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Janet Darcy Saxe
How Do Single Fathers
Construct a Parenting
Identity to Incorporate
Nurturing?

ABSTRACT

This study explored how single fathers who had shared or sole physical custody of their children from a young age, thought and felt about their experience of nurturing. This qualitative, exploratory study aimed to broaden the knowledge of single fathers in this role, which has been largely unexplored.

Heterosexual and gay fathers with shared or sole physical custody of their children from the age of four or under were recruited from New York and Massachusetts. Ten fathers participated in this study. Questions were grouped around topics such as: 1) the participants' experience of being parented; 2) the experience of being a new parent; 3) the experience of becoming a single father; 4) ongoing conflicts experienced as single fathers; 5) adaptive measures taken to carry out the parenting role as a single father, and; 6) the participants' intra-psychic integration of their nurturing role.

Participants' narratives indicated that these fathers experienced little agency in the decision to become fathers and little intentional preparation for fathering, yet found deep satisfaction in their relationships with their children and a great deal of affective engagement and reflective capacity as parents. While the constraints of hegemonic masculinity caused internal conflict, it did not prevent these fathers from including feminine-associated elements in their fathering identities. Suggestions for further research were made to expand the literature on single fathers with shared or sole custody.

HOW DO SINGLE FATHERS CONSTRUCT A PARENTING IDENTITY TO
INCORPORATE NURTURING?

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2008

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Masculinities are not fixed nor are they homogenous, simple states of being. Instead they are often in tension within and without and such tensions are important sources of change (Connell, 2000).

The literature on infant attachment exclusively recognizes mothers as primary caregivers. The absence of fathers from the research is startling. This parochial bias reinforces an institutional marginalization of fathers in Early Intervention (EI) and related child welfare programs, and has implications for the wellbeing of mothers, fathers and children. Implicitly, the burden is on mothers to bear responsibility for the healthy developmental outcomes associated with the formation of a secure parent-infant attachment (or its failure). The exclusive focus on mother-infant dyads in direct psychotherapeutic intervention models inadvertently detracts from the rewards that fathers, too, may gain through the experience of nurturing their children.

In many popular practice models of parent-infant dyadic psychotherapy, such as the *Circles of Security* program developed by Robert Marvin, the dyad is viewed primarily as mother-infant (Cooper, Hoffman, Powell and Marvin, 2007). In my own practice as an early intervention therapist in NYC, I noticed many instances in which fathers were subtly or overtly excluded to the detriment of all members of the family.

For example, I worked with a family in which the father had been the sole caregiver to his infant daughter for the first four months of life due to the mother's postpartum depression (PPD). While the father appeared to have a warm bond with the baby, he seemed stressed. In keeping with the programmatic expectation, the compromised mother-child relationship became the focus of my intervention. A strengths-based model of intervention that recognized the importance of fathers as primary caregivers might have directed me to give equal time to supporting the child's relationship with her father. Had I the backing of such a model, perhaps I would have been better equipped to recognize and address the needs of the father-infant dyad, as well.

A substantial body of literature has demonstrated that fathers, in general, nurture their children less and abandon their children at a far greater rate than mothers do particularly in families in which parents have separated, divorced, or never cohabited. The literature from social learning theory and concepts from the theory of masculinities shed light on what interferes with father involvement. Men have little preparation and modeling for parenting and hegemonic masculinity exerts intrapsychic pressures on men to distance themselves from feminine-identified behaviors, such as tending to the affective needs of children.

At the same time research has shown that men can and do nurture children similarly to women, and there are appreciable and enduring emotional rewards for those who do. Children and women also benefit from positive father involvement in children's lives. Scant research attention has been given to understanding the experience of single fathers with joint or sole custody who stay highly involved with their children.

Social identities are fluid and co-constructed. There is little literature that considers the experience of highly involved single fathers as they co-construct a fathering identity in interaction with social identities assigned to them as men, and their own experience of the parenting role.

The purpose of my research proposal is a qualitative, flexible methods study of the experience of men who parent alone. By studying the narratives of these fathers it will be possible to gain insight into how men, themselves, define their role as single fathers. These narratives will also shed light on what it means to be part of an unseen minority of men who are highly engaged single caregivers to their children. From this study we may be able to develop a better understanding of the strengths and needs of these fathers and, as social workers, develop better ways to acknowledge and support father involvement with children in our work.

This research has implications for recognizing and supporting fathers as primary caregivers in EI work, and other programs that employ direct intervention models to parent-child attachment dyads. Fathers may find themselves in the primary caregiver role to an infant for many reasons, both elective and non-elective. This occurs in cases of maternal (emotional) absence through post partum depression (PPD), single gay fathers or couples, incarceration, death, kinship and custodial arrangement of biological and non-biological children to name some of the myriad family structures a practitioner may encounter. Adaptive variety dominates the contemporary social landscape in which children are born and families coalesce. As single and partnered primary care giving fathers are acknowledged, new visions of attuned, engaged and nurturing fathers, now so

woefully unseen, must be brought into practice. Practitioners need an expanded working model for parental, not just maternal responsiveness.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fathers nurture their children far less than mothers do, both within and outside the context of marriage. Additionally, fathers abandon their children at a far greater rate than mothers do. Dowd (2000) suggests that societal complacency regarding this fact reflects a limited view of what it means to be a father and assumes that such men do not experience psychological pain as a result of their detachment from their children. However, a contrasting trend in fatherhood studies has emerged that indicates this supposition is inaccurate: that is, a small but growing group of fathers are highly involved as caretakers of their children.

This review of the literature will examine this issue by looking at the literature in the following areas: the social facts of father involvement with children in contemporary American families, the social cost of disengaged fathering versus the benefits of highly involved fathering, impediments to highly involved fathering, and the experience of highly involved fathers.

The Social Facts of Father Involvement with Children in Contemporary American Families

Over the last few decades there have been profound social changes in the lives of men and women. European and North American men's wages have declined and unemployment of men has increased. At the same time there has been sustained growth

in women's labor force participation (Allen & Daley, 2002). As women have moved into the labor force they continue to be primary care givers. The majority of men, on the other hand, are no longer primary breadwinners, yet they retain a secondary role as participants in domestic care.

Some researchers have noted evidence that fathers of the last two decades demonstrate greater involvement than previous generations in their children's lives as shown by increased time allotted to childcare and a greater gender balance in child care tasks (Coltrane & Adams, 2001). Nonetheless, the overall pattern of gendered responsibility for children and domestic life has remained static.

Five and a half million American, 2-parent families in the US have one parent who acts as the primary breadwinner and a second who cares for young children at home. Eighteen percent of these stay-at-home parents are men (98,000 of 5.5million). (Doucet, 2006).

The gendered differences between mothers' and fathers' parenting responsibilities endure in the culture at large. This is evident both in the realms of wage work and non-wage earning domestic labor. Typically, whether partnered or single mothers, women accommodate their wage work to childcare responsibilities in ways that men do not. For example, women frequently take time off after the birth or adoption of a child, and make changes in their ensuing wage work patterns, effectively limiting their career advancement and earning potential.

Patterns of caretaking are equally binary in the domestic realm. Men generally take on an unequal rather than coequal share of both direct caretaking and domestic tasks when cohabiting with the mother of their children (Doucet, 2006).

The pattern of gender inequity in parenting responsibility is even more evident in divorce and families in which the parents were never married. Although the number of fathers with primary or sole custody is increasing, 90% of single mothers have primary custody of their children. Most single-parent fathers are non-custodial fathers (Dowd, 2000) "Just as women can expect to spend some of their adult life as single mothers with custody of their children, men are likely to be non-custodial fathers living apart from their children. Co-equal parenting is rare, as is father custody, though both are increasing" (Fox & Blanton, as cited in Dowd, 2004, p.60). In the U.S. 15.6% of children from divorced families live with their fathers, a figure that has remained constant between 1994 and 2004 (Fathers Direct, 2004). In Canada, joint custody arrangements are rapidly increasing: from 10% in 1986 to 62% in 2002 (Stats Canada, 2002b as cited in Doucet, 2006).

Research statistics on father involvement with children show that after divorce, fathers without custody have a pattern of infrequent contact and a rapidly declining pattern of child visitation (Dowd, 2000). Allen and Daly (2007) found that on average, non-custodial divorced fathers have two visits with their children per month several years after divorce. No visitation at all occurred in approximately 50% of all cases, and over 33% of children in divorced families do not see their fathers at all after one year of separation. Additionally, Czapanskiy found that only 10% of children have contact with their fathers 10 years post-divorce (as cited in Dowd, 2000).

Joint physical custody assigned by a court awards lodging and care of children to both parents following divorce. Though still a minority arrangement, it has been demonstrated to maintain the father-child relationship to a much greater degree.

According to the Children's Rights Council, 37 states in the U.S., and Washington, D.C. currently have some form of preference for joint custody (CRCKids.org). The stability and quality of the parent-child relationship, rather than the structure of custody or visitation, however, matter most for positive child outcomes (Kelly, 1993).

While paternal involvement with children whose parents do not cohabit remains slight, and mothers in two-parent households maintain far greater responsibility than fathers for childcare and domestic labor in addition to their labor force tasks, there are co-occurring contrasting trends of father involvement. According to the Children's Rights Council, "37 states and the District of Columbia have statutes that explicitly authorize joint custody as a presumption or strong preference" (www.CRC.org, 2008). Divorce settlements in which fathers are granted sole custody have increased from 1% to 5% between 1970 and 2000 (ParentsWithoutPartners.org, 2008). Five and a half million American, 2-parent families in the US have one parent who acts as the primary breadwinner and a second who cares for young children at home. Eighteen percent of these stay-at-home parents are men (98,000 of 5.5million) (Doucet, 2006).

According to Dowd (2000), this data suggests two current patterns of fatherhood: 1) men who father like mothers in substance and style (highly involved fathers), represented by a small group of single and married men, and 2) men who father as disengaged nurturers (Dowd, 2000, p.64).

*The Social Cost of Disengaged Fathering Versus the Benefits of Highly Involved
Fathering*

Many feminist theorists have argued that a society's flaws are reflected by the gendered disparity in responsibility for childcare. Doucet (2006) noted, "more than any other life event, the arrival of children most profoundly marks long-term systemic inequalities between men and women" (p.5). Furthermore, this lopsidedness perpetuates a rudimentary social flaw and society as a whole suffers as a result. As Dinnerstein (1977) commented, "there is a fundamental imbalance to a society when one gender does the metaphoric rocking of the cradle and the other rules the world" (p.147).

Costs of Disengaged Fathering to Women and Society as a Whole

Mothers, children and fathers experience the social disadvantages associated with disengaged fathering. For women the cost is felt in terms of economic, personal and political power. As Dinnerstein (1977) writes, "The division of responsibility, opportunity, privilege that prevails between male and female humans, and the patterns of psychological interdependence implicit in this division, stem from a core fact that has so far been universal: the fact of primary female responsibility for the care of infants and young children" (p.4).

Overall, 85% of American children live in single mother-headed households (Allen & Daley, 2007). The economic consequences of divorce and being a single mother are significant for women and children. The majority of single- parent, female- headed families live in poverty, regardless of whether the mother works. Furthermore, 55% of children who live in single parent, mother-only households are poor, compared with 10% of children who live in two-parent families (Wood, 2003). Economic support of children

by nonresidential fathers declines in a pattern resembling visitation (Dowd, 2000). Dowd notes: "to the extent that child support was ever paid, as contact declines, so does the support"(p.61). Further, she notes "nonpayment or partial payment is common"(p.61). While some fathers cannot pay, a significant portion of fathers simply choose not to, particularly those who do not stay in touch with their children (Dowd, 2000).

Costs for Children

In a research summary on the effects of father involvement, Allen and Daley (2007) citing an abundance of research concluded that father absence has deleterious effects on a wide range of child developmental outcomes, including health, social emotional, and cognitive outcomes. Conversely, it showed beneficial effects of father involvement in the same developmental domains (Wertheimer, Croan, Moore & Hair, 2003 as cited in Allen & Daley, 2007). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) found that father absence was associated with children's poor academic performance and behavioral problems. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) identified a pattern of lower scores of intellectual ability and IQ as well as higher drop out rates amongst children of absent fathers. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2003) reported that children in father absent homes were five times more likely to be poor, thus affecting access to nutrition, health care, and safe housing, as well as imposing a range of other risk factors to child development.

A large body of research on children of highly engaged fathers, on the other hand, indicates many positive social, emotional and cognitive outcomes for these children (Allen & Daley, 2002; Deutsch, Servis & Payne, 2001). This research includes studies demonstrating that children of involved fathers have higher levels of economic and

educational outcomes, career success, occupational competency, higher educational attainment, and psychological well being (Amato, 1994; Barber & Thomas, 1986; Flouri, 2005 as cited in Allen & Daly, 2007). These children also exhibit positive peer relations and are well liked by peers (Hooven, Gottman & Katz, 1995 as cited in Allen & Daly, 2007).

It is important to note that studies on the impact of father involvement on children overwhelmingly indicate that the quality of father involvement is a far more salient feature of child benefit than the fact of father involvement alone. Father involvement can also have deleterious effects on children when fathers engage in antisocial behaviors such as theft, substance abuse, and violent conduct (Flood, 2003; Allen & Daly, 2007).

Amato and Gilbreth use the term, "authoritative parenting" to describe the qualities of parenting associated with positive child outcomes. Authoritative parenting,

involves parental support reflected in such behaviors as responsiveness, encouragement, instruction and everyday assistance, and parental control, reflected in rule formulation, monitoring and discipline (but not coercive punishment such as hitting). In other words, it combines a high level of support with a moderately high level of non-coercive control (Amato and Gilbreth as cited in Flood, 2003, p. 17).

It is a quality of parenting which can be associated with either parent regardless of gender and is considered a key factor in children's well-being in both intact and separated families (Flood, 2003).

While some studies showed clear cognitive and social emotional benefits to children of involved fathers, another showed that the psychological adjustment of the primary parent was more salient to a child's well being regardless of gender (Dowd, 2000). Multiple, emotionally mature caregivers are considered a protective factor for

children's well being and a child with only one adult caregiver is at greater risk (Dowd, 2000; Flood, 2004; Allen & Daly, 2007).

Furthermore, Allen and Daly (2007) concluded that when fathers are supportive and encouraging, mothers are more competent parents. They are "more patient, flexible, emotionally responsive, sensitive and available to their infants and young children" (p. 21).

Costs for Men

Although the majority of single fathers are better off economically than the mothers who have primary caregiving responsibility for their children (Dowd, 2000), studies from the generative fathering movement have demonstrated that both the personal toll of having an absent or distant father and the losses men experience by distance from their own children are significant (Snarey, 1993; Flood, 2004).

A proliferation of literature on fatherhood earned it the status of a "hot topic" in the 1990's (Marsiglio, 1993). It is now a well-established area of cross-disciplinary study. This literature has focused attention on the costs of stress and work-family conflict, the liability of being a breadwinner and the dearth of opportunity men who are distant or absent fathers experience to develop close emotional and relational attachments (Barnett, Marshall & Pleck, 1992 as cited in Doucet, 2006).

Men have documented the personal and relational losses they incur both from the experience of having an absent father and from not being fully involved in caring for children. Being an involved father, on the other hand, is argued to have substantial benefits for men, women and children. Scholars have pointed to the important

"generative effects" for men who are highly involved with their children (Harkins, Christiansen, Sargent & Hill, 1993 as cited in Doucet, 2006; Snarey, 1993).

Allen and Daly (2007) concluded that men who are highly involved fathers feel more self confident and effective as parents, find parenthood more satisfying, feel more important to their children, and feel motivated to be more involved. (DeLuccie, 1996; Russell, 1982 as cited in Allen & Daley, 2007). Fathers who are involved in their children's lives are more likely to exhibit greater psychosocial maturity (Pleck, 1997; Snarey, 1993), experience greater satisfaction with their lives (Eggebean & Knoester, 2001, as cited in Allen & Daly, 2007), and feel less psychological distress in their lives, as a whole. They also report fewer accidental and premature deaths, less than average contact with the law, lower rates of substance abuse, fewer hospital admissions and a greater sense of well being, overall (Pleck, 1997). Furthermore, many studies on fathering have concluded that fathers have both the desire and the capacity to be protective, nurturing, affectionate and responsive to their children (Doucet, 2006; Dowd, 2000; Lamb, 1987; Peck, 1985; Pruett, 2000).

Impediments to Highly Involved Fathering

Given these losses to all members of society, men's desire and capacity to nurture and the well- established advantages of highly involved fathering, how can the persistence of disengaged fathering be explained? Doucet, (2004) posed the following question: "Across time, ethnicities, class and culture it is overwhelmingly women who organize, plan, orchestrate and worry. What is it about domestic responsibility that is so difficult for men?" (Doucet, 2006, p.15).

From pre-industrial times through the present, there has been no historical precedent for highly engaged fathering as a co-equal parental role. An equitable gender balance of childcare responsibilities has never before been viewed as an ideal. Thus, models of highly engaged fatherhood must, of necessity, be a contemporary construction.

The literature on gender differences in parenting draws from a wide variety of overlapping theories and disciplines, including psychoanalytic theories, attachment theory, feminist writings, gender studies, men's studies and sociology. Much of this writing can be seen as coming from either an individualist perspective or a structuralist perspective, with many varieties of both and different policy implications proceeding from each. In her study addressing policy questions which emerge in the research on single fathers, Risman (1986) states that most of the literature on gender differences in parenting clearly comes from an individualist perspective. The individualist perspective and its policy implications, as articulated by Risman, suggest that "personality develops from habitualized attitudes and as a result of repeated experiences, intensely held emotions, values and predispositions [which] develop during childhood and coalesce into a person's core identity, which has limited flexibility once formed." (p. 96). She further states that the individualist literature on parenting, "attributes the observed sex differences between mothers and fathers to internalized psychic predispositions: women desire to mother their children while men do not" (p.96). Risman (1986) also writes,

Although individualist theorists identify differing social and/or biological determinants for sex differences in parental behavior, they all take for granted the consequences of sex role acquisition and focus their debate on how sex role acquisition occurs. In particular, individualist theorists often assume that women make better care givers than do men. They debate whether this is because women have themselves been mothered by same-sex parents and therefore developed the desire for intense intimacy or whether the social reinforcement they receive for

doll play and other nurturing behavior is a better explanation for exclusively female mothering (p.96).

The structuralist perspective, on the other hand,

rejects the assumption that sex roles are internalized as personality traits. Because behavior is not viewed as immutably fixed by childhood experiences and biological preconditions, the differing parental behaviors of men and women must be explained as adaptive to on-going interaction, the product of more immediate situational demands" (Risman, 1986, p.101).

Each of these theoretical perspectives suggests slightly different implications for social welfare policy. Policy emanating from a structuralist theoretical base might, for example, lead to policies of advocacy for the easing of workplace requirements to allow parents of any gender to take time off to attend to parenting responsibilities. Social welfare policies based on an individualist theoretical perspective might advocate programs that encourage young boys to engage in doll play or train fathers parenting skills in order to be better nurturers of children.

This section will examine some of the sociological literature (research and theory) from both the individualist perspective and the structuralist perspective that have been used to examine and explain why the conduct of fatherhood has been slow to change in spite of the widely accepted individual and societal advantages of being a highly engaged father.

The first theoretical perspective is social learning theory as represented by the research of Snarey (1993) and Daly (1993), each of whom studied role models for fatherhood. Social learning theory explains human interaction as a result of observation and imitation (Bandura, 1977). As it pertains to research on father involvement, social learning theory suggests that men learn to enact a fathering role through interaction with

role models. The lack of positive role models leads to uncertainty amongst men as to how to fulfill a paternal role, thus inhibiting positive engagement with children (Snarey, 1993).

Within the social role research on fatherhood there are two major hypotheses; the first of these is that fathers model themselves after positive traits of their own father, or secondly, compensate for the perceived inadequacies of their father. The use of modeling or compensation as a strategy is determined by a man's positive or negative evaluation of his own father.

Daly (1993) interviewed 100 men about their paternal role models. He hypothesized that the behavior of fathering has been slow to change because men lack exposure to appropriate paternal role models. From the results of his research he came to three conclusions: 1) fathers in his study experienced a lack of identifiable and meaningful role models; 2) fathers in his study selectively incorporated particular behaviors from a variety of role models into their role rather than modeling their parenting behavior on an individual; and 3) in the absence of role models in their own lives, these men placed emphasis on providing a role model for their own children.

Overall, these men felt a deficit of positive role models for parenthood and perceived their own fathers as a powerful influence only insofar as they had done a poor job of parenting by contemporary standards. For many men in his study, the failure of their own father to serve as a satisfactory role model was the result of generational differences in the expectations of how one should act as a father. Daley speculated that the lack of role models contributes to a level of internalized confusion for men regarding

how to parent, and subsequently the potential for a lack of self-efficacy associated with fulfillment of the paternal role.

Risman (1987) was critical of what she saw as the individualistic approach of social learning theory to explain gendered differences in parenting and counterposed a structuralist point of view for research. She criticized the presumption that sex roles are internalized by childhood experience as personality traits. Instead, she suggests, the differential parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers are better understood as adaptive to ongoing circumstances and interactions, the product of exigent situational demands. As Risman writes: "Behavior is viewed as immutably fixed by childhood experiences and biological preconditions, the differing parental behaviors of men and women must instead be explained as adaptive to on-going interaction, the product of more immediate social demands" (Risman, 1986, p.101). Taking a structuralist approach instead, she suggested that when the primary responsibility for children is shifted to fathers, men will become highly involved and adopt those behaviors, which have traditionally been considered mothering (Risman, 1986).

Within the individualist camp, social learning and exchange theorists suggest that to study the father-child relationship, factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the relationship should be considered. Thus, the role of the mother has been identified as a key factor in determining the manner in which fathers take on the care of children. The concept of "maternal gatekeeping" has become another widely accepted idea within the social learning and exchange approach to the study of father involvement (Allen & Daly, 2007).

The maternal gatekeeping research has suggested that mothers act as mediators of the father-child relationship, either encouraging or discouraging men's interaction with children. Women are viewed as ambivalent about greater father involvement for a variety of reasons that include concern that men are not competent caregivers, an unwillingness to change their standards for childcare and housework, and trepidation over loss of control in a sphere in which they exercise power. As a result, the father's level of involvement in the child's life is in part determined by the extent to which mothers allow paternal participation (Allen & Daly, 2007). The phenomena of maternal gatekeeping has been explained in several ways; for example, Daly (1993) suggests that mothers may encourage certain levels of father-child involvement based on cultural values or on the relationship they had with their own father. Mothers who believe fathering is important are more likely to encourage it. Those who do not, may discourage father involvement.

Another explanation, widely accepted in the literature, is that maternal gatekeeping grows out of the power dynamics and differential between men and women and reflects a reluctance of women to relinquish power in a realm in which they are dominant. Doucet's (2006), however, digs deeper to unpack the complexities of the maternal gatekeeping phenomenon. Doucet conducted qualitative interviews over a four-year span, with 118 Canadian men, both single and married, who self identified as primary caregivers. Reflecting on her results she suggested that the reasons for maternal gatekeeping "cannot be reduced to domestic negotiation between partners. Rather, it is deeply rooted in women's profoundly felt 'moral' obligation to care" (Finch & Mason, 1993, as cited in Doucet, 2005, p.712). Additionally, she found evidence in her research that men hold the expectation that women be the mediators and directors of paternal

caregiving. Furthermore, she argues that "women's propensity to take on this responsibility and men's expectation that they will do so is further facilitated by an advantage women attain by becoming the early expert in care giving" (Fox, 1997 and 2001 as cited in Doucet, 2005).

Regardless of the explanation for maternal gatekeeping, numerous studies have indicated that behavior is influenced by perceptions of self- efficacy (Bandura, 1977). That is, people are likely to expend little energy in situations in which they sense their actions will have little influence on the outcomes. Hence, men may do little to engage their children when they sense their engagement is not significant for their children.

Allen and Daly (2007) concluded that:

Fathers who perceived their wives as evaluating them positively as fathers were more likely to report higher levels of involvement in child-related activities and place greater importance on the father role identity which was, in turn, associated with higher levels of involvement (Pasely, et al., 2000 as cited in Daly, p.15).

In addition, numerous studies have shown that the quality of the co-parental relationship indirectly affects the parent-child relationship both in residential and non-co-habiting parental arrangements. Sobolewski & King (2005) found that cooperative co-parenting predicts higher, more frequent father-child contact, which in turn predicts higher relationship quality and more responsive fathering.

Examining specific contextual factors that mediate father-child interaction, Doucet (2006) noted that male "embodiment" issues in care giving were the missing link in our understanding of "fathering, caring and community life." She contends that the care of children is both "eminently social and occurs not only between carer and cared—

for, but within larger sets of social relations within which the caring [for children] gets done and within which it is perceived and judged by others" (Doucet, 2006, p. 240).

Doucet's (2006) thematic analysis of her interview subjects' narratives revealed a significant trend: The fathers in her study frequently described feeling watched with suspicion when they attempted to enter "estrogen filled places," for example, the mother dominated community realms in which childcare takes place. Doucet draws on sociologist Irving Goffman's work on space and the body to explore the taboos implicit in this issue of male "embodiment" (and what it imputes):

When we think about fathers moving as embodied subjects in female defined settings, [Goffman's work] is helpful to remind us that relations between people are both practical and moral. The movements of fathers are practical in the sense that men learn how to involve themselves in ways that are acceptable, normal and in concert with public expectations. Furthermore, these movements are moral in that, as embodied subjects, fathers and mothers not only interact but also judgments are made about whether, and how, people maintain or disrupt routine social and public engagement... one's sense of self and moral worth and whether one can sustain a definition of oneself as normal, are at stake as one moves through public spaces and engages in public encounters" (Crossley, 1995b as cited in Doucet, 2005, p.709).

Implicit in these issues of male embodiment as they relate to father nurture are strong taboos associated with homophobia and pedophilia and linked to hegemonic masculinity. Men in her study typically described the experience of feeling gazed at with suspicion by others and exercised caution as actors in female-dominated community play groups and settings where they were placed in close relationship to preteen and teenage children. Typically they reported feeling nervous that public displays of close physical affection could be easily misinterpreted by others and having difficulty fitting into the complex maternal world populated by mothers and mothering networks that sometimes

eyed them with suspicion. This experience was particularly difficult for single fathers who lacked a female partner to bridge the gender gap.

Doucet (2006) also identified the intersection of the dominant ideology of masculinity and the role of social class played out in this theme. Unemployed or low-income primary caregiving fathers, she noted, reported greater difficulty with the experience of feeling gazed at with suspicion by others in the community when out with their children. She hypothesized that this was because these men were judged as "failed men" for not being able to fulfill the role expectation of being the breadwinner for their families, whereas the fathers in her study who were visibly of higher socioeconomic and professional status felt greater community acceptance. Further she noted there was a "double jeopardy" for study participants who were both low or no income and primary care givers; they were viewed both as "failed men" and "deviant men" for taking on a female role expectation (Doucet, 2006, p.211). While the fathers in Doucet's study were highly involved fathers of their children, one can easily speculate how social perception, masculinities, social class and race are encountered by many men as a strong disincentive to father involvement.

Burgeoning sociological literature on gender relations over the last two decades has established the concept of "masculinities." Scholarly consensus has been reached on several central points. First, there is a plurality of masculinities (Brittan, 1989; Hearn & Morgan, 1990 cited in Doucet, 2005), though a single ideology may dominate (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1992 as cited in Dowd, 2000). In her seminal work, "Redefining Fatherhood," Dowd (2000) explains that "because multiple masculinities exist, the dominant masculinity is subverted and there is potential for change from within.

Nevertheless, the power of the dominant masculinity must not be ignored, since it constrains men to act within its boundaries" (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1992 as cited in Dowd, 2000).

A second core understanding is that masculinities are a cultural construct, not a biologically essential characteristic possessed by individuals (Connell, 1995). Instead, as Doucet (2005) states, they occur in social relations "where issues of power and difference are at play and where masculinities exist at both the level of agency and structure" (Doucet, p.36). The literature on the concept of masculinities is fundamentally structuralist. Dowd (2000) notes, "masculinity is not only constructed, it is performative, that is, we don't merely play out a constructed role, we also play with, perform within that role, which means the role is fluid and temporal, not fixed" (Berger, Wallis and Watson, 1995, as cited in Dowd, 2000). Herein, the concept of masculinities provides a lens for examining how the experience of highly involved single fathers can inform our understanding of how they incorporate nurturing into a masculine identity within a contemporary social landscape. My study is an attempt to explore how these men are making and remaking conventions of fatherhood and masculinity in social practice itself.

Amongst the types of masculinity, "hegemonic masculinity" is defined by Connell (1995) as; "the most honored or desired" form of masculinity (p.10). It is one that aligns itself with traditional masculine qualities of "being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control." Kimmel (1996) characterizes the fundamental dilemma of masculinity as "the need to constantly prove oneself to be a man" (Kimmel, 1996, as cited in Dowd, 2000, p.182). Importantly, hegemonic masculinity is usually defined as "the opposite of femininity" (Connell, 1995, p.31).

Within the field of men's studies, few theorists have speculated on the inhibiting role of hegemonic masculinity on father involvement (Dowd, 2000). However, given that hegemonic masculinity is largely associated with devaluation and distancing from the feminine and childcare is equated with feminine practice, there are implicit tensions for men in the activity of nurturing children. As noted by Dowd (2000):

Masculinity is a significant barrier to fathering, at least certain aspects of masculinity as currently constructed. Men are defined by limitation, by fear of being seen as gay or as acting like a girl. Ways of behaving, feeling and communicating are proscribed by these powerful deterrents" (p.190).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity and theoretical assumptions highlighting processes by which men "distance themselves from and devalue the feminine" (Doucet, 2006, p.122) also help to explain the predominant trend of fathers who parent as disengaged nurturers. For example, psychologist Lynne Segal (1999) argues that a major theme of masculinity is dominance and hierarchy that requires the subordination of women and the feminine and describes the tensions in contemporary masculinity as a form of feminist backlash which reproduces maternal responsibility and paternal disengagement. In the contemporary setting in which subordination is increasingly difficult, she posits:

... [I]t is insufficient for *men* to be distinguished from the *boys*; the *men* must be distinguished from the *women*. Without the return of full-blooded patriarchy, many men are today condemned to live with ever increasing levels of insecurity over the distinctiveness of their *manliness*. For it is no longer so easy to imagine that there are many significant activities or areas of life, which, by definition, forever exclude women. Just as it is easy to imagine that there are not many activities or areas of life, which can, by definition, never include men. And this becomes ever more apparent, however much the reality of men's dominance continues to reproduce significant areas of actual exclusion for women, and opting out by men (p.132).

Single fathers with shared or sole custody live and work for sustained periods as primary caregivers. They are highly involved nurturers and as such, in a unique position to create new forms of masculinity. There is scant literature, however, that addresses the question of how these fathers incorporate the feminine identified work of care into a masculine parenting identity. My study is an attempt to explore how these men are making and remaking conventions of fatherhood and masculinity in social practice itself.

The Experience of Highly Involved Fathers

Primary caregiving fathers who live with the mothers of their children are the predominant subjects of most of the literature on highly engaged fathering. This research began in the late 1960's in the US, Canada, England and Australia. Results of these studies have varied widely depending on geographical location and research methods used. The American studies have tended to be exploratory studies with small samples of predominantly white, middle class fathers (Risman, 1986). A small group of researchers have addressed the experience of single men who have shared or sole physical custody of their children (Doucet, 2006; Pruett, 2000; Risman, 1986). Several of these researchers have attempted to grapple with the thorny question of whether men nurture like women or whether they engage in gender distinct nurturing behaviors. However, the issue of gender differences in the quality of care is less an issue of debate. An extensive body of research has demonstrated men's success at taking on protective, nurturing, affectionate and responsive caring toward their children (Doucet, 2004).

Risman (1986) conducted a study of 281 single American fathers who completed questionnaires measuring father-child dyadic intimacy. Amongst her findings were 1)

higher levels of child disclosure of positive affect to the father were correlated with higher income levels; 2) the majority of fathers had high levels of physical contact with their children; 3) single fathers have support networks of kin and friends but do not depend on others for routine care of children; and 4) extended family members provided little routine care for children, but lots of emotional support and practical help in crisis situations. Risman also found that these fathers reported high levels of contentment with their fathering role.

42 single fathers were included in Doucet's (2006) extensive ethnographic study of primary caregiving Canadian fathers. In contrast to Risman's (1986) findings, Doucet discovered that most fathers in her study drew heavily on another woman such as a sister, mother, neighbor or older daughter to assist them. Doucet also found that most fathers in her study, single and married started out with sparse social networks, but gradually learned to rely on others.

Doucet (2006) also found that mothers and fathers in her study held the conviction that their roles were different from one another. They typically expressed the belief that women were more protective, nurturing and emotionally connected to children. Many fathers in her study expressed confusion regarding how to account for this difference. Frequently, they accounted for it in terms of embodiment issues, theorizing that a female body was integral to a closer relationship with children than men could have due to hormones, pregnancy and the act of giving birth. Fathers in her study also spoke about embodiment issues in terms of the social taboos around men toward touching children, both with boys and girls in the preteen and teenage years. Overall, she found that men drew attention to differences in mothering and fathering, which, she speculated

was due to their desire to distance their fathering from mothering and from any feminine associations with it. Doucet concluded that these highly involved fathers were in a "unique position to create new forms of masculinity through the delicate balancing acts of simultaneously embracing and rejecting both femininity and hegemonic masculinity" (p. 238).

This chapter has reviewed the literature with a primary emphasis on the social facts of father involvement in contemporary American society, the social cost of disengaged fathering versus the benefits of highly involved fathering for women, children, men and society as a whole, impediments to highly involved fathering and the experience of highly involved fathers. Research from structuralist and individualist theoretical positions were compared and the intersection of embodiment issues with social class and masculinities were examined to analyze some of the complex issues surrounding the impediments to highly involved fathering.

Fatherhood identity can best be understood as a fluid and transformative social construct. This study is an attempt to explore how this identity is evolving in the contemporary experience of single fathers who have shared or sole physical custody and are, or were, highly involved in the care of their children.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study is an attempt to explore the question: How do single primary care giving fathers of young children construct their personal histories as men who can nurture children? In order to answer this question this study uses a qualitative, exploratory research design.

Flexible methods were chosen for two reasons. The first reason was that a review of the literature yielded little information on fathering from the point of view of men who are single (non cohabitating) caregivers of young children. According to Anastas (1999), “One purpose of flexible method research, then, is in initial, pilot, or formulative investigations designed to refine our understanding of new or ill-defined phenomena” (p.60). The second reason is that this style of design will provide me with rich data well suited for studying the complexities of self-reflective and interpersonal processes associated with fathering. “Flexible method research is aimed at generating in depth understandings of people and events in context and as they naturally develop and occur” (Anastas, 1999).

A qualitative design is appropriate because of the small number of participants in the study (Anastas, 1999). My method of data collection was an interview guide designed for the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from ten single custodial fathers. Data were then analyzed thematically.

Sample

Because this study uses flexible methods, the sample for this study was a non-probability sample of convenience (Anastas, 1999). Inclusion criteria for participants were the following: 1) be 18 years old or older, 2) have or have had partial or full physical custody of a child from the time the child was aged 4 or under, 3) live or have lived without a female partner who provides or provided care for his child, and 4) be fluent in English. For the purpose of this study, "single custodial father" was defined as a father who has shared or full custody of his child or children and does not live with a female partner.

Recruitment procedures included the snowball method and word of mouth. Additionally, flyers were posted in libraries and coffee shops around the Pioneer Valley, and email and phone contacts were made to on-line fathering organizations. Acquaintances, colleagues and representatives from on-line fathering-related websites were approached and given the inclusion criteria for this study. Potential research participants were screened by phone or email to ensure that they met the study criteria. Research participants were asked before or after their interview if they knew any other men who met the research criteria. Further distribution of recruitment flyers around Western Massachusetts and recruitment postings on fathering related websites were also planned; however, the snowball method was so effective that other recruitment methods were not necessary. The sample size for this study was ten single custodial fathers.

Participants

Ten fathers participated in this study. Two men identified as mixed race/ethnicity; one identified as Hispanic-Jewish and the other identified himself as Scottish-Native American-Jewish. Four participants identified themselves as Caucasian, while four identified themselves as Jewish-Caucasian.

The participants ranged in age from 36 to 64, with a median age of 51. All but three of the fathers raised only one child. Of these, five raised daughters and three raised sons. Two of the other three participants raised two children, one son and one daughter, while the remaining participant raised three daughters. Five fathers had school age children living at home and five had adult children who no longer lived at home. The median age of participants' children was 15. Eight of the fathers had been married to the mother of their children and two had not. Four of the fathers in this study became single fathers by separation from their child's mother when their child was less than 12 months old. One of the fathers became a single custodial father when his child was born. Two gay fathers were also recruited for this study.

Data Collection

Data collection began after the Smith College School approved the study design for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix A) granting me permission to proceed with my study. Informed consent forms (see Appendix B) were given to the participants at the time of the interviews. The informed consent letter explained the nature of the study, the risks and benefits of study participation, and the safeguards used to protect study participants.

Data collection was conducted through the use of in person, semi-structured interviews approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length with ten men who met the selection criteria for the study and signed the informed consent prior to the interview. Detailed field notes were also taken to record any pertinent thoughts I had immediately following each interview. Semi-structured interviews were an appropriate data collection method for this exploratory study as they allow for the collection of rich, narrative data that contributes to greater understanding of a relatively unknown phenomenon (Anastas, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the unexplored phenomenon was how single fathers who have or have had shared or full custody of their children from a young age, experience their role as men who nurture.

The interview guide for this study (see Appendix C) consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions. I chose to develop an interview guide for my data collection method based on the results of my literature review. “In flexible methods research, intensive interviewing is generally used because the research question springs from a desire to explore and learn more about some phenomenon that has not been studied or has been poorly understood”(Anastas, 1999, p. 353). Results of my literature review showed a lack of research on the fathering experience of men who are single and have shared or full physical custody of their young children. According to Anastas (1999), “often it is possible to interpret, explain, repeat or redirect an interview question on the spot to obtain the information that the question was designed to elicit” (p. 351). Interviews were conducted in person, in order to provide study participants a personalized experience in which they felt comfortable speak freely about their experience and had the flexibility to

elaborate on individual responses, while allowing the researcher to clarify any questions that were misunderstood.

The interview guide for this study began with demographic questions, including: participants' age, race, ethnicity, level of education, relationship status, relationship to child, child's/children's age(s) and gender. The interview questions were grouped around the following themes 1) the father *imago*, e.g.: each participant father's personified and idealized image of the self that structures a life story (Lamb, 2000). These questions were aimed at eliciting thoughts and feelings about their physiological capacity to create human life, daydreams they had about their children before becoming a father, how their view of masculinity influenced their role as a nurturing parent, and ways in which they prepared for a parenting role; 2) fathers' interpersonal relationship with their child; how they viewed their child, what they enjoyed and found challenging about their child, how they expected their child to develop, and 3) the social ecology of being a single father in relationship to a larger community. This category of questions was aimed at eliciting information about gender, race, class, sexuality, space and body as well as social institutions. Follow-up and probing questions were used to identify or clarify themes and patterns, which emerged during the interviews. Thus, the data collected from each interview was unique to the experience of each individual participant.

To promote reliability, the interview guide was piloted on one individual prior to use with the participants in this study. The narrative data from each interview was audio-recorded during the interview. Narrative data were then downloaded onto a computer and selectively transcribed in order to preserve the integrity of the data and facilitate the

proper use of quotations in written format. All identifying information was excluded from the transcription summaries.

Data Analysis

Each interview was recorded using a voice-recording device. Following each interview, reflections on each interview were noted in a dedicated research journal. Data collected from the detailed notes and the audio recordings were partially transcribed and entered into a computerized database specifically created to collect and organize the data. Recordings and transcripts were first analyzed to find data specific to each question from the interview guide. Recorded data were listened to several times and transcripts were reread in order to organize data into categories based on themes and patterns that emerged.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size and the restricted geographic area of the study participants may limit generalization and transferability of the data. The data obtained from this study reflect the in-depth experience of ten men who are or were single fathers with shared or full physical custody of their children. Additionally, the small sample size did not allow for racial diversity.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter contains the findings from interviews conducted with 10 single fathers who have or had sole or joint physical custody while raising their children from the age of four or younger. This study explores answers to the following question: How do single fathers construct a parenting identity to incorporate nurturing?

Ten fathers participated in this study. They ranged in age from 36 to 64. One was 36, one was 47, two were 49, one was 50, one was 52, two were 61 and two were age 64. All but three of the participants raised only one child. Of these, five raised daughters and three raised sons. Two of the other three participants raised two children, one son and one daughter, while the remaining participant raised three daughters. The current ages of all of the participant's children ranged from 3 years old to age 36.

One participant had sole custody and the others had shared physical custody. Of those with shared physical custody, two participants had a co-parenting arrangement in which their children were with them 50% of the time. The remaining participants had children who lived with the child's mother as a primary parent and spent a lesser percentage of their time with them.

All participants had at least a high school education including one who had a year of college, three who held a bachelor's degree, and six who held at least a master's level degree. All the participants were born in this country. Two participants self identified as

mixed race/ethnicity; one described himself as Hispanic-Jewish and the other described himself as Scottish-Native American-Jewish. Four participants self identified as Caucasian, while four described themselves as Jewish Caucasian. Eight of the participants resided in Western Massachusetts; the others lived in Boston and Albany.

The findings are presented according to themes that emerged from grounded theory analysis. Hence, the findings are organized as follows: the experience the fathers had of being parented, their experience as a new parent, their experience of becoming a single father, their ongoing conflicts as single fathers, adaptive measures they have taken to carry out their parenting role, and their intra-psychic integration of their nurturing role.

The Experience of Being Parented

Three themes emerged with regard to the experience of being parented, which were reflected in answers to the question: Who were your role models for parenting? One theme was that a majority of participants reported that they modeled themselves after a variety of people. Nine of ten participants reported having a range of role models for parenthood who were male and female and included mothers and fathers, extended family, camp counselors and parents of friends. Only one participant reported having no role models.

Responding to the question, one participant stated:

Certainly my father, a very creative whacko guy who worked hard to build a relationship with me and my friends early on. My mother was unusual, too...a psychologist, gently direct, never yelled. I don't yell at kids, never have. My Uncle Johnny, my best friend's father, Paul was one of my role models.

Another participant stated:

Definitely my grandparents who were incredibly great, liberal characters, and my parents and then all my aunts and uncles. Before my generation, all the couples were well married and stayed together and seemed to be in harmony. My grandparents loved each other and even in the end they would make out in front of us in their late 70's. And my parents, even though it wasn't working out, my parents truly loved each other, so there wasn't that undercurrent of animosity or fighting when we were growing up. There might have been a little depression, but there was more good humor and more good fun than the undercurrent of anything else. I drew from all of that stuff.

A number of men had no resistance to expressing that they drew from female role models. One participant listed his child's maternal grandmother along with numerous other female and male role models: "My mother, who was a terrific mother and also [my ex's] mother who was one of my best friends..." Another participant who had worked hard to gain full custody of his three children, identified only his mother as a role model:

My mom was like the ultimate nurturing single parent. I had a lot of experience on how to take care of people. My dad left when I was 14 or 15 years old... When I was 14 or 15, I would drive her all over town when she got through with work so she could go sell Avon. She just worked, and worked, and worked. If the TV blew up, she'd just get another job and find a way to get a new one. I got a lot from my mom. She used to work all the time... She just sacrificed. Maybe there were times she overdid it.

The typical response, however, was to identify mothers and grandmothers, as well as male role models.

A number of men initially claimed they had no role models, but in their narrative it emerged that they, too, had a variety of people whom they drew from in their parenting role. One participant initially stated: "I'm not like anybody. I don't know who I'm like. I have no role models," but in further discussion talked about ways in which he modeled himself after both his mother and father. Another participant initially stated, "I drew... just from me," but in further discussion he, too, identified ways in which his parenting also drew from grandparents and camp counselors.

Both Parents as Role Models- "But I Didn't Want to Do Some Things the Way My Father Did."

The second trend evidenced by the participants was their tendency to avoid modeling themselves after significant aspects of their own father's personalities. There was substantial overlap in these two themes: many participants had a variety of role models while not wanting to replicate the emotional and/or physical absence of their own fathers.

One participant, the son of an obstetrician who was rarely at home stated, "My model was mostly '*not* my father'; not out of negativity, but out of longing."

A subsection of participants reported having had abusive fathers. One had a father who killed his mother while in a psychotic state. He reported a crippling struggle not to be like his father that kept him emotionally disconnected from significant others for many years. He stated:

In the same way that I subconsciously avoided intimate relationships with women, I had it somewhere in the back of my mind that... how could I be a good father when I had the father I had? There's no way I could be a good father and that was reflected in the sort of distance I had when [his first infant son] died... When he died I was in a state of suspension in my relationship with him. There was that bad father thing, like if you're a father you'll go and kill someone.

The other described how holding memories of his father's warmth counterbalanced seeing his father as solely a role model of abuse. He stated:

I think I conceptually polarize my image of my parents as role models, maybe because I want to develop my own self- image relative to those roles. But the more I've parented the more I reality tested my memories. In particular, like how emotionally available my father was to me as a child. There's memories of him singing frequently and coming up with nicknames for me that were endearing to me. I think his emotional presence went a long way to balance his physical and spiritual abusiveness that was a repetition of his parent's parenting style. But specifically I've changed that pattern through therapy so I wouldn't give in to the

impulses the way my parents did. My parents were in their early 20's when they became parents and they had a lot of unconscious behavior. I became a parent in my mid-forties, the age their parents became grandparents. I've been able to change that behavior because I've lived longer and also because I've made it a priority.

The Experience of Being a New Parent

The experience of being a new parent often begins in a parent's imagination and specific actions he or she takes to prepare for the new role well before a child is born. In discussing this issue with the participants, I centered questions on the following: the participants' desire to become a parent; specific images they had of their child before she was born; how they prepared themselves to become a parent, and their level of involvement in the early physical care of their child.

The Desire to Become a Parent- "I Thought I Didn't Want to Have Children"

Three major themes emerged from the participants regarding their anticipation of parenthood: When asked about their desire to become a parent a majority of the men clearly reported having lesser agency in the decision than their female partners and going along with the ambition of their female partner to have a baby. There were some men, however, who very consciously made a decision to become parents and chose their partners in accordance with that decision. The three themes were, 1) going along with woman's sense of readiness or urgency, 2) ambivalence, and 3) intentionally choosing a partner with whom to have a baby. There was much overlap between the first two themes. Feeling led by a woman's desire to have a baby most frequently co-occurred with ambivalence.

Six of the participants reported that they didn't feel as strongly as their female partners about becoming a parent or think much about it prior to becoming one. One

father stated, "I knew I wanted to have children at some point, but I never spent a lot of time thinking ahead about it."

Illustrating an extreme example of going along with a woman's ambition to fulfill the mandate of her biological clock, one participant stated:

I was just a free spirited artist and wanted to be sexually active and I didn't really think about having kids. And also, I was in the drug scene and the art scene and nobody was having kids and getting married. I wasn't thinking career, settle down, pay insurance... But then, smack dab in the middle of my thirties all these women are hormonal and they're ready to reproduce, so all this stuff is flying around and guys are [biologically] ready from the time they're 13... Her mother came to me one night and said, "I'm ovulating, wanna' make a baby?" Once I got adjusted to it [the idea of having a child] I was really wanting it.

Expressing great ambivalence, one father reported that he did not want to become a parent though his feelings changed when his daughter was born. He stated:

I really didn't want to have children. I thought I didn't want to have children. I didn't want to get married, but I got married. Then we got pregnant and I wasn't thrilled about it. All during the pregnancy I was somewhat ambivalent about what was coming – but it was coming and I sort of made peace with it, and I was at the birth and the moment I saw her... That was it! I was in love with her. Really, it was pretty instantaneous. I remember thinking "I can't believe it! I can't believe it!"

Two participants reported that they became parents by their own agency, and that their choice of partner was made for the express purpose of taking on this role. One of these was a gay father who partnered with a lesbian friend to have a child. He explained his decision to co-parent as follows:

I came out in the late '70's. The assumption of course, then, was no kids. I was sad about that. I like kids. Also it was one of those life transitions. Ok, I'm gay, what does that mean? One of those things was: I'm never going to be a dad. I was sad. At the time gay was new enough. Stonewall was '69, so it just wasn't an option. My parents could care less that I was gay, but my father was like "does this mean no grandchildren?" Then an interesting thing happened. A very good friend approached me about having a child together. It was the very first time it dawned on me, "huh, I might pull this off, yet." It didn't work out with [friend A] for

various reasons but I liked the idea. So when my friend [B] first started talking about this it wasn't like a new idea.

Another participant knew from a very young age he wanted to have a child. In his first marriage it didn't work, and what drew him and his second wife together was a mutual desire to have a baby.

It wasn't until I was 41 or 42 that I met someone who was both capable and interested in having a child with me. We were both very interested in having a child at the time we met and the chemistry between us worked. Unlike my first wife where we both tried for a year to get pregnant, in the case of my second wife, the effort was scheduled and pregnancy took the first time. So even though we had a window of 2-3 months, the first month we made the effort she got pregnant. It turned out that having the baby was all we had in common...

Images of the Unborn Child- "I Don't Think I Had Any"

Participants were asked to discuss any images they had of their child before the child was born and how they prepared themselves to become a parent. The first theme that emerged was that most of the men had no preconceived idea about their child. A second theme that emerged was and that they became parents with very little intentional preparation.

A secondary trend was that of having a preconceived vision of an unborn child. In response to the first question, two of the men identified a specific image they had of their child prior to becoming a parent. Though he did not know where it came from, one participant described a persistent image of his child that had occurred to him since young adulthood. He reported:

I always had a vision of my daughter coming down the stairs in a prom dress." The second participant reported, "I had a particular image that repeated enough that I wrote a poem about it. An image of him standing on the back of the family couch and smiling at me and reaching for me to lift him and I pick him up and it felt great. He hugged me back.

Preparing to be a Parent

In comparison to women, American men typically have very little engagement with young children to prepare them for future nurturing as a parent, and are given little encouragement to think about or prepare for this role, overall. Boys are often discouraged from playing with dolls and generally do not baby sit. Young women are far more often the recipients of deliberate social and cultural forms of preparation for nurturing young children in the form of classes and books than young men.

In the discussion of how they prepared to become a parent, another theme that emerged was that some participants had no conscious, deliberate preparation but in reflecting on the question, it occurred that experiences they had had in life were of a preparatory nature.

Five participants described prior experience they had with children, either younger relatives (including foster siblings) whom they had helped to raise, work experience as a camp counselor or educator that had sensitized them to the needs of children. As one participant described it: "How I got around to being a nurturer...I was a camp counselor for five consecutive years. That's really hard work. It's the kind of emotional caretaking a lot of guys wouldn't want to do."

Though participants were not specifically asked about economic preparation, only one respondent noted that his preparation for parenthood included a dawning sense of financial responsibility that led him to finalize his plans to start a business when his wife was pregnant. He reported, "It was going to happen sooner or later, but suddenly it was, 'Ok, I'm going to have a child. I better do this now.' "

Involvement in Early Physical Care

Participants were asked the question, what was your level of involvement in the early physical care of your child, such as bathing, feeding and diapering? One overarching theme emerged in response. Though they were not asked specific questions about their involvement in other dimensions of parental care such as housecleaning, cooking, social planning, bringing children to medical appointments, etc., all responded that they had participated equally or greater than their child's mother in the physical aspects of infant care. Equanimity in this form of domestic labor appeared to be an accepted value. One participant reported, "I would say it was about equal. We set up my schedule so I could be home half time with [the baby]." Another stated, "It was as close to 50-50 as possible." A third participant reported, "I was pretty much an equal partner, aside from producing the milk."

Three sub themes also emerged: that trying to participate 50/50 created conflict, that trying to participate 50-50 created competition, and that the opportunity to have involvement in physical care was deeply rewarding for participants.

One participant responded that equity in childcare responsibilities beyond physical care had been a source of conflict with his child's mother. He stated:

We set it up to be 50-50 but we had a disagreement about it. She felt like she would be the one that was calling up doctors or setting up appointments or checking out schools. My standpoint was- well you're the one that's home, you've got time to do that. I'm the one that's working. So, in some aspects she felt like I wasn't being as involved because she would be the one making those calls even though we'd discuss who she called and we'd both go to the playschools she was looking at.

Two of the older fathers in this study (age 65 and age 64) each of whom identified themselves as becoming parents during the period of "First Wave Feminism," spoke of

feeling some competition with their child's mother to participate equally in all aspects of care. One participant reported:

Before we got divorced I had this odd interaction with [my ex-wife]. I remember coming back from the shop and she'd be exhausted because she'd been taking care of the kids all day and I would say, "Let me change the diapers; I'll make a dinner for us," and she would raise herself off the couch and say "Oh no, no, I'll do it" and it became a fight. I think for her it had a very strong meaning doing that stuff and it had it for me, too, which is why it became a fight.

The second participant explained a sense of competition with his child's mother in the context of his experience being parented:

[My father] was very loving but somehow my primary relationship was with my mom and I saw that as ... why did my father allow that to happen? Why wasn't he coequal with her? He wasn't distant but somehow the emotional tie was to my mom. It was some sense that this came out of a need of my mother's and I wasn't going to accede to that need that [my child's mom] may have had as well, so I responded maybe more strongly than maybe she ever intended. It was very important for me to be a father. I was going to spend time with this child. I was going to be as emotionally connected to this child as her mother is.

In discussing the question of their level of involvement in the early physical care of his child, participants typically described the experience as very gratifying. One participant described how a specific experience of physical care of his infant son had impacted him in a deeply satisfying way:

I remember the most difficult but satisfying moment when he was an infant and I was taking care of him solo was one day he was just crying and crying. He was still in diapers and nothing would calm him and he seemed to be in pain. That wasn't like him. I finally figured out that he was constipated which was relieved by me using Vaseline on my little finger. That was definitely not in the male book. It was just like, off the map! But he immediately went to the bathroom and he was so relieved and so happy (and he was preverbal) and that I was able to do this for him was the peak of that feminine, earthy tending-to, shit. I felt absolutely great. I had no idea whether that would work. It was pure invention. It was immediately successful. He was immediately happy and I was deeply satisfied with my success in that role at the moment.

Another participant fondly recounted:

I'd give her a bottle and change diapers and embrace her when she needed holding at night. It was my responsibility and I enjoyed holding her and one of our routines was dancing to Sade and she would fall asleep on my shoulder.

Speaking with enthusiasm about his involvement in his daughter's early physical care, a third participant recalled: "It was fun! It was fun! She was a beautiful little kid, splashing water all over the place, getting up in the middle of the night. I wanted to be right there."

The Experience of Becoming a Single Father

Participants became single fathers in a variety of ways. Most often it ensued from the break-up of a relationship with the child's mother. The complicated feelings surrounding this loss were salient to how they consequently experienced their role as a single parent. Therefore, the findings for this section will be broken into the following two subsections: the participants' experience of how they became a single father and how they experienced parenting alone.

How it Happened

The responses of the participants to the question of how they became a single father varied widely. All but two of the fathers had been married to the mother of their children. Two reported that the mother of their child had left them for a best friend. One of these fathers described this experience as follows: "There was a lot of pain involved in getting rejected and losing a household." One separated from his abusive wife, then filed for custody to protect his children. (After allegations that he was the perpetrator and a year of visits and outings with his kids accompanied by a DSS escort, the courts finally granted him full custody.) Another participant intentionally became a single father through alternative insemination. One separated from a wife he adored following his personal revelation that he was gay. Three reported having marriages in which pregnancy

occurred shortly before or soon after the decision to marry. Two of these three participants separated because they felt their conflicted relationship provided a poor emotional milieu for child rearing. As one participant stated, "there was so much tension between us we agreed it wasn't a healthy environment to raise a child." A third participant stated, "We just couldn't pull it together for the family thing. It was just easier to parent alone."

The Mixed Experience of Parenting Alone-"It's Easier This Way"

One major theme emerged with regard to the overall experience of parenting alone. The preponderance of participants (7 of 10) described having mixed feelings, both positive and negative about their experience.

Participants reported their positive feelings related to being in charge, freedom from conflict, and emotional satisfaction found in the father-child relationship. There was significant overlap between all three responses. One participant reported, "I always wanted to be a fully engaged primary caregiver. I think I instigated the separation for that reason. It's easier to be a single parent when you don't have to negotiate what you're doing." A second participant stated, "I get my kids all to myself, so I can think of doing things I want to do with them, whereas in the past it would have to be a negotiation with my wife." A third participant reported, "I like being in charge of the daily stuff, like making lunch. In the past it was very hard for me to give that up."

"It's Beautiful; Just Me and Him"

Parenting alone provided a fulfilling relational opportunity for many of these fathers. One participant described a positive aspect of parenting alone: emotional consolation found in the close connection with his child following the painful separation

from his child's mother. He stated, "In some ways it was so beautiful because I got the full measure of her 1:1. She was my solace. Suddenly, my relationship was broken up. All I had was me and this beautiful little girl."

Another participant expressed pleasure he took in his dyadic relationship with his son: "When it's the two of us, it's just the two of us. I am on and I am totally here with him. It's like a dance, just the two of us."

"It's All On Me, Alone."

Participants reported negative feelings about the experience of parenting alone such as loneliness when their child was not present and being unable to get respite from the parenting role. One participant reported: "As soon as we [he and his daughter] separated I had all this freedom, but there was also a sense of loneliness when she left and wasn't there." Another participant recalled his sadness at the abrupt transitions from rapprochement to parting:

Every Sunday night I'd cry my eyes out when I dropped my daughter off. It seemed like Friday night we were strangers. Saturday morning we were getting used to each other. Saturday afternoon we started to click and then by Sunday we were in such great synch and then I had to drive her home.

One participant reflected on the stress he experienced when he was alone with his two children:

When they're with me it's all up to me. When they're bickering with each other and I tell them to stop and they won't, and I want to say, "Do you mind taking them for half an hour because I feel like I'm going to lose my mind." I get no break.

An additional participant whose ex-wife had remarried complained: "Her mother has someone to share her responsibilities with. I don't have that. It's all on me, alone." For

the majority of participants there was substantial overlap between the positive and negative aspects of parenting alone.

One participant, the oldest in the study, whose wife had left him for his best friend, reported only a negative experience of feeling lonesome parenting alone. He saw his experience as colored largely by the unmet expectations of family life he had developed growing up. He stated:

It's hard to separate parenting alone from just being alone. It always felt like there was a big hole. There's a nice feeling to being partnered and being able to shift off and below that, it feels like that's how it's supposed to be. My parents never divorced. That was my model, my template for the way things were supposed to be. So when that falls apart, nothing feels the way it's supposed to be, and certainly taking care of kids doesn't feel like it's supposed to be. It always feels like there's a big hole. Like there ought to be four people there instead of three. It felt weird. I felt like I was on the outside. I felt like things weren't correct, the way they were supposed to be.

Alternatively, two participants did not report having mixed feelings about parenting alone. One participant explained that living in an intentional community of artists when his son was young kept him from feeling alone. He stated, "because I lived in such a large community it was never fully alone. It was just without his mother." The criteria for this study included partnered gay fathers. The other participant who did not report negative feelings about parenting alone was a gay father who stated, "I wasn't really alone because I had a partner at that time."

Previous studies of single fathers have shown that they have often felt unwelcome in "estrogen filled spaces" (Doucet, 2005, p.1), e.g. the social realm in which young children are present with female caregivers. To elicit their experience of being a single father in public spaces, participants were asked to describe any situations that felt awkward for them as a single father in public arenas such as play groups, the park or the

pediatrician's office. They were also asked the question: What was your experience of being with your child out in public? One significant theme that emerged was that the majority (8 of 10) of the participants in this study reported that there were no situations in public spaces that felt awkward to them as a single father.

In fact, most participants described feeling welcomed and supported in public settings. Many attributed this to unique qualities of their Western Massachusetts communities. For example, speaking of his business located in a small town, one participant stated, "This town has offered so much emotional support, too...People know who I am. It's such a gathering place. Here, people stop. They know her, and they genuinely want to hear what we're doing."

Only one participant who lived in Albany described a situation in which he had felt discriminated against as a father by a daycare center his daughter attended. He stated:

Starting at age 6 weeks she had daycare. I started work around 2:30 in the afternoon. On days I was working I wanted to take her in bed with me before I got up. She was an infant and I wanted to snuggle and feed her on my schedule and the daycare was unsympathetic. I understood from a business point of view but the compassion wasn't there for me as a man. I got more the – "You should know because you are a man that you're disrespecting our business needs." They'd be more accommodating to a woman.

Furthermore, in the discussion of what they liked most and least about being a parent, several fathers described being seen in public with their children as most pleasurable. One participant described enjoyment he found in the public acknowledgement of the quality of his relationship to his daughter. He stated:

I like being with her out in public. Our relationship evokes a lot of positive feedback from the community; just in the sense that she's very much in flow in her relationship with me and overtly self-possessed and connected with me, and people seem to respond to that and acknowledge it as pleasant to see.

Another father speaking about the pride he took in having others notice his child's gifts stated, "I like hearing other people praise her and say she's extraordinary and that they enjoy being with her."

One participant spoke of an internally driven sense of being an outsider in spite of living in a socially progressive area that supported a wide range of family arrangements:

I remember walking down the street when it was dark out and looking in at all the happy families and I'm not part of that happy family. I'm the person who's kind of... out there, and I've always felt that way.

Participants' answers to the question of what they liked least about being a parent varied. Several participants spoke about the stress of balancing their desire to be available to their children with the demands of work and career. One participant stated: "How to get my business going and being present and being emotionally available. Every night he's here I struggle with that." Another stated: "What I don't like is coming home tired when I want to be with her. Sometimes I'd rather not be putting in long hours, but then I feel like it's for her so I keep doing it."

Several spoke about the difficulty of integrating new relationships into their lives with their children. One participant spoke about difficulties he encountered dating:

There's the whole thing of how you form a new relationship with a different woman when you have kids and what does that look like? How to be a dad in the presence of a woman. What does he do if he's out having a nice glass of wine with a woman he's just met and his daughter calls and needs a ride home. Some women are ok with that and some won't tolerate it. It's perfectly ok for a single woman to have her kids come first. For some reason it's not as acceptable for a man to make his kids primary. It's about gender roles. It's brutal. It ended my first relationship. Your week is split in two parts. One part of the week you and your new partner are like a dyad and then suddenly these kids come in. It's easier I think for the parent than the new partner.

A second participant stated: "I've tried to protect her from a sense of a revolving door of women in her life through me. She'll sometimes want to see someone I used to be involved with; that's been tricky." A third participant spoke of thwarting serious relationships to avoid posing a threat to his relationship with his daughter: "I waited eight years before I had a real relationship. It was just me and her, and I didn't want anyone to get in the way of that."

A singular trend emerged in response to the question, how comfortable are you showing affection to your child? All but one participant reported that they felt very comfortable expressing affection to their children. Descriptions of affection included verbal and physical expressions of affection including singing to a child, saying, "I love you," hugging and holding, and wrestling with children. One participant stated, "She's an easy kid to shower with hugs and kisses." Another participant stated, "It's very easy to be affectionate with my kids because they're both very affectionate people."

Several participants also commented on sleeping with their young children. One father of a 3 year- old son reported:

My son sleeps with me when he's here. That's huge! I never slept with my dad. Alone! Every time he's here we sleep together. We either cuddle all night or we don't. I have a physically, really intimate relationship with him that's not sexual. This is like intimacy without sexuality. It's really lovely. I don't know what effect that'll end up having on him in life but I just want to give him that physical feeling of having somebody there – some male figure. I know that is important and the guys who have a close relationship with their father, I think, are generally more successful.

Another participant stated:

I was an exceedingly affectionate father. In fact, every night she was with me she slept with me until she was 8 ½. It was just sort of like, I'd read to her, she'd fall asleep, I'd get up and draw and paint, then I'd come back and sleep beside her.

Ongoing Conflicts as Single Fathers

The nature of their role as co-parents forced these fathers to have on-going relationships with the mothers of their children. Answers to the question, how would you describe your relationship with your child's mother, revealed a wide range of conflicts, as well as adaptive strategies to manage these conflicts.

Various themes emerged with regard to the nature of the relationship with the child's mother that typically manifested differently depending on the nature of the separation. The first theme: unresolved feelings of resentment, was expressed by one of the gay fathers who had a child with a female friend. He explained his ongoing feelings of resentment towards his child's mother regarding her maternal gatekeeping, as follows:

[Her mother] had her own psychology going. She was adopted. She wanted a child for years and years. It was very hard for her to not let [our daughter] be with her. It got significantly in the way of my family developing a relationship with [my daughter] and there's still scars from that. [She] is a very possessive mother. She said to me: "[Tom], this is the only living relative I have on the planet!" Both of my parents are dead now and I remain angry over how difficult [she] was about letting my parents be grandparents to [my daughter].

The second theme: wary engagement for the sake of the child; was expressed by another participant whose partner had left him for his best friend. He spoke about his long endeavor to bury the hatchet, established for the sake of his daughter's protection:

I decided I would never guilt trip or say any bad words about her mother and whenever we passed [my daughter] off I'd give her a hug in a friendly, detached way and I made something very painful seem normal. A couple times in the early days when I was really steamed and I couldn't stand her, I'd put [my daughter] in the car and then I'd say, "Hold on. I just need to get something in the car," and then I'd go back and scream at her mother and tell her what a bitch she was. I was upset with her and I just wanted to leave her with how I felt, and my daughter wasn't a part of that.

One participant spoke of the need to provide emotional support to his ex-wife for the sake of their child:

There were periods when she was very depressed and I'd have to go get [my daughter] and talk with [my ex-wife] and try to get her to look at all the positive things and stress [our daughter] needs you... If she's not stable then what kind of mom is she going to be for [our daughter]?

Three fathers in the study described greater mutual attachment and fondness in their relationship with their children's mothers. One participant who realized he was gay after being married for 9 years spoke of his ex-wife with endearment:

In every other way we were a perfect match. We both picked the right partner in many ways. The majority of men in my gay fathers group had bad marriages that were going to fall apart anyway. For us, this was the only straw. We know we'll continue to have a very special bond for the rest of our lives, which is great for co-parenting.

Another participant stated: "We could never do the family thing but we still sleep together." For a third participant, career interests had taken he and his ex-wife to a variety of divergent geographic locations following their divorce. Nonetheless, they succeeded in co-parenting with mutual respect for one another's aspirations. He stated: "We were supportive of each other's life goals so we made it work."

Two other areas of conflict that emerged were; how to balance the roles of nurturer and provider, and how to integrate new partners into the parent-child relationship. Several fathers struggled with what they perceived as conflicting pressures to be both a provider and to be emotionally available to their children. One participant reported: "...how to get my business going and being present, being emotionally available. Every night he's here I struggle with that."

Two participants reported they made a decision to sacrifice the provider role in order to be emotionally and physically available to their child. One stated, " I stayed where I couldn't get a job." The other described a personal ethos of sacrifice that extended to his child, family and friends. He stated:

The first person in your entire life who you're willing to do anything for is your kid. You'll sacrifice your time and everything. I did. I wanted to. You want to because that energy is more important for me than my career. I sacrificed my career a lot because I wanted to be part of this. Many times I would do that in my life. I would sacrifice for people and family in my life over career. So, I haven't made much money yet, but it's been good for me. Now, I can catch up financially, but you can't play catch-up with that. People and people's feelings are more important than anything.

Adaptive Measures

A vast body of literature on sex role socialization indicates that women are socialized to be relational and men to be independent (Daley, 2000). The participants in this study became fathers with very little deliberate preparation for caretaking. Nonetheless, they found adaptive ways to meet the immediate demands presented by their new role as single fathers. These adaptive shifts seemed to occur prior to the psychological integration of the significant changes they had made.

In the discussion of adaptive measures they had taken to meet the challenges of parenting alone, participants were asked: who helped or hindered you as a parent? And, whom do you turn to for support as a parent? Two themes emerged in response to these questions; participants turned to communities composed of friends and family for support, and participants included other males they knew as those whom they turned to

for support. There was overlap between these responses and most participants identified more than one source of support.

The Use of Rituals in Parenting

An additional theme, the use of routine to organize interaction with their children emerged in the narratives of participants as they described their parenting style and activity they engaged in with their children. One participant explained why he liked the mundane routines and details of his parenting:

It may be that doing that stuff is a way to bring regularity to an absurdly unnatural situation. You're by yourself and you're trying to find something to make it feel like a family, so just the day-to-day stuff, arranging the carpools, picking up the kids, the stuff that drives parents crazy. I really liked it. It was a self-soothing.

Another participant described how he organized life with his 3 daughters, of whom he had full custody, around his elder daughter's competitive ice skating schedule:

We'd skate 5-6 nights a week. We'd pack a dinner and the homework and we'd go to a skating rink and we'd eat our dinner and [she] would skate and we'd do our homework and then we had games and coloring.

A third participant spoke about how a weekend routine he conjured helped him to connect with his quiet daughter:

We had a special regime on Friday nights. I'd welcome her with a special meal. It was always her favorite: meat loaf, roast potatoes and peas, and special ice cream for dessert. I didn't really know how to raise her so I decided the only way I could do it was to get plenty of nourishing food and plenty of art supplies and a good TV. So that's what we basically did: cooked, made art and watched shows.

The Role Community Plays to Help Raise a Child

The preponderance of participants spoke about the importance their identified community had in supporting them to raise and nurture their children. One participant nicknamed his extended community of family and friends "the Jews." He described this

close-knit intergenerational band of friends and family and the role they played in helping him respond to his daughter's needs when he found it difficult:

We spend every summer together. My best friend is C. Our grandmothers grew up together. My mother and his father grew up together and C and I grew up together. They are the family, and everybody has an opinion about everything. To this day, I'll call my mother's friend in Florida and she'll say, "I understand you're having dinner tonight with your friend Mary. I'm in Massachusetts, she's in Florida and Mary's in California. It's my Big Fat Greek Wedding over a globe!"

When his daughter got her first menstrual period he was at a loss for how to respond and turned to "the Jews" for help:

N got her first period when we were all on vacation in Canada and I thought "Oh my god, couldn't you have waited 'til September when you're with your mother." I have no idea what my mother would have done in that situation with my sister. So, I went to the relatives. N came to me and she knew what a period was and she said, "I think I'm having one, Dad," and I said "Oh, isn't this awkward," and she said, "You think it's awkward!" What ended up happening is, my weird, whacked out family ended up having a Welcome to Womanhood ceremony for her, welcoming her to womanhood and we had a bonfire. So that's what I did with it; I turfed it!

He described himself as having difficulty showing affection to his daughter and the interventions of his family on her behalf:

Certainly the Jews think I should be more affectionate with her. She'll arrive at the airport... and if one of my aunts or cousins is there, they'll say: "Give N. a hug. It's not gonna' kill you," so under that kind of pressure, you will!

Another participant described having an intergenerational community of family and friends whom he referred to as his "tribe," and the importance that he placed on continuity in raising his daughter as a tribal member, as well:

Even in my aloneness, those people are part of who I am and when I love and parent people, that's part of who I am. The more love you give to younger people, the more you can give them an essential part of belonging and being cared for in this world. That's how I grew up and that's how I raised my daughter. She has a huge network of tribal feeling. I think tribal is a beautiful thing. It's one step bigger than extended family. It's extended family plus all their friends. That's a

beautiful way to grow up. You get lots of mirrors and reflections on being who you are.

A third participant spoke about the assistance he received from others when he lived in a unique artist colony when his son was young:

There were usually people who would take [him] for an hour and the environment was such that I was living and working in the same place and it was a safe landscape, more like an ancient agricultural settlement where kids could be anywhere. He would go to the barn and watch people print or go be with the sculptor...

A second trend that emerged was that more than half the respondents identified other males whom they turned to for help in parenting. One participant described various sources of support that included both the town in which he lived, and his brother:

I'm helped in a lot of ways...my brother helps out physically. He'll watch her on certain nights when I have to work. She absolutely loves playing with him. This town has offered so much emotional support, too. In some ways, it's like a great big playground. You can go to the library. You can stop on the sidewalk and there's other little kids and neighbors and friends and all those add up to a lot of support because you'll get little teeny breaks where you can talk to another adult and there seem to be so many people around here who have little kids her age.

Two other participants listed male friends who were also single fathers and two identified single male friends who were childless as those who helped them out.

Intra-Psychic Integration of the Parenting Role

In order to elicit a sense of how the participants perceived their parenting role in comparison to the parenting role of mothers, they were asked whether they thought fathering was different from mothering; and if so, how? They were also asked: How would you describe the ideal father? In their answers to these questions, and in the overall content of their narratives, it was clear that these men were striving to integrate feminine-identified traits of nurturing with masculine role expectations into their parenting identity.

In the discussion of whether fathering is different from mothering, two themes emerged; participants insisted that fathering was different from mothering, and participants had confusion about how and why.

Several participants explained the difference they perceived between mothering and fathering as having a direct relationship to the body. Some saw mothers as more intimately bonded with children because they were born from the mother's body. Many noted this, but felt at a loss to explain it. One participant stated: "There's something about having that physical connection to a child by giving birth to it that I'll never have. I don't know how to explain it."

Another participant believed it took longer for fathers to bond with infants than mothers who established a relationship with the child *in utero*. He stated: "Men take longer to bond with children. Women have that 9- month head start".

Several stated the belief that fathers allowed children to take more risks than mothers. One explained this was a result of having a degree of physical detachment from the child that the mother does not share. He stated:

I think mothers are more protective. We're [fathers] the ones who throw the babies around. I think moms are more: "I'm not ready", dads are more... moms protect and dads expose. I think dads are willing to let kids take greater risks. There's a little bit more of a distance. [My daughter] didn't come out of my body so I don't have quite that connection. A child is so much a part of a mother and there's no way I'll ever understand that.

Another participant who incorporated this detachment into his description of an ideal father stated, "Being a father is not being overly protective. Giving a person more rope... not overly involved."

In discussion of the difference between mothering and fathering, a third participant, saw the differences between mothering and fathering as based on the individual. Describing his own experience as contradictory to a stereotypical view of maternal protectiveness he stated:

I think stereotypically you could say yes, but in a lot of ways it goes back to the individual. Typically, fathers are not as protective as mothers. For example, climbing a tree. Well, [my child's mother] was like, "climb it all you want," and I was like, "that looks dangerous."

Others noted that unlike mothers, fathers responded to a child's distress using problem solving strategies. Several wondered whether their own tendency to do this might be an inappropriate reaction to their children's needs. Looking back, one participant commented on how he responded to his children's problems in comparison to his ex-wife. Believing he was too quick to move to problem-solving, he stated:

If my kid fell down and scraped a knee, I'd be loving and kiss it and all that – roughly equivalent to what [his mother's] done. I think if it's more like "someone's giving me trouble at school," that's the stuff I'm worse at. "Gee, that's really too bad. How do you suppose we could strategize to make that person stop?" I think that's where I go too fast for the solution and too much for what your kids really need, which I think is just hearing it, and being supported and loved for a while before you move to the solution. I classify that as a male thing. I have to remember, we're not doing solutions now, we're just listening to the problem.

Another, weighing the relative merit of two approaches, stated:

Maybe mothers are able to be more focused on the other; the child, while men can be focused on the child, but they're playing some other role. They're being realists; they're preparing you for life; they're solving problems instead of helping the kid solve problems. The worry is "will you be able to find your way through the world? What tools do you have?" For men the tools are more material, actual tools rather than "Do you have a good heart? Can you listen to people? Do you empathize?"

Two commented that the differences between fathers and mothers were based more on culture than gender. One participant delineated masculine and feminine energies

in parenting and noted that men and women were guided by cultural and hormonal prompts:

Do men and women parent differently? Yes, but I put most of that difference on culture. For me, if you're nurturing, it's a feminine energy. Women do it a little more naturally than men. You need to be secure and you need to venture out. The mentoring of venturing out is what I'd call masculine and the providing of safety and security is what I'd call feminine. Instinctively and culturally we have prompts to do it a certain way, or not.

Another commented on the similarity of what he believed both mothers and fathers should provide for children and the influence of socialization on how men play a fathering role:

Ultimately, I think they're not different aside from the obvious biological differences. I think it's important for both parents to provide support and clarity and communicate love and boundaries and encouragement and affection and safety. Men are raised differently and they tend to perpetuate an unconscious pattern which is not necessarily part of being a father, but tends to go along with male roles, like being a disciplinarian, being less emotionally expressive, being more financially responsible, and less socially involved.

Two participants used spiritual imagery to expound on the difference between mothering and fathering. One, using imagery of earth and sky, stated:

Mother is like the earth, the unconditional place you can always go to for succor should be the mother, but the father should be, as well, an amazingly safe place you can go to and always be yourself, but also a father. There's a way in which a father should be one step detached so he can be a wiser guy in your life. A mother is like, really intimate. You came out of your mother. Women are more of the earth, and men are more of the sky because of that gravity of giving birth. But beyond the body part we're all the same. A father has authority or substance. My father is like this pillar or force that allows me to feel safer in the world. As a single parent you have to work both worlds. A father is like a pillar of masculine strength but is feminine in his approach to you.

The other used yin yang imagery to describe the interdependence of men and women:

Men are different from women and that's a good thing. It's sort of like the yin yang. The black side has the white dot and the white has the black dot so neither

side can destroy the other because they'd be destroying themselves in the process. So, by denying that as a man, I have a piece of me that's a woman and vice versa... it's not just physical, it's an emotional and spiritual kind of thing. How do kids know that mom has what she has? They just do. The ideal is to have both.

In answer to the question, how would you describe the ideal father, and in self-descriptions that occurred in their narratives, one overarching trend emerged: participants tended to describe an ideal that melded traditionally held views of feminine and masculine traits. The ideal masculine traits of fathering included in these descriptions were; exposing children to the world, and helping them gain confidence and competence. Amongst the ideal feminine traits included were; emotional availability, relatedness to others, physical affection, and being child-centered. As described by one participant:

An ideal father ought to have a pretty good mix of masculine and feminine characteristics. He ought to be able to nurture kids and do it well. He also ought to be fairly active. I think you should have your own life and bring your kids into it. Expose your kids to as much as possible and give them a lot of loving and support and care, but also to read to them and bring them out in nature and learn to love the world. Also, an ideal parent needs to be politically committed and involve the kid in thinking about the world and what is a good world and how should people treat each other. He shouldn't be too judgmental but he should give direction and standards and feel strongly about it.

Another participant described his idea of an ideal father in contrast to his own:

"An ideal father is '*not mine*.' So some of my description is in reaction... [He should be] available, emotionally present, physically affectionate, provide windows into the adult world..."

A third, who saw himself as an ideal father stated:

If I had to have a dad, I'd want me for a dad! I think I give [my son] an incredible mix of nurturing, loving, a physical dad, present. I hate to say it, but, like modeling maleness... It's not really maleness...being confident, relating to other people. He comes on the job site frequently... I'm in charge and I enjoy that and he gets to see it, which is really cool.

Another participant, who has ADD, stressed the importance he placed on helping his daughter feel competent in a way he did not: "I am competent, but I don't feel it... I want my child to feel loved and I want her to feel she can do anything and I want her to feel competent and good in herself."

One participant (whose daughter had been present when his partner died of AIDS) did not include typically feminine traits in his description of an ideal father. He asserted:

My image of an ideal dad is a complete, honest, functional direct role in a kid's life... There's the combination of providing for, talking to and facing the tougher issues. My philosophy about parenting: You face the discomfort. You do it in a way that works for the kid.

One participant defined his role as countering the potentially damaging influence of gender socialization on his young son. He argued:

My son is a very sensitive kid. He cries at movies or if he hears something sad about somebody and I don't want him to lose that by virtue of being male in this society. So, I'm going to do whatever it takes to make sure that doesn't happen... I'll just say, "Part of being a man is being able to cry or be sad or being able to comfort somebody. That's what a real man is."

Reflecting on their parenting style, several fathers described themselves. These descriptions also revealed identities that melded masculine and feminine characteristics, and/or countered masculine stereotypes. One participant stated: "I'm a biker guy with a tattoo on my head and a baby on my back. I'm a conundrum!" Another stated: "I'm not the stereotype. I'm the counter stereotype."

Rewards and Regrets

Participants were asked, how has fathering affected you? All participants responded enthusiastically that they had been affected in a positive way. One theme that

emerged was that fathering had allowed them a chance to develop a nurturing side of themselves.

One stated "Fathering gave me the opportunity to focus on someone else's needs rather than my own" Another spoke of how it's made him more sensitive than he already was:

It's enhanced something about me. I was always kind of an emotional and caring person, but ever since she was born that's been so hyper-enhanced that like right after she was born, if I saw a movie where a baby was crying, it was like, all of a sudden, "Ugh, somebody's got to do something about it!" It's gotten to the point where certain movies I can't watch if children were going to be hurt. It's like "how can people let this happen?"

Another stated: "The reflection, the feedback, the love, the whole thing... I imagine I'd be lots more narcissistic and insular if I hadn't become a father."

Another stated: "I know I can do it and that's given me confidence in a certain way. It really gave me deeper insight into the nature of raising children and partnership and sacrifice."

The older fathers in this study inevitably reflected on regrets they had as parents. Two themes emerged in these discussions; feeling like they missed out by not having more time with their children when they were younger, and feeling they had made empathic failures. One stated:

When your kids are little it's so fast, and so special, and so draining, and so ridiculous, but also... that time comes and goes and then she doesn't need to be diapered anymore and doesn't need any of that. I don't have that intense interaction with somebody who's so dependent. She's more independent which is very cool, but there's a piece that was truncated in my relationship with her.

Another commented on how he wished he had parented differently:

I remember a lot of moments where I feel I wish I'd done it differently. My own sense of wanting to do new things all the time and later realizing that familiarity,

routine that kids need. This was a need I had. It came out of my own thoughts of what's best and most valuable and not out of an awareness of what's typical for children to need. I would be more sensitive now. Was I pushing her too hard? I needed to be active. It may have made her feel insecure.

Another commented:

I loved having her around and I'm sad I always had to leave her and that's part of the wound I carry around with me now. I never got enough of her and now she's grown up and forget it. I'll have to wait until I'm a grandfather. I realize I wish I'd had more. It's fun raising kids."

Finally, participants were asked, in an ideal world, what resources or supports would you like to see for single fathers? Several mentioned that support groups for single fathers seemed like a good idea with the caveat that either they would not, themselves attend one, or had attended one and not found it useful. As one participant replied, "Support groups where dads could get together and talk about what's going on would seem like a good idea, but I don't think I'd go to one".

Instead he suggested what he thought would, in fact, be useful:

...some structured way for single dads to talk to single moms and exchange ideas. This gender stuff is so impossible and so difficult for us. As men we struggle with it a lot. Because most men I know aren't afraid of their feminine side, but we're not quite sure what to do with it. How are we supposed to be parents in a situation where the male and female used to be taken care of, both those roles were occupied and now we're in those two roles and we haven't got the training for it and the understanding of it and we're in a society which doesn't value it by and large? We need a way to explore this stuff because it seems so crucial.

The findings of this study were organized into six categories and presented above.

The next chapter of this study will discuss the relevance of this study's findings to the literature previously reviewed. Additionally, the next chapter will discuss the relevance of this study's findings to social work practice, theory and social work policy.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study sought to answer the following question: How do single fathers construct a parenting identity that incorporates nurturing? In my Findings Chapter, I discussed the results within the context of a number of different themes and subthemes. In this chapter I discuss the most salient findings of this study grouped around the following themes: 1) role models, 2) preparation for fathering, 3) level of involvement in early physical care, 4) the experience of becoming a single father, 5) the experience of parenting alone, 6) the influence of ongoing relationships with the child's mother, 7) patterns of adaptation to new role demands, 8) perceptions of sameness and difference from mothering, and 9) role satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

This chapter will also relate key findings of this study to prior studies and theoretical frameworks described in the literature review. Some of the key findings of this study supported the previous literature, and others did not.

Role Models

Masciadelli, Pleck and Stueve, (2006) found that "highly involved fathers were more likely to cite peer parents than to specifically cite their own fathers as influential role models" (p. 32). Their own fathers functioned as reference points for what they wanted to do differently as a parent. Furthermore, they found that fathers did not cite their spouses as models. Daley (2003) found that fathers frequently perceived themselves

as lacking specific role models for fathering and often reported dissatisfaction with their own fathers as parenting models. One response was to create "fragmented models"(p.511) for fathering by selectively incorporating desirable traits from a variety of models.

Results of this study partially supported the findings of both Masciadelli, Pleck and Steuve (2006) and Daley (2003). While several participants initially denied having any role models, further questioning on my part revealed that they did. Nine of ten participants reported they had a range of role models for parenting and none identified the mother of their children as a model. Additionally, participants selectively chose specific traits of various people in their lives to emulate. Unlike Masciadelli, Pleck and Stueve (2006), as well as Daley's (2003) findings, fathers in this study tended to include aspects of their own fathers, as well. Only one participant clearly identified his father, in general, as someone whom he did not want to emulate, e.g. "my role model was *not my father*." In this case, the participant's father functioned as a reference point for what he chose to do differently as a father. Additionally, while they did not identify the mother of their children in their narratives, participants showed no hesitation to name women, or aspects of other women they knew, as role models.

Two interesting themes of this study were found in the narratives of a subgroup of fathers who had abusive fathers themselves. One reported that an internal struggle to avoid being like his own father had kept him emotionally distant from his children. The second described how a capacity to hold memories of his father's warmth counterbalanced seeing his father solely as a role model of abuse. Further investigation of these phenomena, while a potentially valuable area of inquiry, was beyond the scope of this study.

Preparation for Fathering

A review of the literature revealed no research on how fathers anticipate fatherhood: in particular, their desire to become fathers, how they imagine being a father, and their intentional and unintentional preparation for fatherhood. However, my findings on the experience of how fathers anticipate fatherhood revealed several interesting trends. First, when asked about their desire to become a father prior to becoming one, the majority of participants reported feeling they had ambivalence and little agency in the decision to have a child but went along with their female partner's sense of urgency. This trend can be viewed in light of hegemonic masculinity as described by Robert Connell (1995). The ambivalence of these men reveals their distancing from the feminine-associated activity of welcoming and wishing for a baby. Additionally, the constraints of hegemonic masculinity may have kept these men from imagining a fuller range of relational possibilities for their lives.

A small, secondary trend: that of fathers who exercised greater agency, also emerged in this study: This small but significant group of men intentionally sought a partner with whom to have a child. One, a gay father, framed his decision in the political context of Stonewall and expansion of his personal options after the liberation of coming out in the late 70's:

The assumption, of course, then, was no kids.... O.k., I'm gay. What does that mean? One of those things was "I'm never gonna' be a dad" I was sad. At the time gay was new enough. Stonewall was '69, so it just wasn't an option...

After a lesbian friend approached him with the idea of having a child together it dawned on him that having a child was a possibility for him as a gay man. Connell (1995) described a type of masculine identity formed in rebellion toward hegemonic masculinity.

This decision can be seen as such a rebellion in the wake of another significant personal act of gender liberation.

Risman (1986) puts forth a structuralist argument in which she argues that in spite of minimal or nonexistent preparation for nurturing, when faced with the responsibility for primary care of children men will accommodate to the immediate demands of the task and "adopt those behaviors which have traditionally considered mothering (p.96).

Findings of my study revealed that most participants had very little deliberate preparation for a parenting role; however, upon reflection it occurred that experiences they had in life were of a preparatory nature. Additionally, when asked to discuss preconceived images they had of their child before becoming a parent, most participants had none to report. These findings lend support to Risman's structuralist argument as well as to an individualist one. The participants had no formal preparation yet they drew on various past experiences of caretaking in order to meet the immediate demands associated with parenting as a single father.

Level of Involvement in Early Physical Care

While studies of the visitation patterns of divorced fathers demonstrates the startling trend of declining visits post-divorce, Pruett's (2000) work has maintained that fathers early, active involvement with young children is a salient predictor of future sustained involvement regardless of divorce or separation from the child's mother. The findings of this study support Pruett's findings. Unlike the predominant social trend, the fathers in this study were highly involved years after physical separation from the mothers of their children and all reported high levels of early involvement in the physical aspects of early care of their children.

Doucet's (2006) work showed that married fathers who acted as primary care givers to their children claimed to have a 50-50 co-equal division of childcare tasks with their spouses; however, this assertion was frequently disputed by their wives. Though the participants in this study were not probed to determine whether the mothers of their children would agree that they had co-equal responsibilities for early childcare, equanimity in the form of domestic labor appeared to be an accepted and defended value for these men. One finding of this study, not found in the literature, was revealed in the participants' descriptions of how trying to participate 50/50 created conflict and competition with mothers of their children before, and sometimes after, separation. An additional finding not noted in the literature was how deeply rewarding the experience of participation in early physical care of children was noted to be by the majority of the study participants. While no studies specifically addressing the opportunity for involvement in physical care were covered by the scope of the literature review, this finding does support the general findings of the generative fathering category of research touched upon in the literature review.

The Experience of Becoming a Single Father and the Ongoing Influence of the Relationship with the Child's Mother

Dowd's (2000) work found evidence that the circumstances of separation from the child's mother and the ongoing relationship with her had a significant impact on time allotted to father involvement with offspring post-separation. This researcher found that participants' narratives revealed a range of complicated emotions about their relationships with the mother of their children. For all the fathers in this study these relationships remained significant factors in how they felt about their parenting

experience post separation. The sustained influence that these relationships had on the participants' parenting experience was reflected in the narratives of the fathers with adult children; the emotional impact of relationships with their children's mothers remained a salient feature of how they reflected on their parenting experience. However, these results did not support Dowd's findings that the parental relationship impacted fathers' relationship with their children in terms of time allotted to fathering or the quality of the father-child relationship.

Patterns of Role Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Studies of single father role satisfaction are limited and contradictory. Risman (1986) found that American fathers are comfortable and contented as single parents. However, English and Australian studies that used large samples and included low-income single fathers showed a tendency toward more problems in the fathers' role satisfaction and the father-child relationship (Katz 1979; Risman, 1986). The fathers in this study described mixed feelings about their experience of fathering alone. Specifically, positive feelings were reported in two areas: 1) freedoms associated with being in charge without having to negotiate with another adult, and 2) intense satisfaction found in the father-child relationship. Negative feelings reported were related to three areas: 1) feelings of loneliness 2) abrupt relational transitions with children from rapprochement to parting when their children stayed with them, and 3) stress related to having to manage children's needs alone. Several participants also spoke about having difficulty integrating new relationships with female partners into the existing relationship with their children as an additional area of strain related to being a single father. Each of

these findings suggests areas for further social work research into the needs of single fathers.

Patterns of Adaptation to New Role Demands and Embodiment Issues

Doucet's (2004; 2006) work on fathering and embodiment issues indicated that fathers often feel unwelcome in "estrogen filled spaces," for example in the social spaces in which young children are present with female caregivers. Results of this study did not support Doucet's findings. In fact, a majority (8 of 10) fathers in this study reported they felt welcomed in public spaces. In discussions of what they liked most about being a parent, several highlighted the experience of being seen in public with their children as a source of pride and greatest pleasure. It is important to note that demographics and geography may have been a factor in this unusual experience. All but two of the men in this study lived in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, an area that is known for having liberal acceptance of non-normative gender roles and family structures. Recognition of this fact showed up in the narratives of most of the participants; they frequently elaborated on their answer to this question by mentioning that they lived in a uniquely progressive community when questions pertaining to embodiment issues were asked.

Fathers in this study were also queried about how comfortable they felt showing affection to their children. All but one participant reported they felt great ease expressing affection to their children. Participants' described sharing both verbal and physical expressions of affection toward children that included singing lullabies, saying, "I love you, "hugging and holding, "showering with kisses," and "cuddling all night." It is interesting to note that fathers in my study also commented on sleeping with their young

children. For example, one father of a three year- old son spoke at length about how extraordinary he found this experience as he shared his internal dialogue about the nature of the physical relationship:

I never slept with my dad...alone! Every night he's here we sleep together. We either cuddle all night or we don't. ... I've asked myself a lot, is this sexual? I have a physical, really intimate relationship with him that's not sexual. This is like intimacy without sexuality.

The narrative of this father indicated he was questioning, exploring, and nudging the conventional boundaries of paternal physical affection, suggesting a fathering identity forming in opposition to the strictures of hegemonic masculinity.

Risman (1986) found that single fathers often relied on routines such as housekeeping to organize their interactions with children. Risman's findings were supported by the findings of this study, as well. The fathers in my study described both their use of routines and the benefit they found in their use. The benefits identified by these participants included bringing regularity to "an unnatural situation," self-soothing, and finding a way to connect with a quiet child.

While there is scant literature to address how fathers adapt to the demands of single fathering or being a primary caregiver of children, Doucet (2006) reported two somewhat contradictory trends: 1) primary caregiving fathers (single and partnered) have a hard time forming social connections to support them in their fathering role, and 2) these fathers rely on females in their social network such as older daughters, neighbors, or girlfriends to take over many responsibilities of childcare. Both of Doucet's results were unsupported by the findings of my study. The preponderance of participants spoke about the importance that their identified communities had in supporting them to

raise and nurture their children. These networks were frequently described as being comprised of a combination of both relatives and friends. In one case it was described as the small town in which the participant lived and ran a business. Another father spoke of finding support in an intentional community of artists he lived in when his son was little. One surprising finding was that many of the participants formed supportive relationships for nurturing children with other men, either a brother or friends who were also single fathers.

Doucet (2006) found that men in her study believed that mothering and fathering were different activities and that their own nurturing behavior towards their children could not be categorized as "mothering." Explanations of the distinction between the two were typically ambiguous and the difference between gendered bodies was most often used to account for the distinction. Findings from my study solidly supported Doucet's findings. Two themes were evident in the narratives of fathers in this study in response to my inquiry into whether they believed fathering is different from mothering:

1) participants insisted upon the difference, and 2) participants had confusion about how and why they were different. Answers typically relied on differences emanating from the physical differences between men and women. For example, mothers had a closer bond with children because they carried them *in utero* and/or because they breastfed children.

The participants' explanations also emphasized different styles mothers and fathers use to respond to children's distress, such as offering a hug versus engaging the child in problem-solving. While the parenting activities of that study participants described suggested that they employed many broad aspects of nurturing associated with feminine enterprise, (physical soothing, developing networks of support, thinking about,

planning for and prioritizing their children's needs, shopping, cooking, etc.), these fathers insisted on that their actions were different from their female counterparts.

Participants expressed confusion about the nature of this difference in many of their narratives; noting the contradictions and attempting to explain them using terms such as yin and yang, and earth and sky. One participant, a Jungian, explained it in terms of anima and animus. Another participant insisted that there was a difference between mothering and fathering, then stated: "Ultimately, I think they're not different aside from the obvious biological differences..." While listening to these discourses it often occurred to me that these men were grappling with a distinction between men and women rather than the activities of fathering and mothering, suggesting that their adaptation to the role demands of fathering as a single parent preceded incorporation of this behavior into a masculine identity. Hegemonic masculinity made it confusing for them to negotiate an embrace of the feminine associated behaviors they employed and enjoyed while comfortably retaining their identity as men.

In narratives describing the ideal father, participants tended to describe an ideal that melded traditionally held views of feminine and masculine traits of parenting: exposing children to the world, assisting children to gain competence and confidence as actors in the world with emotional availability, relatedness to others, physical affection and being child-centered. When asked how fathering had affected them, two significant themes emerged: 1) all participants responded enthusiastically that they had been affected in a positive way, and 2) many described positive feelings associated with the opportunity to experience and develop a side of themselves they might not have, otherwise. Most of the opportunities they identified were of a feminine-associated nature: "a focus on 'the

other'," [increased] sensitivity," reflection and love," insight into partnership and sacrifice," as well as, "increased confidence" were listed as benefits of this opportunity.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size and limited geographic area in which the participants lived did not allow for transferability and generalization of the findings. Additionally, the participants in this study were predominantly Caucasian, and had college or graduate school education, which suggested that the responses of the participants might have been biased toward the experience of a limited group of single fathers who are privileged by being both Caucasian and having high levels of formal education.

Attention was given to the issues of reliability and validity. Selected sections of the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts compared to the original recordings to ensure accuracy. Field notes recorded nonverbal information, such as facial expression, tone of voice, body language and my own immediate impressions following each interview in an attempt to capture a holistic experience of the interview. Coding the data involved a reliance on the participants' own words and ideas. Threats to trustworthiness of the data included researcher bias and respondent bias. Researcher bias included an interpretation of the data based upon the theories and concepts presented in the literature review. Respondent bias may have included gender differences between the researcher and the respondents, and respondents' knowledge that this study was seeking information about how respondents incorporated nurturing into their masculine identity that may have enjoined them to highlight some information or conversely to conceal other information.

The findings of this study will have implications for social work research and practice. Very little is known about the experience of single fathers overall, and about the needs and concerns of single American fathers who are diverse in terms of their ethnicity, race, social class and sexual orientation in particular. Further research is needed to broaden and expand the existing body of literature.

While it is common for clinicians to include mothers in the treatment of children and families, it is less common for single fathers to be included. The findings of this study will help clinicians to anticipate family constellations that include single fathers. Knowledge that single or partnered, fathers are equally as capable and invested as mothers in being good nurturers should encourage clinicians to develop ways to increase inclusion of fathers in their practice with children and families.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity poses significant dilemmas for men that inhibit the incorporation of nurturing into a fathering identity with negative consequences for men, women and children. Clinicians who work with men may benefit from gaining knowledge and sensitivity to some of the feelings, aspirations and challenges that single fathers experience as men who nurture.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Approval Letter

January 19, 2008

Janet Saxe

Dear Janet,

Your latest revisions have been reviewed and they are fine. All is now in order and we are glad to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Edmund DeLaCour, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Janet Saxe and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study of single care giving fathers in order to learn more about their experience of nurturing young children. Data obtained in this study will be used for my master's thesis and for possible presentations and publications.

You are being asked to participate in this study if (a) you are 18 years old or older, (b) have or have had partial or full physical custody of a child from the time the child was aged four or under. If you choose to be a subject in this study you will be asked to participate in a face to face interview. Questions will focus on what it means to you to be a single father, how you think and feel about nurturing your young child/children, how these thoughts and feelings relate to your own experience of being parented, how nurturing a child has affected your life and self concept. The interview is expected to take approximately 90 minutes to complete and will take place at your convenience in a predetermined location in the community. With your consent, interviews will be audio taped. I may also telephone you after the interview for the purpose of further clarification and/or elaboration if necessary.

Your participation is voluntary. You will receive no financial benefit for your participation in this study. However, you may benefit from knowing that you have contributed to the knowledge of the issues related to being a single father. It is my hope that this study will help social workers have a better understanding of the experience of fathers as caregivers. You may also benefit from being able to tell your story and having your perspective heard.

The potential risks of participating in this study are the possibility that you might feel strong or uncomfortable emotions while talking about your experiences. In case you feel the need

for additional support after participating in this study, you will be given a list of resources for mental health services in your area.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, as consistent with Federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Confidentiality will be protected by coding the audiotapes and interview notes instead of using your real name. Your name will never be associated with the information you provide in the interview. In addition, I will lock consent forms, audio tapes, interview notes in a file drawer and during the thesis process and for three years thereafter, in accordance with federal regulations. After such time, I will destroy the above-mentioned materials. The data may be used in other education activities as well as in the preparation for my Master's thesis.

This study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by indicating in writing that you are no longer interested in participating. You have until March 15, 2008 to withdraw from this study; after this date, I will begin writing the Results and Discussion sections of my thesis. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you will be immediately destroyed.

If you have any questions about this study, participation, rights of participants, this consent form, or if you wish to withdraw your consent, please contact me via the contact information given below or the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 595-7974.

Please return this consent form to me by February 14, 2008 to indicate your intention of participating in the study (I suggest you keep a copy of this consent form for your records). If I do not hear from you by then, I will follow up with a telephone call.

Thank you for your time and I greatly look forward to having you as a participant in my study.

Sincerely,
Janet Saxe
jsaxe@smith.edu

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

| _____
Date

Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. What is your current marital status?
3. How many years of school have you completed?
4. Are you currently employed? If yes, is this job full time or part time?
5. How many children do you have? What is/are their age(s)? Gender?
6. How old were you when you first became a father?
7. How many people live in your household including yourself? What is their relationship to you?
8. What is your relationship to your child/children (e.g. biological father, adoptive father, custodial uncle or grandfather, etc.)
9. How did you become a single father?
10. How old was your child/children when you became a single father?

Father *Imago*/ Self as Father

1. Describe your image of the ideal father.
2. What does being a father mean to you?
3. Describe any specific images or stories you've had while daydreaming about your child before she/he came into your life.
4. Describe any of the thoughts you had about being a father someday before you had a child. How did they come about? What prompted them?
5. How did/do you feel about your physiological ability to create a human life?
6. How did you decide to become a father? How did you prepare yourself to be a father?

Self as Solo Parent/Interpersonal Connection to Child

1. What is your child like?
2. Who does your child remind you of?
3. What does your child enjoy about being with you?
4. What activities do you engage in with your child?
5. What do you think your child will learn to do next?
6. What ages/stages of development do you look forward to or have concerns about?
7. What do you think your child will be like at 6? 10? 13? 17? 21?
8. What do you think your child will think of you when she/he is grown up?
9. What are you like as a parent? What is your style of parenting?
10. Who are you similar to as a parent?
11. In what ways do you parent like or unlike your mother did? Father? Other significant caregiver in your life as a child?
12. What do you enjoy most about parenting? What do you like least? What do you find most challenging?
13. How has your experience of being a single father changed your life?

Self as Gendered Parent in Relation to Community/ (Social Ecology)

1. Describe how your involvement with your child's mother affects how you are involved in your child's life (if applicable).
2. How are you helped to be a parent by other people? Hindered?
3. Who do you turn to when you need help?
4. Describe what it is like to be a single father in public places (e.g. shopping, at the playground, in play groups, out with friends)
5. Is it ever difficult to show affection for your child? When? Where? Why?
6. When/where/how do you feel most comfortable as a father?
7. How does being a man affect your experience of being a single parent?