some cases, I found that I would've liked them to explain an answer further, re-explain something, and so on. Another limitation of this study was the time restraints, which led to a sample size limit; I had to complete this project in a short amount of time, only allowing me to use a small amount of cases. Future studies could include more women, and different questions that yield more information about how intersectionality plays a role in their lives. These questions should pertain to the person's family history, including socioeconomic status while growing up, amount of siblings, parent involvement, parent job and educational history, and current status on parent(s) and/or sibling(s), job history, including previously held positions and reason for leaving, history of promotions/raises if applicable, and reason for any periods of unemployment, and history with and perceptions of law enforcement.

Face to face interviewing creates the limitation of not being able to grant anonymity. This causes a researcher to not be able to ask questions that may be considered too personal.

Surveying will allow a researcher to grant full anonymity while also allowing them to generate a larger amount of cases. This will help to establish an even larger connection between poverty and intersectionality. The survey should begin with demographic questions about the individual, such as age, gender, race, highest level of education completed, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, marital status, and current state of residence. The questions to follow should include type of housing the individual is current living in, amount of individuals living full-time in home, age of members living in home, and relationship of individual to members in the household.

Once establishing these facts, more personal questions can be asked pertaining the individual's history with the following: law enforcement, abuse, mental health, and disability. Questions addressing job history can include amount of times rejected from positions and amount of times fired from positions. Questions addressing history with law enforcement can include amount of arrests, amount of times detained, amount of times charged, amount of times incarcerated, as well as family history with law enforcement regarding the previous questions. Questions addressing history of abuse can include personal or family drug use and abuse and personal and family domestic violence. Questions addressing mental health can include personal or family history of mental health issues, amount of times admitted for mental health reasons, and amount of daily medications taken for mental health purposes. Lastly, questions addressing disability can include family and personal history of disability and any children with disability.

Once these questions have been asked, a researcher will want to address the difficulty to overcome the structural barriers of poverty in the individual's life. This can be done in a matrices formation by asking the individual to rate, from one to five, how she feels about certain statements. These statements can include: I can pay my bills on time every month, I find holding a steady job to be difficult, I can afford to get a degree, and I am afraid of not being able to

provide for my family. To follow up, the researcher should ask about future goals of the individual in the same format, including: I want to get my degree in the next five years and I feel as though I can be off of government assistance in the next five years.

When completing the research, I found that I wasn't completely sure if the supports had truly helped these women overcome the obstacles of poverty, or simply helped them cope with poverty. To address this limitation in the future, a longitudinal study should be conducted to see how these women overcome the barriers of poverty with the use of these supports over time. This will allow for a clearer conclusion in regards to the success the women have.

There are other research methodologies that can be done to collect this data as well, such as having women write down their own experiences. All of these forms of research help to minimize the limitations of the study presented, but also come with limitations of their own, including the inability to ask follow-up questions, the survey's inability to provide more detailed information, the longitudinal study's time requirement, and the written methodology's inability to have more concise answers.

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Appendix A

Figure 1

Quotes analyzed from interview with “Bethany”, included with coding information.

Quote	Community Support	Social Support
“...his medical pays for that”		Tangible Healthcare Program
“...they needed a person there in the office to work, so he brought me there and I’ve been working there for eleven years now”	Foundation/Association	Emotional Family Support
“...because the section 8 is through the housing authority”		Tangible Housing Support
“It helps out with rent. They pay 30% of your income”		Tangible Financial Assistance
“...my husband would take them”		Tangible Childcare
“They go to the babysitters”		Tangible Childcare
“I have assistance for the two kids”		Tangible Financial Assistance

Figure 1.1

Chart displaying total frequencies of each root code mentioned in “Bethany’s” interview

Type of Support	Frequency Total
Community Support	1
Social Support	7

Figure 2

Quotes analyzed from interview with “Debora”, included with coding information.

Quote	Community Support	Social Support
“...that’s how I became part of the P.T. partners board member”	Foundation/Association	
“...she was going to nominate me for being on the board”		Emotional Friend Support
“...like any job I had from the time I moved here was because of her”	Foundation/Association	Informational
“The advantage is you can get all the assistance and get into all the programs that you can think of”	Foundation/Association	
“...that actually had a library in there!”	School/Educational program	
“Good Will”	Foundation/Association	
“I have medical”		Tangible Healthcare Program
“They serve breakfast at school now”	School/Educational Program	Tangible Food Program
“I have food stamps”		Tangible Food Program
“My father did help me out for awhile because he was dabbling into real estate for a little bit, flipping houses and whatnot...”		Tangible Housing Support

Figure 2.1

Chart displaying total frequencies of each root code mentioned in “Debora’s” interview

Type of Support	Frequency Total
Community Support	6
Social Support	6

Figure 3

Quotes analyzed from interview with “Emilia”, included with coding information.

Quote	Community Support	Social Support
“...food pantry’s there for them”		Tangible Food Program
“...here, they got events with some food and they giving out stuff...”		Tangible Food Program
“...they came because we cook and everything back to school event we did that, they came out because we giving away book bags for some kids”	School/Educational Program	
“I come here, to the clinic”	Foundation/Association	Tangible Healthcare Program
“I am on disability”		Tangible Healthcare Program
“...we get coupons”		Tangible Food Program
“...we got a food pantry”		Tangible Food Program
“Right now we got a counselor coming tomorrow to talk about the community and what we have to do, what’s going to happen and everything”		Informational
“Getting into P.T. Partners I came out talking and doing things I never did before”	Foundation/Association	Informational
“The part with P.T. Barnum, that’s where I started making a lot of friends”		Emotional Friend Support

Figure 3.1

Chart displaying total frequencies of each root code mentioned in “Emilia’s” interview

Type of Support	Frequency Total
Community Support	3
Social Support	9

Figure 4

Quotes analyzed from interview with “Lorraine”, included with coding information.

Quote	Community Support	Social Support
“Speaking to Kate, she enlightened me on a lot of things that they do, and how it helps keep focus on what we need in the community, help the kids out, and get them interacted in things other than just things they don’t need to be going, which I find to be so good”		Informational
“...she attends to a program where they help her and it gets her college credits too”	School/Educational Program	
“We’re trying to give you an opportunity to help us, or see if you need anything, if there’s a problem with anything that needs to be fixed, or you’re not getting anything done, let us know”		Tangible
“...a program where this guy came and spoke to us about helping us getting into careers”	Foundation/Association	Informational
“...Peggy, and she’ll inform me if there’s anything open, available, any programs starting...”		Informational
“Before I could even leave out to go get the kids, my sister came with them...”		Tangible Childcare
“...you got people who stick together like family”		Emotional Friend Support
“A lot of people out here, they stick together, and they help out”		Emotional Friend Support
“Medical.”		Tangible Healthcare Program
“Just food stamps.”		Tangible Food Program
“I have to call their uncle who lives a couple buildings over, and he’ll sit with one of them, or both of them if they’re both		Emotional Family Support Tangible Childcare

sick”		
“They even have after-school programs for your kids, so if you work late you got somewhere for your kids to be”	School/Educational Program	Tangible Childcare
“They help you find work, and even if you want to back to school, they’ll help you out with that too”	Foundation/Association	Informational
“They have classes for computers, so you could look for work online, go back to school online for where it’s more convenient for you, and help you learn how to understand the programs on it. They help me out a lot, to help me further my education and everything else.”	Foundation/association	Informational
“I know I can come to the pantry...”		Tangible Food Program
“I get emails for job openings, and section 8 and a lot of other things”		Informational
“I look at a lot of stuff they post on the boards outside”		Informational

Figure 4.1
Chart displaying total frequencies of each root code mentioned in “Lorraine’s” interview

Type of Support	Frequency Total
Community Support	5
Social Support	17

Figure 5

Quotes analyzed from interview with “Sherrie”, included with coding information.

Quote	Community Support	Social Support
“...after school program”	School/Educational Program	Tangible Childcare
“I am a P.T. partner. I am a resident leader, informing our residents on things they need, and vice versa”	Foundation/Association	Informational
“We have built a family of community here. You have a group of residents that...PT partner is a family, let alone a partnership. I can honestly say that a family of residents that take on a lot of everyday life issues, situations...”		Emotional Friend Support
“My mom is one of my greatest support systems”		Emotional Family Support
“We didn’t have any after school programs at the time for our grade school kids; we have that now”	School/Educational Program	Tangible Childcare
“She has this movement called, The Million Mile March; her goal is to have one million moms off of welfare by 2025”	Civic Group	
“...work so closely with Kate Kelly”		Informational
“My mom has a backyard, so most of the times they do to my mom’s house”		Tangible Childcare
“I did two terms of AmeriCorps... You get a stipend and an ed-award after you term is completed. I got \$9000 still to go to school, so I plan to use that as well”	Foundation/Association School/Educational Program	Tangible Financial Assistance

Figure 5.1

Chart displaying total frequencies of each root code mentioned in “Sherrie’s” interview

Type of Support	Frequency Total:
Community Support	5
Social Support	8

Figure 6

Final Community Support chart displaying the total frequency of child codes mentioned across all five interviews.

Community Support

Type:	Frequency
School Program	8
Foundation/Association	12
Civic Group	1
Youth Program	0
Total	21

Figure 7

Final Social Support chart displaying the total frequency of child codes mentioned across all five interviews.

Social Support

Type:	Frequency
Emotional	8
Informational	12
Tangible	27
Total	47

Figure 8

Chart displaying the frequency of community support codes mentioned per interview, showing the proportion of child codes.

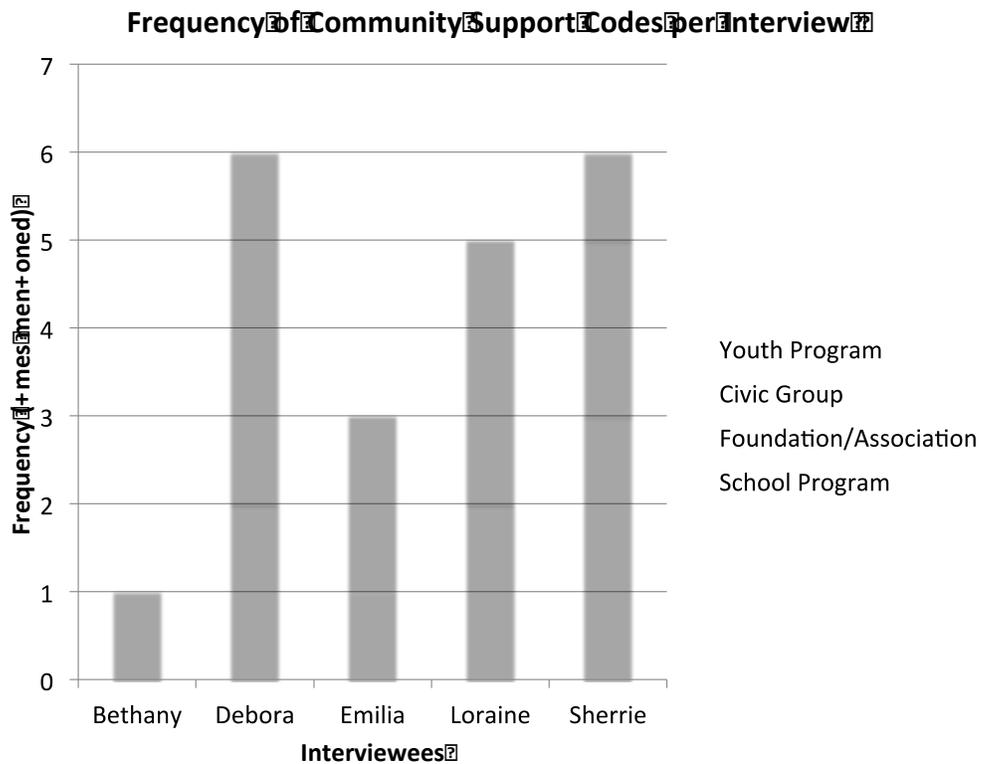


Figure 9
 Chart displaying frequency of support codes mention per interview, showing the proportion of child codes.

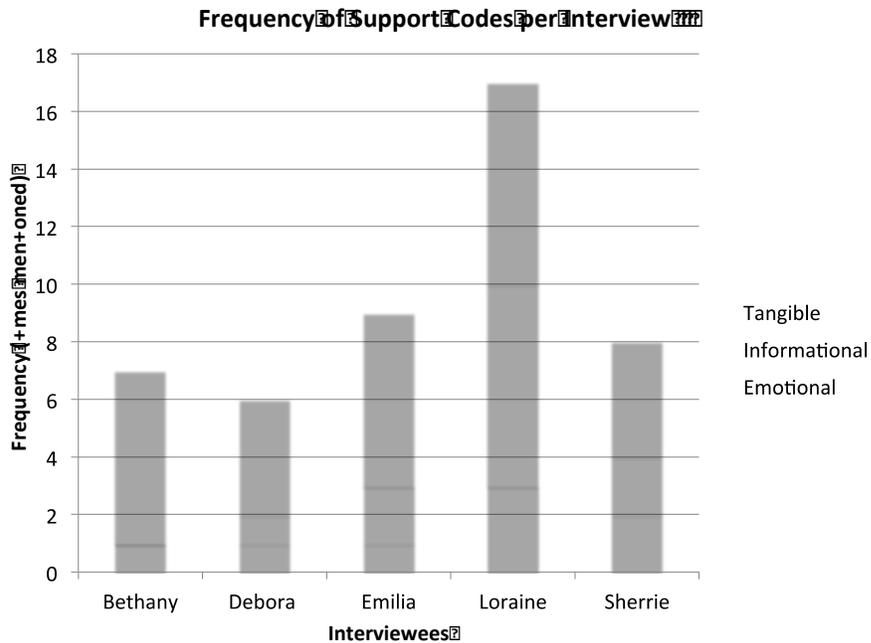


Figure 10
 Chart displaying the frequency of emotional support codes mentioned per interview, showing the proportion of child codes.

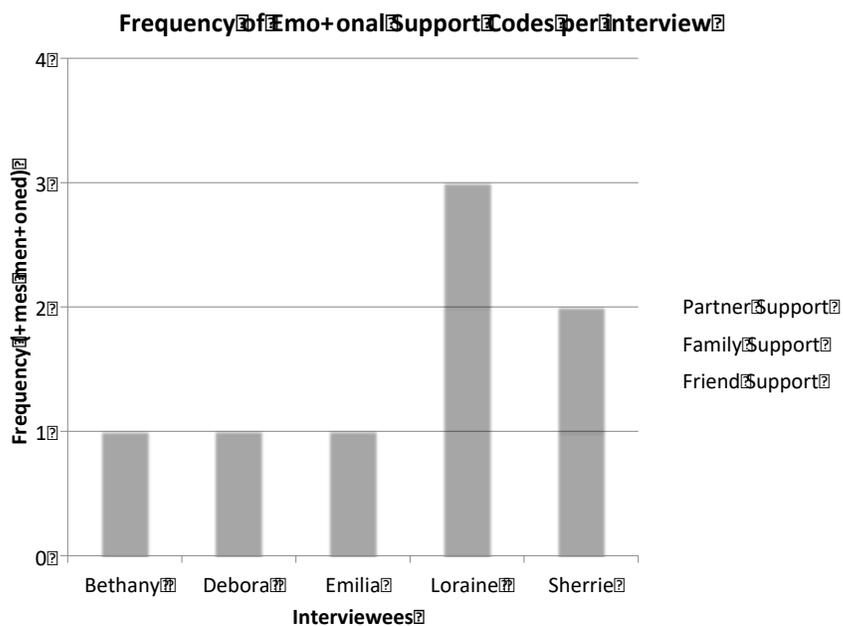


Figure 11
 Chart displaying the frequency of tangible support codes mentioned across all interviews, showing the proportion of child codes.

