Mount Saint Vincent University

Department of Family Studies and Gerontology

Single Divorced Fathers: Ecological Risk and Protective Factors

by

Christen Terakita, B.A., M.A.

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

Master of Arts in Family Studies and Gerontology

September, 2012

Halifax, Nova Scotia

© Christen Terakita, 2012

Abstract

This qualitative study was employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the personal experiences of single fathers in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) as well as the personal perspectives of service providers who are part of services/programs targeted towards fathers. Narrative inquiry was used to understand the diverse and unique stories of five single father participants. General qualitative methods were used to understand the service needs and current availability of support for single father families in HRM. Approaching single fatherhood from an ecological resilience framework allowed for a holistic view of how single fatherhood was experienced by these individuals. Risk and protective factors existed at different, but related, levels that influenced how the fathers perceived their experiences and the support they received. Identified risk and protective factors ranged from: experiences with custody processes, gender of the children, positive feelings as a father, supports for fathers, navigating the legal system, perceived biases, and social stigmas. These results created a starting point for future, in-depth research into single father families that could be used to better support these important parents. Future directions for research with single fathers is explicated, such as examining the way services are advertised, administered, and perceived by single father participants. Furthermore, recommendations for service providers such as gender-neutral language of parenting programs and more diverse education are explained, as well as suggestions for future change to family law and court processes that allow a smoother transition for fathers in the legal system.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to my dad Craig Terakita who inspired this work, my stepmom Deb Terakita who came into my life and changed it forever, and my amazing brothers Tom Priddle and Matthew Terakita . Thank you to my partner Denis Davidov for keeping me going through this journey.

Thank you to my thesis committee for their consistent support and feedback:

Supervisor: Dr. Deborah Norris

Committee: Dr. Áine Humble, Dr. Daniel Séguin

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction……..……..1

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework……..……7

Ecological Framework.……8

Resilience Model……...15

Chapter 3: Literature Review……..……...23

The History of Fatherhood…….……23

Current Views of Fathers……...28

Ecological Framework of Fatherhood……...30

Microsystem……...31

Mesosystem……35

Exosystem……..37

Macrosystem……..40

Chronosystem……45

Conclusion……45

Chapter 4: Methods……..…….…….47

Participants…….……51

Procedure……...52

Analysis…….55

Ethical Considerations……...60

Chapter 5: Results……..……63

Single Father Narratives……63

Michael……..63

James……..71

Tyson……..79

Frank……..85

Joshua…….89

Service Provider Common Themes……...94

Perseverance and capabilities of single fathers……..95

Family services and programs of support……..97

Assistance in legal processes……...106

Father stigmas and exclusion……...108

Chapter 6: Discussion……..118

Limitations……..……..128

Conclusions and Recommendations...…….132

References……137

Appendices……..159

Appendix A: Interview Example for Single Fathers……159

Appendix B: Follow up Survey Questions for Single Fathers…….160

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Service Providers……...161

Table of Figures

Figure 2.1 Influences on Responsible Fathering: A Conceptual Model……12

Figure 2.2 Ecological Model for Fatherhood……...……..14

Figure 2.3 Resilience Model for Fatherhood……..……...17

Figure 2.4 Ecological Resilience Approach for Single Fatherhood…..……22

Chapter 1

Introduction

Like many roles in society, social constructions of parenthood are important in understanding what being a father means. It is important to understand the societal norms that influence how members of society act out and perceive the role of father. Most researchers focus on fathers as they exist in two-parent families; little current research focuses on fathers as they exist in single father families. Single fathers may be custodial parents due to the death of a partner, because they never married, or, as was the case for my family, divorce. Fathers have historically played an important part in families and understanding the part single fathers play is equally as important. With the growing social emphasis on father involvement and nurturance (Lamb, 2000), it is beneficial to explore family life as experienced by the single divorced father. Single father families, although less common than single mother families (Statistics Canada, 2006a), are a growing population and therefore gaining access to what it means to be in a single father family is necessary to fully understand this population.

My interest in the topic of single father families has been influenced by my experiences within my own family. Although I have overcome the negative feelings associated with my past and personally have resolved my issues, I believe acknowledging those experiences is important in addressing my interest in this topic. I was seven-years-old when my parents divorced. At the time none of my school friends' parents were divorced, therefore I did not have other families to compare mine too. I was old enough to understand what was going on in terms of what divorce meant, while my four year-old brother was none the wiser. However, it was not until I was a university student that I

realized how unique my situation seemed to be. When I mentioned that I had spent a short amount of my life in a single parent home, people automatically assumed that I meant a single mother family. I found this interesting that a seemingly gender neutral word such as “parent” was interpreted as a female entity, or “mother”. Assumptions were made by others that my father must have walked out on us, when in fact it was the contrary; my dad was the single parent taking care of his two children, while my mom moved to Mexico to start a new life of her own. It was hard for others to conceptualize the fact that my mother was the one to leave her children and my father was the one to take on the role of pony-tail stylist and caregiver.

These experiences led me to realize that parenting is affected by gender as a social construction; it is assumed that fathers are more frequently “dead beat dads” and that mothers are the ones to dedicate their lives to their children. However, in my own situation I had an amazing father who did everything in his power to provide for the needs of his children. He was involved in cooking, cleaning, getting us ready for school, meeting with teachers, while at the same time working overtime to keep our family afloat. My experiences while in a single father family went against the societal assumption that fathers are not the nurturing parent. This made me want to understand others’ experiences in single father families in order to address some of these social constructions of gendered parenting; in other words, how social expectations and norms form how we, as players in society, view and act out gender in parenting. Social constructions of gender are socialized through interactions, relationships, and contexts (Wickstrom, 2010). For example, children are taught at a young age how mothers and fathers are supposed to act by observing the behaviours that their parents model.

With a grounding in psychology for my undergraduate degree, the idea of using personal experience in a thesis was foreign to me. However, in qualitative research, subjectivity is not only accepted, but encouraged. Therefore, in keeping with an acknowledgement of my subjectivity and involvement in the research process, I have described the background of my curiosity about single father families. My personal experiences give me grounding to start from and firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon of single father families from my own perspective.

Having been through the divorce of my parents and counselling as a child, I realized how important social services were for families functioning through adversity. When I learned through my own work at a family resource organization that there was a lack of services tailored towards fathers in Halifax, I wondered how this could affect single father families seeking support. In facilitating a fathers' group, I talked to fathers who expressed a frustration for the lack of services, programs, and groups available to them seeking support. They explained that they reached a point where they just gave up trying to find support because it was so hard to find. This angered me to realize the multitude of services that exist for mothers in Halifax that fathers do not have. It seemed to be a never ending cycle for these fathers; they needed supports in their role as a father to successfully gain custody of their children, yet those supports were not available to them. Despite their capabilities as fathers, many of these men were labelled unfit. Therefore, understanding the experiences of single fathers and the services provided to these families are of great interest to me.

According to Statistics Canada (2006a), an estimated 18.3% of children under the age of 15 have lived with a single parent at some point in their life; an increase from the

1986 census of 12.4%. During those two decades, married parents decreased from 81.2% to 65.7% of parents in Canada. According to the General Social Survey, over 800,000 parents separated or divorced in a five-year period (Robinson, 2009). There was an increase in the population of single parent households, and an even larger increase within that population of single father families. Of the single parent families residing in Canada in 2006, 20% were headed by single fathers (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Although this percentage seems low, in comparison to single father households 20 years ago (approximately 8%), this is a rapidly growing population. Between 2001 and 2006 the proportion of single father families grew by 15% (Statistics Canada, 2001; 2006a). This is a large increase in comparison to the 6% increase in single mother homes during that same period.

As can be seen in the statistics, children in single parent homes are more likely to be living with their mother than their father (Statistics Canada, 2009). There is a gender division when it comes to custody of children post-divorce with a bias towards mothers gaining custody of their children instead of fathers (Pichitino, 1983; Statistics Canada, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2009). According to Statistics Canada (2002; 2004), although joint custody is increasing in Canada (41.8% of custody arrangements), mothers are still more likely to receive custody of the children (49.5% for mothers compared to 8.5% for fathers). Language of custody has also been a biased factor as "joint custody with primary residency" and "sole custody" are interchangeable in Canada allowing many single mother families to be classified as "joint custody" (Fathers are Capable Too, 2004). Evidence of the effect this custody imbalance has on fathers is apparent in the fathers who do gain custody; they are more likely to try and convince their children to

side with them instead of their spouse, indicating that single fathers feel desperate to keep their custody arrangements and fear losing their children to the mother (Defrain & Eirick, 1981).

It is important to not only examine the history of single fathers but also to examine fathers in general to fully understand how the assumption that fathers are less qualified than mothers has developed. When looking at what it means to be a "family" in current society, men have been faced with the risk of being defined out of the family (Bianchi, 2006). This means that they have become an invisible identity within the family structure and the focus remains on mothers. It is possible that this may be due to the higher numbers of fathers who do not live with their children, therefore creating an assumption that fathers can leave the family whereas mothers cannot (Bianchi, 2006). It is interesting that men are overlooked in the definition of family yet are an important piece of the SNAF (Standard North American Family) model of family that is valued by society including two heterosexual parents and children (Smith, 1993). This incongruence has possibly led to fathers becoming the invisible parent. Despite the current importance of nurturing fatherhood, it seems contradictory to me that single father families are off the research radar. Historically fathers have moved from moral guider to breadwinner to sex role model to marital support and more currently nurturer (Lamb, 2000). The current focus on fathers as nurturers has placed more importance and emphasis on the role of the father and has brought fathers back into the definition of "family".

Over the past few centuries, significant changes have contributed to the social construction of fatherhood, which in turn have constructed a meaning of single fatherhood. In order to more fully understand single fatherhood, an historical and current

understanding of single fathers and their place in the family system is integral. My personal experiences have led me to pursue research that seeks to answer the following questions: How do separated/divorced fathers experience single parenthood? What risk and protective factors do they identify? In order to address these questions, a review of current literature on single fathers as well as fathers in general is required to understand the gaps in knowledge surrounding single father families.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework has been used by various researchers as a foundation for developing frameworks focusing on fatherhood and how it influences development (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Fagan & Press, 2008; Hanson, 1985; Pleck, 2007; Sipsma, Biello, Cole-Lewis, & Kershaw, 2010). According to Doherty et al.'s (1998) use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, fathers are more influenced than mothers by environmental and interpersonal contexts. Ecological factors such as relationships with their child's mother, parent education, school systems, extended family, economic status, work, involvement with their children, social capital, policies, race, culture, and institutional practices can influence responsible fatherhood (Behnke et al., 2008; Doherty et al., 1998; Fagan & Press, 2008; Pleck, 2007; Sipsma et al., 2010). There are many barriers for non-married fathers and therefore research on fathers would benefit from an ecological framework to address all of these factors and levels.

In addition to the barriers and challenges fathers face, the strengths single fathers have at each of these levels are important to consider. Risk and protective factors have been examined using a resilience perspective with non-residential fathers but not with sole custody fathers (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy, & Farrie, 2009). However, in keeping with the holistic model of fatherhood, it may be beneficial to use a resilience approach when examining challenges and strengths at each ecological level with single father families.

Ecological Framework

The ecological theory was used as a framework to examine single fatherhood and how it was experienced. Although it seems common knowledge that individuals are influenced not only by who they are as a person but also by their environment, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that research still tends to focus on the individual and places little focus on the contexts embedded in social behaviour. Ecological systems theory shows that there are combined influences shaping behaviour and development of individuals in a particular setting (Hanson, 1985). Fathers have historically been examined from a micro-level approach, focusing only on attributes of the father or time allocated to children (see literature review). However, this approach neglects the structural barriers and cultural/societal factors embedded in family life that influence how fathers act in their role as "dad". It is not only what happens inside the family that is important, but also what occurs outside the family (Hanson, 1985). Better understandings of both direct and indirect influences are important when studying family well-being (Cook & Kilmer, 2010). I conducted this research to be able to make recommendations for the development of adequate services and support for single fathers in the future that may also have an influence on policy. Therefore a holistic, ecological approach is beneficial to understanding the understudied experiences of the single father family.

Fathers are influenced by and influence their children at all ecological levels (Pleck, 2007). An ecological framework is helpful for researchers in understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing fathers (Behnke et al., 2008). To fully comprehend single father families from an ecological perspective, the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems must be examined (see Figure 2.2). The *microsystem*

considers the "activities, roles, and interpersonal relations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22) as experienced by an individual. This system includes the direct setting and interactions in which an individual engages. Also included are the roles individuals act out, such as the role of "father" in the family. The microsystem is where much research, such as psychology, focuses its scope without going any further (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There are many micro-level characteristics that can influence the way fatherhood is experienced by fathers, such as a child's temperament, gender, age, development, a father's motivation, delinquency, personality, attachment, and types and lengths of interaction with the children (Behnke et al., 2008; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erikson, 1998; Pleck, 2007; Sipsma et al., 2010).

The *mesosystem* is the interrelation between settings and individual experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interrelation between settings includes an individual's social network where an individual moves from one setting to another creating a connection and communication between microsystems. A major contributor to the construction of fatherhood at the meso-level is work. Because fathers have been historically viewed as the family breadwinner, looking at how fathers experience work is important. This can include fathers' work-family balance or earnings (Pleck, 2007). Community services and programs are also an important meso-level influence. Community can also include a father's social capital and extended family (Hanson, 1985; Pleck, 2007).

The *exosystem* does not involve the individual as a direct participant, however it can affect or be affected by the setting of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system includes regulations and policies that affect fathers; however the fathers individually do not directly influence these policies. Fathers are influenced at the exo-

level by the legal system, political agendas, and government policies regarding fatherhood and custody (Fagan & Press, 2008). Other examples are the availability of child-care centres (Hanson, 1985) or influences of immigration on fatherhood (Behnke et al., 2008).

The *macrosystem* includes society and culture and how the ideologies and belief systems within can influence the other levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem is dynamic in that culture changes over time. Examining fathers from a macro-level perspective requires examining societal and cultural influences on fathers and the family; in other words, social constructions. Fatherhood can be seen as a sociocultural process, meaning that fatherhood is shaped and moulded by society and culture. The macro-level or "beliefs about the father" are cultural beliefs, folklore, and popular ideas surrounding fatherhood (Behnke et al., 2008; Krampe, 2009) and notions of responsible fatherhood (Doherty et al., 1998). Religion and spirituality are also included as a role model form of fatherhood. Race and ethnicity are also important in terms of how they influence a father's culture (Behnke et al., 2008; Sipsma et al., 2010).

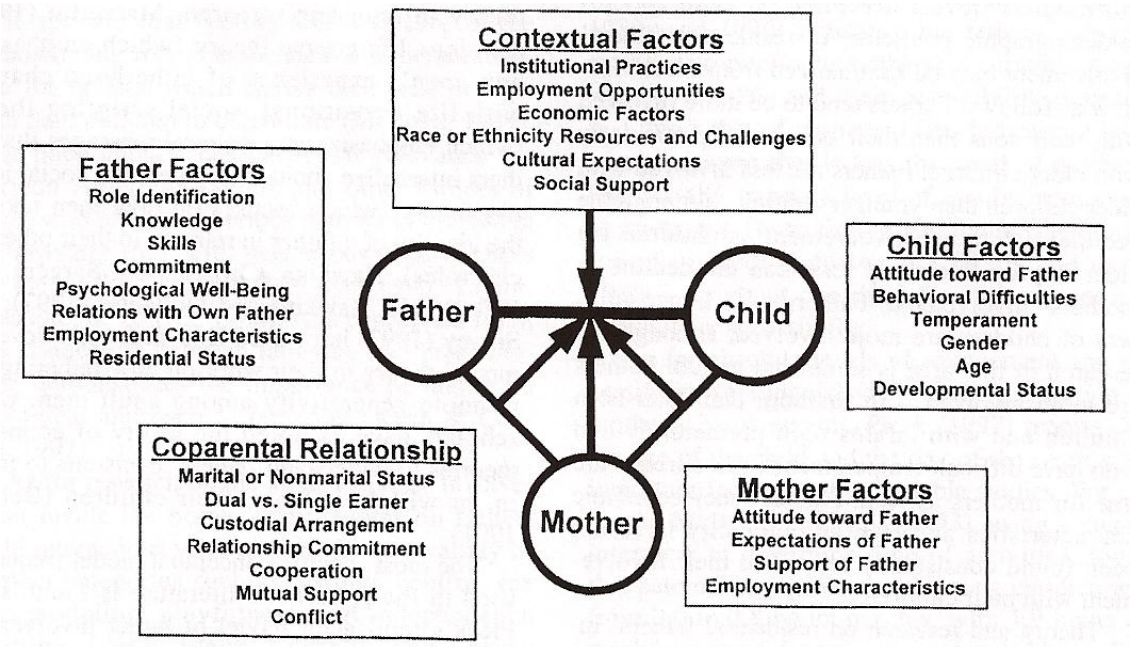
Lastly, the *chronosystem* was an addition to the original ecological framework created by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The chronosystem involves time and significant events; events can be within the individual person as well as within the environment and these systems can influence each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Ecological-based research should include life transitions. For single father families this could include divorce, becoming a single father, remarrying, and children's progression through developmental stages. These transitions can influence the family unit as well as the individuals within the family. There are normative transitions that are expected within the

lifespan (i.e., marriage, children starting school) as well as non-normative transitions (i.e., divorce, death) that are not expected or pre-planned. Regardless of the type of events, life events are seen as cumulative in that they build on top of one another and continue to have an ongoing effect on the family as well as the other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

In order for the societal construction of fatherhood and the experiences of fatherhood to be more fully understood, a holistic ecological approach can be employed (see Figure 2.1). Fatherhood is best addressed in the context of a man's entire life including all aspects and domains (Behnke, 2008; Goodsell, Barrus, Meldrum, & Vargo, 2010; Sipsma et al., 2010). It not only changes within context but also over time (Hanson, 1985). Changes in the environment require adaptation in all the ecological levels. It is important to acknowledge that the influence of the levels is *bidirectional* in nature where all levels interact with each other. A transition such as divorce alters not only one system but all systems. When addressing what it means to be a "good father" it is almost impossible to define because fatherhood is socially constructed and changing. A father can choose to follow a cultural script or innovate his own script (Goodsell et al., 2010). An ecological framework is useful in studying fathers because it acknowledges and embraces variability (Behnke et al., 2008). It focuses on multiple systems or levels and the interrelationships between them (Fagan & Press, 2008). To illustrate this point, Doherty et al. (1998) created a visual model of influences on responsible fatherhood (p. 285; see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Influences on Responsible Fathering: A Conceptual Model

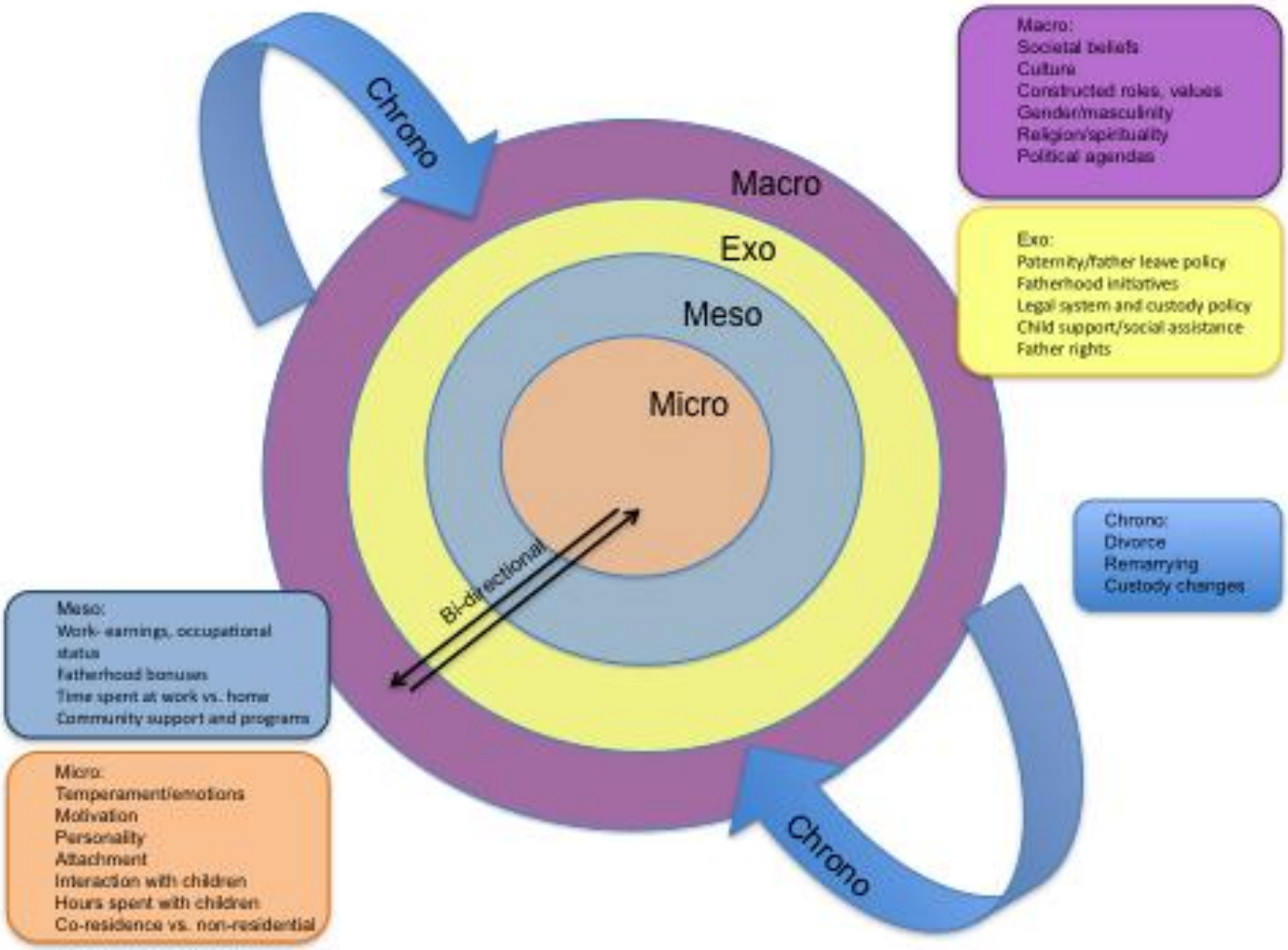


Note: Based on an ecological model of fatherhood. Contextual and relational factors shown in boxes that influence the father-child relationship. From "Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework," by W. J. Doherty, E. F. Kouneski, and M. F. Erickson, 1998, *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60,* p. 285. Copyright permissions from Wiley Publications.

I have created my own model depicting an ecological framework for fatherhood (see Figure 2.2) incorporating Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson's (1998) model, as well as integrating a literature review of fatherhood and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. This model shows the multiple systems that influence fatherhood, while emphasizing that the events or time periods within the chronosystem impact each of the systems as well.

Figure 2.2

Ecological Model for Influences on Fatherhood



Note: Circles represent systems within the Ecological Theory, rectangles represent examples of each system within the Ecological Theory as it pertains to fatherhood.

It is important to note that each of the systems depicted in the figure are embedded within each other. This demonstrates the intertwining nature of the systems in that each level is influencing and incorporated into the other systems, as opposed to acting as independent systems. The chronosystem has been illustrated as an arrow that surrounds the ecological model because the events or significant time periods change and affect all of the systems. Each of the ecological levels will be examined in the literature review, incorporating significant findings at each of the levels for fathers or specifically single fathers. Although research has been done on fathers from an ecological perspective, some of the research focuses more directly on a single system (i.e., the impact of fathers on child development), rather than attempting to understand how all are connected. Using an ecological framework allowed me to understand how multiple factors influence single fatherhood without restricting my focus to a single system. A review of the literature showed me that not only do studies on fatherhood tend to reflect on a single system, but the literature also tends to take a deficit view of fatherhood (i.e., what fathers are lacking or doing wrong), therefore I incorporate a resilience model into my conceptual framework.

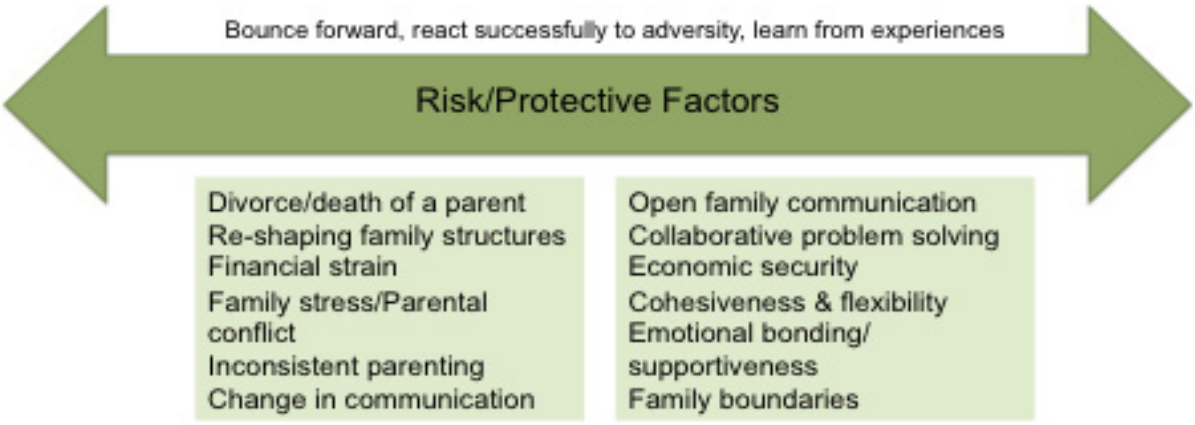
Resilience Model

I thought a theoretical model that would be useful in research on single father families would be an ecological resilience model; a resilience approach embedded in an ecological framework. In resilience models the positive outcomes are of focus rather than the deficit focus that most single father research has shown (Heard, 2007). Walsh (2003) believes that resilience in the family is seen as the ability of a family to "bounce forward" by rising up to meet new challenges that arise (see Figure 2.3). Resilient families and

individuals are ones that are able to react successfully to adversity and learn from these experiences (Borden et al., 2010).

Figure 2.3

Resilience Model for Fatherhood



Note: Rectangles represent the potential risk and protective factors for single fathers. Arrow represents the individual's potential reaction to risk and protective factors.

Resilience was first studied in the field of child psychopathology in an attempt to understand how some children thrived through adversity whereas others did not (Patterson, 2002). Family resilience has been found to be a process, not a trait, and therefore families who are resilient in one context may not be in another (Patterson, 2002). Furthermore, stressors can be prolonged, requiring an ongoing process of resilience (Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2003). An example of a prolonged stressor would be divorce (Walsh, 2003); single father families are likely to have experienced either divorce or death of a spouse and would therefore require ongoing family resilience. Additional stressors can include reshaping family structures such as divorce/separation or remarriage, financial strain, or family stress (Walsh, 2003). An important component of resilient models is that they reinforce the importance of individual and family feelings, normalizing their situation instead of placing blame (Walsh, 2003).

Resilient families tend to have open family communication as well as collaborative problem solving (Borden et al., 2010). Resilience is demonstrated in protective factors that the family possesses to thrive in the presence of risk (Patterson, 2002). Family cohesiveness and flexibility are central in family resilience. Cohesiveness consists of emotional bonding, supportiveness, and family boundaries, and it is correlated with fathers' life satisfaction (Boyraz & Sagar, 2009). Flexibility is the family's ability to rebound and reorganize in the face of a challenge, and not be over-structured (Black & Lobo, 2008). Therefore it is important to focus not only on the risks that families may face but also on the protective processes they have (Bogenschneider, 1996).

Resilience models have also been used in research on trauma, emphasizing the positive growth and strength that can come from adversity (Harvey, 2007). Therefore

resilience occurs when negative effects are minimized or alleviated by internal processes and resources. However, Harvey (2007) suggests that individuals need some degree of resilience pre-trauma to have post-traumatic growth. Trauma survivors are said to experience both suffering and surviving simultaneously (Harvey, 2007). Although not the case for all families, in some cases divorce can be viewed as a trauma to families going through it (Dreman, 1991; Taylor, 2004). Aside from divorce, other risks on a single parent family can include reduced supervision, higher responsibility placed on the parent, and lower income (Hsieh & Shek, 2008). In the cases of divorce, there are additional contexts such as parental conflict, inconsistent parenting, less neighbour support, and change in communication. Resilience in families experiencing divorce varies depending on the context of the family.

After divorce children can transition through resilience, survival, or vulnerability depending on family ties and relations, implications of the parents' divorce, and supportive agents (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009). Resilience varies depending on culture and context in which families reside (Hsieh & Shek, 2008; Ungar, 2010b). Thus, risk comes not only from within the family but also from the social context in which it is embedded (Patterson, 2002). Resilience is difficult to measure as it is determined by both the community's resilience as well as the individual's resilience and motivation to go forth and seek supports and resources (Ungar, 2010b). Resilience is strongly tied to an ecological framework in terms of being fluid, based on individual resilience, community resilience, and cultural norms (Borden et al., 2010; Ungar, 2010b; Walsh, 2003).

Considering the diversity of families, an ecological approach is an appropriate model for understanding the various ecological stressors/risks and protective factors impacting individual families (Walsh, 2003). Furthermore, incorporating a resilience model empowers participants as they face the ecological influences on their lives (Walsh, 2003). Therefore understanding family resilience requires accessing the way a family constructs meaning. Qualitative research can be integral in accessing meanings of families (Patterson, 2002), therefore qualitative research would be appropriate for understanding meanings of single fathers.

The previous diagram (Figure 2.3) was created to illustrate the potential risk factors as well as the protective factors that may be present for single father families. As mentioned earlier, the research on single fathers has predominantly focused on risk factors arising from single fatherhood, and has neglected protective factors. A resilient approach addresses both as they exist and influence families.

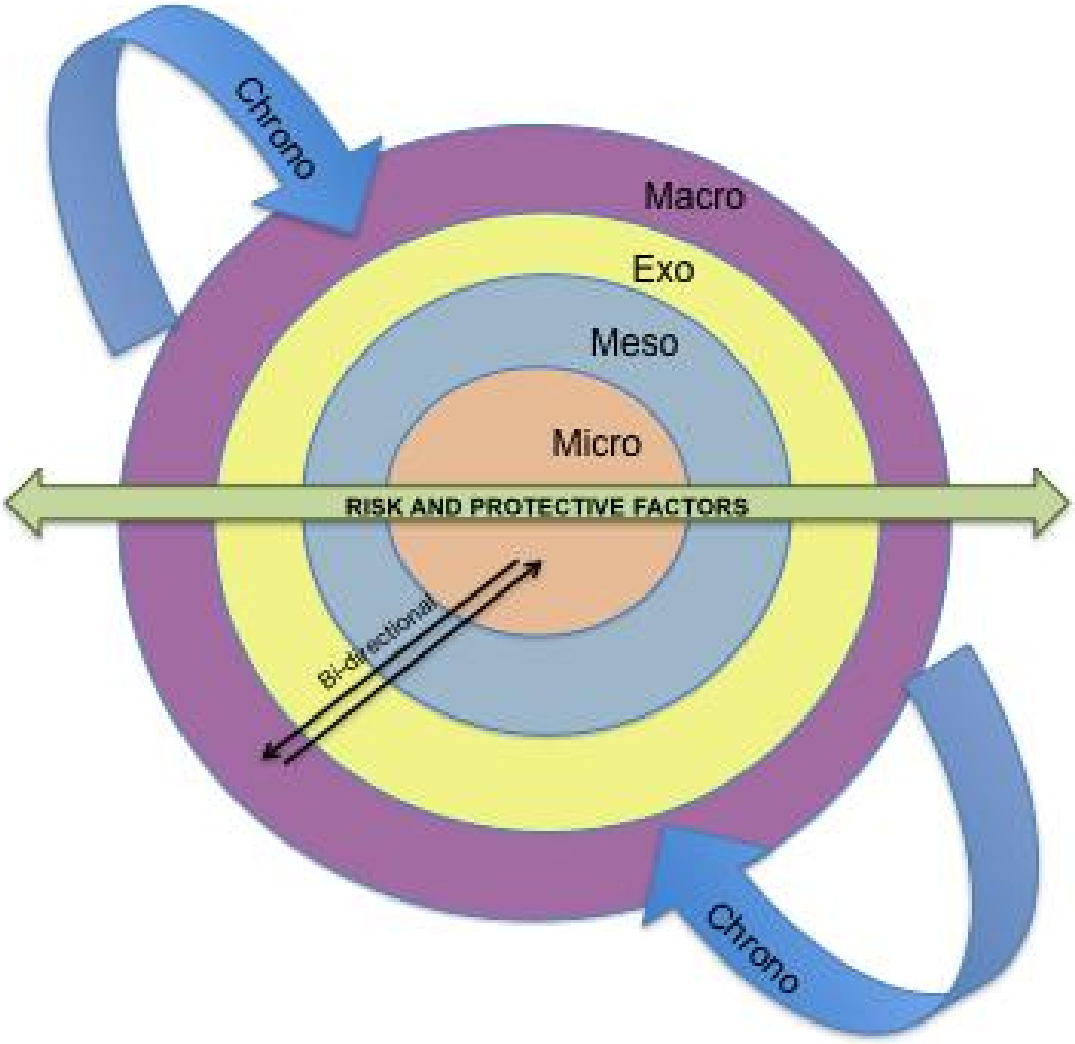
To understand the experiences of five single father families, my research used an ecological resilience approach (see Figure 2.4). This enabled an understanding of the role that single fathers play in the context of the family as well as an understanding of the ways in which single fathers overcome adversity and create resilient families. Risk and protective factors that support resilience emerge at each of these ecological levels. Although there has not yet been research on single fathers from an ecological resilience model, research into single fathers and fathers in general informed this research on important areas of focus.

Only by understanding family and personal meanings, combined with culture and context, can a researcher understand if sources of support for a population are meaningful

(Ungar, 2010a). Therefore understanding strengths not only at the individual level but also at the environmental levels allows better opportunities for evaluations of systems (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004). Considering that single father families continue to be an understudied population, an ecological resilience approach creates a starting ground to understanding what it means to be a single father and what important influences there are for single father families. This approach with single father families focuses on strengths and abilities to overcome adversity. Figure 2.4 illustrates a combination of an ecological framework with a resilience model; the ecological resilience model of single fatherhood. Strengths and risks from previous findings will be explained in the next chapter as I review the literature on single fathers and more broadly, fathers.

Figure 2.4

Ecological Resilience Approach for Single Fatherhood



Note: The figure represents Ecological Theory from a Resilience approach with potential risk and protective factors for single fathers. Arrows represent the continuity and flow between systems.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Although single father families remain understudied, fatherhood and father involvement within a nuclear family have been studied for some time. The purpose of this literature review is to identify research that has been completed on fathers and their role in the family. This literature review will focus on historical constructions of fatherhood, current views of fatherhood and father involvement, the shift to a resilient focus on fatherhood, and the ecological influences on single fatherhood. I will begin with a look at how fathers have been historically viewed within the family, keeping in mind that most research was done on two-parent, heterosexual, nuclear families.

The History of Fatherhood

In the 16th century marriage became a formalized institution between a man and a woman (Thornton, 2009). During the 17th and 18th centuries a period called the Enlightenment emerged. During this time human nature was closely examined, science became widely used, people critically questioned the current way of life, and democracy emerged in the United States. At this time freedom and equality were valued; therefore every member of society was seen as equal and important. Divorce, therefore, became a legalized practice because keeping individuals in an unhealthy marriage was viewed as a form of slavery (Thornton, 2009). This began a shift in the nuclear, two parent family.

Prior to the 20th century children were considered second class citizens, therefore children did not have the same rights that were given to adults. At this time children were viewed as property of their fathers due to the high maternal mortality rate, meaning the chance of death in child birth was high for mothers (Grief, 1985) and because fathers

were the ones who owned the property and land (Crossman, Powell, Principe, & Ceci, 2002). Fathers took on the role of "moral guider" by educating their children on morals (Lamb, 2000). Fathers taught their children to be literate so that scriptures could be read. Moreover religion was important and morals were thought to be gained by reading of the scriptures, placing fathers in a role of "divine authority" (Lamb, 2000).

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Industrial Revolution created another major social change for the family (Crossman et al., 2002; Grief, 1985). This time period signified a change from agrarian life with a focus on agriculture and work from within the home, to one of technology and manufacturing that required working outside of the home. Fathers worked outside of the home for pay, often requiring travel away from their family and household duties. Mothers were then left in the home, for the most part, to complete the domestic work and childrearing on their own, as well as without formal pay for their labour. This time period was significant in the division of gendered labour. The father's role as a "breadwinner" came about during industrialization because men and women no longer shared the household responsibilities and fathers had to work outside of the home in order to support their families (Lamb, 2000). Furthermore, status became important in the workplace as well as in the family. In the same way an employer had status and control over their employees, so too did fathers have control over their children and others living under their roof (Barker & Hamlet, 2010). Privacy became valued as families protected themselves as a unit from the rest of the community (Barker & Hamlet, 2010), however the government became more involved in the family unit as domestic regulation became important (Crossman et al., 2002).

In the 20th century, science and the social sciences came to the forefront in understanding human behaviour. Scientists and theorists began looking at the family and the gender dynamics within the family to answer questions regarding child development. Freud (1920) believed that mothers were integral in the psychological development of her children; he did not believe the same to be true with fathers. Although he did believe that sons had a conflicting relationship with their father; wanting to cut out their father in order to have their mother to themselves. This neglected the impact of fathers on the development of their children.

This focus on the inadequacies of fathers was prevalent in the 1940s (Lamb, 2000), brought about by the end of the Great Depression and World War II when fathers were distanced from the family. A father's role became one of a "sex-role model" for his children, specifically for his sons. The role that fathers were seen as playing at this time was to teach their sons how to be a "man" (Lamb, 2000). Fathers' interactions with their infant sons were viewed as important in socializing masculine roles for the child in infancy (Lamb & Lamb, 1976). In addition, fathers were meant to act as marital support to the mother of their children rather than primary caregivers. Considering the gendered thinking prior to the mid-twentieth century and the research that "verified" this gendered dichotomy of parenting, it was almost impossible for men to gain custody of their children unless they could prove the mother to be "unfit" (Crossman et al., 2002; Grief, 1985). Therefore in the case of separation or divorce a father had to prove that the mother of his children was either emotionally unstable or physically incapable of taking care of her children (Grief, 1985). Fathers were not valued as nurturers and had to go to great lengths to receive custody of their children.

In the second half of the 20th century there was another major change in the social construction of family. The women's movement was successful in bringing attention to gender issues. Sex role expectations began to change following the women's movement and fathers began to gain custody of their children more frequently post-divorce (Crossman et al., 2002; Grief, 1985). A high value was placed on the father's ability to provide economic security for his children, which was related to fathers' greater economic security compared to mothers. This meant that fathers were still valued for their breadwinning role and not for their nurturing capabilities. Research in the 1960s and 1970s focused on quantitative variables such as time spent with children and neglected the holistic focus of fathers' experiences (Lamb, 2000). Bowlby (1978) also contributed to the research by emphasizing that mothers were needed for the proper attachment of her children. Attachment to fathers was not omitted, but less emphasized. This was also apparent in Seay and Harlow's (1965) research that used rhesus monkeys to demonstrate the extreme distress infants displayed when separated from their mothers. Therefore the lack of overt focus on the role of the father in child development and attachment influenced fathers, placing them in a position of secondary parent.

In the United States, the 1970s were important for custody allocation as the children's views and desires were beginning to be considered in the custody process (Crossman et al., 2002). The "best interests of the child" became a formal part of the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act of 1970 in the US (Crossman et al., 2002) enabling children to voice their preference of which parent to live with instead of having gendered assumptions decide the best fit. This contributed to the rapid increase in fathers gaining

custody in the United States; with single father families increasing by 180% between 1970 and 1983 (Grief, 1985).

Similarly, in Canada in the 1970s children were legally seen as autonomous individuals and they had basic rights. One of these rights was the right to be consulted in guardianship (Department of Justice, 2002). Family justice principles put the needs and well-being of children as a priority, therefore protecting them from violence, conflict and abuse (Department of Justice, 2001). As a result, since the 1970s, researchers focused more on the nurturing capabilities of fathers as the societal value of father nurturance increased (Lamb, 2000). Although the increase in Canadian single father families was not as significant as in the US (McQuillan & Belle, 2001), there were proposed reasons for this. One reason is that common-law parents were not included in the Canadian census until 1991, meaning fathers who were living with a partner were given a choice to claim married *or* lone parent status (McQuillan & Belle, 2001). This may have affected the numbers of single father families in the Canadian census prior to that date.

Considering the historical construction of fatherhood, fathers had been pushed to the side of the parenting domain. Nevertheless, as society changed, so had the definition of being a father. Nurturance had only recently become an accepted concept of fatherhood (Lamb, 2000) as fathers were spending more time with their children since the 1980s and the *quality* of this time has been currently under examination. Historically fatherhood has moved through moral guidance, breadwinner, sex-role modelling, marital support, and now nurturance. Current research would benefit from taking a more holistic, ecological approach to include the individual, interactional, and cultural/social contexts of fatherhood to better understand the current construction of the nurturing father.

Hopefully then we will understand why fathers are still seen as a secondary parent and why single fathers are a minority compared to single mothers.

Current Views of Fathers

Much of the current literature on fathers was done with co-residing, heterosexual married families. However, this research was equally important in demonstrating how fatherhood was expressed and valued. Fathers continued to be seen as secondary in their role as a parent (Wilson & Prior, 2010). The mother was seen as the primary parent figure and the father was seen as an additional support for her (Lindsey & Caldera, 2006; Nentwich, 2008). Fathers' roles were seen as a "babysitter" because they spent, on average, less time with their children than mothers did. This was especially true of solo-care time for co-residing fathers, meaning time caring for children alone. Often times when fathers spent time with their children the mothers were around to handle tasks or issues that arose (Wilson & Prior, 2010). This suggests that fathers were not as capable as mothers in caring for their children to the extent that fathers were monitored. According to a survey on 147 Swiss fathers of 18-month-old children, on average fathers who co-resided with the mothers of their children tended to see their wife as not encouraging in their role as a parent (Rouyer, Frascarolo, Zaouch-Gaudron, & Lavanchy, 2007). Mothers continued to be seen as the primary caregiver and they tended to hold the most responsibility for the children over fathers, at times preventing fathers from being an active solo caregiver. Despite progressions such as fathers helping out with childcare duties, these progressions were still viewed as alternative situations rather than normative ones (Nentwich, 2008).

However, there were many positive outcomes stemming from father involvement that had recently been studied. Father involvement was correlated with protective agents for children in terms of lower engagement in risky and delinquent behaviours (Goncy & von Dulmen, 2010; Zimmerman, Salem, & Notaro, 2000), less anti-social behaviours (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002), healthy development of social, cognitive, and emotional skills (Lundahl et al., 2008; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002), lower childhood depression scores (deMinzi, 2010), and had positive relationships of their own in later life (Heard, 2007). With regards to school, children were more likely to have higher school success with father involvement (Howard et al., 2006) and displayed more social engagement (Nelson, 2004). Later in life these children were also more likely to have higher earnings than those with fathers not as highly involved in their life (Nelson, 2004). Protective factors could also include fathers' economic support of their children and the positive outcomes that came with economic security (Borden et al., 2010).

There were also protective factors for fathers when it came to positive involvement with their children. Being a father was motivation for the men to better themselves with education, employment, and daily life (Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010). When fathers engaged in play and socialization with their children they produced prolactin and oxytocin (Gordon, Zagoory-Sharon, Leckman, & Feldman, 2010). Prolactin is a hormone secreted in the brain that can inspire nurturing tendencies in males, such as caring for children or having a concerned response to an infant crying (Delahunty, McKay, Noseworthy, & Storey, 2007). Oxytocin is a hormone that is associated with bonding and fathers high in oxytocin were correlated with less hostility shown towards their children (Naber, Jzendoorn, Deschamps, Engeland, & Bakermans-

Kranenburg, 2010). This demonstrated that there was a positive biological reaction in men when they became a father. In addition, middle-aged men who had been fathers in their lifetime were more likely to have altruistic traits (Eggebeen, Dew, & Knoester, 2010).

There was actually very little difference between single fathers and single mothers in terms of feelings associated with being a single parent, childrearing, child behavioural issues, social relationships, and their relationship with their ex-spouse (Defrain & Eirick, 1981). More currently, researchers suggested that single mothers and single fathers of kindergarten-aged children did not differ significantly in terms of attitudes and behaviours as parents with the exception of individual differences (i.e., income of the parent) (Dufur, Howell, Downey, Ainsworth, & Lapray, 2010). Studies such as Dufur et al.'s (2010) that found little to no differences in childhood and parenting outcomes of single mother and single father families created a need for further research to understand why single fathers have been neglected in the single parenting literature.

All of the previously stated positive outcomes of father involvement could act as protective factors in the family. Protective factors such as these could lead to more resilient families. Therefore, resilience may be important to consider when studying single fathers and their families. This current shift to resilience in fatherhood could be examined at each ecological system to glean a more holistic overview of single fatherhood.

Ecological Framework of Fatherhood

Fatherhood cannot be examined in isolation, but rather including multiple layers such as mothers, children, extended family, community, culture and institutions (Doherty

et al., 1998; 2008). Experiences of fathers have been examined by researchers using an ecological model (Behnke et al., 2008; Doherty et al., 1998; Fagan & Press, 2008; Hanson, 1985; Plack 2007; Sipsma, 2010). This section will attempt to address these findings as well as other findings from studies not utilizing an ecological framework, but providing evidence within the ecological systems, while connecting risk and protective factors associated with a resilience approach. Doherty et al.'s (1998) research showed that there were multiple contextual influences on fatherhood that influenced the father-child relationship. Other researchers have observed these factors individually as they related to fatherhood.

Microsystem. The microsystem incorporates individual and familial characteristics and interactions that are in the immediate environment. With this in mind, there was minimal correlation between temperament of children from primary caregiving fathers and children from non-primary caregiving fathers (Lewis et al., 2008). However, higher emotions were expressed during play situations from both the primary care giving fathers and their children. This could indicate that emotions do develop through paternal relations at the micro-level. The more hours the fathers spent with their infants the higher the paternal happiness, and the happier the child appeared regardless of whether or not the father was the primary care giver (Lewis et al., 2008). At the micro-level children exhibited the "inner father"; children innately searched for their father in infancy (Krampe, 2009). This exhibited the child's ability to attach to more than one person, and the child displayed attachment by searching for their father. Consequently, exposure to their father via co-residence and involvement may have been beneficial to the development of the inner father (Krampe, 2009).

In addition, children who had positive interactions with their mother were more likely to have positive interactions with their father (Holmes & Huston, 2010). This emphasizes that relationships between the parents may have been important to father involvement. Although it may seem logical that if the marriage between a mother and a father was positive then their childrearing outcomes would be positive, this was not found to be the case in some research, and true in other research. Holmes and Huston (2010), found that the marital relationship of the parents when they resided together did *not* have an effect on the father-child relationships unless there was conflict in the marriage. Fathers, in fact, were more able to focus on their children through marital conflict than were mothers (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010). Therefore the parents did not need to be happily married in order for fathers to have had positive relationships with their children. However, other researchers have found that the marital bond was predictive of family cohesion (Doohan, Carrere, Siler, & Beardslee, 2009).

For single father families it was important to note that mothers could influence father-child relations by acting as a gatekeeper to their children (Doherty et al., 1998). Walker and McGraw (2000) believed that it was the contrary; mothers had a positive outlook on father involvement and assistance from the father in childrearing. Even if some mothers acted as gatekeepers to the children, it was the primary responsibility of the father to ensure that he had access to his children (Walker & McGraw, 2000). This reiterated the importance of examining the construction of what being a father meant and how it was valued (see macrosystem).

Fatherhood and paternal engagement may be influenced by the developmental stage of the father (Saleh & Hilton, 2011), taking into account age rather than maturity.

Adolescent and young adult fathers tended to be less engaged with their children than older fathers. This could be due to the fact that younger adult and adolescent fathers tended to have less access to their children than older fathers (Saleh & Hilton, 2011). Being a breadwinner for the children was still prevalent for fathers of all ages. On average older fathers provided less financial assistance to their children than younger fathers did (Robbers, 2009). It was also more socially acceptable for younger fathers to ask for familial support in providing for their children, whereas middle-aged fathers were socially expected to have saved up throughout their adult life and have more resources (Saleh & Hilton, 2011). Apparently fatherhood was still dependent on financial contribution to the family that placed lower-income fathers at a disadvantage. The influence of aggravation and stress of father engagement was worse (Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, & Carrano, 2010) and co-parenting relationships were also less supportive for low-income fathers.

Fathers in traditional nuclear families spent less time with their children and rated interactions with their children as less important than fathers in non-traditional non-nuclear families (Halme, Astedt-Kurki, & Tarkka, 2009). This was likely the case because married fathers had a hard time spending time with their children with the expectations of work and earning money for their family, while also having the mother as support at home. Interestingly, however, fathers in traditional families wanted to spend more time with their children than they perceived was possible (Halme et al., 2009) and on average fathers felt more involved with their children than they initially anticipated (Rouyer et al., 2007). This shows us that perhaps the gender assumptions of the traditional family did not necessarily capture fatherhood and the current desire for active

participation in childrearing. Currently, fathers in traditional nuclear families were becoming more nurturing and taking on primary roles with their children as reported in narratives of mothers (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010). Nurturance reported by mothers included acting as a playmate, an attachment figure, care taking, engaging in emotional roles, and providing encouragement and support for the children.

Whether fathers had full custody, shared custody, or no custody post-divorce, the *quality* of time spent with their children was similar across all fathers despite the differences in *quantity* of time spent with their children (DeGarmo, 2010). Quality of time was important; proximity and time did not necessarily lead to attachment (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010). In fact, divorced fathers with joint custody tended to be more committed to their children's lives than co-resident married fathers according to a Finnish survey of 263 fathers of three to six year olds (Halme et al., 2009). Additionally, an Oregon study with 230 divorced fathers of children four to 11 years of age found that divorced fathers maintained contact and quality of involvement post-separation (DeGarmo, 2010). This post-divorce involvement was despite the fact that residential fathers had more opportunities to be involved than non-residential fathers (Saleh & Hiton, 2011). Single fathers were in fact the fathers most involved in childcare compared to other fathers according to a US national study (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996), which was logical considering the child lived in their full-time care.

Fathers who did engage in solo child care often had lower prestige jobs, worked longer hours, had support in their role as a parent, felt important in their role, and were satisfied with their involvement (Wilson & Prior, 2010). Oftentimes if the father was married and provided solo child care, his wife worked as well and the balance between

work and parenting was more apparent for both parents. Fathers who got to provide solo care for their children tended to value nurturing, affection, and emotional connection as well as play activities in interactions with their children (Wilson & Prior, 2010) which negated the belief that fathers were not natural nurturers.

Mesosystem. The mesosystem included the services, community, and workplace in which an individual participated. Fathering was sensitive to changes in the workplace and economy (Doherty et al., 1998). Primary caregiving fathers tended to have lower earnings and occupational status than non-primary caregiving fathers due to the increased hours spent giving care to their children (Lewis et al., 2008). Although it remained an expectation for mothers to adjust their workplace involvement and domestic work when children entered the picture, this was not usually the expectation for fathers (Dommermuth & Kitterod, 2009). However, fathers were influenced by the work sphere and the importance and value placed on work for men (Doherty et al., 1998). In fact, on average, fathers worked more hours per week than non-fathers did (Biggart & O'Brien, 2010). This could be due to the perceived breadwinner role that fathers still attempted to fill. When fathers were married there was an expectation that they would have less responsibility in domestic tasks and that they would be more work-focused. Furthermore, there were larger bonuses for white men, men in professional and managerial positions, men with college degrees, and men in occupations that required high cognitive skills (Hodges & Budig, 2010). These characteristics added with their fatherhood status led to a larger fatherhood bonus for these fathers, which then made working worthwhile. However, the father as sole breadwinner for the family was becoming no longer possible (Biggart & O'Brien, 2010).

In two-parent families, even when both parents were equal in characteristics aside from gender, mothers continued to spend more time caring for their children than fathers did (Craig, 2006). Even when both parents worked full-time there was an emphasis on the mother dedicating her time to her role as a parent. Fathers were more likely than mothers to work full time and contribute more income to their family (Johansson & Klinth, 2008). In addition, the mother more often did the physical care for the children and interactive and fun activities were more often done by the father (Craig, 2006). More often than not fathers did not get solo time with their children but instead were caring for their children with the assistance of their spouse; meaning that fathers did not alleviate the workload of the mothers to allow them time for their career (Craig, 2006). It was more acceptable for fathers to focus solely on their career while mothers could take care of their children. Unfortunately, this emphasis on work for fathers created an assumption that they were not in a position to nurture or parent full-time.

Effective interventions were an important part of supporting fathers on the meso level. A lack of community resources and supports could hinder a family's resilience (Patterson, 2002). Interventions were typically aimed at parents to increase their feelings of self-competency and encouraged positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes in their children (Borden, Schultz, Herman, & Brooks, 2010). Although both fathers and children benefited from fathering education programs (Holmes, Galovan, Yoshida, & Hawkins, 2010), participation of fathers in parent education programs was quite low, as low as 11% (Sanders, Dittman, Keown, Farruggia, & Rose, 2010). However, father involvement in early childhood programs had increased in the last 10 to 15 years (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Those fathers who attend parenting programs tended to be of a higher

social advantage and those of a lower social advantage tended to instead seek a professional in the case of severe child problem behaviour (Sanders et al., 2010). Men of social disadvantage tended not to access these parenting resources because of a lack of awareness of the services, belief that the program would not help them or meet their needs, or there was an incongruence between the program and the father's schedule and life (Sanders et al., 2010).

On average, fathers had positive attitudes and interests in participating in early childhood programs (Palm & Fagan, 2008); however often times they believed that services and social institutions were unsupportive of them as parents (Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010). They also believed these institutions prevented them from the parental involvement they wished to have with their children. Some mothers and teachers were also resistant in involving fathers in early childhood programs (Palm & Fagan, 2008), making it difficult for fathers to gain acceptance in these programs. Therefore, programs and communities were still more supportive of mother programs and services than they were of father programs and services.

Exosystem. The exosystem included regulatory practices such as policies and governing bodies that influenced fathers. Some countries had parental leave policies that allowed fathers to take time off to care for their children that the mothers were not entitled to take in lieu of the fathers, for example in Sweden (Hallberg, Beckman, & Hakansson, 2010), Denmark, Iceland, and Norway (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Madsen, 2009). Leave policies made a significant difference to father involvement if they could not get substantial time off for parental leave to be with their children and socialize into a nurturing role. Unfortunately more fathers would have liked to take parental leave than

were actually able to with their companies (Haas & Hwang, 2007).There were also early fatherhood initiatives such as the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Initiative that directed policy to encourage active participation of fathers in parenting (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2006). This initiative provided access to resources that strengthened relationships between fathers and their children.

In Canada, 55% of fathers took a leave from work following the birth of a child (Statistics Canada, 2006b). This was considerably lower than the 90% of mothers who took leave but higher than in previous years (45% in 2005, 38% in 2001). Canadian parents could receive up to 35 paid weeks of leave due to a federal program for choice over child care. However, mothers were still more likely to take maternity leave whereas fathers tended to take annual, unpaid, or parental leave (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Moreover, although half of mothers returned to work within 12 to 47 months, more than 2/3 of fathers returned to work within one month.

In the legal system, fathers who fought for custody tended to be viewed as aggressive and possibly violent with their partners and/or their children, putting pathology on fathers who desired to receive access to their children (Nathanson & Young, 2006). The term “deadbeat dads” came from the US in the 1970s as a way for the federal government to control child support payments made by fathers who lived in a different state from their children (Nathanson & Young, 2006). The belief was that fathers would move to another state to avoid paying child support. The Office of Child Support Enforcement was created despite the evidence that 95% of fathers were paying their child support regularly in the US (Nathanson & Young, 2006). Following the increasing rate of divorce in the US, the government decided to increase child support

from the fathers because there was a high prevalence of mothers needing social assistance. It was punishable by law to purposefully miss a child support payment (Nathanson & Young, 2006), demonstrating an importance placed on the financial contributions of fathers in the eyes of the US federal government. Interestingly, non-residential mothers were less likely than non-residential fathers to pay their child support (Doherty et al., 1998).

In Canada, child support payments were also punishable by law if purposefully missed (Department of Justice, 2010). If the parents were married and were divorcing the amount would be decided through federal court, whereas if the parents were never married or separating without a divorce the amount of child support would be decided through provincial court. Regardless of which court the couple went through the amount of child support was dependent on the income of the parents (Department of Justice, 2010). Therefore, more often than not fathers paid more child support because men on average had higher incomes than women (Statistics Canada, 2005).

In Canada, there was a shift towards an emphasis on the importance of having both parents involved in the raising of children regardless of gender (Nathanson & Young, 2006). Although there was an emphasis on the best interest of the child and shared parental arrangements, in the amendments to the Divorce Act in 2002 “maximum contact with both parents” was removed. In Ontario, a mother did not even have to put the father on the child’s birth registry, but she could name him for child support (Nathanson & Young, 2006). It is apparent that the Canadian legal system played a large role in the construction of fatherhood within families.

A major exo-level contributor to single father families was child custody policy and regulations. Dissimilarities could be seen in custody outcomes in different countries due to their differing policies. For example, in Sweden there was more state involvement in terms of funding and support as well as an increase in gender equality awareness, therefore joint custody was a "default condition" in that close to 80% of cases ended in joint custody (Beaujot, 2000; Schiratzki, 2009). In Japan, joint custody was illegal after the separation of the parents (Hayes, 2009). Custody of the children went either to the mother or to the father and visitation could be decided upon informally without enforcement. In Canada, child custody policy strove to protect the "best interests" of the child, and that for most children it was believed that both parents should have active participation in the parenting of their child unless there was suspected abuse (Kruk, 2008). Therefore it was interesting that despite joint custody being most common, single mothers were drastically more frequent than single fathers (Statistics Canada, 2006a; Statistics Canada, 2009). In Canada it was believed that children had the right to benefit from the financial support of both parents, as if they were still together (Department of Justice, 2010). Child support was required by law until the children were the age of the majority or finished post-secondary education. However, more often than not it was fathers making these payments. Failing to include fathers in policy and practice put children at risk of not being provided resources (Strega, Brown, Calaahan, Dominelli, & Walmsley, 2009).

Macrosystem. The macrosystem included social and cultural influences such as social roles and beliefs. Fatherhood was a social construction shaped by historical events and culture (Doherty et al., 1998). Breadwinning and moral leadership had been seen as

characteristics of fatherhood in the 20th century (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Historically fatherhood and father roles had been approached with a Caucasian middle-classed lens that ignored many factors such as ethnicity and race. In the 1990s research on fatherhood moved towards investigating responsibility, engagement, and accessibility of the father-child relationship (Doherty et al., 1998; Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000). The ecological approach to fatherhood shows that fatherhood was impacted by contextual influences more than motherhood was (Doherty et al., 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000). More currently, men were not as strongly associated with the role of father to the extent that women were to the role of mother, making parenting have more of a heterosexual, female identity (Park, Smith, & Correll, 2010).

At the macro-level, our society portrayed an ideal father as married, co-resident, and actively involved with his children (Doherty et al., 1998; Settersen & Cancel-Tirado, 2010). If not married and co-resident with the mother of their children, relationships and support were important factors for fathers. Therefore, those fathers who lived with their children were more likely to be in a committed partner relationship as a form of support, whereas fathers who did not live with their children tended to have a closer relationship with their own parents as support in the father role (La Taillade, Hofferth, & Wight, 2010). It would be interesting for research to be done on common-law families in Quebec because there was a high rate of common-law unions (Statistics Canada, 2006c) as well as a high rate (82%) of paternity leaves (Vanier Institute, 2011).

Fatherhood was a social construction of gender; socialized through interactions, relationships, and contexts (Wickstrom, 2010). Gender was socialized with individuals at a young age (Morrongiello, Zdzieborski, & Normand, 2010). Therefore micro-level

family systems could be a learning ground for children to learn macro-level gender roles and schemas. Cultural gender roles were important factors in father involvement (Robbers, 2009) and how men understood and experienced fatherhood was influenced by gender ideologies (Bulanda, 2004). There had been a shift from the "public masculinity around work" to a "private masculinity around fathering" (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007). Although perceived as separate in the past, masculinity and fatherhood were gradually becoming enmeshed (Finn & Henwood, 2009). There was a level of "masculine paternity" present in fathers where fathers believed that they cared for their child just as well as their spouse did (Rouyer et al., 2007). Therefore masculinity and the social construction of what it meant to be masculine were changing to incorporate the current image of fatherhood. Currently fathers were trying to find their masculinities in a mixture of modern and traditional images of fatherhood (Finn & Henwood, 2009). Most co-resident fathers cared for their children for their own pleasure and not only to help their spouse (Rouyer et al., 2007), which was contradictory to historical beliefs that fathers were only marital support for the mothers of their children.

Fathers who were expecting gender equality in the parenting of their children found it more difficult in early childhood when gender roles were enacted (Shirani & Henwood, 2011). The role of the father seemed less of an obligation than it was to the mother for reasons such as the mother carrying the baby to term and then being the one to breastfeed the baby. It is for this reason that paternal involvement was more prevalent later in their child's life (Shirani & Henwood, 2011). These perceived biological barriers seemed to get in the way of fathers acting out their nurturing role until later in their child's life. Fathers, therefore, tended to be more future-oriented in thinking about the

positive interactions and parenting experiences they would have in the future (Shirani & Henwood, 2011). As mentioned earlier, fathers were also less likely to take parental leave than mothers in Canada, and they were also more likely to return to work directly following the birth of their child (Statistics Canada, 2006b). This had also created a social expectation that fathers would be more involved with the children when they were older rather than when they were infants.

Biological assumptions contributed to social and cultural beliefs about parenting. Fathers were seen through the lens of paternity determination and genetic lineage before they were recognized as a nurturing parent. This may have had roots in the biological hypothesis of a male "spreading his seed"; to reproduce as much as possible. Determination of paternity was important to fathers (Voracek, Fisher, & Shackelford, 2009) as they did not want to waste their time raising a child that was not genetically theirs. Perhaps there was a cultural belief that mothers had more power in parenting because fathers did not have the certainty mothers did in genetic contribution.

Individual fathers' experiences differed significantly (Settersen & Cancel-Tirado, 2010), which provided evidence that there must be other influences in the father role aside from biology. Gender of the children may have also determined how fatherhood was experienced and expressed. Fathers of boys tended to be more involved in the caregiving of their children than fathers of girls were (Moon & Hoffman, 2008; Rouyer et al., 2007). In addition, when asked about parenting, fathers tended to reference their parenting in relation to their sons rather than their daughters (Mormon & Floyd, 2006) emphasizing the social expectation of sex-role modeling of fathers to sons (Lamb, 2000). Fathers and sons had high agreement on what it meant to be a good father such as

showing love, availability, and being a good role model (Mormon & Floyd, 2006). This showed that there were some assumptions that were created that men felt they had to live up to in order to be a good father. Fatherhood was a social construction and this explained why there has been more emphasis on the nurturing and emotional role of fathers in the 21st century as social values changed (Morman & Floyd, 2006).

The way fathers perceived and acted out their fathering role was important (Wilson & Prior, 2010). In our society, being a good father was seen as a man "being there" for his children (Lemay et al., 2010). Fatherhood was a cultural product; always changing to reflect cultural changes in what being a good father constituted (Morman & Floyd, 2002). Moreover, the conception of responsible fatherhood was created to apply to men across all races and social classes (Doherty et al., 1998). However, there were still traces of fatherhood as breadwinner in the cultural definition of father, making fathers' finances important because they could determine access to the children by the mother (Doherty et al., 1998). Finances also contributed to fathers' feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem in parenting (Lemay et al., 2010). Fatherhood had become seen as a possibility rather than a necessity (Klinth, 2008). Therefore the crossover between all of the ecological systems could be seen; cultural ideals of what constituted a "good father" affected individual factors such as self-esteem, and meso- and exo- levels such as father bonuses and leave policies.

The ecological systems were incomplete to study if the chronosystem was not considered because there were significant events and points in time at each ecological level that contributed as risk and protective factors. Divorce or separation at the micro-level could influence fatherhood through financial distress or separation from children

(Rueger, Schneider, Zier, Letzel, & Muenster, 2011). At the meso-level separation or divorce could change the social support networks that fathers have (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2012). The age of internet created a change in communication that allowed for online Fathers' Rights Groups which was a form of social support for fathers at the meso-level, but also influenced family law policies at the exo-level (Rosen, Dragiewicz, & Gibbs, 2009). Social changes at the macro-level such as the increasing acceptance of stay-at-home fathers, changed how fatherhood was viewed and experienced as nurturing (Chesley, 2011). Therefore, the chronosystem was also an integral part of an ecological model. The ecological approach examined both opportunities such as family encouragement for fathers, but also risks to development (Hanson, 1985), creating a link between an ecological framework and resilience models of risk and protective factors.

Conclusion

Although there has been research completed on ecological models of fatherhood, what is missing is an ecological model of single fatherhood. Many individual factors have been examined for their influence on fatherhood. However, there is room for further development and research. It would be beneficial to look at the overall picture, and it is important to consider that the role of fathers in the family has changed throughout history. The current nurturing father was prevalent in the research on nuclear families, suggesting a more positive perception of father involvement. Although researchers were beginning to look at the positive outcomes of fatherhood and their impact on their families, a resilience model would address the positive outcomes at each level of the ecological system to more fully access life as a divorced single father. In order to further understand the experiences of living in a single father family, the single fathers'

perceptions and life experiences could be examined from the ecological levels. In depth analysis of meanings of single divorced fathers addressed the questions: how do divorced fathers experience single parenthood and what risk and protective factors do they identify?

Chapter 4

Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of fathers in divorced or separated single father families in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). I wanted to identify where single father families may need support and assistance, and where they were strong and resilient. In order to understand meaning for single fathers, the method that well suited an ecological resilience approach was qualitative research methods. Qualitative or inductive research can include personal experiences in the form of narratives and open interviews. Qualitative research allows an understanding of personal experiences and subjectivity that is not easily accessed from quantitative research (Wertz, 2011). Qualitative researchers are able to access authentic experiences by asking, "how was it for *you*?" (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004). This allows a holistic view of a person, and allows a more rich and detailed description than sometimes possible with quantitative methods (Mruk, 2010). Therefore, to understand the experiences of single fathers I used qualitative interview methods with single fathers themselves and service providers who work with fathers in their line of work in HRM.

Narrative inquiry, which was used for the fathers' interviews, is a form of qualitative research that allows individuals to tell their stories and have the researcher write up their stories in the form of narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) justify narrative inquiry when they say "Why narrative? Because experience" (p. 50), indicating the importance of narratives in experience sharing. Narrative inquiry supports diversity and human experience and has historically been used to hear silenced voices (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Narratives come from the analysis of stories and gives light to how a

person understands and perceives their experiences (Riley & Hawe, 2005). The narrative entails creating and telling meaning of the self, the world, and one's identity (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Narrative inquiry also allows studying individuals, relationships, organizations, and society (Gergen & Gergen, 2010; Seale et al., 2004) because people use stories to make sense of their experiences and their world (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2004), therefore it is a good fit for an ecological resilience framework. It is beneficial to the research to have both an understanding of the social phenomenon but also the experiences of those directly influenced by the phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Solomon & Bagatell, 2010). Using narrative inquiry is therefore beneficial to research on interventions and services because it allows an in-depth analysis of community interventions and whether or not they are working for the populations they serve (Riley & Hawe, 2005).

Narrative analysis can potentially reveal layered contexts with fathers and their children (Strega et al., 2009). It allowed for an understanding of what was important and forefront in the minds of the fathers rather than the subjective beliefs of the researcher (Gergen & Gergen, 2010; Strega et al., 2009), allowing the fathers to exert control over the flow of the interview. Control was given to the fathers by having open questions and allowing the fathers to guide the flow of conversation without a lot of structure on my part as the researcher, and allowing their feelings and selves to be heard and recognized (Andrews et al., 2004).

To understand a phenomenon such as single fatherhood, it is important to examine the experiences of individuals involved both from the individual and social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Context is important because narratives are used

for meaning making and are stories of experience in relation to others and in specific situations (Boothe, Grimm, Herman & Luder, 2010). Within narrative inquiry researchers consider inward feelings, the outward environment, personal and social interactions, and continuity along the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This means remembering that (a) people are always changing in an ongoing process, (b) people behave and react differently dependent on situation or context, (c) there are different interpretations of the same situation that are equally true, (d) events do not happen in isolation but are acted out from previous experiences, and (e) interpretative pathways are not cause and effect (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is important to note that narratives are not history; they are recreated again and again (Spector-Mersel, 2010), therefore interpretation plays a large role. Data collection was done by asking questions, keeping journals, and taking field notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Journaling is important because as the researcher acts as listener they can be triggered or reminded of their own experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This way they can write their thoughts down to understand their inward thinking at the time of an outward event. It is important in narrative inquiry for researchers to acknowledge their place in the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Unlike quantitative research where objectivity is valued, researchers acknowledge their influence and voice in the studied events. Acknowledging subjectivity as a researcher is important because interviews are an interaction between two people and are therefore collaboratively produced (Rapley, 2004). Field notes are a way to keep track of outward events or the experience itself, whereas journals allow a record of inward events or experiencing the experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Flexibility and openness are valued because of the

changing nature of events, different relationships between researcher and participants, and the changing purpose of the research. In addition, narrative inquiry is not overly structured but flows as a process, which is why journaling and field notes are important as these resources can track how the process evolves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Journaling and field notes allow the researcher to take context into consideration and to understand the text in analysis (Rapley, 2004). Journaling and open interviews with participants are congruent with relativism, acknowledging that everyone has their own interpretations and that they are all equally valid (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For these reasons I kept both a journal for my thought processes as well as field notes to supplement my interviews (same journal, different pens colours used).

In the case of an understudied population such as divorced single father families it is important to gather as much information as possible (Lietz, 2006). A narrative inquiry approach allowed an understanding of the personal processes of family resilience in five single father families, as seen through the ecological systems (Andrews et al., 2004; Caine, 2010; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Narratives are both a conscious and unconscious selection of information as it is impossible to tell every detail of a person's story (Spector-Mersel, 2010). This means that the fathers had to choose what they wanted to tell, whether consciously or unconsciously, and prioritize what was important to talk about. Therefore, the single fathers had more control over the flow of conversation in the interviews to ensure their valued experiences and meanings came through using broad questions (see Appendix A). Sometimes their perspectives came across as stories and sometimes they did not, however this is often the case for narrative inquiry (Andrews et al., 2004). In the case where a story was not formed by the single father himself, it was

then my place as researcher to create that story in analysis using the information provided (Andrews et al., 2004). At the end of the interview each single father filled out a brief questionnaire for demographic purposes (see Appendix B). For the service providers, however, I used general qualitative methods with semi-structured, in-depth interviews to allow for more structured questions and therefore was able to code for commonalities (see Appendix C). Although I was still trying to access the personal viewpoints and perceptions of the service providers, there were specific things I wanted to know about such as program availability for single fathers within HRM.

Participants

Participants were self-identified as single fathers. I did not create a concrete definition of single father because of the nature of narrative inquiry as well as due to the small population of single fathers in HRM. I did, however, specify that fathers needed to be either separated or divorced rather than widowed. Single fathers were over the age of the majority (19 years of age) and therefore were assumed to be able to consent to their interview. The five single fathers ranged in age from 32 to 64 years of age, and were single fathers for just over one year to nine years. I did put a requirement on participants' time as a single father. I ensured that the single fathers were separated/divorced from the mother of their children for at least one year. This was intended to act as a safeguard and alleviate the chance of creating an emotionally uncomfortable experience for the fathers. Of the five single fathers that I interviewed, two were current single fathers and three were single fathers in the past (between three and 20 years previous). The ages of their children during single parenthood ranged from infant age to teenagers, and two of the single fathers' children were now adults.

The service providers were also over the age of 19 and had worked as service providers for two to nine years in HRM. Although I initially wanted to have the perspectives of service providers from different agencies within HRM, after recruitment I was only able to recruit four service providers and all four service providers worked for the same agency. Positions were social workers, program coordinator, program facilitators, and family intervention workers, with some having overlapping responsibilities.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was granted by the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) at Mount Saint Vincent University prior to recruitment. Participants were first recruited by speaking to family support agencies that offer programs and supports to fathers within HRM. Snowball sampling was employed using contacts I had in the community, poster advertisements, online poster advertisements, and word of mouth. These community contacts acted as gatekeepers in granting access to potential participants. Four interviews were completed with service providers that work with fathers on a regular basis in their line of work. Five additional interviews were conducted with single fathers.

Both the single fathers and the service providers were given an invitation to participate. For service providers, I first sent information letters to the agencies via email or mail. These letters were addressed to the Executive Directors of the agencies to gain permission to contact their staff. Two agencies contacted me giving their consent to advertise to their staff (service providers). Upon receiving permission I forwarded invitations to participate to the service providers as well as my contact information. Those service providers who wished to participate contacted me and I set up a time that

was convenient for them to meet for an interview. Reminder emails were sent after one month to those who received the invitation letters. Only one service provider was in contact with me from another agency, however, despite multiple attempts at contact we were unable to set up a time to interview. Reminder calls were made to this agency as well. Those agencies who did not respond to the original information letter were followed up with via email or telephone, but no responses were given.

Single fathers were also given an invitation to participate when they contacted me. This letter outlined what would be expected if they chose to participate in my research. This document was emailed to the fathers as they demonstrated interest. Two fathers contacted me due to their connection with a family agency, one through seeing my poster advertisement, and two fathers were recruited through word of mouth. However, I had sent out five additional information letters to single fathers who unfortunately were unable to participate due to other commitments. For the five fathers who were still interested in participating after reading the information letter, I set up convenient times for an interview.

For both the single fathers and the service providers the interview began with reviewing the letter of consent. The participants were given two copies of the letter of informed consent to sign; one for my records and one for their records and for future contact with me. I went over the letter of consent with the participants and explained their right to withdraw at any time. I explained that I would be recording the interview with their permission, but they could turn off the recorder at any time or ask to have specific parts removed in transcription. All participants agreed to the voice recording. The letter of consent also included information regarding confidentiality; how their information was

stored, protection of their identity, and that their participation should not cause them any harm or embarrassment (Punch, 1998). After I answered any questions they had and they consented to the terms in the letter of consent, I asked them to sign their form and we began the interview.

Service provider participants were interviewed using an interview guide (see Appendix C) including questions about services, programs, and working with single father families. They were asked about their perspectives of single father families, what it is like to work with single fathers, as well as the current and future services available to these fathers. Interviews with service providers lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Although I had questions to consider for my single father interviews (see Appendix A), the narrative inquiry approach employed allowed for the fathers to tell their own stories through conversation. A set interview guide would not have been congruent with narrative inquiry because the purpose of the research shifts with the narratives of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These in-depth interviews allowed participants to provide "think descriptions" (p. 15) in which they were encouraged to provide elaborate and detailed answers in the interview (Rapley, 2004). Examples of topics that were expanded on with single fathers (although not the case for all fathers) as they arose were: life as a single father, enjoyment from father-child interactions, pride as a single father, the importance of family life, barriers to being an active single father, and available services for fathers. A personal account of life as a single father was requested from the single fathers; they were asked to reflect on their time spent in a single father family and their perceptions and meanings of those experiences. Interviews with single

fathers lasted between 45 minutes to 75 minutes. Within the interviews, open-ended questions were asked that allowed the participants to elaborate on the points they saw fit.

At the end of the interview participants were reminded that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would be kept confidential. I told them to contact me if they had any questions or wished to remove parts of their transcript or withdraw their entire interview. I asked participants if they wished to receive a copy of their interview transcript; those who responded "yes" received their transcript via email once completed. This allowed the participants to read over the interview and change or edit information if they desired. Only one participant provided a change to their transcript, clarifying a point they had made. I had a list of services with me at all interviews in case the participants felt they needed to access them after their participation in my research (i.e., family services, counselling services). The feedback I received from the interviews was positive and hopeful. I did not get the feeling that any participants were negatively affected by these interviews.

Analysis

There were two different analyses used for these interviews. The service provider interviews were analysed using general qualitative methods, however, the single father interviews were analysed using narrative analysis (a form of analysis in narrative inquiry). Narrative analysis involves "finding out about how people frame, remember and report their experiences" as well as making sense of complexities of human lives (Andrews et al., 2004, p. 115). Narrative analysis focuses on meanings, language, plots, and social structures of the interviews (Kvale, 2007). I acted as a "co-producer" of the narrative (p. 74), assisting in unfolding and interpreting the stories of the participants

(Kvale, 2007). Through analysis of personal stories/narratives, I was able to access social processes (Andrews et al., 2004).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim into text documents. I transcribed the interviews myself as a means of cost reduction, but also because it kept my participants' confidentiality and allowed me to integrate the non-verbal components into the transcripts (Kvale, 2007). Text documents were then uploaded into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program. Because service providers were interviewed using general qualitative methods and divorced single fathers were interviewed using narrative inquiry the analyses were also different. Responses from the service providers were coded for common themes and the narratives from single fathers were interpreted and summarized into personal stories using narrative analysis; however some common themes still stood out. Coding means labelling pieces of data and defining what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2006). "Coding gives us a focused way of viewing data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 70). Analyses of both service providers' and single fathers' interviews were ongoing, meaning that analyses were happening as the interviews progressed and continued to shape and form (Kvale, 2007; Rapley 2004). As a component of the ongoing analysis process, I also completed ongoing literature searches corresponding to themes in the data (Rapley, 2004).

For service provider interviews, similar to grounded methodology, coding started with initial/open coding (Bryman, 2008; Charmaz, 2006) in which I took a preliminary run through of the transcripts and coded everything that I believed to be relevant with a category, name or label. This open exploration included examining words, sentences, and incidents (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage of analysis I attempted to distance my

preconceptions and take the data as it was, also referred to as bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I kept codes short and precise as I had the ability to return to them and re-evaluate. I then employed focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), where I used the most relevant and useful codes and went through the data with those codes in mind. Next I used axial coding (Bryman, 2008); I connected codes from initial coding, organized the codes, and tied the data together. This allowed the information to flow better by putting them in categories or subcategories and creating links between those subcategories (Charmaz, 2006). I also used in vivo coding (Charmaz, 2006), where I wanted to keep the meaning and language of a participant to possibly glean an understanding of some social constructions. Throughout this whole process I needed to remain flexible to new discoveries in the data.

Flexibility was integral in understanding the complexities of each individual's experiences. An important part of narrative analysis is that each individual story should be taken as told by the individual (Gergen & Gergen, 2010), meaning it is necessary to use their direct quotations and language. Over-analysis should be avoided because this can lose the impact of each person's story. Narrative analysis allowed me to see trends within the narratives, while being careful to not lump all individual stories together. In her research on teachers, Gade (2011) emphasized that it is important to listen to the language of a group and appreciate each individual voice. It was important that I also look at my own narrative so that I could find my place as a researcher in narrative inquiry and become more critical in my role (Gade, 2011). Narratives were used by Wells (2011) in her analysis of a single mother's custody story; she warns that interpretations of someone else's narratives are incomplete due to it being exactly that, an interpretation. It

is important to consider in narrative analysis that the interpretation of the stories may shift and change. Language and shifts in topic can tell a story in themselves. For all of the interviews, data collection and data analysis happened simultaneously. As recommended by Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001), I did not wait until all interviews were completed to begin coding.

Internal validity or credibility (Bryman, 2008) was increased by my ability to ask further questions within the interview if I wanted more information on a topic, this would not be possible with survey-type responses. In terms of external validity or transferability (Bryman, 2008), however, I could only generalize the information from the interviews to the group I sampled. Generalization of the findings to all single father families in Canada cannot happen due to the limited sample. However, qualitative research such as this looks at social significance rather than statistical numbers (Gobo, 2004). In terms of ecological validity (Bryman, 2008), this study was beneficial in that the interviews gave firsthand accounts of what the selected single fathers' lives were like at the time, making it more reflective of the experiences of the group. An open statement allowed single fathers to express their lived experience; "tell me what it is/was like to be a single father". Also, there is the additional perspective of the service providers to enhance validity as professionals who provide services to fathers on a regular basis. For example, the single fathers expressed a lack of services in HRM and the service providers echoed this same absence in their field.

I also kept my biases and opinions in check by keeping a journal to track my thought processes. This journal also contained notes from my interview sessions to compare later with the transcripts. This journal as well as memo writing and logbook

entries in MAXQDA created an audit trail for reflexivity (Kvale, 2007). Memo writing can be used in general qualitative research, not only for grounded theory research (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). Conception and contemplation along the process of analysis is made easier for the researcher by utilizing memos (Birks et al., 2008). More effective communication can occur, both with myself looking back on notes taken or logbook entries, but also with my thesis supervisor. Memos also allow the researcher to be reflexive in keeping track of their subjectivity, assumptions, and personal interpretations of the data. I was able to go back and confirm or re-evaluate my assumptions. My journal entries and field notes could be incorporated this way into the transcripts. Memos also allowed a starting point for my writing, therefore making the thesis writing more of a process from the beginning (Birks et al., 2008). An audit trail allowed me to keep track of the processes, steps, and conclusions reached throughout the research timeline (Birks et al., 2008; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). My reflexivity was important as I engaged in active, ongoing analysis (Seale et al., 2004). It kept my thought and action processes transparent.

Finally, when reporting the results, I used both small direct quotes but also large passages of my single father participants' narratives to better illustrate their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This allows the reader to have firsthand accounts of single fatherhood told in the language of single fathers themselves. However, using large portions of a participant's transcript can create ethical concern, therefore there were ethical considerations that I had to address for this research.

Ethical Considerations

First of all it was important to address a pressing issue in narrative inquiry ethics. Ethical constraints within themselves go against the foundations of narrative inquiry. Ethics are viewed as set boundaries and a knowledge of right that give the impression of control or power in a situation (Adams, 2008). This makes the morphing and situational nature of narrative inquiry difficult to fit into ethics boundaries; each situation and interview is new and different. Researchers have found that there is no such thing as a universal set of principles (Adams, 2008). Ethics are subjective in that as a researcher I did not know who I would harm or help with my research. As a researcher "[I] ha[d] an ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives [I] stud[ied]" (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). This could have become difficult when I was essentially playing two roles: (a) an intimate relationship with my participant, while asking them to disclose their personal experiences and (b) a scholarly and professional role (Josselson, 2007). It is important to acknowledge the dilemma this form of interpersonal research creates for ethical procedures. Furthermore, trust and rapport become important ethical factors in narrative research (Josselson, 2007).

In terms of compensation for participating in the interviews, father and service provider participation was voluntary and they were not recruited by monetary incentives. With a small sample size for interview participants there may be concern that individuals are identifiable; therefore appropriate safeguards were required such as the use of pseudonyms and omitting identifiable information such as workplaces, addresses, children's names, and ex-partner's information. Appropriate safeguards were also required to assure that interview participants had access to further supports should they

require them after their interviews. None of the fathers required further support materials after their interviews, nor did they need to take a break within their interviews.

Due to the possible ethical issues with this research there were specific safeguards in place to protect the participants. Interview participants were adults over the age of the majority. I assumed that at this age the participants had the cognitive maturity to understand their participation in the study. Interview participants had the ability to stop or refuse to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, without penalty. However, none of the participants exercised this right. Single father participants were informed that large portions of their stories would be used verbatim, but that identifying information would be omitted or changed. Due to the large portions of narrative being used, single fathers needed to be made aware that identification was more likely than in other qualitative interviews. Service provider participants were assured that their participation or non-participation would not affect their job with their affiliated organization. Single fathers were told that their participation or non-participation would not have an effect on the courses or groups they may have been participating in or joining, or any services they were currently receiving or accessing in the future. Participants were advised of this before commencing the interview and this was also listed on the informed consent document. Resources for the participants were available if they needed to talk further with a professional on the issues raised, or if the experience of the interview itself brought up troubling feelings and memories. Information that could have been provided to the participants were contact information for counselling, parenting programs, and support groups that participants

could access if they wish. Check-ins were made throughout the interview to ensure that the participant felt comfortable with how the conversation was progressing.

A letter of informed consent was given to each participant with information on the study and what to expect if they chose to participate. The letter of consent outlined their rights to withdraw or refuse to answer questions. It also outlined that they would have the ability to withdraw their transcript in whole or specific parts if they decide they would rather not have specific information included. Participants were provided with a copy of their transcript to review if they wished. Any names or identifying factors were removed from the transcripts. Hard copies of data were kept in a locked filing cabinet accessible only by myself, while electronic copies of data were on a password-protected computer accessible only to my thesis supervisor and myself.

The qualitative research that I completed was person-centered, therefore I had person-centered rules to follow to ensure that my participants' well-being was protected throughout the interview and analysis process (Seale et al., 2004). Although there were important ethical considerations involved, this research method was beneficial in accessing personal meanings and narratives of single fathers in HRM. Speaking with service providers allowed me to gain understanding of the current services and needed supports for single fathers in HRM. Listening and being a part of single father interviews gave me the opportunity to hear and interpret stories and experiences of five diverse single fathers. The combination of narrative inquiry and general qualitative methods created a nice entry-level scope of single fatherhood at the various ecological levels, while also accessing the protective factors and risks that single fathers identified as significant. I will now go into more detail on these findings.

Chapter 5

Results

The following section will address the results of the interviews with both the single fathers and the service providers. First, I will present the narratives of the single fathers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, narrative analysis requires the creation of a story or narrative of each individual father. I have created pseudonyms for each father and have told the story of each father using their own words and experiences. Second, I address the common themes that were extrapolated from the service provider interviews. Lastly, I tie together some of the overlapping themes that stood out between the single fathers and the service providers.

Single Father Narratives

The five single fathers that I interviewed each had their own unique stories and their own experiences of single fatherhood. Although they differed in length as a single father, age and number of children, and personal backgrounds, there were also similarities in their stories. However, with narrative inquiry, the focus is not on making connections through common themes, but rather appreciating each individual's personal experiences. Thus, here are the stories of five inspiring single fathers.

Michael's story. Michael is a 40 year-old, Caucasian father who has been the primary caregiver for his seven-year-old son, Ryan, for over a year. Michael has custody of his son both voluntarily as well as out of need; the mother of his child, Rita, has proven herself unfit at the moment to raise her child in a healthy environment. Michael has been fighting to get his former partner help in order for his son to enjoy the benefits of having both parents equally involved in his life. Currently his son sees his mother

every second weekend for a few hours as well as a couple days a week after school. When asked about his experience as a single father he replies:

> If I didn't have family support I don't know how I'd do it. I lost my home, I lost everything. I'm fighting to keep my boy, to keep him safe. And there's [*sic*] very little supports out there.

Michael differs from the other single fathers in the sense that he has interim primary custody due to the mother of his child being a danger to herself and their son. Although not always the case in the past, his former partner is in need of some assistance that is not being provided despite Michael's efforts to help her become a fit parent again. "It's been a fight at every angle, every step, and there was no support."

> Um, initially I found the process fine, you know everything was put in place; I was told I was doing the right thing. And then there was no follow through. They made, I think, two or three visits to the home with my ex, to see if things were okay. Initially what happened: my ex had moved in with a family to help her pay the mortgage on her matrimonial home. After a month of them being there they came to me with concerns of her leaving him alone, her using drugs in the house, her not getting up and getting the kid ready for school on time, not picking him up at the bus stop on time. So they brought this information to me, which I brought to community services. And it was a battle to get community services to talk to this family. The social worker that opened the file and handled the file had refused to really talk to them. Initially the family had to call them, so the family said they called; they called and set up an appointment. The social worker, in an emergency, cancelled the appointment and then never ever called the family back to reschedule.

Despite Michael's efforts to get his former partner help, the professionals he encounters become barriers in the process. He believes that in his case he comes off as a very competent parent, therefore the system does not want to use their resources on him. His experiences have led him to believe that instead of preventing future issues, the focus remains instead on maintenance and waiting for something dangerous to happen before stepping in. Michael believes that community services did not take a "serious look at the

information provided" in the file and did not follow up with his concerns. Michael believes that his competence as a father became the reason for community services to not help the mother of his child, "they end up closing the file because they said I took all the right steps. So they have nothing to worry about."

> It was me on the phone begging them to look into it, begging them to contact the family. And kind of reiterating that you know I don't know them, they're complete strangers and they're coming to me. And from my work experience, and what I was doing, I didn't have a choice I had to go through the system and even morally and ethically there were enough risk factors there. Like she left my, at the time, six-year-old alone in the house, and that's not safe. Right, but yet here I am on the phone with the social worker, not getting call backs, and with her supervisor you know with her supervisor kind of saying "please provide help here, I want my son safe". And I think there was like maybe three home visits and then the file was closed.

Michael continues to explain how much of a fight this process has been to ensure the safety of his son when in his mother's care. Despite physical evidence of the living conditions at his former partner's home, he does not feel that community services made it their responsibility to get involved. Michael made multiple calls to the social worker after she cancelled a meeting with the family that lived with his former partner. This family was trying to get her help as well, but social services was unresponsive. Michael persists, "it took me going to the supervisor, and the supervisor finally said okay."

Something that stands out to me in interviewing Michael is his desire to help his former partner to ensure his son could have both of his parents in his life. This is something I noticed again in other interviews, but I will address that later. The importance of having both parents "healthy" for his son is something to which Michael speaks. Although community services saw the mother's involvement to be minimal and therefore adjustments would be unnecessary, Michael says, "I want to get back to the

shared custody thing but we have to help her address her parenting choices and if that's not addressed there's always going to be kind of limited involvement and that's going to impact my son, he needs both of his parents, but he needs both his parents' help to be safe." Michael had his former partner sign an interim agreement because of threats she made to take her son and run, however:

> She signed it and we arranged the first visit and the first visit she doesn't show up to school to pick my son up. And I got a call from the school and my son is crying in the background loudly because he hasn't seen his mom in almost four or five weeks. Um, hadn't seen each other. You know, and I called the social worker right away and said "look here's what we're dealing with, first opportunity for her to see her son in four weeks and I get a call from the school saying she's not there and my son's at school crying his eyes out. Please, please, please help her and help me help my son". And they said, "well the file is closed."

Michael describes his former partner as a different person than she used to be; before being involved in a motor vehicle accident she was a "wonderful mom." Since her motor vehicle accident she has used prescription drugs and marijuana as well as experienced pain and depression. He has tried "for years to help get supports for her as a parent. It's just doors shut everywhere." However, since community services closed her file, "she feels she's a perfect mom and has become even more difficult in regards to access." His experience with Children's Aid was equally disheartening.

> I mean when Children's Aid was involved, they could have been maybe a little bit more protective of Ryan to see how he was adjusting, how he's doing, how he's being impacted, see what's in place to help him deal with that some of that stuff. And then also it gives them an opportunity to say "Okay wait a minute what we're seeing here doesn't really match with what we're seeing with Rita" and yes there's a lot of needed support that needs to go in certain areas, and let's provide that for her so that Ryan's not impacted.

Michael believes that if the tables were turned and it was his ex that had primary custody due to perceived inabilities to parent on *his* part that things would have panned

out differently. He believes that as a father he would have been more closely monitored, "I think if it had been the other way around, um, they would have reacted strongly, I think, to the point where they would have dictated supervised visits for myself. Yeah. And dictating any upcoming home visits with supervised access to make sure he was safe." This was evidenced when the social worker that Michael was in contact with contacted his former partner to provide *her* with help, when initially Michael had contacted the social worker to help *him*. He says the social worker "created a situation with my ex where I got a lot of calls from her threatening to take me to court because the social worker told her that I was…so she was offering support there, but on my end there was nothing." Dealing with community services was like a double edged sword, as Michael explains:

> I do what community services tells me, but I get in trouble in court for it. And if I don't listen to what community services is telling me at the time, then they could have taken Ryan away from both of us and held me responsible for not keeping him safe. And I didn't want that. It was like a no-win situation.

Michael has found struggles along the way in terms of the processes he has had to go through. An example that is prevalent in his life is dealing with his son's school through the courts. The courts will not allow Michael to move his son to a school in the area he lives in therefore it becomes a struggle for Michael as primary guardian, "I don't think it's in his best interests to travel an hour and ten minutes every morning and an hour and ten minutes every afternoon after school." Even something as seemingly small as his child's school became a lengthy, unsolved process. Michael was only given two days notice before needing to appear in court, he says, "there's no way I could get a lawyer to gather information, to get us subpoenas, or affidavits, and stuff and then represent our side of the situation. So the judge basically said he wanted parental capacity assessments

to be done before any decision was made." Michael explains the unfairness of the court system in expecting him to be able to find a lawyer and afford a lawyer on short notice.

In general, process barriers as a single father continue to influence Michael's quality of life. Michael refers to his former partner as being a barrier:

> She refused to move out of the matrimonial home when we separated, refused to let me try to sell it, and then refused to pay the mortgage. So the bank took the home back and I lost a fair bit and an asset. As well as she was entitled to half of that, but I couldn't afford to pay a mortgage, an apartment, raise [child name] on my own, and keep my car on the road and all that. I was just not able to do all of that. So the only choice I had was, legally I could sell the house, but um any time we tried to arrange a viewing once I identified that she was behind on the mortgage, we'd try and arrange someone to view it. She would sabotage the sales, she wouldn't leave the home or the home would be a mess. And when I say a mess, I mean people would come back saying there was dog feces and they don't want that, they don't want this home. So all I do is just sit and wait for her to kind of completely destroy the place. So I have to go bankrupt, I can't afford to pay for that house and then live. And she's trying to make- when she finally moved out, the bank told her she had to. There were holes in the walls, there were holes in the ceiling, carpet's ripped up, you know the place was destroyed. She's taken all that, that whole time. So right now I know it's going to take me three years to have any kind of credit to have it secured as well.

Another barrier that Michael identifies is the lack of support he receives as a single father.

> Um, like I said with social supports I get nothing, like there's no…I don't get help with haircuts, I don't get help with clothing, nothing. I've been doing it all on my own. There's really nothing there in terms of support.

Michael finds that not having financial support as well makes life challenging at times because the way of life that his son is used to has changed.

> You know like some of the things we would normally be able to do. Um, you know, if it wasn't for some of this him and I would have been to the ski hill a couple of times this year so he could learn. And it's not about giving him gifts, but providing him opportunities to learn things. You know, learn how to ski or

> snowboard, things of that nature. Maybe a few more movies out, just things like that I have to pick and choose.

Michael even explains that he tried to hide his role as provider from his son in case he was seen as "buying" his son's love.

> And this year for Christmas she [Rita] said she couldn't afford to have him; didn't want him so he didn't really have Christmas gifts, but I provided like all of that, to the point where I told her "this is what I'm going to do, so Ryan's not…I don't want you to feel like Ryan's with me because he gets gifts". Everything that I got was either from Santa or Mom and Dad. You know so from Ryan's point of view, Dad didn't get him all these presents, Mom and Dad shared. Because I don't want him or anyone to feel like he's being bought by presents.

Formal support for single fathers in general is something that Michael notices as missing in HRM. Not only does Michael have experience as a single father, but he also worked as a service provider within HRM dealing with at-risk youth and families. He has noticed through both life domains that there is a lack of support for single fathers and fathers in general. Michael believes that "there could be more support groups, there could be more information displayed at service providers." He mentions attending an IWK clinic and reading their mission statement, "promoting healthy families, and they mention children and moms but the word dad or father does not appear on the mission statement. So I was there as a service provider at that point, not even as a parent, and I thought wow I wonder how many dads tend to feel left out or you know, or intimidated to ask for help because they get this message a lot of places they go." Michael believes that this reflects how fathers are treated and viewed as parents, he says, "maybe if there was more information and more understanding and more of a thought process towards promoting this, things would be a lot different."

Despite the support challenges that Michael identifies, he also identifies support as a protective factor in the areas that he *does* have that needed support. For Michael, his family is an integral form of this support. He states, "if it wasn't for my family I really wouldn't be here." Michael moved closer to his family for support, which is why he is trying to change his son's school. Due to the financial burden of his matrimonial home, his mother is helping to finance a house closer to the family. He describes their living situation as better for his son because "he's got my mom, my brother, his cousins. This is a long-term, stable place. You know, that was my thought process." However, the judge did not appreciate the move, hence his barriers in court to move schools for his son. Regardless, being close to his family gives him social support as well as financial support. "You know so I'm fortunate, fortunate to have them because if not I would be much, much worse. You know, it's not right, it's not fair to the kids."

Parental capacity has been ordered on behalf of both Michael as well as his former partner, however Michael is not worried. He expresses his confidence in his parenting abilities, despite the lack of support he has received from the legal system, Children's Aid, or social services.

> I'm really not that worried that she's going to see anything alarming. I'm good with Ryan, Ryan and I are very close, he listens very well, we're very kind of we're bonded completely, in a very appropriate kind of way. So I'm not worried about that.

Despite his confidence in his abilities, Michael expresses worry about stigmas getting in the way of his parental capacity results, "I do worry sometimes that the biases can sneak into some of that." He worries that since he has not had more than one visit in his home and none of his referral contacts have been contacted that something may turn up against him. However, he hopes, "you can't report something negatively and not look

at every side." Michael expresses that his next steps are figuring out school for his son and continuing to fight for his son because being a single father is "worth it."

James' story. James is a 43 year-old, Caucasian father who currently does not have primary custody of his children, however, he did have primary custody over seven years ago. He classifies himself as being a single father for nine years before his ex-wife removed his children from his care without any legal repercussions in 2010. He is the proud father of a 15 year-old daughter, Emily, and a nine-year-old son, Ben. James has also experienced fathering as a dual parent when parenting the children in the same household as his ex-wife and a split custody parent when he had custody of their daughter and his ex-wife had custody of their son. From the beginning I knew that James was a very passionate father who surrounded his life with his children, but he is also an advocate for other parents. He describes himself as a "proud dad."

When describing his children it is apparent how proud James is of both of his children. He describes his daughter as a "strong young lady" because she has "persevered through" despite the custody and access issues and is still "making the A's in school." She remains "focused, and driven, and everything like that is applaudible [*sic*]." James speaks proudly of his son, not only because he is his only boy and the one to carry on the family name, but also because "he's a very strong young boy."

A major influence on James' life is that of which he refers to as Parental Alienation, James spoke about his ex-wife preventing him from having contact with his children despite previously agreed upon terms. He expresses the pain it has caused him and his family to no longer have that full-time access. James worries about how the alienation is affecting his son because "he has been affected by it a bit more than [his]

daughter." He sees the effects in his son, "most recently he's withdrawn, he doesn't want to talk, there's not a lot of access with him or my daughter at this point." The distance that has been created between James and his children has been difficult, "and you know I still stay the hard road and try and make the contact and stay involved as much as I can, but a lot has been lost since 2010. It relates to a lot of it a parenting that exists when the kids are closer to you, where you can go to their school." James explains how being in close proximity to his children allowed him to be more active as a father even when a joint custody agreement was in place. He was involved with his children's schools, concerts, sports, and even things as simple as fixing a flat tire on a bike. Now going from a primary caregiver for his children to being separated from them he feels that there is "a loss of that connection that we used to have" that is felt by his son as well.

Because James has experienced fatherhood from many different roles with his children, I asked him for a timeline of what it was like in the beginning when he had primary custody of his children, when they lived at home with him. James speaks about the bonding that was present, specifically with his daughter, he says, "it was great- it was fantastic. Like I just felt so engaged and so in tune with them." He explains how daily living was enjoyable with his children "being able to embrace each other and share the household the way we did."

> When I came [*sic*] home at the end of the day, prepared supper for them, helped them with their homework, embraced them in activity or whatever school work has to be done, prepared them for bed and you can get your hugs and kisses in and say goodnight and stuff right. I was able to go to the school and be involved in school, able to be involved in sports that were taking place in the evenings for them. Like Emily was always in soccer, we had Ben in soccer for a little bit too.

Despite the positive things that James mentions about being a full-time custodial parent, he finds that once his family situation changed those important tasks he took on were not considered in his court procedure. James emphasizes that the court processes are "hard on the kids" because "you have that bond and it's being disrupted".

> My children were used to Dad being there, like I said, making supper, going to school, going to the sports, hugging them, kissing them at night, cleaning house, washing the clothes, buying groceries with them, like just things that the courts don't consider. None of it is looked at properly when families are in the family court systems. They seem to look at well, who's better for these children? Or whatever, right. They just don't get into it as fine-tuned as they should, I guess! Like I said, they kind of look at; well what arrangements are you guys going to agree on based on what we have here in black and white? And then where does one of you people fall into this table of support? You know?

When James and his ex-wife lived one kilometre away from each they had joint custody. James describes it as not as ideal as being around his children everyday but that it was still better than his situation now because he "was able to continue like with a lot of what was happening but for less of the time." Although not as ideal as living full-time with his children he says, "I was on their school bus route so they could then stay over nights at their other home with me and just get up and go to school. And I was able to still go to their schools, still go to their sports, and you know participate as the other parent."

James then explains the next transition in his fatherhood timeline, split custody. Due to his ex-wife moving out of the city he was placed in a situation over which that he ended up having little control. His ex-wife took his son with her to the new city and James received custody of his daughter; splitting the children up.

> Yeah I had split custody and my daughter stayed with me, and my son had no choice, she just took him to [city]. I had a lawyer at the time and we, or should I say I, agreed to this split custody arrangement instead of fighting to have my son

> brought back to his community. As well, I was trying to avoid more disruption to my children's lives. I was told by the judge at the end of it that he applauded the settlement and that he couldn't have done much better. It didn't make me feel any better, but I guess that told me right there that if I had have gone to try and bring them back I probably wouldn't have been successful. So I guess, again less disruption is better. If I had have tried that it would have went on for a longer period of time. The courts take forever, so it would have went on and disrupted things even more for the children.

Although this time spent with his daughter was great, James realizes that other factors came into play such as gender that posed as challenging when raising a pre-teen daughter.

> Unfortunately, after my daughter finished her school year, after turning 13 that year, she started going through puberty. She felt she needed her mother. And I should have keyed into that when I was agreeing to the way the split custody was heard out and realized I would probably have a better chance as a single parent with my son being in our home than I would my daughter. I thought I had that strong bond with my daughter because she said openly to her mother "I'm not having you take me out of my community, I'm going to stay with Dad" and I could do nothing but embrace that and support that at that time. But being a dad and being a human being, I know about the changes in life and how those changes in life go. And I couldn't negatively look at her request to live with her mom after she finished her school year. She was approaching grade eight and started going through puberty and was feeling she needed to be around a female. You know, I couldn't say well no you're not, or I'll be damned, let's get back in court, stuff like that. I had to just say, I said openly "I don't agree with not having you in my life, but I'm not going to stop you from being happy so if that's where you need to be, then that's where you need to be. I'll do what I can to get through this situation, whatever change has to take place between your mom and I."

James, looking out for the best interests of his daughter, allowed her to go live with her mother during her time of need. This was an informal agreement, not through the courts, which is how custody began to be lost for James. Although his ex-wife breached the relocation order, it has continued to be a battle for James to access his children. Continuing to look out for the best interests of his children, he attempted to "think with a

rational head as well about, you know, minimizing disruption" for his children. However, trusting his legal aid lawyer ended up in disruption to his family, "I mean life is unpredictable in a sense that you can roll with it but then sometimes it rolls over you."

Despite losing custody from a breach of relocation order, James still tries to remain positive and keep the best interests of his children in mind. He believes it was better to not hold his ex-wife in contempt because he fears it would negatively affect his children and continues to strive to create the most comfortable life for his children, "it just seemed better for the kids. You know, it wasn't any better for me."

James has repeatedly encountered challenges as a father dealing with custody issues and the process of the courts. Officials tended to side with their mother, "while we were in court, you know she was blatantly not having, following the agreement. And I had an officer document some of the access times she did not follow our agreement, who ended up taking her side." James did not receive any assistance when his ex-wife breached the relocation order, "I know from speaking with lawyers the order that I had about not relocating the kids, apparently it's a false façade because they were saying the justices really don't have the power to tell an individual whether or not they can't move somewhere or not." Therefore, when his ex-wife realized this she took advantage of it. Currently, James is still alienated from his children and he is starting to feel and see the effects on his children.

> Current day I'm dealing with next to no access. I've been paying child support the whole time and ended up with a strained relationship with both of the children. As I said, my nine year-old son doesn't really even talk to me. My 15 year-old daughter kind of blows me off. And I don't know if that's just being a teenager or not, it might be.

There are some differences that James notices between when he had primary care of his children to current day, such as his ability to be *involved* with his children. James believes the bonds with his children have changed because he has:

> No access, not being involved in their sports, not being involved in their school, not knowing who they're running around with anymore, like I don't know any of their friends, or who they are, or what they do or anything like that. I don't know the extent of you know the things that are happening in their household which are appropriate or not. Um, I don't know if they're eating properly. Before I used to be part of the grocery order and preparing food and stuff and I knew they were eating well and on time and in the appropriate manner. With a background in fitness, I know what a good diet looks like for a person and I don't know if any of that is happening anymore for our children. I don't get to hug them each day, I don't get to give them a kiss at night or tuck them in, or do their laundry. There's just so much that isn't there anymore and all that is here now, to answer your question, is me and an empty house that I bought for us. And court dates to try and come up with something new that's going to promote a better relationship with them and hopefully reconnect with some of their lives somehow.

When James attempted to get shared custody with his children he found it difficult due to the courts and child support payment assumptions. His ex-wife was convinced by her lawyer that if she allowed James to have one more day with his children to make it shared custody, there would no longer be child support paid to her because time with the children would be relatively equal. In fact, likely she would have had to pay *him* child support because of her higher income. However, getting money was not James' intent, he says, "I don't want your money, I want half the time with our kids up the street so that they can have two homes to share." However it was not successful for James.

In discussing his access of services or programs for fathers, James tells me that he tried to access counselling but found that his family was more supportive than the formal supports in HRM. He also accessed a fathers' program through a family organization but found there to be some pitfalls with these formal supports. James says, "the support that's

out there is so structured and a lot of times it's so um… you know, black and white." He mentions that although the services are meant as support, it is not enough, "everybody was acknowledging that things aren't good and that the change needs to be happened… it needs to happen sorry. But nobody was willing to get involved." James attempted to find advocates for parents in his situation, however found that because organizations were funded by the government, "you can't bite the hand that feeds you and that's what makes me not feel that comfortable with those programs and services that are out there. Because if there is help and support there shouldn't be that type of thing that will stop the help and support at a certain stage of what they're trying to provide to people, you know?" James also accessed legal services and found them to be costly and unhelpful unless he was "emptying RRSPs and my credit cards into their hands to try and help my family," as he did in the beginning. Once he started using legal aid tariffs, he believes they lost interest because it was not their "best bang for their buck."

James encountered multiple barriers with the legal system as well as the government and it was not until he started having these custody issues that he realized some of the internal workings of these systems. He feels the system is biased and that it has made him have to "walk on eggshells" to see his children.

> Once the court was involved I had to try and find help and I got more engaged with society and services and these people and everybody that's running things. It's exposed its ugly face. I was just like "oh my gosh", like how dare they, shame on them. Not only shame on my ex, but shame on these people too. Shame on them. I walk on eggshells; I walk on eggshells every day. It's a terrible way to live.

What James would like to see happen to support fathers as primary caregivers to their children would be large-scale reform. These exo-level factors could influence the

relations that single fathers may have with their children. James would like to see the Justice Minister promote an initiative for reform to "chang[e] the custody and maintenance act, and the maintenance enforcement act, the divorce act will probably have some repercussions in there as well." James believes that this is a large task, and that is probably the reason why no one is addressing it. For the initiative to start he thinks that ground level researchers can work with parents "that have gone into the good, the bad and the ugly and need to start talking and going over that legislation with a fine tooth comb, and pinpointing the flaws and correcting them through reform." However, he does not believe that education of those in power is enough:

> They're- that's a very difficult statement because we already put these people in power based on saying that they're educated to do those things. So how much more can they be educated to help out with the situation? I think maybe the initiative will be a good place to start making the changes needed.

James then mentions that perhaps what is needed is for someone who holds some power and is going through a similar family situation personally to talk about his experiences because it would benefit the whole by addressing these issues and giving a "higher voice" to them with more "merit".

> They give people like that more merit than they would someone like myself. They would then maybe spin the wheels a little faster. Because I'm telling you, they're a vicious breed. If it's affecting them, then they'll move quicker. But if it's not affecting them, as I've seen with all this research I did and contacts I tried to make, they just ignore you.

James continues to fight for his rights as a father. The quantity of his life that is dedicated to his children, with or without custody, is admirable. My heart went out to him and how awful his time has been navigating the legal system and government as a father.

Tyson's story. Tyson was a black single father over ten years ago to his two children; a daughter who is now adult-aged and a son who unfortunately has passed away. After their separation Tyson and his ex-wife attempted sharing custody on a two year on, two year off basis. However, "unfortunately after her first three, four months she decided that she did not want to have the kids. So [he] decided to take them on [him]self, no strings attached. Um, no money involved, no finances exchanged what-so-ever." Tyson raised his children solely for about six years from the time his son was seven and his daughter was five-years-old. Currently Tyson is 54 years-old and has remarried and currently acts as a dual parent to his stepchildren; two pre-teen boys.

Tyson speaks in a very story-like form, while explaining his experiences as a single father he gave detailed examples of his life at the time of the event. Something that stood out to me was that Tyson expresses immense pride in his role as a single father.

> At the beginning I was um…very excited you know and very proud um that I was going to raise my children on my own based on knowing that there are a lot of fathers out there that don't raise their children, sometimes don't even see their children or don't pay attention to their children. Um I grew up in an old style atmosphere of you know community taking care of all the kids in the community and that's how parents were and they raised your own kids and your neighbour's kids. So that was my character and um, so when I had my two kids and um you know I was very happy to take on this task and looking forward to doing that and being that primary giver.

However, despite Tyson's inspirational outlook of his experiences as a single father, he also came across some challenges and barriers. One of these challenges is working while also needing to cook, clean and take care of the children; which he notes that he respects in single mothers. Another challenge Tyson found is that organizations expect the mother to be the primary caregiver, not the father so "when I went into school meetings and um you know I made it out from work and I see all the mothers there and

I'm the father sitting in the group. You know people are kind of looking at me oddly." He notices this expectation of mothers as primary caregiver in terms of support as well, "as far as any agencies that reached out to single mothers and um it seemed like they were pretty set in their ways about them dealing with single mothers and not single fathers."

Tyson explains that he encountered barriers regarding stereotypes of fathers as "dead beat" dads who do not pay child support for their children. He gives this story of his experiences with maintenance enforcement despite the fact that Tyson had primary custody of his children and there were no financial exchanges between himself and his ex-wife. One day Tyson received a letter in the mail from maintenance enforcement, he called the number provided and was told he owed his ex-wife money. Tyson explains that he was the sole guardian of his children and had no financial agreements with his wife. The woman from maintenance enforcement did not seem to understand the concept of a father having sole custody and referred him to her supervisor. Yet, the supervisor would not give Tyson any information over the phone, so Tyson was required to take time to come into the office.

> So I get down there and he states to me that um I'm supposed to be paying her $300 a month and I said, "no." He says, "well do you owe her $300?" and I said, "no" I said, "can you tell me what it's more- what more entails?" And he wouldn't give me detail. But what had happened was, to get back at me what she did was she applied to this office, to the enforcement office, stating that I owed her money and they automatically assumed she was correct without even looking up my court agreement.

He continues to explain how this process continued even longer for him as the staff were unaware of how to approach this situation and could not comprehend his custody arrangement. They were unable to produce his court agreement when he asked and they refused to read the copy he brought in himself. Tyson says, "it took me almost two hours

to prove that I did not owe any money. Um but they still did not sign off on me not being in the system. He wanted to make sure that the document that I had was the same document that was in the court." Luckily, Tyson did not have to proceed with a lawsuit, he got a letter of apology and the records of his involvement with maintenance enforcement were wiped clean.

However it was not the end of the challenges for Tyson. At one point his ex-wife had visits with their children every second weekend, Tyson would drop off and pick up his children for those visits. There were one or two weekends where Tyson was unable to drop off or pick up his children and told his ex-wife that she would have to pick them up for her weekends. He then explains to me:

> So she actually took me to court for denying her access for the children. And I walked into the courts…I gave the…as soon as the court procedures started the judge was a female judge, a female judge, and the judge had about four or five things listed on this list that she had that the children's mother submitted that were all things I was in the wrong in. And that judge reprimanded me without me without me saying a word, for probably about I don't know, a good five-ten minutes. And listed all of these things and said that- you know the things I had to do. And I said, "OK well now can I get a chance to talk?" and the judge said, "no, we don't need to hear from you. This is dismissed, we'll write this up in the order about," I can't remember what the other two or three things were. So I walked out of that court room very frustrated because that judge looked at me as if…I was a deadbeat dad and um the mother was the one who was struggling trying to keep things um in order. And I knew very well this judge had no idea that I was the one who was the primary giver. So and what was done is- is she pre-judged me by when I walked into that court.

Tyson believes that race may have played a factor in this judge's case; believing that double jeopardy may play a factor in the courtroom between not only being a father, but a black father. "Mainly, one because I was black and male. And you know, there's a high percentage of black males who don't support their children and she automatically

assumed that I was one." Tyson researched how to appeal a case on his own and a new case was opened in which "everything was thrown out of court" when he was able to explain his side. It was found that his ex-wife had provided inaccurate information but that the judge made assumptions without validating those statements.

Another challenge that Tyson came across was that his ex-wife feared that he would ask for child support from her, despite the fact that Tyson had never asked for money and never intended to ask for money from the children's mother. He explains, "so she decided that she was going to after a four-year period, after she signed custody over to me, was that then she was going to um get the kids back. She wanted to go back to the original agreement because she figured she was in a position where I was going- in a place to ask for money. Which I never did; I never had any intentions of asking for any money uh for support." Tyson believes that the lawyers defending his ex-wife were even going as far as stretching the truth to "prove" that he was not a capable father, they "twisted things around that would make me look like I was an unfit father." He says, "they did everything to try to get me in anger, to show that I had a temper. Which didn't work. And they did everything to show that I was an unfit father after I watched- took care of the kids for a four-year period."

After this process finished the judge deemed that nothing would change with the children's custody; therefore, despite the efforts of his ex-wife and her three lawyers trying to prove him unfit, he was seen as a capable parent. Tyson says, "and that was um after a four-year period of me having the children, was the- was probably the first time that I got a little feeling of pride and um a sense of accomplishment of being a single father um only because somebody understood and believed what I was trying to- how I

was trying to present myself and what I was trying to say." Tyson then says something that makes me wonder if the same would be true for single mothers going through a similar situation, "and I felt comfortable with OK now I have my children, I don't have to worry about anybody breathing down my back saying that you know they're going to take my children away from me."

Despite the validation Tyson received from the courts of his abilities as a father he continued to have to prove himself by having multiple social worker visits to his home to check on his children. These were not court-ordered but because of phone calls made by his ex-wife. Luckily, he had the validation of multiple "witnesses" to his parenting as well as the verbal testimony from his children that they were happy in Tyson's custody.

Tyson mentions he also received validation of his parenting from participating in his daughter's activities despite what some other fathers might see as gendered barriers.

> And…you know as far as my daughter's concerned, you know she was in the Girl Guides and all of that stuff. And at the beginning it was very awkward because the only ones that were participating with the daughters in the girl guides were the mothers. And you know, I just think you know what, no I'm not going to let that moment pass me; I need to be there and participate in those things as well. So you know at times you would have…um you know 15 girl guides and 14 mothers and me. And eventually the community got to know that hey this guy's legit, he's doing whatever it takes to raise his kids. But what a sense of pride that I had because I was able to see that side of her as well; the feminine side, the things that girls like to do, and all that stuff. And I used to say to her, "you know if you're missing that part of where your mother should be here, please don't hesitate to tell me because we'll do our best to get her to do this kind of stuff instead of me." And most of her response was, "no Dad, it's okay I'd like to have you here, this is something that we're going to do". And there's a sense of pride because she is willing to say, "it's okay for me to be different."

Tyson describes his experiences as giving him both a "bitter side" and a "better side." He says, "I'm always on the defensive when it comes to the single father trying to

raise a child, you know with the way society is built to stand to." This is because "you find those emotions of all that stuff you've gone through in the past comes forward from the subconscious mind only because they were bad experiences." Despite some of the challenges and negative feelings associated with the process of single fatherhood, Tyson says, "I often say to myself, "geez my rights have been violated many, many times" but do I want to spend my time dealing with that and dwelling on that or do I really want to enjoy the rest of my life for me and for my…again for my daughter." In speaking to his "better side" from his experiences as a single father, Tyson explains:

> my past experience has made me a better father where now at home I'm taking 50% of the responsibility and respecting the other 50% of- of what my wife does… um… because I know what she may entail, what she may go through, I know what I've gone through in the past you know. So I think it's made me a better person in the long run because I am able to see everything on both sides.

Tyson explains that there are more positive outcomes from being a single father than negative outcomes; perhaps it is just that the negative things come to mind first because of how they affected him at the time. The things Tyson appreciated as a single father are:

> spending every day with my children, um waking up with them, you know, going to sleep with them, um…you know, driving them to school every day, um seeing them after school every day, having to keep that responsibility of checking in as to how's it all going and all that other stuff. Um…you know they were…they were perks, they were things that I looked at and I realized um as I was going through it and now that I was fortunate…you know to be that or to gather all of that information. I'm gathering all that parenting and parenthood that kids would share with two people and I got to hold all of that stuff in as one and it was a real- at one time I mean it was an overwhelming experience, but a good overwhelming experience.

Tyson is currently sharing parenting responsibilities for his two stepsons and parenting his adult-aged daughter from a distance as she attends college internationally. He remains very close to his daughter despite their distance. Tyson's story strikes home

with me because of how similar his story is to my relationship with my own father. In my journal I write, “I felt myself getting emotional when Tyson described his relationship with his daughter; it is similar to the bond I have with my own dad while I’m away for school” (journal reflection).

Frank’s story. Frank is a 32 year-old, black father of a two year-old son and a nine year-old son. Although Frank’s ex-wife has custody of the children as well, he considers himself a single father. Currently Frank has been separated from his ex-wife for two years and has an interim agreement of shared custody. Frank does not wish to take full custody, but would like to have his sons live equally with their mother as well to make his children’s lives as comfortable as possible. Frank describes his ex-wife as “involved” with their children. In his own childhood Frank was raised by a single mother, and then later by his grandmother and older brother. He has also experienced living in a group home due to his familial history.

Every time Frank speaks of his children he has a smile on his face. Despite how hard the divorce has been on his eldest, he speaks of how great his sons are doing. Currently Frank lives within 500 metres of his ex-wife which makes it easier on his son because he’s “still in the same school, same friends, that kind of thing.”

Frank describes that he believes the way he has parented his older son is different than how he was raised himself. He seems to describe himself as more of an authoritative parent compared to his own authoritarian upbringing. Frank says in regards to his oldest son, “he was raised as a single child for about- throughout his life right, so he feels that he can talk to adults like at that level. Which is not always appropriate depending on you know your customs.” He also explains that, “when I was raised they put food on the

table, it's like you eat your dinner at the table until you're finished, you know there was no discussion about what's for dinner you know or what you want to do. But he's given that free reign kind of deal." In describing his youngest son he was proud saying:

> Yeah but he's getting funny too. He's super smart, he just absorbs everything. Read a book to him and all of a sudden he's saying all the words from the book. Um he knows you know…he's yeah very smart, he's going to go far. Um, I don't know, they're both great kids.

I ask Frank what it is like to be a single father and he chuckles, then responds, "there's joys and there's…I don't know. I don't know, it's the best experience I've had really because my kids are everything to me. Um…they're the reason why I wake up good every day and do that, it puts things in perspective." He goes on to say, "there's days where you want to pull your hair out or you know. Sometimes I just sit on the couch and I'll go "oh my God, why, why?! You know I could have went a different way" [laughing]. But you know, overall it's been a good experience." Frank believes that it has been a good experience because, "I've always been hands on so it's not really a big deal."

Frank explains to me how he has always been "hands on" with this children even when he was still married to his ex-wife. He explains that he took time away from work when his oldest arrived in order to be a parent to his newborn. He tells me how his co-workers found that different than what they were used to. However, he explains that this is the parent he always has been.

> And then I remember even when I went back to work, we were always like the minute I'd walk through the door she'd just hand them to me. Like now it's your turn kind of deal. So I've always been hands-on and like you know a psychological parent. Um you know I was the one that always made the doctor's appointments and stayed- I stayed home when they were sick. And I still do to this day right. So I don't know it's a lot different than I guess traditionally we just used to do.

Frank expresses an interest in always gaining more knowledge as a father to best raise his children. He says, “I went to a parent resource centre, you know, I didn’t grow up in the best situation so I always read books, you know expecting this, expecting- [I] did some research on kids and I also took adolescence and various development courses in school. So I’m always trying to learn about more things, that’s how I learn about things.”

Frank says that he thought being a single father was actually easier than being a two-parent father, despite that the children are sometimes “finding it hard going back and forth to two homes.” He explains, “I find it easier being a single dad than trying to navigate being a parent with like another parent in the house because like if you have different personalities and different approaches to things, um and you’re not respecting each other then you tend to step on toes and cause conflict and kids see that right.” He believes that it is sometimes easier than the “oh Mommy said yes, even though Daddy says no” that can exist in two parent families. Frank even says, “I’ve always been confident about my parenting abilities, but I think I’m even more confident now.”

Frank explains how he had to initially balance time with his ex-wife and how monetary support became a factor to his ex-wife. “I think it was first year we didn’t even have a set settlement. And that’s- like I wanted a shared 50/50 split and um she wanted them- me to have like a every other weekend, one day kind of deal. So for the child support, right?” However, Frank resisted because being an active, involved parent was important to him.

Frank has noticed the effect of the changed parenting arrangement differently on each of his sons. While his younger son is confused, his older son behaves differently at

each household. Frank's younger son will "wake up and he'll say "ooh" and you know say he doesn't say "good morning", he says "Dada up, Dada up". Right he's ready to play and if he doesn't know what's going on then you know he might even say "Mama" because he doesn't know where he's at." Therefore Frank sees the confusion it can cause. Also, he notices that his eldest son "wets the bed a lot at his mom's place but he doesn't wet the bed at my place. You know, he's obviously- you know like an emotional, psychological component to that and I mean overall he's just a- he's different with me than he is with her."

Frank attributes the change in behaviour to differences in parenting styles between himself and his ex-wife. While he describes his parenting as authoritative in nature, his ex-wife seems more permissive and less consistent in her parenting. He also describes what seems to be a more secure attachment at his home versus her home, "he knows that I don't pick and choose, like I'm very this is where it is, there's natural consequences for your behaviour and that's fine." Therefore his son knows there are rules at his home, but "he'll go back to there and stay there and you know they're um…not consistent. So he knows he can play with that right, she's just going to give up instead of keep at it, which causes difficulties." The secure attachment with his son is reflected as Frank says:

> And um like my son, like I spent the most time with him during that first year and it was funny because when he's with me he's I don't know, he's outgoing, you know feels he can do anything, you know he's trying new things and he's climbing up. And I noticed when his mother's around he's more clingy and he's more reserved and some people might see it as separation anxiety, but I see it differently, I'm like I see him as his true self when he's with me from what I observe of him right. He's exploring and things, but he still knows you're there and he comes to you when he needs it, he falls down you know. And I think that's more of the approach because you know a child cries, every cry is different, it's

> not all the same. Um you know like my youngest, he sleeps the night with me um with his mother he rarely ever does because he's used to her, the minute he cries she'll put him in bed with her.

Frank believes that gender plays a role in how a parent raises their child; that perhaps it is easier for mothers to raise daughters and fathers to raise sons. He describes his relationship with his son as "that bond that we have being the same sex I guess, that helps." Franks says that biologically boys are different from girls, "it's not socializing." For this reason he believes it can be challenging to raise the opposite sex, and thinks that if he was a single father to daughters it would be much different. However, his time raising his two boys as a single father has been very successful. Frank is currently working through an official custody arrangement with his children, but wishes to still involve the mother of his children for optimal development.

Joshua's story. Joshua is a black father of three who raised his children solely for two years when they were six months old, two years, and three years old. Currently Joshua's children are all adult-aged, however he was the primary caregiver to them when they were young children. His children's mother chose to leave the family therefore Joshua stepped up as sole custody father both out of need as well as out of a desire to continue being a father to his children. He explains, "Dave [younger son] was six months old when their birth mother left and um was um still being breast fed and I had to find out from my mother how to wean him off the day that happened." Joshua describes his children as "all of them very motivated, very busy, and um they have me to thank for it."

Interestingly, Joshua did not identify with the role of "single father" at first. This is something I noticed when talking to the other fathers as well, was that they identify as a "father", not specifically a "single father" despite the fact that they were, or had been,

parenting alone. Therefore they are not as quick to label themselves as single parents as perhaps a single mother would. Joshua states, "and it was funny because the idea of being a single dad wasn't foremost in my mind, I just had three kids that had to be taken care of [laughing]. That's it you know."

When Joshua and his wife divorced, they had a legal custody agreement completed at the time of the divorce proceedings. He says, "at the time I had no choice but to be a single parent" and worked it out with friends to babysit because his line of work required a lot of travel. His process through divorce court was relatively smooth because his ex-wife agreed to the terms, "she got the car and I got the three kids." Joshua describes becoming a single dad as, "very time consuming, very um…very scared."

Joshua's entrance into single fatherhood was a little bit different than the others in terms of his ex-wife's mental health. He describes her struggles:

> I remember she had…she had tried to commit suicide and there was a- I got a call from the police station saying that they were sending her to the [city name] hospital and um…a couple of days went, they pumped her stomach and she was OK. And a couple days went by and I had several phone calls trying to get a hold of her and then find out what was up. And then getting hold of her therapist and the therapist telling me that for her mental stability I should move out. And um I was very angry because I still had the three children there and I remember being very surprised that this lady wanted me to depart and leave the kids all by myself- or all by themselves. And um at one point I thought well I did move out and I had a lawyer and the lawyer said, "well they're part black and part mix and if it ever goes towards the court you should be back in the house", so I moved back in. And um…and their birth mother moved out with her boyfriend.

When I ask Joshua why the therapist thought it was better for him to move out of their matrimonial home instead of his ex-wife, leaving the children alone in the home with her, he responds that they believed he was causing his wife too much "stress". In looking back at the situation now, Joshua believes that it was the "baby blues" from "having three kids

right very quickly and [younger son name] being six months and she was alone you know when I was on the road." However, Joshua did not think twice about stepping up to take care of his children.

> Yeah and you know in hindsight so much of it was because…it was very unusual for me to take control or take responsibility for the three kids. I never thought about that at all, that it- to me I had no choice, they were just too young. And I was close to them even though I was a road musician.

For approximately a year, the children saw their mother every second weekend. Then this changed and the children spent all their time in Joshua's custody because their mother "became pregnant and she decided that she wanted to spend all her time with the other family." Joshua explains the effect that being a single father had on his financial capital as "financially it was quite a burden." He was stuck between a rock and a hard place because if he had a low paying job he could get family allowance, but if he had a higher paying job the allowance was withdrawn. For a while he says he received family allowance, but then "I changed jobs and the second job had a better income and they took it away from me."

Joshua describes how his children were during his time as a single father. He explains some negative outcomes, but that overall his children were fine. "I was very diligent about any kind of psychological things um…and I had lots, I remember having lots of reading material um from the counsellor on what to look for and um, to see like maybe more aggressive signs, anything like that, you know sleep patterns. Yeah so they did fine." One of the challenges he came across was the older children picking on the youngest son, he describes this situation:

> I remember one day [older son name] taking a truck and was all set to throw it in the crib. I caught him and was able to stop him before he did throw- there were a

> number of things that you know are little signs that would be the "whoa, this isn't really good behaviour". So I had to be very diligent…If they did something wrong then they were punished for it, that kind of thing.

Joshua describes his style of parenting as "very much in tune with reality." His children used to call him the "lecture man", however his now adult-aged children have "come back to tell [him] that those were good lessons to learn." Joshua notices the difference in time spent with his children when he became a single father; where he used to be able to do one-on-one time with his son while his ex-wife was with his daughter, he learned that he had to find things to do with all three children.

> Um well in order to deal with three children I had to find activities that I could take all three of them, like go to the Commons and stuff like that. And um I looked into…I imagine- when the ex was there you could separate. See they were still too young.

Another barrier Joshua identifies is that living arrangements were sometimes questionable for his family. He lived in an area of the city that "wasn't the nicest neighbourhood" and was known for drug deals. There were drug deals that occurred across the street from his house that meant Joshua had to make safety adjustments for his young children, "so at nights the kids never went out that door, there was a backyard so I always made sure that they played out back and I built a fence- like built a fence so that they couldn't get out at those ages and having like a swing set and stuff to play." Interestingly, he explains he felt even more safe in that home since he never called the cops, he feels that he had some protection from the drug community.

Joshua describes his learning of child development as a single father and father in general and how that self-education acted as a helpful agent in his parenting role. He

notes that understanding how his children were progressing through developmental stages was important.

> And um those two- when they change it's because they're growing, they're finding, they're discovering, and they were never the terrible twos it was just um I had to re-evaluate how my perspective on that. Um if a two-year-old was all of a sudden picking up food and throwing it down, there's a reason for that. It's not them getting angry, maybe the kind of food was- they had grown and they were either tired or needed some other kind of diet or another way to feed them and um you didn't look at the action as the terrible, you sort of looked at the action as there must be a reason for it and if you're smart you'd try and find a reason.

After a couple years, Joshua started getting assistance as a dual parent from the children's stepmother. Their stepmother began as a friend of a co-worker and started babysitting for Joshua. He describes her assistance as social support, an extra set of hands, and additional income to be extremely valued. Joshua says, "as far as [younger son name]'s concerned, that's his mother." This changed Joshua's experiences of single fatherhood because, "Well um just being able to parcel out some of the responsibilities made it easier on me." Now, Joshua's children are grown and have families of their own. He continues to play an active role in each of their lives.

Conclusion. Now I have illustrated each single father's narrative of their experience as a primary custodial parent. Often in narrative analysis commonalities are not strived for, but instead the individual experiences are elaborated. However, as I progressed through my thought processes I could not help but see overlapping risks and protective factors at each ecological level. The single fathers tended to emphasize a positive parent-child relationship and a couple wished to reintegrate or maintain the mother's involvement in parenting. All fathers encountered the legal system and two mentioned the importance of government intervention. All fathers mentioned the

importance of social support both formal and informal. Lastly, parenting was presented as gendered and the invisibility of single fathers in society was apparent. These were themes echoed in the interviews conducted with service providers as well. The next section will address the common themes that arose in the service provider interviews.

Service Provider Common Themes

The semi-structured interviews with four service providers were complimentary to the five single father narratives in that they delved deeper into the perspectives of single father families from an external perspective. Interviews conducted with service providers were completed at the same time as the interviews with single fathers, meaning collaboratively they were creating a picture of single fatherhood. Being part of the mesosystem themselves, the service providers were able to address more fully the direct family services and programs of support available to single fathers outside the family and friend support network. They also were in a position to discuss the risk and protective factors that single fathers presented within their programs and services. Through these interviews I was also able to get an understanding of some of the micro-, exo-, and macro-level factors such as the perseverance and capabilities of single fathers, education and awareness of services, assistance in legal processes, father exclusion, making fathers equal to mothers, and stereotypes and stigmas. Lastly, the service providers informed me of what they, as meso-level participants, would like to know further about single father families to better serve this clientele.

Perseverance and capabilities of single fathers. At the micro-level single fathers are described as capable in their role as parents and are praised for their perseverance by the service providers. Their relationships with their children are touched

on as well as the influence of the children's mothers. Something that one service provider thinks is important to consider about single fathers is "their ability to parent" because "people always seem to think they lack, but it's already there" (Jeannette).

There are variables about single fathers that possibly even the service providers are not capable of understanding because the population they serve is somewhat biased. "We see the fathers that want to continue. You know kind of playing true, they'd do anything to be able to see their kids or you know, to help financially maybe do anything from working however many jobs, they want to do that" (Susan). Therefore the fathers that access these particular services are the ones who are already reaching out for support. However, she says that determination is something noticeable in this group "their determination I guess for a better life for them" (Susan).

Although there is a social construction of how fatherhood is viewed, it is also something that one service provider attributes to the father himself internalizing the social norms, "I think we can all take responsibility for it and some of it is about recognition and recognizing that about ourselves, whether it be everything I think: internalized sexism, internalized racism, internalized anything. I think that kind of stuff men can internalize and almost feel inadequate "am I doing enough?"" (Sarah). Due to these internalized stereotypes, single fathers may be at risk of second guessing their parenting behaviours.

> But then because of men being I think one fewer as fathers and because of stereotypes, I think they might be more likely to go "oh my gosh, am I doing a good enough job, do I need a woman around? I don't know what to do," you know especially if they have girls. I think for them that might be a challenge. So I think in some ways maybe fathers, single fathers, might question their parenting abilities more (Sarah).

This service provider believes that due to these fathers questioning their abilities perhaps they are more likely to step aside in the raising of their children. “And I think that um it’s really limited a lot of dads because if a lot of dads don’t think that they’re that important in a child’s life then they’re going to be more removed from their children. And children should, in my opinion, if anything possible should have the influence of both their parents in their lives” (Sarah).

Single fatherhood can be a good thing for discipline because “they [the children] know Dad’s routine, they know how Dad’s going to react, they know; rather than being home with somebody else. Um…they’re not going between two people” (Jeannette). This is beneficial because “it could make for more open communication between Dad and the kids” (Jeannette).

Similarly to what is echoed in Frank and James’ interviews, gender of the child may have an impact on the single father relationship. However, despite Frank and James’ belief that they would not know how to handle raising a girl through puberty, one service provider believes that possibly “kids would respond different to Mom and Dad” (Jeannette). This can be an issue of what parent the children feel more relatable to “some of it’s different, like with girls and their, you know, how they mature, they might tend to go to Mom. And boys go to Dad” (Jeannette).

Service providers describe single fathers as resilient, very much in line with the resilience model of family:

> They’re malleable, they’re adjustable, you know they can change to the circumstances around them because if they have something that’s not working for them right now, they can be very quick to say, “Okay what do I need to do?” And try to be better or to do what’s best for them or to you know, they want to do that. So they’re not stuck in a rut, they’re not spinning their wheels, they want to just keep moving through it. “How do I just get through this problem?” Um you know,

> I'm sure for some of them they do try just spinning their wheels sometimes, they just can't get ahead fast enough. But, you know, they're very eager to say, "just tell me what I have to do quickly and I'll do it". Um you know they want to move on. I mean a court process done and over with, whether you know they just want to parent their kids, have access to them, or it could be anything. They just want to keep going. They're very pliable…I don't know what word I'm looking for; adjustable to different circumstances and surroundings (Susan).

Family services and programs of support. When I started my interviews I knew that I would obtain a lot of information about the meso-level influences from the service providers. Being experts in their field, they are very aware of current services and supports for parents, but yet they find it difficult to think of programs specifically for single fathers or even fathers in general. There are three to five local programs/services identified by the service providers; they were unsure if a couple were still in existence. Because there are few choices in HRM, I ask the service providers to tell me what is available, what is lacking, and what would be beneficial to have implemented in HRM for single fathers.

When comparing the services that are available to mothers, the service providers believe that "it would be nice if the father services matched the mother services" (Tammy). This is in terms of offering the same supports to fathers that are more prevalent for mothers. "They do offer "Daddy and me" classes type of thing now whereas before it was always "Mommy and me" things" (Susan). It is not believed that mothers and fathers necessarily need separate supports but that "there's more single mothers out there so in terms of quantity I think that…and the thing is in a lot of ways I don't see why they need anything different, I mean if they're a parent they're a parent" (Sarah). In terms of having programs for single fathers, it is not believed that single mother programs should be limited but make sure that both mothers and fathers have access to the resources they

need, “it’s the ratios, I think the ratios should be appropriate” (Sarah). However, one service provider believes that overall “mothers and fathers can access the same services” (Sarah) in HRM, it just may be an issue of not being aware of the opportunities.

Another reason single fathers may not access services that are available for parents in general could be because of the location in which the services are offered. One service provider notes that “in the community organizations so you know that may have dealings with families in general and you know women’s groups or possibly family resources, but I think resource centres primarily I think women participate in family resource centres opposed to men” (Susan). It may also be difficult to reach out to fathers if they are not already connected to some form of support or service, “to reach out to single fathers when there’s already a small population, but then they’re already hard to reach with, if they’re not already connected with services it’s hard to go “oh you have all these contacts with single fathers, let me reach out to them” when they might not be accessing those services” (Sarah). Therefore it is important to consider locations where fathers feel comfortable, and “probably need to know things like um where the best location would be” (Tammy). Another service provider agrees, “stuff like your environment so where you’re asking men to meet. Because you have to take into consideration um you know what their comfort level is in meeting certain places” (Susan). When I ask where single fathers would feel comfortable, she responds “not at court” (Susan), but instead “somewhere where they can not be judged.”

For the most part the service providers believe that more support for single fathers is needed. “It would be nice if there were support groups for fathers, single fathers, in the community” (Sarah). When I ask if there is a demand for programs targeting single

fathers, all but one agree that there is. However, even the one who did not agree changed her mind later, “like not according to our stats right now, and what we’re looking at for- I mean it’s low unfortunately. Um…hmm…I’m going to say yes, there’s a demand for it I really- you know I think it’s needed, I think there is a demand for it” (Susan). Therefore it may be an issue of barriers instead of a lack of need interpreted by this service agency, “yeah I think it would be difficult to gage the demand if the barriers that are currently in place are still there. But yes I do think there would be a high need” (Tammy).

According to the service providers, single fathers “ need the services and the services aren’t there” (Tammy). What is needed is “parenting support. Um…more groups. I know they have um programs for- I think the IWK used to have programs like “single mothers”. You know, learning all the ins and outs so some of those same things for dads… Some father support groups or programs” (Jeannette). In terms of current supports one service provider says, “I can’t say they’re not available, but they’re very limited. The resources are, for men in general and also single men who are going through our program, um are definitely limited. There’s very few resources available to them” (Susan). It can be especially difficult for some single fathers to access the limited services available in HRM. “I know generally speaking rural areas, the more rural you get, the less services they have. Um so I can imagine that single parents or single fathers in rural areas must really be in need of services or support” (Tammy).

The service providers believe that in order to successfully serve single father families and fathers in general there are some important points to consider. One of these important factors is to consider the time of day that services are made available “times of day, there obviously needs to be consideration um again what fits for them. Um so the

evenings work better than during the days" (Susan). Timing of programs is a barrier because of "working full-time and getting child care" (Tammy) as well as "single dads have to work, some are in school, some are out doing two jobs, you know so it's- it's finding that balance where it's a timeline for them to attend" (Jeannette). A service provider proposes that it would be beneficial if "services were offered outside of regular office hours or on weekends" (Tammy).

> From my perspective it would be really great if there were some alternatives to our parenting group. Um we run the group for mothers and fathers at the moment and the responses that I'm getting from the dads is that we're pretty much the only ones out there that are doing this specific fathers' group. And within that it would be nice if there were a couple alternatives as far as general parenting groups go. It would be great if they could get more specific; so if there was a group or a service of some sort out there for single fathers or for first time fathers or fathers who have been involved with child protection even, something a little more specialized. But generally speaking it would be a good start if we could get more than just the one fathers group in the city. And further to that if we could get the group offered at a different time or more times during the year, something along those lines (Tammy).

Another important thing to consider is the cost of the service, "services being free of charge" (Tammy). Also, the areas that services are offered, "so if we were able to have programs established that would reach all different parts of Nova Scotia, that would definitely be effective" (Tammy). Also, gender of the service facilitator may be a factor as one service provider notes, "unfortunately it is a question um with the dads in the group, um for the males as to, "why couldn't we have a male facilitator?" or "this group would have been better you know, no offense to you but you know it may have been better if we had a female- or a *male* facilitator". Yeah I think it does make a difference just they can relate more to just having that same gender" (Susan).

Gender does not come up solely in relation to facilitator gender, but also in terms of current supports offered. The service providers, as well as Michael, believe that programs delivered to fathers are more likely to have anger management incorporated into them while mothers' programs do not, "it was called anger management, but that piece was in the fathers group and for whatever reason it wasn't offered in the mothers group" (Tammy). Instead the wording for mothers' groups tends to be "stress management" (Tammy). One service provider says if you ask fathers, "I'm pretty sure most of them will tell you they don't all need anger management (Susan). However, "I think there- you know like maybe because there's not enough services offered that there's nowhere else to put them. Nothing else to offer them so they're just all funnelled under the same thing. Like "you need some anger management'" (Susan).

Fathers may also feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in the services they access that are meant to be inclusive to mothers *and* fathers. For one parents' group that has attracted only mothers, a service provider comments "men probably wouldn't mind having a place to socialize but do they want to come with, you know like I said, a bunch of women? Where they feel like topics they are talking about they feel not, they can't relate to" (Sarah). Since parenting groups for mothers seem to be a norm it can be taken for granted, "what I've heard from single fathers in the group is just things that single mothers would take for granted as far as what's already established" (Tammy).

> The difference is the dads are a little bit more reserved coming into group and not knowing what to expect and just kind of- whereas the females and the moms can be very gung-ho to you know, "oh great, another service I can access. I get to go into this parenting group" and kind of a little bit more eager and excited to be in there. Whereas dads will come in a little bit more reserved, don't really know why they're there sometimes because it was recommended by the court and they come because of that. Um, they're just not sure what to expect (Susan).

The service providers suggest that parenting supports do not necessarily need to be gendered. “We basically teach them the same skills and the same barriers that you would as a parent in general. You know, everything from child development, um…child development to…I don’t know, kids misbehaving, to discipline in the home” (Jeannette), therefore the things covered in the groups are beneficial to parents in general not just fathers *or* mothers. “I think the attachment from the kids is different with moms and dads. *But* um I think all the discipline techniques can be the same” (Jeannette) and “some aspects are the same in terms of the information that’s covered regarding um you know parenting, discipline techniques and stuff like that, that information is relatively the same”. “There’s definitely a benefit to providing general services because mother or father you’re a parent; you’re going to go through similar experiences, you’re going to have similar difficulties (Tammy). However, “on the other side of that coin, you’re going to have different experiences, there’s different things that women and men can access as far as services go and as far as parenting goes. Um so yeah I do think mothers and fathers require a little bit different experiences, perspectives” (Tammy) therefore a needs assessment would be required of the group. Subsequently the groups can be “different but it can- may have some of the same information also” (Jeannette).

These service providers believe that making an active effort to include fathers in family services is important. “Like a resource centre or something like that, they did those kind of programs that I think that they should also try if they have enough population they serve, to have specific for dads to get them to come out and things like that” (Sarah). “I don’t think there’s a lot or enough to support single dads” (Jeannette). Therefore it is important for agencies of support to “not only recognize moms but dads”

(Jeannette). In terms of parenting groups that are gender-neutral, it is "the responsibility of the facilitator to open that up and to educate them from the get-go, make sure they understand that men might join the group" (Sarah). When groups are separate for mothers and fathers, they believe that specific supports should not be offered to one and not the other, "But as far as offering one group something and not the other group, I would like to move away from that. And have the capability to offer the same topic to both groups and if the lens or the perspective that that topic is offered *through* needs to change, then so be it" (Tammy). Another service provider expresses her concern that a father was unable to get ahold of other service agencies when attempting to access services, which was reinforced in my inability to have other service providers contact me back during recruitment. Unfortunately, "funding cuts [are] a big problem as far as when the programs are being offered" (Tammy). For those programs that are currently being offered, they believe that it "would be a really great thing to have implemented is more of a strengths-based look at everything" (Tammy) therefore looking at parenting strengths of fathers instead of their deficits. "Why not focus on what they already have in place and work with that and expand" (Jeannette). This is important because "we always tend to go with the negative right, rather than take the positive, expand on that and then go from there" (Jeannette).

It is important to consider where the support gaps are since there are minimal services offered to men (Susan). As well as: "If that's not working for them then what is it? I think we need to try and figure that out" (Susan). As mentioned later, there are many questions that the service providers would like assistance with to better serve single fathers. "We hear a lot of complaints from men and a lot of criticisms against that and

that's just one thing. Well [o]kay now you need to tell us what you *do* want and what you're looking for so we can provide that service" (Susan).

Contrary to simply introducing more programs for single fathers it was also brought to my attention that perhaps more services are not needed but rather informing fathers of their current existence is important. "It's more about education and promotion of current services" (Sarah). Instead of believing there is a lack of services for fathers, perhaps there is a "lack of knowledge of any services" (Jeannette). "I feel like a lot of it is about education and awareness. I don't think we necessarily need to develop completely new programs" (Sarah).

These services and supports should be promoted not only to fathers, but also to the general public and businesses, therefore educating on how father-unfriendly some public domains are. "There should be an organization in the HRM that could actively educate businesses" (Sarah). This could be educating businesses on the need for "family" washrooms instead of having change tables solely in women's washrooms. Public education can make organizations more aware of fathers such has happened with the military, "I know the military for example has, and a lot of it I think is because they recognize dads being away a lot with just so many men enlisted in the military, they have a specific time for dad and me; it's called Dad and Me" (Sarah).

More specific education would be helpful for service providers and professionals working with families because it is important to have "more community awareness….um…and agencies to recognize dads as an effective parent just as much as moms" (Jeannette). This could be something as simple as reconsidering language around programs "a lot of it has to do, like I said, with the wording, with educating, outreach,

'fathers did you know you could also make use of this service?'" (Sarah). The naming of groups could be reconsidered, "sometimes I think it's about educating, I think it's about how they title things, or how they…how programs are named or what they're called" (Sarah). The service providers express the importance of research such as this and needs assessments in educating professionals. "Parenting groups like um…like you know…if people are putting on more groups, a little more advertising for those groups. Um somebody like you doing your thesis…doing a talk you know what I mean? Like um…not like necessarily workshops but educating professionals" (Jeannette). Also, publishing research in this area of parenting is seen as helpful "just using the research is a huge piece you know, in part to get out there and hopefully be read by professionals and different organizations' groups, agencies, whatever. Um they all generally do need to kind of re-look or re-vamp what we're doing" (Susan).

These service providers have some ideas on how advertisements of these groups or services could be done in HRM. Advertising could include "anywhere like newspapers, um schools…I mean it would be a little different for elementary school. Um you know, flyers could be handed out to the parents at schools. Um…community centres, hospitals, doctors offices, grocery stores, like flyers in the grocery stores, any type of media" (Jeannette). Single mothers tend to be referred to services by health professionals or hospitals more often than men; "it's easily accessible for moms than it is for single dads" (Jeannette). Therefore providing information to these health services may be an effective means of advertisement for single fathers.

Assistance in legal processes. A major exo-level determinant for single fathers that have accessed the programs provided by these service providers is the process of

navigating the legal system. The service providers explain that often fathers request help with lawyers, the courts, access, and custody issues. As is the case for most of their answers, it can be hard to distinguish between single fathers and fathers in general. “I have heard concerns about even the court system. I’m not sure…what I find hard is making that distinction; is the difference between single fathers in the court system versus just general fathers trying to get help with custody” (Sarah). Therefore, it can be hard to determine challenges for single fathers specifically since all types of fathers experience difficulties in the court system. Regardless, they suggest that single fathers would greatly benefit from “primarily support services, to support them in, you know, court proceedings” (Susan).

> It would be really nice if there was some sort of service, or group, or support out there for fathers who are having to go through custody and access issues, um through the court systems. I find in general that that service is kind of lacking. We get a lot of referrals from both mothers and fathers or caregivers that are looking for some sort of support navigating the system (Tammy).

> The fathers group a little while ago, there was a high demand for any information on court systems; a lot of the participants were going to court, were anticipating court, and were having affidavits put in front of them and didn’t have a clue what any of the legal terminology was. So we did implement a little bit of information from the courts as far as that piece goes and we are now also planning on including that in the fathers group if that is something that the participants share (Tammy).

Often times fathers in the groups become frustrated with their experiences with the legal system. “I mean the process is so intimidating. I mean you have a lawyer on top of that, you know, you don’t feel is accurately doing what they should be, how do you push them to do more? And how do you navigate it yourself if you don’t trust them to do

it? Or don't want them to do it?" (Susan). Service providers then believe that their role is integral as acting as support navigators for fathers:

> We hear about lawyers; just lawyers not doing their jobs or you know efficiently or accurately or um…you know just advocate on their behalf, just having someone behind them advocating, I think that's a huge thing that we do for them, as a service provider just helping them walk through the process (Susan).

For this reason, some believe that educating not only service providers on single fathers but also those in legal positions is important. When I say education that could mean lawyers, judges, you know things like that. I think there's still a lot of entrenched stereotypes even in the court" (Sarah). The service providers believe that parenting stereotypes in favour of mothers over fathers can perpetuate from the court level "the court system does seem to specifically be one area that is remarkably slow as far as bringing services up to an equal level" (Tammy). Legal stereotypes can be present in the programs that are required of fathers attempting to gain custody of their children; fathers are more likely to be required to take anger management courses than mothers. "So they were having- and we still do get this request from fathers specifically, um a lawyer, a child protection worker, someone along those lines will say, "you need to have a parenting group and you need to get anger management"" (Tammy).

The service providers, instead of placing blame in another sector, explain that perhaps what is causing the barrier is that the legal system and family services sector should work collaboratively.

> I can see where family courts would be restricted as far as how much support they would be able to give and that it wouldn't be legal advice, and that sort of thing. And that's why I see them handling the sort of terminology, the baseline info, and then as far as the parenting support goes that's what they would be going to the social service agencies in order to get; hopefully after hours (Tammy).

Perhaps if there was more communication between the exo- and the meso-systems there would be better service provision and support for single fathers. “The way I would see the best services from my perspective is if the courts could be involved as a collaborator, that would be perfect” (Tammy). This collaboration would look like “[the courts] provide the information, other voluntary services would provide the support” (Tammy). This could also be a form of advertisement and could be made with the courts to connect single fathers to services “you know being involved with the court process you see a lot of men go through that process. And facing all the challenges that comes with that so, you know offering something kind of through them or at least getting the word out if this is what you’re offering” (Susan). This is important because the parenting support the court offers now is “basically an arena for lawyers to say, ‘we’re not here to answer any legal questions’ and that’s kind of it” (Tammy).

Father stigmas and exclusion. Father exclusion could be considered a hybrid of meso- and macro- systems. Although present at a societal level, it is acted out in the mesosystem. The service providers address the ways in which fathers are excluded, be it intentionally or unintentionally, from being active parents. One thing that stood out with some of the service providers is the lack of men’s washrooms with a changing station. “When you go to a mall or a restaurant and the baby change station is only in the women’s bathroom. Um, small details from that, so I think that’s important for organizations, businesses, everybody to be more aware about” (Sarah).

> Little things like um hearing a single father- I can think of now off the top of my head, talking about how difficult it was for him to physically get around. He couldn’t take his child out to public places because he had to take into consideration things like a lot of the baby changing rooms are in women’s washrooms, there is no…now in a few places I’ve seen family bathrooms, which are a great idea, but not every place has that and the majority of places that still

> have male and female bathrooms, the changing rooms or the changing tables are in the women's bathroom (Tammy).

Important observations made by the service providers are mission statements or advertising in the community that neglect to mention fathers as part of the family unit. "At the IWK, I know that its explicit statement is for 'women and children'" (Sarah). The service provider knew a father who felt that this statement is "very exclusive" (Sarah). Not including the word 'father' means "it's not very inviting I guess to men who have children who might need to use the services at the IWK because it almost makes it sound like it's for women and children" (Sarah). Although meant as a pre- and post-natal clinic, "when you just look at it outside it does look like it's for women and their children only. Dads are left somewhere out there" (Sarah). This could potentially make fathers uncomfortable.

One service provider sees a benefit in using inclusive language to make single fathers feel more welcome in parenting services, "just in terms of like terminology because even as years go by, we talk about more inclusive language" (Sarah). In one example there is a current parent group where this service provider says she tries "to make it not sound the way that it's so exclusive, or excluding of men" (Sarah). Even though all of the current participants in this informal parent group are mothers, she does not want to label it a mothers' group in case fathers choose to join. She emphasizes that "this is not a group for women, this is a group for parents" (Sarah). Since fathers are currently absent from the group, they do not have a father's voice to help plan activities therefore they may be more geared to mothers, however she reemphasizes "we would never exclude a man from the group if he came" (Sarah).

Although Halifax is seeing more general parenting groups and services, sometimes fathers still feel excluded or unwelcome as echoed in Frank's narrative. "In terms of concrete services, you know, men are feeling excluded from places. I just think in general it would be…tougher in some ways to be a single father than it would be to be a single mother because there are so many single mothers out there that it almost forgets about the fact that there's [*sic*] single fathers" (Sarah). This makes it difficult for service providers because "understanding that more women need them in terms of proportion but that more men are marginalized so I don't think they necessarily need more services, I think they need to have services for them, and I don't think it's fair for them to have a bunch of services just for moms and then you've got nothing left for dads" (Sarah). Perhaps being able to talk to other men in similar situations could help them feel less isolated and not "feeling even more alone because they don't feel like they have anyone to talk to. So maybe talking about single dads groups and things like that so they all have an opportunity to come together and discuss" (Sarah).

At the macro-level is the gender ideology that women are the ideal parent. Sometimes this creates a barrier in that fathers can be ignored. Something to consider with single fathers is "just the fact that they're there" (Tammy). This societal belief means that single fathers and fathers in general can be devalued, "like just raising the awareness level and I think that it's hard anyway in a society where I think fathers are devalued. Um, you know I don't think men as a gender are devalued, but I think that fathers and their role is often devalued" (Sarah). This imbalance is shown through what is culturally significant "like the attention that Mother's Day gets, which is not necessarily reflected when Father's Day rolls around" (Tammy). Therefore, it is important for

"services that are often catered to mothers or single mothers, things like that, to not forget that there's single fathers. So, you know, allowing space or an opportunity for single fathers to also join in that" (Sarah). As a service provider "you just want them to be seen as equals; mothers and fathers" (Susan).

Currently, fathers tend to be left out of parenting at a social level even in the media "I think they're still going to be a little bit ostracized, yeah I don't know. I just feel like there's going to be so many changes, and I feel like so much of it is about even like everything from advertising, you know, when they're using moms with their kids all the time, not enough advertising using dads with their kids" (Sarah). This invisibility of fathers and more specifically single fathers means that there is less acceptance of these fathers. "I think they deserve as much a chance as anybody else. Um just because they're a single dad it almost seems like, "oh that's one strike against you". You know and…I just- I just think that they deserve just as much as anybody else. And they shouldn't be left out just because they're a single dad" (Jeannette).

Single fathers are neglected as parents because of a lack of social awareness, "we spend so much time talking about mothers and women and their role that we're kind of missing fathers, right? Not that we're saying 'you suck fathers', it's saying, it's basically just neglecting them I think as a group" (Sarah). This neglect is also demonstrated in foster children or children who lose their mother. "You hear of kids being taken away from moms and not even considering dad as the alternative" (Jeannette).

Interestingly, possibly due to social gender ideologies, parents themselves believe that they are different depending on whether they are a mother or a father. However, the service providers believe they are not as different as the parents believe. "I guess what

strikes me is- between the two parenting groups um just thinking of the feedback that I've been receiving, it sort of amazes me how both the mothers and the fathers think they're completely different from one another but they actually have a lot more similarities than they realize. Um it's just the different perspective that it's coming through" (Tammy). Further to that, "I'm not sure that either group would know that or would even be interested in knowing that to be honest with you" (Tammy).

It is important to note is that the definition of family is changing and therefore the service providers are aware of how their services too need to change. "There are going to be more single parents and more single fathers. And as far as noteworthy things go, one thing I do try and keep in mind a lot with the work that I do is the whole definition of family and how that is changing, there is no way that can be a static definition anymore. So I always try and keep that in mind" (Tammy). Another service provider agrees, "you know it's nice to have two parents but a family looks a lot different today than it did years ago. Like parenting, you could have two moms, two dads, you know mom and dad, blended family. Like it's not as it used to be, so the parenting type I guess, I don't know if I'd call it type, but they're changing" (Jeannette). Most importantly, examining how parents of both genders require support is important "you know, they're just equal, not better or less than; just equal" (Susan).

Masculinity and how it is portrayed in our society is something that the service providers acknowledge as important for fatherhood. "So by nature and then nurture that, you know, we don't teach men as much that they should be open and they should be able to express their feelings and expose their vulnerabilities, things like that. And so, you know, you get probably a lot of single dads that don't really know who to talk to about

parenting problems or struggles" (Sarah). Emotions and communication are qualities that the service providers acknowledge as barriers to fathers in terms of social pressures as well as personal beliefs. "Society teaches men that they need to be tough and macho and shouldn't show their emotions and shouldn't have to do this kind of stuff. We try to talk about how that might not work" (Sarah). This can be exhibited in the care positions that men are a minority in such as "how few male youth workers there are, how few male social workers there are" (Sarah). This could be due to "this awful system where we tell men and boys that they shouldn't be interested in these things, or only exclusively promoting their interests in other areas" (Sarah). These beliefs of men as not primary caregivers creates biases against fathers "we're telling dads 'you're not valuable' you know 'they don't need you, the kids don't need you' or we're telling fathers 'you know what, that's not your job, you're a man, you do your own thing' and fatherhood is something like complimentary, or you'll do it if you can, or if you have time, or if you want to" (Sarah).

Because of these societal assumptions about fathers, it is important to talk to fathers about their awareness of these stereotypes and how they may not be accurate. "Talking about how those stereotypes or barriers, how that might not be as conducive and um also just general awareness" (Sarah) is important in understanding how stereotypes can limit fathers. "I think there's a stereotype like "well shouldn't the mom be staying at home with the child?" And I think as a single father that might still be there. Like, "what you're taking time off to take care of your child?" Whereas if it was a mother doing it, nothing would be thought of it" (Sarah). These stereotypes can be the reason for fathers being labelled as aggressive "you're automatically labelling someone, you're saying,

“you’re in an anger management course”” (Susan) due to the disciplinarian belief “I mean it’s stereotypical that dad is the yeller. Like Dad seems to be more the strict one and Mom comes off as the mellow one” (Jeannette). Therefore it is common to encounter the stereotypical ““Wait ‘til your dad gets home”. Right so it’s kind of like someone put the fear of God in you, which is not necessarily true because…I just think it puts a bad taste in your mouth when you kind of think of Dad as “wait ‘til your father gets home” or “I’m telling your father!” because it kind of turns the kid, you know, against Dad unintentionally or intentionally” (Jeannette).

As one service provider posits, “How can you be raised being taught those things whether it be indirectly or directly and then come out and be untarnished?” (Sarah), showing that everyone is influenced by social constructions. When the public reacts to situations such as single fathers it exhibits the way parenthood is expressed, “when you see a single mom coming, not so bad. When you see a single dad coming it’s “oooh” you know and pity, like “oh he’s a single dad”” (Jeannette).

> As far as the things that stand out for me…um talking, or hearing the fathers talk about their experiences out in the public... So assumptions that have been made about, for example going to school and wanting to speak with your child’s teacher and teachers or administrators or whoever not really wanting to talk to dads because “you’re the dad, you’re not the mom. We need to talk to the mom” even if the father has primary custody, or has the child in their care, or is a single parent. They just automatically assume that it’s the mother’s role to take on the interest in the educational piece (Tammy).

The next potential step is to challenge the stereotypes against fathers, some of which have already started to change. “I think it’s good, we have a society that’s seen more. For example, fathers walking with their children in strollers and fathers there for children. So I think that that is kind of helping to break down some of the stereotypes”

(Sarah). Starting to examine fathers for the strengths they bring is an important starting point. “Really like to have that strengths-based perspective in there because they’ve certainly been mirroring what we were saying as far as the majority of the focus seems to be on, “OK this is what you’re doing wrong” instead of praising them for how great a job they’re doing or how far they’ve come or what they’ve had to go through” (Tammy). One service provider believes that more fathers would step up as primary guardian if stereotypes were changed, “I think that we could have a lot more involved single fathers if we didn’t send the messages that we did” (Sarah).

The service providers also tell me what they think is important to know about single fathers. At a micro-level: “What is their experience like as single fathers? What are they regularly encountering? You know, what’s positive, what they enjoy about being a single father? Um, what are their barriers, like what are their struggles?” (Sarah). Also, “What it’s like to be a single parent and give them that general support and what pieces of it are “that’s going to be hard because you’re a single *father*”” (Sarah). Research is important according to a few service providers and fathers, “ah well at the base-level research like this to find out exactly what it is that um single fathers or fathers in particular are looking for, what some of their barriers are” (Tammy). This research will allow “just finding out what their circumstances are and what challenges do they face and what do they need or what are they looking for?” (Susan). “Maybe if there was more of it, people would see a need for it almost. But you know, unfortunately I don’t think there’s a whole lot of research in this area so looking at the needs of you know single fathers or you know their needs they’re faced with, the challenges and such” (Susan).

At the meso-level the service providers also want to learn more about how single fathers navigate the community-level resources such as schools and support services. Other ideas of investigation include "connecting with the school" and the experiences with the school, "with their children directly and their experience with the outside world" (Sarah). This is believed to be accessed by investigating:

> What the collective voice of single fathers is asking for because they're going to be the experts on their own life and their own parenting abilities and they're going to be the experts on what kind of things they need to have in order to meet the goals that they have set for themselves and their families. Um the other focus would be on any barriers. So what kind of barriers exist, how frequent are they, how could they be broken down? That sort of thing (Tammy).

The collective voice of single fathers can be accessed by "doing essentially a needs assessment that we haven't thought of or haven't seen before" (Susan). This way, service providers are able to "find what their needs are. What are they doing better as opposed to you know us telling them, "oh you need an anger management group"" (Susan). Questions asked could be "now what are their needs? What are they looking for? What do you think they want?" (Susan).

In conclusion, the service providers see a need for more services for single fathers. However, they believe that parents need not always be divided into mothers and fathers in their services, but instead should be all-inclusive. Additionally, it may be beneficial to have *some* services specifically for single fathers in order to provide social support and camaraderie. Service providers touch on all levels of the ecological model when describing their experiences with single fathers and believe that change needs to occur at all levels in order to best serve these families. The next step identified by the service providers is to do a larger-scale needs assessment of local single fathers.

Chapter 6

Discussion

An in-depth analysis of the single father narratives as well as the service providers' interviews provides evidence of both risk and protective factors to single fatherhood at each ecological level; the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems. I

will now address each system of the ecological model and integrate the ways single fathers are resilient or have challenges in these respective systems and why these are important to consider. I will then address the considerations of my research, and conclude with how these findings can be utilized to provide single father families with their necessary supports and future directions for research.

Chronosystem

It is important to look at the chronosystem when addressing single father families. There are many significant time periods that are addressed by the single fathers themselves as well as the service providers. The first significant event is the separation/divorce of the parent dyad. This can be seen as both a *risk* and a *protective* factor. Although it is mentioned that the transition is a difficult one, at times it was protective in that it removed an unhealthy parent or changed an unhealthy relationship. Divorce is an area where the single fathers show resilience and are able to step up and parent their children on their own. Although there are challenges associated with divorce such as lower family income, less parenting support, and dealing with psychological well-being of children, these fathers are able to use personal processes to overcome challenges and rise to become successful fathers. This is interesting considering the literature that states that divorce is in fact a risk to the father-child bond (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). This is seen in the service providers' accounts as well, that single fathers are willing to persist to the next step. It is important for service providers, policy makers, and legal representatives to understand this resilient quality in fathers.

Another significant event is the custody allocation process. Whether done through the courts or informally, this is an important event in single father families. For the most

part this process acts as a risk to single father resilience in the challenges they have to face (see exosystem). Lastly, the fathers identify that developmental stages of their children act as significant events such as learning how to transition from breastfeeding, to dealing with a teenage daughter starting menstruation. The fathers see these as learning opportunities and the service providers see developmental stages as an important component of parenting programs. Therefore, education on how these developmental stages will affect their children is an important piece of support for single fathers. These events interact with the multiple levels of the ecological framework. However, single fathers, and single parents in general, tend to feel that single parenting becomes easier over time (Richards & Schmiege, 1993).

Microsystem

At the micro-level the fathers and service providers identify *risk* influences on single fatherhood such as the gender of the children in terms of raising daughters versus sons and the health of the children's mothers. Although fathers tend to think sons and daughters should be raised the same, they believe there are notable differences like needing to protect girls (Rouyer, Frascarolo, Zaouche-Gaudron, & Lavanchy, 2007). *Protective* influences at the micro-level include working towards reintegrating the mother of the children into the parent-child relationship to have the "best" environment for their children. Mental health issues of the mothers are common occurrences in single father families (Richards & Schmiege, 1993), as was shown in Tyson and Joshua's narratives. What stood out for me in terms of protective influences at the micro-level are the feelings of strength, pride, and capability as a father, as well as a strong bond and relationship with their children. Fathers have been successful in their strengths ratings of honesty,

listening, and discipline (Strom, Beckert, Strom, Strom, & Griswold, 2002). These protective influences have the ability to negate the effects of the risks; for example, a father's feelings of strength and pride can overcome his perceived inabilities to parent a daughter. Confidence building and focusing on *strengths* therefore becomes important in single father resilience.

This pride and belief in their abilities is encouraging. Oftentimes single fathers perceive themselves differently than single mothers due to the sometimes negative perception society has of single fathers (Haire & McGeorge, 2012). These internalized feelings from society of how single fatherhood "should" be can feel like oppression to single fathers (Haire & McGeorge, 2012); however, luckily none of these single fathers seem to have internalized feelings of self-doubt. Views of masculinity and traditional roles in fatherhood are changing, as seen with stay-at-home fathers (Fischer & Anderson, 2012), and perhaps single fathers are developing their own form of fatherhood. This new internalized view of fatherhood builds on the resilience of single fathers and their families as well as a need for strengths-based support.

Mesosystem

In terms of *risks* at the meso-level the fathers acknowledge their lack of formal supports in HRM, both past and present. The service providers agree that the quantity of support needed is not present for single fathers in HRM, but that there is also a lack of awareness of the available services for fathers or a stigma that exists in parenting services geared towards mothers. Social work primarily focuses on maternal issues, neglecting resources and interventions for fathers (Clapton, 2009). Single fathers also tend to be viewed as less deserving of support than single mothers and their problems are seen as

more severe when in fact they are comparable (Kullberg, 2005). Community-based fathering programs are important because they allow fathers from all backgrounds and income levels to attend (Roy & Dyson, 2010). The service providers and the fathers agree that there needs to be more support groups for single fathers to come together and share experiences as a means of feeling less alone.

Another risk that is perceived by two single fathers is the interaction with their children's schools. Teachers treat the fathers as disciplinarians and secondary to the role that mothers play in the education of the children despite their role as primary guardian. This could be due to past instances of difficulty involving fathers in school programs (McBride, Rane, & Bae, 2001). However, it is alarming that the fathers who want to be involved with their children's education are discouraged. Some of the responsibility is on teachers to include and understand the role of father (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002). The lack of services for single fathers and the neglect of fathers in children's schools are barriers to their resilience. If fathers are neglected in these domains, they have more difficulty thriving. Therefore, this system is an area in need of change to eliminate risk factors towards single fathers.

Work, although initially expected to be an important meso-level factor, is not directly addressed as a risk factor for these single fathers, however, it influences other domains of life. For example, lower finances in the family in a single father home poses as a risk for some single fathers, despite research stating that single fathers are financially more comfortable than single mothers (Richards & Schmiege, 1993). Not being able to attend parenting groups or services because of work schedules is addressed by both the single fathers as well as the service providers interviewed. Fathers have difficulties with

accommodating groups and work, as well as indicate work as a challenge in parenting (Summers, Boller, & Raikes, 2004). Interestingly, however, work is also seen as a *protective* factor at the meso-level. One father notes how he received a promotion in his company and expressed to the management that his children would always come before work, and his company accommodates his fathering in the workplace. Another father is able to take days off to care for his sick children, visit their school, or take them to appointments. Therefore work acts as both risk and protective to father resilience. Workplaces incorporating more flexible policies surrounding employees who are fathers act as protective agents for these families. Also, it is important for service providers to understand that services offered during an average work day are often not feasible to attend; therefore, if services were to be offered during the evenings or weekends perhaps these could also act as protective agents allowing fathers to thrive.

A major meso-level *protective* factor is informal social support for single fathers in the form of extended family members and friends. The fathers express that their lack of formal supports cause them to reach out even more to their extended family and friends for support. Family and friends support the fathers with emotional support, childcare, financial support, and personal parenting experience/advice. Fathers tend to rely on support from their own parents or others considered "insiders" to the family (Summers, Boller, & Raikes, 2004). The fathers agree that having a single father support group would act as a much needed protective factor. Divorced fathers who have had confidant support have shown better problem solving outcomes, more effective parenting, and a decrease in problem behaviour in their children (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2012). This support could consist of family, friends, or professionals. The way in which fathers create

their own networks of support when formal ones are not in place shows the resilience of single fathers, they are able to create their own support systems in the face of adversity. This is an unnoticed strength of single fathers.

As explained by the service providers and single fathers in this study, there are significant barriers to accessing formal services. Fathers do not access services as often as mothers due to barriers such as time the programs run, staff/facilitator gender, and topics that are covered that are often targeted towards mothers (Wells & Sarkadi, 2012). More of an active encouragement towards fathers to participate in services is needed. Also, negative stereotypes, biases, and personal beliefs need to come to the forefront of service provider awareness in order to better include fathers (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Haire & McGeorge, 2012; White et al., 2011). It is important to note that both informal advice and support from people in similar situations as well as formal, more research-based recommendations and support are beneficial to a separated parent, especially fathers (Brotherson, Rittenbach, & White, 2012). Education and awareness of service providers would help provide best-fit services to single fathers and can lead to collaborative resilience.

Exosystem

Despite the increase in fathers seeking custodial rights in family court (Townsend, 2003), almost unanimously the single fathers and service providers identify the legal system as a major *risk* or barrier to single fatherhood. Issues with the court system, accessing a lawyer, being assigned social workers, and dealing with child protection

services are identified as challenges. Social work has been slow in responding to fatherhood in terms of policies, materials, guidance, and practice (Clapton, 2009). Fathers have been overlooked with a maternal focus to social work.

Service providers express that the fathers going through their services constantly request assistance with legal/court procedures. Biases and stereotypes of fathers are prevalent in many cases where assumptions are made about fathers without any proof or validations. Mothers are assumed to be the nurturing, primary parent to the extent that even child payments are expected to go to the mother despite the sole custody status of the fathers. Paying regular child support is seen in court as an indicator of an involved father (Townsend, 2003). Previous research has shown that fathers feel that the legal system is biased, specifically for low-income African American fathers (Gadsden, Wortham, & Turner, 2003). This compliments the idea of a double-edged sword in the courtroom, mentioned by Tyson. It is also felt that social work interventions are not made towards mothers as readily as they tend to be made towards fathers, even when the fathers request the intervention or support for the mother. This outlines a major need for change as single fathers are prevented from being resilient, and not due to a lack of trying. The single fathers interviewed have fought through the court system for their children and have met multiple barriers. Although the means to fight for their children is a resilient trait in itself, it is difficult to remain resilient through a process with multiple challenges for single fathers. As Townsend (2003) states, “courts do not define fatherhood; fathers do” (p. 356). I would both agree and disagree with this statement. Yes, fathers define fatherhood, but multitudes of factors influence this definition, including the courts. Townsend does not consider other ecological influences.

The fathers believe that if there is government support it would act as a *protective* influence over the exo-level. Government support could be: (a) supporting and promoting father involvement with their children and (b) funding initiatives that provide supports to single fathers and fathers in general. It is hoped that through research such as this, family law can be re-examined or in the very least raise awareness of primary custodial fathers. More legal attention to fathers and their important place in the family would contribute to more resilient single fathers. It is apparent that the exosystem is in need of major reform for single fathers. Policies and practices are important because of their indirect influence over interventions, but also on how the public perceives fathers (Clarke, 2012; Featherstone, 2009).

Macrosystem

At the macro-level the major *risks* or challenges identified by both the single fathers and the service providers working with fathers are the gendered ideology of parenthood and the social stigma against fathers. Much like Bianchi's (2006) research claiming that fathers can be defined out of the family, these single fathers feel the invisibility of their role in society. Clapton (2009) agrees and suggests that society categorizes fathers into two categories: invisible or demonized. Fathers can therefore be made to feel like social "oddities" (Richards & Schmiege, 1993). The fathers still feel that society does not know how to handle them as single parents; ranging from strangers wondering where the children's mother is when playing at the park, to teachers not communicating to fathers, to the exclusion of fathers in definition of family at a local health centre, to judgments made about being a "dead beat dad". The service providers agree that this is an area that requires re-examination. Single fathers are made to

overcome these social expectations and stereotypes on a regular basis, including overcoming perceptions of fathers as "threats" to the concept of mother or low expectations of fathers ingrained in society (Clapton, 2009). This means that those single fathers who persist exemplify resilient traits, as it takes resilience to consistently "prove" their capabilities as parents.

The fathers identify that because of the lack of societal attention to single fathers they thought that they were alone in the matter until participating in research such as this. Even I did not expect to get the quick and high response that I did when I tried to recruit single fathers. The single fathers express that realizing that there are other fathers in their shoes acts as a *protective* influence, even if they were single fathers in the past they express that realizing that others were out there is a nice feeling that they wish they had previously. They believe that if more people knew about single fathers, the social stigma may be reduced. This is echoed in the interviews with service providers who believe that socially when we think of parents, we think of mothers and when we think of single parents, we think of single mothers to the extent that the label "single parent" is more personally attributable to mothers than fathers. Roy and Dyson (2010) believe that the presence of more community-based services/programs would help support fathers who are stigmatized. Educating society on the positive contributions of fathers would also help change perceptions (Clapton, 2009), as well as, researchers focusing on parenting as gender-neutral (Pleck, 2012).

It is important to change these social beliefs. As I have learned, there are many single fathers that are very capable parents and they are resilient within all the systems of their lives. Understanding that fathers are equally important and equipped for the job of

parenting is integral in supporting these resilient families. These single fathers show resilient traits in their parenthood that need to be embraced, rather than neglected in society. I will discuss how this change can occur shortly.

From an ecological resilience approach it is important to address the "so what"? How do all these levels interact in single fatherhood? And, why does it matter to consider all the influences on single fatherhood? It is important to consider all influences on single fatherhood because they do not occur in isolation, but rather overlap. Feelings of strength and pride as a father allowed the fathers to overcome significant events that were viewed as difficult, such as court processes. Accommodating schedules at work allowed more time to dedicate to their father-child relationship. Emotional support from family and friends led to the fathers feeling strength as a parent. Biases and stereotypes of fatherhood were seen in court assumptions, personal beliefs, and the services offered in HRM. The fathers expressed that feeling alone meant that they did not reach out to formal social support because of the assumption that it was not available, which led to feeling more alone. Having to constantly prove themselves as fathers because of stereotypes made events like social worker visits more traumatizing. Concepts of masculinity in society can also meant fathers were less likely to actively seek out support or admit needing assistance (Summers, Boller, & Raikes, 2004). In other words, there is a perpetual cycle. Starting with acknowledging the single fathers and their strength, pride, and experiences can lead to recognition of a need to include and adjust social supports. From there an understanding of fathers and their part in parenting can be reflected in policies, practices, and legal proceedings. Changes to the social perceptions of single fatherhood can begin to shift as awareness transcends from the other levels, and possibly significant events

such as divorce will be less feared by fathers. Not considering each ecological level would have limited my understanding not only of why single fatherhood is experienced a certain way, but would have also limited my ability to suggest means of change.

Resilience has not been considered with single father research, which is unfortunate due to the positive influence it has on the single fathers as mentioned in the interviews. Children's resilience with father involvement has been examined (Best, 2008; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Malmberg &Flouri, 2011), but not the resilience of fathers themselves. Looking at father resilience is important as we move from a focus on how families fail to how they can succeed (Walsh, 2002). Qualitative research allows a first-hand account of how these single fathers want to be best supported to be resilient. Interviewing the single fathers and service providers allowed an ability to connect research to future practice and policy, bridging the ecological levels (Walsh, 2002). A resilience approach to single fatherhood also allows more room for accommodation to culture and individual family challenges, an area for future practice to focus on.

Limitations

A consideration of this study is the lack of a definition of "single father" family. Single father families exist due to different reasons and this study only focused on divorced or separated single father families. Single fathers may identify as a single father for different reasons than the parameters I had set. Another possibility outside of divorce/separation and death would be single fathers who were never married. Presumably there would be different experiences of single fatherhood by those who were not married or parenting with their partner. Unfortunately, it was not within the scope of

this research to examine each of the possibilities. To accommodate this a broad definition of single father was created.

An important point to consider about my participant sample is that the single divorced fathers are men; it is important to consider gender within methods (Wical & Doherty, 2005). Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) describe gender as an important factor in interviewing. Masculinity is a trait that men in Western societies try to present; arguably interview situations can challenge a man's masculinity (Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Interviews, therefore, can be challenging because men typically do not like women witnessing their weaknesses. My being a female interviewer posed as a potential challenge when I asked men to open up about their personal lives to me. In an interview men may feel a loss of control to the interviewer, especially when discussing gender-specific topics that draws more attention to their role as a man. As a researcher I had to prepare myself for the perceived threat the divorced single fathers may have felt to their masculinity.

The single fathers could have tried to test my agenda or prove my lack of control (Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001); possibly with comments like "how could you understand? You're not a man or a parent". Sexualizing could have been an issue as I was targeting divorced single fathers and men are more likely to sexualize a situation with a female interviewer to keep a sense of control (Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). For this reason I held interviews in public spaces, with one exception as he was a relative of a friend. I wanted the fathers to feel comfortable in the space chosen, but I also needed to feel comfortable. I tried to ensure that the public space was not noisy due to the voice recording. Minimizing is also common with male interviewees meaning they may not tell

a lot in their responses and even when prompted may not give expansive answers. Men are also more likely to hide their emotions, making probing more likely. However, I could play the learning audience and have them explain what they meant without losing their respect (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001).

Fortunately, I did not feel that any of the men were exerting themselves in a masculine manner in their interview with me nor did they use testing, sexualizing or minimizing. Although, some were more outgoing than others, all were willing to tell me about their experiences as a single father and open up to me without the risks stated above. This could be a sample bias; these fathers may have been more likely to want to talk about these issues since they volunteered. I felt comfortable with the process of each interview from my place as researcher. Of course, I do not know what the fathers themselves were thinking during the interview, however none of the men disclosed any uncomfortable feelings with the interview. This could also be the case because the men who would volunteer for an interview may be more comfortable with talking about their experiences. Pini (2005) believes that female interviewers need not shy away from male dominated research domains, but to instead make sure reflexivity is engaged, which I did via field notes and journaling. Reflexivity allowed me to incorporate my gender identity in the interview process (Broom, Hand, & Tovey, 2009). Additionally, reciprocity in the interview was established by my ability to share something in common with my participants (Broom, Hand, & Tovey, 2009), being both a service provider and a past child from a single father family.

Although important data to gather, research with fathers can pose challenges in that sometimes they are not found to be useful sources of information about family life

(Lareau, 2000). However, Wical and Doherty (2005) found that, despite previous findings, fathers are reliable in their reports of their involvement with their children. Using 52 time diaries the researchers found that mothers' and fathers' responses were similar. It used to be believed that mothers were more accurate reporters for the family, that may not be true, but instead studies may just require the right methods for fathers in order to access information in a manner comfortable to men (Wical & Doherty, 2005). Sociologists need to be aware of the emphasis of *mother* in the family and place more emphasis on the role and perspective of father (Lareau, 2000) and take into account all roles in the family acting together.

Generalizability is a limitation of the interviews. The interview sample of nine is not a large sample and only consists of HRM residents, therefore it is not generalizable to all Canadian single father families and service providers. Also, the service providers interviewed all came from the same organization. Unfortunately, other agencies contacted were unresponsive to this research. Nevertheless, this information is still helpful in understanding the experiences of the single fathers and those who work closely with single fathers to give suggestions of what would be beneficial for programs and services for similar families.

Of my single father participants, only one of the fathers classified themselves as below average income. Perhaps future research could look at results for fathers outside of average to above average income. A larger sample size could also indicate if this is a sample bias or if this information can validate the idea that single fathers are financially more stable than single mothers. It was difficult to recruit service providers from other organizations. Mail outs were sent as well as follow-up emails and phone calls to select

individuals. The limited range means this is not representative of all service providers. I would like to see other cultural backgrounds represented in a similar study; my participants were of Caucasian or Black descent. The small and diversity-limited sample size means these findings are not representative of single fathers in general; although this was not strived for in my methods as I wanted to hear individual narratives. Also, the retrospective nature of three single fathers could pose as an issue with accuracy. However, as mentioned earlier, history is constantly created and recreated when looking at narratives. Lastly, I knew some participants before the interview, we had a previous relationship as co-workers. However, this did not seem to be an issue and the participants were comfortable being involved.

Regardless of the limitations of this study, it can still be used as a preliminary tool to understanding the experiences of single father families. In the future, more comprehensive research could reveal further evidence of experiences of single fathers and their children. For now, using qualitative methodologies allows us to delve deeper into this topic and create a starting ground for policies and programs supporting single fathers and their children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Parenting programs should assess whether or not their services are gender-neutral and inclusive of both mothers and fathers. It is also important to assess the effectiveness of those programs for fathers since fathers have a unique relationship with their children that may differ from mothers (Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011). Needs assessments of each individual parenting group would ensure that single fathers participating in the group are having their needs adequately met. Ideally, services and support groups should

be conscious of average work schedules for men and strive to incorporate some evening and weekend services as well. Also, costs of the programs should remain minimal as these families are single income households, for the most part.

Legal system reform would be important in assuring fathers of their importance in the family unit. It is difficult to gage if single fathers are a minority in comparison to single mothers because they are marginalized in the court system, or if they are marginalized in the court system because of their small numbers. Regardless, for single fathers to feel uncomfortable, uneasy, and angry towards their experiences with the court system means there is importance in changing this process. The legal process came up in all interviews with the single fathers, despite it not being a question I had asked or expected to be as prominent. Traditional SNAF values have been shown in the courts with fathers treated as less important than the mothers of their children. The work required by the fathers to gain custody, escape false allegations, prove themselves as capable parents, and prove they were not owing in child support was disturbing to me. I believe there could be more research done on the exo-level factors alone. More research could be done on comparing the legal experiences of single fathers and single mothers to identify what issues are specific to single fathers and which are issues that are prominent to single parents in general. Townsend (2003) agrees that Family Court needs to embrace the changing definition of fatherhood.

Ideally there would be a re-examination of Family Law in Canada to see if policies and law are congruent with the changing nature of the family. Traditional roles are less common therefore the ideal of father as breadwinner and female as nurturing parent should not influence decisions of the court. When listening to the stories of these

fathers, it became apparent that the "best interest of the child" is not always considered. A father asking for support for the mother of his child due to an unsafe environment and not receiving support, a father who has been alienated from his children when he was a primary guardian before, a father who is asked to leave his home and children when the mother is having psychological distress, are all decisions that I questioned when listening to these stories. Where is the "best interest of the child" being considered? A re-evaluation of how gender of the parent influences decisions made in family court would be important.

There is a demand for more education given to service providers on the invisibility of fathers in family services and supports. Ideally, more single fathers would be aware of these services, and this requires inviting the single fathers specifically so that they do not feel left out of parenting groups that may appear to be predominantly mothers. There needs to be more collaboration between service providers, not necessarily the individuals, but between agencies. This would provide more services to a broader population and keep service providers aware of what is available elsewhere. This being said, it would also be beneficial to see the legal system collaborating with the service providers. The court system could be a place to recommend services for single fathers and to provide information on the legal process for fathers. The more connections between the ecological levels the better, allowing for a more holistic support system for fathers.

It was interesting that only one family service agency contacted me to participate. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to the reasoning without having had contact, but it made me consider: Were they not contacting me back because they did not have any

services that qualified as serving single fathers? Were they overwhelmed with demand of their services and do not have time to do interviews? Were they unaware of single fathers and their needs in HRM? Is this a problem with communication within service provider agencies? A more general examination of family services may be required to understand the demands of these agencies.

In conclusion, much of the research shows there are many risk factors influencing single father families from each ecological system. However, these risk factors are accompanied by protective factors as well. A resilience approach to the ecological framework allowed me to focus on how single fathers thrive instead of their deficits in parenting. Although focus on deficits of fathers has been a common theme in the literature, to complement the current "nurturing" father it is important to continue researching fathers and how they create successful families and bring protective factors as well. Examining single fathers through each ecological system, and explicating the challenges and strengths at each level creates a starting ground for future research into single father families. Through balanced research that examines *both* risks and protective influences on single fathers, service providers will be able to better provide support to these important families. Through awareness of these families, perhaps the macro-level social constructions can be changed to replace "dead beat dads" with a more current, strengths-based, resilient perspective of fatherhood. As can be gleaned from the ecological framework, it only takes change in one sphere to initiate change in all spheres.

References

Adams, T. E. (2008). A review of narrative ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14,* 175-194.

Andrews, M., Sclater, S. D., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2004). Narrative research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 109-124). London: Sage.

Barker, H., & Hamlett, J. (2010). Living above the shop: Home, business, and family in

the English "industrial revolution". *Journal of Family History, 35,* 311-328. doi:10.1177/ 0363199010373544

Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behavior. *Child Development, 37,* 887-907. doi:10.2307/1126611

Beaujot, R. (2000). *Children, custody and outcomes: Cross-national comparisons.* Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://sociology.uwo.ca/ftsc/Beaujot4Custody.htm

Behnke, A. O., Taylor, B. A., & Parra-Cardona, J. R. (2008). "I hardly understand English, but…": Mexican origin fathers describe their commitment as fathers despite the challenges of immigration. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 39,* 187-205.

Bianchi, S. M. (2006). Mothers and daughters "do," fathers "don't do" family: Gender and generational bonds. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68,* 812-816. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00296.x

Biggart, L., & O'Brien, M. (2010). UK fathers' long work hours: Career stage or fatherhood? *Fathering, 8,* 341-361. doi:10.3149/fth.0803.341

Birks, M., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 13,* 68-75. doi:10.1177/174498710708125

Black, K., & Lobo, M. (2008). A conceptual review of family resilience factors. *Journal of Family Nursing, 14,* 33-55. doi:10.1177/1074840707312237

Bogenschneider, K. (1996). Family related prevention programs: An ecological risk/protective theory for building prevention programs, policies, and community capacity to support youth. *Family Relations, 45,* 127-138. doi:10.2307/585283

Boothe, B., Grimm, G., Herman, M. -L., & Luder, M. (2010). JAKOB narrative analysis:

The psychodynamic conflict as a narrative model. *Psychotherapy Research, 20,* 511-525.

Borden, L. A., Schultz, T. R., Herman, K. C., & Brooks, C. M. (2010). The incredible years parent training program: Promoting resilience through evidence-based prevention groups. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 14,* 230-241. doi:10.1037/a0020322

Bowlby, J. (1978). Attachment theory and its therapeutic implications. *Adolescent Psychiatry, 6,* 5-33.

Boyraz, G., & Sayger, T. (2009). An exploratory path analysis of the factors contributing to life satisfaction in fathers. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4,* 145-154. doi:10.1080/ 17439760802650592

Brandth, B., & Kvande, E. (2009). Gendered or gender-neutral care politics for fathers? *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 624,* 177-189. doi:10.1177/0002716209334119

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22,* 723-742. doi:10.1037// 0012-1649.22.6.723

Bronte-Tinkew, J., Horowitz, A., & Carrano, J. (2010). Aggravation and stress in parenting: Associations with coparenting and father engagement among resident fathers. *Journal of Family Issues, 31,* 525-555. doi:10.1177/0192513X09340147

Broom, A., Hand, K., & Tovey, P. (2009). The role of gender, environment and individual biography in shaping qualitative interview data. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 12,* 51-65. doi:10.1080/13645570701606028

Brotherson, S. E., Rittenbach, C., & White, J. M. (2012). Impacts of parents forever on parental behaviour and adjustment during divorce: A short-term follow-up evaluation study. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 53,* 267-291.

Brown, A. P. (2010). Qualitative method and compromise in applied social research. *Qualitative Research, 10,* 229-248.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). London: Oxford University Press.

Bulanda, R. E. (2004). Paternal involvement with children: The influence of gender ideologies. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66,* 40-45. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-2455.2004.00003.x

Caine, V. (2010). Visualizing community: Understanding narrative inquiry as action research. *Educational Action Research, 18,* 481-496. doi:10.1080/09650792.2010.52482

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London: Sage.

Chesley, N. (2011). Stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers: Gender, couple dynamics, and social change. *Gender & Society, 25,* 642-664. doi:10.1177/0891243211417433

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clapton, G. (2009). How and why social work fails fathers: Redressing an imbalance,

social work's role and responsibility. *Practice: Social Work in Action, 21,* 17-34.

Clark, H. (2012). Contemporary fathering: Theory, policy and practice. *Social Work Education: The International Journal, 31,* 131-132.

Cook, J. R., & Kilmer, R. P. (2010). Defining the scope of systems of care: An ecological perspective. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 33,* 18-20. doi:10.1016/j. evalprogplan.2009.05.006

Cooksey, E. C., & Fondell, M. M. (1996). Spending time with his kids: Effects of family structure on father's and children's lives. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58,* 693-707. doi:10.2307//353729

Corcoran, J., & Nichols-Casebolt, A. (2004). Risk and resilience ecological framework for assessment and goal formulation. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 21,* 211-235. doi:10.1023/B:CASW.0000028453.79719.65

Craig, L. (2006). Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender & Society, 20,* 259-281. doi:10.1177/ 0891243205285212

Crossman, A. M., Powell, M. B., Principe, G. F., & Ceci, S. J. (2002). Child testimony in custody cases: A review. *Journal of Forensic Psychology, 2,* 1-31. doi:10.1300/ J158v02n01_01

Defrain, J., & Eirick, R. (1981). Coping as divorced single parents: A comparative study of fathers and mothers. *Family Relations, 30,* 265-274. doi:10.2307/584140

DeGarmo, D. S. (2010). A time varying evaluation of identity theory and father involvement for full custody, shared custody, and no custody divorced fathers. *Fathering, 8,* 181-202. doi: 10.3149/fth.1802.181

DeGarmo, D. S., & Forgatch, M. S. (2012). A confidant support and problem solving model of divorced fathers' parenting. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 49,* 258-269. doi:10.1007/s10464-011-9437-y

Delahunty, K. M., McKay, D. W., Noseworthy, D. E., & Storey, A. E. (2007). Prolactin responses to infant cues in men and women: Effects of parental experience and recent infant contact. *Hormones and Behavior, 51,* 213-220. doi:10.1016/j. yhbeh.2006.10.00

de Menzi, M. C. R. (2010). Gender and cultural patterns of mothers' and fathers' attachment and links with children's self-competence, depression and loneliness in middle and late childhood. *Early Child Development and Care, 180,* 193-209. doi:10.1080/ 03004430903415056

Department of Justice (2001). *Federal funding of provincial and territorial child support, support reinforcement and child custody and access projects: 1977-2001.* Retrieved on August 29, 2011, from http://www.justice.gc.ca

Department of Justice (2002). *The voice of the child in divorce, custody, and access proceedings: 2002.* Retrieved August 29, 2011, from http://www.justice.gc.ca

Department of Justice (2010). *About child support*. Retrieved on April 5, 2011, from http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fcy-fea/sup-pen/index.html

Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60,* 277-292. doi: 10.2307/353848

Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (2000). We are all responsible for

responsible fathering: A response to Walker and McGraw. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62,* 570-574. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00570.x

Dommermuth, L., & Kitterod, R. H. (2009). Fathers' employment in a father-friendly welfare state: Does fatherhood affect men's working hours? *Community, Work & Family, 12,* 417-436. doi:10.1080/13668800902753960

Doohan, E. M., Carrere, S., Siler, C., & Beardslee, C. (2009). The link between the marital bond and future triadic family interactions. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 71,* 892-904.

Dreman, S. (1991). Coping with the trauma of divorce. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 4,* 113-121. doi:10.1002/jts.2490040109

Dufur, M. J., Howell, N. C., Downey, D. B., Ainsworth, J. W., & Lapray, A. J. (2010). Sex differences in parenting behaviors in single-mother and single-father households. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 1092-1106. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00752.x

Easterbrooks, M. A., Chaudhuri, J. H., Bartlett, J. D., & Copeman, A. (2011). Resilience in parenting among young mothers: Family and ecological risks and opportunities. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33,* 42-50. doi:10.1016/j. childyouth.2010.08.010

Eggebeen, D. J., Dew, J., & Knoester, C. (2010). Fatherhood and men's lives at middle

age. *Journal of Family Issues, 31,* 113-130. doi:10.1177/0192513X09341446

Eldar-Avidan, D., Haj-Yahia, M. M., & Greenbaum, C. W. (2009). Divorce is part of my life… resilience, survival, and vulnerability: Young adults' perception of the implications of parental divorce. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 35,* 30-46. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2008.00094.x

Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21,* 479-480. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.21.3.479

Fagan, J., Palkovitz, R., Roy, K., & Farrie, D. (2009). Pathways to paternal engagement: Longitudinal effects of risk and resilience on nonresident fathers. *Developmental Psychology, 45,* 1389-1405. doi:10.1037/a0015210

Fagan, J., & Press, J. (2008). Father influences on employed mothers' work-family balance. *Journal of Family Issues, 29,* 1136-1160.

Fathers are Capable Too (2012). *Supporting a child's right to both parents*. Retrieved on April 25, 2012, from www.fact.on.ca

Finn, M., & Henwood, K. (2009). Exploring masculinities within men's identificatory imaginings of first-time fatherhood. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 48,* 547-562. doi:10.1348/014466608X386099

Fischer, J., & Anderson, V. N. (2012). Gender role attitudes and characteristics of stay-at-home and employed fathers. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 13,* 16-31. doi:10.1037/ a0024359

Flouri, E., & Buchanan, A. (2002). Father involvement in childhood and trouble with the police in adolescence: Findings from the 1958 British cohort. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 17,* 689-701. doi: 10.1177/0886260502017006006

Freud, S. (1920). *A general introduction to psychoanalysis.* New York: Horace Liveright. doi:10.1037/10667-000

Frieman, B. B., & Berkeley, T. R. (2002). Encouraging fathers to participate in the school experiences of young children: The teacher's role. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29,* 209-213.

Gade, S. (2011). Narrative as unit of analysis for teaching-learning praxis and action: Tracing the personal growth of a professional voice. *Reflective Practice, 12,* 35-45.

Gadsden, V. L., Wortham, S. E. F., & Turner, H. M. (2003). Situated identities of young, African American fathers in low-income urban settings: Perspectives on home, street, and the system. *Family Court Review, 41,* 381-399.

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (2010). Scanning the landscape of narrative inquiry. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 4/9,* 728-735. doi: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00294.x

Gobo, G. (2004). Sampling, representativeness and generalizability. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 435-456). London: Sage.

Goncy, E. A., & van Dulmen, M. H. M. (2010). Fathers do make a difference: Parental involvement and adolescent alcohol use. *Fathering, 8,* 91-108. doi:10.3149/fth.0801.93

Goodsell, T. L., Barrus, R. J., Meldrum, J. T., & Vargo, D. W. (2010). Fatherhood harmony: Polyphony, movement, and subjectivity. *Fathering, 8,* 3-23. doi:10.3149/fth.0801.3

Goodsell, T. L., & Meldrum, J. T. (2010). Nurturing fathers: A qualitative examination of child-father attachment. *Early Child Development and Care, 180,* 249-262. doi:10.1080/ 03004430903415098

Gordon, I., Zagoory-Sharon, O., Leckman, J. F., & Feldman, R. (2010). Prolactin, oxytocin, and the development of paternal behaviour across the first six months of fatherhood. *Hormones and Behavior, 58,* 513-518. doi:10.1016/j.yhbeh.2010.04.007

Greif, G. L. (1985). *Single fathers.* Massachusetts: D. C. Health and Company.

Haas, L., & Hwang, C. P. (2007). Gender and organizational culture: Correlates of companies' responsiveness to fathers in Sweden. *Gender & Society, 21,* 52-79. doi:10.1177/ 0891243206295091

Haire, A. H., & McGeorge, C. R. (2012). Negative perceptions of never-married custodial single mothers and fathers: Applications of a gender analysis for family therapists. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 24,* 24-51. doi:10.1080/ 08952833.2012.629130

Hallberg, A. C., Beckman, A., & Hakansson, A. (2010). Many fathers visit the child health care centre, but few take part in parents' groups. *Journal of Child Health Care, 14,* 296-303. doi:10.1177/1367493510373755

Halme, N., Astedt-Kurki, P., & Tarkka, M. T. (2009). Fathers' involvement with their

preschool-age children: How fathers spend time with their children in different family structures. *Child Youth Care Forum, 38,* 103-119. doi:10.1007/s10566-009-9069-7

Hanson, S. M. H. (1985). Fatherhood: Contextual variations. *American Behavioral Scientist, 29,* 55-77.

Harvey, M. R. (2007). Towards and ecological understanding of resilience in trauma survivors: Implications for theory, research, and practice. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 14,* 9-32. doi:10.1300/J146v14n01_02

Hayes, J. (2009). *Divorce in Japan*. Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=616&catid=18

Heard, H. E. (2007). Fathers, mothers, and family structure: Family trajectories, parent gender, and adolescent schooling. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69,* 435-450. doi:10.1111/ j.1741-3737.2007.00375.x

Hodges, M. J., & Budig, M. J. (2010). Who gets the daddy bonus? Organizational hegemonic masculinity and the impact of fatherhood on earnings. *Gender & Society, 24,* 717-745. doi:10.1177/0891243210386729

Holmes, E. K., Galovan, A. M., Yoshida, K., & Hawkins, A. J. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effectiveness of resident fathering programs: Are family life educators interested in fathers? *Family Relations, 59,* 240-252. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2010.00599

Holmes, E. K., & Huston, A. C. (2010). Understanding positive father-child interaction: Children's, fathers', and mothers' contributions. *Fathering, 8,* 203-225. doi:10.3149/ fth.1802.203

Howard, K., Burke, J., Borkowski, J., & Whitman, T. (2006). Fathers' influence in the lives of children with adolescent mothers. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20,* 468-476. doi:10. 1037/0893-3200.20.3.468

Hsieh, M. O., & Shek, D. T. L. (2008). Personal and family correlates or resilience among adolescents living in single-parent households in Taiwan. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 49,* 330-348. doi:10.1080/10502550802221925

Johansson, T., & Klinth, R. (2008). Caring fathers: The ideology of gender equality and masculine positions. *Men and Masculinities, 11,* 42-62. doi:10.1177/1097184X06291899

Josselson, R. (2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research: Principles and practicalities. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry* (pp. 537-565). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Klinth, R. (2008). The best of both worlds? Fatherhood and gender equality in Swedish paternity leave campaigns, 1976-2006. *Fathering, 6,* 20-38. doi:10.3149/fth.0601.20

Krampe, E. M. (2009). When is the father really there? A conceptual reformulation of father presence. *Journal of Family Issues, 30,* 875-897. doi:10.1177/0192513X08331008

Kruk, E. (2008). *Child custody, access and parental responsibility: The search for a just and equitable standard.* Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://www.fira.ca/cms/documents/181/April7_Kruk.pdf

Kullberg, C. (2005). Differences in the seriousness of problems and deservingness of

help: Swedish social workers' assessments of single mothers and fathers. *British Journal of Social Work, 35,* 373-386.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews.* U. Flick (Ed.). London: Sage.

Lamb, M. E., & Lamb, J. E. (1976). The nature and importance of the father-infant relationship. *The Family Coordinator, 25,* 379-385. doi:10.2307/582850

Lamb, M. E. (2000). The history of research on father involvement: An overview. *Marriage & Family Review, 29,* 23-42. doi:10.1300/J002v29n02_03

La Taillade, J. J., Hofferth, S., & Wight, V. R. (2010). Consequences of fatherhood for young men's relationships with partners and parents. *Research in Human Development, 7,* 103-122. doi:10.1080/15427609.2010.481531

Le Goff, J. M., & Ryser, V.- A. (2010). Meaning of marriage for men during their transition to fatherhood: The Swiss context. *Marriage & Family Review, 46,* 107-125. doi:10.1080/ 01494921003648654

Lemay, C. A., Cashman, S. B., Elfenbein, D. S., & Felice, M. E. (2010). A qualitative study of the meaning of fatherhood among young urban fathers. *Public Health Nursing, 27,* 221-231. doi:10.1111/j.1525-1446.2010.00847.x

Lewis, S. N., West, A. F., Stein, A., Malmberg, L. –E., Bethell, K., Barnes, J., Sylva, K., Leach, P., & the Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) project team. (2008). A comparison of father-infant interaction between primary and non-primary care giving fathers. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 35,* 199-207. doi:10.1111/ j.1365-2214.2008.00837.x

Lietz, C. A. (2009). Examining families' perceptions of intense in-home services: A

mixed methods study. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31,* 1337-1345. doi:10.1016/j. childyouth.2009.06.007

Lietz, C. A. (2006). Uncovering stories of family resilience: A mixed methods study of resilient families, part 1. *Families in Society, 87,* 575-582.

Lindsey, E. W., & Caldera, Y. M. (2006). Mother-father-child triadic interaction and mother-child dyadic interaction: Gender differences within and between contexts. *Sex Roles, 55,* 511-521. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9106-z

Mac an Ghaill, M., & Haywood, C. (2007). *Gender, culture and society: Contemporary femininities and masculinities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Madsen, S. A. (2009). Men's mental health: Fatherhood and psychotherapy. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 17,* 15-30. doi:10.3149/jms.1701.15

Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62,* 1173-1191. doi:10.1111/ j.1741-3737.2000.01173.x

McBride, B. A., Rane, T. R., & Bae, J. H. (2001). Intervening with teachers to encourage father/male involvement in early childhood programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16,* 77-93.

McQuillan, K., & Belle, M. (2001). Lone-father families in Canada, 1971-1996. *Canadian Studies in Population, 28,* 67-88.

Moon, M., & Hoffman, C. D. (2008). Mothers' and fathers' differential expectancies and behaviours: Parent x child gender effects. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 164,* 261-279. doi:10.3200/GNTP.169.3.261-280

Morman, M. T., & Floyd, K. (2002). A "changing culture of fatherhood": Effects on

affectionate communication, closeness, and satisfaction in men's relationships with their fathers and their sons. *Western Journal of Communication, 66,* 395-411. doi:10.1080%2F1057031 0209374746

Morman, M. T., & Floyd, K. (2006). Good fathering: Father and son perceptions of what it means to be a good father. *Fathering, 4,* 113-136. doi:10.3149/fth.0402.113

Morrongiello, B. A., Zdzieborski, D., & Normand, J. (2010). Understanding gender differences in children's risk taking and injury: A comparison of mothers' and fathers' reactions to sons and daughters misbehaving in ways that lead to injury. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31,* 322-329. doi:10.1016/j. appdev.2010.05.004

Mruk, C. J. (2010). Integrated description: A qualitative method for an evidence-based world. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 38,* 305-316.

Naber, F., Jzendoorn, M. H. I., Deschamps, P., Engeland, H., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2010). Intranasal oxytocin increases fathers' observed responsiveness during play with their children: A double-blind within-subject experiment. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 35,* 1583-1586. doi:10.1016/j.psyneuen.2010.04.00

Nathanson, P., & Young, K. K. (2006). *Legalizing misandry: From public shame to systemic discrimination against men*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press. Nelson, T. J. (2004). Low-income fathers. *Annual Review of Sociology, 30,* 427-451. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.095947

Nentwich, J. C. (2008). New fathers and mothers as gender troublemakers? Exploring

discursive constructions of heterosexual parenthood and their subversive potential. *Feminism & Psychology, 18,* 207-230. doi:10.1177/0959353507088591

Palm, G., & Fagan, J. (2008). Father involvement in early childhood programs: Review of the literature. *Early Child Development and Care, 178,* 745-759. doi:10.1080/03004430802352137

Park, B., Smith, J. A., & Correll, J. (2010). The persistence of implicit behavioural associations for moms and dads. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46,* 809-815. doi:10. 1016/j.jesp.2010.04.009

Patterson, J. M. (2002). Integrating family resilience and family stress theory. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64,* 349-360. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00349.x

Peters, B., & Ehrenberg, M. F. (2008). The influence of parental separation and divorce on father-child relationships. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 49,* 78-109.

Peterson, C. (2004). Mothers, fathers, and gender: Parental narratives about children. *Narrative Inquiry, 14,* 323-346.

Phares, V., Renk, K., Duhig, A. M., Fields, S., & Sly, J. (2009). Gender differences in positive and negative feelings between adolescents and their fathers and mothers. *Journal of Child Family Studies, 18,* 213-218. doi:10.1007/s10826-008-9221-2

Pichitino, J. P. (1983). Profile of the single father: A thematic integration of the literature. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 61,* 295-299.

Pini, B. (2005). Interviewing men: Gender and the collection and interpretation of qualitative data. *Journal of Sociology, 41,* 201-216. doi:10.1177/1440783305053238

Pleck, J. H. (2007). Why could father involvement benefit children? Theoretical perspectives. *Applied Development Science, 11,* 196-202.

Pleck, J. H. (2012). Integrating father involvement in parenting research. *Parenting: Science and Practice, 12,* 243-253.

Punch, M. (1998). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 156-184). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rabun, C., & Oswald, R. F. (2009). Upholding and expanding the normal family: Future fatherhood through the eyes of gay male emerging adults. *Fathering, 7,* 269-285. doi: 10.3149/fth.0703.269

Rapley, T. (2004). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 15-33). London: Sage.

Richards, L. N., & Schmiege, C. J. (1993). Problems and strengths of single-parent families: Implications for practice and policy. *Family Relations, 42,* 277-285.

Riley, T., & Hawe, P. (2005). Researching practice: The methodological case for narrative inquiry. *Health Education Research Theory and Practice, 20,* 226-236. doi: 10.1093/her/cy

Robbers, M. L. P. (2009). Facilitating fatherhood: A longitudinal examination of father involvement among young minority fathers. *Child Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26,* 121-134. doi:10.1007/s10560-008-0157-6

Robinson, P. (2009). Parenting after separation and divorce: A profile of arrangements

for spending time with and making decisions for children. *Component of Statistics Canada, 29*(4), 1-16.

Rosen, L. N., Dragiewicz, M., & Gibbs, J. C. (2009). Fathers' rights groups: Demographic correlates and impact on custody policy. *Violence against Women, 15,* 513-531. doi:10.1177/1077801209331409

Rouyer, V., Frascarolo, F., Zaouche-Gaudron, C., & Lavanchy, C. (2007). Fathers of girls, fathers of boys: Influence of child's gender on fathers' experience of, engagement in, and representations of paternity. *Swiss Journal of Psychology, 66,* 225-233. doi:10.1024/ 1421-0185.66.4.225

Roy, K. M., & Dyson, O. (2010). Making daddies into fathers: Community-based fatherhood programs and the construction of masculinities for low-income African American men. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 45,* 139-154.

Rueger, H., Schneider, N. F., Zier, U., Letzel, S., & Muenster, E. (2011). Health risks of separated or divorced over-indebted fathers: Separation from children and financial distress. *Social Work in Health Care, 50,* 242-256. doi:10.1080/ 00981389.2010.527793

Saleh, M. F., & Hilton, J. M. (2011). A comparison of the paternal involvement of low-income fathers in four developmental stages: Adolescence, young adult, adult, and midlife. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 19,* 47-55. doi:10. 1177/1066480710387496

Sanders, M. R., Dittman, C. K., Keown, L. J., Farruggia, S., & Rose, D. (2010). What are the parenting experiences of fathers? The use of household survey data to inform decisions about the delivery of evidence-based parenting interventions to fathers. *Child Psychiatry Child Development, 41,* 562-581. doi:10.1007/s10578-010-0188-z

Schiratzki, J. (2009). *Custody of children in Sweden: Recent developments*. Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://www.scandinavianlaw.se/pdf/38-11.pdf

Schwalbe, M. L., & Wolkomir, M. (2001). Interviewing men. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (203-219). London: Sage.

Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J. F., & Silverman, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Qualitative research practice.* London: Sage.

Seay, B., & Harlow, H. F. (1965). Maternal separation in the rhesus monkey. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 140,* 434-441. doi:10.1097/00005053-196506000-00006

Settersen, R. A., & Cancel-Tirado, D. (2010). Fatherhood as a hidden variable in men's development and life course. *Research in Human Development, 7,* 83-102. doi:10.1080/ 15427609.2010.481520

Shannon, J. D., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., London, K., & Cabrera, N. (2002). Beyond rough and tumble: Low-income fathers' interactions and children's cognitive development at 24 months. *Parenting: Science and Practice, 2,* 77-104. doi: 10.1207/ S15327922PAR0202_01

Shirani, F., & Henwood, K. (2011). Continuity and change in a qualitative longitudinal

study of fatherhood: Relevance without responsibility. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 14,* 17-29. doi:10.1080/13645571003690876

Sipsma, H., Biello, K. B., Cole-Lewis, H., & Kershaw, T. (2010). Like father, like son: The intergenerational cycle of adolescent fatherhood. *American Journal of Public Health, 100,* 517-524.

Smith, D. E. (1993). The standard North American family: SNAF as an ideological code. *Journal of Family Issues, 14,* 50-65. doi:10.1177/0192513X93014001005

Solomon, O., & Bagatell, N. (2010). Autism: Rethinking the possibilities. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, 38,* 2-7. doi:10.1111%2Fj.15481352.2009.01078.x

Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry, 20,* 204-224.

Statistics Canada. (2002). *Divorces 2001 and 2002 of custody arrangement via court proceedings.* Retrieved August 29, 2011, from http://www.statscan.gc.ca

Statistics Canada. (2005). *Presence of income.* Retrieved September 20, 2011, from http://www.statscan.gc.ca

Statistics Canada. (2006a). *Census family structure.* Retrieved August 29, 2011, from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census06/data/topics/

Statistics Canada. (2006b). *Navigating family transitions: Evidence from the general social survey.* Retrieved August 29, 2011, from http://www.statscan.gc.ca

Statistics Canada. (2006c). *Common law unions.* Retrieved September 20, 2011, from http://www.statscan.gc.ca

Strega, S., Brown, L., Callahan, M., Dominelli, L., & Walmsley, C. (2009). Working with me, working at me: Fathers' narratives of child welfare. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 20,* 72-91.

Strom, R. D., Beckert, T. E., Strom, P. S., Strom, S. K., & Griswold, D. L. (2002). Evaluating the success of Caucasian fathers in guiding adolescents. *Adolescence, 37,* 131-150.

Summers, J. A., Boller, K., & Raikes, H. (2004). Preferences and perceptions about getting support expressed by low-income fathers. *Fathering, 2,* 61-82.

Taylor, R. J. (2004). Therapeutic intervention of trauma and stress brought on by divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 41,* 129-135. doi:10.1300/J087v41n01_08

Thornton, A. (2009). Framework for interpreting long-term trends in values and beliefs concerning single-parent families. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 71*, 230-234. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00594.x

Townsend, S. S. (2003). Fatherhood: A judicial perspective- unmarried fathers and the changing role of the family court. *Family Court Review, 41,* 354-361.

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work, 11,* 80-96. doi:10.1177/1473325010368316

Ungar, M. (2010a). Families as navigators and negotiators: Facilitating culturally and contextually specific expressions of resilience. *Family Process, 49,* 421-435. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01331.x

Ungar, M. (2010b). What is resilience across cultures and contexts? Advances to the

theory of positive development among individuals and families under stress. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 21,* 1-16. doi:10.1080/08975351003618494

United States Department of Health & Human Services. (2006). *Promoting responsible fatherhood initiative.* Retrieved April 5, 2011, from http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/2006Initiative/index.shtml

Voracek, M., Fisher, M., & Shackelford, T. K. (2009). Sex differences in subjective estimates of non-paternity rates in Austria. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38,* 652-656. doi:10.1007/ s10508-009-9525-3

Walker, A. J., & McGraw, L. A. (2000). Who is responsible for responsible fathering? *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62,* 563-569. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00563.x

Walsh, F. (2003). Family resilience: A framework for clinical practice. *Family Process, 42,* 1-18. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2003.00001.x

Wells, K. (2011). A narrative analysis of one mother's story of child custody loss and regain. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33,* 439-447.

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing.* London: Sage.

Wertz, F. J. (2011). The qualitative revolution and psychology: Science, politics, and ethics. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 39,* 77-104. doi: 10.1080/08873267.2011.564531

Wells, M. B., & Sarkadi, A. (2012). Do father-friendly policies promote father-friendly child-rearing practices? A review of Swedish parental leave and child health centers. *Journal of Child Family Studies, 21,* 25-31. doi:10.1007/s10826-011-9487-7

White, J. M., Brotherson, S. E., Galovan, A. M., Holmes, E. K., & Kampmann, J. A. (2011). The Dakota father friendly assessment: Measuring father-friendliness in head start and similar settings. *Fathering, 9,* 22-43. doi:10.3149/fth.0901.22

Wical, K. A., & Doherty, W. J. (2005). How reliable are fathers' reports of involvement with their children?: A methodological report. *Fathering, 3,* 81-93.

Wickstrom, A. (2010). Influencing gender relations through child parent relationship therapy. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 19,* 79-94. doi: 10.1037/a0017339

Wilson, K. R., & Prior, M. R. (2010). Father involvement: The importance of paternal solo care. *Early Child Development and Care, 180,* 1391-1405. doi:10.1080/03004430903172335

Zimmerman, M. A., Salem, D. A., & Notaro, P. C. (2000). Make room for daddy II: The positive effects of fathers' role in adolescent development. In R. D. Taylor & M. C. Wang (Eds.). *Resilience across contexts: Family, work, culture, and community* (pp. 233-253). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Appendix A

Interview Conversation for Single Fathers*

- Tell me about yourself
- Tell me about your child(ren)

- Tell me what it's like to be a single father, from your experience
    - What was it like at first?
    - What is it like now?
    - Has it changed over time?
- Tell me about your child(ren)'s mother's involvement/relationship
- How do you feel about the level of support you currently receive as a single father?
- What services/programs were or would be helpful for you and your children?
    - Are those services/programs available in HRM?
- Is there anything else you can teach me about single fatherhood?

*Interviews will not be structured with an interview guide. This is an example of questions that can progress throughout the interview. Focus will remain on the single fathers' narratives.

Appendix B

Follow up Survey Questions for Single Fathers

Please fill out the following questions about yourself as honestly as possible:

Your age: _____ years

Length of time as a single father: _____ years, _____ months

Number of children: _____

Child(ren)'s gender and age:

Gender M F
Age _____

Gender M F
Age _____

Gender M F
Age _____

Gender M F
Age _____

More space if needed
_____
_____

Your income range (please circle one):

Far below average – Below average – Average – Above average – Far above average

Would you like a copy of your transcript sent to you once typed up? Y N

If yes, please provide an address or email address you would like it sent to: _____
_____

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Service Providers

1. Tell me about yourself
2. What do you do as a service provider in HRM?

    a. How long have you been a service provider?

3. In your opinion, what services or programs does HRM need for single fathers?
    a. Are those services/programs available?
    b. If not, what would be needed to set up those services/programs?
4. From your experience, do single mothers and single fathers need different services?
    a. Please explain further
5. Would there be a demand for services/programs for single fathers in HRM?
6. Is there anything else you can tell me about working with single father families?
7. What is the most important thing about single father families, in your opinion, that I should consider in my research?