Title
Single fathers

Author
Blevins, Patricia M.

Publication Date
1983

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Single Fathers: Their Lifestyle and Parenting Experiences

by

Patricia M. Blevins

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

NURSING

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

San Francisco

[redacted]

Date University Librarian

Degree Conferred: JUNE 12, 1983

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Laura Reif, R.N., Ph.D., for her support and advocacy. As my professor she made the idea of participation in the research process exciting. She also gave me the encouragement to begin this project.

I extend my appreciation to Ellen Lewin, Ph.D., for the guidance she gave me and for chairing my Thesis Committee. She gave so generously of her time and wisdom.

The thoughtful directions and comments of Virginia Olesen, Ph.D., and Marilyn Savedra, R.N., D.N.S., are greatly appreciated. Thank you for serving on my Thesis Committee.

Finally, I thank the single fathers who willingly participated in this project and who generously gave of their time, thoughts and feelings.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my children Catherine and Richard who have always been loving and understanding of their single parent.

ABSTRACT

In the United States research about the lifestyle and role of men as primary parents has become important as fathers are more often awarded custody of their children following divorce. This descriptive study used open-ended interviews to study eleven single fathers who had physical custody and primary parenting responsibility for their children. The focus was on the lifestyle of the single father, his role, his parenting experiences, and whether he finds his role or responsibility different from when he was married. The findings are limited in their generalizability because the subjects are all from a high socioeconomic level and because of the small sample size.

These single fathers were fiercely independent. According to the informants, no relationship with a woman, career accomplishment or recreational pursuit gave as much reward as successful parenting.

The data indicated extensive similarities between adaptations described by single fathers and those reported in the literature for single mothers. A major difference involved financial constraints, which tend to be far less pressing for fathers as compared with mothers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Introduction

During the last ten years, the number of single fathers in the United States who have assumed custody of their children has increased (Santrock & Warshak, 1979). It is estimated that 3.5 million children are being reared by single fathers. The increase in this type of family structure is reflective of the rising divorce rate. The actual percentage of fathers seeking custody has remained the same (Santrock & Warshak, 1979). While it is true that divorced fathers compose the largest percentage of single fathers, adoption and loss of a spouse through death, desertion, chronic illness and incarceration also are factors which contribute to an increase in the number of single fathers.

In family systems theory any change that occurs in one family member's role is viewed with relation to its affects on all other members of that system. Changes in the role of the parent most definitely affect the children. The role of the single father is not yet institutionalized in American society (Mendes, 1976). The primary parenting role has traditionally belonged to the mother. The single father currently functions as an atypical primary parent without clear guidelines for performing his role (Mendes, 1976). There is relatively little in the literature about the lifestyle of the single father or his relationship with his children. In order to determine the quality of parenting ability of single fathers, it is important to learn how single fathers cope with the many stresses of single parenting. To what extent do factors such as parenting style, use of support systems, attitudes of the children toward loss of the mother, gender of the dependent children

or the reason for originally gaining custody, influence the quality of parenting by single fathers?

The challenge to Family Nurse Practitioners, or anyone who works with single-parent families, lies in understanding the unique structure and function of these families. This understanding is key to appropriate assessment and the formation of strategies for intervention. The objective of this study is to learn more about the following: 1) the role of the single father; 2) the parenting experiences he finds most difficult and least difficult; 3) and whether he finds his role or responsibility different from when he was married.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

There are few studies which focus on single fathers. A discussion of the research on single-parent families in general will provide a framework for the appreciation and understanding of the studies on single fathers.

Single-Parent Family Research Tradition

Studies of single-parent families in the 1950's and 1960's focused on demonstrating a cause-effect relationship between the single-parent family or "broken home" and delinquency or pathology in the children. These families were considered a homogeneous group regardless of the reason for the single parent status (death, divorce, never married, etc.). Further, these studies lacked adequate controls for social class and education, use of control groups of two-parent families when appropriate, or poor matching on significant variables when control groups were used. Single parent status alone, without consideration for mediating factors, was used to explain one particular outcome of delinquent behavior. These conceptual and methodological problems challenge the validity of these early findings. However, these studies have clearly defined areas where further exploration is needed (see, for instance, Biller, 1970; Herzog & Sudia, 1968, 1971, 1973 for reviews and critiques).

Current Research on Single-Parent Families

Today the single-parent family is conceptualized as a separate family form to be studied on its own terms.

In the early 1970's Hetherington, Cox and Cox conducted one of the more influential studies on the impact of divorce on children. Forty-eight white, middle-class, intact families with a preschool child were matched with forty-eight divorcing families with a preschool child. The mother had custody in all case families. Families were matched on birth order, age, sex and nursery school of the child. An attempt was made to match parents on length of marriage, education and age. Data were gathered at two months, one year, and two years following the divorce using the following methods: interview, structured diaries, laboratory and home observation of parent-child interactions, child-teacher and child-peer interactions at school, personality tests of children, teacher and parent ratings of child behavior and measures of sex-role typing, cognitive performance, and social development of the children. The study revealed that the single-parent family experiences severe turmoil and stress during the first year after divorce. Some particular observations resulting from analysis of the data included: 1) the divorcing mother's parenting skills and satisfaction were below the level of those experienced by two-parent families; 2) in general, the divorced parents were coping far less well than the non-divorced parents and communication with their children was perceived, by the investigators, to be less affectionate and less effective; 3) case children displayed more negative behavior, more dependency demands and less affection than the children from two-parent families; 4) the mother-son relationship in the divorced family was found to be particularly wrought with problems.

At the two year follow-up, except for the mother-son relationship which was still a troubled area, most of the upset and turmoil for

mothers as well as children had dissipated. Less severe and less prolonged disorganization in divorced families was associated with minimal conflict between divorcing parents and agreement on child-rearing practices.

The investigators were able to draw conclusions about the impact of divorce on children, parents and parent-child relationships by including the carefully matched comparison group. The generalizability of the study is limited due to the narrow range of demographic characteristics represented by the families. However, the homogeneity of the sample and inclusion of the comparison group allowed for in-depth analysis of the data.

Between 1971 and 1977 another classic study on single-parent families was conducted by Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly. These two investigators conducted clinical interviews with sixty, predominantly white, middle-class divorcing families who had a total of 131 children ranging in age from three to eighteen years. Mothers had custody in all but one family. The parents and the children were interviewed separately at the point of separation of the parents, and also at one and five years after the divorce. As part of the study an initial six weeks of counseling was offered in an attempt to facilitate a reduction of the stress associated with divorce. The counseling was child-centered, prevention oriented and time limited. The counseling sessions, an innovative idea in the early 1970's, were offered as part of the study to test the effectiveness of such a program for stress reduction in divorcing families.

Wallerstein and Kelly replicated the findings of Hetherington, Cox and Cox regarding the highly stressful and critical period of the first

year after divorce, the difficulty of the mother-son relationship, the importance of a continuing good relationship of the non-custodial parent. Further they found that children who were the focus of their parents' conflict, or whose parents were highly distressed, were themselves the most distressed children.

Wallerstein and Kelly were also able to contribute a very significant discription of the unique reactions children have to divorce depending on their chronological age and developmental stage.

Because the study followed families for five years the investigators witnessed the return of all the families to homeostasis. While all families in the study were able to rebuild a functioning family unit, the process took some families eighteen months and some families more than two years to accomplish. A smooth process was associated with a positive continuing relationship between the non-custodial parent, the ex-spouse and the child.

Like the Hetherington, Cox and Cox study the representativeness of the sample in the Wallerstein and Kelly study is hard to estimate. Whether their findings can be replicated by studying families experienccing chronic poverty, or the pressures of rascism and overcrowding or other inner-city problems is unknown. The lack of a control or comparison group and the use of clinical interviews that are not easily replicated are other problems with the study. However, the formidable clinical skills and training of the researchers lent creditability to their clinical perceptions and insights. They were the first clinicians to develop a short term, comprehensive, prevention-oriented, counseling program for divorcing families. This service is recognized as a major

contribution to clinical practice (Levitin, 1979). Their interpretations of the impact of divorce on children suggest new directions for research.

Another major researcher studying the social and psychological effects of ending a marriage is Robert Weiss. His study reports the dramatic role changes experienced by each member of the single-parent family. He found the role changes to be associated with the overload and conflict experienced by the single parent as he or she attempts to become both mother and father, nurturer and disciplinarian, as well as primary provider. No one can adequately fill all these roles. In reorganizing the household the single parent calls upon the children to share responsibility for household tasks, decision-making, and planning. Weiss has found that many single parents consider their children as "junior partners" in the management of the household rather than as subordinates. The children's change in status is thought to result from both the parent-child role changes seen in the single-parent family and from the collapse of the "eschelon structure" with the ending of the marriage. The eschelon structure is described as a hierarchy or chain-of-command structure often seen in hospitals, military and two-parent families. This structure is composed of superiors and subordinates, each understanding their role and remaining within their defined boundries. With the absence of the other parent, the control and authority the parents exercised over the children during the marriage no longer exists. Consequently, the single-parent family forms a new structure. Weiss reports that many single parents refer to themselves as "first among equals" when describing their position in the family. The single parent often expresses that without the help of the children the family

can't survive. Tasks that previously were the responsibility of one or the other parent during the marriage are now shared equally by both the parent and the children. Responsibility for themselves after school, packing their lunches, laundry, housecleaning, meal preparation and clean up as well as giving opinions on how income should be spent are common ways in which children participate more fully in a single-parent family. Of course these responsibilities are more increased if the single parent works away from home than they are if the parent is at home. Additionally, the amount of participation of each child is representative of his or her developmental stage. However, Weiss has found that children in single-parent families, regardless of age, participate more fully in the management of the household and in more of a partnership role with their parent than do children from two-parent families. While it may be true that children from two-parent families, especially where both parents work, may be responsible for an increased amount of household tasks and self-care, they rarely have an equal say when it comes to decision-making and planning for the family. Generally, according to Weiss, the parents have the last word in these families.

Weiss also reports that most single parents spend many hours alone with their children, confiding in them and conversing with them in much the same manner that they conversed and confided in the partner during the marriage. In many instances single parents report that their relationship with their children has become more like a friendship. Occasional episodes of role-reversal are common. For instance, a child may instruct a parent to return home by a certain hour and the parent

may comply. This kind of behavior in a two-parent family might be considered highly irregular. However, due to the blurring of roles in the single-parent family role-reversal is found to be common.

Weiss notes that this greater mutual responsiveness and increased mutual reliance means that disappointments and disagreements in single-parent families are often painful and reactions are sharp.

Weiss found that single parents report difficulty with limit-setting, because punishing the children may result in alienation and loneliness for the parent. Any punishment given to the child is also felt by the parent, consequently the parent may resort to the usually ineffective technique of coercion and nagging to obtain results from the child.

Weiss also found the mother-son relationship to be difficult. He comments that research has little to say whether or not gender makes it difficult for women to command their children's respect, especially their adolescent sons.

Because children in single-parent families have no option but to particpate in their households as full members, Weiss explored the results of this role change on these children. He found that this experience can have pathogenic potential for the occasional child who is overwhelmed and unprepared to meet demands for increased autonomy. More often, however, he observed that both younger and older children experienced an increase in self esteem, competence and growth because of the demands placed on them for responsibility and autonomy. Older children from single-parent families have related that they regret they missed out on a more carefree youth and traditional family. They also indicated a sense of self respect because they were able to rise to the

occasion when their families needed their contributions.

Weiss chronicles the tremendous struggle that the single parent, who is also a single adult, must go through to reconstruct his or her social life. He also relates the often difficult process of juggling single parenting and a relationship with a new significant other.

The Weiss study is a broad, sensitive report of the feelings and experiences of 200 single parents and about 40 children from single-parent families. He compiled data from six separate studies on single-parent families. The studies represent different methodologies, types of samples and data analysis techniques. His work with single-parent families is certainly most varied, ambitious and prolific, not to mention sympathetic, and his results have made many suggestions for further research. He has proposed a theory of the structure and function of the single-parent family. A longitudinal study of single-parent families is needed to test this theory by attempting to measure any evolution or change in the proposed structure and function of this unique family unit over time.

Research On Single-Parent Fathers

Although limited, the studies on single fathers begin to weave an underlying thread of commonality. Still in the theory-generating stage the majority of these studies are descriptive in design. Some of the factors believed to influence the quality of parenting of single fathers include: 1) parenting style; 2) use of support systems; 3) attitudes of the children toward loss of the mother; 4) gender of the dependent children; and 5) reason for originally gaining custody. Most of the current research on single fathers addresses one or more of these factors. All of the studies discussed here involve men who have been

single fathers for at least two to three years. In order to focus on the restructured single-parent family unit, this study will also involve single fathers who have survived the chaotic, stressful period of the first two years following the end of the marriage.

There appears to be a correlation between how the father obtained custody and his perception of success at single parenting (Hanson, 1979; Gasser and Taylor, 1976; Mendes, 1979). Fathers who actually sought and received custody of their children perceive the quality of their parenting high and their parent-child relationship positive. Men whose wives deserted the children, often express feelings of being overwhelmed (Hanson, 1979).

In their study of forty single fathers living with a dependent child under age eighteen, with no wife present (due to death or divorce) the contrasts between widowed and divorced fathers were striking (Gasser and Taylor, 1976). More widowed fathers expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and perceived themselves as less well-adjusted and with parenting experiences that were more problematic than the divorced fathers in the sample. Divorced fathers seem to be spurred on to prove that men can raise children as well as women. Divorced fathers were also more anxious to consider their present situation as in control and functioning smoothly. They were often reluctant to admit they needed help because such behavior was inconsistant with the masculine ideals they had set for themselves. They also found that the subjects in their sample faced many role changes and were now accepting responsibility for areas of home management their wives had handled previously. In homes with small children the subjects assumed the major responsibility for the children's care. When the subjects expressed difficulty it appeared

to stem more from the overburdening of roles than from unfamiliarity with the tasks. No demographic data was given so generalizability of the findings in the Gasser and Taylor study is very difficult.

Orthner, Brown and Ferguson replicated the findings of Gasser and Taylor in their study of twenty single fathers living with dependent children age eighteen months to seventeen years in Greensboro, North Carolina. The men were widowed, divorced and two subjects were never married. Fathers were sought from all socioeconomic levels but they were unable to find subjects from the lowest income categories. The investigators did not find this situation surprising because of the requirements demanded by the courts in order for a father to be awarded custody of his minor children. The majority of single fathers today are divorced and they must be able to demonstrate a degree of resource availability that the courts and sometimes the exspouse will respect.

Common problems mentioned by the fathers in this study included: 1) lack of patience with the children; 2) lack of time for the children; 3) making decisions alone; 4) having to be away from the children more than they want to be away. The fathers reported they have acquired an increased appreciation of the primary parenting role. They feel less discipline-oriented now then they felt when they were married and they currently demand increased independency from their children. They also expressed an increased concern about the adequacy of day care and education for their children, and feelings of increased protectiveness toward their children.

Orthner, et al concluded that the single fathers interviewed felt quite capable and successful in their ability to be the primary parent for their children. They found little evidence of role strain or

problems with adjustment to being the primary parent. All the fathers experienced problems with their children but not any more complicated problems than those faced by most families. The sense of pride in being able to cope with the challenge of parenthood and seeing their children mature under their guidance was said to be a major compensating force.

Courts traditionally look askance at the efficacy of fathers raising daughters alone. Orthner et al reported that overall these fathers felt quite successful raising their daughters. The fathers considered problems such as issues of sexuality to be situational, not continual. For instance, fathers often felt hesitant or uncomfortable discussing sex education with their daughters. Some were able to find a teacher, female friend or relative to help out and a few whose exspouse was available relied on them.

The high socioeconomic level of the subjects in the Orthner et al study might be associated with their perceptions of successful single parenting and satisfaction with their lifestyle. It is unknown whether a study of single fathers from lower socioeconomic groups would report a similar high level of success and satisfaction.

Mendes replicated the Orthner et al findings regarding a lack of adequate role models for daughters of single fathers in her study of 32, divorced and widowed single fathers from So. California who were not co-parenting. Not all the fathers could specify the kind of role model they wanted for their daughters but they felt that such a role model could teach their daughters how to be feminine and "women's ways". Most fathers felt that having their daughters growing up without women role models was cause for concern. Further, fathers over 40 believed that sex education should be given to their daughters by women and not by

themselves. Subjects also expressed concern about how their daughters might choose to express their sexuality as adolescents without the daily guidance of a "good woman". Other than these concerns fathers did not report that daughters were any more difficult to raise than their sons. These findings contradict Weiss's findings that opposite sex parent-child relationships are usually strained. (Weiss, 1980).

Fathers of younger children, in the Mendes study, reported that they declared their love and openly hugged and kissed their children more than did the fathers of adolescents. The fathers believed that they expressed their love for their children by the quality of care they gave them and by being a stable, strong presence in the childrens' lives.The men expected deference and respect as proof of the childrens' love for them.

In families where the mother deserted the children an adverse affect on the father-child relationship often resulted. This may possibly be associated with the child's anger, confusion and insecurity about the mother's desertion being displaced onto the father-child relationship.

In all the studies discussed so far the interview was the single method used to gather date, no intact family comparison group or mother custody comparison group was included and children were not studied directly. In order to begin to build an empirical data base about single-parent families Santrock and Warshak used a multimethod approach to their case control study of 60 white, predominantly middle-class families. In all 33 boys and 27 girls ranging in age from 6 to 11 were studied. One third of the children were from mother custody families, one third from father custody families and one third from two-parent

families. The three different types of families were matched on age of the children, family size and socioeconomic status. The two groups of children from divorced homes were matched on sibling status and for age when parents separated. Parents had separated an average of 2.9 years and were in their early thirties. Children identified clinically as having emotional disorders were excluded. A multimethod approach was used to gather data. Laboratory and home observation of parent-child interaction, structured interviews, self-report scales, and teacher rating forms were used. Children and their fathers from intact families served as a control group for father custody families while these same children and their mothers served as a control group for the mother custody families.

In the initial report on this study only the parent-child observations in the laboratory and questions regarding support systems were reported.

Santrock and Warshak also found data on same sex custodial parent-child relationship faring better. Boys whose fathers have custody are less demanding than girls in this type of family structure, while girls are less demanding than boys in mother custody families. A similar, significantly positive same-sex-child and parent effect was evidenced in the children's maturity, sociability, and independence.

Father custody boys performed in a much more socially competent manner in the laboratory interactions than boys from intact families; they were observed to be warmer, have higher self-esteem, be less demanding, show more maturity, behave more independently, act more sociably with their fathers than boys from intact families did with

their fathers. Girls under the father custody arrangement, by contrast, were observed to be less warm, be more demanding, show less maturity, show lower self-esteem, act less sociably and be less conforming, and show less independence with their fathers than girls from intact families did with their fathers. On each of their observational measures the mean score for boys in father custody homes was higher than the means score for girls in father custody homes. The children's scores were reversed in mother custody homes.

Fathers used support systems (non-custodial parent, babysitters, relatives, daycare centers and friends) more than twice as much as custodial mothers. This difference was not attributable to differences in working vs. non-working parents. This finding contradicts a finding in the Gasser and Taylor study that found fathers hesitant to admit that they needed help and seek it.

In both types of custody situations total contact with additional caretakers was positively related to the child's warmth. There appears to be a relationship between the availability of support systems and children receiving higher quality adult involvement both from the additional caretakers and from the custodial parent whose resources are less depleted. It is also possible that children with more warmth and sociability would make better candidates for babysitting both because caretakers may be more willing to watch them and parents may feel more comfortable leaving them with caretakers. It is also possible that parents who fail to obtain help outside the family may feel more alienated, less warm, sociable and comforting themselves. The investigators suggest more research is needed to disentangle these relationships.

Regardless of custodial arrangement, a parenting style of warmth, clear setting of rules and regulations, and extensive verbal give-and-take (some of the main ingredients of authoritative parenting), was significantly associated with higher warmth, self-esteem, maturity, sociability, and social conformity in children. The correlation between authoritative parenting style and anger and demandingness in both types of custodial homes was significantly negative. It was also noted that authoritarian and liassez faire styles are more likely to be associated with a child's social incompetence than competence. Anger and lack of independence in their children was significantly correlated with the use of authoritarian parenting style by custodial fathers. Mothers who used laissez faire parenting style had children who rated as showing little warmth, high anger, high demandingness and little social conformity. There were no significant correlations between custodial fathers who used laissez faire style and the child's social behavior and likewise use of authoritarian style by mothers with custody and the child's social competence. The investigators concluded that authoritative parenting style appears to be associated with positive outcomes for children in social competence and therefore may be a more effective style of parenting for both mothers and fathers.

In conclusion the research on single fathers available today is but a handful of descriptive studies involving small numbers of subjects and in many cases with questionable generalizability. Systematic research is still needed to complete the picture of the single father family and the effect this lifestyle has on these men and their children.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

I will limit my sample to American-born, English speaking men who live in the South San Francisco Bay Area of Northern California. The sample will include men with physical custody and total parenting responsibilities for their children. In order to gather data about the single father role as primary parent, subjects will be chosen from households where the mother of the children has very limited or no contact with the children, and where no woman is in the residence unless she was hired to perform child care or housekeeping tasks. Subjects will have one to five children ranging in age from three to 19 years. Ages three to nineteen represent children with a wide range of parenting needs without dealing with the special needs of parenting the very young. At least five families will contain a daughter, in order to facilitate studying the father-daughter relationship. Finally, the subjects must have lived with the children and their mother, at one time, but have lost or been apart from the spouse for at least two years, but no longer than 8 years. By adding this criteria I hope to find subjects who have adjusted to this alternate life-style and who are not currently experiencing stress and separation anxiety related to the critical early period following a divorce or the death of a spouse. It is suspected that a separation of more than 8 years might interfere with the subject's ability to compare his parenting role before and after becoming a single parent.

Setting

Subjects will be interviewed in their homes, provided child care can be arranged to insure freedom from distractions. I will offer to help defray the cost of this child care, if necessary.

Plan for Obtaining Access to Subjects

I plan to advertise for subjects in the Newsletter of the Parents without Partners Association, (PWP), South Bay Chapter. At this time I don't anticipate any problems either with use of the Newsletter or with response of subjects from the PWP Association. The chapter president has given me permission to advertise for subjects in the Newsletter and has reassured me that there are ample numbers of single fathers in the organization who will meet my criteria. He also believes that members will enthusiastically participate in a research project such as this one. I will include the goals and criteria for participation in the study as well as my home telephone number and mailing address. Upon initial contact with the subjects I will review with them the criteria and procedures for participation in the study. Interviews will be arranged for ten volunteers who agree to participate. Volunteers will also be informed that signing a consent form will be required for participation in the study. (A sample consent form appears as Appendix B).

I am aware that choosing my subjects from a social organization like PWP might introduce bias. However, I see use of this club to obtain subjects who represent a small percentage of the general population as inexpensive and time saving, as well as providing a socially similar, homogeneous sample.

Data Collection

Subjects will be interviewed one time for a period of approximately two hours. Initially I will ask questions to obtain demographic information and background data on the subject. Subjects also will be questioned on the following range of topics: obtaining child care during work hours, child's health care and illness care, child's emotional, behavioral and discipline problems, child's schooling and relations with teachers, household chores, recreational activities, relationships or problems with child vs. sibs, peers, other important persons, social support network of the family, and juggling priorities, such as work, child care, and social life. (A copy of the interview is included as Appendix B).

While I have found that parents enjoy talking about their experiences raising their children, subjects may have difficulty finding time in their busy schedule for the interview. I will attempt to be as flexible as possible when arranging the interview in order to accommodate their schedule and time constraints. If necessary, splitting the interview into two sessions could be attempted.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed by extracting the common themes elicited during the interview session. These common themes will be discussed by comparing and contrasting them with those themes analyzed in the current literature on single fathers.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Demographic Data

The sample was composed of eleven single fathers who had physical custody and primary parenting responsibility for their children. Twenty-two children ranging in age from nine to nineteen years with an average age of 12.7 years were being raised by the subjects. Four families had two children; four families had one child; two families had three children and one family had four children. The single fathers ranged in age from 31 to 49 years with an average age of 40.09 years. Eight of the men were divorced and three were widowed. They had been single parenting an average of 4.86 years with a range from 2 to 8 years. Of the divorced men three assented to custody; two gained custody after lengthy court battles with their former spouses; and three gained custody by mutual agreement with their former spouses. All the men were high school graduates; six completed some college; one had a Bachelor's degree and three had Master's degrees. All worked full time. None were self-employed. The income levels of 9 of the subjects were in the $20,000 to $40,000 per year range; one subject earned between $40,000 to $60,000 per year; and one subject earned over $60,000 per year. Three subjects rented and eight owned their own homes. All owned at least one automobile. All the subjects were American born; two were oriental and nine were caucasian. All the subjects lived with the mother of the children prior to the divorce or death of the spouse. The length of the marriages ranged from 7.5 to 22 years with an average of 12 years.

Household Management

Seven of the subjects classified their marriages as the traditional type where their wives had assumed responsibility for household management and childcare. Four of the subjects had either shared responsibility with their wives for these tasks or had assumed the majority of the responsibility themselves. Regardless of the situation during the marriage, within eighteen months to two years after separation from the spouse all the subjects not only had adjusted to the change in role but also had successfully assumed full responsibility for these tasks. None of the men felt that assumption of these typically female roles was demeaning or threatening to their male self-image. They admitted that while some of the household tasks were boring and they would gladly give them up if they ever remarried, they were proud of themselves for having risen to the occasion and they enjoyed the feeling of independence. Three of the men wanted to be completely independent from any need for a woman. They perfected additional skills such as sewing or growing and canning their own fruits and vegetables. They said they wanted to prove to themselves they could do anything a woman could do and do it just as well.

The men experienced varying degrees of difficulty learning household tasks. Some are better cooks than others; all had some initial problems with laundry and establishing a routine. Some had never budgeted household money, paid the monthly bills or shopped for groceries. After an initial period of trial and error some degree of mastery was attained and no household task was labeled "difficult". The men assigned certain chores to their children more to instill responsibility than to receive help.

To ensure their children a carefree childhood ten of the men assumed the majority of the household chores. They felt their children had already experienced enough upheaval and disappointment without taking them away from time with their friends to complete daily household chores. For example, one man arrived home too late each evening to have time to prepare dinner, he reported that he paid his oldest daughter to start dinner but he believed it was unfair to expect her to cook every evening. He solved this problem by taking the family out to eat one or two times during the week and by doing the cooking himself on weekends. Another man whose only child, a girl, turned fifteen recently decided it might be time for her to learn to cook, do the laundry and clean house. He has begun encouraging her for the first time in seven years to help him around the house. Although he came from a traditional marriage and had to learn to do household chores after his divorce, he felt strongly about providing a home for his daughter where she could remain a child and not be used as a fill-in housekeeper in his ex- wife's absence.

Career vs Childcare

Each of the single fathers in the study stated that the focus of his life is his children. Prior to becoming single parents a majority of the fathers said the focus of their life was their career. After becoming a single parent each man came to the realization that he was solely responsible for his children's well-being. This sobering thought resulted in decisions like getting off the "career ladder," passing up overtime and negotiating for jobs that involved minimal travel and after-hour responsibility. Of course, with these decisions came the reality that the single fathers were often passed over for promotions

and pay raises. For example, after the death of his wife, one single father gave up a prestigious, executive position which had taken him years to obtain because the job involved extensive travel outside the country. He found a position that permitted him to be at home with his young son as much as possible. He said he did not regret this decision because his family life gives him much satisfaction and happiness. He believes that the change in his priorities has benefited him in ways he never thought possible.

Rewards of Single-Parent Lifestyle

When asked what reward might compensate for this demanding lifestyle all the men said seeing their children mature into responsible, happy adults. Any sacrifice in terms of their own social life, career advancement or love relationship with a woman would be worth making if their children benefited. The fathers in this study felt that their children's happiness and success was key to their own sense of fulfillment.

Illness Care - Health Care

Care of their children during illness was an area eight of the men experienced difficulty with at first. Having no preparation for this role they felt very uncomfortable and had no skill in assessing what to do for their child or when to take the child to a doctor. Two men expressed initial difficulty holding and comforting their child during illness because the role of the nurturing parent was new and did not agree with how they perceived their past role as a father. Both men have since changed their parenting style because they wanted to meet their children's need to be held and comforted. In contrast, nine of the fathers found comforting, holding and cuddling their children a

natural response that had always been part of their parenting style. After an initial awkward period all the fathers reported feeling comfortable providing illness and health care for their children. The men stated if they err at all now they are guilty of waiting too long to take the child to a physician. They don't believe in pampering their children or encouraging them to use illness to stay home from school or get out of unpleasant obligations.

None of the men reported having difficulty obtaining time away from work to take their children for medical or dental appointments or to stay home with the child during illness. All but one man said his boss was sympathetic to his problems as a single parent. This man had no one else to care for his daughter when she was ill. The day care center where she was supervised while he worked did not provide care for sick children. This man's company allowed him to stay home when his child was ill only if he used one of his vacation days. He could not use one of his paid sick days. He felt strongly that his vacation days were to be used for recreational purpose rather than to care for a sick child. Consequently, he allowed his daughter very few occasions to be home sick. Sniffles, headaches or mental health days did not qualify. He felt that his boss was unreasonable in refusing him use of his paid sick time when his daughter was ill. He felt his single father status received no consideration from his boss.

Some of the fathers allowed an older child to stay home with a younger one who was ill rather than miss a day at work. One man who had several young children expressed great difficulty finding adequate childcare when a child was ill. He said when his children were young they were often sick and passed the illness from one to another. It

seemed that one of the children was always ill and he could not take that much time off work. For years obtaining sick child care for his four young children was a major problem. One father has decided to hire a woman to live in his home to provide childcare in his absence. This man has few resources as his family lives out of state and his friends also work during the day. Because he must leave town once a month on business, he is constantly having childcare problems. He hopes a relationship will develop between this woman and his daughters that will help meet their need for a female role model. Their mother died two years ago.

Childcare

Childcare in general continues to be a problem for three of the single fathers. These men have limited resources in family, friends or neighbors who are home during the day and willing to care for the children. They are constantly scrambling to solve childcare problems. It is also a major expense. One father of four children reported paying $500 a month for childcare.

Eight of the fathers reported no current problems with childcare. These men all had children over twelve years of age who were supervising themselves or had an older child who supervised younger siblings. Some of these men who were single parents when their children were much younger reported difficulties finding adequate, convenient childcare during those earlier years. However, at least four of these eight fathers reported having no childcare problems at any time. Two fathers had concerned neighbors who volunteered to take care of the children whenever the fathers needed help. These arrangements have continued successfully for more than four years in each case. Another man moved

in with his mother-in-law the first year after separating from his wife. This year gave him the time he needed to find a house and childcare arrangements near where he worked. Further, he had time to adjust emotionally from the divorce before assuming all the responsibilities of parenting alone.

Most of the fathers with young children tried to find childcare close to home. With this arrangement the children could remain in the same school and keep the same playmates. The fathers believed it was important to disrupt the children's routine as little as possible. In some cases where both parents worked during the marriage, the children continued in that same childcare arrangement.

Initially the mothers of two of the widowers moved into their homes to care for their children and lend support during the early period of adjustment. Both men tolerated the live-in situation longer than they needed the support due to concern for their mothers' feelings. Within two years these arrangements ended because the men preferred to be on their own and independent.

Because paid childcare is expensive, difficult to obtain and a constant source of concern all the men encouraged their children to try supervising themselves as soon as the child was willing and considered able. This age ranged from eight to seventeen years with an average of twelve years for the first attempt at self supervision and/or supervision of younger siblings while the father was working. Nine of the men believed their children did a good job supervising themselves and their siblings. The men all expressed a desire to encourage the traits of self-sufficiency and competence in their children. They believed the children would benefit from this chance to be independent, and they said

their children preferred their own home to a sitter's. One father said his son received 1½ hours more sleep in the morning by getting himself off to school at 8:00 am instead of going to a sitter's home at 6:30 am when the father left for work. Of the twenty children in the study only two were still receiving childcare during the father's work hours. These two children were both ten years old and were cared for in a neighbor's home while their fathers were at work.

The children supervising themselves had access to their fathers by telephone for emergencies or advice. The men felt comfortable with the arrangement for a variety of reasons. Some worked nearby and could be home quickly in an emergency. Some were salesmen or out in the field during work hours and could check on the children periodically at home as they made their rounds. Three men had electronic "beepers" for the children to use to reach them when they couldn't be near a phone. Many of the fathers made arrangements with neighbors who were willing to help out in emergencies until the father could get home. Three families had grandparents who lived nearby and were available if the children needed them.

Father's Social Life

Childcare for recreational activities and evenings also included children supervising themselves for eight of the fathers. Three of the fathers hired sitters or used family to care for the children while they dated, attended a night class, or spent one evening a week in an exercise program, or attended a club meeting etc. Social life for all the fathers was limited and for three of the men minimal due to both lack of time, and a concern that their children would be left alone additional

hours. The men expressed concern that they saw little enough of their children without also being away evenings.

The men all said that a one to one relationship with a woman was difficult to establish because of the numerous other demands on their time and energy. Despite definitely wanting to marry again three of the fathers reported difficulty finding a woman who wanted a relationship with a man with children. This situation made them feel angry and discriminated against. They believed the problem stemmed from the current trend for women either not to marry or not to have children if they do get married. The men believed that a man with children was definitely off limits to these modern women. Further, divorced or widowed women with children do not necessarily want to have a man in their life who also has children. The TV exploits of the Brady Bunch don't seem very feasible outside of Hollywood. (In this program a widower with three sons marries a widow with three daughters).

Two men reported having no difficulty finding a variety of women to date casually, but again, finding a quality relationship with a special woman was more difficult. At the time he was interviewed one father reported he had just ended a serious live-together relationship with a woman he loved very much. He said that although the relationship did not end due to conflicts over the children, their differences of opinion regarding his children may have contributed to the problems they experienced.

Four men stated they dated infrequently because they simply did not have the time, desire, money and/or energy to do so. These men believed there would be adequate time for a full social life when their children were older or fully grown.

All the men were very selective about the kind of woman they allowed their children to meet. Casual dates were usually not invited to their homes. Only women known for a period of time and who had become important to the men were included in family activities or invited to the home. In only one case was the child's feelings about the woman not considered. This single father believed his daughter should have little to say about his choices. He also attempted to keep his dating life and his home life separate. All the other single fathers considered their children's feelings about the women they dated. Two fathers ended serious relationships with women at least once because their children did not get along with the women.

To some degree all the men experienced competition between their dates and their children. No matter how they arranged things someone felt left out. Most of the men preferred activities that included the children at least a part of the time. However, they expressed difficulty finding women to date who would include the children in activities and not insist on seeing the single father alone. Friction often resulted when the fathers attempted to put their children's needs first.

All the men expressed a desire to marry again. None would marry to obtain help raising the children or help completing household chores. All stated they would marry again for love and companionship. None of the men would ask any woman to take over responsibility for raising their children.

Mother - Child Visitation

Only one of the eight divorced fathers thought his child's visitation with his mother was adequate. This child had begun to visit his mother, who lived 800 miles away, for two months in the summer. It

was hoped this lengthy visit would become a yearly routine. The single father believed that a two month visit was long enough for the child to settle into life with his mother and the necessary adjustments that would require yet short enough to facilitate re-adjustment to the rules and routine after returning home. For the first time in seven years, his ex-wife wanted more time with the child. However, the father would not agree with the mother's request for an arrangement of six months with her and six months with him. He felt that after seven years together he and his child had established a secure homelife and six months of separation would be very distressing for both himself and his child.

The seven remaining divorced fathers said visitation was sporadic, unpredictable and usually at the whim of the mother. All the fathers said they would welcome more involvement by the mothers in the children's lives. The fathers of daughters expressed this wish even more strongly than the fathers of sons. Four of the mothers lived more than 800 miles away. One mother of four children had remarried and with her second husband had five more children. Both distance and new obligations since the divorce made visitation for these mothers more complicated. Four of the divorced men would welcome a co-parenting arrangement with their ex-wives. These men expressed anger about their ex-wives' total lack of involvement and responsibility for their children on a regular basis even though these four mothers lived nearby. The men said the children missed their mothers and would probably never understand why their mothers didn't see them more often. Further, they felt it was time the mothers started sharing responsibility for the children because the fathers felt they were entitled to a break. None

of the fathers would consider relinquishing custody but they would welcome more help from their ex-wives.

The divorced fathers believed that basically visits with the mother were beneficial for the children. They reported that sometimes the children enjoyed the visits but sometimes they came home depressed and unhappy.

The divorced fathers all reported their children experienced an adjustment period following a visit with their mothers. During this period the children acted tearful and depressed or angry and aggressive. During this period they also tested their fathers about long-established rules and were generally hard to handle. After a short period of time the children usually settled down into more familiar behavior patterns. The fathers reported separation from the mother seemed harder on younger children than adolescents. One father, however, reported his nineteen year old still had difficulty adjusting five years after her mother moved out. His daughter frequently remarked, "Mom is never here when I need her."

Father - Daughter Relationships

When questioned about the father-daughter relationship only two of the eight fathers with daughters admitted to ongoing friction in that relationship. These two men also had sons but they reported the relationship with their sons flowed easier and seemed less stressful. One of the men related a scenario of constant upheaval in his home created by the daughter. He said he constantly needed to discipline her because she never let up. He felt the only peaceful times in the home occurred when the daughter was staying with a friend or grandparent for the weekend. Another father remembers recently explaining to his son that

he needed to devote most of his energy to the boy's sister and he hoped his son understood. His 17 year old daughter was constantly testing him and the limits he had set as well as asserting her independence. His son said he understood and that he didn't feel cheated of his father's attention. Comments like "girls are harder to raise" and "boys just raise themselves" were mentioned by some of the fathers of daughters during the interviews.

Conversely two of the subjects said they preferred raising daughters. One subject had three daughters and another subject had two daughters. Neither of the men had sons. In one family friction existed between the father and his eldest daughter but he enjoyed a smooth relationship with his two younger daughters. In the other family friction existed between the younger daughter and the father, while the older daughter enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the father. These men attributed the differences in the relationships to personality rather than gender. These men felt they experienced no special problems raising daughters alone. Whatever situational problems they had could be resolved.

Six of the men noticed differences in raising sons vs. daughters but none expressed major problems with the girls. One man said he was easier on his daughter, "You just can't yell at a little girl like you can an adolescent boy."

All the men expressed difficulty discussing sex education and personal hygiene with their daughters. Some relied on women family members, friends, school sex education classes, and in at least three cases they relied on the ex-spouse to provide their daughters with this information.

Four men who wanted their daughters to become assertive, self-sufficient women were concerned that the girls seemed to have very traditional ideas about women's roles. These girls refused to take responsibility for themselves as women, the men reported. Each daughter expressed a desire to find the right man who would marry her and take care of her. One father expressed concern that his 17 year old daughter seemed to become whatever her current boyfriend wanted her to become. She seemed to have no mind of her own. Her behavior was most distressing to this man because he had always supported the Women's Movement and had worked toward passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

One man, whose ex-wife spent very little time with their daughter, uses the Big Sisters Organization to provide a role model for his daughter. He found this solution to be very workable. He encourages his daughter and her Big Sister to have a relationship completely independent of him. His daughter truly enjoys these weekly outings and seems to gain much from this relationship.

All the men, but one, reported enjoying warm, affectionate relationships with their daughters. They had no difficulty being openly affectionate with them. The single exception was a father who wasn't demonstrative with either his sons or his daughter. "It's just not my way," he said. He also believed that if encouraged, his daughter might use feminine "wiles" to manipulate him. He felt he had better control of her if he kept her at a distance. He also observed that this daughter seemed to have greater need for physical affection than his sons. Because he felt uncomfortable giving her affection he rarely did. He believes he demonstrates his love for her by protecting her, taking her places and doing things for her.

None of the men seemed overly concerned that their daughters might suffer damage to their personality development because they were raised without role modeling from their mothers. The fathers all related conversations with their daughters that revealed the love the daughters said they felt for their fathers and the appreciation of the good job the fathers were doing as parents. The men believed the girls received adequate input on "women's ways" and femininity from the mothers of peers, family members, neighbors, teachers, TV and magazines. Peer influence was also felt to be a strong factor.

Communication and Discipline Style

Ten of the subjects reported an open communication style between themselves and their children. That is, a style characterized by much verbal give and take. They often sounded out ideas or concerns with the children in order to obtain the children's opinions. These opinions were valued by the fathers. The subjects rarely used corporal punishment when disciplining their children. Lectures, withholding favors or using rewards and praise to encourage good behavior were the alternatives chosen. The fathers described their relationships with their children as companionate, affectionate, honest and predictable. The fathers' beliefs about important issues or small concerns were well understood by the children and frequently discussed in the home. The men believed in consistent rules and regulations and in firm but fair limit setting. Few of the men believed in punishments that lasted beyond a few days. They talked about the difficulty of carrying out both the disciplinarian role and the nurturing role simultaneously. Additionally, they related that long punishments inevitably resulted in punishment of the fathers because they were deprived of their children's

presence, companionship and conversation. They found limit setting and punishment of their children a very challenging aspect of parenting. Because of the closeness in the parent-child relationship the men expressed feeling deeply hurt when their children deceived them or disobeyed a house rule about which they felt strongly.

Only one father described a household where clearly defined parent-child roles were maintained. He classified himself as an authoratarian in discipline style and that he dominated his daughter and controlled all decision-making with little or no input from her.

Involvement In School Activities

All the subjects felt they had rapport with their children's school teachers. Only one father was actively involved at his children's school. He was recently elected to the PTA board. He related how the women members of the board appreciated his male viewpoint and his active participation. He said he enjoyed the experience. Six of the fathers attended their children's school programs, parent-teacher conferences and evaluations regularly. They usually went during the lunch hour or took off early from work and made up the time the next day. Two of the single fathers spoke by phone occasionally to the school teacher regarding their children but rarely could find the time to attend school functions or meet the teachers personally. These two men placed school involvement as a low priority but neither man had children experiencing any difficulty in school. Both said their approach would change if their children started experiencing problems at school.

None of the subjects felt their children were discriminated against because they were from single parent families. One father related how

his child's teacher gave testimony during the custody hearing that proved very beneficial to his case for obtaining custody of his child.

Restructuring the Family Unit

When asked what was the most important influence in motivating the single parent initially to carry on and rebuild, the men said they pulled themselves together for the sake of their children. Family, friends, professional help, pride were also mentioned but not as key to their recovery effort as their children. They described a feeling of pulling together as a family. One father said even the youngest child helped, his two year old noticeably didn't cry as much. For the family to survive they needed to work together. Many of the men remember emotional conversations with their children initially where they declared "we are a team now," or "we must all help each other." The men reported receiving a great deal of support and cooperation from their children. One man reported that his 17 year old daughter, aware that her mother left him for another man, gave him permission to begin dating. She said "It wasn't fair what Mom did, Dad. You should go out and find another woman to love you. You deserve happiness too." This man believed his daughter showed great maturity for her age, especially under such stressful circumstances. He was very moved by her compassion and encouragement at a time when he was emotionally devastated.

All the men believed their children to be more mature and competent than their peers from two-parent families. Further, their children have stated a preference for the communication and discipline styles established in their homes. They have observed two-parent families where there are fewer opportunities for the children to express their opinions or hear the rationale used for decisions made by their parents. The

children complain to their fathers about their dislike for having to assume responsibility for themselves and/or their siblings. However, they enjoy the opportunity to participate actively with their parent in making decisions and plans for the family. They also appreciate the special, close relationship they enjoy with their parent. Some of the older children also have indicated that they feel closer to their father now than they felt to their parent during the marriage. The children whose mothers have died, while expressing a deep love and appreciation for their fathers, also intermittantly related an intense longing for their mothers. The children whose parents were divorced were less verbal about the feelings they had for their mothers. The men usually did not try to draw them out. Often the fathers said "if the child wanted to talk about it he would."

Family Recreation

All the subjects enjoyed various kinds of recreation with their children both inside and outside the home. Six of the families enjoyed family activities sponsored by a single parent organization. The parents and the children also found separate recreational activities through this club. All the subjects reported participation in more family-centered activities currently than when they were married. They had no explanation for this change, except that perhaps plans were more spontaneous now because there is no need to discuss or compromise with the spouse.

Six of the subjects had coached a soccer or Little League team in which their child participated. None of the men continued coaching more than one year because of the afternoon and weekend commitment required.

All of the fathers realized the importance of satisfying their need for solitude, and stress reduction. Two of the fathers were runners, one did trick water skiing and one played raquetball regularly. Four of the men had strict rules about bedtime for their children that allowed a few hours of solitude each evening for themselves. They read, relaxed, watched TV or talked with friends on the phone during this time. One father saw a professional counselor regularly. Another attended a meditation class to facilitate his ability to relax. Four belonged to a singles' group and attended social activities on Friday or Saturday evenings.

Challenge of Single Parent Lifestyle

The subjects all stated the challenge of their lifestyle was deftly juggling all their priorities well enough to enable growth and happiness for the children and themselves. One of the fathers said, "It's trying to give the kids what they need while trying to still have the time and space to give myself what I need. It's striking a balance between their needs and mine. . . maintaining a balance without being a martyr."

Never having enough time and frequently feeling tired were complaints expressed by most of the men. Initially many of the fathers threw themselves into single-parenting determined to meet every need and complete every task. After varying lengths of time each man came to the conclusion that it was not possible to do everything demanded of him. Six of the men recalled emotional reactions initially that made them want to prove they could parent as well as any woman. All the subjects said that they believed men could parent as well as women.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Given the tradition in our society of the mother as the primary parent it was surprising to find the ease and effectiveness with which the fathers in this study assumed the primary parenting role. Little evidence of role strain or problems with adjustment to being the primary parent was found. The ease of transition for fathers as primary parents was also a finding of Orthner and others. Both the current study and the Orthner study included subjects from a high socioeconomic level. Whether these findings could be replicated focusing on a group of fathers from a lower socioeconomic level is not known.

Because of the predicted higher financial status of the men, it was expected that they might fare better than the women in assuming the many roles of single parenthood. This higher status makes available to the men many alternatives for problem-solving that are not available to women who are more likely to be from a lower socioeconomic group. In 1976 one out of three single-parent families headed by women were living below the officially defined poverty level (Johnson, 1978). Families headed by women were also more likely to live in central cities, to rent rather than own their homes, and to reside in public housing. In contrast, only one out of nine families headed by a man, without a wife present, was living below the poverty level. In 1981 it was estimated by the National Organization Of Women that a woman earns $.56 for every $1.00 a man earns, even when the woman does a job of comparable worth.

It may be that the woman's take over of the role of satisfying the single parent family's financial needs is a more difficult task than

the single father's assumption of the primary parenting role. This is especially true if the single mother has no marketable skills. It would certainly seem that the subjects in the current study described their lifestyle as satisfactory and fulfilling many more times than their female counterparts reported in earlier studies of woman-headed single-parent families. In these earlier studies, secondary to their financial problems, the women described lifestyles that were more problematic and at times overwhelming (Brandwein, Brown, and Fox 1974; Friedman, 1978; Weiss, 1981).

Divorced single mothers not only lose income but also status. Single divorced fathers, while rarely receiving alimony, lose less income and retain their status in the community after divorce. Society is slowly changing in its assessment of a woman's status by beginning to judge some women by their own accomplishments and not as extensions of their husbands and fathers. However, society continues to judge the status of most women as an extension of the man in her life. Single mothers often have no financial power and status because they have no husband. Conversely following a divorce, single fathers continue to maintain their status and recognition in the community much as they did when they were married.

A secure financial status seems to be positively associated with a successfully functioning single parent family. Role overload and feelings of being overwhelmed are less likely to occur when the single parent has the financial resources to obtain help. Further, the single parent whose energy is not depleted can better parent his or her children. It would seem at this juncture that the single fathers have more opportunity to provide a secure financial homelife for their

children. Certainly it appears to require less effort than it does for the single mothers.

The method used to obtain custody and the father's perception of success at single parenting did not prove to be strongly related. All the men in the current study whether they assented to custody, sought custody legally through the courts or were widowed, perceived the quality of their single parenting as above average. In contrast, earlier studies had observed fathers who sought custody legally as rating their parent-child relationships as more positive than fathers who assented to custody when their ex spouse left the children in their care (Hanson, 1979; Gasser and Taylor, 1979; Mendes, 1979). Further, in these earlier studies, fathers who assented to custody were found to be overwhelmed with the numerous responsibilities of the single-parent lifestyle. Gasser and Taylor also found widowers to be overwhelmed with the single-parent lifestyle, in contrast to the divorced men in that study who seemed to be spurred on to prove that men could raise children as well as women. The divorced fathers in the Gasser and Taylor study presented their home situation as in control and running smoothly. Because no socioeconomic data were given in the Gasser and Taylor study it is difficult to know if those factors contributed to the feelings of being overwhelmed experienced by the widowers. For this reason it is also not possible to compare the widowers in the current study who perceived themselves as very capable with the widowers in the Gasser and Taylor study.

The men who rated their lifestyle highly satisfactory also seemed to have the largest network of social support including close friends, family and neighbors. With one exception, the men said they enjoyed

their single-parent lifestyle and five men said they were in no hurry to marry again. One man rated his lifestyle as only tolerable. This subject had minimal family contact and only a few friends who were available to offer verbal support and encouragement. Further, his ex-wife was not a reliable source of assistance with childcare. In an effort to deal more effectively with his feelings and to gain emotional support he used a professional counselor. He also provided counseling for his child. The counseling was not family-centered and they each saw different counselors. This father also found it difficult to show affection to his child or to share confidences. He appeared to be the most socially isolated and distressed of all the subjects in the study.

A wide circle of supportive family and friends seemed to be positively associated with a smooth transition into the restructured family unit and for the adjustment of the adult to single-parenting. Earlier studies also found this positive correlation between a good social support network and adjustment to single parenting (Santrock and Warshak, 1979; Weiss, 1980).

Another factor affecting the smooth transition of the single parent family is a continued relationship with the non-custodial parent and the children. With only one exception the children in this study whose parents were divorced, had contact with their mothers on a sporadic, unpredictable basis. One child was beginning to visit his mother regularly for a two month period every summer. The other seven divorced fathers also encourage very open visitation privileges between their ex-wives and their children. However, four of the mothers lived some distance away. Their children were permitted long distance phone calls whenever they needed to talk with their mothers, but visits were limited

due to distance. The remaining four mothers who lived near their children appeared unwilling or unable to establish regular, predictable visits. The reasons for the mothers' unwillingness to share parenting responsibilities were not always clearly understood by the fathers. The men believed their children to be hurt by their mother's lack of involvement. Although all the families in the study appeared to have made a smooth transition and appeared adjusted to the single-parent family lifestyle, it is unknown how much the children's personality development and feelings of self-worth were negatively influenced by the knowledge that their mother was in the area but not available to them when they needed her. Further research on the affect of child growth and personality development for children reared under circumstances like the children from these four families would be beneficial. Both single fathers and professionals who work with single fathers and their families could use this information to help children deal with their possible feelings of rejection. It is also true that children whose mothers have died can feel abandoned and rejected and can have many emotional problems to work out. Research has been done with children in these circumstances and professionals are aware of the anger and depression these children can feel. However, little is known about the possible deep, psychic pain that may be felt by children whose mothers are living and only superficially involved in their lives. This overtly rejecting behavior on the part of their mothers may lead to emotional problems that these children may have difficulty working out alone. It may be that a loving, concerned father can compensate for the loss of an involved relationship with the child's mother. More research needs to be done to fully answer these questions.

Prior to completion of the study a supposition about single fathers as primary parents was that they probably assumed the primary parenting role during the marriage as well. Further, it was assumed that the father as primary parent during the marriage was most likely to occur in cases where the mother was only minimally involved with the children after the divorce. While three of the eight divorced fathers described strong co-parenting activities with their ex spouse during the marriage in no case did any of the fathers describe himself as the primary parent. Lack of involvement with the children by the mother after the divorce was not related to a pattern of previous lack of involvement during the marriage. In all cases the mothers were reported to have been the primary parents or strong co-parents during the marriage.

In the majority of the families with daughters the father-daughter relationship posed no special problems. Even though the fathers said that boys seemed easier to raise in some cases, and they also related specific instances of conflict with their daughters, they did not describe feelings of being handicapped because they were raising daughters alone. On the contrary, they described relationships with their daughters that were working and mutually rewarding. It is not possible to assess both sides of a relationship when only interviewing one party. It is also impossible to know how much the fathers' desire to defend their image as a successful parent influenced their description of a positive relationship between themselves and their daughters.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the importance of the child's ability to identify with the same sex parent. With emphasis on the behavioral aspects of the modeling process, this emphasis is continued by social learning theory. A parent may know how to interact

more effectively and feel more comfortable with a child who is the same sex. Additionally, an opposite sex child may physically remind the parent of the former spouse. Whether the memory of the spouse is happy or disturbing, interactions between the parent and the child may be triggered by these memories and not by a true response to the child's own unique personality. The opposite sex child may also at times represent a substitute for the now absent spouse. Weiss, in his extensive research on single-parent families found that most opposite sex parent-child relationships were problematic. Based on these perspectives, it was predicted that the father-daughter relationship would prove to be somewhat difficult. It was surprising to hear the fathers have so few negative comments to make about their relationships with their daughters. Of course, this finding may be a result of the small sample size rather than a true reflection of the typical father-daughter relationship in single parent families where a mother is not present.

In describing the unique family function within the single-parent household Weiss spoke about the role of the children in assuming, or being assigned, many of the household chores in order to assist the overburdened single-parent. In contrast the fathers in the current study assumed a major portion of the household tasks themselves in order to guarantee their children as carefree a childhood as possible. It was expected before beginning the study that the fathers would welcome help from their children, especially their daughters, in completing household tasks. Since men typically do not assume this role during a marriage it seemed unlikely that they would willingly take over these tasks when single parenting. However, after completing the interviews this expectation had little support.

The men did expect increased independence and autonomy from their children. When they were assigned chores to complete the fathers said it was more to benefit their learning of survival skills than to benefit the father. Further, the fathers encourage their children to supervise themselves and their siblings at an early age. This last finding concurred with Weiss's observations. An interesting finding was the men's expression of increased feelings of protectiveness toward their children since becoming single parents while at the same time expecting more independence from their children than they did during the marriage. The fathers believed that their children could master the increased levels of independence if they knew they could reach their father or another reliable adult in an emergency. Another common theme was the fathers' desire to instill a sense of trust in their children that they would be there whenever the children needed them. Further, the fathers all believed their children had already suffered many disappointments in life and each father was committed to do whatever was necessary to eliminate the chance of further disappointment for his children.

A definite blurring of roles existed in the single-parent families that were studied, with the exception of one father who insisted that clearly defined parent-child roles be enforced. Role-reversal was also common in all but the one family. Weiss and other early researchers described parent-child relationships that were more peer-like, companion-like and mutually supportive. These types of relationships were clearly described by the fathers in this study as well.

The practice of open communication, authoritative parenting style and the mutual responsiveness and reliance described by Weiss as typical

in the single parent family was also noted in the current study. The "pulling together," and working as a team, in addition to the collapse of the "eschelon" structure, described by Weiss, were other common themes in this study. With this new feeling of common purpose most of the men believed the interactions with their children to be closer and more mutually beneficial. In fact, in most cases the men preferred the current parent-child relationship to the one that existed during the marriage.

Two areas that consistently gave the single fathers difficulty were disciplining the children and establishing a satisfactory relationship with a woman. It would appear that these two problems might be related because in many ways the men looked to their children for companionship. Weiss, in describing the structure of the single-parent family, noted this difference in the parent-child relationship when compared to two-parent families. In the absence of the spouse the single parent often seeks companionship from the children. This situation works well until the parent must step back into the parent role to discipline the child. It is a challenge to simultaneously fill the role of nurturer and disciplinarian, not to mention the role of companion. Further the fathers in this study preferred to spend much of their spare time with their children. They wanted this closeness not only to be able to supervise and influence the child but also to acquire that sense of family that was important to these fathers. Time for their own social life and a relationship with a woman, though desirable to the fathers, was clearly given a back seat to the relationship with their children. It would take a very understanding woman, indeed, to accept these terms.

Because most of the men had children entering mid-adolescence one could foresee a time in the near future when the children would begin to spend increasing lengths of time outside the home with their peers. At this time the fathers might allow themselves more freedom to date. The unknown factor is whether the men would choose to become more socially active, given the changing circumstances at home, or begin to experience feelings ascribed to the "empty nest syndrome". Certainly the feelings of increased closeness, companionship and responsiveness experienced by the fathers and their children might be difficult for the fathers to give up as the children began to spend less time at home in preparation for adulthood.

Another common theme that each father discussed was the wish that his family could blend into the community and not pose any special problems or be labelled different or handicapped in any way. They believed this sharing in the community and a sense of acceptance was important for the continued growth and development of their family.

Implications For Nursing

No other family constellation is currently growing as fast as the single parent family. It is time that nursing education acknowledge this unique family structure and include content on single parent families in nursing curriculum. Moving beyond the early literature which focused on the problems of the single parent family and supported the belief that this lifestyles was deleterious, nursing educators need to include discussion about the many single parents who are coping successfully while rearing their children without a co-parent. Our effectiveness in working with these families is limited without knowledge of these current data.

Single parent families are not a homogeneous group. Men are now successfully challenging previously held beliefs that only mothers could nurture and provide primary parenting. The study reported here indicates that single fathers want to be acknowledged as caring, capable and effective primary parents.

A clear understanding of the single father's lifestyle and his parenting role is necessary for precise needs assessment and the subsequent formation of strategies for intervention. This is relevant both for the Family Nurse Practitioner and for other professionals who work with families.

The Nurse Practitioner may offer encouragement and support to the new single parent as he or she attempts to cope initially with energy depletion and role overload. Setting priorities and problem-solving can be very difficult for these adults experiencing the initial period following the death or divorce of a spouse. Family-centered counseling may be very useful at this time to facilitate the rebuilding of the single-parent family.

Single parent fathers may also have few interested adults with whom they can share concerns about situational problems with their children. The Nurse Practitioner (NP) should be alert to the possibility of this type of client need when assessing a single father and his family. The NP can become a resource person for the single father as well as a supportive, concerned listener.

Nurse Practitioners should be aware that new single parent fathers may have minimal experience with care of the sick child. These fathers may require additional teaching and support as they assume this new responsibility. By carefully developing a non-threatening relationship the

NP may help the father feel more comfortable asking questions and revealing his inexperience and concerns.

School Nurses should be alert to the special needs of children from single-parent families. Girls who are uncomfortable discussing personal hygiene and sex education with their fathers may welcome discussion of these subjects with the nurse. Building a relationship with these children could also serve to meet their need for a same-sex role model or contact with a concerned adult outside the family. Issues and feelings around the loss of the child's mother and the subsequent change in his/her family constellation can be discussed and appropriate support given.

There are real problems to be met rearing children alone. However, these problems are not insurmountable and every single parent deserves support and encouragement. He or she also deserves to know that the struggle can be successful.

Future Research

A study of single fathers from lower socioeconomic groups would allow us to know more about whether the perception of successful single parenting is influenced by financial security or the lack of it. There seems to be a relationship between problematic parenting experiences and low income for single mothers. Because the majority of the studies on single fathers, including the current study, describe men from high socioeconomic groups we have little data about this relationship in the single father experience.

Some of the fathers in this study expressed concern about how their children would be affected by the limited, sporadic relationship the children had with their mothers. The men believed the children were

hurt and disappointed by their mothers' lack of concern for them. A relationship with a caring, concerned father may compensate for the loss of a satisfactory relationship with a child's mother. It may also help ameliorate the child's feelings of rejection. More research is needed to answer these questions.

The father-daughter relationship, while being special and in many ways beneficial, may have some unique problems. More research needs to be done focusing on fathers raising daughters alone to better understand this unusual parenting situation.

Conclusion

This has been a descriptive study involving open-ended interviews with eleven single fathers who have physical custody and primary parenting responsibility for their children. An attempt was made to find out more about the lifestyle of the single father, his role, parenting experiences, and whether he finds his role or responsibility different from when he was married. The findings are limited in their generalizability because the subjects are all from a high socioeconomic level, and because of the small sample size.

The single fathers in this study described a family life that was characterized by love, responsibility, consistency, dedication and sacrifice. No relationship with a woman, career accomplishment or recreational pursuit gave as much reward as successful parenting.

These single fathers were fiercely independent. They were proud of their children and proud of their accomplishments as primary parents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biller, H.B. Father absence and the personality development of the male child. Developmental Psychology, 1970, 2, 181-201.

Brandwein, R.A. and Brown, C.A. and Fox, E.M. Women and children last: the social situation of divorced mothers and their families. Journal of Marriage and Family 1974. 32 (3), 498-514.

Friedman, M.M. Family Nursing Theory and Assessment. Boston: Little-Brown. 1978.

Gasser, R.S. and Taylor, C.M. Role adjustment of single parent fathers with dependent children. The Family Coordinator. 1976. 25 (10), 397-401.

Herzog, S. Single custodial fathers and the parent-child relationship. Nursing Research. 1981. 30 (4), 202-204.

Herzog, E. and Sudia, C.E. Fatherless homes. Children, 1968, (15), 177-182.

Herzog, E. and Sudia, C.E. Children in fatherless homes. Caldwell B.M. Ricutti, H.N. (eds.): Review of Child Development Research, Vol. 3 Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Hetherington, E.M. and Cox, M. and Cox, R. The Aftermath of Divorce in Mother-Child, Father-Child Relations. edited by Stephen, J.H. Jr., Education of Young Children, 1978.

Johnson, B.L. Women who head families, 1970-77: their numbers rose, income lagged. Monthly Labor Review. February 1978. 32-37.

Levitin, T.E. Children of divorce: an introduction. The Family Coordinator. 1976. 25 (10), 1-23.

Mendes, H.A. Single fathers. The Family Coordinator. 1976. 25 (10), 439-440.

Orthner, K.K. and Brown, T. and Ferguson, D. Single-parent fatherhood: an emerging family life style. The Family Coordinator. 1976. 23 (10), 429-437.

Santrock, J.W. and Warshak, R.A. Father custody and social development in boys and girls. Journal of Social Issues. 1979. 35 4), 12-125.

Wallerstein, J.S. and Kelly, J.B. Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce. Basic Books, Inc. Publishers: New York. 1980.

Weiss, Robert, Going It Alone: The Family Life And Social Situation Of The Single Parent. Basic Books, Inc.: New York. 1979.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM I

INVESTIGATION: Single Fathers: Their Lifestyle and Parenting Experience

INVESTIGATOR: Pat Blevins

Pat Blevins, a nurse and graduate student at the School of Nursing, University of California San Francisco, is conducting a study to find out about: 1) the role of the single father; 2) the parenting experiences he finds most difficult and least difficult; 3) and whether he finds this role or responsibility different from when he was married.

If I agree to participate in this study, I will be interviewed by Ms. Blevins. I will answer questions in an interview session that will take approximately two hours. Information given during the course of the interview will be recorded by written notes with my permission. I have been assured by Ms. Blevins that all information, written notes obtained during the course of the interview will be handled in a manner to insure confidentiality. Any publications resulting from this study will include the necessary precautions to insure my anonymity.

I understand that sharing my thoughts and feelings with Ms. Blevins may not benefit me personally but that the findings of this study may be of benefit to single parent families in the future.

I have been told that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and that I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without fear of negative consequences. I also understand that I may refuse to answer individual questions and may terminate the interview if I so desire.

If I have any comments or questions about participation in this study I should first talk with the investigator. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects and the Environment, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the Committee between 8:00 am and 500 pm, Monday through Friday, by calling (415) 666-1814, or by writing them at: Committee for Protection of Human Subjects and the Environment, University of California, San Francisco, California, 94143.

_____ Date

_____ Signature of Participant

CONSENT FORM II

INVESTIGATION: Single Fathers: Their Lifestyle and Parenting Experiences

INVESTIGATOR: Pat Blevins

Pat Blevins, a nurse and graduate student at the School of Nursing, Univesity of California San Francisco, is conducting a study to find out about: 1) the role of the single father; 2) the parenting experiences he finds most difficult and least difficult; 3) and whether he finds this role or responsibility different from when he was married.

If I agree to participate in this study, I will be interviewed by Ms. Blevins. I will answer questions in an interview session that will take approximately two hours. Information given during the course of the interview will be recorded by written notes and tape recordings with my permission. I have been assured by Ms. Blevins that all information and written notes and tape recordings obtained during the course ot the interview will be handled in a manner to insure confidentiality. Any publications resulting from this study will include the necessary precautions to insure my anonymity.

I understand that sharing my thoughts and feelings with Ms. Blevins may not benefit me personally but that the findings of this study may be of benefit to single parent families in the future.

I have been told that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and that I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without fear of negative consequences. I also understand that I may refuse to answer individual questions and may terminate the interview if I so desire.

If I have any comments or questions about participation in this study I should first talk with the investigator. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects and the Environment, which is concerned with the portection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the Committee between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, by calling (415) 666-1814, or by writing them at: Committee for Protection of Human Subjects and the Environment, University of California, San Francisco, California, 94143.

_____ Date

_____ Signature of Participant

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Demographic and background information:

Name: Phone:

Address:

Parents's Age:

Occupation:

Financial Status (income level):

under $10,000 yr. $10,000 - 20,000 yr.

$20 - 40,000 yr. $40 - 60,000 yr.

$60 - 100,000 yr. over $100,000 yr.

Work Status: Full time Part time unemployed

Dwelling: House Apt. Mobile Home

Rent Own

Transportation used: Own car Public Trans. Other

Number of children:

Ages of children

Boy

Girls

1. How long married before separation or death of spouse?
2. Amount of time since separation from spouse.
3. Cause of separation from spouse or reason for single-parent status.

   divorce death grave illness separation
4. How did you come to assume responsibility of children?
5. How long single-parenting?
6. Anyone else help with child care?
   a. who
   b. how many hours per day per week
   c. with what sorts of tasks

II. Management of household and childcare activities:

a. How do you manage the following:
   1. Child care during absences for work, social and recreational activities and other commitments.

      paid help relatives friends

      childcare coop preschool child independent

      older child helps
   2. How are child health care and illness care managed? (how are dental and medical checkups handled? -- including emotional upsets and worries.
   3. Household responsibilities connected with child care and food preparation:

      laundry cleaning marketing

      eat out meals at home at relative's
   4. School (relationships with child's teachers)

5. Recreation:
   a) family together
   b) child's scouts little league hobbies
   c) parent's social life

6. Child's problems with peers, sibs and important others.

7. Problems with parent/child relationship. Each child.

8. Discipline problems and bad behavior of child.

9. Juggling priorities (work vs. child care vs. social life).

10. Parent's social life.

III. Social Support Network:

1. What kind of moral support and encouragement do you and your family receive
   from friends relatives neighbors support group
   club counselors community service agencies
   social workers other
2. Who can you turn to in a crisis? i.e. If you were suddenly hospitalized. You are kept at work after 5:00 pm and the nursery school closes at 5:00 pm.

IV. Degree of Difficulty of Household and Child Care Management.

A. If possible give an example of why this aspect of parenting is easy or difficult for you.
   1. Child care during work hours
   2. Child's health care
   3. Child's illness care
   4. Emotional upset or worries of the child
   5. Disciplinary problems or bad behavior of the child
   6. Child's school work, homework, choice of school, relations with teachers, truancy, achievement, plans for college with older children
   7. Household responsibilities: meal preparation laundry cleaning yard work repairs
   8. Leisure and recreational activities with children
   9. Child care during parent's social activities
   10. Relationships and problems child has with sibs, peers and other important persons.
   11. Juggling priorities work vs. child care vs. social life
   12. Getting adequate support and help from others in child rearing.
   13. Other activities you can think of related to parenting alone

V. Shared Parenting Compared With Single Parenting:

A. How were these things handled when your wife was here? Has her absence changed things a lot? How?
1. Child care during work hours
2. Child's health care
3. Child's illness care
4. Emotional upset and worries of the child
5. Disciplinary problems and bad behavior of the child
6. School work, homework, choice of school, relations with teachers, truancy, achievement, plans for college with older children
7. Household responsibilities: meal preparation
laundry cleaning yard work
yard work repairs
8. Leisure and recreational activities with children
9. Child care during parent's social activities
10. Relationships and problems child has with sibs, peers and other important persons
11. Juggling priorities work vs. child care vs. social life
12. Getting adequate support and help from others in child rearing
13. Any other activities that were handled differently when your wife was here.

B. Social Support
1. Who could you turn to in a crisis during your marriage?
2. Have you lost friends, relatives' support since divorce, death of spouse?
How has this made you feel?
3. Have you made new contacts who offer support since becoming single?

VI. Adjustment to Single Parenting:
1. How do you think you and your children are adjusting since becoming single?
2. How long did the process take to adjust? What aided or impeded the adjustment process?
Counseling friends pulling together
significant other family
3. How is this adjustment process being blocked? (when appropriate)
Can you see a time when you and the children will feel better about your lifestyles?

VII. Visitation Arrangements:

1. How is visitation with the child's mother arranged? How often?
2. Do you feel the mother visits often enough or too often?

3. What effects do you observe in the children from the visits?
beneficial harmful important waste of time
4. What do the children say about the visits?

VIII. Children's Relations with Kin

1. How often do the children see the following relatives:

   Maternal grandparents

   Paternal grandparents

   Paternal aunts, uncles, cousins

   Maternal aunts, uncles, cousins

2. In what ways are these relationships beneficial or harmful to the children?

3. In what ways are the children's relationships with their relatives of benefit to you? Cause more hassle to you?

IX. Is there anything about the single parent experience that we have not discussed that you find challenging? Rewarding?

1. What part of your lifestyle do you find the most challenging?

2. What part of your lifestyle gives you the greatest reward?

APPENDIX C

Methods Appendix

Finding qualified subjects was more difficult than originally anticipated. Initially I planned to contact subjects through the newsletter of a large inner-city Parents Without Partners organization. However, only six subjects were recruited after two months of advertising in the newsletter. I continued the search informally by word of mouth through friends, acquaintances and associates. Eventually five additional subjects were recruited, bringing the sample size to eleven. Even though the sample size was small, considerable effort was needed to contact the eleven qualified subjects.

Interviewing subjects who occupy this little-understood role was both enjoyable and enlightening. In every case I believed that the single fathers took myself as interviewer and the subject seriously. Their responses were freely given, and in many cases quite eloquent. It seemed obvious that these fathers possessed great sensitivity about both positive and negative parenting experiences. During two interviews the subjects became tearful and overcome with emotion while relating their feelings of protectiveness and love for their children.

All the subjects were enthusiastic participants and freely shared information with me about their lifestyle and parenting experiences. If any problem consistantly occurred, it was the problem of limiting the interview to two hours. The interviews often took three to three and one half hours. Every attempt was made to end by the agreed time, however the subjects often had much to say and were enthusiastic about

expressing themselves on this topic which was the focus of their lives. There was no problem whatever with this group of men being closed, guarded or difficult to interview.

Caution must be used when interpreting self-report data because subjects can allow a need for social acceptance to color their responses or respond to what they think the researcher wants to hear. I attempted to clarify responses made to direct questions by listening to subjects' responses to other questions in the interview where the same subject was being explored from a different angle or in combination with another subject. In this way I tried to get an overall feeling for the subjects experience with the major topic areas without relying solely on responses to direct questions. I also attempted to observe eye contact and body language during responses to try to deal with the potential problem of the validity of self-report data. Of course, these techniques and interpretations are quite subjective and difficult to duplicate from researcher to researcher.

When I first arrived at each subject's home I carefully explained the purpose of the study and the necessity of signing a consent form (see copy in appendix). I then allowed time for the subject to read the consent form and to ask any questions he might have about the form or the study. I asked each subject for permission to take notes and to tape record the interview. In only one case was permission to tape record denied. Each subject was assured that all written notes and tape recordings would be handled in such a way as to insure confidentiality, and that any publications resulting from this study would include the necessary precautions to insure the subject's anonymity.

I decided a descriptive study using open-ended questions would be appropriate because to date little has been written to chronicle the lifestyle, role and parenting experiences of single fathers. I phrased my questions to glean information that would contribute to this description of the single father lifestyle and his parenting experiences.

The results of this study altered some stereotypes commonly accepted in our society about men and fathers. Some of these included: 1) Men as respondents would probably be non-verbal and guarded in their responses. In contrast, the subjects were found to be very verbal and their responses quite open. 2) Because our society puts such a value on men as providers these single fathers would quite naturally place career first and family last. In every case the subjects placed parenting responsibilities and family life first. 3) Single men with children would place sexual conquest and/or regular, intimate contact with a woman before parenting responsibilities. This stereotype was proven untrue in every case. 4) Men cannot be the nurturing parent, only the mother can adequately nurture the child. A "masculine" man would not attempt to fill this role. The subjects in this study all attempted to meet their children's needs for nurturance by expanding or modifying their parenting role. 5) Men left with primary parenting responsibilities would hire help or move in with their mothers and/or girlfriends in order to avoid minial household tasks and childcare. The subjects in this study took pride in their ability to successfully handle occupational, household and childcare responsibilities without help.