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Illuminating the Experiences of Single Fathers

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Illuminating the Experiences
of Single Fathers

by

Heidi Rosa Esbensen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Sociology

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the experiences of single fathers and their roles as primary caregiver to their children as men in society adopting traditionally feminine roles. There was one primary research question explored: How do single father's experience parenthood? This is explored through four sub questions and discussions about daily life and childrearing alone; childcare and work and family conflicts; use of services and support networks; and of particular interest, gender and the influence of masculinity. Through an analysis of interviews with 14 fathers of varying class status, age, education, and time spent as a single father, I captured broadly the ways in which these men maneuver their childrearing with their lives, and how they are challenging, yet still upholding aspects of hegemonic masculinity. By exploring how these fathers maneuver childrearing as a male in society I assist in gaining insight and understanding to this population that has been previously overlooked in academic research.

Dedicated to:

Eva-Rosa Charis Esbensen-Martinosky,

Lilian Elizabeth Esbensen-LeBourveau

Finn-Aage Esbensen

And

Dana Burr Esbensen

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Non-traditional families, including single parent households, have become a common phenomenon within our society, yet even the single parent family structure has undergone significant change over the last few decades, including an increase in single-father households. (Stephens and Gillies 2011). Scholars have concluded that there is nothing simple or easy about raising children, and once combined with additional factors such as low-income strains and/or “going it alone” for single parents, childrearing becomes more difficult and presents numerous more challenges (Coles 2002, 2009; Gibson-Davis 2008; Roy 1999; Waldfogel et al. 2010).

Previous literature has examined single mothers in the contexts of work and family conflict, parental practices, daily life, parenting struggles, service access/usage, support networks, as well as how some combination of these factors influences their parenting practices and parenting experiences (e.g. McLanahan and Booth 1989; Neblett 2007; Nelson 2006; Olson and Banyard 1993; Quinn and Allen 1989). Single fathers, on the other hand, have not received the same level of scholarly interest (but see: Coles 2002, 2009; Doucet 2004; Grief 1985; Hamer and Marchioro 2002; Hatter et al 2002; Roy 1999; Schindler and Coley 2006; Smith and Smith 1981; Williams 2007), thereby begging the question upon which this thesis is based: How do single fathers experience parenthood? Within this broad exploration, I will also explore four sub-questions: how do single fathers maneuver daily life? How do single fathers balance work and family? How do single fathers use services and support networks? Finally, how do single fathers view gender within their roles? Drawing on in-depth interviews with single fathers in Portland, OR, I argue that the social constructs of gender in parenting and specifically

ideas of hegemonic masculinity inform all aspects and facets of parenting for the fathers explored within this research. Using concepts from Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, I aim to illuminate the influence these ideals and pressures of masculinity have over the lived experiences of lone parenting for these single fathers. I also explore the intersection of class and gender in this analysis to determine similarities and differences across social class boundaries for these single fathers.

There are 1.8 million single fathers in the US, meaning that 15% of all single parents were men according to the 2010 US census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Furthermore, this number has increased by over 60% in the last ten years (US Census Bureau 2010). As single fathers are an apparently growing population, it is important to study their struggles and experiences. Of equal import is to explore the intersection of gender and class within this context.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of single fathers in relation to their position as primary caregiver to their children. This will be explored through conversations about daily life, scheduling, work and/or school balance, services and support networks; and conversations about gendered parenting, their perceptions about masculinity in this scenario, and social reactions. Through the analysis of 14 interviews with single fathers, I will illuminate the ways that these fathers experience parenting in relation to the above discussed conversations.

This study was conducted in Portland, Oregon among single fathers who had at least half time care of their children. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture the personal stories and emotions of these fathers from their points of view. This facilitated a deep understanding of the struggles and barriers that these men face as males in the

traditional feminine social role of childrearing. This study also included men with a variation of class status to look at the possible intersections between class and gender within single fathering. This sample included low-income to middle-class fathers with incomes ranging from \$15,000 per year to greater than \$50,000. Eight fathers made less than \$30,000 per year; and two fathers had incomes that varied due to self-employment, ranging between \$15,000 and \$40,000. The remaining four fathers would be considered middle-class families. There was also a relatively high education status among these fathers with only three having no higher education past high school.

This study will give voice to a population that has of yet to be broadly heard. It will also be able to expand upon current literature in parenting, gender and social policy. Through the outcomes of these conversations, there are also suggestions for practice and policy implications, which could provide support and assistance for this growing population.

Overview of chapters

In chapter two I will discuss existing literature on parenting in general; covering parenting in two-parent families and fathering in two-parent families; I will then discuss some of the literature on single parents in general, single mothers, and then the literature that has been published on single fathers. Chapter three discusses the methodology used for this research, as well as the strengths, limitations.

The analysis chapters cover four broad but interrelated themes. Chapter four covers the struggles of daily life that these fathers face, including scheduling and daily hardship. In chapter five, I will discuss the way that these fathers maneuver work and

lone parenting. Chapter six explores the use of services and support networks for these fathers. I examine whether they use these forms of assistance or not, and the reason behind why they do, or do not. Chapter seven examines gender in the context of these fathers' positions in a traditionally non-masculine role. Looking at how they view and maneuver the socially constructed gendered expectations, and the social reactions they encounter. In the concluding chapter, eight, I provide an overview of the research findings, explain the importance of these findings in relation to adding to the existing body of literature and describe some policy and practice implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a significant amount of research on parenting in two-parent families, mothers' and fathers' experiences in two-parent families, and on single mothers experiences, hardships and interactions/relationships with their children and with others (e.g. Bank and Forgatch 1993; Kotchick et al. 2005; McLanahan and Booth 1989; Neblett 2007; Nelson 2006; Olson and Banyard 1993; Quinn and Allen 1989). There is currently a gap in research on fathers, single fathers especially. Single fathers are of theoretical interest because "American culture does not expect men...to be full-time lone parents" (Coles 2009 pg. 1311). I will provide an overview of this literature in relation to parenting in dual parent households including gendered roles, then an overview of parenting in single parent households before turning to a specific discussion of the single-mother and single-father literature.

Parenting in Two Parent Families

It has been shown that there are significant differences in respect to gender roles in parenting and within the household division of labor including the daily care of children. Gender roles associated with parenting include the societal constructs of mothering and fathering that have inherently carried different tasks associated with them and influence daily care of children and childrearing (Castillo 2010; Chesley 2011; Coles 2002, 2009; Coltart and Henwood 2012; Doucet 2004; Johansson and Klinth 2008; Hofner 2009; Miller 2011; Nelson 2006; Respler-Herman et al 2011; Riina and Feinberg 2012; Schindler and Coley 2006). Traditionally, parenting is conceptualized and understood as occurring within two-parent heterosexual households. This traditional

situation including a mother and father who are both living within the home and mutually responsible for this role of parent has led to significant research involving the gendered roles incorporated within childrearing in the context of two parent heterosexual couples (Chesley 2011; Doucet 2004; Dufur et al. 2010; Wall and Arnold 2007). Mothering has traditionally involved providing daily necessities, routines, care and nurturing whereas the traditional fathering role has provided more of the economic, playful, and disciplinary aspects of parenting (Dufur et al. 2010). These roles will be further discussed below as they are in relation to dual parent households, and also discussed as to how these generally separated and specifically “done” gendered roles in a single family household must be intertwined and carried out by the sole parent. These social roles for men are also influenced by the impact of hegemonic masculinity, a concept made popular by Connell (1987). This encompasses the ideas that men are pressured to uphold certain gendered expectations, qualities and roles to ensure their standing in a dominant social position, and to adhere to these they should reject feminine qualities and positions in society. These expectations, qualities and roles are fluid to the extent that they are accomplished through social behaviors and interactions and can change according to different social settings and within differing role portrayals, and not a static attribute of an individual’s identity. Masculinity is enacted in one’s role and differs with gender relations and social hierarchy placement. The theory claims that although there are multiple and alternative masculinities, one form holds more social value and is dominant based on certain characteristics. The traits associated with this dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity change over time, but carry the same weight on men in society. Research suggests that the current constructs of hegemonic masculinity in America include traits of

authority and dominance, economic stability, educational and labor market success, and heterosexuality (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The concept of alternative masculinities expresses that there is agency to create these alternatives specifically in populations that are somehow marginalized or subordinated, i.e. working class men, ethnic groups, and homosexual populations. Challenges and changes to hegemonic masculinity are common according to Connell, such as they adapt to social institutional changes and will change over time and context, but less systematic challenges by individuals or groups may be faced with adversity from other men. Broad changes or alterations over time to the overall concept of hegemonic masculinity does not account for or necessarily adopt the alternatives of marginalized or smaller populations of men that are challenging these ideals, but enacting these alternative masculinities is also common. Brandth and Kvande (1998) began to explore alternative masculinities in relation to fatherhood by discussing what they call “masculine care” where although the provider role was salient in the lives of fathers, it was not discussed. In contrast, the fathering role was discussed as highly important and being involved and engaged with their children was based on some adaptation to adopt the ‘mothering roles’.

Parenting and parental responsibilities are all-encompassing terms that refer to involvement with and overseeing of the lives and daily care of children, including discipline, nurturing, teaching, and instilling values and solid belief systems; also included in the overall concept of parenting is general household responsibilities and duties that coincide with childrearing (Castillo 2010; Coles 2002, 2009; Doucet 2004; Nelson 2006; Riina and Feinberg 2012). As mentioned above, these responsibilities of parenting are highly gendered and a majority of previous research has generally been

assumed under the umbrella of mothering, therefore the discussion in this section is inclusive of mothering, where fathering is discussed separately below as this is a more contemporary as well as limited body of research. There are many facets to childrearing and scholars have examined many of these. To encompass a broad view of the experience of parenting, I will include a wide variety of literature covering some of these many topics. Based on the reviewed parenting literature, this current research will include the following themes that are of concern and interest to the current project: childrearing struggles and practices, parental stress and coping, work/family balance, financial strain, access and use of assistance services, support networks, and gender roles.

Work/family balance is a long standing struggle for all parents and has been shown to create different forms of guilt, stressors, anxiety and increased time constraints (Dyk 2005; Wall and Arnold 2007). In some dual low-income households, two parents tend to adjust their work schedules so that one parent can be at home while the other is at work and vice versa, alleviating some of the direct stress as well as assisting with decreasing costs for child care (Doucet 2004). Middle class families face similar struggles as do low-income and working class families, experiencing similar feelings of guilt for lack of time spent with child(ren), stress over decisions of career/employment or family, and struggles of balancing child care and restrictive schedules (Greenhaus 1985; Nomagutchi 2012). Some middle-class families also employ a “split shift shared parenting” where parents schedule their lives and work around having one parent at home while the other is at work similar to that of dual low-income households (Harris and Giuffre 2010). This is clearly a struggle for many parents, on one hand with a parent

home, there is a parental influence and direct interaction with the child(ren) and they are not in a child care situation, but on the other hand the family is fairly regularly split and it has been shown that engagement with children by parents in this situation is actually lessened (Coltart and Henwood 2012; Dyk 2005). It is suggested that in dual parent families mothers may feel more stress and burden from childrearing than fathers due to the unequal division of labor and child care within these homes (Riina and Feinberg 2012).

Class status impacts not only who takes care of children and when, but also how children are parented. Considering parenting with the intersection of class creates a different scenario and its own set of individualized circumstances for parents. Lareau's (2002, 2003) research showed several differences that the influence of class had on childrearing in relation to how time was spent with children outside of school, how parents spoke with their children and how they engaged with them academically. This influence of working-class parenting showed different outcomes and development within children in this body of research. Further investigation has since begun in this field, exploring whether the influence of class is the sole variable and whether other variables may possibly affect these differences (Cheadle and Amoto 2010). Suggested in this latter research is that time restrictions and financial constraints are possibly an influencing factor and that the option to raise children any differently in this situation is difficult at best (Cheadle and Amoto 2010). Class has been shown to also influence the levels of parental stress and increase the need for outside assistance, which is discussed in more depth below (Dyk 2005; Olson and Barnard 1993).

Use of public assistance such as food, medical, childcare and emergency financial aid is obviously also significantly correlated to class, and has differing outcomes and inferences within the research on parents and use of such services. Previous analyses of public assistance use showed that dual parent homes were less likely to be eligible for assistance, and less likely to use them in comparison to single parents (US Department of Health and Human Services 2012). One analysis notes that many studies have shown distress and lowered perceptions of self in relation to the use of public assistance services, but points out that other literature has stated that the use of these services creates resilience and feelings of independence and security (Maupin et al 2010).

Support networks have been shown to influence parents' feelings of success and to enhance parents' ability to cope with their situations (e.g. Easterbrooks et al 2011; Respler-Hermann et al 2011). Support networks can include family, friends, other parents, teachers, school staff, neighbors, and other social resources and networks that could provide a variety of support including emotional, financial, child care, favors, emergency and listening/advice support. This network can also include forms of community support such as programs within the community that provide assistance, activities, advice or any of the other aforementioned forms of support for parents and families (Coles 2002, 2009; Easterbrooks et al. 2011; Kotchick 2005; Olson and Banyard 1993; Pinderhughes et al 2007; Respler-Herman et al 2011). Single and low income parents tend to be more socially isolated, but when the use of these supports are utilized their stress decreases, contentment increases and engagement with children increases as well (Weinraub 1983; Kotchick, 2005) The amount of stress that a parent feels and how they cope with this stress is influenced by their level of support network, less support

creates higher strains and more stress (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009, Castillo 2010 and 2012; Coles 2002, 2009, Olson and Banyard 1993; Respler-Herman et al. 2011) as well as negatively influences depression and overall feelings of satisfaction (Lee et al. 2009). Parenting practices such as positive discipline, increased interactions and positive engagement have also been suggested to be positively related to more access and use of support networks (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009, Castillo 2010 and 2012). Increased use of support networks and higher stress levels are another area where this research shows that class status influences parenting practices and experiences (e.g. Coles 2002, 2009; Kotchick 2005).

One of the highly gendered associations with parenting is the expectations for mothers to raise their children in highly attached manners, this has been referred to as “intensive mothering” by Hays (1998) and the idea developed as well as expanded upon by others (i.e. Glenn 1994; Hook 2008). This is associated with the social pressure on mothers to parent in excessively time consuming and overly personally demanding manners. This includes sacrificing oneself, time, energy, and resources constantly and continuously to this role of mother and creating excessive demands and unrealistic obligations upon them. Glenn suggests that this intensive mothering is socially constructed and includes an expectation or reaffirmation that mothers be passive and subordinate to their families (Glenn 1994).

Fathering in two parent families

Although it has been suggested that fathers are less engaged and involved with childrearing, it has also been expressed that even though fathers had less experiences with

childrearing and daily care of children that there was the desire to incorporate this into their experiences with their children and that the “gendered roles” of parenting were not an end all to the ability for them to balance the emotional and physical needs of their children (Coles 2002, 2009; Smith and Smith 1981). Previous research has found that fathers were more likely to adopt authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles (meaning more strict and more direct, and stricter rules and schedules), and at the same time were less involved in their children’s lives and personal interests (Bronte-Tinkew et al 2010). In many situations, men have been less likely to have been involved in much of the daily care and child rearing as well as household tasks, although recently it has been shown that involvement and participation has increased, as well as an increase in general time spent with children and within household routines and care (Berger et al. 2008; Doucet 2004; Johansson and Klinth 2008; Riina and Feinberg 2012). Increased time spent engaged and involved with their children has also been linked to more successful outcomes, parent efficacy and more positive attitudes for fathers in these situations (Riina and Feinberg 2012).

Gerstel and Shows’ (2009) research on class and gender found that EMT fathers (from the working class) were more likely to assist within the division of household labor, and participate more in traditional daily care roles of children as well as specialized involvement, where physicians (higher class status) were less likely to provide daily care roles, but more likely to participate in specialized engagement and activities such as sporting and school events. In this case, it is suggested that fathering is closely linked to class status and that the manner in which this influences traditional gender roles in these situations is significant. Father’s with lower incomes seemed to provide more of the

daily care in a manner that is suggestive of altering the traditional masculine father gender roles to fulfill more daily parental duties (Shows and Gerstel 2009). This research is one example of how class status influences parenting experiences.

Parenting in Single Parent Families

Single parenting research and literature has most commonly focused on single mothers specifically and the majority of this research has been based on low-income single mothers (Kotchick et al. 2005; Neblett 2007; Olson and Banyard 1993) with little based on middle class or upper class single mothers. Part of this may be due to the fact that 77% of single mothers were low-income according to 2009 Census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). Therefore, in general terms, discussions on single parenting becomes more highly associated with single mothers and does not explicitly apply to single fathers, even though there are several commonalities between them.

Parenting research has shown to have specific stress and gender role associations which influence the lives of parents and children alike (Castillo 2010; Chesley 2011; Coles 2002, 2009; Coltart and Henwood 2012; Doucet 2004; Johansson and Klinth 2008; Hofner 2009; Miller 2011; Nelson 2006; Respler-Herman et al 2011; Riina and Feinberg 2012; Schindler and Coley 2006) and this more general body of research leads into how gender roles are carried out in single parent households. Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2010) found that there were differences in how parents conducted their parental roles and responsibilities in single parent households in relation to the parent's gender. Single mothers and single fathers did daily tasks, play and household labor in different manners, which will be explored below with relation to each (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2010).

Research on stress in parenting has shown that daily parental stressors can be exacerbated by other factors such as occupation, social networks and support, finances, and other resources and these stressors are even more compounded when associated with single parenting (Bronte-Tinkew et al 2009, Gibson-Davis 2008; Respler-Herman et al 2011). One conclusion from this body of research is that single parents feel “more stress” on a daily life basis and that some of this added stress is due to what is referred to as “task overload”. “Task overload” leads to and encompasses having less personal time, less leisure time, less sleep and poorer health and personal care of themselves (Bronte-Tinkew et al 2009; Castillo 2010; Coles 2009; Coltart and Henwood 2012; Olson and Banyard 1993; Respler-Herman et al 2011; Riina and Feinberg 2012).

For all intentional purposes, and for reference to this discussion, within research on single parenting a “single parent” has been defined in either one of two ways, as either full-time single parents with little to no contact, support or time sharing of the children with the other parent, or being defined as having a specific percentage of parenting time (50% or more) which includes daily care and responsibility for the child(ren), commonly known as dual custody or split parenting time. Again, this research has been significantly based on single mothers and has also varied in theme from stress, work, depression, income, support networks, service usage, parenting practices as well as on the overall experience and how they (single mothers) “get by”.

Single mothers

This research on single mothers has shown that there are many stressors that compromise the majority of single mothers within their daily life, this research has also

looked at the coping reactions to these stressors (e.g. McLanahan and Booth 1989; Neblett 2007; Olson and Banyard 1993). Stressors are the occurrences, situations, obstacles, interactions, etc. within daily life that cause stress within one's world. Olson and Banyard found that stressors for single mothers included child related stressors, interpersonal relationship stressors, household stressors, financial stressors and work stress (Olson and Banyard 1993). Child related stress included tantrums, lack of help with house chores, talking back, messes, and food or eating issues (Olson and Banyard 1993). Interpersonal relationships refers to relationships with adults which can include issues, fights, or disagreements with other people such as ex-partners, the other parent, new partner, and friends. Household stressors relate to the overall functioning of the household; including cleanliness, availability of what is needed within the home at the time it is needed and maintenance such as yard work (Olson and Banyard 1993). Financial stress is associated with the strain of money, bills and access and availability of food (Olson and Banyard 1993). Finally, work stress includes issues such as having to work too many hours, not having enough hours, struggles with and at work, boss issues, as well as fear of losing a job (Olson and Banyard 1993). These stressors have been used in later research and the financial and work stress were shown to be most relevant to those with lower-incomes (Neblett 2007) and these other forms of stress were also more salient in situations of low-income single mothers (McLanahan and Booth 1989, Neblett 2007). This body of research further reinforces the impacts that class-status has on parenting.

The coping mechanisms this research found to be used in responses and reactions were ones that contrasted, alleviated, or released some of the tension from the stressors

and varied depending situation and stressor (Olson and Banyard 1993; McLanahan and Booth 1989). For example, the use of support networks assisted in coping with these stressors for single mothers (McLanahan and Booth 1989)

In relation to parenting practices, single mothers were found to have a harsher disciplinarian approach to childrearing in comparison to fathers. However, they still tended to take on the gendered parental role of nurturer even in single parent households (Nelson 2006). Mothers in general are more likely to participate in imaginary play, sing songs and play gentle and calm games with children, even when taking on the dual parental roles of single motherhood these findings stayed consistent (Dufur et al 2010; Nelson 2006; Quinn and Allen 1989). Attempting to balance single mothering with spending time with children and doing activities has been shown to create guilt about mothering roles and some self-neglect in relation to care of themselves (Ciabattari 2007; Quinn and Allen 1989). Activities outside of daily routines tend to decrease with single parenting, and extracurricular activities for older children tend to cause struggle with scheduling and cause more stress, especially if the mother is employed (Neblett 2007; Quinn and Allen 1989).

Research on work and family balance in single-mother households has shown that there are several areas of stress and conflict, including: whether or not they work, balancing responsibilities and roles, flexibility for work and home duties, and parenting habits in general (Ciabattari 2007). Single mothers feel more conflict about this balance than married mothers or fathers and this is possibly because of the excessive demands incorporated with lone parenting, as well as lesser amounts of resources both socially and financially (Ciabattari 2007; Nomagutchi 2012). It is also suggested that low-income

single mothers report more emotional and physical health issues, therefore making work-family balance struggles to be higher than other groups (Ciabattari 2007; Corcoran et al 2007). In general, discussions of spillover is when the intersection of family and work invade upon each other, such as work having positive or negative effects on family function (Stevens et al 2007). This work-family balance consists of issues with family coming before work, such as taking time off for illness and childcare issues (family to work spillover) and work impeding on time with family and daily family balance (work to family spillover) (Ciabattari 2007, Stevens et al 2007). Much of this literature has investigated dual earner households, gendered influence on conflict, or single mothers with median to upper incomes (Ciabattari 2007). Ciabattari's research on single mothers found that low-income mothers faced higher levels of conflict, and this was impacted by the lack of flexibility at work to deal with family (work to family spillover). This research also suggested that child care struggles, poor health, and lack of social support increased feelings of conflict with work and family life as well as influenced the ability to maintain stable employment (Ciabattari 2007).

Single fathers

Previous research on fathers and masculinity has shown that there is a binary tension for fathers to accept and balance between fulfilling the gendered idea of the breadwinner role and being a more active and participatory father (Williams, 2007; Hatter et al, 2002). For men, there is also a general struggle over their identities as fathers, and when in a single-parent situation there is a drive to "prove" themselves capable of traditional "mothering" roles in providing full care for their children (Coles,

2009). It has also been noted that fathers struggle with a constant need to reaffirm their masculinity and the feeling like they no longer fit the traditional masculine male role (Coles, 2009;). Some men address these personal struggles with gender roles (mothering and fathering) by changing how they view and conduct these roles, while others attempted to dismiss or ignore them altogether (Williams 2009). Those who attempted to change their role perspectives and alter a generalized “maternal” lifestyle did so by replacing or altering the maternal-nurturing ideas of daily life with more risk taking, fun and physical/sports/outdoor activities and with less indoor make believe, art, crafts, etc. (Doucet 2004). The conflict between nurturer and provider appears in several articles on single fathers and this research found that this is a constant struggle, as well as a form of stress that single mothers tend not to have (Coles 2002, 2009; Doucet 2004; Williams 2009).

There was a fair amount of research on single fathers in the 1980s and early 1990s when it was seemingly apparent that this population was expanding (Coles 2002; Greif 1985; Smith and Smith 1981). This early research has been expanded to a certain degree, and the significant portion of recent and current research on fathers has been looking into smaller and more cohesive groups, such as African American men who chose custody (Coles 2002, 2009), African American men in poverty (Hamer and Marchioro 2002; Roy 1999), stay-at-home fathers (Doucet 2004), homeless fathers (Schindler and Coley 2006) and widowed or divorced men (Smith and Smith 1981). Yet still, the research of the current single father’s overall experience is lacking, especially with respect to the inclusion of a broader or more generic population, more variation of class-status issues, and gender relations within current societal norms and social issues.

The previous research on single fathers did find that there was a struggle with adjustment to full-time parenting, the acceptance of new roles, and difficulty and confusion with respect to the many facets of childrearing or parenthood (Coles 2002, 2009; Dufur et al 2010; Hamer and Marchioro 2002). Adjusting to full time single parenting for fathers has been shown to be a very difficult transition and this struggle was similar across differing circumstances that led to single parenthood, whether by personal decision or choice, by happenstance (i.e. widowed), or by the need to remove the child(ren) from the other household for child(ren)'s safety or well-being (Coles 2002, 2009; Hamer and Marchioro 2002). It was found that many times the transition included a need to increase patience, learn new forms of communication, balance the added responsibility and set personal mental decisions on childrearing including such things as discipline and schedule (Coles 2002, 2009; Hamer and Marchioro 2002). Fathers appear to have a more difficult time not only adjusting to the new role, but also accepting it, and some findings suggest that single fathers are associated with having more negative feelings towards single parenting, especially with younger children, due to the massive amounts of time and care involved with younger ages (Dufur et al 2010).

Due to the historical difference suggesting that fathers are less engaged and participatory in child rearing (Doucet 2004; Riina and Feinberg 2012) there is a social concern of possible struggle for single fathers to manage daily childrearing aspects appropriately when looking at guidance, discipline and developmentally appropriate rules and boundaries (Kielty, 2006). Parenting practices in single father households have been shown to be different from those in dual parent households or within single mother households. Dufur et al's research (2010) found that single fathers tended to be less

affectionate, stricter on daily routines such as bedtime, TV and foods, but also less abrasive in their discipline techniques. They also found that different activities and games were played in single father homes, things such as singing and imaginary play occurred less, but things such as puzzles and sports occurred more frequently.

Research on single parents and their use of services has varied, but for single fathers there is a struggle, as well as the pride, of doing independently what is needed for themselves and their families that was attached to not using services or to assist their childrearing or parenting roles in daily life. (Coles 2009). There are also suggestions and findings of attempting to avoid the social stigmas of using social services for both mothers and fathers (Coles 2009; Maupin et al 2010). The question arises within the previous research of whether or not services are used within lower-income single fathers' homes due to the desire for autonomy or if lack of access and knowledge of available services may play a key role in not accessing or utilizing them. Knowledge of these services is not always as common as one would assume, and if not sought out may be a hidden resource. The use of such programs and services not only assists with basic needs, but provides some alleviation of daily stressors, which can have a positive impact on fathers' and children's health, satisfaction and personal relationships between them (Olson and Banyard 1993).

As is the case with use of assistance services, previous research has found that men are more prone to have a strong desire for autonomy, yet, at the same time, many single fathers depend on their families of origin as a main support network for their child-linked responsibilities and care (Coles 2002). Having access to these networks of support has been shown to decrease the stress in a single parent's life and provide for better

parenting practices and more positive interaction with children (Coles 2009; Olson and Banyard 1993; Respler-Herman et al 2011)

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the existing literature on parenting in dual parent households, fathering in two parent households, single parenting, single mothers and what exists on single fathers. The span of this research included gendered parenting, work and family balance, influence of class on parenting, services and support networks, daily life stress and coping and concepts pertaining to fathering and gender. A majority of previous research on fathering has taken place within dual parent households therefore, this body of literature provided an important background on fathering research. Research on single parenting has explored some comparisons between single mother and single father households and informed some possible similarities and differences to explore further in this research. This general single parenting literature as well illustrated gaps that should be further explored for single parenting in relation to lone fathers. The broad spectrum of work on single mothers informs the base of this research in relation to framing research on single fathers. It assisted in distinguishing important aspects of childrearing for single mothers to explore in relation to single fathers. Previous research on single fathers has taken place within highly specific and homogenous populations, such as African American single fathers, homeless fathers, etc., but there is a gap beyond these populations. With this background overview, the traditional ideals of gendered parenting and the experiences of single mothers are most pertinent in the focus of this research and frame the analysis of this research.

When looking at this previous research there is an apparent gap in research on single fathers as a general research base, as well as in relation to a more comprehensive experience. Given that there are few researchers who have begun to explore single fathers, and the highly specific populations that have been researched, a continuation and expansion with the inclusion of an additional population is important. This literature base is also missing a deep understanding of how gender, class and fatherhood intersect with each other and what this means socially, as well as its impacts to those individuals who experience it. This research explores the overall daily experiences of single fatherhood including a population varying in situation and class-status. This can contribute to this gap by illustrating the gendered and possible classed experiences of single fathers through their narratives. This research used a qualitative approach to obtain this deep understanding and analysis and this methodology is described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

I conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with single fathers. This design allowed for potential variance and independent perceptions and experiences that arose in these individual experiences of single fathers. I was exploring the overall experience of single fathers, so performing a qualitative study provided me with a means to investigate and explore this experience sans any specific assumptions on what the experiences may be, but also allowed me to gather a thorough and in-depth understanding of the experiences of single parenting on fathers that is grounded in previously researched concepts. I chose to conduct this research in Portland, OR due to convenience of proximal location to this institution, and available and willing participants as well as access to this population through neighborhood contacts and school system.

The selected sample was single fathers (with 50% or more of parenting time with child(ren), and at least one of who's child(ren) is under the age of 10 or under the age of 14 if they have been the primary caregiver for at least 6 years. These factors standardized the sample to be comparable to each other and limiting the age of children to 10 (or care from at least age of 8) and under will allow for the sample to correspond more appropriately to the literature on childrearing and stressor concepts, which would be less relevant using this format of concepts if the child(ren) was a pre-teen or teenager. In this research, I defined a single parent as one that has 50% or more parenting time. The terms custody and parenting time have different legal standards in different jurisdictions; in this research, I used Oregon's definition of parenting time to define this, which is the percentage amount of time caring for a child with full responsibility of them and daily care during this time, this time agreement is non-dependent on the custody agreement.

Legal custody defines the rights of a custodial parent, or both parents if in joint custody, with respect to the child's major medical, educational and religious decisions. So, custody does not determine the living situation of a child and although these rights are important and pertinent for the well-being of the child they do not influence the amount of parenting time for either parent in and of itself, or determine daily care of child.

There were two waves of recruitment for this research. The first wave included purposeful recruitment of low-income single fathers as determined by at least one of several measures: 1) use of free and reduced lunch program through Portland Public Schools, 2) current use of state services, such as food stamps, or 3) household income at or below \$1500 monthly for father and one child, \$2000 for 2 children, etc. with a \$500 increase per month per child above this baseline. The second wave recruited all single fathers of any income, with intentions to stay below \$60,000 a year. These two waves of recruitment were used to intentionally seek diversity in the SES of single fathers.

I used a purposive sampling technique; single-parent fathers were recruited through flyers that were posted in Portland Public Elementary Schools, YMCA Daycares, on community flyer boards and around Portland State University. These same flyers were posted on Facebook and on local single parent group websites. I also recruited known single fathers that fit within the participant criteria through friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Snowball sampling was also used when possible through known contacts and recruited participants needed to achieve desired number of participants from the sample population. Participants were asked to refer other low-income single fathers to be contacted for possible participation in the study. Flyers requested that possible participants contact me through email or through phone. Four of the participants were

recruited through known contacts, eight were recruited through the flyers directly either at the locations or online, and the last two were through snowball and referrals from other participants. I conducted a preliminary screening after initial contact was made through email or phone with the possible participants that provided basic demographic information as well as screened participants to ensure that they meet study criteria for further participation in the project. This portion of the screening and initial method as well as the survey design was partially based from Coles (2002, 2009) research on Single Black Fathers (See appendix A for screening design). From this recruitment, 14 fathers contacted me and met the criteria to participate in this study.

The fathers' demographic information are shown in Chart 1 at the end of this section. All but two fathers identified as Caucasian, one identified as Spanish/Filipino and one identified as Caucasian/Native American. Children's ages ranged from three to nineteen, 12 fathers having custody of more than one child, four of which had three children in their care. Eight fathers had been single parents for five years or more, seven of which had taken full time responsibility when their children were infants or toddlers (less than 3 years old). Four had been single parents for two to three years and two had been single parents for about a year. Five of the fathers had some form of stable long term co-parenting with the other parent, still having half-time or more of the daily care, the other nine fathers were full time caregivers. Fathers had acquired custody or full responsibility of their children due to different situations. Five had experienced severe addiction issues with the mother, one had faced abuse of himself and his children from the mother and one had separated due to the mothers mental health issues. Eight fathers were divorced, but only four were single parents due solely to divorce and didn't include

other extenuating factors, such as addiction or abuse. The remaining three fathers were single parents due to unplanned pregnancies, two of which were fathers with co-parenting situations. Two of the fathers also had taken on care of step-children, both due to addiction issues with the mothers. Bryan has custody of his two step-children on the weekends and is seeking full time custody from their mother due to drug addiction, the biological father is uninvolved. Brad acquired custody of his step-daughter also due to addiction, when she turned 18 she moved away closer to her mother, who still struggles greatly with drug addiction and does not have contact with their son.

The participants that were selected further set up interviews with me at a location and a time that was convenient for them, typically occurring in my department office, although 3 were conducted in a coffee shop. Interviews lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half and were recorded. Acknowledging that safety considerations were relevant I attempted to avoid in home interviews, but due to the difficulty that single parenthood carries with time constraints and need for child care, one interview was conducted in a participants home, this was a known participant through a trusted source.

The interviews were semi-structured and an interview guide was constructed to guide the conversation (see appendix B). Although the conversations were facilitated by me, many fathers' stories covered future cues in the interview guide and not all questions were asked, but all concepts were discussed to the best of my ability. The fathers were also asked if they desired to use a pseudonym or maintain their given name for any information related to this research.

Upon completion of the interview, the audio was uploaded to a secure password protected file and then were transcribed by the investigator. During transcription all

names of children, ex partners, schools, work and any other identifying information was deleted or changed to limit ability to identify these fathers. The transcriptions were then coded using Dedoose qualitative analysis software. The interviews were coded in several phases, the first of which being an open coding, rooted in a grounded theory approach, of one thorough and clear interview. These codes were then compressed into cohesive basic themes that had emerged and child codes were added. The next process including using this basic open code book and applying it to the remaining interviews, changing and adding codes as necessary. Once all interviews were coded, analysis of code application was used and codes were combined, or redistributed to create the final codebook that is cohesive and concise. The excerpts were then analyzed for common narratives and emergent stories across these fathers' experiences.

Strength of Research

This research carries several strengths in relation to the previous literature in two ways, first by expanding the research from single parents, which has previously been largely focused on single mothers, to include single fathers and also by including multiple concepts and facets of parenting that have been previously explored separately. By combining these concepts together, there is the possibility for a more cumulative experience of single father parenthood. It also carries strengths of qualitative research with exploration of the lived experiences and the overall research design provided for participants to relate these experiences in their own words. Previous research done on single fathers has looked at specific identities of men such as stay-at-home fathers or African American fathers, where general fathering research has had a lapse in time and

updates for current societal situations have changed significantly in the last three decades. This research will fill in that gap, bringing up-to-date experiences of single fathers and exposing a more heterogeneous group. This research could also provide much needed insight and information that could assist in family policy and public family support programs, as well as provide insight for educational and familial needs. Due to the lack of acknowledgement of single fathers, this inclusion to the discourse could provide much needed support and assistance.

The inclusion and combination of multiple facets and dimensions of the experience of parenthood allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences. Basing concepts off of previous research findings and combining them into a framework that explores their intersections and overall experiences of parenting strengthens the field of parenthood in one cumulative manner that current research has not, and expands the idea of parenthood and fathering into these other fields. By following existing literature on single mothers, either through methodology, findings, suggestions for further research or through existing survey sets, there is a strong case for high validity. Successful qualitative data with men about gender also guides my research to maintain that the responses are not too highly influenced based on social desirability. As a researcher, I also stand in the position as a long time single parent, this position lending to a possible connection and feeling of open communication with respondents. This positionality was discussed at some point with each father, or expressed either during the preliminary recruitment or during interviews. This had an apparent and perceivable calming effect upon respondents and formed a mutual connection that opened conversational themes and allowed for more personal responses, due to similar situational understanding.

As a final strength, Portland by nature is in general a community-based, open-minded, and accepting city. This should prove as a strength when looking at single fathers due to the ability for them to feel less influenced by the possibility of judgment or gender role affiliation. By looking at this specific experience in a “best case scenario” of a city full of support and acceptance, the results can be seen as possibly relevant in cities with less accepting and open attributes, although not transferable in this manner.

Limitations of Research

As with any research there are bound to be weaknesses or limitations that are important to recognize and should be noted, explained, and limited to the best of a researcher’s abilities. Qualitative research collection has intrinsic limitations within the context of in-depth interviews, the first of which is that of having smaller sample sizes in relation to other forms of research. Small sample size will lead to generalizability issues as well as reliability. The ability to apply these findings to another populace area outside of Portland or in different areas may be difficult and recreating the research could lead to differences in experiences. Portland is a community-based city that by its own nature is more accepting than many other large cities, so a single father’s experience in Portland could significantly vary from a single father in another city, this is a strength and a weakness of this location for research. This also influences the reliability and that it is not a study that could be recreated in another city and contain the same experiences, findings, or context.

It is also pertinent to mention that social desirability effect in research where one is broaching on emotional subjects and situations which may have a societally perceived

conception of acceptance to them could play a factor. The tendency for responses to be framed in a socially favorable manner versus strictly honest answers can be decreased significantly with an understanding of the subject matter, and the manner of approaching it. I will, to the best of my ability, frame discussion and interviews in a manner that is non-threatening as well as make the interviewee feel at ease and out of the scope of judgment by developing common ground and allowing multiple discussions to occur (changes of subject).

Although there is previous research discussing gender and the associated roles with a female researcher and male interviewees, there were no significant weaknesses identified, it may have an influence on the ability of the sample to be willing to share their experiences with a female researcher. This could be a possible limitation that I hope to find of minimal influence on this researcher, but have noted that it may be an influencing factor and will attempt to dissuade it from infringing on the quality of the data. Looking at previous research with a female interviewer and male respondents I will attempt to minimize the impact of gender by approaching subjects in a subtle manner and allowing the common ground of single parenthood and empathy in the struggle of balancing roles to limit any social desirability effects based on gender. In “Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men's Experiences with Women’s Work”, Wingfield states that “Social desirability bias may compel men to phrase responses that might sound harsh in ways that will not be offensive or problematic to the woman interviewer” (2009) and although responses may have been formatted differently and more subtly; the overall interview method and common ground between herself and the males she interviewed provided detailed responses and did not have an overall impact on the substance even

when gender may have been a factor (Wingfield 2009). Coles mentions that in some manners males are more willing to speak openly with a female than with a male and this could be beneficial for this research.

Despite these limitations this research can serve as a means to learn more about single fathers, add to the existing literature in parenting and help inform ideas for policy and practice implications, as well as be used as a base for further research as is discussed in the Conclusion chapter.

TABLE 1: STUDY PARTICIPANT DATA

Name	Age	# Child	Female	Male	Employment /Income	Education	Years Single Parent
Jason	42	2	8	10	No/<15,000	Assoc.	>5 years Addiction
Noah	35	2	7, 12		Self/Varies	Master	>5 years Divorce
Matthew	31	3		3, 9, 12	Self/Varies	Bach.	2-3 years Mental Health
Tony	46	3	10, 22	5	Yes/<20,000	Bach./in coll.	2-3 years Unplanned
Mike	37	1		6	Yes/25,000	HS/in coll.	2-3 years Unplanned
Larry	40	2	11	8	Yes/>50,000	Bach.	2-3 years Divorce
Bryan	29	3	8-step	4, 12-step	Yes/50,000	HS	1 year Divorce/Addiction
Joe	50	2	15, 19		Disability/< 15,000	Bach.	>5 years Divorce
Jared	32	2	8	13	Yes/<15,000	HS	>5 years Divorce/Abuse
Brad	37	2	18-step	11	Yes/30,000	Bach.	>5 years Divorce/Addiction
Skip	38	3	8, 12	11	Self/>50,000	Bach.	>5 years Divorce/Addiction
Scott	45	2		7, 10	Yes/35,000	Masters	1 year Divorce
Justin	45	1		7	Self/30,000	Some College	>5 years Unplanned
Christian	40	2	14	12	No/<15,000	High School	>5 years Addiction

CHAPTER 4: “DOING IT ALONE”:

Someone asked me how it was to be a single dad and everything if I could sum it up you know. It was, you are a single father with two kids or a single mother with two kids, it does not matter. All three of you are hungry and you get a corn dog, you split the corn dog in half and they each get a half. It’s not about us anymore, it’s their movie as soon as they are born...our wants and needs are secondary. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

Daily Life, Schedules and Emotional Challenges

As Jason explains above, parenting, single parenting in particular, requires sacrifice and adaptations to one’s life. In this chapter I give an overview of life for these 14 fathers in relation to “doing it alone”. In this chapter, I look at how they describe their daily lives in relation to raising children, balancing their schedules with other parental responsibilities, and their perspectives of the importance of their relative roles as father, participant in society, and as an individual outside of the fathering role. This includes daily life, scheduling and emotional challenges that these fathers faced in doing this alone. Throughout these narratives and the analysis one thing became very clear, the social influence of masculinity theory impacted and informed these fathers’ daily lives, schedules, and emotional struggles (I will expand on the concept of gender in chapter seven). In describing their caregiving as a single parent, fathers also faced challenges in seeking and receiving support in their parenting (I will expand on this theme in chapter six). Despite these challenges, these fathers viewed their time with their children as primary. To illustrate both of the main theme in this chapter, I provide an in-depth story of one father, and then provide supporting stories from several other fathers.

Noah is a 35-year-old father of two girls, seven and twelve years old. He has been a single father for over five years and his ex-wife lives in another state. She has visits with their daughters on holidays and for several weeks over the summer, but other than these times, Noah is in charge of childrearing alone. Noah built his own business to provide for his children. This allows him the ability to get up with them in the morning, get them to school, while also being present after school and for extracurricular activities. The balancing act of getting children to and from school, activities, and visits with friends on top of the daily care is a constant struggle with many sacrifices. Because of these obligations, he has not succeeded as much in his business or career as he would have hoped, nor had as much balance in his home and personal life. Noah's daily life and hardship with scheduling is easy to see in his description of a routine day in their lives. One daughter needs to arrive at school at 7:30, the other catches a bus to school at 8:30; he rushes across town to work, given the locations are constantly changing, hopefully arriving by 9:00. He then has to leave by 3:30 to retrieve his daughters from two locations. The evening consists of violin and/or swim practice, going to the grocery store, cooking dinner, overseeing homework, and some play time, followed by bathing, brushing teeth, and finally reading prior to bedtime at around 9:00pm. Noah repeats this schedule day in and day out on school and workdays, also sometimes having to work evenings and weekends for his own business to complete jobs. In these cases, which are not infrequent, he usually takes his daughters with him to work. On days when he has had to pick them up from school and go back to a job site, he will work late into the evening or night and

occasionally his daughters will fall asleep on the floor with a blanket until he is finished. Beyond the hectic schedule and financial strain, Noah feels a lack of time to spend actively engaged with his children individually in activities, games and conversations.

These struggles with schedule, daily financial strains, stressors with lack of time, and coping mechanisms or adaptations were not unique to Noah's situation, but followed suit with many other father's stories. They all discussed issues related to doing it alone, schedule conflicts and balance, daily life and hardships, and child engagement and routines as well. Noah's description of a chaotic schedule is very similar to that of many other respondents. These fathers most specifically described the lack of another caregiver, the struggle of juggling their schedules day to day, and accomplishing everything necessary while still being able to work and maintain their own sanity. The discussion of how to balance doing it alone in combination with the benefits of this scenario was a common theme through many of these fathers' narratives. These discussions of doing it alone fell into two main categories; the logistical struggles with daily life and schedule, and the emotional struggles of doing it alone.

Doing it Alone: Schedule balance and Sacrifice

The discussions of basic chaos in daily scheduling, as illustrated at the beginning with Noah's story, for each father carried variations in times and routine, but each described their schedules as non-stop. Noah discussed several themes in his descriptions and story of daily life as did many other fathers, but all of them clearly illustrated the

constant care and immense responsibility that child rearing alone entailed. It was described as a constant juggling act and changed day to day. Many fathers discussed the theme of not having another caregiver to balance the daily responsibilities. This overwhelming responsibility and time commitment was not expected by many of these fathers in relation to childrearing, and they referenced this when discussing their daily schedules and routines:

I would say that the biggest gap between what I had, my preconceived notion of what parenthood would be and what it has actually been has just been the overwhelming time commitment that it is... I don't think I fully anticipated the nonstop everything responsibility of being a parent. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

That constant negotiation and constantly getting babysitters and doing all of that stuff and then just taking them to whatever after school activity they have to do, all of that stuff was done by my ex before, but now I have to do that alone when I have them. (Larry, 40, 8 and 11 year old, full time employment)

Although many of these fathers stated that they had wanted to be highly involved participants in all of the facets of childrearing, the responsibility and scheduling time commitments came as a shock. Many discussed feeling that they were always late, constantly feeling behind, and not able to fit that last thing that needed to be done into their days. Sometimes this meant scrounging leftovers or grabbing fast food for dinner, to having to skip music or soccer practice, and even down to skipping meals themselves to try and squeeze it all in. These fathers' schedules have shown that most of them are in constant motion and rushing to provide daily care for their children in between their other responsibilities. Making the time in their schedules to get these necessities accomplished was difficult for many of them.

Struggles with daily schedules also highlighted feelings of losing time with their children. This included “fun educational time” and learning time, as well as time for individual attention and conversation. Noah discussed this as a failure on his part, and stated that he sees differences between his children where his youngest daughter received less independent attention and time from him, due to raising them alone and the burden of their schedules. He feels his older daughter’s young years were spent much more effectively learning and the success that she has because of this is not something he has been able to give his other daughter. This is due to these schedule and time restraints that have now become normal for many of these single fathers. Mike also felt that his chaotic schedule, other caretakers, work, and school significantly influences his quality time with his son: “I lose significant time that he is with his Gammie for the time being. I kind of thought that my schedule, I didn’t arrange it very well, but I want one less night where he is with her and he is with me, I think that is going to be big.” (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school) These fathers expressed this lack of time to spend engaged with their children was difficult for them. In some cases, this was discussed as detrimental in some manners to their children, and to themselves. The time that remained after daily schedules where they may have had this available time was usually given to errands and house chores. Many fathers discussed the immense amount of time it took just to keep their house clean, laundry done, yard maintained, groceries in the fridge, etc. and many felt this daily maintenance of their space was extremely difficult to maintain. Many fathers specifically said that their schedules around children, work, housework, and everything else left them with little time to sleep or shower, much less time to fold and put away laundry regularly. This meant that time to engage in activities and quality time

with their children was sometimes gained only in sacrifice of other things that needed to be done. The discussions of daily balance and scheduling were no different for fathers with different income levels. The chaos, conflicts and struggles remained the same across class boundaries even when looking at daily childcare, as will be seen in the next chapter.

There were many times where the struggle of balancing daily life and schedules, and mentions of doing it alone were overlapped with references of lacking another caregiver, suggesting that these struggles may not occur if there was a partner to assist:

I just think that the role of two caregivers whether or not it is a partner, like a husband and wife, or it is you living with your mom and dad, or it is you living with a sister or a brother raising multiple children. Anytime you have multiple caregivers in the house, it's just a magnitude, an order of how much easier things are...So whenever you are in a position where you are the sole responsible party you are going to miss things that wouldn't happen if you were in a partnership (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Noah suggests that even if lacking the other parent, having a support network would alleviate some of the struggles that he faced, as Mike mentioned above such as having support with day to day tasks. However, there was a similar sentiment of lacking assistance from another caregiver even for those fathers who lived in multigenerational households, or those who had strong support networks: "Mostly it has just been not having somebody else specifically to rely on for certain things when there is just having another parent there; there is somebody to kind of take up the slack of certain things." (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed) Matthew has a strong support network as do several of the other fathers, which will be discussed in depth in chapter six. This did not seem to impact their emotional acknowledgement that they were lacking some assistance with childrearing and daily life.

I think that, there are less breaks you know? It is kind of one of those things where working, I will work a night shift and get done at 11, unwind, be in bed at 12:30, well I don't have that someone who is like don't worry I got breakfast in the morning, you are that person. So, with that, it is more you are in it you are in it every day, you are in every meal. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

These fathers clearly stated there is an overburden on schedules and providing care and that the relief of another caregiver to take on some of the responsibility would be beneficial. The daily care of a child as Mike points out is constant and “you are in it every day, you are in every meal” leaving little time and energy for oneself, much less for work or daily life. The challenge of completing the basic responsibilities of daily life childrearing alone was a common theme for many of these fathers, it appeared to adversely influence their perspectives on some factors of childrearing alone. This was not only seen as a daily care and schedule issue but also, as Noah described, also a missing of aspects such as behaviors, manners, and independent time to converse with children to be sure they are doing well. Matthew mentions someone could “pick up the slack” were there another caregiver present and several of these fathers had either adapted daily life or expectations to cope with not having another adult to “pitch in.” This appeared pertinent for their own and their children’s overall wellbeing. For example, when talking about completing daily chores and day-to-day household responsibilities, which tended to fall to the wayside, Noah explained he could not keep up with chores around the house and found a way to hire assistance: “It’s like by the time that we are home at like 7:30 at night and we have got an hour before bedtime the last things I want them to do is chores.” (Noah, 35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed) These fathers found it very important to spend “quality” time with their children, and for Noah, paying

someone clean provided him with the ability to have this rare time with his daughters. Not having another caregiver to share not only daily care, but also general household maintenance led to some personal negative reflections. Noah felt that the fact he could not keep up with the task of household maintenance alone, was a personal failure. This modification to his self-expectations and hiring assistance alleviated that negativity. Matthew on the other hand, acknowledging that paying for assistance is not always an option based on income, discussed modifying his overall expectations of daily life and childrearing mentally and emotionally:

It is not really a specific thing, but when I reflect upon the reality of being a single parent, it's the juggling act of trying to figure and fit everything together, and trying to maintain my sanity in the process and not be grumpy and taking it out on my kids. Time management is a big thing, and it is easy to blame it on [the children] when things don't happen as quickly as they should, so it is a good thing to keep in perspective. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew's description of a routine in their daily life and their schedule mirrored Noah's description of scheduling and routines above. The chaotic juggling of self, work and children was stressful for most of these fathers, coping and managing skills appeared crucial in dealing with schedule balance as well as with emotional aspects which are discussed next. Where Noah had found a way to provide daily house care assistance to cope with negative ideas of himself, Matthew discussed relaxing his expectations of daily life flow and time management. This adaptation includes keeping in perspective that things do not always go according to plan. Matthew mentioned several times throughout his narrative the modifications of accepting the daily life struggles and lack of time that come with childrearing alone, as did many other fathers. This signifies that acceptance of disturbances in plans is a continuous mental coping strategy used to maintain sanity

without another caregiver to rely upon. The concept of using support systems to alleviate stress and strain in day to day life will be discussed in the chapter six.

Doing it Alone: Emotional struggles

When discussing childrearing alone, it was obvious that daily schedule and routine balance was a struggle for most of these fathers. The logistical side was not the only factor of doing it alone that these fathers faced, another aspect discussed was that of emotional struggles. Lacking another caregiver was mentioned in collaboration with doing it alone frequently, this theme is explored next. This includes discussions of being alone in daily struggles, ways of adapting, dealing with childrearing issues, and feelings of failure and loneliness. This section ends with discussing the perspectives of these fathers' role importance, and on the benefits of doing it alone.

Other than the stress felt by the lack of sharing the burdens of daily schedules and routines with another caregiver, there were discussion of the fundamental difficulties of raising children alone. This pertained to the effects felt in areas of behavior, discipline, and how they were handled: "By Sunday night I am cranky, my patience is very thin and I have a temper, not as bad as my dad, but my temper does kick in..." (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment) Bryan discussed his lack of patience in a manner similar to Justin when discussing normal and frustrating parenting experiences. They stated that the benefit of the other parent, or another adult would facilitate more patient parenting and felt that they may have been more successful or balanced in dealing with certain situations with their children were another caregiver present:

Having the buffer of maybe being able to step away, have the other parent come in and handle it can be...maybe mitigate frustration. When you are really just dealing with it by yourself you don't have that pressure valve of maybe keeping your frustration level below where you might raise your voice, lose your temper. I mean it is not so much of an issue now, but back when he was two, three, when they are still a lot more needy, but also becoming more challenging. Those were some moments that despite the immense relief of not being with his mother anymore, it was like, wow it would be so nice to be like 'hey can you take care of him for a minute so I can catch my breath?' (Justin, 45, 7 year old, self-employed)

When raising a child alone, there are going to be times when discipline and child behavior issues are going to appear more difficult. Bryan relates the lack of another caregiver to give him a break by the end of week as troublesome, in that he feels overextended and exhausted. Justin also mentions this issue and indicates that it may lead to overreacting, which he feels would be alleviated with someone to assist him. Feeling overly burdened, overly tired and overly stressed has been associated with single parenting and this can lead to overreacting to children's behaviors. Jason also feels this excessive stress: "With couples you say 'man I got to take a break' and you have 15 minutes to yourself, but as far as single parenting goes you don't get any of those breaks so you are constantly rechecking yourself for patience and redistributing it out." (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless) This task overload relates to the discussions with Noah and Matthew that illustrated creating coping strategies to assist with daily life stress may be crucial to alleviating some of this strain and managing this task overload more efficiently.

The final themes that emerged in conversations of lacking another caregiver were feelings of possible failure by childrearing alone, as well as an overall sentiment of loneliness and lack of sharing the experience. Bryan first touches on this fear of failure

stating “Because who says what I am doing is right, I may believe it is, but I don’t get that opposite point of view, that better option.” He is not alone in this state of worry that what one is doing may not be the optimal option or most effective manner of childrearing. Noah, along with other fathers, shared this sentiment: “For the first two years that I lived in Portland I never had another adult in my house, just me and the kids. That is not ideal either. Because when you fail by yourself, you fail big. Nobody is there to check you.” (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed) The concept of checks and balances in childrearing were frequently discussed, many feeling that they were not capable of this due to lacking the other parent. Part of this self-doubt could be due to the socialization of gendered parenting and struggles with adopting the traditional mothering role, which will be discussed explicitly in chapter seven on gender. There were a broad range of areas that these fathers discussed these checks should possibly occur, but many were in relation to daily life routines and discipline, such as Justin’s narrative above. Questions arose around punishment, what kind and for what actions, and behaviors that were or were not age appropriate or acceptable in their homes. These fathers also related checks and balances to what their children should watch on media, read, how to dress, how to act, manners, and schedules that fit with their lifestyle, but that were still age appropriate. These issues were expressed with concern of failing or making wrong decisions even with minor things such as food choices, appropriate clothing, and activities such as Bryan stated: “I have problems when it comes to clothing, I don’t dress well and I have zero fashion sense and I am okay with it, but she is a pretty princess and she wants to be a pretty princess.” (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment) This sentiment of making mistakes with dressing and

“manners” was especially in relation to fathers’ with daughters. Some discussed feeling that they had failed when other adults would point out social behaviors, such as poor table manners. This made these fathers feel as if they had missed something, or neglected to parent effectively, which added to feelings of being unsuccessful alone. It can be assumed that these fathers were not socialized to understand the feminine aspects of appropriate social behavior, therefore they struggle in the area of teaching their daughters these role expectations. Also, questions arising for these fathers as to whether they were making the right decisions, is directed by the ideas of struggling to “prove themselves as men raising children” as discussed by Coles and within this research in chapter seven.

It was obvious that the lack of another caregiver and the insecurity of whether these fathers were doing well as a parent was a theme in their narratives. These discussions of feelings of failure though, were directly associated with overall feelings of loneliness or lack of emotional guidance and support in relation to childrearing: At the low point it is really not being able to share what is going on when I want help or I need help or I just want to say how I’m feeling or whatever, and there is really no one else that is either you know? So it is just sort of a lonely road. (Larry, 40, 8 and 11 year old, full time employment) Several other fathers mentioned the “lonely road” and included that no one could replace the other parent as far as the love and understanding of raising their particular child. So even Larry, who was dating a woman consistently (not blending his children and time with her), as a co-parent with half-time childrearing responsibilities still discussed doing it alone as lonely in general. Not being able to share the daily stories of childrearing was one way that these fathers felt alone in their worlds. They were not

able to converse about their days with another adult on a regular basis, share the struggles and ridiculousness of what their children had done as Matthew emphasizes here:

My kids do really crazy annoying ridiculous stuff, being kids; my youngest is a little Dennis the menace, beyond the general frustration leading to their crazy, crazy stuff that happens and not being able to relate that to somebody else and have them be surprised at how crazy it is too. Being able to share that experience of crazy shit kids do. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew discussed that he spoke with friends and family sometimes, but that it was never the same as it would be with that other involved parent (these types of conversations with friends and family are discussed in chapter six). For these fathers, being unable to share stories of their children with someone who had an intimate understanding of not only them, but also the children, was discussed as a very lonely realization. Fathers discussed this theme in such ways not only as “the lonely road,” but that they were “on an island” and that there would be “a lot of loneliness” as part of their expectations of living day in and day out with their children.

However, even when considering these perceptions or feelings of failure and loneliness, when asked what made a successful father many of these fathers stated a similar sentiment to Noah: “That my children are more successful, better educated, better adjusted and happier than I am. If I do that, then I do not really care what happens to me. That’s all I really want.” (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed) So when examining these stories and narratives of how they interact and engage with their children, this “success” they are attempting to obtain is fully represented in the manner in which they described daily lives, schedules and routine. Each of these fathers discussed the need for individual time, extracurricular activities or supporting their children’s specific areas of interest, and noted the desire for more time engaging with them. This

illuminates that their fathering roles held high importance and that these fathers were exceedingly engaged not only in their childrens' lives, but also in their overall wellbeing. This extreme role of successful father is further described in context in the chapter seven when discussing these fathers' changing masculine identities. Most of these fathers acknowledged and discussed that their children were very bright, happy, developing well and exploring their world. Their narratives implied that their children are enjoying their lives, succeeding in school, doing activities, making friends and able to cope with the chaotic schedules, as well as to changes in their routines and schedules. These descriptions clearly match their personal definitions of how one is succeeding as a father.

Doing it Alone: Positive Aspects

Some fathers discussed the scenario of doing it alone in a negative light, but many saw a dual and almost equal balance of benefit and downside to not having the other parent present. Seeing the positives in relation to full control and time with their children, while still acknowledging the issues with schedules and daily life was a prominent theme. Expectations of what childrearing would be like for these fathers were flipped on their head once they had taken on the full responsibility alone: "So I thought it was going to be like Beaver Cleaver you know and what it turned out to be was married with children without the girl, you know?" (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless) Their narratives suggest that being positive about the benefits of childrearing alone appeared to provide a more positive outlook overall:

On the flip side as a single parent, you are the sole influence on your child so you are in a position to shape their view and opinion of the world to a much greater extent than when you are in a partnership with another person. Which has its drawbacks, its shortcomings. (Noah, 35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed)

I think I get all of the experience, I haven't missed too much of my son's life. This relationship that I have with him, it is so strong and it is so detailed I get so much on a daily basis that I can have little conversations with him and check in and know where we are at, be able to tell things. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

This discussion of the full influence on their children and substantial time with them represents the importance that being a father represents to these men. Although their day in day out routines and schedules are difficult, and they struggle with lacking another caregiver, they felt they were able to be close and bonded to their children. Even though these discussions included shortcomings, the lack of another opinion or the differences of expectations, they were all positively related to this close and necessary single caregiver relationship. Several of these fathers explained that they did not feel they would have as close of a bond with their children if they were sharing the childrearing with the other parent. This is a theme that will be discussed further in relation to adapting to the gendered differences in parenting in chapter seven, but is important to note here when discussing their perspectives on the "lack of another caregiver".

After exploring the chaotic schedules, daily life and the emotional struggles for these fathers that are doing it alone, it is important to examine how these fathers, even given their self-doubts, balance all of this while successfully raising their children. These areas of schedule conflict, lack of another caregiver and sacrifices seemed to fall highly on the ability to work and maneuver parenting. So looking specifically at how these fathers balanced these family commitments with work, as well as how they reconfigured them, directly correlates to the discussion of daily life and maneuvering "doing it alone, this is discussed in the next chapter.

Discussion

Many of these fathers expressed struggles with schedules, daily life balance, financial strain, lack of time for themselves and their children. The “lack of the other” to assist was a common theme within these narratives. Previous research has shown that common parental stressors are exacerbated when childrearing alone (Bronte-Tinkew et al 2009, Gibson-Davis 2008, Respler-Herman et al 2011). Therefore, the theme pertaining to lacking another would suggest that having that other would alleviate some of the daily stress in schedule and childrearing. Many fathers had managed to find coping or adaptation mechanisms to alleviate the strain of lacking another to assist in daily life. These strategies included thinking about what was actually possible, modifying expectations, and seeking assistance such as hiring someone to clean and decrease the expectations. There was also a common theme of consistently feeling overwhelmed and overextended, that had negative impacts on coping with the children daily. These feelings of “task-overload” are prominent in research related to single parenting (Coles 2009) and this was clearly illustrated in this research. Discussions of task overload along with other discussion of childrearing also illuminated feelings of loneliness and feelings of failure for these fathers. Discussions of missing activities, or lacking time were a common theme from most of the fathers. Coles (1997, 2009) and Shaw (1991) discussed similar findings in their research on single parents. Feelings of loneliness were one of the main stressors found in Coles’ work. The clear descriptions of these fathers’ daily schedules highlighted their feelings of being overburdened and alone. Their abilities to manage their chaotic schedules and still engage actively with their children were discussed as possible only by some form of sacrifice. Research on single mothers has

shown that attempting to balance single parenting with scheduling creates guilt as well as stress (Ciabattari 2007; Quinn and Allen 1989). These findings seem to illustrate that feelings of guilt and stress hold true for single fathers as well. The feelings these fathers expressed of lacking time with their children was also similar to findings of single mothers from that same body of research. This added to the feelings of guilt associated with less involvement in the children's activities, as well as struggling with scheduling extracurricular activities and the stress associated with balancing the schedule (Neblett 2007; Quinn and Allen 1989). Within this discussion of lacking another to assist, many fathers saw that their sole influence and time with their children was a strong point to doing it alone, even with the daily stress. These participants' positive outlooks on lone parenting contradict findings from Dufur et al. (2010) who found that single fathers are typically associated with having more feelings of negativity in relation to single parenting. It seemed that these fathers accepted and embraced the amount of time and care involved with raising their children. The discussions related to constantly feeling that they needed more time with their children or that they felt they were failing relates to ideas discussed by Coles of fathers feeling a need to "prove" themselves capable of taking on traditional mothering roles of childrearing as well. Attempting to adapt to or relive the chaos of daily life and be a fully participant parent was obviously a struggle for these fathers. One manner in which they attempted balance were efforts to reconfigure schedules through work and/or school as is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: RECONFIGURING WORK AND SCHOOL

Discussions of doing it alone, daily life, and schedules led to further discussions expressing enormous amounts of conflict with work for these fathers. In this chapter, I examine how these fathers maneuver and balance their work, school, and childrearing through their narratives of work and family conflict. I also examine how they attempted to reconfigure work and school in a unique manner, taking into account a stated need to sacrifice for their children. This section includes issues surrounding childcare, family to work spillover, work to family spillover and manners in which these fathers have reconfigured work and school to avoid this work/family conflict. It became clear in this analysis as it did in the previous chapter, that the social influence of masculinity theory impacted and informed these fathers' perspectives on work and home balance as well as how they viewed and maneuvered it. In describing their caregiving as a single parent, fathers also faced challenges in seeking and receiving support in their parenting (I will expand on this theme in chapter six). To illustrate the main theme in this chapter, I provide an in-depth story of one father again, and then provide supporting stories from several other fathers.

Matthew is a 31-year-old father of three boys ages three, nine and twelve.

Matthew and the children's mother went through hard times and separations during their relationship and finally decided to permanently separate. Matthew has had a large portion of the children's daily care since each of them was born.

Their mother has struggled with mental illness and has not always been able to

care for them, and sometimes it has been unsafe and harmful for them to visit or stay with her. There are times when Matthew has been able to work out a co-parenting situation where the children spend a night or two with their mother, but the norm for Matthew is to have full care seven days a week. This lack of consistency in and of itself has been a large stressor for both Matthew and his sons, but has influenced his ability to balance work and parenting. To cope, Matthew has reconfigured his work to working from home and using support networks for care to maintain income and home balance for his family. Part of Matthew's coping method to take on full time childrearing and still provide for his family was to move into his parents' home. This provided a safe home for the children and himself, as well as alleviating some of the costs of housing and bills. By doing this, he was able to renovate a portion of the home for his business space and establish his own massage therapy business. This allowed him the ability to parent full time, provide a fair income, and continue to do what he loved for work. He has been established in this specific situation for three years. Even with this situation though, he has lost significant work time that has stunted his personal career success, both financially and by lack of expansion. A large struggle for Matthew has been time to work, not having the money or the desire to place his youngest in 'daycare'; he worked around nap schedules, support network availability limitations, and minor assistance from his older children. There were also many times where Matthew had to cancel appointments due to this less than desirable situation, therefore decreasing his income potential and disrupting his clients' schedules as well.

Matthew's struggles with work and balance were a common theme among these fathers. Many spoke of issues arranging consistent childcare either in the past, or currently. Several were awaiting different arrangements with their schedules through work or waiting for their children to begin school to alleviate the childcare tensions and stressors to some extent. In light of the struggles of childrearing alone, and struggling with childcare to allow for work and school, many of these fathers had made unique reconfigurations to these aspects of their lives. Several fathers had changed jobs to more family friendly positions or employers, several had started their own businesses, and some had gone back to school. Incorporating ideals of success through a lens of masculine norms, the idea of being the provider through maintaining or building a successful and lucrative career was obvious in these narratives. A portion of the reconfigurations were expressed as a manner in which to balance these masculine expectations while still adopting the traditional mothering aspects of childrearing. A common theme through most of these fathers' discussions was the alteration of their perspectives on work and family balance. Still, even after enacting these reconfigurations and changes of perspectives, these fathers felt that their work and family balance affected their time with their children and many stated they felt they did not balance it well. This chapter will discuss these issues with childcare, reconfigurations of work and school, and the work and family conflict issues that these fathers described facing.

Childcare

One of the struggles that many fathers had found was that their ability to work around their children's schedules, and available childcare significantly affected their

income potential, growth of their business, as well as time with their children. The childcare that these fathers used varied depending on ages of children and options available; the use of which is noted in parentheses, daycare (2), social/familial support (9), school and/or after school programs (10, this varied over the year based on availability) and many had some combination of these. Several fathers, when asked about how many hours they worked and what childcare arrangements they had, discussed them as complex and in constant flux. They stated that their work schedules depended significantly upon their children's schedules, availability of family and support networks, and the amount of energy they had remaining to spend working. Expanding on Matthew's description of his childcare arrangement, he stated that when his children are in school, he worked during those hours performing a multitude of work related tasks, and he was one of the fathers who felt accomplishing these things strongly depended on availability of childcare.

My youngest is starting preschool next week and he is going to be going into a half day, 4 day a week preschool which will change drastically my situation. It has been inconsistent and it has been very hard to juggle. I have gone through periods of having childcare accessible to me so that I have reliable schedule that I can work around. Daytimes vary, the inconsistency of childcare and having a personal schedule that I can work around has been the biggest complication to me working; and sometimes it is extended family, sometimes it is other friends, childcare. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Several fathers discussed constantly searching for solutions to childcare and work issues, and many were not necessarily content with their options or current arrangements. For Matthew, the inconsistency he faced with childcare for his youngest, especially from their mother and his family and friends, led him to search out alternatives. This inconsistency,

as well as other factors including his son's age and need for peer socialization, recently led him to enroll his son in preschool and free up four half days to focus on much needed work time. This alteration with his childcare arrangement has made him more able to set schedules for appointments, although he still struggles with times outside this limited schedule for other clients and paperwork.

Two other fathers were not satisfied with their current childcare arrangements, although they did facilitate their ability to work and/or go to school. Mike works and goes to school full time and while he is in either location, his son's grandmother cares for him. This childcare arrangement was less than desirable, Mike was currently attempting to change work and school schedules so that his schedule was congruent with his son's school schedule and he would be spending less time with grandma. He felt that forethought and better planning could assist him in having more time with his son. Bryan expresses this same sentiment about having someone else watch his child while he is working:

I am just not going to have my son being raised by my mother 5 days a week, not that she does a bad job as a parent, it is just not her job, she is not his parent and I need to be home with my kids. So I will make it work, which is why I have my son in preschool 3 full days a week versus 5 half days, I still get some time with him. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment)

Bryan works swing shift, which is early afternoon to midnight, and was looking forward to when his son begins kindergarten in the fall. This included incorporating a schedule change with his work to have more time with him since he is opposed to having his mother watch him full time when that change occurs. If his work schedule were to stay

the same, he and his son would have opposing schedules and he would only see him briefly in the mornings and on weekends. As will be discussed in the next section, Bryan, along with several other fathers, discuss finding a way of reconfiguring work schedules to match that of their children's school schedule. These fathers' opposition to having significant care of their children done by others outside of a regular necessary schedule, made childcare for them difficult to acquire. Two fathers had previously had jobs in apartment complexes that allowed them to be with their children when necessary and have other tenants or family who resided there care for them while they needed to be on the job:

It was hard, but it was the ideal job, I was the maintenance guy through property management, my aunt was in our lives at the time, she was not the best, nobody was going to be the best, she was my only option. She did lots of arts and crafts with them and lots of positive things, but the maintenance job was the easiest way because I could be on site, working the same place that my kids were, they were at my apartment. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year olds, unemployed and homeless)

Although Jason speaks of this situation as less than positive, both fathers felt that the childcare arrangement was ideal for their situation at the time. When their employment situation changed, they both reflected on the ease of working in this position. The difficulties they faced with managing work and childcare afterwards was clear in the continued conversations, especially with Jason who had not been able to maintain a job and continue to care for his children full time. Many fathers faced difficulty with childcare especially when their children were younger and before entering public school. However, entering the public school system did not eliminate the struggles of childcare either. Issues with days off from school, sick days, late start days and other scheduling

conflicts, such as afterschool care, were still prominent through these conversations.

Although several fathers praised the afterschool programs, which tended to be free, and praised the support networks they utilized, there was still a clear undertone of childcare being unstable in the long term. Noah illustrates this constant flux:

There are levels, there is afterschool programs, and there are two days a week where the neighbor who has a daughter the same age as my youngest picks her up from school. There is a Friday where my oldest daughter picks my youngest daughter up at the bus stop while she is on the phone with me. I mean it is like a puzzle and every single term is different; there are eight school terms, every time the schedule changes I have to change. There was a time where I had to be home at 3:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays for like six weeks, which means I leave work at 2:30. Every single Wednesday morning that we have late start I do not get to work until 10 o'clock. How many businesses will employ you? Honestly, I am practically unemployable. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year olds, self-employed)

Noah brings up several points in this narrative, one illustrating the immense instability with childcare that was common throughout these fathers' narratives. The second point suggests that the constant schedule changes for a single parent conflicts with the current constructs of work and employment, especially for these fathers as men in the workplace. Ideals of masculinity expect men to work and provide at all costs, without taking time "off" for parenting. These struggles with childcare were the same for these fathers across class boundaries. Fathers who were more financially able to afford childcare still struggled with feelings of lacking time with their children and chose to not pay for time away from their children or to expand their work hours. One father mentioned having a babysitter company for nights off, but had the same daily struggles as did all of the other fathers. The childcare struggles these fathers discussed were one of the main conversations that led into the following theme surrounding daily life balance. This

prominent theme of daily life balance was specifically related to how these fathers reconfigured the structure of work or school and family, given these conflicts, to successfully maneuver childrearing alone.

Reconfiguring Work/School to avoid work to family spillover

Maintaining stable and lucrative employment while balancing with family was a struggle for these fathers, it is important to note that reconfiguring careers, continuing education, and changing where they worked had been a solution to lone parenting for eleven of these fathers. Five fathers established self-employment businesses which were run mainly from, or out of their homes. This allowed them the flexibility to participate in their children's lives around a reasonable schedule, as well as flexibility when they were ill, or when an unexpected situation arose. Self-employment was also a strategy that created the ability to have their children at work with them if necessary, or work from home with their children present when needed. This is not to say that there was a lack of conflicts or stress still surrounding work and family, but the discourse from these fathers expressed that those who had reconfigured work, or entered school tended to cope with the balance and schedule in a more sustainable manner. Many fathers reconfigured work to avoid the work to family spillover, meaning having work interfere with time with their children, childcare issues and daily schedules, which is discussed later. These fathers tended to use their support networks to a greater degree as well, which is discussed in depth in the chapter six. How these fathers reconfigured their lives with employment or education to adapt to issues such as childcare was a unique finding within this research.

As Noah stated above, with his chaotic schedule and need to have time off, he is “practically unemployable”. Becoming self-employed made it possible to work around

this barrier. Matthew also explained that working through other offices had not been conducive to being a full time father, and that he had always worked for himself on the side to provide extra income anyway. The struggle with scheduling within the current ideals and constructs of work and career for adults, inflexible schedules and strict confines to location, made it difficult to maintain a successful placement working under or for someone else, which Noah also discussed. For Matthew this change, to his own business, was liberating and he has been able to provide the same income for his family as he did working for another office. This was also seen in stories from the other fathers, even if they made less money from their own business initially, the ability to feel that they were parenting and balancing their schedules more effectively was worth the financial loss, and for some, worth the sacrifice of their initial ideals of success.

But, I have been able to parent and father, and my kids are excelling in life and in school, emotionally, physically, mentally. And so, to me I feel redeemed that I can succeed as a father and really, in the grand scheme of things that is the only thing I really care about, that is the most important thing. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Noah previously had a similar business when married that was successful. Once he relocated to Oregon, he worked in a job as a mechanic where there were significant struggles with schedules and the ability get off work when necessary, as well as specified limitations for advancement due to him being a single father, because of scheduling conflicts. He decided to resurrect his business due to the awareness that the lack of time to work he was facing while raising his children alone, would lead to less success professionally and financially otherwise. Reconfiguring work from a status of being employed to being self-employed allowed these men to take the time to care for their children, although that means having their children join them on the job occasionally.

These fathers may not be able to work as many hours in their businesses as they would desire, but they are able to adjust their schedules to accommodate their children's needs.

Well, I would say it changes a lot depending on whether or not the kids are in school. The fall and we ended summer vacation and having them around all the time was a big time commitment so that impeded my scheduling. But when they are in school and I have time and energy to work, I am a massage therapist, I probably do between six and ten 90 minute appointments a week, so that is 15-20 hours and then all of the other stuff I have to do outside of hands on time with paperwork and all of the other stuff it takes to run a business myself. I would say between 20 and 30 hours a week. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9 and 12 year olds, self-employed)

Noah stated that he sometimes worked 50 hours, but this included taking his daughters with him to job sites in the evenings and on weekends when necessary. Other fathers that had turned to self-employment had similar stories to Noah and Matthew. Justin had an at home business that allowed him to be with his son during the day for most of his young years, and continues to be congruent with school schedules. Although there was a "nanny" that was hired three days a week when his son was very young, Justin stated that he was always available and would take care of his son on days that his son was ill, or if the nanny could not be there. He also continued his work on the other four days either during naptime, or with his son in his lap. This also facilitated a close bond between him and his son, which is noted as a theme from several others fathers: "I had my studio at home and so I was just with him all the time even when I was working. So we had a close bond early on and I think that it is nice that we get to spend the time we do as just the two of us." Scott, who has two elementary aged sons, had a similar situation with being self-employed with a stay at home job, this made him available to his sons before they were in school as well as when they entered elementary. Scott and Justin's

businesses both allowed them to attend many field trips as well as daily pick up and drop off from school; they chose to reconfigure their lives in this way so they could be present more often, as many of these fathers had. These fathers discussed work success as highly important to them, and the ability to succeed in their own business where they could not as an employee somewhere else. This success as well as expressing their success as a father, leads back to the ideas of gendered expectations of roles and of what one should accomplish. These ideas of success and reconfigurations that occur for these fathers in this chapter relate to how they view their masculinity as discussed in chapter seven.

Other fathers have reconfigured their work by changing to employment that more suited childrearing alone. Tony shifted employment with a return to a property management company for two reasons, other than what he stated above about being in the same location as his son. The first being that he desired to attend a master's program to secure a better future for him and his son, but secondly the hours provided more time with his son, he stated that he worked: "25 hours a week, so it has opened up a lot of time in the afternoon for my son." Tony did not feel that he was getting enough time with his son and knew that it would further decrease when he began his degree program, so he altered his job to facilitate both. Mike and Brad also made similar employment changes to accommodate their roles as father. Mike returned to a job where he knew they would be flexible with his schedule to allow for the days off when his son had activities, performances, or when he had to stay home because his child was ill. Mike expressed that his son came before his job, and the change to an employment position that would accommodate that significantly influenced his ability to be available for his son. This idea of balancing work and family will be discussed further below. He has also made

clear with his schooling that although he intends to complete all necessary assignments and fulfill his student role, he will not do so at his son's expense. The reconfiguration of changing jobs to accommodate a family was also seen in Brad's narrative:

I've been fortunate enough that I have a pretty flexible schedule and if I need to take care of something with him than I can. In the past when I was married, there were times [work made him miss something at home]. Just because the job I had, I was making most of the money and I was being relied upon by my whole family, so there were times where I just had to miss this or that because of work. I think it was mostly stuff like voluntary school programs that I've been wanting to do or wanting to do back then but I couldn't, and wanted to sign up for and not be able to end up doing, but recently I'm pretty fortunate. (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment)

Brad's previous job had strict hours and expectations that did not allow for accommodating days off to be with his child for activities and events, much less last minute changes. He expressed that this was always a struggle for him and he felt that he had missed many things by not having a position flexible enough to attend activities or stay home when his son was ill. He also explained that when he was with his wife, he had been the breadwinner and putting his job at stake to take time off was not an option. Once a single father, he made the decision to switch positions when he realized his son was struggling emotionally and a position became available that was in a family oriented, family owned business, even though there was a pay decrease. Brad expressed that his son had previously struggled in part due to his work schedule and being gone many hours of their day, making him unavailable. Brad had also had the option to work from home with pay occasionally to complete his tasks when he took a day off or left work early, therefore not losing considerable income by doing so. Jason also discussed leaving a job that would not allow him to take time off when he needed to: "That sucked too. Your

boss gives you flack or whatever, but when it comes to it, if I have to leave on the spot because my kid is in trouble there is no question. If my job gets pissed off at me then I might be working the wrong job.” (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year olds, unemployed and homeless) Jason had struggled to maintain jobs that allowed him to be available to care for his children, some of his attempts included independent contract jobs such as yard work and labor. His struggle with a steady income led him to move into a small home with some acquaintances, which developed into a dangerous situation for him and his children. Not having the ability to gather enough money to get a place of his own, they had to move into his car, further decreasing his ability to work, as Noah stated Jason was also ‘practically unemployable’ due to his single parent status. There were times that Jason discussed not being able to take his son to the doctor when he was sick because he could not leave work. He also discussed similar situations to Brad in that his children were suffering emotionally with his lengthy absences in a job that allowed no flexibility and overlapped hours he should be home to care for his children. This was a common theme with many of these fathers, there was a struggle of how to balance working enough to provide a fair income, but still being available for their children emotionally as well as for daily care.

Another way in which these fathers had reconfigured their lives to accommodate childrearing alone was to reenter or begin a higher education programs. Four of these fathers were either currently enrolled, entering into, or planning on attending college in the near future. This decision was based upon the ability to balance schedules with their children’s school, as well as to further advance their income potentials. Tony was just about to begin a Master’s program, Mike was finishing his core classes at a community

college to transfer to a four year program, Jared was looking at continuing his college education after a long gap, and Justin was currently looking at re-entering college for another degree to further or change his career. Mike explained above that he knew his job would allow him the flexibility to return to school which was important to him for the same reason that the other fathers expressed, increased quality of life in the future for his family. Tony combined changing employment, as discussed above, with going back to college in reconfiguring his life to accommodate being a single father, as had Mike. Mike discussed also how this change in his employment and going back to school was beneficial for his overall lifestyle of being a parent and gave him pride in each aspect of his life:

I spent too many years playing around and doing hobbies and fun things like that. I really enjoy doing homework. I really enjoy having a GPA that is really high. Like I said, sitting on my couch or sitting in front of a computer doing homework is a good time for me, marking things off my list is awesome. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

Mike felt that he was now accomplishing something for himself, while currently making his family life better, as well as better in the long run. Mike also discussed that he gained quality time with his son ‘doing homework together’ in the evenings. They would sit and accomplish one or two of their homework tasks and they both got a lot of enjoyment out of doing that together. The concept of work and family conflict directly related to why these fathers chose to reconfigure their lives. It is important to understand the root of these decisions, which for most, was specifically to avoid the work to family spillover, they did not want their work expectations to compromise their family lives, although sometimes it was necessary. Very few fathers felt that they established a true balance and

discuss both family to work spillover and work to family spillover in their narratives, although many had maintained some balance through the reconfigurations discussed above. It is also important to look at what other struggles emerge for these fathers in relation to these conflicting roles. The next section explores why these fathers had reconfigured their work and school in such manners.

Family to Work spillover (kids come first)

Most of these fathers felt that their children came first, above work, school, or themselves, as was first mentioned with Mike's narrative above. This theme of lack of time with children was brought up in relation to schedules and daily life, but many fathers discussed it in much more depth when specifically related to work. Many fathers felt that their way of balancing work and family was to find, or create, employment that allowed family to work spillover. For Matthew, there was a light at the end of the tunnel for the future of his business and for his desire to be a more attentive parent consistently and manage efficiently his parental responsibilities. This solution emerged when asked about his ideal childcare arrangement:

I am really looking forward to when they are all in school full time. I am working towards that. So when they go to school I can work and then when they are out of school, I can be accessible to interact with them and help them with their homework and take them to their extracurricular activities, hang out and play games and make them dinner and stuff. I think working while they are at school and having time for scheduled appointments on my evenings off and being available and accessible to them the other times is ideal to me. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Although this description includes the possibility of consistent parenting times with their mother, it was stated that having all three boys in school for the full day would still allow for more successful balancing of career and family with or without her stable parenting time. Matthew is attempting to construct a way to work as a single father in a manner that best facilitates his career and his family. Again, we see that had Matthew been working at another job, it would have been difficult to have a schedule that allowed the flexibility to be there with his children, for daily routines as well as emergency and last minute schedule changes. This view forward for him sets the stage to alter the conflict of feeling a lack of time with his children and create the time to engage in activities with them. Several other fathers discussed shifting their schedules or planning to alleviate these feelings of missing time with their children. Mike describes this clearly:

I think that you just have to have some sort of a framework of a plan. I like to share mine with my son, what we have going on and this is kind of what I would like to happen and if all this happens we are going to do this. I don't think that it is like wishing and hoping, I think it is like showing him that if A and B and C get done D is going to happen. I think that he understands what is being done to a certain extent by his dad on a daily basis so he is willing, he is like "oh yea I can do that" you know? I think we have a team thing going. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

Mike incorporated and engaged his son in this routine of making sure there was a balance of time. Some of this included shared chores, quiet time to complete schoolwork before playtime, and some included keeping his son informed of his schedule (for instance, that he would be at school, work, then pick him up from grandma and then they would be able to spend time together). Several of these fathers felt that they had found a healthy work and family balance. There were different manners in which they felt they had achieved

this, one of which was discussed above with changing workplaces as Brad had done (as did Mike) to allow them to spend time with their children. “There’s been a couple times with Miles where he’s I can tell just, he’s needed me and, or I stayed home with him, I just felt that he needed me to nurture him, be with him and spend some time with him, but it’s not out of necessity it’s just more out of I guess my own assessment of his wellbeing.” (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment) Brad discusses compromising his work time when he felt that his family needed him to be available. Several of these fathers made the push towards balancing work and family in favor of their children through jobs that allowed the family to work spillover, which they felt was a healthy balance.

Bryan maintained a healthy work and family balance by simply confining his work to strictly work, and when he is home, being fully engaged with his family. He still describes his family coming before work, such as always being aware of his phone to be connected to his children and stating that he would leave work if his children needed.

When asked if his job influenced his time with his children he responded:

Oh, very much! That is why like on my days off I fully focus on my kids, because I've only got those two days, I can't see them during the week, especially my older kids. It would be different if I could spend that little bit more time with them. You know when I am at work, I am at work, you know I check my phone regularly just to make sure there is not an emergency that I have to leave for, but when I am at work, I focus on work because if I am not, stuff can blow up. I have to focus and when I am there, and when I go home I do not think about work, I do not care it is no longer important once I leave that door. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment)

Bryan has created a distinct separation between work and family that includes his perspectives on how important his role with his children is, as Brad clearly did as well.

Even though in some manners he takes his family to work with him, as in always still being available to them, he leaves his work at the door when he gets home. Bryan described that he “makes up for” his lack of time with his children due to work in the times he is home, and he is able to do so by leaving work at work. Other fathers’ approaches to managing work and family included the opposite, doing work at home and attempting to combine the two worlds. Larry works from home quite often when he has his two children. Although he struggles with accomplishing as much, or maintaining a separation from the children while participating in such things as conference calls, he feels it is best for his family that he be more physically present. For Noah, he occasionally continues work once his children are in bed: “I will work, very often I have things on jobs that I need to build or things that I can do and so I will get out tools and work from 10-2 in the morning or something to get me a heads up on my next day. I am just tired, but it feels like I have been tired for a long time.” (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year olds, self-employed) The overall tone from these fathers is that many did not feel that they balanced their time at work and their time with their family very well, but there were strategies that they used to attempt this balance in favor of their children. The importance that these fathers placed on their time with their children beyond solely providing an income and daily care is clearly illustrated, and these strategies to increase time with them, by sacrificing or delaying work in some manner, was emphasized.

These types of conflicts also related to financial loss, which added stress to these fathers’ lives. When discussing work and whether it conflicted with times it was necessary to be home, Noah made very clear the cost of being the only income and the only caregiver:

How much money I lost, like thousands of dollars a year. I would say that since the beginning of this school year, I have dealt with hand foot and mouth disease, lice, both swept through school. I have dealt with one daughter that got bronchitis, another daughter who got stomach flu, I went on two field trips and several meetings and several times, I had to leave work during the day to bring violins and other things to my children. When I add it up, I would say that I have missed two and a half or three weeks of work. So, you know think of \$800 a week, then I got sick as well, I got sick for like a week and a half, sickest I have ever been in my life. So all of those things happening within three months, it's like losing almost an entire months' worth of wages, thousands of dollars, it put me behind for three months. That is shocking. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year olds, self-employed)

It is clear that even for these fathers who were self-employed, the ability to take time off for their families negatively affected their ability to provide and complete jobs.

Sometimes sacrificing time with their children had to occur to continue their ability to provide, but this struggle weighed heavily on them. Sometimes, these fathers could not sacrifice work as Noah describes above, but have to place work first, but only for the benefit of their family.

Work to family spillover (work first, but only to provide for family)

While trying to balance their lives and place their children first, these fathers faced significant challenges with work and family balance. When asked if they felt their time at work influenced time with their children, work to family spillover, and whether or not they felt they balanced these two roles effectively, some fathers had responses that fell in favor of work having to come first. As Matthew described, he felt great struggles with balancing work and parenting and when asked if he felt whether he balanced it well he said:

It is hard; I do not know that I would say I do it well. There are a lot of times where I have had to, where I have scheduled appointments and I am busy working when it probably would have been better if I was doing things with them. Especially it just would have been simpler for everyone if I would have had time to make dinner ahead of time and not be so rushed and overwhelmed. It is definitely one of those constant struggles. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew recognized that his children had significant access to him, but he felt that his engagement with them lacked and that his parental duties became diminished trying to do too much every day. This was seen as a failure for him in many ways. Matthew desired that balancing work and family would lean more towards quality time with his children instead of chaotic last minute “maintenance” of his children more often. Although both he and Noah discussed above having the ability through self-employment to allow family to work spillover, they still felt the strain of work on their families. Noah shared a similar stance on whether he did well at balancing work and family:

No, I find it very difficult, a constant battle. There is always too much to do. Parenting is not just about getting the house cleaned and making dinner and making sure homework is done, parenting is talking to your children...The more responsibilities you have, the less you get to say “oh we are going to have educational fun time, we are going to go and look at ducks and stuff”. Instead we are like, you are going to come to work with daddy and you are going to do your homework and fall asleep on this blanket here on this floor and I am going to take you home at midnight because if I don’t do this we are not going to be able to pay the rent this month. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year olds, self-employed)

Noah not only mentions that work sometimes overtakes time with his family, but also points out that his role as a father is much more than simply taking care of his children daily and that this area is where he thought his two roles conflicted. He stated he could maintain the general childrearing tasks and complete his jobs, but parenting is more than

daily care. As other fathers stated above, their children usually come before work or school, but there were times that for the benefit of the family and a need to provide, that work had to come first.

The personal feelings of lacking time were not the only conflicts with work that these fathers faced. When asked what challenges they faced, whether something at home had made them miss work, and whether something at work had made them miss something at home, these conflicting issues continued to emerge. Brad discussed missing school activities and other events due to the inability to take time off work in the past. Bryan had shared similar conflicts: “I do miss some holidays with my kids because I have to go to work and I can’t just call in or not show up because I have to have the income because there is no one else providing it is just...it does change, you miss some things.” (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment) Bryan also discussed having to call in sick due to issues with childcare, illness, etc. and with his limited options when this occurred, his work understood even if not pleased, but if he was able to find a solution that allowed him to still work, he would do so to maintain stability with his employer.

Whether they were self-employed or someone else employed them, both sides had strong connections between missing work as well as missing home life. The many challenges that these fathers faced between the struggles of employment and lone childrearing crossed all forms of employment as well as crossed class boundaries. Scott, who works from home and has two sons in elementary school, stated that he still struggled with completing his work and feelings of whether he could take a day to stay home with a sick child. His ability to work from home had alleviated some issues of not

having to answer to an employer, but when he fell behind from taking time off, his stress level increased and his income decreased. Justin, who owns a recording studio business, also struggled with having to take time away from his scheduled workdays, placing him behind schedule and at risk of disrupting or upsetting clients. These stories from all of the fathers had one consistent theme, that throughout these conflicts it appeared that the reconfigurations of work that these fathers had performed did assist with a decrease in the struggles, even if not eliminating them. The manner in which these fathers attempted balance was through creating a way that family to work spillover was possible and that work to family spillover was decreased. The manners which these fathers changed employment, perceptions and ways to cope and manage family and work balance were also mediated by use of their support networks as is discussed in the following chapter.

Discussion

The constant balancing of work and family is common and has been a long-standing struggle for all parents, but again lone parenting exacerbates this conflict due to the excessive demands incorporated with lone parenting as well as lower amounts of social and financial resources (Ciabattari 2007; Nomagutchi 2012). Dyk (2005) and Wall and Arnold (2007) discuss that this conflict can create guilt, stress, anxiety and increased time constraints. These themes emerged in this research for many of these fathers as well. They discussed feeling guilty for not being fully available to their children, feeling stress with the conflicting schedules, and never having enough time to take care of everything (which was also discussed in the first section). Many fathers also had issues with procuring childcare for their children, not having their options match their work

needs, or lacking the ability to pay for full childcare. These childcare issues were consistent across these fathers of different class status in relation to work. Feelings of guilt about lacking time with their children restricted even fathers who could have afforded more childcare, the salience of their fathering roles were held above their roles of worker. Research on single mothers found issues similar to those that arose in this research. Ciabattari (2007) discussed that conflict was higher in single mothers due to struggles with childcare, ability to maintain work and whether support systems were available or used (discussed from this research in chapter six). Maintaining work in a way that facilitates being a single parent as a struggle for mothers, appears consistent as well for fathers in this research, they are “practically unemployable” by work standards, due to conflicting family roles. These fathers were also prone to the stigma of single parenthood within the work force in a similar manner to single mothers and were not benefited in the workforce by a fathering premium as has been seen with fathers in dual households (Hodges and Budig, 2010). Yet, even without having access to the “daddy bonus” this research finds a consistent theme related to Coles (2002, 2009) that due to the pressures for men to provide, they are more prone to increase their education and incomes in fulfillment of this standard.

A prominent theme for these fathers was reconfiguring work to fit a full parental role. This theme seems to assist in facilitating the ability to parent alone, which as shown by Hamer and Marchiori (2002) in relation to single fathers is a significant barrier. They stated that the ability to work for the participants in their research was complicated by their full time parenting status and that the current work standards do not accommodate a

flexible schedule that allows the support of this status. Other research has similarly and broadly stated that the current workplace fails to accommodate the needs of working families (Ranson 2012). This research identified strategies these fathers adopted to reconfigure work to allow them to overcome this structural barrier and support their families. Many of these fathers either became self-employed or changed jobs to facilitate their parental role responsibilities and manage their childrens' schedules and activities. These fathers felt the social gendered pressures of maintaining the provider role and being successful in the work environment, while still attempting to be full time single parents. The ideals of hegemonic masculinity that pertain to success in education and the labor market as well as displaying economic stability shaped these fathers endeavors to reconfigure work. Even with these modifications to actual work situations, many fathers also made mental adaptations to their possible achievements professionally, and what they were capable of accomplishing daily. Many fathers appear to have had more success balancing work and family and being able to manage their schedules with their children by reconfiguring work in some manner. Many fathers had done so in a way that allowed family to work spillover and decreased their levels of work to family spillover. However, there was still a narrative of work and family conflict with most of these fathers. Many felt that their work significantly affected their time with their children, work to family spillover, and they struggled with having to take time off for activities, events, and sick children. As is illustrated by Coles (2002, 2009) and others, the amount of stress and guilt can be decreased by the use of and access to support networks and assistance services, suggesting a need for outside assistance to manage work and lone parenting (Ahmed 2005; Dyk 2005; Olson and Barnard 1993). This alleviation of stress

and use of these support networks has also been linked to more time and positive engagement with children, as well as more positive feelings of satisfaction in the lone parent role (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009; Castillo 2010 and 2012; Coles 2002, 2009). The next section will look at whether these fathers access these streams of support, why or why not and how they assist in their ability to work, go to school and facilitate “doing it alone”.

CHAPTER 6: SERVICES AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

In this chapter, I examine the use of community and government services which range from food stamps and state health plans to food pantries, clothing resources, and childcare. I also examine the importance and use of social and familial support networks for these 14 single fathers in providing daily care, emergency care, financial assistance, and stability for their children. Single fathers have been shown to rely less on social services than do single mothers (Coles 2002, 2009; Paulin and Lee 2002), but they are more likely to use social and familial support networks consistently (Coles 2002). As an overall resounding theme, there was a need to maintain the role of provider and show autonomy which is stressed by social role expectations of masculinity. However, this also included a unique perspective upon the bearing and adaptation of this provider role, including an expansion of support networks and minimal use of social and community services.

Most of these fathers stated that they would use whatever means necessary to provide for their children, including accessing state and community services even though they acknowledged the potential negative or stigmatizing impact of utilizing these services upon them and their children. They were also aware of the struggles that they, as men raising children alone, face in particular when dealing with assistance programs and procurement of services. The issues that arose most with these fathers around their attempts to access services were surrounded by appearances that they as men, should not have custody or full time care of children; the absence of the mother served as a barrier to these services both socially and structurally.

In contrast to the division of these fathers' use of social services, the majority of these fathers had strong and extensive support networks that facilitated their parenting and daily lives. These fathers indicated that their social support network helped to meet their needs, as well as those of their children, including assisting with work or school demands in addition to allowing them to take some time to themselves. During the interviews, the fathers also spoke about the need for a larger community ideal of support, not only for themselves and their children, but also for the building of a supportive community or village at large for the betterment of all involved.

Services

To examine the use of services, I asked these fathers whether they currently used or had used state, federal, or community resources during their time parenting, and, if not, why had they not used these services. These services included Food Stamps (SNAP), state healthcare programs, free and reduced lunch programs, childcare assistance, as well as local church and community programs providing any food, clothing, or financial assistance. Five fathers had used none of these listed services, five had used or were using only state assistance programs, two had only accessed community based support and two had used or were using both.

Half of the fathers were currently using or had previously used some form of state assistance. Several of the fathers who had used assistance in the past were those who now had a higher income and were no longer eligible for many forms of assistance. The most commonly used service was state healthcare for their children, this particular service is mandated by the state as part of a parental agreement of custody or parenting

time, or for food stamp/food supplement programs. These fathers reported little use of other state support or assistance services such as housing, childcare, financial, or utility assistance. There was an overall negative response to talking about these state services and government agencies. Several fathers had experienced difficult and challenging issues and barriers surrounding attempts to access these agencies and services. These issues included assumptions about their presumed physical reprimand or discipline against their children, and two fathers specifically mentioned encountering barriers based solely on not being the mother or not having her present during the process. This barrier is related to gendered perceptions upon parenting and social perceptions and expectations upon who should be the primary caregiver for children as is further discussed in chapter seven. When asked about whether they had accessed any of these services many of these fathers stated that, as men, it was difficult: “I have never had any luck dealing with the city; state, anything as a dude, like with the kids.” (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children, employed full time as truck mechanic) Jason had a similar response bringing in suggestions of lack of trust as well as difficulty: “I do not because, anybody (referring to a case worker) that they are going to give me I am not going to trust and everything that I have ever been through with [state service agency] as a man has been negative. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless) And later in the interview, again Jason mentions his frustration with the system as a father attempting to receive state assistance in a time of need:

I never accessed them, but for some reason I thought that guys couldn't, probably because guys can't access a lot of stuff. Most shelters won't accept a single father with two kids, it has to be a female or you get separated from your kids while you are in the shelter. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

In search of assistance to facilitate a transition into a job and out of homelessness, Jason expresses his disinterest in using services out of fear of unequal treatment and betrayal in his time of need. Several other fathers mentioned similar experiences that raised concerns about possible unequal treatment. Mike, for instance, was denied access to food stamps because his son's mother was still claiming the child, although she had been minimally involved for some time. Attempts to resolve this custodial issue were met with accusations and denial of benefits until the mother vouched for the situation, which had not yet occurred.

About half of the fathers also mentioned a personal barrier that prevented them from seeking assistance: their pride and desire not to ask for assistance. The men expressed a desire to be autonomous in the support of their children both financially and in daily life. This theme repeated itself throughout the discussion of services and only when faced with extreme disabling situations were these fathers willing to "swallow their pride" and consider seeking assistance services. One father, Tony, said this directly: "No. I have not, too proud....Way I was raised, I have always worked, I work for my money, and I work for my living." Tony elaborated on this theme when asked what he would do if he just wasn't quite making it through hard work, his response was telling of the need to provide alone and just how much this would impact his acceptance of assistance:

I always found a way, took on another job, cut back on something else, it is kind of simple, you know if you smoke cigarettes, but you can't afford them, why do you smoke cigarettes? Just quit smoking. Or if you are spending too much on gas, just don't go drive around. Stay at home. (Tony, 46, 5 year old with him, employed apartment manager low-income)

Other fathers discussed this theme of pride and doing it alone, incorporating themes from chapter four on daily life and struggles, autonomy was part of adapting to the traditional mothering role and “proving” they could raise their children alone. Jason only made the decision to finally use state assistance when he and his children lost their home, after he had lost his job, and was at risk of losing his children. It took these extreme circumstances for him to abandon the belief that he should be the sole provider for his children and apply for and receive government and community assistance to get back on his feet again. Since the conclusion of this research, this father contacted me and informed me that with assistance from the state and other services he and his children have left the shelter. He is now employed on private land as a groundskeeper and general maintenance for an elderly couple. This provides an adequate income and a supplied house on location for him and his children, they have settled in and are doing well there. Several fathers, including the one just described, felt that they had failed as men when they required assistance or had used services and expressed a more negative view of themselves due to this assumed failure. Jason recognized that he needed these programs to put his life back in order, but still said he wished he could have done it on his own and his perception of somehow failing to provide alone prevailed. This suggests just how deeply the ideals of masculinity that pertain to pride and autonomy are entrenched within these fathers.

These findings, similar to Coles (2002, 2009), suggest that for single fathers their lack of knowledge and/or difficulties in access to these services were barriers to utilizing these programs and assistance services. The fathers’ pride and struggle for autonomy as well as their perceptions of failure associated with use of government services mirror

findings reported by Coles (2002, 2009) and Maupin et al. (2010). These bodies of research, as with this one, found this was closely correlated with the social expectations of men to provide, above all other parental aspects. Redefining and adapting this gendered role of parenting is explored in the following chapter.

The avoidance of stigma was also a prominent theme during the discussions with these single fathers. They discussed awareness of how the use of services was viewed socially, especially in relation to the use of food pantries at the school their children attended and entering the local branch of state assistance agencies. One of the fathers expressed his knowledge of food pantries and their possible assistance in his situation if necessary:

There is a food pantry at my daughter's school that is really fantastic. I would never go there... children are very bright and very able to classify different people and I don't want my daughters classified a particular way in the minds of people around them. If I was to go to a food bank, I would go alone and I would go someplace in town where I was not known...I have not had to do that. But if I did have to, I wouldn't go to my kids' school, I am known there everybody knows who I am and who my kids are. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed low income)

Three of the other fathers mentioned specifically that they would not use food pantries at their local school because they did not want their children to have negative repercussions from peers around the knowledge that the family needed or acquired food from the pantry. This avoidance of social stigma is most clearly seen in relation to these public school food pantry situations. However, it was also discussed as a stigma against men asking for help or seeking assistance, these fathers' perceptions of how society would view this were negative.

The influence of a stereotypical role of masculinity, the ideal of the breadwinner or provider role, and whether it had an influence over whether or not services or certain forms of support networks were used was fairly evenly split between these fathers. Half of the fathers saw these resources as a necessity in their situation. They did not view the use of community or state assistance or the use of support networks as problematic or detrimental to their pride, even if they were concerned by the possible outside pressures and stigma associated with them. They saw their pride and desire to be in the role of an autonomous provider as secondary and almost irrelevant to raising their children successfully and procuring all the necessities for a healthy and happy lifestyle. As Matthew states and was further emphasized through conversation with him, and several other of the fathers, it is a matter of defining a new stance that these fathers have taken: “It’s redefining pride, it is okay to ask for help.” (Matthew, 39, 3, 9 and 12 years old, self-employed low-income) The notion of easing the burden of childrearing alone through reconfiguring their ideals of autonomy and pride as a man was expressed by several fathers, and is further discussed in the chapter seven. They saw this as a way to accomplish themselves individually, as a parent, a student, professionally in their own business or career, or as simply a competent and productive member of society.

The other half of fathers did speak of pride and doing it alone as inhibiting their use of services. They emphasized the need to “provide” by themselves, stating that they had always worked hard and would find a way through the struggle and excessive hardship, before they would ask for help. As Noah states, even though he had utilized help in the past and knows that he can ask for support and even financial assistance, it is not something with which he is altogether comfortable: “And I know I could ask those

people for help I just don't ever want to do it again. I have made it by myself.” (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed low income)

Support Networks

To examine the use of support networks, these fathers were asked a series of questions about whether they had friends, family or others that they could call for assistance or support. This included forms of emotional support or childrearing questions; childcare assistance; emergency errands; small favors (grocery, late-night medicine for child, moving, etc.); time to self or a night out; as well as financial support. If fathers indicated that they had used social networks, they were then asked if they had received what they needed and if they would ask for this assistance or support again. Many times these support networks were mentioned through other stories of daily life, hardship, and balancing childrearing. They were also mentioned often within the context of work and school, implying that these were highly important to these fathers as a way of balancing childrearing alone. This was seen briefly in the discussions of daily life and work in chapters four and five. These fathers use of support networks varied, with several of them having no real forms of social support, to some having a strong reliance upon them, but most fell somewhere in between. The use of support networks also varied in their reliance from solely daily assistance and logistical care of their children, to the inclusion of emotional and mental support, or vice versa. Many of the fathers had a decent and stable support network of some form and only a few were significantly lacking any such network.

Use of Networks for Daily life

Most of these fathers had intentionally built some form of a support system for themselves and their children. These networks consisted of family, friends, community, and other parents; as well as some school faculty and staff networks for emotional and childrearing support. Although the fathers highlighted in this section tended to use familial support, other respondents depended on neighbors, other parents, friends, etc. which is briefly discussed in chapter five in relation to childcare issues. The overlap between chapters was necessary, chapter five required an explanation of childcare struggles as being a reason for reconfiguring work, and this chapter furthers the discussions of how these networks assist these fathers including the alleviation or assistance with those struggles. For example from chapter five, Noah used his daughter's friend's parents and his friend network to assist with daily care and when he needed to work outside of school schedules and afterschool care. Mike and Brad also discussed having friends, neighbors and their children's friends' parents assist them with childcare as well as time away for themselves. This section discusses these networks further and highlights the fathers and supports more related to family and those not discussed in chapter five.

The rhetoric surrounding these networks was both that of survival and coping as well as increased contentment with their situation and with their children. For Matthew, discussed in depth in the previous chapter, his support network was a necessity for aiding in his successful fulfillment of his roles as a father and as a contributing member to society with his own business: "I do have people I can call, yes. The list changes as the years go by, but I have made a point of finding reliable sorts of people that I can call on

in times of need. For many, many years now because it is kind of a necessity.”

(Matthew, 39, 3, 9 and 12 years old, self-employed low-income) Matthew, along with several other fathers, spoke of support networks as being their ability to work, go back to school, or build and maintain their own business, as well as to take a break when feeling overwhelmed. Matthew and two other fathers went so far as to say it was a “necessity” that these networks be in place or they did not think they would have fared as well or have been as successful personally or professionally. Mike was able to maintain his full-time position at his job while going back to college working towards a degree by using this network, specifically his son’s grandmother:

I have my son’s mom’s mom, Gammie, pick him up Mondays and Wednesdays after school and then on Thursday’s afterschool he stays the night with her and then takes him to my house Friday morning and I walk him to school. Then he stays with her on Friday night and I get him back Saturday when I am done working. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school low-income)

Mike expressed this was not his ideal arrangement and felt that it impacted his time with his son as discussed in chapter four, but that it was for the betterment of them both in the long run and good for his son to spend time with his grandmother and other adults.

Several other fathers also expressed the extent of their use of support networks, mostly related to their immediate family and kin: “My mother, she has helped out, my father has helped out and also his mother’s mother has helped out too. There are plenty of people to ask to help.” (Tony, 46, 5 year old with him, employed apartment manager low-income)

Tony stated that his family has always been available to assist him, whether it be with childcare for necessity such as for work or to go back to school, or for time away. Tony also had friends that he relied on for support, but spoke about his family as being his first

call. Jason spoke positively about a previous job, as discussed in chapter five, and his use of familial support to fulfill his responsibilities there, although he has since lost a functional support network:

I was the maintenance guy through property management, my aunt was in our lives at the time, she wasn't the best, nobody was going to be the best, and she was my only option. She did lots of arts and crafts with them and lots of positive things, but the maintenance job was the easiest way because I could be on site, working the same place that my kids were, at my apartment. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

Tony and Jason had specifically used their familial networks to facilitate conducting or furthering a job or completing daily responsibilities for the job. Tony had used these networks for personal time as well such as to work out at the gym or hang out with friends. Bryan, on the other hand, was more hesitant to take personal time and felt that he was going to be burdened by asking, but did use his family to assist with continuing his 40 hour a week swing shift mechanic job. When talking about his childcare arrangement he explained that he lived with his mother out of necessity so that he could continue in his current job by having her care for his son while he worked.

My son goes to the same school as my little brother, I have a 10 year old little brother that lives with us too so we have a gaggle of children at the house. I drop him off at the same school as my little brother and they get out of school at the same time so she is able to pick up both the kids at the same time and bring them home and she watches him while I am at work which is why we live together. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old and 8 and 12 year old step-children, full time employment)

Due to this childcare arrangement though, Bryan doesn't want to ask his mother for more help with other time assistance or childcare for free time, because he feels like she does enough for not being his son's parent. Bryan did discuss that he has other family that he can call when he feels the need to take a break or go out:

If I need to go do something I can have my mom watch them, and she will. I mean she is very good about helping out, but on the same token I don't want to overburden her and I just don't go out. I get a lot of help from my family so I have never really had to look at outside help on stuff like that. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old and 8 and 12 year old step-children, full time employment)

He mentioned that occasionally he will take his son to his brother's house in the country and leave him for a night to catch up on sleep or take a break. This ability to depend on support for both work and the ability to step away was discussed as highly important for many of these fathers. Facilitating work and career success is again illustrated as highly prominent in their discussions. This concept of needing to provide and achieve financial and career success as a male in society penetrated these fathers stories not only as seen in daily life and work in the previous chapters, but again here in their use of support networks that allowed this type of success.

In addition to necessary childcare for work, school or daily life, some fathers also discussed the need for a break and the desire and benefits of some time to themselves. This assisted with the alleviation of the daily life chaos that was illustrated in chapter four. Many fathers discussed their lack of a social life, but also that they sometimes needed and wanted to break from the fathering role and socialize. The use of familial support to help acquire this time of relief was common, albeit minimally requested due to existing childcare arrangements or other assistance from the same network:

One dynamic that I did not fully anticipate was when their mom and I separated we moved back into my parents' house and before that had happened, she routinely kept them at least one night over the weekends and took full responsibility and was very engaged and there were clearly defined grandma times. Now that we all share a house I think the novelty of that has faded, so now there is a very clear distinction that they are not her kids and that she is not as willing to take full responsibility so that I can run off and do my own thing and have my own time. Especially if I have time in advance I can usually arrange

reliable childcare and do things for myself. (Matthew, 39, 3, 9 and 12 years old, self-employed low-income)

...on the weekend it just gets amped up and amped up and amped up, it is like you want to go outside and take a break, but you can't because then they will terrorize the house by themselves. You can't let the convicts loose you know? ((Bryan, 29, 4 year old and 8 and 12 year old step-children, full time employment)

Bryan also discussed the burnout, or task overload, of full time parenting and a full time job. He stated that by the end of his work week he didn't have the energy to go out, but that his mood and patience was severely impacted by feeling overloaded. He discussed that he would probably be a happier and "more fun" dad if he had some time alone to decompress and enjoy the peace and quiet, but again, felt restricted in asking for too much from his small familial support system. Many of the fathers had similar sentiments that they would be more content and enjoy time with their children more if they were able to step away occasionally and decompress.

Several other fathers discussed using these networks to take a break, take time alone, or enjoy themselves socially outside of their parenting role and they felt this was beneficial not only for them, but also for their children. Jason was currently homeless and had always struggled with trusting others with his children, due to issues they had experienced in the past (which he did not elaborate on). He had a weak support network and no family around to assist him as he had previously, but still emphasized and expressed the desire for this support and for the benefits of taking time alone. He expressed that he wished he was able, and willing, to find a way to do this and explains here why it would be important:

I think it would be more beneficial for me because my kids need to miss me, I need to be away from my children more than I am because if I don't then I am around all the time and I am chopped liver and they don't respect me and treat me

like shit. They tend to lose respect for me and just be mean or rude to the point where my kids would never be that way, which is not the way I raised them. It is just because I am always there, always there, always there, it is just unfair. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

He expressed further that he felt a support network and outside assistance would make his engagement and time with his children more enjoyable, as Bryan and other respondents did. They explained that they felt not only would there be better engagement with their children, but also their children would benefit from the input and influence of other adults as role models and authority figures. Several fathers included this idea of adult external influence as part of their reasoning for the use of support networks, and discussed the idea of building or using a larger community network: “the village”.

For “the Village” at Large

The expressed necessity of these support networks emanated throughout the conversations with these fathers in relation to daily coping and childrearing. Several of the fathers explained that they sought out these networks, and not only for their own needs and own benefits, but to provide a support network for their communities in general. Several discussed that they had at some time in their lone parenting lacked a network and felt that having a larger, dependable network was important for any parent, especially a single one. Mike discussed his restructuring of this network or community from before he had children to after, and that he saw it as an equal exchange of support and assistance within his new support system. The way in which he referred to this throughout the conversation is that it not only allowed him to work and attend school, but also facilitated his involvement with his own child, and eliminated some daily stressors making the childrearing experience more positive overall. Several other fathers also

discussed this idea of a larger community or village and how the influence from other adults assisted in building respect, civility, and provided other influences for their children. With this community ideal discussion, there was also the desire to provide support and positivity for others around them. Noah discussed having many children from the neighborhood come to his house to play or hang out and that he adored each of them and saw benefit in them spending time outside of their immediate home environments. He felt the same about his children spending time away from their home and with others in his community and support network. Mike discusses this idea of the village very clearly:

I have a pretty good support system and growing from that community you had pre-kids to the community of people you have after kids. “I love you guys over here, but I am going to let these guys watch my kid.” It is nice to have a good support circle, and especially with single parents. I find them immediately, like “hey, whatever you need, call me! And we will do the same” and I do not hesitate for a second to ask somebody, “hey do you mind doing this? Because I will help you out, we are a community, we are a village.” I am a big proponent of that. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school low-income)

The concept of the village is a notion of using the broader community to assist in childrearing. The reference comes from the “it takes a village” ideal, and this is what these fathers described as being an important aspect of their support networks. It was expressed from these fathers that building this village within the community to support each parent, each child, and to expand the assistance that was available for the families was important and necessary.

Brad relied on his son’s friends to expand his support network, explaining that his son goes home with his friends after school for about an hour and a half, thereby helping with childcare needs and being more able to balance his new job (which he had changed

to be more available as discussed in chapter five). He explained there is a benefit of having other role models and other support for his son, it is clear that he finds this important for both of them. When asked if this was ideal childcare arrangement he continues:

Actually yeah, because the house he goes to are the parents who have kind of taken him in, so it's been a big help. They're good people and they are great parents, and they didn't have to give as much love and care to him as they have, yet they saw that there was a need for it, not only to help, in fact it wasn't really to help me it was to help him. So, yeah it's a great situation actually. (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment)

Brad discussed what he felt was a lack of female influence specifically in his sons life and that the mother in this family had in many ways decreased this feeling and provided this influence which he felt benefited the both of them. These fathers felt that the idea of the village for support in the community as well as the influence upon their children from other adults was very important. Some related their feelings of loneliness and missing the other caregiver from chapter four to another reason that adults other than themselves were important to have in their children's lives. They did not want their children or others to feel that they were on "an island" or feel that their children were missing out on important aspects of social learning. Building a dependable community strengthened support networks for these fathers and those around them, they clearly sought out ways to expand and incorporate those in their community into their lives and the lives of their children.

Emotional/Mental Support

Support networks did not only surround and include the basic needs of childcare, physical assistance in daily life, and a break from the daily chaos for these fathers, but there was also a dialogue about the emotional support sought and needed through childrearing alone. There was a binary struggle for these fathers on their desire to seek emotional support, their desire for the support and companionship of others, but on the other hand some discussed being weary of asking for this kind of assistance. Although assistance with daily life and childcare was sought out regularly and discussed openly with many of these fathers, only a few of the fathers willingly discussed support surrounding issues or questions about parenting and emotional struggles. The fathers who had sought out emotional and mental support saw benefits to this and discussed it as a very positive experience. Two fathers describe these positive experiences:

So I might find a friend to vent to, I have a good friend that lives at the apartment complex who is also a single parent and he understands, completely understands. (Tony, 46, 5 year old, full time employment low-income)

Yea, sometimes I will call and talk to the girl's mother. That is horrible sounding, but...there are some other people that I have met that I can talk to. My oldest daughter has a friend who's mom I will call and talk to once in a while, I have a great deal of respect for her, she is a mental health profession actually. So she can talk the talk and that is helpful, and she has been really candid to me about her life so it is a lot easier to open up to someone when they have already opened up to you. (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed low income)

The benefits to this outlet for these fathers appeared to alleviate stress, lessen feelings of aloneness, allow them to balance feelings of struggle associated with fulltime single parenting, and receive feedback on questions or concerns related to parenting. Previous literature (Coles 2002, 2009; Dufer et al. 2010; Hamer and Marchioro 2002) has shown that some fathers struggle with adjusting to full time parenting and, for several of the

fathers interviewed in this study, it appeared that their support network was a form of coping with and avoiding this struggle or confusion. As Noah explained, having a large network and community gives him the opportunity to seek out support and advice from multiple sources. He felt this was important specifically with respect to childrearing or parenting questions or concerns:

...and I just kind of bounce all these ideas and conversations off in a way that I really formulate, it takes me time to figure out what is going on and I need a global approach to it so I need multiple options and opinions (Noah, 35, 7 and 12 year old, self-employed low income)

This sentiment was seen with several of the fathers as well, in relation to their using their village for childrearing questions. Many of these fathers did not struggle with asking for daily care, as well, they did not appear to struggle with asking for advice or assistance with overall parenting concerns and questions. In fact, the community or village seemed to provide a space of mutual understanding where these issues could be discussed. Some of the fathers, however, were not receptive to the idea of reaching out for emotional support or said that this was not something that they did. The fathers who did, as shown above, had very positive responses and were able to discuss this subject with confidence and ease as they had with daily care assistance. On the other hand, the fathers who did not or would not ask for parenting or emotional assistance, when asked if they had someone to call after a bad day, when upset or sad, or just feeling alone, many simply responded “no” or “not really.” When asked why they had no one to call or talk to, they were not able to articulate a reason and simply stated: “I don’t know”, “I don’t need to”, or a shoulder shrug and the hint to move onto the next question. This clear dismissal from about half of the fathers in relation to asking for emotional support aligns with ideas

of hegemonic masculinity and the dismissal of anything seen as “feminine”. Requiring emotional conversation or discussing struggles with coping seems to fit a traditional masculine idea of pride, autonomy and doing it alone. There was a definite line between logistical support and other forms of support in parenting for these fathers.

Desired Services/Support

After discussions of services that were used or not, and discussions of support networks, these fathers were asked about what services they would like to have available and to identify resources they felt were lacking that would be beneficial for single fathers or single parents in general. The fathers overwhelmingly identified the desire and need for a support network system, counseling, child share, and basic community bonding ideals that they felt would increase their success and contentment as parents in general. They stated that these support and outreach concepts were needed and these included some of the resources they were currently lacking. Mike discussed this in depth as to how it could work and why:

I think maybe some sort of intranet of time share; I think the most valuable thing for single parents is time. That is where the playdate, that is the resource that I use, I use the community of parents that I have. If there was some sort of system where we could do that where you got to meet people and had playdates and community events and then branched off from there with these people that would be an outstanding resource. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school low-income)

Jason mirrored this sentiment for a parent’s group and support network. He brought in the theme of loneliness from chapter four and discussed that this group and network may be a way to alleviate some of those feelings. He felt that not having to be alone and do everything by yourself continually was one of the principal resources that was lacking for single parents:

Something that would be fun for the parents as much as it would be the child, but to help them bond more, something like that would be cool. I think a general single parent group; because there is so much pressure on a single parent that we always lack something. Whether it is too much stress, because it is only you, to where it is hard to have fun when they want to have fun because you have everything else you have to worry about that they don't even know about; like survival. It is hard to cut that off and go watch a game...go to the park and swing and make sure they have fun and play tag and stuff like that, or hide and seek, it would be nice not to have to do it by myself you know? (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

Larry also presented a suggestion of bonding and community that agrees with the other fathers, stating that a place to get together with people who are faced with similar situations would be beneficial. Larry discussed that the ability to talk with others or simply have some company that understood the circumstances of a single parent would be the primary resource that could be provided:

I guess what I am thinking of is just the cliché counseling forum where people could just get together and talk. It takes a lot of trust to be able to do that, maybe even more with men than with women, maybe? I don't know for sure. If there was just a forum to openly share what you are going through that is probably it. People have such different problems. I guess for me it would be, just a place to openly share stuff. (Larry, 40, 8 and 11 year old, full time employment)

Larry's idea of support through counseling, communication and bonding coincides with many of the fathers' narratives on the use of support systems for emotional and parental support. These fathers felt that they were more able to share stories and talk to those who had been in similar situations and understood that spectrum of issues. Larry also introduces a concept discussed in the next chapter that men may have a more difficult time than women sharing emotions, social constructs of masculinity have restricted this for many men. Several other fathers also mentioned that having a group to talk to, especially other single fathers with whom they could share stories and struggles, would be most beneficial. They indicated that such a group would provide a "safe place" to be

open and receive emotional support without reservation, which may also facilitate overcoming some of the struggles discussed in the next chapter. For each of the fathers involved in this research they were asked whether they could recruit other single fathers for the research. This snowball sampling technique had little success, many fathers said they did not have contact or know any other single fathers, and only two fathers knew another single father that they could refer. This further emphasized the importance of a network and support within and for single fathers.

The concept of support networks providing a more positive experience and allowing more success for single fathers has been discussed by Coles (2002, 2009) and others. The capability to parent alone successfully and with more contentment is impacted by the willingness to accept assistance in the broad sense of either services and/or support networks. Fathers who used either or both of these resources had an overall calmer and seemingly more positive perspective to share about their parenting experiences and were more willing to discuss them.

Discussion

These fathers were split in both their use of services and in their reasons for why they used them or not. Several of the fathers discussed a mistrust and lack of faith in the institutions providing such services, citing previous interactions that involved negative treatment and outcomes while accessing such services. Others expressed a desire for autonomy and a drive to provide alone for their children. This desire for self-sufficiency is consistent with previous research from Coles (2002, 2009) in which this drive for autonomy is found to be stronger among single fathers than for single mothers. Also

consistent with this previous research from Coles (2002, 2009), several fathers that had previously used services had achieved higher incomes and no longer used or sought out these assistant services. Coles suggests that the constructs of work for men and the strong desire for autonomy leads to this class mobility and through work, as discussed in chapter two, are inclined to increase their incomes and no longer be eligible or need state assistance. Maupin et al. (2010) found similar expressions of autonomy and the avoidance of social stigma attached to service usage for single parents, fathers especially. The importance of such services lies in the alleviation of daily life stressors and the weight and burden of attempting to do it all alone. This assistance has been related to better health, satisfaction, and personal relationships by Olson and Banyard (1993). The fathers in this research indicated that the use of services, when a positive and beneficial experience, assisted them in their childrearing, daily necessities and in their personal and professional lives.

Although over half of these fathers had strong and extensive support networks, consistent with Cole's work, several of them still discussed their desire not to use these networks to their full extent. This is due in part again to the desire and drive for autonomy and proving themselves capable of childrearing alone (Coles 2002, 2009) Several other researchers (Coles 2002, 2009; Olson and Banyard 1993; Respler-Herman et al 2011) have identified the benefits of support networks and reported similar positive outcomes as did this research. Use of these networks facilitated work, school, daily life, and personal time which all lead to more positive life perspectives, less stress, more positive interactions with their children, and more engagement with their children. This decrease of stress is important, especially for single parents who feel more stress in daily

life. Individuals experiencing more stress are also more likely to experience reductions in health and quality of life, so less support equates to higher strains and more stress (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009, Castillo 2010 and 2012; Coles 2002, 2009; Olson and Banyard 1993; Respler-Herman et al. 2011). Therefore, balancing the daily child-linked and work-linked responsibilities with the use of a support network lead to more positive outlooks upon childrearing, and facilitates achievements professionally, academically and personally, as well as for the larger community.

The use of these support networks not only assists with daily life, but many of the fathers used these networks for emotional and parental support and assistance. This support helped fathers balance the struggle of adjustments to full time parenting and alleviate some of the confusion they had felt about childrearing. These struggles with adjustment have been discussed by Coles (2002, 2009) as well as Dufer et al. (2010) and Hamer and Marchioro (2002) where it was found that accepting these new roles and adjusting to full time parenting was a struggle and barrier to contentment for single fathers. The use of these support networks seemed to assist with this aspect and be a solution for these fathers. The emotional support that these networks provide, typically from others who were or had been in similar situations decreased stress and allowed these fathers a way to connect with others on a deeper level. In line with previous research on single mothers (i.e. McLanahan and Booth 1989), the overall conversation led to the use of services and support networks being beneficial for all involved.

The idea of a village, an extended community that mutually assists each other, was discussed by several fathers and was discussed as a desired service that was not currently in place. This idea has not been reported in prior literature on single fathers, or

on single mothers, but it was a prominent theme discussed by the fathers in this research. The possible difference could be linked to that of “reconfiguring” fathering, and the social pressures that mother’s tend to feel (intensive mothering), not being the same for these fathers. Whether or not the desire for autonomy and breadwinner ideal is present, fathers are beginning to be acknowledged as daily care providers of children and full time parents. This is possibly leading to the ability to define the means of coping and parenting versus having a social standard to appease as mothers have faced. The social feedback and pressure for these fathers was discussed in these interviews as many times “too positive” and as shock to others that these men are full time parents. This leniency and lack of social structure surrounding fathering may allow, though, a possible freedom for these fathers to design how to balance lone childrearing that single mothers have not had due to social restrictions and expectations upon mothering.

CHAPTER 7: GENDERED PARENTING AND CHANGING MASCULINITY

In this final chapter, I examine these fathers' perspectives of the societal roles of mothering and fathering and how they felt the gendered dimensions of parenting occurred within single parent households. This section leads into a larger discussion of these fathers' specific roles and how they face these socially constructed roles of gendered parenting. That is, I examine whether they accept or reject these stereotypical roles and the extent to which their ideas of parenting were influenced by them. I will then discuss how these fathers feel about the impact of single fathering on their masculinity and how these roles have influenced their perceptions of themselves as men in society.

Mothering/Fathering: Is it Different?

When it comes to the actual experience of being a child in a family, I don't think gender is the most defining characteristic. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Mothers and fathers have traditionally held different roles in our society, which categorizes mothers as the caregiver/nurturer and fathers the role of provider, leaving the majority of childrearing to women. The fathers in this study were asked if they thought men and women cared for children differently and if they thought that mothering and fathering were different. These fathers did not believe that the roles necessarily had to be different or were socially imprinted in a way that was unchangeable. However, some of the respondents felt these roles were imprinted through biology or so deeply entrenched via socialization that they were inherent, but that they were fluid when necessary or in situations of single parents. Others felt that these roles were only seen as different because we are socialized to think so and that the illusion of differences was not necessarily a part of their model for parenting.

Different, but Adaptable and Fluid if Necessary

Women are generally more nurturing and emotional, where men are more, I don't know callous. I don't think intentionally, I don't think they mean to, just as in nature, they are more analytical, more logical with less emotion. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment)

This first theme emerged from the fathers' ideas pertaining to mothering and fathering in that the two were different biologically, or inherently, but they could be fluid. These differences was described as certain role expectations, but the fathers either saw reasoning for these role separations, such as women being "biologically programmed" for childrearing, or some combination of socialization that was so deeply entrenched within parenting that it appears as inherent traits.

Women are certainly more nurturing. Well, that argument, I mean, yeah, I think that they are born biologically programmed as long as you believe in evolution to be the more nurturing, their job is childrearing. Not that I think fathers can't do that, try to be more nurturing...it is something I have to personally work on. (Noah, 35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Noah described here that the concept of a biological drive to raise children influenced his perspective on whether mothering and fathering are different roles. He stated that mothers inherently hold more nurturing characteristics, but that is fluid because fathers can also be nurturing and raise children, even if more effort to adapt to the nurturer role is required. These fathers felt that this biological difference to be nurturer or provider did not necessarily prevent a father or mother from fulfilling both roles and they could fulfill them as single fathers, as discussed further below.

Following the discussion of inherent different roles for mothers and fathers, another manner in which these fathers discussed them within the same idea of

“differing,” was that they could be fluid from the beginning of childrearing, not only later in a child’s life due to single parenthood. This was dependent on the situation, but these fathers still held beliefs of possible inherent differences of mother and father, based on biology or imbedded socialization.

I think traditionally they are, but I don’t think that can keep one or the other from doing things that traditionally should be done by the other. I’ve seen men that can nurture their children much better than their female companions can. So, I don’t think that in the traditional sense of parenting, mothering, and fathering nuclear family, all that crap... I think we’ve gotten to a point where those barriers have kind of broken down a little bit. I think the female can do a lot of things that the male used to do, you know as far as teaching a child how to fix things, a lot of that. Those ideas to me are so rudimentary and old, I just don’t think they exist anymore. I think chemically there’s you know, different ways that we seems to be programmed, not chemically, but I think females and males are hardwired to do certain things. But I don’t think we can’t change those hardwires if necessary. (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment)

Brad indicated that he thought males and females were programmed differently; mother is the nurturer and father is the “fixer of things.” However, this hardwiring could be altered and is by no means a set of traits that is not adaptable. The fluidity within roles that these fathers discussed was based on their ability or desire to adapt to “mothering” roles associated with child rearing. Several of them spoke of these differences while acknowledging they did not necessarily feel they had to be bound by them. For example, Mike states: “I figured I would be all in. I knew that there would be things that I would have to do, I would have to provide and I would have to get benefits for these sorts of things, like medical. I knew those things were going to be my responsibility, I knew that.” (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school) Although Mike said he did not feel there was anything he would not do associated with the role of mother or father, he stated that providing was his social role as a father. His further discussion

expanded on the concept that even though his role of provider was known, it didn't mean he was incapable of fulfilling the nurturing or "mothering" aspects as well. He stated that he began his role of father with every intention to work towards crossing these gendered boundaries of parenting. Mike did not believe that biological roles were the factors defining these differences necessarily, but deeply entrenched socialization impacted these notions making them appear inherent.

It only is because we have been socialized to think it is: Role rejection

Every scenario is different and it doesn't really have anything to do all the time with gender, it is just the person themselves. (Jared, 32, 8 and 13 year olds, part-time employment and part-time school)

In contrast to fathers who viewed differences as biological but flexible, others rejected these essentialist claims, the second theme that emerged is reflected in Jared's assessment that gender is not necessarily important in parenting. Scott supported that the influence of socialization is the primary driving force for ideals of gendered roles within parenting when asked if mothering and fathering were different: "Not necessarily but they often get expressed that way. I think it is still very true that there are different social expectations on men versus women." (Scott, 45, 7 and 10 year olds, self-employed) This group of fathers began their parenting experiences with the belief that socialization was the only source of role divisions between mothers and fathers and there was no biological reasoning. They felt the social division of gendered parenting was purely that, social expectations, and many blatantly rejected the roles that were placed on them. Many of the fathers expressed the same opinion about the social division of mothering and fathering:

I don't feel a strong gender bias in parenting itself, I think both fathers and mothers can provide just about all of the physical and emotional and other needs that their kids have. They might do it slightly differently, but I don't think hormones or sex organs purely define that. I think there are a lot of social and cultural norms that people identify with and adhere to when it comes to how they interact with their children. Gender has a lot to do with it, but I don't think that it is the only defining characteristic. I think socioeconomic levels and that kind of stuff, time. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew stated biological sex does not determine parenting abilities and strengths, but socialization has delineated these expectations. He also suggested that other social factors may define parenting roles more than sex or gender, such as class. The rejection of gendered roles has influenced many of these fathers' parenting. For Matthew he had taken on the caregiving role from the birth of his first son, even finger feeding him due to birth and breastfeeding complications. "I was there a great deal of the time for all of my children since birth and I definitely feel that I share that bond with my kids, regardless of my testicles." (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed) Matthew's open and active rejection of socially defined roles of father provided him the ability to form a close and early bond with all of his children. Matthew rejected his gendered role early in his parenting and did not allow the gendered expectations to interfere at any point. Other fathers discussed their ability to work from home or have flexible schedules, as discussed in chapter five, that allowed them to be with their children from an early age, also allowed them to develop a deep bond with their children. This bond has traditionally been associated with mothers, and the fathers felt this "bond" was one explanation for the socially constructed ideas of mothering and fathering. Their rejection of the belief that mothers should provide the majority of the early nurturing allowed them to build these bonds with their children that fathers are not normally granted. As several fathers

discussed, the manner in which social institutions are designed, the mother is allotted this independent nurturing time to bond with children whereas fathers are not traditionally supported in doing so. This idea of the institutional structure not supporting great amounts of early father involvement is discussed next.

The blurring and dismissal of these roles also manifested in conversations with other fathers. Larry discussed his role as parent as just that, a parent. He believed that his role of father is equal to that of the mother in all aspects. However, in his previous situation, finances established a gendered norm for him that matched societal expectations:

I don't know what the difference is between a mother and a father, I mean one has a penis and one doesn't. I think they should be similar roles, I mean we are both supposed to care for the kids and take care of them. In my situation, I wasn't able to be at home because of money, but I think that society just carves it out that way. It didn't make a lot of sense for me to be at home. Basically, men get gipped in a lot of ways, women get gipped too, but no one really talks about the way that men get gipped, men get gipped because they don't get to be with their kids, they have to go to this other world of work and that is it. Then they get to come home at night and have dinner and you know go to bed and that is their life with their kids. I don't think that is the way that it should be...My role, I thought that I would be a caregiver just like the other parent, I don't really like that the 'dad goes to work mom stays at home' thing necessarily. It seemed to work for us, but I always kind of felt gipped, and a little bit jealous. I would have liked to have been home with them more. (Larry, 40, 8 and 11 year old, full time employment)

Larry expressed several times in this narrative that he feels that the social division of parental roles has "gipped" him and not allowed him to parent the way that he would want to. As was the case with several other fathers, he indicates that when living with the children's mother, he was not able to participate in all facets of the child rearing due to the constructs of work/income. Larry emphasized that "no one really talks about the way that men get gipped.", but they should. The stereotypical gendered parenting roles have a

negative impact on these fathers in that they did not want to adhere to the provider role and miss out on other involvement with their children. They viewed parenting as parenting and discussed that these socially constructed divisions were sometimes barriers for them in raising their children the way that they wanted to. Jason discussed these barriers as well, unlike Larry, he highlighted the impact on mothers having to take on the full childrearing responsibilities. He stated “mothering” is a harder job and there should be a shift to equality in parenting, especially since “those roles don’t have a place” and more fathers are taking custody and daily care of children on, proving they are capable of childrearing. Jason has been the primary and only caregiver of his children since they were one and two years old, but discussed that from the time the pregnancies began he did not intend to leave this “harder job” to their mother. He felt that he would be losing out or missing the opportunity to raise his children if he were to adhere to these gendered social norms. The inability to fully participate in their children’s lives due to these gendered expectations was discussed as problematic for these fathers and contributed to their decisions to reject the gendered parenting roles from the beginning of childrearing.

Mothering and Fathering in Single Parent Households

It is just parenting. If you take the role of a single parent, they are the father and the mother. I do think there are certain things that mothers are better at than fathers and things that fathers are better at than the mothers. But as a single parent you really don’t have a choice, you don’t get to choose what you can and can’t do, you have to do it all or nothing. (Jared, 32, 8 and 13 year olds, part-time employment and part-time school)

After discussing the social roles of mothering and fathering, the fathers were asked how this manifested in their single parent households. Were the roles were still salient? How were the roles adapted? As noted above, Jared said there was still an

undertone of some differences with fathers being less nurturing or needing to put in extra effort to compensate for the lack of the socialized mothering roles. However, regardless of whether they viewed differences as biological but flexible or socially constructed, all of these fathers were secure in the idea that anyone was capable of providing both roles: “I think in that aspect, you have dual, you have to be a little mother, a little father...If you are by yourself, which makes it tougher, way tougher.” (Tony, 46, 5 year old, full time employment and full time school) As described above, Tony is one who feels that the expectations and roles of parenting may be inherently different, but that a single parent needs to make these roles fluid. He explained that, as many other fathers did, in single parent households, one needs to be able to provide the expectations of both roles. Mike expands on these expectations:

Yea I mean I think that you have to, on your shifts, do both jobs. That is why I think there are such blurred roles anymore; I think that you have to be, you could go within a 15 minute window from the hardcore disciplinarian to the loving affectionate ‘it is going to be okay’. I think without knowing that you are doing it, it is just the role that you have, and it is a universal one. So I think that you just have to be a jack of all trades when it comes to that...I think that you have to make sure that they understand that this is love, this is it. (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

Again, Mike felt that there were specific roles that mothers and fathers fulfilled, but adapting these roles and making them fluid in a single parent home is highly important. He discussed the spectrum from one end, disciplinarian, as traditional father role, to the loving and affectionate, traditional mother role on the other end. Mike discussed further that it took him time to learn these “other” roles of what is typically mothering and to remember that his son needed that. He stated that he now switched roles unknowingly, as several other fathers mentioned. The necessity to fill dual roles was thought to be the

same in single mother homes with mothers having to fulfill the traditional father role while fathers had to fulfill the traditional mother role. However, with many things, this was expected of single mothers socially; whereas for them as fathers, providing the traditional mothering expectations were above and beyond what is socially expected of them. Similar to Mike, several other fathers discussed the “two sides” of parenting and that at some points it was a struggle for them. Nonetheless, with many of these fathers, the discussion of switching between both role expectations was possible and necessary.

Well I think that by necessity certainly [single fathers have to adopt a mothering role], but it all depends on how sensitive the individual is, you know I think some men can't, they don't have the ability to do it and I think some men do. I think probably a lot of it has to do with the relationships they had with their parents, with their mother. I guess by necessity we're forced into it [as single fathers]. Not forced being a bad thing, it just is what it is. (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment)

Brad reinforced the idea of necessity in providing both roles, but also discussed that this was by “force” and stated that maybe not all men could do it. Again, he is reinforcing the prominence of social ideas that men are not necessarily supposed to, or capable of raising children. He discussed earlier that there are things that men and women do differently, but that the hardwiring could be changed if there was a need to do so. Brad had taken on a full time caregiver role with relative ease, but as he mentions it depends on “how sensitive” a person is as to how and if they can adopt these roles.

Overall, these fathers felt the roles of mothering and fathering were capable of being fluid and that one was able to adapt to conducting both either by necessity or for some, role rejection from the beginning. Even though their initial ideals or understanding of these roles and their roots were different, they agreed that the gendered parenting roles could be blurred and that in single parent homes it was essential that they were. A

prominent theme that emerged through all of these conversations was about learning to or being able to be “more nurturing or emotional”. These ideas of being more emotional and nurturing and the blurring of gendered parental roles and how it impacts these fathers is discussed in the next section.

Masculinity

Through extensive conversations with these fathers, numerous themes emerged in relation to masculinity and struggling with, challenging, or ignoring the gendered expectations of fathering. In relation to the preceding discussion of parenting in single parent households and providing both roles to their children, the first theme that I will discuss is the idea of traditional mothering qualities. These fathers discussed their desire to be more nurturing and/or to show more emotion. For many of the fathers, this was challenging but they were able to strategically challenge their gendered expectations in order to fulfill their role of father to their children. The second theme I will discuss focuses on the fathers’ responses when asked “Has being a single father changed the way you view yourself as a man?” Their responses were surprising, unique and intellectually stunning.

Showing Emotion/Being More Nurturing

[It’s important,] making sure that you do stop to be more nurturing, because that is very hard for men and I don’t know why. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

Gendered stereotypes are prevalent and pervasive in daily life, and this is no less the case for these single fathers. They discussed feeling incapable of being highly nurturing, or showing emotions openly, and that it did not always come naturally,

because they had been raised to be tough and unemotional. The fathers discussed this challenge mostly in relation to balancing the traditional mothering roles of nurturing and emotions in contrast to the traditional fathering roles of disciplinarian and tough parent. Many of the fathers discussed some difficulty in achieving these balances. However, a portion of these fathers also embraced and welcomed the opportunity to change and emerge as more compassionate, nurturing individuals; even when facing the social expectations and ideals as men to be tough and stoic.

Tony raised the fact that he was told that he should be more compassionate: “So with my own son though, I don’t know. I am sure there is always room to improve. I have been told that I need to be more compassionate, so more understanding.” (Tony, 46, 5 year old, full time employment and full time school) He indicated that although he did not have issues providing physical affection to his son, the emotional talk, conversations and coddling, when necessary, his son was difficult for him. Several fathers stated that needing to make these kind of adjustments were pointed out to them by those in their social circles and daily interactions, where others came to this conclusion on their own. In any case, many fathers felt they needed to learn to be more nurturing and emotional because it was important as a single parent to have this balance. In many circumstance, as Bryan discusses below, there were conscious efforts and attempts made to remind themselves to enact more of the mothering qualities.

So finding that right balance of knowing when to stop being callous or firm or strict and stop and okay I need to be emotional now, and how to be emotional, because I am not any good at it. Trying to find that balance, and I am probably not doing enough on the emotional side, but I will do what I can. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment)

Bryan's statement about not doing enough, or struggling with this idea was common for many of the fathers. They implied that they were much more naturally able to take on the callous, firm, disciplinarian areas of parenting, but not the other areas as easily. As single fathers, they recognized that they were in positions that required them to be both mother and father and as such, needed to balance the roles that would normally be provided by two parents. As this has been discussed several times, it is important to look at the impact that this has on these fathers in adjusting to the dual roles:

How you parent is, I really have to dig deep to be more sensitive, because they are kind of like sharks if they think I am being a sissy about something or I am being weak they end up going into a frenzy and start working me over. But I have to be strong, because I am the stereotypical dude, but then I also need to be sensitive because I am a single father, with a daughter and it almost forces you to become bi-polar in a sense. I have to be strong, but sensitive at the same time, it is kind of hard. (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)

Jason's description of feeling "bi-polar" in dealing with this balance is a concise way to describe how many of these fathers described this struggle. As men, they felt that they needed to be "tough" and strong, as well as hold their ground when it came to their children, yet not all the time. They discussed feelings of not quite understanding when and how to either switch or combine the mothering and fathering traits and discussed this struggle as sometimes problematic. Bryan discussed his own struggle with not wanting to coddle his children and that he was not very emotional or affectionate, but also acknowledged that they were not going to get it anywhere else. He also discussed this back and forth struggle as a feeling of bipolar. Jason and Bryan both lead into reasons behind why they fought to attain this balance when they discussed the reasons they felt they needed to be more sensitive. Jason refers to his daughter only, but many fathers

discussed the need to show both strength and emotion for their children's sake in general, this idea was not directly related to the child's gender.

Conversations with these fathers on how they balanced the role of provider/nurturer or attempted to be more emotional, typically related back to the knowledge that it was necessary for the child's sake: "You can't raise a kid with no emotion or they are going to be shooting off the roof with a deer rifle, but with the same token, you don't want to raise a child with thin skin because as an adult they will never succeed in life." (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment) Several fathers mentioned that they were trying very hard to teach their children to express their emotions effectively. They felt that this ability to control yet express emotions was necessary for their success as adults in society and they as parents needed to show this to teach it. These fathers also discussed that as a single parent, they felt they needed their children to feel comfortable and capable in coming to them with any emotion, any issue, and any problem therefore they as fathers, needed to be receptive to emotion:

He seems to feel safe to bring up things that he is struggling with emotionally during the day, it tends to be a lot of trying to understand other kids' behavior. He is outgoing, but he can also be sensitive and thoughtful and so he sometimes struggles to understand why other kids might act a certain way that is hurtful. It makes me happy that he feels that he can talk to me about those things. I know that there will come a time when he is going to push against that and shut down [because of social norms as well as puberty], but I am hoping that there will be a through line from that that will carry on throughout our lives where he feels like he trusts me (Justin, 45, 7 year old, self-employed)

These fathers discussed that if they were able to show emotions and be more nurturing that this would facilitate these same forms of communication from their children. They expressed concerns of the impact and repercussions if their children were unable to

communicate emotions with them or others effectively because they had not had a good role model to follow. For some of these fathers the idea their children may grow up “haters” or as Bryan stated, “shooting off the roof with a deer rifle” terrified them. They felt that if they were incapable or lacked in providing a means of emotional and nurturing behavior for their children this could be the outcome. As far as parenting is concerned, there is a worst case scenario reaction as to what will happen if you do or do not completely provide something for your children. This thought process guided these fathers into challenging their masculine gender ideas and to expand themselves in these areas for their children.

Although some of these fathers struggled with and needed daily self-affirming reminders to express these nurturing angles to their children, several of these fathers truly embraced the idea of blurring their prescribed masculine images. Several of these fathers described that they were delighted to embrace the idea of being a more emotional and nurturing person. They discussed this was due in part to their childhood experiences, as Jason explains, as well as breaking the societal limits they felt were placed on their fathers and other men in past generations:

My father was, I never saw my father cry, his father never told him he loved him with his mouth or anything. It has forced me to become emotional and my dad is a stroke victim right now, so the way that I have changed, changed him. I have always been sensitive and emotional inside and all that, but now I know that it is cool, and that I have to express sensitivity and I have to, not because I have to, but because they need to see that I am sensitive and that it is good to have a heart. Rather than grow up a bunch of kids that are haters, you know? (Jason, 42, 8 and 10 year old, unemployed and homeless)
I don't think that I am in the same boat as my father, or fathers of the past generation who were like rub some dirt on them, I think there is something to say about embracing, holding, and 'hey it is going to be okay, are you good, you good?' (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school)

Mike and Jason were two of four fathers that specifically stated the idea of being able to change the masculine ideals of fathering from past generations and allow themselves as fathers now to embrace the traditionally attributed maternal role expectations. Jason discussed now being allowed to express his emotional side and that it is beneficial for him and his children. Mike also described that embracing and holding his child is important to him and there is a benefit for both of them. Mike goes on to explain that his childhood was lacking a biological father role, as was seen in several other of these fathers stories, and his step-father had taken on a very traditional role of provider without nurturing aspects. Mike states: "I didn't learn much from him. So to be in a position where I think that I am doing a little bit more, I am there providing plus I am showing emotion. I want my son to be able to talk about things and do certain things." (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school) This description of the importance of "doing more" on the nurturing side explains that some of these fathers are willing to embrace the nurturing side because they now have the opportunity and realize the positive impact that it has upon their children, as well as themselves. Mike reaffirms the idea discussed by other fathers above that he feels his son's ability to communicate with him requires this adoption of a more nurturing role. Conversation of past generations being limited and these fathers now being able to embrace the ideas of nurturing their children, it was discussed that part of the acceptance was related to passing on to children a new lesson about the concepts of gender expectations: "Let them know that it is okay to be that [emotional, caring, nurturing] even though most of us [boys] were raised that it is not okay. Not so much that we were told, but that implied to just suck it up, and we just can't teach all our kids that." (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children

half time, full time employment) As Bryan and Jason both stated, the past ideals of being tough all the time and not showing emotion were harmful to them and would be harmful to their children. These fathers see great benefit embracing this refined role definition for themselves as men, as well as to pass on these new ideals to their children. They also want their children to be able to come and talk with them, feel open about all subjects, and bond with them, as fathers, in a way that they were not raised to do.

Fathers that discussed the idea of being able to change expectations of fathering from past generations also discussed wanting to embrace concepts of nurturing and more emotion because they appreciated and respected this side of themselves once given the opportunity to explore it. This was discussed as one of the facets of childrearing that these fathers had not expected, but were able to discuss with positivity and confidence. They felt that they were willing and able to adapt their traditional roles, because as parents in general they felt that they should.

Noah: I am very motherly in a lot of ways like keeping my kids clean, like giving loves and snuggles in bed every time that my youngest daughter goes to sleep, she won't sleep unless I snuggle her up in the blanket. Or just telling them how much I love them every day, which I probably would not do near as much if there was another person there saying the same thing. Like, my dad said it, three times a year. Instead, I am not able to follow that model, I am more nurturer, softer...

Heidi: More than you were before?

Noah: Oh yeah, I will cry over a commercial now. I wasn't like that before, but there is something about being around children that changes you, or it should I think. (35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Noah acknowledged that he had once adhered to the masculine standards and that he had not always been capable of being emotional or nurturing, but through having children, he changed in several significant ways. He explained, as did several others, that as soon as he had children, he felt a fundamental shift that opened the door to embrace his caring

side to facilitate childrearing. None of the fathers felt negatively about the adaptation to their traditional male rigidity, even if they struggled with it. Noah continued to discuss his emotional and nurturing side: “I am not embarrassed about it, I guess. I guess it is an improved myself view, my self-image.” (Noah, 35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed) As I will discuss in the next section, this idea of an improved self-identity penetrated these fathers’ stories and changing masculinity.

Has Single Fathering Changed How You View Yourself as a Man?

All of these fathers were asked if being a single father had changed the way that they viewed themselves as a man in society. Their answers were resoundingly unique and captivating in relation to the societal ideals of masculinity. Many responses will be reported to allow their voices to resonate and to express these unique perspectives as single fathers, of a changing masculinity. These responses fell into several categories (which coincided with what aspect or qualities these men most strongly associated their masculinity with); the first being based on changing from a rough and tough deviant male to a responsible father. The second category was about redefining ideals of male social success via work and accomplishment to that of being a successful father. Lastly there was an overall idea from some of these fathers that they were “more masculine” because of their role as primary caregiver equating to a “new form of masculinity”.

Rough and Tough Deviant to Responsible Father

Several fathers discussed their youthful rambunctiousness as a defining factor in how their life and their “maleness” was before fatherhood. These men spoke of partying,

sexual prowess, risky behavior, fighting, and things including guns and drinking. The fathers who discussed these past associations with their “manhood”, when asked if being a father changed their views of themselves as men were pleased to share that yes, it absolutely had:

I have changed quite a bit, I can definitely tell. I used to be, when I went to college I was the student body president, I was outgoing, the A personality and the life of the party and all of that great stuff. I would go out and party like crazy with everybody, but now I have turned more into an introverted homebody. I don't care what people think about me I just do what I have to do (Skip, 38, 8, 11, and 12 year olds, self-employed)

Skip shared the ideas of his boyish adventures and the change he made for his children.

He associated these antics with his masculinity and changing this part of himself for his role of father was something he discussed as being a shift of which he was very proud.

He no longer felt that the idea of being at home doing “homebody” stuff (e.g. cooking, playing, and cleaning) was less masculine, but it was his job as a responsible father.

Larry shared a similar sentiment of his youth, and even though he still participated in some activities and hobbies that he associated with pre-fatherhood, he had made a lot of changes to being “more mature” for his children: “I do feel like a man...I have to be a grown up for these kids and I am not always that good at that. I do have some different kind of hobbies that not a lot of other dads have, I think that I am doing, I am mature when I need to be...” (Larry, 40, 8 and 11 year old, full time employment) Larry also discussed that the idea of “growing up” and being responsible for his children made him feel more like a man. The responsibility that these men associated with childrearing has redefined their ideas of what being masculine is, and they embraced the ability to expand and redefine these ideals.

Another father who also associated masculinity with a “toughness” described the prominence of this aggressive and deviant behavior in his pre-fathering years. When asked if he felt being a single father had changed the way he viewed himself as a man, Jared responded:

Yes, I guess it has, because I think it has changed my perspective on life. My self...I grew up an angry, very violent kid and my son was born and that all changed and then being a single father. Even if something happens in front of my kids, I just can't go beat someone up like I used to. The thought doesn't even cross my mind. I think it has made me a better man. To be calm and handle the situation in a calm manner that keeps my kids safe and doesn't scare them. So I think that it has changed me as a man more emotionally and how I react in certain situations. (Jared, 32, 8 and 13 year olds, part-time employment and part-time school)

Jared was one of the fathers who also embraced the opportunity to express more emotion and to be more nurturing. He mentioned that soothing his children and having deep emotional conversations with them was a basis of his ideals of parenting. He connected his rougher “manly” years with what he used to associate with masculinity, but as a father, he had found a new standard for being “a better man.” The association between the idealistic tough, rugged, danger seeking, emotionless man that these fathers viewed as their previous standards of masculinity had been washed away to encompass that of mature, involved and emotionally responsive and available fathers as being an improved version of masculine.

Redefined “success”

As the standard role of a male and father, society has pinned men into a role of provider. They are guided into an ideal of success meaning good careers, hard work and accomplishments, and “taking care” of others through financial means. Several of these

fathers had previously associated their masculine ideals with these standards of male success. Matthew discussed that before his first child he was “on the fast track to personal success” and this had been sidelined for his fathering role ever since his first son’s arrival:

I would say being a single father is being a father in general, being a very involved father has been kind of, made me redefine success. It’s trying at times, but it grants me a profound sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction, fulfillment, all of that...that I don’t believe is widely presented in our culture and society these days, just how rewarding it can be to watch your kids grow up. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew’s fast track was that of a prominent and highly paid professional. He has redefined his success not to one of personal and financial gain through career, but to success raising his children. He recognized that this is not highly prominent or necessarily acceptable in our society for fathering to be labeled as success for a man, but for him that had become irrelevant. This is an area where several fathers had felt a change in their perspectives of their manhood or masculine ideals: “I really did believe (after first son was born), maybe I was compensating for other inadequacies as well or whatever, but I really did believe that if I do this one thing well, nothing else matters. This is success and the way that I measure success is if they [his children] are happy.” (Scott, 45, 7 and 10 year olds, self-employed) Scott is relating his ability to be a father to the greatest success in life, similar to that of Matthew discussing a profound sense of pride in participating in and watching his boys “growing into men” (as further discussed in next section). These concepts of fatherhood and changing perceptions of success and masculinity these fathers felt may help provide their children with a new formed idea on what it is to be a man in society. The relationships between accepting emotional roles

and redefining masculine ideals for the sake of passing them on to the children they are raising correlates with many themes in this chapter.

A few fathers did not necessarily feel that they had changed how they perceived themselves as men in particular, but they described shifting ideas of success and responsibility. This illustrates that they had in fact changed their scope of how these traditional masculine ideals influenced them as males in society and how changing them had changed them as “men”. Bryan illustrates:

No not how I view myself no, it is just a different responsibility in life, you know your responsibilities change. It goes from being successful in what fields you have, to being successful as a parent and then trying to be successful at everything else. It just changes your perspective on things. (Bryan, 29, 4 year old, 8 and 12 year old step children half time, full time employment)

Bryan, as seen with other fathers, viewed previous ideas of male success as subordinate to their success as fathers. Each of these fathers still held some personal foundation of a need to provide for their children financially and through hard work and career orientation, but this was always spoken of as secondary to their roles as father. The change in their perceptions from pre-fatherhood to now was explained as a change in their ideals of how much their provider role and success as a man took weight over other roles. This shift to the importance of being a successful father first and foremost, overweighing any other form of success, is successfully changing for them and their children some of the entrenched societal masculine ideals.

More Masculine, Different Kind of Masculine

Following the concept of changing ideas of masculinity for these fathers, several of them were clear in stating that because of their fathering role, and specifically as a

single father, they felt more masculine, or saw themselves as more of a man. These fathers were stating that they felt they were able to alter some of the standard expectations of hegemonic masculinity that were placed upon them; such as always being tough, proud, steadfast, stoic and dominant. Matthew had changed his ideas of success as described above, but he also had changed his ideas of masculinity in general. He explained that not all of the typical male associated activities are a part of his life, but being a father overshadowed all of associated traits and behaviors:

I would say so. I feel much more manly because of it. I don't have any guns, I don't drive a motorcycle, I don't really go hunting or fishing or play sports, but I have accomplished my biological imperative and I think on a primal, personal, hormonal, masculine level I feel very much, I have spread my seed and I am growing my kin, they are getting big and strong and I am very proud of how big and strong they are getting... it feels to me like a great personal accomplishment that I have been able to raise these children. I think the fact that I have 3 boys and I am their same sex role model has a lot to do with it too. Having them grow up to be proud of themselves and comfortable with their own sexual identity and how they identify with themselves as boys growing into men, it seems to be a much more profound deep seeded kind of masculine identity than what I would say is more like superficial, cultural definitions. (Matthew, 31, 3, 9, and 12 year old, self-employed)

Matthew is cunningly aware of the “superficial, cultural definitions” of what a man is supposed to be in our society based on these ideas of Hegemonic Masculinity. This theory states that males will adhere to certain traits and expectations to maintain a dominant social status and avoid such traits deemed as “feminine”; being emotional, nurturing and raising children being examples that are relevant here. He no longer associated these definitions with what he considers a strong masculine identity and has instead transformed his roots of manhood into his ability to raise his children. He still discussed how “big and strong” they were getting, and this is a form of masculine identity that he still felt comfortable associating with them being males. He discussed further

though, that “big and strong” needs to be fused with ideas of emotion and nurturing for his sons to be well rounded participants in society. He does not intend to dismiss all forms of masculinity for himself or for his children, but instead he discussed blurring the divisions between masculine and feminine and raising children with both sets of qualities. This process is begun through his own redefining of himself as a man and relaying this to his children. Another father discussed this same concept of raising children in a manner that intentionally blurs the division of gender traits. Noah, though, has two young girls and expressed the same masculine change within himself that he felt was important to have his children adopt:

I guess it is an improved myself view, my self-image. I have always, this sounds stupid, I have always thought of myself as a pretty tough guy, right? Like I could pretty much do whatever anyone else could do. Didn't really think anything could hurt me, but at some point in time, my wife left and that hurt. And the thought of losing my children is almost devastating I don't think I could go through it. So realizing that I actually care about somebody else or something else that much...it does, it softens you up a little bit it makes everything else in the world seem less important and the things you have personally seem more important. (Noah, 35, 8 and 12 year old, self-employed)

Noah discussed ideas related to the first concept of “tough guy”, but illuminated that as a male in society he had altered himself to accept that the standard ideals of masculinity do not fit his role as a father anymore. These fathers felt a shift in their standards of maleness to one of a “profound deep seeded kind of masculine identity” that contradicts many of the socially prescribed traits. The fact that this redefinition crosses child-gender is telling of how deeply these men feel ascribing to a “new form of masculinity.”

Two fathers discussed these social ideas of masculinity and how they had been harmful to them and had negatively impacted their lives either prior to or during their early childrearing experiences. Brad discussed this change from the negative impacts of

social expectations as a man, to the positive outcome when asked if being a single father had changed the way he viewed himself as a man:

Absolutely. Confidence, because when you have someone else to rely on you rely on them and there's certain things you don't feel like you need to be doing because the other person is doing it. So it's definitely made me understand what I want in life and what I want for him much better, but over all I would just say confidence. You know I think everyone has fear of the unknown, especially in a situation like that when you lose a parent and you don't know how things are going to turn out, and with me, it was not just his mother leaving. We lost our house because she lost her job and I couldn't afford to pay for the house all by myself and financially, I had to figure out how to make it work. A lot of things I thought I'd never have to do because I was fairly confident that I was where I was and that's how it was going to be. So immediately I had to do a lot of things I didn't know I had the capacity to do without breaking down, there's a lot of implied weakness that I guess I had, and you know when I was faced with a challenge and had to do it, I did, and realized that most of that stuff you can do if/when it's necessary.

Heidi: Do you mean implied weakness as far as being able to handle the child on your own?

Yeah. (Brad, 37, 11 year old, full time employment)

Brad illustrated the idea that several fathers discussed - feeling unprepared or incapable of raising their children, especially alone. He identified the socially implied weakness of being a man raising children. Men and women are socialized from a young age to have different roles in society and this has been related historically to specific childrearing roles. Taking on both of sides of parenting for Brad and several other fathers was their opportunity to change these ideas of their masculine roles. Mike held similar ideas of a change in himself not only as a man, but also as a person in general: "I didn't think I could be the person that I am right now as far as a father 7 years ago when I found out that he was going to be around. I wouldn't have thought that I could be in the position that I am right now, so I think that I like being a single father, I like being father of him" (Mike, 37, 6 year old, full time employment and full time school) Mike also felt that his

socialization as a man in society would be a possible barrier to his parenting ability in the beginning. However, as he took on the role of full time single father early in his son's life, he quickly shifted and was able to redefine himself to be a successful father to his son. This meant that he had to dismiss the previous ideals that he held upon himself as incapable of full childrearing due to masculine expectations. There are many overlaps within this thesis of how these men had changed their initial concepts or ideas to fulfill their role as father, many related to the gendered ascribed traits that are socialized from a young age. For example, Brad was one of the fathers along with Noah and Matthew who had redefined work to facilitate their parenting, all three to the "detriment" of their personal career success. These interrelated concepts of adaptation with several of these fathers supports their radical shifts in ideas of masculinity.

Discussion

These fathers were divided in whether they felt that mothering and fathering were inherently two different things, but they agreed that socialization has constructed divisions of the role. They all agreed that whether socially or biologically, mothering and fathering were different and had separate associated childrearing responsibilities. These responses were not surprising given the longstanding concepts of "mothering and fathering" that has been researched and socially defined (Dufur et al. 2010; Bronte-Tinkew et al 2010). Dufur et al. (2010) concluded that traditionally there have been separate roles with the mothering meaning providing daily care, routines, and nurturing and fathering providing the economic, playful and disciplinary facets of parenting. These fathers recognized these socially depicted roles, yet all of them felt that they were fluid

and in single parent households, by necessity, they needed to provide both. Coles (2002, 2009) found similar outcomes in her research and that further, there were struggles for these fathers in adapting to the roles of being both mother and father.

The struggles with adaptation that the fathers in this research faced were consistent with Cole's findings. They felt that they were not as naturally capable of being emotional or nurturing and struggled with finding this balance. This has been shown numerous times in research on fathering that there is a binary tension to provide the traditional role of provider while also being the nurturer (Coles 2002, 2009; Hatter et al 2002; Williams 2007). The pull between these two socially opposing parental roles was a struggle for these fathers, even though they were capable and willing to adapt to them. Previous research also found this as a form of stress and struggle for fathers within the gendered parental roles (Coles 2002 & 2009; Doucet 2004; Williams 2009). This research also follows similar findings that the desire the fathers in this research had to incorporate more nurturing roles into their lives led them to acknowledge that the gendered roles of childrearing were not a barrier to their success with full time parenting (Coles 2002 & 2009; Smith and Smith 1981). These fathers were either willing to alter their gendered roles, or to fully embrace them in daily life with their children. Many of these fathers accepted that in general, they no longer fit all of the traditional masculine role expectations. They instead altered their ideas of masculinity to incorporate their abilities of participatory childrearing to form a new idea of masculinity. This idea seemed to manifest from the attempt to prove that they were capable of the more maternal parental expectations which was also found by Coles (2009) within her research population. These fathers faced similar issues to mothers in relation to daily care,

schedule conflicts, task overload, childcare and work struggles. However, in contrast to Hochschild's (1989) findings in the *Second Shift* that women felt de-feminized by these overbearing struggles, these fathers felt more masculine in their abilities to maneuver the struggles of daily childrearing and work.

In contradiction to previous research on fathering, the roles that these fathers adopted and the manner in which they fulfilled their daily parental duties crossed class boundaries. About two thirds of this population (9) were considered low-income, where the other third (5) was not. Several of the fathers had also previously been middle to upper class or had varied incomes from self-employment and fell into different class categories depending upon this. Gerstal and Shows found that working class fathers were more likely to participate in the traditional daily care roles of childrearing, where those with a higher income were less involved in the daily care. In this case, with single fathers there was not a discrepancy of daily care, engagement or participation in daily activities based upon class. This is not discussed throughout this chapter due to the lack of difference, which in and of itself is important and relevant to this research. Acknowledging that these are both situational studies, these findings of cross class symbiotic participations are unique to the body of existing literature of class and gender in fatherhood.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of single fathers in the Portland, OR by looking at their daily lives, challenges, and the way in which they conduct this non-traditional gendered parenting role. These issues were explored through in-depth interviews with 14 fathers. A summary of the findings from each chapter, limitations of the research, and implications for future research and policy are included in this conclusion.

Findings

The first analysis chapter explored the daily lives and schedules of these fathers, focusing on logistical and emotional struggles they encountered. Balancing daily life and schedules was a challenge for all of these fathers, crossing all boundaries of situation and class. All fathers struggled with maintaining their child's daily needs as well as household needs within the chaos of school, activity and work schedules. These struggles contributed to feelings of inadequacy in terms of a lack of quality time with their children and time to themselves. Emotionally, many fathers felt stress, loneliness and the effects of sacrifice in their daily lives. Lacking another caregiver led to struggles and questioning in relation to child behavior and discipline as well as feeling overwhelmed and overloaded. Several fathers expressed great concern with possible failure in raising their children, whether it be uncorrected behaviors, manners, dress and decisions made in daily life. Lacking another adult to provide checks and balances in these situations was a prominent theme. Feelings of loneliness in childrearing and feelings of being "an island" were also common. Not feeling able to share the day in and

day out stories of raising children, as well as having no one to check them led to loneliness. Overall, these fathers had adopted the daily lives of childrearing alone, yet even while taking on the main caregiver role they had some struggles with gendered expectations. The ideas of their masculine role in parenting left them in question of whether they were making the right decisions and their feelings of possible failure were closely related to not being socially prepared or expected to raise children. Stories of daily struggle and schedule balancing were consistent across class boundaries, including areas such as scheduling conflicts, stress and feelings of lack of time for engagement with their children. This chapter explored and illuminated how these fathers maneuvered their daily lives as lone parents.

Chapter five included discussion of how these fathers reconfigured their work or schooling to accommodate the daily stress and chaos of lone childrearing. In addition to the schedule balance they were attempting to obtain there were also constant struggles with dependable and sustainable childcare. Most of the fathers felt that their children came first and this was the source of conflict for their career or work success. They would provide and accommodate their children and sacrifice their work as a regular occurrence. Several fathers had built self-run businesses to help navigate their children and work schedules, providing them the option to work from home, stay home with their children during days off from school or take them to work when necessary. Several fathers had transferred or moved jobs to more family-oriented and accommodating sites or businesses. This shift allowed either schedule changes that were congruent with their children's schedules, leniency when time off was needed, proximal location to their children or ability to take work home sometimes. A few fathers had entered or re-entered

higher education to further their possible success and accommodate the daily schedules of their children. This chapter aimed to explore also how these fathers balance work and family and showed that they were attempting to do so by constructing work in a manner that allowed family to work spillover and avoided or decreased work to family spillover. Even with adaptations to their work life, they still struggled occasionally with the balance and the need to work first came in sacrifice of their families, but only out of necessity for family benefit or survival. Some fathers, especially those who were self-employed, discussed having to take their children to work with them on more than a few occasions in lieu of other things to finish a job, or to accomplish a task in a timely manner. This was discussed as stressful, but also as one of the reasons for becoming self-employed. It was clear that for these men some work/career success and maintaining the provider or breadwinner role was important to them, but they were challenging the ideas of hegemonic masculinity while still upholding these specific aspects of it. For these fathers as well there were no obvious differences in their associated work and child struggles based upon their class. Childcare for all these fathers was unstable and in constant flux, and across income lines, these fathers all felt a need to reconfigure their work lives to provide for their children not only financially and logistically, but also emotionally.

Chapter Six discussed the use of services and support networks that these fathers did or did not utilize as well as reasons for why or why not in response to the related research question. Half of the fathers did use, or had in the past used, some form of social or community assistance services. They were divided in their reasons for non-use, but these reasons consisted of a desire for autonomy and providing alone for their children, as well as barriers they had faced socially and lack of trust in the institutions.

Some fathers had faced adverse situations in attempts to access or procure services leaving them timid in attempts to search out assistance publicly through institutional means. In contrast, many of these fathers had extensive support networks consisting of family, friends, or community. Again, many discussed their desire to avoid using these networks unless necessary due to the desire for autonomy and pride. Those fathers who were open and willing to these supports used networks that facilitated the ability to work, attend school, balance schedules, and provide time alone or away for these fathers. The use of these support networks assisted fathers in balancing their child-linked responsibilities with the rest of their lives, and several fathers discussed the use of them to assist in building the community village at large. These networks were also used for emotional and mental support for some of the fathers. This seemed to assist in their adjustments to full time parenting, stress and when questions on childrearing occurred. The same struggle of autonomy and pride was present with emotional support as it was with daily support and the use of services. This desire for autonomy has been linked through previous research to gendered role expectations (Coles 2002, 2009). Again, we see that the hegemonic masculine ideals of autonomy and pride still hold strong for these men, but they are also breaking away from and challenging some of these aspects, such as asking for emotional support. Many fathers discussed the concept of a support or meeting group of single fathers for use as sounding board, support, networking, as well as a safe space to share their struggles. This suggestion and request by these fathers, in and of itself, challenges the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and feelings of the need for autonomy. It is unique that once again, the stories in this chapter crossed class boundaries, even for the fathers who had a higher income; many had used some form of

services at some point in time. They spoke of the same ideas in relation to asking for assistance through both state/community programs and support networks, and the desire to maintain autonomy, but across the sample, each of them said they would do whatever was needed to provide for their children. Only one father discussed his ability to provide babysitters for a night out, this being the only class difference noted throughout the analyses.

Chapter Seven focused specifically on the intersection of gender and fathering exploring how these fathers viewed gendered roles in parenting as well as their own masculine identities. Many fathers discussed the suggested division of mothering and fathering as influential in their views of the world yet they were divided on whether these roles were both biological and socially constructed or existent purely through socialization. In both cases, these fathers felt the roles could be fluid and were necessarily so when lone childrearing. Acknowledging the necessity for providing both roles, many fathers struggled with taking on the traditional mothering roles of being more emotional and nurturing. They discussed their ability to do so in relation to struggles with adapting themselves to provide this nurturing role. In relation to adapting to more feminine defined characteristics, these fathers also expressed that they no longer filled the traditional masculine identities that they once had, and accepted this. Interestingly, each of these fathers had redefined their masculine identities into one that embraced their fathering role as a strong form of masculinity. This form of masculinity was discussed in terms of pride in raising their children successfully, and feeling more masculine for proving themselves capable of doing so. Once again, these fathers are challenging the ideas of hegemonic masculinity, however still upholding the traditional ideals in some

manner. The drive to be a provider and to raise “strong” boys still came through when speaking with these fathers. Also found in this chapter was the lack of difference in fathering in relation to class. Their changing ideas of masculinity held no relation to class, occupation, age, or gender of child.

Across class boundaries these fathers all shared similar daily struggles, daily involvement in their children’s lives, and were redefining themselves in manner that were unrelated to occupation or income. Every father expressed through their stories across each chapter and concept the value that their children come first, their primary and most rewarding job is to raise their children to be happy and successful. They clearly redefined their masculine identities in substantial ways that challenge the social order and gender expectations yet, still upholding several aspects as well reinforcing the stronghold that hegemonic masculinity has on men in society.

Contribution and Implications for future research

This study contributes to the existing literature on single fathers (Coles 2002, 2009; Connelly 2004; Greif 1985; Hamer and Marchioro 2002; Roy 1999; Schindler and Coley 2006; Smith and Smith 1981) in a broad sense of illuminating their experiences and exploring further some previously researched concepts. There is also a broad contribution to single parenting and parenting literature in general. Using Coles’ research (2002, 2009) as a guide in formulating ways to recruit, view and interview single fathers, this research expands prior research on African American single fathers to include a more diverse sample as well as a different location. The consistent findings with overall concepts verify there may be general themes and ideals in these fathers’ ideas of

childrearing. The lack of differences found across class boundaries in this research is also significant and needs further exploration with a larger sample.

This research also stands to contribute to literature on gender and masculinity. The stories and identities of these fathers can assist in furthering the understandings of masculinity in society and the ways in which it can be challenged, changed, and redirected for future generations. The broader discussions of institutionalized gender roles and expectations can also benefit from the analysis of this research.

This study has explored and found useful and unique information on the experiences of single fathers, which has been an area of minimal research. This population of single fathers should be explored further in future studies with multiple angles. Expanding this research to a larger sample and expanding the geographical location would be of great value to this body of research. It would also be of benefit to delve deeper into each of the discussed subject areas and other facets of life for these fathers to gain more insight into the workings, challenges, and solutions for this population. Furthermore using these fathers' stories could lead to a larger survey study that would allow researchers to gain insight and extensive data to examine the experiences of single fathers further. It would also be of value to include a more diverse sample of racial and ethnic groups and to maintain the variation in class to explore issues related to the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Discussions of manners in which to provide assistance and support for this population from this research are plentiful. As suggested in Coles' research on African

American single fathers (2002, 2009), it is first important to acknowledge that first and foremost research should guide society to social acceptance of these fathers and dismiss the gendered roles of parenting as a barrier to their success. Coles stated that “approaching” these fathers with “expectation” (that they be full time caregivers) in place of surprise could reduce issues surrounding social perception, especially when done by practitioners and those in positions of service and support. This could also decrease fathers’ feelings of inability to parent if it is expressed that what they are doing is common and expected as it is for mothers. In this manner, policies to include single fathers in relation to social and community services are of high import. Relieving the stigma and barriers these fathers described in relation to accessing services could be accomplished through policy and through education/knowledge to those providing such services. As far back as 1981, Smith and Smith suggested inclusion for young males in parenting classes or family life education could increase their understanding as well as likelihood to parent children, especially alone.

These fathers discussed support and networks as one of their most desired services, and one that was lacking the most. Providing programs that could build community and support networks for these fathers would be important. One manner in which this could be accomplished would be through the public school system by creating a group that could use the available rooms’ afterschool to create these bonds. These fathers also suggested having transitional support and counseling available to single fathers, which was also suggested by Smith and Smith (1981).

Lastly, the lack of childcare and work constraints that exist are final areas where policy and practice could facilitate these fathers successful childrearing. Making work

places more family friendly in general, but also more specifically towards single fathers would alleviate some of the struggles they face. Also providing affordable quality childcare could not only assist in the work and success of these fathers, but, as with most subjects discussed in this thesis, could assist with all single parents, and parents in general. The difficulty in balancing daily life, work, childcare, finances and support is a shared childrearing struggle not only faced by these fathers, although most strongly felt by those raising children alone.

Conclusion

Each of these fathers faced daily struggles, challenges, barriers, and stress in their roles of lone parenting. In addition, they faced adverse social and personal struggles in relation to going against the traditional masculine role expectations and fulfilling the traditionally female gendered roles of childrearing. Despite all of these barriers and challenges, these fathers are raising their children successfully and have taken their fathering role as primary, as well as the most rewarding aspect of their lives.

The manners in which these fathers are directly challenging the ideals of hegemonic masculinity are plentiful and clear through the chapters, although they are still upholding some of the aspects such as autonomy, success, and pride. The redefining masculinity that these fathers have shown from this research gives hope and suggestions for the future that the negative consequences of this stronghold of what “men” should be can be changed for the betterment of these fathers and men of future generations.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Screening Questions

(These questions were designed to ensure that participants are eligible for the study and to obtain background information)

1. What is your name?
2. How many children do you have?
3. What is/are their ages?
4. Child(ren) male or female?
5. Does your child live with you 50% or more of the time including at least an average of 4 overnights a week? How much time?
6. Do you have a child under the age of 14?
7. Were you ever married? If so, to child(rens) mother?
8. Are you currently living with child's mother?
9. Do you live alone in your own home with your children? If no: who else lives in the home?
10. Are you the biological father? Adoptive father? Caregiver father?
11. How old are you?
12. What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
13. What is your formal level of education? (i.e. No Formal Education, High school diploma, technical school, undergraduate degree, graduate degree).
14. Are you currently employed? AND/OR In school?
15. What is your average annual or monthly income? (feel free to give a range if that is more comfortable)
16. What is your email address?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Intro questions

- 1) How long have you been a single parent?
- 2) Describe the circumstances that made you a single father?
- 3) Describe the highpoints and challenges that you have encountered as a single father?

Fathering/Parenting

If previously shared home with mother, include after question: How was this different when not a single father?

- 1) What did you expect role fathering role to be like?
- 2) Is there a gap between what you expected and what you actually experience?
- 3) Was there anything that was surprising to you in taking on this role?
- 4) Can you tell me a story that describes what it is like being a primary care-giving father?
- 5) IF PREVIOUSLY WITH MOTHER AND SINGLE LESS THAN 2 YEARS: How is the experience of being a father different from when you and your partner were together?
- 6) IF CHILD IS OLDER THAN 5 AND FATHER HAS BEEN SINGLE FOR AT LEAST 2 YEARS: How is fathering different now than it was when child was younger: preschool/toddler/infant?
- 7) Explain the types of experiences that have influenced your parenting style? How did you learn to be a parent? Who do you look to as a role model for your parenting?
- 8) Describe what factors make being a successful father to you?
- 9) How would you describe yourself as a father?
- 10) What is most important to you in your role of father?
- 11) Describe to me the relationship you have with your children. Is there a story you could tell me that would illustrate your relationship with your children?
- 12) If I were to follow you for a day with your children, what might that day look like?
- 13) Can you describe what a typical week is like for you?
- 14) What activities do you feel you do most with your child(ren)? Which are most enjoyable to you?
- 15) Do you do chores/house maintenance, etc. with your children? What do you do? What do they help with?
- 16) Do you foresee or have you had situations with your daughter that you have struggled with handling? Explaining? Example?

Gender and Fathering

- 1) Do you think men and women care for children differently?
 - a. Probe: Is fathering the same as mothering? OR How are mothers and fathers alike? Different?
 - b. Probe: in what ways do you see your role as a caregiver similar or different from that of a mother?

- 2) Do you think this is different for single parents? How?
- 3) How is being a single father perceived by others?
 - a. Family
 - b. Friends
 - c. Employer?
 - d. Co-Workers?
 - e. Other men?
 - f. Other parents?
 - g. Other children?
- 4) How do people respond to you at the playground? / At the school that your child attends? / At community programs or activities that your child attends?
- 5) What types of comments do you get from others concerning your role as a single father?
- 6) Has being a single father changed the way that you view yourself as a man?

Childcare and Work or School Conflict:

- 1) If employed: How long have you been employed in this job?
- 2) If employed: How many hours per week do you work?
- 3) If in school: How long have you been going to school?
- 4) If in school: How many hours per week are you in class/homework/etc.?
- 5) Tell me about your current childcare arrangement. How long have you had this arrangement?
- 6) Is this your ideal childcare and work arrangement? / What is your ideal childcare and work arrangement? What would you change?
- 7) How do you feel this influences your time with your child?
- 8) How do you feel about working and balancing your family? Can you think of a time when commitments to work made you miss something at home? How about when something at home made you miss work?
- 9) Do you feel like you balance your time at work and your time parenting?
- 10) What other activities, hobbies, etc. do you enjoy doing without your children? Do you have or take personal time or time for yourself? When and how? Do you feel like this is balanced with your home/work/etc.?
 - a. Prompt: Prompt: Time to self: How often do you do this? Do you think it's beneficial? What do you do when you have time to yourself? With friends?
- 11) Tell me what kind of advice you would give to other single fathers?

Services:

- 1) Do you access community resources for parents? What kinds? Why? / Why not?
- 2) Are you aware of services in your area such as assistance for food, medical, cash, child care, housing or bills? (Food stamps, Medicaid, WIC, TANF, child care, energy and housing assistance)
- 3) Are you or child(s) now receiving any of this assistance? (Food stamps, Medicaid, WIC, TANF, child care, energy and housing assistance).
- 4) Have you in the past?
- 5) Do you know of other local options such as food pantries, food banks, and clothing or supplies from churches or other organizations?

- 6) Have you visited any of these?
- 7) What changes would you make to the resources available in your community to make them more accessible/enjoyable/relevant to you?
- 8) If you were designing an ideal program for fathers, what would it be? Feel like? Are there any other resources or services you wish were available, i.e. diapers, clothing, support, etc. anything?

Support:

- 1) Sometimes a person needs the support of people around them, such as friends, family, and other parents. When you need someone to listen to your problems when you're feeling low, are there people that you can or do call or talk to?
- 2) Can you tell me about a time when you did need support and sought help as a father? Prompts: To whom did you turn? What type of help were you seeking/hoping for? Did you get help that was truly helpful to you? What kind of help did you receive?
- 3) When you have a question or concern about parenting your children, what resources do you access? / Who do you ask?
- 4) When you need someone to take care of your child(ren), either regular care or babysitting, when you can't be there, have to work, run errands, emergency, are there people that you can call?
- 5) What about when you just want to have some time to yourself or a night out, are there people that you can or do call?
- 6) What about when you need help with smaller favors? (moving, forgot a grocery, late-night medicine, etc.)
- 7) When you need someone to loan you money in an emergency, do you have someone that you can contact? Would you or have you?

Is there anything else that I have not asked about that you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time, I will email you the research/findings/your transcript if you would like, would you like me to do so?

Would it be possible for me to contact you if I would like clarification on anything in the future?