

FATHERHOOD AND THE “INSIDE AMERICAN JOKE:” THE PERSEVERANCE OF
SINGLE FATHERS IN COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the experience of the single father in college. A transformative/feminist perspective, interpreted through the author's personal lens of motherhood, sheds light on ways patriarchy and masculinity constrain the identities of a group of single fathers. Affordances and drawbacks of the father identity are explored, particularly in the context of school.

Being a father afforded these men certain advantages. They were positive role models for their children and made it a point to be present both physically and emotionally. The fathers demonstrated skills of emotional intelligence, and also did not see themselves as the typical college guy, and reported school being a positive influence in their lives in various ways. School provided structure in these fathers' lives and their success in education is evidence of their ability to persevere.

However, there were also drawbacks to being a single father. Fathers reported feeling overlooked or dismissed and reported negative connotations about men/fathers. They felt guilt and shame often, experienced financial difficulties and employment disadvantages, and they were also sometimes unsatisfied with living arrangements or their children's relationship with their mother.

Other challenges depended on the context and varied by participant. These areas included the reactions of surprise in others regarding them being single fathers, and an overall presence of informal support from family and friends but a lack of formal support. The fathers discussed their own coping behaviors, and told of varied experiences with dating. Lastly, despite these fathers' more androgynous identities, effects of traditional masculinity were observed in the form of gendered or racial commentary or emotional disengagement.

Even though these men find themselves in a world among college men, these single fathers do not identify with that world, nor even the world of traditional masculinity in many respects. The men in this study completely reject the world of the typical college guy. Of most importance, they very much embrace the positive space afforded to them through the identity of being a father.

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The years in which I have been pursuing a doctoral degree have been times of the biggest changes in my life. I began the Education Doctoral Program in the summer of 2008, at the same time I was starting a new job in my office. I considered not starting the program at that time because of the challenges ahead of me with the new position, but kept at it anyway. When I became pregnant with my son, I took 2 years off until I felt ready to return, but almost didn't come back to the program. Looking back, it seems quite interesting that there were two points where I could have easily turned my back and taken the easy way out. To look into the past and to realize that I now have my degree, I see how fortunate I am to have made those decisions along the way and how it's been so worth it.

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In conclusion, I wanted to keep with some tradition. In the acknowledgments section of my thesis, I thanked a German tea company for keeping me awake with caffeine in the evenings. Now, as a mom of a toddler, my life is very different. So now, I give my thanks to the Amazon Kindle Fire, Netflix, and Cheerios for entertaining my son as I transcribed and finished writing my dissertation.

DEDICATION

To H - Thank you for choosing me to be your mommy. I love you so much! You are a dream come true, long in the making. And, of course, to S.B.J. Even though I never got to hold you in my arms, you are forever a part of me and Harrison and you came along with me in this process as I reflected on motherhood and grieved for you in my own way.

To the 16 single dads from my Master's thesis study, wherever they may be. In the conclusion to my thesis, I wrote the following and still mean it to this day: *"The single fathers in this study cared so much for their children and enjoyed being with them a great deal...Many fathers indicated they would never give up this opportunity to be with their children nor would they trade it for anything. The responsibility that the men in this study felt for their children was unmistakable and extremely inspiring."*

Also, of course, without further ado – this dissertation is especially dedicated to the six dads I interviewed for this project. The words above to the previous fathers from my thesis holds very true to my experience with you as well. Thank you so much, and this dissertation is my pledge to you that I will raise awareness about what it's like to be a single father in college and place a focus on this topic which has long been neglected.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1975)

It has been found through a review of the existing research that college student fathers, and single fathers in particular, have been overlooked in the research until now. Because very little prior research has been done on the experience of the single father in college, the purpose of this study is to understand more about what a single father experiences while being a college student. As a researcher, I wish to increase awareness of the rules of masculinity and the experience of men in college, while exploring the world of patriarchy and how it dominates men and society in general, and in particular, how it influences the lives of college students who are single fathers.

In basic terms, patriarchy is our “system of gender inequality” (Katz, 2006, p. 252). To discuss this topic, I have chosen to write from a transformative and feminist perspective to create an awareness of how men and boys are burdened by a patriarchal society. Throughout, references to popular culture such as song lyrics and quotes from various authors will be used to illustrate

how patriarchy manifests itself in our everyday lives. When contemplating fatherhood, keep in mind the concept of the “inside American joke” alluded to in the title of this dissertation. The meaning will become clear as we progress into the findings and finally into the discussion chapter.

Through this study in particular, it has been demonstrated that college student fathers, especially single fathers, have been overlooked in the research until now. This study added to the already existing research on male college students while adding another dimension that until now has not had any focus—that of single fathers who are parenting while in college.

A phenomenological methodology was used in which I focused on understanding how patriarchy can manifest itself in the context of the experience of men in general and the single father on a college campus. My personal background as a single mother of a son and my research emphasis from my Master’s program provided a unique perspective through which the single father experience was viewed. This study built on the awareness gained through my Master’s thesis work and subsequent doctoral education until this point.

I will begin this dissertation with a literature review which situates masculinity within society by discussing the raising of boys in American culture through my own personal lens of motherhood. I will continue with a discussion of patriarchy, viewing it through sociological perspectives. A gap in the existing knowledge related to college students who are fathers, especially single fathers, will be discussed. In conclusion, I will discuss the *mask of masculinity* and through this, a case will be made that men are harmed through the patriarchal system that normally affords them privilege.

Throughout this dissertation, the reader will be witness to how the identities of these single fathers have been formed and will see evidence of how it is in the process of constantly

evolving. The fathers were positive role models for their children and modeled a value for education in the bonding that happened because their fathers were in school. The fathers made it a point to be there for their children, both physically in spending time with them, and with emotional support as well. They also did not see themselves as the typical college guy and overall, did not feel many pressures to fit in to that lifestyle.

However, there were also many disadvantages to being a single dad in college. Fathers reported feeling overlooked or dismissed, felt guilt and shame often, experienced financial difficulties and career disadvantages, and they were also dissatisfied about their children's living arrangement and relationship with their mother.

Other challenges depended on the context and varied by participant. These areas included the reactions of surprise in others regarding them being single fathers, an overall presence of informal support from family and friends and a lack of formal support, the practicing of coping skills and behaviors and their experiences with dating which included their reports of how women would react to them as a father. Lastly, despite these fathers' more androgynous identities, I examined the effects that traditional masculinity had on their lives, in the area of gendered or racial commentary, including evidence of disengagement in their behavior.

Even though these men find themselves in a world among college men, these men do not identify with that world, nor even the world of traditional masculinity in many respects. The men in this study completely reject the world of the typical college guy. Of most importance, they very much embrace the positive space afforded to them through the identity of being a father and being a father gives them purpose.

In general, this study cannot be generalizable due to the small sample size and fact that the study consisted of mostly White participants from only one institution. However, the findings

portray the type of rich data that was obtained through this study and the opportunity to have in-depth interviews with participants. In order to present and begin to better understand the lived experiences of single fathers in college, in-depth research and context was needed. Single dads in college may have been overlooked in the research until this point, and the participants already felt that on a basic level. This study provided them with the very important opportunity to have a voice. This work will also assist student services professionals in understanding how to provide better services to dads on-campus, in addition to creating an awareness for single fathers themselves to help them realize they are *not* alone, even though they sometimes may feel that way.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

When you see a priceless French painting, I see a drunk, naked girl. You think that riding a wild bull sounds crazy, and I'd like to give it a whirl. Well love makes a man do some things he ain't proud of, and in a weak moment I might...walk your sissy dog, hold your purse at the mall. But remember, I'm still a guy.

I'll pour out my heart, hold your hand in the car, write a love song that makes you cry. Then turn right around knock some jerk to the ground, 'cause he copped a feel as you walked by.

I can hear you now talking to your friends saying "Yeah girls he's come a long way" from dragging his knuckles and carrying a club and building a fire in a cave. But when you say a backrub means only a backrub, then you swat my hand when I try. Well, what can I say at the end of the day, Honey, I'm still a guy....

These days there's dudes getting facials, manicured, waxed and botoxed. With deep spray-on tans and creamy lotiony hands, you can't grip a tacklebox. With all of these men lining up to get neutered, it's hip now to be feminized. I don't highlight my hair, I've still got a pair...Yeah Honey, I'm still a guy.

Oh my eyebrows ain't plucked...There's a gun in my truck...Oh thank God, I'm still a guy.

Brad Paisley, "I'm Still a Guy"
(Paisley, Lovelace, & Miller, 2007, track 5)

Messages abound in the media and popular culture regarding what it means to be a man, and both males and females of all ages are susceptible to these messages. Through this, we are being taught what manhood is. One may not be consciously aware of all of the messages received daily, however if you pay attention, you might just be surprised at the underlying meanings being conveyed. According to violence prevention advocate and sociologist Jackson Katz (2006), "[M]edia is the great pedagogical—or teaching—force of our time," and he stated it is "critical to examine the stories we tell in media that link violence and masculinity" (p. 251).

As an illustration, take for example the abovementioned lyrics from country singer Brad Paisley as one such story. In a biography of the singer on *Billboard* (n.d.), some of his songs including "I'm Still a Guy," are described as songs that "showcased his wry humor" (para. 1).

‘Wry humor’ seems to be a troublesome classification of a song that portrays patriarchal behavior, homophobic views, and actions related to physical violence and a proclivity for sex.

Also from the world of country music, Toby Keith’s song “Red Solo Cup” also portrays an equally disappointing view on manhood. The music video depicts a shaky camera entering a house where a party is taking place, and the camera follows a seemingly intoxicated Keith around as he walks through the house. In the first verse of the song, he sings: “And you Sir do not have a pair of testicles if you prefer drinkin’ from glass” (Salomon, 2011). Similarly, you may remember Paisley’s lyrics which stated “I don’t highlight my hair....I’ve still got a pair...Yeah Honey, I’m still a guy.” The literal translation of the two sets of lyrics could be interpreted to infer that if you are doing something construed as feminine, you are biologically not male. It is a direct attack on manhood and likewise on one’s identity as a person.

Admittedly, I never listened closely to these lyrics until recent years when I began delving into various writings on the topic of patriarchy for purposes of my dissertation. Driving in my car one day, the Paisley lyrics jumped out at me, allowing me to pay attention to something that, until now, had gone unnoticed. In reflecting on my feelings about the lyrics, one can be fairly certain the writers and singers of the songs did not set out to release homophobic and hyper-masculine songs. However, the message is clear. Even if the song is perceived as fun to the general public, the message is still perpetuated: If a man drinks out of a glass, highlights his hair, carries a woman’s purse for her, or does any other things perceived as feminine, a man’s gender is attacked. A perceived lack of manhood translates into an implication from others about his sexuality, a byproduct of which is a culture of homophobia. While the lyrics are anti-male, the message also conveys an avoidance of feminine behaviors and is therefore at the same time

also very misogynistic. All of these underlying messages about gender are furthered by people who practice patriarchy—men and women alike.

When studying men, it is critical to look at the college realm because it is a place where students grow and find support among one another (Capraro, 2004). So in this literature review, I will be exploring the world of patriarchy and how it dominates men and society in general, with a sub-focus on college men. I will then make a case for the invisibility of single fathers in the literature about college men.

Kimmel (2008) defines the culture occupied by boys from their teenage years to mid-twenties, between the ages of 16-26, as *Guyland*. In *Guyland*, men follow the *Guy Code* and “shirk the responsibilities of adulthood and remain fixated on the trappings of boyhood, while the boys they still are struggle heroically to prove that they are real men despite all evidence to the contrary” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 4). College is a time of great change in men’s lives, and it will inevitably shape their views on life from that point forward. My aim herein is to increase our awareness of masculinity and the situation of men in college.

Men enter their college years just as they are right in the middle of moving through *Guyland*, and they begin forming connections with other men and defining themselves through the eyes of their peers, adapting to what is called the *Guy Code* (Kimmel, 2008). The environment of *Guyland* can be summarized in an article by Jaschik (2008) as “specifically the misbehavior of many through excessive drinking, hazing, and abusive behavior toward women” (para. 1). These abusive behaviors include sexual aggression and rape culture, other violence towards women, and the use of pornography (Kimmel, 2008).

In Jaschik’s (2008) article, he interviewed Kimmel who stated that *Guyland* is “both a developmental stage and a social space.” It is important to note that it affects both sexes as

children grow up: Guyland is the “world that young people—male and female—inhabit” (Jaschik, 2008, para. 4). Kimmel (2008) states that “[V]iolence, or the threat of violence, is a main element of the Guy Code” (p. 63).

As to the importance of friendships and relationships with other college men, Lyman (1987) indicated the use of joking, including sexist jokes, that happens between college men is a “ritual bond...in the transition between boyhood and manhood” (p. 157). Unfortunately, data show that for men in their college years, there are “troubling trends in men’s attendance, success, engagement, well-being, and behavior in college” (Harris & Edwards, 2010, p. 44). The responsibility to other guys is fostered through a culture of silence, entitlement, and protection (Kimmel, 2008). This protection is given through “implicitly” supporting “the criminals in their midst who take that silence as tacit approval. And not only does that silence support them, it also protects them” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 63). In Guyland, Kimmel says that “the Guy Code fits as comfortably as a straightjacket” (p. 51).

In this literature review, I will begin by situating masculinity within society by discussing the raising of boys in American culture through my own personal lens of motherhood and will then continue on to a discussion of patriarchy, situating it in the worldview of sociology. I will discuss the social construction of patriarchy, the social constructs of gender and identity, in addition to discussing how patriarchy manifests itself in society, ranging from the topic of men, violence and homophobia, to the invisibility of men in society in general and in the existing literature. A gap in the prevailing knowledge related to college students who are fathers, especially single fathers, will be discussed.

In conclusion, I will discuss the mask of masculinity. Through this, a case will be made that men are harmed through patriarchy. Men are the dominant group in our patriarchal culture,

but at the same time are invisible in many regards, so herein lies the paradox of masculinity. Sometimes this privilege serves men positively, but much of this invisibility is detrimental to men and society as a whole. In sum, this theoretical review serves to create an awareness of patriarchy and illuminate the ways in which patriarchy harms everyone, and in turn provide ideas on how to make society an easier place for boys in which to grow up.

Raising Boys: The Boy Code and why it Matters to Me

Where do so many men develop this burning need for dominance? Take a look around. Everywhere you turn, you see manhood equated with power and control—of other men as well as women... Some boys get this message at home, from influential adult male role models. But there are many other sources: their neighborhood, their peers, and the media. They learn it on Saturday morning cartoons and trips to the toy store, where “action heroes” with rippled muscles convey the powerful lesson that might makes right; on the playground, where recent research shows that bullies are not social misfits but often the most popular kids; in the sports culture, where dominating one’s opponent is seen as the height of athletic achievement; in NASCAR racing, whose most popular icon was nicknamed “The Intimidator”; in hip-hop, where rich and famous rappers denigrate women and gays; in professional wrestling, where ritualized bullying, humiliation, and sexual harassment is normal behavior, and caricatured portrayals of brutish manhood are celebrated; in video games, where mastery of the joystick and the ability to “kill” at will—and sometimes beat up prostitutes—is equated to manly competence; and in the larger adult world, where they see abuses of power by men in business and government. (Katz, 2006, p. 229)

The above quote by Katz (2006) is particularly poignant in that it highlights the types of behaviors that are learned by boys as they grow, and this dictates in essence what rules they should follow to prove their masculinity. If boys do not follow the rules, they receive *negative sanctions* which are meant to “help produce conformity to social norms” (Pleck, 1991, p. 144). Boys in our society are taught a certain *code*—a system of stereotypes that guide what it means to be a boy and eventually what it means to be a man. The Boy Code (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998) is defined as:

the outdated and constricting assumptions, models, and rules about boys that our society has used since the nineteenth century...[T]he Boy Code continues to affect the behavior

of all of us—the boys themselves, their parents, their teachers, and society as a whole. None of us is immune—it is so ingrained. (Pollack, 1998, p. 6).

Pollack (1998) and Kimmel (2008) outlined Robert Brannon's rules of masculinity in defining the Boy Code. Kimmel's summary of the rules is as follows:

1. "No Sissy Stuff!" Being a man means not being a sissy, not being perceived as weak, effeminate, or gay. Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.
2. "Be a Big Wheel." This rule refers to the centrality of success and power in the definition of masculinity. Masculinity is measured more by wealth, power, and status than by any particular body part.
3. "Be a Sturdy Oak." What makes a man is that he is reliable in a crisis. And what makes him so reliable in a crisis is not that he is able to respond fully and appropriately to the situation at hand, but rather that he resembles an inanimate object. A rock, a pillar, a species of tree.
4. "Give 'em Hell." Exude an aura of daring and aggression. Live life out on the edge. Take risks. Go for it. Pay no attention to what others think. (p. 45)

By means of the Boy Code, boys are taught that it is normal to show aggression. So, parents who raise boys have a great challenge at hand: "Their responsibility is not just to shield their sons from harm; it is to raise sons who will not mistreat girls and women—or remain silent when their peers do" (Katz, 2006, p. 234). Katz (2006) states that it is "out of love for their sons" that mothers in particular wish to stop men from harming women (p. 236).

This is all very relevant to me as a researcher because in the year 2012, I became a mom to a beautiful son. I am a single mother by choice—choosing to have a child on my own through the use of fertility treatments and an anonymous sperm donor. Some may think that the process was a one-time artificial insemination that you hear about in the movies. But it was far from that. The experience was full of sadness and disappointment of multiple unsuccessful attempts due to unexplained infertility issues, with several donors even, and also the difficulty of some health issues during my last trimester.

I went through many cycles including repeated bloodwork, ultrasounds, pills and hormone shots. The latter part of my pregnancy, I was plagued with gestational diabetes and subsequent blood sugar monitoring 4 times a day and a restricted diet, gained little weight during pregnancy and was constantly hungry. In addition, myself and my doctors now have a strong suspicion that I was suffering from a liver condition during pregnancy called Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy (ICP) that caused me completely unbearable itching the last two months until his birth. This condition could have been very dangerous for the baby, but I unfortunately felt ignored and dismissed by my healthcare team for two months as I continued to complain about the itching.

Also, when fertility medications are involved, the risk of multiples can increase, and at my first ultrasound at 5 weeks, I found out that I was having twins. At 6 weeks I heard the heartbeats of both, but at my 8-week ultrasound, I found out that I had lost one. I did not miscarry in the traditional sense but experienced what is called Vanishing Twin Syndrome. It was devastating and difficult to rationalize all the while having another baby that was still okay. Fast forward 6 months and my little survivor, Harrison, was born. It is sometimes difficult because he is always a reminder of the twin that was lost, but I try to look at that as a blessing in disguise.

Here, I intentionally choose to write openly about my journey to have Harrison because it shaped who I am and my experience of becoming a mother. He was very wanted. Reflecting on the experience changes me each time I think about it or tell my story to others. It is part of my grieving process as well, to talk about my loss, and to ensure Harrison's twin is remembered. So, in the spirit of reflection, I have realized that the path I took to have a child also is evidence of the determination I have had throughout my adult life, and my willingness to take on challenges.

I feel that this determination is reflected here in this study as I learned more about myself, what it means to be the mother of a young boy, and about the sometimes upsetting ideals of masculinity in our culture.

As my son has grown older and entered toddlerhood with a growing sense of language comprehension, I have found myself becoming very aware of the messages he may receive regarding what it means to be a boy. I ponder what it all means for what type of a man he will become, and I wonder how respectful he will be of women as he moves through life. I feel fortunate that I am aware of what societal beliefs are conveyed to him, however, that awareness at the same time does cause a sense of heightened concern. I believe so fervently in the strength of societal influences, so in my situation, a feeling of helplessness comes along with awareness because I wonder what part I can play in diminishing the power of these messages for him. Because my son does not have a father in his life, a large responsibility rests on my shoulders to raise a good man and help manage how he sees the world.

When I was in the hospital after his birth, a social worker visited me—I presume because I am a single mother. I have informally asked other friends who delivered within the last few years at the same hospital, and none of them recall any visits by a social worker. To the best of my knowledge, the social worker asked me questions about if I felt safe at home, what support do I have financially and informally, and she also posed questions about my years of educational attainment. When I completed paperwork to request my son's birth certificate, the only option on the form applicable to me was to indicate that he was a child born out of wedlock.

At the time, I was mildly irritated by all of this, and I did forget about it over time. But recently as I perused subject matter related to patriarchy and masculinity, I remembered my experience in the hospital and saw it in a different light. Simply put, because I was unattached to

a man when I had a child, the formalities conducted in the hospital carried much meaning from a patriarchal perspective. In the hospital, my identity as a single mother began. Just as that identity was formed through the birth of my son, I took on a perception that I was experiencing some differential treatment because of the 'single mother' label.

In referencing Rich and Rossi, Chodorow (1989) states that these authors suggest that "patriarchal institutions have distorted a natural maternal essence and potential for the mother-child bond" (p. 85) and that in a patriarchal society, mothers are seen as powerless (p. 83). There is a fear in our society that a mother's influence on a son can be harmful, especially when a mother's relationship to her son is too close; This fear is focused especially on children with no fathers present (Silverstein, 1994). In a patriarchal society, moms should not spoil their boys and are to sever emotional connections while their son is still young so that they become sufficiently independent (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998; Silverstein, 1994). Unfortunately, a boy's future connections with women can be negatively affected by this separation process (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel sadly states that this separation is what "turns those happy, energetic, playful, and emotionally expressive 5-year olds into sullen, withdrawn and despondent 9-year olds" (p. 52).

In an article by Norman (1997), Carol Gilligan, in reference to the vulnerability of boys, stated that:

We have to build a culture that doesn't reward that separation from the person who raised them.... To shift our understanding of what it means to be a man and to be a woman is to think about how we work and how we love. And what's more basic than that? (para. 21)

In addition to the prescribed separation from their mother, boys are taught to avoid anything feminine (Katz, 2006; Pollack, 1998; Real, 2002; Silverstein, 1994). The avoidance of the feminine was referred to by Horney (1932) as the *dread of women* wherein according to Chodorow (1989), men learn to devalue "whatever women do and are" (p. 36). Much of this

indoctrination is done through the use of shame (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998; Real, 2002).

Pollack refers to these guiding messages as a “shame hardening process” (p. 11).

So how does one *be* a boy? Mead (1949) stated that a male child is prescribed to do “the things Mother says but doing them in a manly way” (p. 308). Above all, boys need to keep showing and proving their masculinity. According to Mead:

Each step forward in work as a successful American regardless of sex means a step back as a woman, and also, inferentially, a step back imposed on some male. For maleness is not absolutely defined, it has to be kept and re-earned every day, and one essential element in the definition is beating women in every game that both sexes play, in every activity in which both sexes engage. (p. 318)

Females have more flexibility in performing gender roles (Chodorow, 1989; Pleck, 1991) and may bend those rules without necessarily feeling a “fundamental challenge to their identity” (Chodorow, 1989, p. 37). But men must continually keep performing in certain ways to prove their differences (Kimmel, 2008) and *attain* masculinity, and more specifically, demonstrate that they are *not* feminine (Chodorow, 1989). Real (2002) used the analogy of *injury* to describe what society does to boys: “[t]he way we ‘turn boys into men’ is through injury...The very phrase ‘Be a man’ means suck it up and keep going. Disconnection is not fallout from traditional masculinity. *Disconnection is masculinity* [italics added]” (p. 78).

hooks (2004) has written that many men she has spoken to can remember a point in their lives where they lost the connections that had once fulfilled them:

‘Something missing within’ was a self-description I heard from many men...Again and again, a man would tell me about early childhood feelings of emotional exuberance, of unrepressed joy, of feeling connected to life and to other people, and then a rupture happened, a disconnect, and that feeling of being loved, of being embraced, was gone. Somehow the test of manhood, men told me, was the willingness to accept this loss, to not speak it even in private grief. Sadly, tragically, these men in great numbers were remembering a primal moment of heartbreak and heartache; the moment that they were compelled to give up their right to feel, to love, in order to take their place as patriarchal men. (p. 15)

In describing similar memories for men, Real (2002) used a personal situation involving his three-year old son who had enjoyed playing dress-up in many different costumes, until his son's friends ridiculed him for wearing a Barbie costume. Real writes of these moments of *traumatization* as follows:

Without a shred of malevolence, the stare my son received transmitted a message: You are not to do this. And the medium that message was broadcast in was a potent emotion: shame. At three, Alexander was learning the rules. A ten-second wordless transaction was powerful enough to dissuade my son from that instant forward from what had been a favorite activity. I call such moments of induction the "normal traumatization of boys." (p. 78)

As a mother, it hurts to think my son could have a moment such as this in his life where he relinquishes himself to patriarchy and no longer feels like he should value emotions or connections with others, especially a connection with me as his mother, and chooses to avoid all associations with femininity or girlhood. I would never want to see my son subjected to such pressures, and I will do what I can to raise a kind and sensitive boy knowing at the same time I cannot protect him from all societal messages.

Will I be judged if I choose to *not* indoctrinate my son into patriarchy? And more importantly, how will my son be judged by *my* actions taken in raising him? For women who do not follow typical prescriptions on masculinity for their boys, society shows disapproval (Pollack, 1998). Not only are women caught in a double-bind situation, but so are their young sons. Pollack (1998) refers to this as the "mother's catch-22:"

She is held responsible for a boy's emotional growth and development, and yet she's also expected by society to push him away so he can learn how to survive in a culture that may shame him for showing the very feelings she's teaching him to express. (p. 87)

However according to Pollack, mothers "have an awesome power to allay the shame-based hardening process that too often claims the psychological souls of our boys" (p. 112) and they can "help make the world safer for sensitive boys" (p. 92).

I don't typically refer to myself as a single mom due to my unique situation, but it is reality for me, and through the writing of this theoretical review I have begun to further internalize it as a new identity. One way I have done this is by referring to myself as a single mother in conversation with others. I strive to wear the badge proudly because single mothers have a great opportunity at their disposal to be a positive influence on their sons:

Among some of our best coaches...are women who raise sons without fathers, due to divorce, a father's death, or simply the choice of single motherhood. Because they are even more likely to be subjected to our cultures discomfort with close mother-son relationships than women in two-parent families, single mothers tend to focus very carefully on what they are doing to raise their boys and how this affects them as they grow into men....Single mothers, I believe, have a lot of good things to teach the rest of us about boys and masculinity. (Pollack, 1998, pp. 92-93)

Our Patriarchal Society

[W]e need to realize that we aren't simply prisoners of a socially constructed reality. Reality is being constructed and reconstructed all the time, and the part we play in that, however small and unconscious, gives us the chance and the responsibility to choose in ways that might make a difference. (Johnson, 2005, p. 153)

In this section, I will review three different overarching perspectives through which one can view the situation of men and masculinity, while stressing how patriarchy is socially constructed between the individual and society. First, I will use sociological theories as a framework through which patriarchy and gender are viewed. Second, I will address gender and identity as a social construct. And last, I will explore the effects of patriarchy, including men's participation in violence and homophobia and a discussion about male invisibility wherein relevant literature on the topic of college men will be discussed.

The Social Construction of Patriarchy

...all our life has a history, that nothing happens disconnectedly, that everything we are or do is part of a current coming down from the remote past....there is a stream and a road running along the bank—two lines of transmission. The stream is heredity...the road is communication or social transmission. (Cooley, 1964, pp. 3-4)

In the United States, we live in a patriarchal society. The complex system of patriarchy itself depends on a few different components to function; components which all relate to a centrality and privilege placed upon men and the effects it has upon all participants in society. Johnson (2005) defines patriarchy as a society which is “*male dominated, male identified, and male centered*;” a society which is “organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women” (p. 5). Bem’s (1993) notion of *androcentrism* is a direct illustration of how patriarchy affects society: “[M]ales and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for the culture or the species as a whole, and females and female experience are treated as a sex-specific deviation from that allegedly universal standard” (pp. 40-41).

Even though the focus is on men in a patriarchal world, both men and women can participate in furthering patriarchal values (hooks, 2000b; hooks, 2004; Johnson, 1997; Johnson, 2005). Within the system, the only true acceptable emotion for men is anger—in other words, “[R]eal men get mad. And their mad-ness, no matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural—a positive expression of patriarchal masculinity” (hooks, 2004, p. 7).

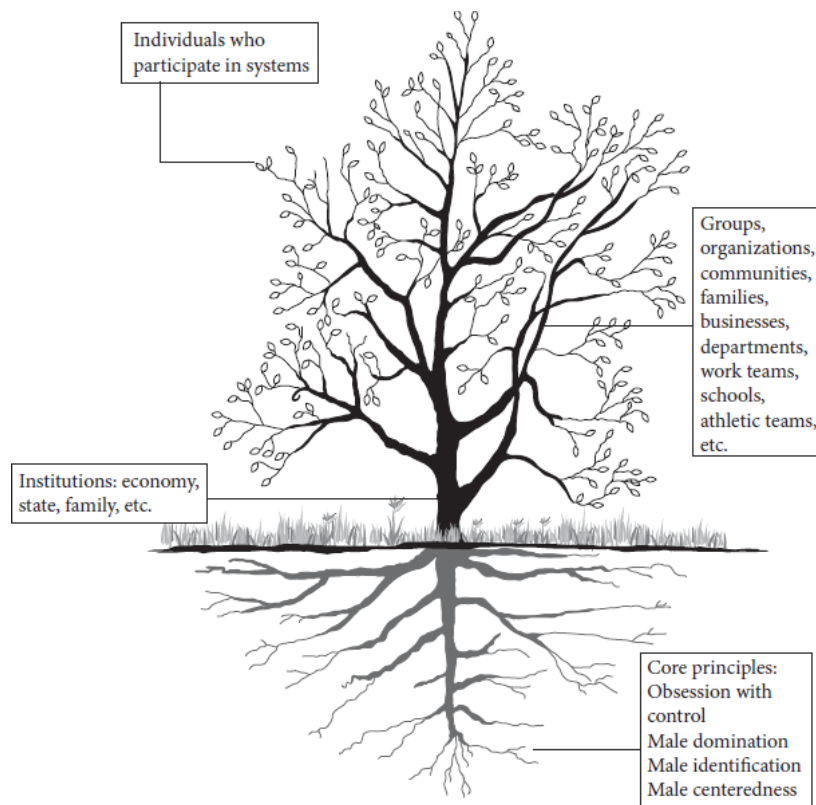


Figure 1. The “Patriarchal Tree.” Drawing by Esther L. Danielson in Johnson (2005).
 Note: Used by permission of the author.

Our ideas of masculinity can be viewed as a byproduct of society. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) observe,

Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting. (p. 836)

The focus on men through patriarchy itself has put upon men many demands and is embedded in the way our society functions. Recall Pollack’s (1998) use of the word *ingrained* to describe the Boy Code in society. Likewise, Johnson (2005) uses the analogy of a tree and its roots to describe how deeply patriarchy is entrenched in society (see Figure 1):

Like all social systems, patriarchy is difficult to change because it is complex and its roots run deep. It is like a tree rooted in core principles of control, male dominance, male identification and male centeredness. Its trunk is the major institutional patterns of social life as shaped by the roots—family, economy, religion, education, music, and the arts.

The branches—first the larger, then the progressively smaller—are the actual communities, organizations, groups, and other systems in which we live our lives, from cities and towns to corporations, parishes, marriages, and families. And in all of this, individuals are the leaves who both make possible the life of the tree and draw their form and life from it.

Obviously, we're in something that's much larger than ourselves, that isn't us. But equally obvious is our profound connection to it through the social conditions that shape our sense of who we are and what kinds of alternatives we can choose from. As a system, patriarchy encourages men to accept male privilege and perpetuate women's oppression, if only through silence. And it encourages women to accept and adapt to their oppressed position even to the extent of undermining movements to bring about change. We can't avoid participating in patriarchy. It was handed to us the moment we came into the world. But we can choose *how* to participate in it. (p. 19)

The description of the 'trunk' of the tree stresses the different types of institutional discrimination that affect us—and how the particular systems that we have created regulate our lives and help perpetuate patriarchy.

Sociologist C.H. Cooley and other symbolic interactionists “believe that there is little shared reality beyond that which is socially created” (Kendall, 2002, p. 117). When one uses sociology to examine an individual's behavior, it reveals “the individual as determined by his relations to other individuals and to a society” (Thomas, 1928, p. 507). Cooley (1964) believed that society and the individual are one in the same, and that we as individuals are both products of evolutionary heredity and our social experiences. According to Cooley, to understand the individual, one cannot overlook the society at large. Society is “collective” (p. 38), and we “exercise our freedom through cooperation with others” (p. 50).

Berger and Luckmann (1967) also share the perspective and stated that “the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped” (p. 50). And sociologist Emile Durkheim believed that one's biological or psychological makeup alone does not determine one's behavior and that one must also look at societal influences,

holding the opinion that “the limits of human potential are socially based, not biologically based” (Kendall, 2002, p. 12).

Evidence exists that what we experience changes us physiologically in the sense of learned behavior responses to subsequent experiences. For example, Thomas (1928) gives the example of someone who feels afraid when they smell roses because in the past, a garden was nearby when they had been involved in a car accident. Berger and Luckmann (1967) stated the following:

All human activity is subject to habituation. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which...is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern....Habituation carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed. (p. 53)

With the idea of the habituation, the analysis of human behavior begins to enter the realm of behaviorism and the field of psychology. This means that situations one experiences can shape a person’s future behavior and even physical or emotional responses to a situation. The “conditioned reflex” and physical responses in the body as furthered by Ivan Pavlov, Vladimir Bekhterev and John Watson is seen by Thomas as being “foundational” to the field of sociology (Thomas, 1928, p. 507), so it is important to note this perspective in this review, however briefly.

But the influence of society overall cannot be ignored. Katz (2006) has a similar perspective in that when it comes to violence, one must examine society to find the answer to the problem. In discussing how to get men involved in violence prevention, he stated that the

trick is to show men how their personal experiences with gender violence—as victims, loved ones of victims, and in some cases as perpetrators—are not simply shaped by individual circumstances or bad luck, but reflect much broader and systematic social forces. (Katz, 2006, pp. 37-38)

One of Katz’ (2006) strategies is to make the subject of violence hit home for men. He stated, “When men can *feel* the issue in their hearts as opposed to *intellectualizing* it in their heads, they are much more likely to gain the self-confidence necessary to confront their fellow

men” (p. 40). Katz also aims to get men thinking about other options to confronting violence other than the two extremes of getting physically involved versus doing nothing, and he wants to empower the ‘bystander’ to have many different choices to take action. Katz is attempting to change the thinking pattern so that a person thinks differently of violence and in turn gains the confidence in themselves that they need to stop violence. In essence, it could be said that he is aiming for a new conditioned reflex, in which one has new confidence to choose among new options to solve a situation.

Cooley (1964) believed that the individual views their own self through the eyes of others: “Each to each a looking glass...Reflects the other that doth pass” (p. 184). This concept coined by Cooley is called the *looking glass self*:

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; *so in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it* [italics added]...A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. (p. 184)

Cooley also stated, “We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind” (p. 184-185). It is quite powerful to think that when we imagine how others perceive us, and that we may share that perceived opinion, even if it is not true reality.

Durkheim’s concept of *social facts* helps illustrate the concept of the looking glass. Social facts are “patterned ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside any one individual” (Kendall, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, social facts are based in the *other*—in society. In forming a masculine identity, what men feel other men think of them is key. Kimmel (2008) refers to men as the *gender police* for other men: “Masculinity is largely a ‘homosocial’ experience: performed for, and judged by, other men” (p. 47).

Imagine for a moment a young boy whose friends ridicule him for playing with dolls. The boy may begin to internalize this ridicule, and in turn, he has received a powerful message that he will take with him—boys do not do things that girls do. This boy's conditioned response might be to never again play with any toys perceived as feminine, and he possibly may even continue the cycle of ridicule and taunt other boys he sees playing with a perceived girls' toy because he needs to put on an act, appearing tough to other boys. All of these internal feelings are affected by the social facts which create a dialogue about what it means to be masculine.

The W.I. Thomas Theorem proposes that if people “define situations as real, they are real *in their consequences* [italics added]” (Thomas, 1928, p. 572). Thomas stated that “the most important situations in the development of personality *are the attitudes and values of other persons* [italics added]” (p. 571). A classic example provided by Thomas to explain the definition of the situation references an inmate who murdered people who had “the unfortunate habit of talking to themselves on the street. From the movement of their lips he imagined that they were calling him vile names, and he behaved as if this were true” (Thomas, 1928, p. 572).

The concept of the definition of the situation is highly interrelated with the self-fulfilling prophecy. The self-fulfilling prophecy was coined by Merton (1948) through his examination of the Thomas theorem: “[I]n the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*” (p. 195) as in the inmate example above.

Using the Thomas theorem, if a young man has been taught his whole life that he shouldn't act like a girl, the consequence of this may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein he may begin to believe that women are not to be respected. Katz (2006) sums up this idea perfectly: “[W]hat is considered ‘feminine’ has less value than what is considered ‘masculine.’ It

is a short step from there to the belief that women are supposed to be subordinate to men” (p. 229-230).

In addition, Katz (2006) also stated that the ‘boys will be boys’ mantra has “a self-fulfilling quality because boys possess not only the potential to rise to people’s expectations, but also the potential to sink to them” and that it “actually carries the profoundly anti-male implication that we should expect bad behavior from boys and men” (p. 86). Not only does this label affect a boy’s inner psyche, but it also affects how others view him, as others take bad behaviors for granted and accept such poor behaviors as normal.

Positioning Gender and Identity as Social Constructs

Masculinity is a constant test—always up for grabs, always needing to be proved. (Kimmel, 2008, p. 51)

The above quote illustrates the need for men to prove their masculinity and gender role performance to others, because they feel compelled to prove themselves to other men. Risman (2004) paraphrased Giddens to illustrate the “human action” necessary for a connection between the individual and society and referred to it as a “recursive relationship,” continuing on to say that “[s]ocial structures not only act on people; people act on social structures” (p. 432).

So in this section, I will discuss one’s gender and identity as intertwining concepts. This comes heavily from our society’s notions of the male-versus-female gender dichotomy as I will discuss below, in addition to how we all participate in furthering this binary type of thinking. The ideas presented will also be framed through how we think about ourselves through the eyes of others.

Ross-Gordon (1999) defines one’s gender identity as “a person’s concept of himself or herself as male or female” (p. 29). In addition, gender is socially constructed (Bem, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Kimmel, 1987; Risman, 2004; Ross-Gordon, 1999). Risman (2004)

summarized the prevailing theories on gender, citing the respective authors, on topics ranging from Udry's biological or Bem's social influences, and to the effect of "how the social structure...creates gendered behavior;" and in addition, perspectives include a focus on "doing gender" and the expectations of others (West & Zimmerman) and gender itself as a "socially constructed stratification system" with an "integrative" approach (Connell; Lorber; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess; Risman) (p. 430).

Risman (2004) takes the above-mentioned *integrative* standpoint, viewing gender as a social structure and does not believe the concept of a social institution provides the right context for the construct of gender and chooses to view it instead as a *structure* "because this brings gender to the same analytic plane as politics and economics, where the focus has long been on political and economic structures" (p. 431). Risman stated that this perspective works only if "we realize that gender itself is a structure deeply embedded in society" (p. 432).

In our everyday lives, we are a product of both biology and societal influences. When the dimension of gender is examined, it is viewed as two sides in opposition. As an illustration, *sex* is defined by Merriam-Webster (2014) as "the state of being male or female." It is of note that even though the origins of sex are based in biology, it still places an influence upon our understanding of the word gender, implying a dichotomy of either being masculine or feminine.

However, this line of thought is flawed. With gender, it is also based in genetics but it is much more complex than biology alone. Similarly, when it comes to sex roles that people perform, Kimmel (1987) notes that such roles can be seen as a "laundry list" or a "static...container into which all biological males and females are forced to fit" (p. 12). Real (2002) illustrates this divide as such:

It is as if we as a culture have taken a blank piece of paper and drawn a line down its center declaring all characteristics to the right of the line "masculine," and all of those to

the left “feminine”...On the ‘masculine’ side lie such qualities as strength, logic, aggression, antidependence, goal orientation, and insensitivity. On the ‘feminine’ side lie such qualities as weakness, emotion, yielding, dependence, process orientation, and oversensitivity. Which one of these two ‘sides’ is healthy? Neither. (p. 73)

Bem refers to this male-female dichotomy as gender polarization: “any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts [is defined] as problematic—as unnatural or immoral” (p. 81). In regards to this polarization, Frye (1983) explained:

The intense demand for marking and for asserting what sex each person is adds up to a strenuous requirement that there *be* two distinct and sharply dimorphic sexes. But, in reality, there are not. There are people who fit on a biological spectrum between two-not-so-sharply defined poles. (p. 25)

Gender inequality exists because we have one sex deemed to be the norm wherein gender differences are then purported to be based on sex, as per the standpoint of what is called *biological essentialism* (Bem, 1993). On the topic of such gender polarization, Bem (1993) stated that such social habits

do two things simultaneously. They program different social experiences for males and females, respectively, and they communicate to both males and females that the male-female distinction is extraordinarily important, that it has—and ought to have—intensive and extensive relevance to virtually every aspect of human experience. (p. 146)

Of note is the above phrase *ought to have* because it conveys the presumption that sex differences *should* affect how one lives their life. On the contrary, Real (2002) explained that a person is healthier if they discover how to exhibit well-rounded characteristics regardless of prescribed sex or gender differences: “Psychologically whole human beings, who could be both tender and tough, depending on the circumstances, proved to have the best mental health” (p. 74).

In the following passage, Frye (1983) describes how we are conditioned to “announce” our sex to others:

We do not, in fact, announce our sexes “in one way or another.” We announce them in a thousand ways. We deck ourselves from head to toe with garments and decorations which

serve like badges and buttons to announce our sexes. For every type of occasion there are distinct clothes, gear and accessories, hairdos, cosmetics and scents, labeled as “ladies” or “men’s” and labeling us as females or males, and most of the time most of us choose, use, wear or bear the paraphernalia associated with our sex. It goes below the skin as well. There are different styles of gait, gesture, posture, speech, humor, taste and even of perception, interest and attention that we learn as we grow up to be women or to be men and that label and announce us as women or as men. It begins early in life: even infants in arms are color coded. (pp. 23-24)

These powerful words really illustrate how ingrained the idea of the gender binary is, in addition to emphasizing the part most people play in furthering the idea that one should dress and act in a way to stay within these imaginary boundaries. Using Frye’s words from above, even babies from day one are *color coded*.

Gee (2000), a linguistics expert, stated that “[w]hen any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain ‘kind of person’ or even as several different ‘kinds’ at once” (p. 99). In Gee’s description, the author was referring to Hacking’s (1983, 1986, 1994, 1995, 1998) terminology regarding “kinds” of people. Hacking (1995) stated that “classifying people works on people, changes them, and can even change their past. The process does not stop there. The people of a kind themselves are changed” (p. 369).

This “looping effect” of influence as described by Hacking (1995) emphasizes how labels can change one’s identity. Gee (2000) defined identity as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person,” wherein someone may have a “core identity” that one identifies most with in a general sense (p. 99). All of these different types of identities interrelate to one another, with each being dependent on the other (Gee, 2000). This concept is akin to the perspectives shared by Cooley (1964) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) regarding the individual and society—in that one cannot understand a particular type of identity without examining the interplay between all identities.

Gee (2000) stated that “all people have multiple identities connected not to their ‘internal states’ but to their performances in society” (p. 99). Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective draws meaning from these performances using analogies related to the world of theater. This perspective is a worthy visual illustration of how one can view the relationship between the individual and the other in society. In describing these *performances* of self, Goffman (1959) believed that each actor may truly believe in the role they are playing, or they may also be aware they are putting on a false act to be accepted by the audience. Goffman stated the following:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show “for the benefit of other people.” (p. 17)

Because of certain identities one holds, and acts one performs in front of others, a person may be labeled many different things. At the heart of labeling theory are the “symbolic labels that people are given in their interactions with others” (Kendall, 2002, p. 169). Some labels are placed by *others* onto a person—good and bad labels alike.

Someone can have multiple labels cast upon them and therefore one may also be playing multiple roles at one time, for example, father, employee, and student, which can lead to role strain. As defined by Goode (1960), one experiences role strain when there is difficulty in “fulfilling role obligations” (p. 483) or role demands (p. 485). The complexities behind role strain can be illustrated with the following:

In role behavior, we begin to experience strain, worry, anxiety, or the pressures of others if we devote more time and attention to one role obligation than we feel we should, or than others feel we should. This strain may be felt because, given a finite sum of role resources, too much has already been expended; or because the individual feels that relative to a given value the cost is too high....Analysis of role allocation requires...that we know the individuals *internal* demands, that is, the demands which he makes on himself, and which thus contribute to his willingness to perform well or not. (p. 488)

What others think of us matters. According to Goffman (1959), “when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole” (p. 35). It is of note to realize that society may put more stake in the assumptions about a person than what is shown by one’s actual behavior. This is a perfect illustration of the looking glass self and the dramaturgical standpoint as someone uses what others think to inform behavior.

Real (2002) describes a process of *gender straitjacketing* and the link between such a dichotomy and patriarchy itself:

The essence of psychological patriarchy is the non-existence of such middle ground. If you win, if you inhabit the ‘masculine’ right-hand side of the page; you are exalted. If you lose, if you fall into the ‘feminine’ left-hand column; you are despised and rejected....The relentless internal architecture of grandiosity and shame, better-than, less-than, is nothing less than the dynamic of psychological patriarchy itself played out inside our own skulls. (p. 84)

Remember for a moment Kimmel’s (2008) similar aforementioned belief that the rules of Guyland fits boys like a “straightjacket” (p. 51). From this we can infer that the rules young men are to follow in our culture regarding masculinity are not comfortable for them. It does not feel natural, and it takes a lot of effort to try and break free. And then we may wonder, is it even possible to escape the restrictions at all?

The Effects of Patriarchy: The Invisibility of Men

Patriarchy doesn’t refer to me or any other man or collection of men, but to a kind of society in which men and women participate. (Johnson, 2005, p. 5)

Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. (hooks, 2004, p. 18)

Up until this point, we have discussed what patriarchy is and how it is socially constructed, and how these notions of masculinity relate directly to the social construction of identity and gender. The following section will focus on two main areas in which one can see

evidence of patriarchy and where their behavior or experience has been rendered almost invisible. It seems counter-intuitive to think about the male-centeredness of patriarchy at the same time we are talking about men being invisible. However, this is the paradox that is the destructive effects of patriarchy.

Homophobia, Violence, and Crime: The Invisible Male

She's a beast, I call her Karma. She'll eat your heart out like Jeffrey Dahmer....You may fall in love when you meet her, If you get the chance, you better keep her. She's sweet as pie, but if you break her heart, she'll turn cold as a freezer. That fairy tale ending with a knight in shining armor—she can be my Sleeping Beauty...I'm gon' [sic] put her in a coma.

Katy Perry feat. Juicy J., “Dark Horse.”
(Gottwald, Houston, Hudson, Martin, Perry & Walter, 2013)

You hit me twice, yeah, but who's countin'? I may have hit you three times, I'm startin' to lose count....Next time I'm pissed, I'll aim my fist at the drywall. Next time? There won't be no next time! I apologize even though I know its lies. I'm tired of the games I just want her back. I know I'm a liar. If she ever tries to [expletive] leave again. Im'a [sic] tie her to the bed and set this house on fire.

Eminem feat. Rihanna, “Love the Way you Lie.”
(Mathers, Grant & Hafermann, 2010)

Society goes as far as expecting bad behavior from boys (Katz, 2006), with the general consensus being that men are the more aggressive sex and that they lack emotional expertise (Pleck, 1991). Katz stated that “the more that abusive behavior is rationalized as normal and expected, the more likely it is to occur” (Katz, p. 87). In speaking of violence, men have been “largely erased from so much of the conversation about a subject that is centrally about men” (Katz, 2012, para. 5).

Violence towards women and the topic of homophobia are two issues that are inextricably linked. As mentioned in the first section on raising boys, boys are taught to not be a girl nor to be *perceived* as feminine. The unwritten message is if you are perceived as having any feminine traits or actions, a judgment is made on your masculinity and sexual orientation, and this judgment itself exposes homophobic fears.

The word homophobia is defined as an “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Herek (2000) provides us with an alternative perspective on homophobia in referring to this as *heterosexism*, in that like racism or sexism, it is “an ideological system that casts homosexuality as inferior to heterosexuality” (p. 19).

Kimmel (2008) puts a thought-provoking twist on the definition in terms of a boy’s experience in Guyland and defines it from the male perspective as “a kind of shorthand for unmanliness” and “the fear that people might *misperceive* you as gay” (p. 50). Kimmel continues on to say that it is “even deeper than this. It’s the fear *of* other men—that will perceive you as a failure, as a fraud. It’s a fear that other men will see you as weak, unmanly, frightened” (p. 50).

From a patriarchal perspective, homophobia is not the fear of homosexuality. Because men find the opinions of other men so important, homophobia is a man’s internalized fear about what other men think of him. A study of college men showed effects of ideas of *heterosexual masculinity* on homophobic views (Theodore & Basow, 2008). The results showed that “College-aged males who not only are highly sensitive to gender stereotypes, but who also evaluate themselves negatively based on a belief that they don’t fulfill the masculine stereotypes are most likely to hold homophobic attitudes and beliefs” (p. 42)

The artist Eminem is known in particular for his less than kind lyrics about women and people who identify as gay. However, his stature as an artist is respected among his fans, despite his hateful lyrics (Katz, 2006). In the song “Love the Way You Lie,” artists Eminem and Rihanna sing in turns about a seemingly mutually abusive relationship between a man and a woman. The chorus of the song includes Rihanna singing “But that’s alright because I like the way it hurts” (Mathers, Grant & Hafermann, 2010). Also note the above lyrics in Katy Perry’s

song “Dark Horse” in which the artist Juicy J sings about putting a woman into a coma. It is troubling that these types of lyrics with such abuse against women are accepted and regarded as commonplace.

Violence clearly affects all in society, but it is an issue belonging to men (Katz, 2006, 2012; Porter, 2010). When one thinks of violence against women, the listener may immediately focus on the woman as the victim and not on what the man did. Katz (2012) states that we shouldn’t be asking questions about what a woman did or didn’t do to become a victim but we should instead place attention on men:

What is going on with men? And then what is the role of the various institutions in our society that are helping to produce abusive men at pandemic rates?...How can we change the socialization of boys and the definitions of manhood that lead to these current outcomes? These are the kinds of questions that we need to be asking and the kind of work that we need to be doing, but if we’re endlessly focused on what women are doing and thinking in relationships and elsewhere, we’re not going to get to that piece. (para. 9 & 11)

Katz (2006) references Julia Penelope in illustrating how we make men invisible when it comes to violence against women in particular, using the following five sentences. Notice how as the sentences progress, we no longer are focusing on John’s actions:

1. John beat Mary.
2. Mary was beaten by John.
3. Mary was beaten.
4. Mary was battered.
5. Mary is a battered woman. (p. 111)

Katz (2006) concludes this discussion by stating: “By the third sentence, John is gone, and it’s all about Mary. In the final sentence, Mary’s very identity—*Mary is a battered woman*—has been created by the now-absent John” (p. 111). One could argue that society is arranged so that men become invisible, even when he has done something as violent as committing abuse towards another person.

It must be noted that violent crime is clearly a men's issue. According to the U. S. Department of Justice (2012), violent crime in the United States is defined as the crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. In the year 2012, a total of 347,000 arrests were made for violent crime. It is of note that 80 percent of the arrests were males (278,167). Over 99 percent of forcible rapes were committed by men, and more than 88 percent of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter crimes were attributable to men. A report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics on the topic of criminal victimization stated that 6.1 million people in the United States were victims of violent crime in the year 2013 (Truman & Langton, 2014). Interestingly enough, nowhere in this document are gender disparities addressed. Clearly from the above statistics, it is mostly men committing these crimes—but gender appears to be absent from the discussion.

According to Katz (2006), if one peruses the news, it “reads like a morbid catalogue of violent masculinity run amok” (p. 22), but men as criminals are ignored in the media, and there is a tendency to victim-blame women which takes the focus away from the perpetrator who is usually male (Katz, 2006). Katz (2006) explains this phenomenon as such: “Stories about men stalking, attacking, and murdering women and children make the local, regional, and national news virtually every day; especially when they have a good news hook like a famous perpetrator or a young, attractive victim” (p. 22).

Anyone who pays attention to national news will notice that the victims of violent crimes that the media focuses on are cases involving attractive women victims—women who are usually white and young in age. So this also shows how race factors into the picture when the non-white victims are being made invisible. But at the same time, men as criminals are ignored in the sense

that society is not taking notice that violence is a problem belonging overwhelmingly to men such as with school shootings where the attackers have usually been young, white men.

In contrast, primarily white women are focused on in the ongoing cases of teachers who abuse their younger male students or enter into relationships with them. In an article written for CBS News, Larosa (2014) explained this pattern shown in the media in recent years:

There was a time in our popular culture when teachers who sexually abused students were depicted as grimy, dandruff-on-the-shoulders, less-than-attractive men who didn't seem to fit in. Today, that image could not be more [out] of date. What has made headlines and astounded many parents in recent years are the number of female teachers—many of them young and attractive—who've been arrested for having sex with male and sometimes female students, sometimes repeatedly. (para. 1-2)

Such as in the Mary Kay Letourneau case where she even bore children with the younger male student and eventually married him, women offenders seem to be presented in the media as a type of beautiful predator. The portrayal holds true with the idea of the *cougar* in popular culture, where beautiful older women seek younger men, with that idea being glamorized. According to various documentation compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (2004), at least 80 percent of sexual offenders were actually male (p. 24), yet cases about men are rarely sensationalized or covered by the media so intensely.

A point should be made about how men as victims are ignored by the media, not just men who are criminals. Take for example the recent September 2014 murder of North Dakota State University student Thomas Bearson which still remains unsolved to this day. About a week before Bearson disappeared, Hannah Graham from The University of Virginia also went missing, and there was unending coverage on national news regarding her disappearance. I was saddened by the fact that I saw no national coverage on the disappearance of Bearson, especially when his body was found plus the subsequent announcement that it had in fact been a homicide. One would think that the media would attach themselves to a story based in a community like Fargo,

North Dakota, where such violence is rare, but I have not seen any evidence of similar attention in the national newscasts. Why do we not usually see a focus on male victims? Why was the nation not made aware of Bearson while he was missing for three days?

National statistics show that men are more likely to be victims of violent crime and they are much more likely to be the ones committing the crime, as well. According to homicide trends from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 67.8 percent of homicides were perpetrated by a male offender on a male victim between the years of 1980-2008 (Cooper & Smith, 2011, p. 9). In reference to Cooper and Smith's 2008 data regarding males as both criminals and victims, take for example these powerful statements:

- “Males were nearly 4 times more likely than females to be murdered” (p. 9)
- “Males were 7 times more likely than females to commit murder” (p. 9)
- “More than half (56.4%) of male murder victims were killed by an acquaintance” (p. 10)
- “Males were more likely to be involved in drug- (90.5%) and gang-related homicides (94.6%)” (p. 10)

It is very clear that men are overwhelmingly more likely to be victims of murder and other violent crimes, and at the same time more likely to also be perpetrators of such violent crime. The numbers of homicides in the United States in 2013 was 14,827 compared to our neighbor to the north, Canada, which experienced only 543 homicides that same year (United Nations, 2014). Even with the statistics on the gender gap in crime being known, and how heavily men are involved, it is troubling that society as a whole has not yet realized this is a men's issue that must be addressed with men.

Men do benefit from patriarchy, but yet there is evidence that they suffer from it at the same time. Under patriarchy, men are the dominant sex, but they are also invisible in a few key ways. In the preceding section, we discussed the invisibility of men in regards to violence and crime. In this next section, we will discuss male invisibility in the higher education sphere which begins to guide us toward the purpose for conducting this study on single fathers.

The Invisibility of Men in Higher Education

Because patriarchal culture designates men and masculinity as the standard for people in general, maleness is the taken-for-granted backdrop, making it the last thing to stand out as remarkable. (Johnson, 2005, p. 155)

Limited academic research exists on the male college student life from a holistic perspective. Much of the empirical research shows a tendency toward the reporting of negative behaviors on the part of male college students, as will be described herein. And secondly, fathers are ignored in policy related to pregnant and parenting students, and also, a gap exists in the literature on the topic of single fathers and fathers in general. If we use the idea of Johnson (2005) from the above quote, the general consensus seems to be that when it comes to caring about the experience of the single father, it is seen as an unremarkable phenomenon without much merit.

Academic Research on College Men.

Academic literature on the experiences on college men is found particularly in the area of student development and psychology. However few original studies conducted solely with college-aged males were found in the published literature. The existing studies overall tended to be small, with some of the same researchers resurfacing in different articles. Despite that, I appreciate how the authors have committed to the topic and are doing what they can to not ignore it. Lastly, the remaining literature included summaries of already existing literature or theories in regards to college men.

Relatively little research on the academic lives of male students was found, but numerous sources regarding depression and mental health and negative behaviors such as drinking, sexual assault and sexual aggressiveness, and misconduct in general was of note.

According to Davis and Laker (2004), college student males are “struggling” and “in crisis” (p. 47). The negative slant to the information we find in the existing literature can be seen as a beacon that can lead us towards understanding why the situation of the male student on campus is exaggerated in a negative fashion. But at the same time, under the paradox of masculinity, their lives are also overlooked. Harris and Edwards (2010) noted that knowledge disseminated up until recently has been more “conceptual rather than empirical, *often missing the voices of college men themselves* [emphasis added]” (p. 44). We need more repeated qualitative studies in which insight can be gained into the lives of college student men and hear their own voices.

Because most of the research on college students from a historical perspective had utilized men as subjects in the research, persons working in student affairs may have a false assumption that the state of men in college is understood: “[I]ssues related to women and people of color are discussed overtly, while men’s issues are overlooked or seen as implied in discussion of general student developmental models” (Davis & Laker, 2004, p. 48). These models had been focused only on white college men of privilege but yet it was assumed these theories could be applied to all students.

Davis and Laker (2004) also continued on to say that this misunderstanding “leads to either reliance on stereotypical gender scripts or failure to consider men as gendered beings. Both are problematic and unprofessional” (p. 49). So in a sense, a paradox exists wherein men have been studied historically for years, yet the true essence of their experience is not evident

because society does not view men as having a gender because the male gender is the norm, and norms are often taken for granted.

Thus, the use of the term gender itself is another area where we find male invisibility. As Katz (2012) stated that many people “when they hear the word ‘gender,’ think it means women. In each case, the dominant group doesn’t get paid attention to...As if white people don’t have some sort of racial identity or belong to some racial category or construct, as if heterosexual people don’t have a sexual orientation, as if men don’t have a gender” (Katz, 2012, para. 5). Davis (2002) cited Gilligan and others who “have convincingly argued that developmental research has too often viewed the male sex as representative of humanity” (p. 508).

Davis (2002) interviewed 10 college men to explore how men were affected by beliefs about gender role expectations. On campus, some of the men felt left out and believed that services for men were lacking, in addition to there being an unease on their part when discussing masculinity. One student indicated an instructor assumed subject knowledge on his part because he was a male student: “Our male teachers, it seems like they are more apt to give them [the female students] help. If we don’t get it, it’s like ‘I don’t understand how you don’t understand this—you should be understanding this’” (p. 516). Recall the concept of men being gender police for other men (Kimmel, 2008); in this example, it was a male instructor furthering a stereotype of the role his fellow male should fulfill.

The Davis (2002) study also found that the men were, in general, uncomfortable in discussing the topic of masculinity: “They were simultaneously unreflective about what being a guy means and aware that masculinity was something with which they did not want to identify” (p. 516). Capraro (2004) has stated that “boys and men need intimacy, but as long as intimacy is identified with the feminine, they reject it” (p. 28). This discussion leads to an unfortunate

dichotomy in performing gender. A male college student may not want to identify with the concept of masculinity, yet also should abandon the notion of anything feminine. If this is the case, what identity is he left with, when he can't identify with either?

As mentioned, the literature surrounding masculinity and male college students seems to lean towards negative, unwanted behaviors. In reviewing the literature, Harris and Edwards (2010) have reported "troubling trends in men's attendance, success, engagement, well-being, and behavior in college" (p. 44). In addition, Rando, Rogers, and Brittan-Powers (1998) showed a connection between "adherence to traditional male gender roles" and the following negative behaviors:

- Increased rape myth acceptance
- Hostility towards women
- Sex role stereotyping. (p. 366)

As shown, the majority of violent crime offenders in the United States are male and the college realm is no exception. According to a review of the literature by Harper, Harris, and Mmeje (2005) the majority of students involved in misconduct on the college campus are male. Ludeman (2004) mentioned the lack of research on the topic of campus offenders and offered an in-text reference to Dannells who has stated that the students engaged in bad behaviors were "immature, impulsive young men, most often freshmen and sophomores, who have not developed positive feelings toward the institution and who very likely were engaged in alcohol use or abuse at the time of the incident" (p. 28). In addition, male students suffer often from mental health issues related to role conflict (Gold, Neurerer, and Miller, 2000; Good and Mintz, 1990; Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens & Bartels, 1996).

A small scale grounded theory study of 10 college student males by Edwards and Jones (2009) indicated that many stereotypes of what it means to be a man in college are negative, involving partying, drinking, and being promiscuous. Subjects indicated they were confronted with negative reactions from other male students regarding showing their feelings, either being teased in reference to homosexuality or not feeling comfortable in showing their emotions. Some other themes found in the study related to socialization through the process of growing up, homophobia, and negative treatment of women.

In a review of the literature, a negative focus was found and it was demonstrated that the true male student experience may be taken for granted, under an assumption that we already understand male students. A gap was found in the area of men who are parenting while in college. The next section is an attempt at uncovering this gap and bringing to light a more specific area where college men are regarded as invisible.

Pregnant and Parenting Students.

Brown and Nichols (2012) conducted a study examining pregnant and parenting students on a college campus and interviewed 24 parents, eight of whom were fathers. The authors referenced 2002 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) which indicated that “approximately 53% of nontraditional students support more than one dependent and 29% are single parents between the age of 30 and 40” (p. 501). Two areas of knowledge gaps made known through this article are of note. First, the authors indicated there are no national statistics which show how many traditionally-aged students under 25 years of age are parenting; even the overall numbers for any age of student are unclear. Secondly, Brown and Nichols (2012) recognized that through a literature search, fathers are absent from the research:

[T]he existing knowledge has been focused solely on the experiences of mothers who are attending schools, with little acknowledgment to what the father might be experiencing.

Because formal statistics do not exist describing the parenting student population in schools, not including fathers in the research is an oversight which needs to be addressed. It would behoove researchers to understand how the issue of parenting affects fathers and what their unique needs are to enable them to reach their academic goals. (pp. 502-503)

Despite this preceding declaration by Brown and Nichols (2012) showing a need for a focus on fathers, it is my opinion that the article did not address anything of note regarding the perspectives of fathers, with the authors also indicating themselves that “the male voice is underrepresented in this study” (p. 513). There unfortunately seems to be no attempt to explain why the male voice is not heard other than the fact the numbers of males interviewed were fewer than females interviewed. The findings did include perspectives from the fathers, but from my perspective, the passages of note do not do anything unique to paint a picture of the fathers’ experience as students. It is admirable to want to put more of a focus on fathers but the attempt seems to have fallen flat.

The “Dear Colleague” Letter.

[N]o person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic, extracurricular, research, occupational training, or other education program or activity operated by a recipient which receives Federal financial assistance.

Excerpt from Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., § 106.31)

In 2013, the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education issued a “Dear Colleague” letter in which it outlined that an institution (including secondary and postsecondary schools) may not discriminate against pregnant and parenting students and thus must allow certain accommodations to such students in order to increase retention and degrees earned, as per Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments. The letter begins with the following sentence: “We as a nation need to do more to help the hundreds of thousands of young people who become mothers and fathers each year graduate from high school ready for college and successful careers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013a). The aforementioned quote is the only place in

the Dear Colleague letter where fathers are mentioned. The gender-neutral word ‘parent’ is used in a few limited places, but the letter is clearly focused on women, pregnancy and post-pregnancy.

In an associated “Know Your Rights” fact sheet on the topic of pregnant and parenting students under Title IX, fathers or males are never mentioned and it is again focused on the condition of pregnancy. It is stated students are allowed excused absences “as long as your doctor says it is necessary” and that students can be given the same rights as those who would normally qualify for services under the auspices of a temporary medical condition (U.S. Department of Education, 2013b, p. 1)

In an accompanying brochure entitled “Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972,” it seemed more promising for the inclusion of males in this document. The following was stated: “Encouraging pregnant and parenting students to stay in school will have a positive effect on their lives and their children’s lives” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013c, p. 4). The word parent was used more often. However, the “and parenting” part of the phrase *pregnant and parenting* soon became only “pregnant,” often with the pronoun “her” used clearly throughout. Again, the mention of permissions from a student’s doctor appear in the document a number of times.

How could a father ever take advantage of such medical-related temporary accommodations? It seems very possible under the law that men could be ignored, and unfortunately the wording in the pregnant and parenting documents under the umbrella of Title IX allows it. Suffice it to say that a male student’s doctor could never approve such an absence as he is not the parent who had personally gone through the physical process of birth. It may be a well-intentioned effort to prohibit any sex discrimination against students who are parenting,

however men seem to have been left out of the discussion in the very document which purports to support them as parents—in a federal act that claims to prohibit sex discrimination. What protections are in place under Title IX for men who have become parents? The answer seems unknown at this point in time, unfortunately, but it is a very worthwhile avenue for future research.

Identifying a Gap in the Literature: Single Fathers in College.

Through a current search of the literature, information on students who are parenting in college is fairly limited. Recall the limitation mentioned by Brown and Nichols (2012) who stated that the overall numbers of students who parent at the postsecondary level is unknown, so it is not surprising that little research exists in this area, if no formal way exists in which to identify the population.

Literature and research regarding college student parents was located, such as sources relating to single parents in general (Boutsen & Lynds-Colbry, 1991; Huff & Thorpe, 1997; Jing & Mayer, 1995), and those specifically on the topic of single mothers as well (Austin & McDermott, 2003; Buteau 2007; Lynds-Colbry, 1989; Schobert, 2000; Stenson, 1989; Watson, 2001; Yakaboski, 2010). Another source focused on undergraduate parents in general (Branscomb, 2006) however the author admitted that fathers were underrepresented in the particular study.

Overall, research on parenting college students was not very recent and it was difficult to find research on parenting in general since most studies seemed focused on single parenting (mothers) or the study dealt with the topic of the parents of the student, not the student as parent. Some of the single mother or single parent sources found were specific only to community colleges, and many were dissertations and not yet formally published works. Common themes in

the single mother literature included the importance of social support for general well-being, in addition to challenges related to managing time related to school and family.

Even though the literature on parenting in college is limited overall, in stark comparison, research on single fathers in college is unfortunately almost non-existent. If fathers were included in a study about single parents, it tended to be focused overwhelmingly on single mothers and the authors may have also noted that fathers were underrepresented as with Branscomb (2006) who stated:

It is unclear why there is such an absence of student parent fathers at a national level or what the experiences and support needs are of those males who do choose to attend college while raising a child either on their own or with a partner...Future work might look at the role student parent fathers play in their children's lives and whether or not their support needs differ from their female counterparts. (p. 114)

Interestingly, the title of the Schobert (2000) study implied *single parents* in general, however the study was specifically conducted with single mothers only. Similarly, the title of Watson's (2001) dissertation was specific to single mothers, but the data sample did include a small number of single fathers; however, no data specific to single fathers was even mentioned in the findings.

Despite the fact that the number of single father families increased two-fold from 1980-1992 (Johnson, 1993), and that the number is rising faster than that of single mother families (Pew Research, 2013), the existing research in higher education on the topic of single fathers does not reflect that increase. It was possible to locate only one study specific only to fathers or single fathers in college—a dissertation by Cook (2004) in which seven single fathers on a community college campus were interviewed. Cook also mentioned the gap in the literature in this topic, and that this dissertation was a way to contribute to existing research. Results from the

study showed encouraging results in that overall, fathers were proud of their identities as fathers and students.

In addition, research exists on the demographics of single fathers, including statistics on educational attainment (Brown, 2000; Eggebeen & Snyder, Zhan & Pandey, 2004), but this cannot be viewed as specific to fathers who occupy the role of student. The fact they are a student plays a central role in their lives as fathers, since there is a direct connection between their daily schedules as a student and to their availability to spend time with their children. The limited literature on male students overall, the lack of positive research findings, in addition to the absence of literature on the topic exposes another critical area of male invisibility in our society, that of single fathers in college. We need more studies solely focused on a father's experience from the student perspective only.

Concluding Notes: The Mask of Masculinity

You better take it from me, that boy is like a disease. You're running, you're trying, you're trying to hide...And you're wondering why you can't get free. He's like a curse, he's like a drug. You get addicted to his love. You wanna get out but he's holding you down 'cause you can't live without one more touch.

He's a good time Cowboy Casanova leaning up against the record machine. Looks like a cool drink of water but he's candy-coated misery...He's the devil in disguise, a snake with blue eyes, and he only comes out at night...Gives you feelings that you don't want to fight, you better run for your life.

Carrie Underwood, "Cowboy Casanova."
(Underwood, Lindsey & Kear, 2009)

Throughout this review of the literature, I have included lyrics to songs from popular culture that advocate misogyny and violence to show how patriarchy is inextricably linked to messages delivered to us in our everyday lives. However, in context and aims of this review, I wanted to bring an awareness of how the lyrics are harmful to men as well—perpetuating the myth that 'real' men, by nature, dominate others, are homophobic, and have a need to avoid

anything feminine. A conceptual framework based in sociology has been used throughout to show how all masculine gender behavior prescriptions are a direct result of our patriarchal society. The perception that men, by nature, hate anything feminine, and that they are violent beings, is naturally not good for them or society as a whole.

According to Weber (1998), gender is a social construct and we cannot ignore our understanding of its context as it has been shaped by history. With the negative messages being delivered to us about men in society, we have built a stereotype of how men are viewed, and that stereotype is not always good. And at this point in history, man bashing unfortunately seems to be an accepted part of popular culture.

The preceding lyrics sung by Carrie Underwood show a disturbing picture into how often, and how easily, men are referred to in a negative way. A song like “Cowboy Casanova” is furthering the abuse culture: A woman can’t help but be attracted to a man whom she knows is going to do her wrong. He’s an irresistible bad boy who is depicted as *misery...as the devil in disguise*. The video for another song by Underwood, “Two Black Cadillacs” (Brown, 2013) depicts two women at a funeral wherein one woman is the wife of the man who died, and the other is a woman who had an affair with him. The video shows one of the Cadillacs barreling towards him in an alley, and his body lying on the ground after what we believe was the car running him over. Both women seem to have been complicit in the crime, and one even led him there to his death.

There is no mistaking that men have privilege in our society, but it is not without problems for men while being a part of this privileged group. It carries a price. Johnson (1997) sums this up as follows: Privilege is

always a problem for people who don’t have it and for people who do, because privilege is *always* in relation to others. Privilege is always at someone else’s expense and always

exacts a cost. Everything that's done to receive or maintain it—however passive and unconscious—results in suffering and deprivation for someone. (p. 10)

hooks (2004) has contended that patriarchy negatively affects men because it creates a situation where men are denying themselves a connection to their emotions: “[P]atriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, *that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves* [italics added]” (p. 66). In the following statements, Real (2002) explored the glaring pressures placed upon men:

It is this unacknowledged superimposition of grandiosity on shame, this burying of hurt boy inside hurting man, the sweet vulnerable self wrapped in the armor of denial, walled off behind business, work, drink, or rage, the hidden “feminine” inside the bluff “masculine,” that is the truth about men which dare not be uttered. [original italicized] (p. 95)

Men are required to constantly be proving themselves as mentioned previously and are relegated to hide any true sense of themselves behind the mask of masculinity. The analogy of a *mask* has been used by many sources to describe the process of fulfilling masculine roles (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Pollack, 1998; Katz, 1999). The notion of men wearing a mask is another connection to the invisibility of men, as they hide their inner selves behind this mask.

The results of the Edwards and Jones (2009) study evidenced expectations of society and this corresponding *mask*—worn by men to hide their true selves because of expectations placed on their behavior. One of the participants, in reference to his behavior and identity as a man, said that he had put “his man face on,” (or *mask*, as the authors describe it throughout) to live up to expectations others placed on him (Edwards & Jones, 2009, pp. 214 & 216). According to the authors, the participants in this study “described a process of learning societal expectations, putting on a mask to conform to these expectations, wearing the mask, and struggling to begin taking off the mask” (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 210).

Brown (2012) and Katz (1999) have referenced the example of the curtain being pulled back on the Wizard of Oz as a parallel to men wearing the mask of masculinity. Katz stated this illustration it is a “powerful metaphor for looking at masculinity in a new way: not as a fixed, inevitable, natural state of being, but rather as a projection, a performance, a mask that men often wear to shield our vulnerability and hide our humanity” (para.1). Thinking of the *mask* as a projection is a perfect illustration because it puts our focus on it being an intentional act, meant to convey one’s self as a certain *kind* of person. The word mask itself implies that it is covering up an identity (or multiple identities) underneath.

Pollack stated that the mask is “a forced persona, to hide shame and insecurity” (p. 91).

In referencing the mask, Pollack (1998) referred to the paradox that is masculinity and boyhood:

We now say that we want boys to share their vulnerable feelings, but at the same time we expect them to cover their need for dependency and *hide* their natural feelings of love and caring behind the mask of masculine autonomy and strength. *It’s an impossible assignment for any boy, or, for that matter, any human being* [italics added]. (pp. 12-13)

Gee (2000) has referred to identity itself as a performance and this connects easily to the concept of a mask worn by an actor portraying a certain role as with the dramaturgical perspective. Goffman utilized the term *mask* in an in-text reference to Park who stated:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves....In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. (p. 19)

It has been mentioned in this review that bad behavior is expected of men, and that domination and control are seen as normal masculine qualities. Katz (2006) indicated that women have been taught to be afraid of men and that they “order their daily lives around the threat of men’s violence” (p. 1) with such behaviors as:

not walking or going out alone at night; holding their keys as a potential weapon; locking all windows and doors in the home and car not making eye contact with strange men; not listing their full names in the phone book; not putting their drink down at a party or bar. The list goes on. (p. 42)

It is transforming and eye-opening for both men and women as we take this reality to heart that women lead their lives in fear of men on a daily basis. Katz' (2006) imperative is to get men involved in speaking out on violence against women, and he stated that “[w]hen adult men take a stand against violence against women, they not only model positive behavior for the next generation, they help children today—including boys” who are victims of domestic violence or witness violence against women in their lives (Katz, 2006, p. 44).

In addition to a propensity towards violence, other traditional notions of masculinity are also detrimental to men and how we view maleness. Chodorow indicated (1989) that “[m]ale dominance on a psychological level is a masculine defense and a major psychic cost to men, built on fears and insecurity; it is not straightforward power” (p. 177). In a further discussion of these types of fears, Mead (1949) has stated the following:

Many societies have educated their male children on the simple device of teaching them not to be women, but there is an inevitable loss in such an education, for it teaches a man to fear that he will lose what he has, and to be forever somewhat haunted by this fear. (p. 315)

Being a boy is a constant struggle of what not to be and according to Chodorow (1999), masculinity is a negative identity: “[B]oys define and attempt to construct their sense of masculinity largely in negative terms” (p. 182). According to Real (2002), “[b]eing a boy means not being weak, not feeling, not needing—in a word, not being a girl” (p. 79). In addition, “in the world of boys and men, you are either a winner or a loser, one up or one down, in control or controlled, man enough or a girl” (Real, 2002, p. 83).

How do we move past these traditional notions of masculinity? Creating an awareness of patriarchy among both men and women is key, and parents can play a big role in how our society

changes over time as we raise our children. In the introduction to this review, I mentioned I would be writing from a feminist and transformative perspective. It is my belief that our society would be better served if we eased up on the gender role prescriptions set forth for both men and women, and that we need to start with the expectations placed upon children by creating an awareness of how these expectations influence a child's perspective of his or her identity, even when very young.

According to Mertens (2010), the transformative perspective “places central importance on the lives and experiences of the diverse groups that, traditionally, have been marginalized” and it “analyzes how and why inequities based on gender, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic classes are reflected in asymmetric power relationships” (p. 21).

If one examines the use of the word *traditionally* above, one could state that no, men have not *traditionally* been marginalized throughout the course of history. However, in the examination of patriarchy, an argument can be made for the fact that men have experienced disadvantages in their lives, despite the privilege they are afforded through being male and that men also have participated in their own oppression through the practice of traditional masculinity and thus also experience sexism.

It *is* sexism nonetheless, intertwined with power and privilege on the part of men who are victims of sexism. This contributes to the idea of *hegemonic masculinity* which historically was understood as “the pattern of practice...that allowed men's dominance over women to continue” wherein even men who *do not* typify traditional masculine attitudes “could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

Therefore, men have a valuable perspective to contribute in the advancement of feminism. Harding (1993) stated:

It cannot be that women are the unique generators of feminist knowledge. Women cannot claim this ability to be uniquely theirs, and men must not be permitted to claim that because they are not women, they are not obligated to produce fully feminist analyses. *Men, too, must contribute distinctive forms of specifically feminist knowledge from their particular social situation* [italics added]. If every other liberatory movement must generate feminist knowledge, it cannot be that women are the unique generators of feminist knowledge. Women cannot claim this ability to be uniquely theirs and men must not be permitted to claim that because they are not women, they are not obligated to produce fully feminist analyses. (p. 67)

Through my research, I want to be an advocate for men and feel it is important to state that I can still hold a feminist perspective at the same time in the same vein of hooks (2000b) who stated that feminism “aims to end domination to free us to be who we are—to live lives where we love justice, where we can live in peace. Feminism is for everybody” (p. 118).

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

In the last chapter, the topic of masculinity and raising boys was presented through my own personal lens of motherhood. How patriarchy manifests itself in society was discussed, in addition to the social constructs of gender and identity; men, violence and homophobia; and to the invisibility of men in society in general and in the existing literature. A gap in the existing knowledge related to college students who are fathers, especially single fathers, was addressed. The concept of the mask of masculinity was also explored wherein I made the claim that men are harmed and rendered invisible through patriarchy even when the system is built to give them privilege. *Herein lies the paradox of masculinity.*

Through this dissertation, I wish to create an awareness of patriarchy and bring to light the ways in which patriarchy harms men. But the specific purpose of this particular research study is to conduct research on a topic that has long been overlooked—that of single fathers in college. Because so little is known about this unique population on a college campus, this study is creating a new area of focus and adding an important dimension to the existing research on college men.

Use of the Phenomenological Perspective

It is my aim as a researcher to understand the experiences of my research participants, from their own unique perspectives. Sociological and constructivist paradigms lend the most assistance in understanding one's experience because through these it is understood that one's reality is socially constructed and experienced by an individual. Through my research, I hope to uncover more about how a single father experiences being a parent while in college and how his lived experience of being a man in a patriarchal system affects his lived experience as a student. A discussion of phenomenological methodology will be used to examine my topic of interest,

due to phenomenology's focus on lived experience. Below, I will explain how my methodology was informed by psychologist Clark Moustakas and how those perspectives were integrated into my methods.

According to Moustakas (1994), "Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences" (p. 84). When research is conducted from a phenomenological perspective, such studies describe "the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon..." focusing on "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58). It is not about the participants' characteristics as a group and is instead meant to "describe the structure of an experience" or the "nature of the experience itself" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 48). Through one-on-one interviews, I will gain first-hand knowledge of what it's like to be a single dad on a college campus. I will infuse this perspective into my research on single fathers so that we understand more about the phenomenon that is the common experience of single dads in college. To bring this concept full circle, more about phenomenology will be discussed later in this chapter and also in the discussion.

Data Sources

For purposes of this study, I conducted in-person one-on-one interviews with participants based on a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendices F and G), in two rounds. Based on insight from related conclusions taken from my Master's thesis experience, I planned to conduct the interviews in the same manner (all in-person) and preferably in the same or a similar neutral location, such as the campus library. I recorded the sessions using a hand-held digital recorder, taking personal notes on my interview protocol sheet as necessary as reminders of

questions covered, and I jotted down themes as they arose. I kept a total of two backups of the interview files, in addition to the original file on the digital recorder.

Research Site

This research was conducted mainly on the campus of “State University,” a 4-year institution in the Upper Midwest region of the United States with approximately 15,000 students. For purposes of this dissertation, the campus may be referred to as “State University” or also simply as “State.”

All interviews were conducted in a quiet and private location. The majority of interviews took place in study rooms on the State University campus with two exceptions. First, one of the fathers requested to have the interview conducted at his place of work. After consulting with my advisor and then with the campus Institutional Review Board, it was determined that as long as the location would offer a similar environment and privacy to what would be offered on campus, I did not need to seek any additional approval for that interview location. The second round interview was also conducted at his workplace as well. And secondly, one of the fathers was not in town at the time of the second interview, so we arranged the interview to be done via a voice call on Skype. The Skype call quality was poor part-way through the interview, so we switched to phone at that point.

Criteria for Participation

Of primary interest was the experience of the single father in college because this is largely unaddressed in the existing research literature as demonstrated. This topical area would be a worthy extension of my master’s thesis work on single dads and I looked forward to seeing the similarities and differences of single dads specifically in the college realm.

To participate, the fathers were informed they must meet the following criteria at the time the study began: Participant must be male, a student enrolled at State University, and must have children that live with him at least part of the time and no longer live with or be in a relationship with his children's mother. His children must be around the age of 10 or younger. He must also be a U.S. citizen who was born in the United States and be at least 18 years of age. There was no distinction based on custody or percentage of time that a child lived with them, and this could include never-married or divorced fathers, in addition to fathers who may be remarried and were recently single fathers, since there was no criteria based on current marital status.

Recruiting the Participants

Participants were recruited from the campus of State University via a combination of three methods: Snowballing techniques amongst colleagues and other campus offices, and email recruitment. Flyers were distributed in paper and electronic format. An external URL was available for access of the flyer via email in cases where an attachment was not feasible. The flyers were used in combination with the recruitment methods below.

My first method of recruitment involved visiting with campus colleagues who work in offices where they may be likely to know students who are single fathers, and I provided those colleagues with a few flyers and recruitment materials by email to forward on to prospective participants. Secondly, I also contacted two campus child care facilities by phone to ask if they were aware of any single fathers who utilized the center for their children. Lastly, participants were contacted through email via State University's "Student Research Participant Listserv" and all guidelines for listserv posting was followed.

The campus childcare services were receptive but did not know of any fathers that met the criteria. Colleagues were aware of single dads they knew personally, but to the best of my

knowledge, all 6 participants found out about the study through my Research Participant Listserv email. I am not aware specifically of anyone who may have contacted me in response to any other method than the Research Participant Listserv, due to fact all interested participants contacted me after that was distributed on the listserv. In all cases, information was distributed to fathers by an intermediary, whether that be a colleague or the use of the Research Participant Listserv. Willing participants made the first direct contact with me. I did not specifically post any paper flyers on campus, but would have done so, had I not initially received such a good response from my recruitment email.

As a token of thanks for their time and participation, fathers were told they would be offered a \$20 gift card to a local grocery store. Approximately a month and a half after the completion of the data collection portion of the study, the gift cards were sent by mail to an address provided by the fathers.

Ethical Considerations

This study received exempt status upon IRB review, Approval # HE15241. Please see Appendix B for the IRB approval letter.

Participants were provided with a link to an informational flyer as part of the recruitment process (see above). If they indicated (e.g., via email contact) that they were considering participation and would like to know more, I provided them with a copy of the informed consent form (e.g., via email reply). If they agreed to participate, a signed copy of the consent form was obtained before data collection began. Most communication happened via email.

Notes were jotted down in the interview guide during the interview, and these notes contained no identifying information. The interview guide was only be associated with the participant's alphabet letter code, such as A. Participants' involvement and anything said in the

interviews was kept confidential. No personal contact information was included by the researcher on the recordings and participants were not referred to by name by the researcher on the recordings. All names and any other information that could potentially identify an individual in the data was omitted in the transcripts.

So that I was able to correctly associate the participant to their data throughout the data collection and analysis, it was necessary to associate a pseudonym to the fathers. A pseudonym was assigned to the father and the names of any persons mentioned by name in the interviews, in addition to de-identifying other items such as names of their children's school and or the father's employer or job title, for example. Contact information including their actual name was kept in an entirely separate location. Because all identifiers were replaced with a pseudonym, all links between the individual and the data were removed. No single materials existed which documented the connection between the participant's name and their pseudonym (or first letter of their pseudonym). The participants were few enough that these connections were retained in my memory only.

Upon completion of this research project, any digital recordings or files will be deleted from their source. In addition, any interview guides used during an interview will be shredded and securely disposed of.

A Note on Sample Size

Upon submission of my dissertation proposal, I initially found it important to constrain the participant pool to only traditional-aged students between the ages of 18-24. I had proposed this because I was looking at factors related to the societal influence of traditional masculinity and wanted to ensure as best as possible that the students have been raised in the same approximate generation with similar cultural values related to patriarchy and masculinity.

However, the number of single fathers on college campuses is presumably quite small, and upon discussion with my committee, I decided to open the criteria to single fathers of any age.

One consequence of broadening the criteria is that some of the participants were describing events from years ago, as to what their experience was previously like as a single father, and then of course up until present day. This explains why both past and present tense are used by the fathers as they are responding to my questions, because they are interpreting the questions through their own unique history of being a single father and likewise when they were (or were not) in school during their entire experience.

According to a summary offered by Polkinghorne (1989), the ideal number of participants for a phenomenological study “varies considerably” and examples were given from anywhere between three participants to 325 (p. 48). One must keep in mind that a phenomenological study with such a large number of participants such as 325 would yield shallower data, in comparison to a smaller sample size which would more than likely produce thick and rich descriptions. Because I would already be starting with a small overall population from which to draw, practically speaking, my sample size mirrored the population and also was limited. Thus, I planned to aim for a sample of 5 to 10 fathers to interview.

I received approximately eight responses from single fathers who stated they qualified and were interested in my request, but in the end some did not follow-up after being sent the informed consent document. Six final participants remained and all 6 persisted throughout the entire study.

Designing the Interview Protocol

In a discussion of phenomenological data analysis, Creswell (2007) paraphrased Moustakas (1994) who recommended “[r]esearchers also write about their own experiences and

the context and situations that have influenced their experiences” (p. 61). I personally have found that writing personal reflections has been an invaluable learning tool in my doctoral education. So to remain as much in line with a phenomenological methodology, it was critical to incorporate my own reflections and assumptions of the topic into my researcher positionality statement and to make my reflections and presuppositions a true part of designing the interview questions.

When designing questions in a study that is based in phenomenological research, the first step in framing the questions to ask of participants is for the researcher to engage in “Individual Phenomenological Reflection” (IPR) as defined by Colaizzi (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Through this process, Polkinghorne stated that the researcher is to “bracket out the presuppositions and assumptions they bring to the investigations” (p. 46). Polkinghorne again referenced Colaizzi in stating that when beginning the process of determining interview questions, the “first step is to engage in self-reflection on the topic to be investigated; this allows the interviewer to uncover *prima facie* dimensions for exploration” (p. 49).

Because I am employed in a higher education environment and due to my already existing knowledge of single fathers, it was important for me to first be aware of my assumptions so that the questions generated do not contain bias and allow me to hear the issues in a fresh and new light, as much as possible, given the fact I am aware that I am in some ways, part of the world I am researching.

To begin this process of IPR related to the design of interview questions, I initiated a list of assumptions I already held regarding college men who may be single fathers. When I felt I had exhausted this general list as much as possible at the time, I moved onto developing questions that may suit the population, attempting to not show bias of my assumptions in those

questions. I continued in a cyclical manner as needed, adding to the list of assumptions and re-working the list of questions as I went. To finalize the questions, I sought assistance from my advisor who can bring an outside perspective to the questions as yet another step for viewing it in a fresh light, to attempt to eliminate bias where it was evident and worked with my committee at the dissertation proposal meeting to refine the types of questions I would be asking. After the first round of interviews was complete, I met with my advisor and another committee member to discuss my findings so far and to determine what types of questions should be asked in the second round.

This process of setting aside my assumptions can be defined as “Epoche” or *bracketing*. Moustakas (1994) considered Husserl’s concept of “epoche” as a critical part in the phenomenological process in which we “bracket” out or “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85). Moustakas continued on to say that through this, “the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a ‘purified’ consciousness” (p. 85).

It is not Moustakas’ opinion that our assumptions harm the process or make it impure. In fact, it is the opposite in that it enriches the research. During Moustakas’ exploration of knowledge and transcendental phenomenology, he recognized that his “own knowledge and experience, in a free, open and imaginative sense, ultimately would determine the core ideas and values that would linger and endure” (p. 26). Moustakas also believed that there is a sort of reciprocal relationship between the other and one’s self, in that the lived experience of both are related. Schutz (1967) stated the following:

If I look at my whole stock of your lived experiences and ask about the structure of this knowledge, one thing becomes clear: *This is that everything I know about your conscious*

life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experience. My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. It is only because of this that, when I look backward, I am able to synchronize my past experiences of you with your past experiences. (p. 106)

In following these guiding premises, as a researcher, I should not feel as though my previous knowledge or assumptions about the topic do not matter to my topic, as it actually does matter a great deal. It is very important to be aware of my preconceived notions about single fathers, male college students, masculinity, and patriarchy. However even though I am a female and a single mother, I still have a lived experience as it relates to the aforementioned topics through my personal and professional life, in addition to my educational background and preparation. The very things that make me different from a single father, combined with my continued interest and knowledge in the topic area already, will only enrich my insight into my area of study.

As is common for phenomenological research, after the first round, data were analyzed to identify common issues and experiences in need of further exploration during the second round of interviews. The attached interview protocols include a list of overarching questions in addition to potential probing questions (see Appendices F and G). It was not expected that all of the potential questions on the protocol were to be asked of all interviewees. Instead, the questions were meant to indicate the topics likely to be addressed during interviews – primarily during the first round, but likely during the second round as well. Fathers were asked to discuss their experience as a dad while attending college and were also asked to share demographic information, in addition to information about their background, family and identity; school life; experience during the birth of their children; relationship with child(ren)'s mother and parenting arrangements; and friends, dating and college peers. Please see the interview protocol for more details on potential information that was gathered.

After the first round, I transcribed those first interviews and began initial coding. This led me to determining what follow-up questions were necessary and I developed additional questions based on the participants' responses in the first round. The content of the second round interview protocol questions (See Appendix G) was developed through a brainstorming session between myself, my advisor and one other member of my committee from my department. In the second round, in addition to a few new but related questions, I also made a point to clarify at least two comments from each of the father's first interviews to gain more depth.

Conducting One-on-One Interviews

I am ultimately viewing my research through the lens of me being female, so it is important that my participants feel that I accurately depicted their experiences, tone, and attitude from the male perspective. I built a strong rapport with my participants wherein they trusted me as someone who listened, who cared about their opinions and experiences, and someone who would keep their information confidential. They were vulnerable and open with me, and I documented my reactions to the interviews in analytic memos, as will be described later in this chapter.

In listening back to the recorded interviews, I realized that I unconsciously adapted my way of speaking to each of the participant's own patterns of speech. This technique may have also allowed them to feel comfortable. As a female researcher, it was of utmost importance to build that rapport when working with men, and I had confidence that I could do it because of my formative experience with conducting research for my Master's thesis.

It was in my original plan to interview the participants in two rounds, but this final decision ultimately came later since the number of participants was at the lower end of the recommended range of 5 to 10 participants. Having two interviews per participant allowed for

thicker and richer data and a more in-depth description of the phenomenon, and it provided an avenue for me to check the emerging findings in the second round. It became evident during my first few interviews that I wanted to know more, and when the idea to do another interview was proposed to them, all of the fathers indicated a strong interest in a second interview.

The interviews were conversational and the techniques I borrowed from could be considered *adjusted conversational interviewing* methods. I would characterize the interviews as very fluid, and the fathers allowed me to have a conversation with them—not simply conduct a one-sided interview. Each interview usually began with the same basic questions, but the order of questions was different for every participant, because I allowed them to guide me in what we covered, when. In addition, even if we skipped an area I needed to address, I always made sure to return later to those topics that we had not yet talked about.

Researcher Positionality Statement

In this section, I will address three areas related to my personal background and characteristics which bring a unique perspective to this topic. I view all of these areas as diverse yet complimentary at the same time, and added together, they form my worldview and framework that I used to conduct the study, design the interview protocol, and analyze my data. I am hopeful that the perspectives I hold add credibility to this study, in that I not only have the abilities but the outlook needed to do the work and do it well.

At the beginning of each first round interview, I described my background to all of the fathers, including the fact I chose to live with my father after the divorce, that I studied single fathers during my Master's program and that I am currently a single mother. I had planned that if they asked me anything during the first interview about my parenting situation, I would tell them I can share more with them at the end of the first interview. There were no points in time where

that happened during the first round, however with two of the fathers in the second round, I found times to mention it to them and was met with some curiosity but overall positive feedback.

It is important to note these perspectives related to my personal interest so that the reader understands my worldview as a researcher. It is also critical to make these perspectives known to myself and others so that I fully assume any bias I may encounter in the context of my position as a researcher. This is an effort towards *bracketing*, a very important part of phenomenological research. However, at the same time, these areas can address where my unique background can benefit the research as well. In bracketing, researchers “set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Previous Thesis Research

As mentioned, I conducted a qualitative study on the topic of single fathers for the completion of my Master’s degree in 2003. In addition to being interested in this topic because of a class assignment I completed, I have a very personal connection to the topic since I am a child of divorce who chose to live with her father after the separation of my parents during my high school years.

During my thesis, interviews were conducted with 16 single fathers with the aim of gaining insight into their personal experiences as fathers. Overall, the two most common findings indicated a bias against men in the court system and against men from society in general, and that in their personal lives and at work, the men had good support but there was a lack of formal support (such as support groups or single father programs). Other findings that arose in my study involved fathers reporting disadvantages in their personal lives related to social lives, time for themselves and finances, and some even felt like they had been doing single parenting even

before they separated from their partners (Johnson, 2003). For an illustration of the themes, see Figure A1 in Appendix A to view the figure used in my thesis to depict the experience of the single father.

At the time my research was conducted, it was my belief that the experience of single fathers had been ignored in the literature. And to this day, I continue to see similar findings, especially in the realm of men who are parents while attending college. Being able to apply my awareness of the topic, plus knowledge gained during the research process, will be beneficial to this new research and would extend research into an area that is almost untouched, thus allowing us to learn more about the experience of college student fathers.

I am fascinated in the similarities between the experience of the single fathers in my thesis and those from my dissertation study. I never imagined revisiting this experience over a decade later, but I am sure glad I did. Even 12 years later, with an entirely different group of men, from a different generation, it is both affirming and troubling at the same time to know that the essence of the experience has remained relatively the same. It helps validate the results of my Master's research, but I also feel saddened that the negative things the fathers from this study are experiencing have not changed much over the years, despite a renewed focus from society on men and gender in the last decade.

My Current Career in Student Affairs

I have been employed at North Dakota State University (NDSU) in the same office for almost eleven years, and our office recently became a part of the Division of Student Affairs due to a reorganization. I worked with primarily domestic students for three years when I began at NDSU as the study abroad advisor, and for the past eight years, I have been working with international students. Because of my years of experience working with students, I possess a

good amount of knowledge related to campus and the services available to students. In all my years at NDSU, I have never become aware of any services that are aimed particularly at male students. Because of my interest in masculinity, I have often pondered the reason for this lack of services and wondered if the needs of male students are being met.

But even with my years of experience on campus, and questions about the existence of services for male students or students who are fathers, I feel I have a unique ability to approach this topic with an open perspective. Because I work currently only in the advising of international students, I do not have extensive experience working with students in a setting where I would often be coming into contact with single fathers in particular. It is true that I do work with students who are parents and I am aware of their parental status at times, but I acquire this knowledge overwhelmingly in areas related to health insurance enrollment or immigration status—not in areas related to parenting challenges. In all my years of working in my office, I do not recall meeting a single father in an advising capacity. Even though I have been working with students for a decade, I do feel that I can bring a fresh perspective to the topic and even may be less likely to be biased because of my unique background.

Conducting Research from my Perspective as a Woman and Mother

Critical to my research paradigm is the influence of my personal characteristics on my conceptual framework. First and foremost, I conducted research on men, as a female researcher. This section is intended to document my process of *bracketing* my assumptions, a critical part of phenomenological research methods. A starting point for my bracketing process was the reading of an article by Arendell (1997), who reflected on her own experience as a female interviewing men, while conducting a study on divorced fathers.

In referencing reflexivity as a researcher, Arendell mentioned that “[s]elf-reflexivity is present also during interviewing, even though little has been written about the unspoken inner or self-dialogue” (p. 342). In this article, she gave the readers a glimpse into her own experience interacting with men as a female researcher. Her aim was to provide insight into the gender dynamics present as a researcher.

Near the beginning of the article, she mentions that she was “well aware that men were relatively neglected in studies of divorce” (Arendell, 1997, p. 343). Because of this commentary, I expected her to have a similar outlook as me, where I feel an innate desire to defend the situation of men, since I also feel that men have been neglected in the research. However, I was very surprised as to how the tone of her article then shifted to what I perceived to be a very bitter take on men. At times, Arendell seemed annoyed by the men.

In addition, Arendell (1997) reported very aggressive and frankly hostile interactions, and that personal boundaries were frequently crossed in the sense of physically touching her or seeing her as a romantic interest, and she felt that she and her abilities were often questioned. She even mentioned one interaction where a participant reached across the table at her to put his hands around her throat, recounting a story with his Ex-partner. As to the verbiage used in the article, she utilized phrases such as “lengthy tirade,” “targets of their wrath,” “harangues,” and “unsolicited” descriptions. She reported being “lectured” to, indicated fathers would “launch again into an instructional mode,” and she told of feeling challenged by the participants and hearing complaining.

As I read this article, I reflected on my experience with the single dads I interviewed for my thesis. There were a few somewhat awkward moments, however nothing was even close to crossing into the realm of inappropriateness or hostility. The fathers I studied were very willing

to open up to me and were very kind. Yes, they did sometimes talk negatively about their Ex-partner, however I did not see that as complaining.

This made me wonder, what was it about this researcher that had such a different experience than me? Was there a particular disarming quality about me that allowed fathers to open up? What was it about how she interviewed them that caused them to respond to her in such aggressive ways? Or was this in regards to what subsets of the population from which she drew the participants, relating to their backgrounds and socioeconomic status for example? Or, was I just missing something that Arendell was able to see? It made me wonder if my experience was unique for a woman interviewing men, and I have asked myself if my ongoing interest in masculinities and view of patriarchy influenced my interpretations of the data, compared to Arendell's life experience and where she was at mentally when she conducted the research and wrote the article.

To be honest, reading the article scared me at first. It made me ask myself what I was getting into. But then, I recalled my thesis experience, and how pleasant my time with the fathers had been. I felt I could be successful in this topic area again. This article, despite my dissatisfaction with it, was very eye-opening for me as I continued reflect on my role as a female who is conducting research on men. And fast-forward to my participants now, I had nothing but friendly and respectful interactions with these men.

The fact that I am a female researcher and a single mother brings a very unique perspective to the study of the experience of single fathers. In the introduction, I stated that I wish to view the topic through a lens of feminism, so in full disclosure I must mention that I view myself as a feminist. Many would say that feminism has gotten a bad reputation over the years and this is unfortunate because being a feminist does not equate to man-bashing. It is in

fact a desire to fight for equality for all sexes and genders. According to hooks (2000b), the “[f]eminist movement is advanced whenever any male or female of any age works on behalf of ending sexism” (p. 116).

In context of this study, most important is my role as a parent – and in particular, the fact I am a mother to a young son, because it very personally shapes my worldview on the topic of masculinity. In sum, my perspective as someone who holds the label of being a *single mother by choice*, raising a male child, is a complex yet possibly very fruitful perspective to bring to the topic of fatherhood and masculinity.

Data Analysis

To ensure I became as familiar with the data as possible, I personally transcribed the interviews and coded the data by hand. The following two sections will detail my transcription and coding process. I view the coding process as having begun even during the conducting of the interviews, and it evolved in tandem while transcribing, in addition to the majority of the coding process which was conducted after all interviews were fully transcribed.

Transcription Process

The actual typing during transcription was completed in Microsoft Word. Each line was pre-numbered in the document as I was typing, so as to provide easy reference to specific lines of narrative for the completion of data analysis. I also formatted the typed dialogue in one narrow column so that notes can be made easily on the edges of the paper when coding began. Time stamps created via the transcription software were also inserted periodically throughout the transcripts, to provide a gauge of time if I needed to return later to listen to a particular point in the audio recording.

I utilized “Express Scribe” brand transcription software which enabled the digital file to be manipulated by slowing it down and rewinding, so that typing was made more efficient. A USB-powered foot pedal was also used to assist with transcription. I repeatedly transcribed until I was satisfied that the narrative was accurately captured, and this involved two full passes through each interview, in addition to rewinding multiple times during each pass to ensure accuracy.

I transcribed literally what the participant said, word-by-word, including all filler words, and pauses as well where substantial. This helped me to remember the words and tone of voice of the father as he was being interviewed. While transcribing, I also inserted comments about laughter, facial expressions, emotions, or movements with their hands, to provide more meaning to the written word as to better retain that moment in my memory. In addition, I included initial comments and reflections in brackets, and this was a fundamental beginning for the coding process.

During the first round of transcription, I played the recording at approximately half-speed. But the actual speed used varied from participant to participant, depending on the unique speech patterns of the father. All data collected, for round one and round two, was equivalent to approximately 17 hours of voice recordings. Each interview ranged in time from approximately 50 minutes, to the longest being approximately 118 minutes. I estimate that it took me a total of 80 hours to fully transcribe the interviews, over the span of 3 months.

Coding Process

Below I will describe my process of coding my data and preparing it for analysis. I saw this as a four-step process. Firstly, I wrote analytic memos about my data throughout my entire study. Secondly, I coded handwritten notes before transcribing the audio. Next, I completed in-

line coding while I was transcribing. And lastly, after all interviews were completely transcribed, I printed out the transcripts and hand-coded the data in the margins of the transcripts. Another important part of my coding process included returning to my literature review after a few iterations of coding, for a reminder of the general thematic areas when it comes to understanding masculinity, and then continued coding from there.

The Writing of Analytic Memos and Initial Coding.

According to Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman and Beauchamp (2001), a “reciprocal relationship” exists “between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon” (p. 397). Therefore, to best understand my data, my coding methods should also align with my aims of observing the phenomena experienced in the lives of a college student father.

The writing of *analytic memos* can lead to even more exploration of your participants’ experiences:

By memo writing about the specific codes you’ve applied to your data, you may discover even better ones....Codes and categories are found not only in the margins or headings of interview transcripts and field notes – they are also embedded *within* analytic memos. (Saldaña, 2001, p. 41)

I wrote analytic memos, starting from the first day of interviews, and the memos began to lead me to some initial coding categories. I continued to write memos as I transcribed, allowing me to develop my codes during the eventual data analysis. Thus, the writing of analytic memos was integral to my coding process.

Coding was conducted in cycles as an iterative process where the codes and categories were defined and re-defined as I continued (See Appendix A for a listing of codes and sub-codes). I utilized a few different types of coding as warranted, but my main coding approach was open coding (or initial coding). In a reference to Clarke (2005), Saldaña suggests “a period of

‘digesting and reflecting’ on the data before beginning Initial Coding ventures” (p. 81). This period of reflecting on the data took place during and after the transcription of the data, as I absorbed the information through listening to the participants’ words and writing the analytic memos after the interviews.

Out of the open coding arose *descriptive coding*, including main codes and sub-codes, through the use of a noun for the chosen code (Saldaña, 2001, p. 70), such as *disadvantages* or *informal support*. Emotion coding was also useful even while I was transcribing the data so I could record my perceptions on the tone of the fathers’ voices as I was listening to their own words. This provided critical insight into how they are experiencing a situation as they were retelling their stories. As I iterated through each of the interviews, I tried to progress through them in the same order of participants one through six, and I found that helped me keep a regulated pattern to my analysis.

During the interviews, I took general notes on themes, and this in effect was my first official step in data analysis. After the first round was complete, I compiled all of the thematic areas and drew them on a large post-it wall notepad so as to better visualize the areas that were emerging. I also made word clouds of some of the initial findings, such as the three things or phrases about being a single dad (see Figure 2), and another one based on the overall themes that seemed to be emerging (see Figure 3). After completing this step, I met with my advisor to discuss the themes that were arising from these first interviews.

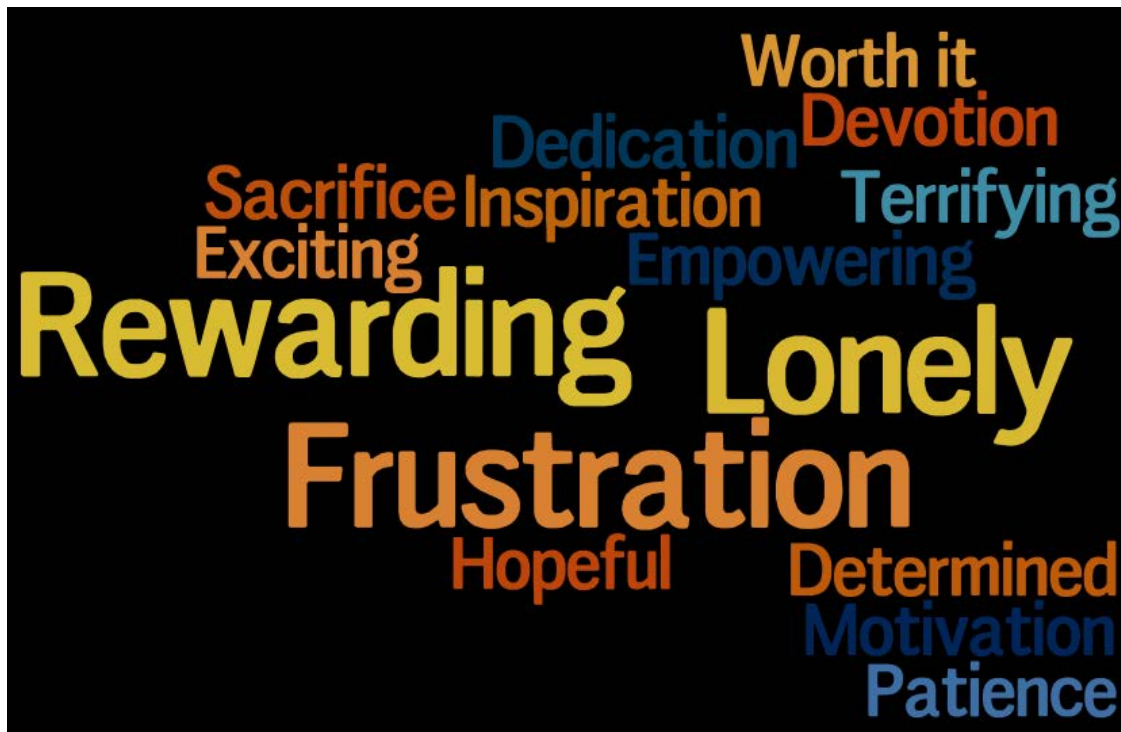


Figure 2. Word Cloud Depicting Three Words or Phrases to Describe the Single Father Experience



Figure 3. Word Cloud Depicting the Emerging Themes After the First Round Interviews

Coding During Transcription.

During the transcription process is when the second stage of coding began. I did inline coding while I was transcribing, picking out themes that were arising or even reflections I was making on my own which connected to my research or even to my own life. I also completed a few more word clouds to help with my analysis, in particular in the areas of advice for other single dads, perception of the typical college guy, and my analytic memos.

For all interviews, I listened through the audio recording a second time, this time at full-speed and did some additional in-line coding. I checked for errors and accuracy and added italics for emphasis. I also used this iteration to make sure I added notes about emotions, sighs, pauses, and other interjections where needed.

Post-Transcription Coding.

After the transcription process was complete for all interviews, I first brainstormed ideas about positive things that affect a father's identity. This was the most natural type of analysis in my situation because the overall feeling of the positive nature of being a single father is what arose for me first. I then highlighted the passages that spoke to their identity as a single dad.

I also looked at passages where the fathers talked about the ideal dad, and their experiences with their own dad. In addition to that, I compared that to how they talked about themselves. I highlighted these areas in a color-coded fashion for easy reference to prepare for writing. During this step, I also coded their emotions in red pen, to monitor the times when emotion was shown and in what context.

During the data analysis process, it became evident to me that I have a propensity to see the positive in these fathers' experiences. Becoming aware of this was another way that the phenomenological concept of bracketing entered into the process of exploring my findings. It

was a reminder to me that the way I see their experience can be connected back to the fact I am a single parent and that my own father was a single dad to me during high school.

Even though I was seeing so many positive things in the data, I was unexpectedly coming across things that contributed negatively to their experience; things that were sad or discouraging in various ways. These feelings led me to look for disconfirming evidence of the initial impression of positive findings. Yes, being a single father was a positive thing, and I was so encouraged by the fact that the fathers were so open with me emotionally, but I began jotting down the comments that surprised me in various ways. I also reviewed the transcripts more in depth for additional surprises that may disconfirm the positivity I was naturally inclined to see. The results of this process is documented later in the Findings chapter, in the section on the “Effects of Traditional Masculinity” and will also be reflected in the Discussion chapter on the topic of *rogue waves*. Focusing in on the negative effects documents the iteration back through my results, enabling me to get a more robust picture of the findings.

After searching for disconfirming evidence, I then returned back to the start, where I again examined the positive effects on fathers’ identity. To do this, I began noting all of my codes that could be considered effects on their experience, and categorized them as either positive or negative for simplicity. I then noted broad thematic areas for organizational purposes, based on the repeated themes I was seeing in the results.

Examples of positive effects or affordances given to single fathers include the rewarding nature of being a parent and serving as a role model for their children, or when I saw evidence of the men demonstrating emotional intelligence. Negative effects included examples such as bias in the legal system, courts or child support; or general disadvantages such as financial difficulties. There were also some categories where it seemed that the experience was dependent

on context or on the individual father's experience. For example, most had strong family support, but a few did not. Also, some talked about hearing reactions of surprise from others as to their single father status in the form of admiration, but sometimes the surprise came across to them as disbelief instead of something positive.

I tallied each of the positive or negative codes under each thematic area, according to which father it belonged to and the line number of the transcript where it could be found for easy retrieval later. The positive and negative categories served as a basis for me to begin organizing my findings chapter. However it should be noted that the thematic areas I began with do not exactly match the structure of the categories or headings in the findings because of how my understanding of the results evolved and became more advanced throughout the writing process.

Positive and negative tallies from both rounds were added up for each father, and a percentage was calculated to show which fathers, in ranked order, had the most positive effects on their experience in general. This was a crude attempt at analyzing my qualitative data in a quantitative way, and it allowed for me to holistically compare the fathers' overall experiences. The meaning of this exercise was confirmed through thinking about my general perceptions of the mood of each of the interviews, because the rankings provided additional insight and avenues for reflection on the findings. Averaging out the percentages, the experience overall was about 46% positive, ranging from 29% positive to approximately 65% positive.

As an example, the father ranked at the bottom of the positivity scale was a father who has a child with autism. He spent a lot of time talking about his son, and has a lot of daily challenges as to his own routine. That ranking did not come as a shock because he was the only father with full custody, and in addition he has a child with special needs so his experience is very different and probably more challenging than the other dads. But another example that did

surprise me was with a father who had the most troubled past, in my opinion, and was probably the most emotionally vulnerable. Ranking-wise, he was somewhere in the middle between the rest of the fathers. In examining this, that also made sense because even though he may be the most emotionally vulnerable, he was also the most reflective. The fact he is able to be reflective most likely has served him very well in remaining as positive as he can, despite his past.

After this process was completed, I returned to my literature review to revisit my conceptual framework to better organize and clarify my findings, and then, I began to write. I can describe the findings and discussion chapters as having been written in tandem. They are connected in a very reciprocal, cyclical nature. This illustrates the reflexive nature of my data analysis process in that I began writing the discussion chapter as soon as conceptual ideas came to me while I was bringing all of the findings together.

Concluding Thoughts about the Process of Data Analysis

When transcribing, I wanted to include bracketed comments about emotions such as laughter, because laughter seemed to be a meaningful part of how the fathers discussed their experience. I am glad that I left these comments in the transcripts because it was a way to convey yet another layer of meaning and how they used humor, specifically. I also left in pauses and sighs, if they were meaningful for understanding their mood as they were recounting something, and filler words such as umm's and ah's if it was critical to the phrasing. But, I sometimes did leave out filler words for ease of reading in the written dissertation, as long as removing it did not take away from the tenor of what they were saying.

As I analyzed the data, I re-read my analytic memos and pages in a notebook where I kept my own notes about the process, ideas about themes and sub-themes, and notes from my meetings with my advisor. I also kept a few notes on my phone to make sure I did not forget

something and reviewed those notes later as I was writing and then of course finalizing the dissertation.

I also used two different spreadsheets during the data analysis process. One was for the purpose of analyzing the aforementioned positive and negative tallies, and the other I called the “dad matrix.” It was the basis for constructing the dads’ profiles in Chapter 4, and it also included a tabulation of the number of hours of the data recordings, per participant and per interview.

In addition to having my advisor review my chapters, I also selected two persons to conduct peer reviews on specific parts of my dissertation to ensure clarity and add to the trustworthiness of my data, as a validity check during the data analysis process. The input of both of these people was vital to ensuring that the tone that I was using was appropriate for the topic at hand. Both persons I selected had extensive experience in higher education. One reviewer had expertise in gender and diversity issues, and I provided this person with my literature review to view it through the lens of gender theory and feminist theory, to ensure I was presenting my ideas appropriately.

And although not a participant, my second reviewer actually met the selection criteria for my study. His input on my findings and discussion section was significant due to his experience as a single father, since he was able to present his perceptions of my findings through the lens of his own experience. Many of the comments from the fathers rang true to his experience, so this led to additional *confirmability* in the data. My discussions with him left me with vocabulary that I could use as I made sense of the emotions that the fathers from this study were feeling. He reported it being therapeutic for him to read. These discussions were of much importance

because I was able to openly discuss how my words came through to him, to help ensure that men and single fathers would be comfortable with my presentation of this dissertation.

An obvious potential limitation for this study is the fact it was conducted with fathers from only one institution, and that the number of participants this study examined was low, and the racial diversity was not very broad since only one father identified as non-White. However, despite the small number of participants, the data gleaned from it was very rich.

Interviewing the fathers in two rounds only deepened my sense of their experience. If I would have had more time, I could have conducted additional interviews to glean a deeper sense of their experience, and I would have had more time to be more fully engaged with them. There were also limited chances for member checking and to get the participants' input on the findings. But, these limitations in this paragraph only arose because of practical constraints due to time and the eventual need to make normal progress towards the completion of the dissertation and degree in a timely manner.

It is commonly known that in qualitative research, one does not aim for generalization to a larger population. It was more important to get a purposeful sample of participants who could speak to their experience openly and were able to speak to it well. Also, there are many similarities to the findings from my Master's thesis. So across time and space, with approximately 12 years in between, the story of their experiences remained fairly consistent. Therefore, as a researcher, I feel that I could expect the findings to be very transferrable to a larger group, especially a group of fathers who are mainly White and attending college in the Upper Midwest.

CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter contains case summaries or “stories” about each of the fathers to help the reader gain perspective on each of the fathers’ lived experiences, before delving into other findings. Think of Chapter 4 as a ‘prequel’ of sorts to the Findings chapter itself, because many things mentioned here in this chapter are at the core of who these men are and the lives they have led. And because of this, I will refer back to their “stories” many times throughout the remainder of this dissertation. After their stories, I will present the results of a question I asked early on in each of the first round interviews, when I asked them to provide me with three words or phrases to describe their experience as a single dad. The descriptions are encouraging, yet at the same time there is an air of sadness hanging above this lived experience.

Introduction to the Participants

As to retain confidentiality, before exploring the men’s stories and presenting the Findings chapter, I will describe some overall traits that are important to understanding the backgrounds of the fathers that participated in my study. Because some of these traits could potentially identify a participant if associated with a father’s description and quotes presented in this dissertation, the characteristics will be described here in a general sense to assist in retaining anonymity on a whole. Here and in the rest of the dissertation, for any place names such as cities, states and universities, or specific details, I also changed or altered the names or inserted general words in brackets for any place names to de-identify even further.

Almost all fathers were white, and one identified as Native American. The Native American father shared with me which tribe he identified with, and he also commented on the experience of being “white-passing” as he talked about who he used to be before becoming a father:

He was smart and charming, and so, he got a lot of advantages and white male of course. Well, white-passing. Actually, I hate when people call me white. But and it happens here more often than you would think. Professors who know I'm native call me white.

Questions about sexual orientation were not directly asked by me, however through the act of conversation about Ex-wives, Ex-girlfriends and current girlfriends, it became evident that all of the fathers most likely identified as being heterosexual in my opinion through the conversations I had with them. Also of note is that the general word of "Ex" is being used throughout the dissertation, to describe the mother of their children. This word is general enough to describe all types of situations regardless of marital status, plus it was a word that some of the fathers used themselves so was fitting for me to also utilize as a descriptor.

All fathers were currently enrolled at State University in the Upper Midwest when the study began, and all considered themselves full-time students. Three were undergraduate students, and three were graduate students. Almost all fathers were to be graduating within a year of when the study began. As to those with different timelines, one has now already graduated and another just completed the first year of his graduate program so an approximate graduation date is undetermined for him.

The fathers were in varying fields of study: Two fathers were in engineering, two were in humanities, one was in a business-related field and another was in a health sciences field. Four fathers lived off-campus, and two fathers lived on-campus. Three dads lived with roommates, two lived alone, and one was re-married and living with his wife and child. All participants became fathers between the ages of 20 to 30. All fathers were considered non-traditional aged, ranging between 28 to 40 years of age, and all had either 1 or 2 children each. The custodial

relationships¹, as characterized by the fathers, included one father who had no legal custody of his child; 1 had full custody; and the remaining fathers had joint custody.

Two of the fathers were never married; three were divorced; and an additional father was also divorced but is currently remarried. As to employment status, one father was unemployed and the remaining fathers were working in various capacities, either on-campus, or off, or both. See Table 1 for a summary of some of the general participant characteristics

¹ I acknowledge that there are certain legal definitions at play here regarding custody, including varying arrangements of legal and physical custody. In this dissertation, we will refer in basic terms to their custodial situation, and in their stories it becomes more specific as to the amount of time a child spends with their father. For example, one of the fathers has no actual legal custodial rights to his son, however, he characterizes the time he spends with him compared to his Ex as about 50/50. Of most importance to this study is the time they spend with their children—not always the legal definition, because the legal definition may not fully represent the fathers' continual involvement in their children's lives.

Table 1.

Selected Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Total
Age	
25-30	2
31-35	2
36-40	2
Current Marital Status	
Never-Married	3
Divorced but Single	2
Divorced but Remarried	1
Current Education Level	
Undergraduate	3
Graduate	3
Area of Study	
Business-Related	1
Engineering-Related	2
Health Sciences	1
Humanities	2
Race or Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	5
Native American	1
Number of Children per Father	
One child	4
Two children	2
Sex of Children	
Male	5
Female	3
Living Arrangements	
On-Campus	2
Off-Campus	4
Custodial Agreement as Characterized by Fathers*	
Full Custody	1
Joint Custody	4
No Legal Agreement	1

*Note: Review Footnote 1 for more information.

As to the names I used for the fathers in this study, it had been determined before participants were recruited that a pseudonym would be assigned to each of the fathers. I did not formally assign any names to the fathers until I knew them and felt comfortable with the names chosen. Because I had six participants, the initial plan was to provide each father with a name beginning with A, B, C, D, E, or F, based on who I first interviewed. For example, the first father I interviewed would be assigned letter A. However, this did not work out in all cases due to the scheduling of interviews and the need to reschedule some, so that specific ordering rubric was sometimes abandoned.

As I got to know the fathers, I decided to begin thinking about their names for purposes of my study. I named some right away, and I named and even re-named others until I felt satisfied. I could not find a name beginning with F that I felt suited that participant, so I branched outside of the alphabet pattern and named him after a close friend of mine.

I also assigned pseudonyms to all of the children in the study, even if they were not mentioned by name by the fathers. In the first round, a few dads had not shared their children's names with me. But when the second round came, they most likely continued to feel more comfortable with me as time went on, and those fathers who had not shared the names yet did so in the second interview. Each time this happened, I had a feeling that I had broken through in some way.

In sum, the pseudonyms of my participants were as follows: Adam, Casey, Ben, Dan, Erik and Shawn. For all of the pseudonyms, fathers, their Exes or current partners, or children, I aimed to use pseudonyms that were fairly traditional names that I felt suited the participants. I used names that I simply liked, names found by browsing lists on the internet, and also names of people in my circle of friends as a nod to them.

Their “Stories”

In this chapter, portraits of each of the participants are being provided in the form of “stories”. Descriptions of the background of each of the fathers will provide context throughout the rest of my dissertation, to allow the reader to know the fathers not just in the light of their specific quotes provided later.

Also within each story I will present their views on fatherhood. With all the participants, I asked questions about what an ideal or ‘good’ dad is in their minds and whether or not they felt they’ve lived up to the ideal. Throughout the interviews, the concept of how they see themselves as a dad rose to the surface, whether that be in response to this specific question or at another time in the interview. In addition, the topic of their own fathers or other male role models in their life came up, with varying reports of types of relationships shared with their own father. A few dads said that they wanted to be the opposite of their dad – but still did mention their dad as a role model – either for good, or for bad. Some of the fathers mentioned other male role models in their lives besides their own parental figures, such as classmates and other dads that they know.

The theme of providing came up but not in the typical patriarchal sense of providing. To these men, providing seems to be much more than just financial. It is being there for your kids and being a leader or someone to protect them and teach them right from wrong. Also, guilt and shame was a thread that is woven throughout the data, where dads may be questioning whether or not they are ‘good enough.’ Overall, it seemed as though they aren’t always giving themselves enough credit and underestimating themselves.

Near the end of each first interview, I asked all of the fathers to give me one piece of advice to other single dads like themselves in college. So, each story will fittingly end with the father’s advice to other single dads like them, to illustrate the reflective nature of their advice.

And throughout the following stories, consider their perseverance. It is clearly evident that they have never given up. This is also evidenced in that they made the conscious effort to respond to my recruitment email, be present with me for two interviews, all the while sharing their stories and always being advocates for themselves and their children.

Adam's Story

Adam is in his late twenties, and is a single father of a 7-year old named Joshua. Adam became a single father when his son was around 2 years old. Adam earned a Bachelor's degree previously and was in that program at a previous institution when his son was born. After a few years, he moved to the area and just finished his first year back in school, and is nearing completion of his second Bachelor's.

He lives alone with his son, and he is currently not working but was seeking part-time jobs and also internships in his field at the time of our interviews. He finds it hard to locate a job that would be willing to work with his limited schedule due to the fact he is a single parent with a child that lives with him 100% of the time. His interviews were some of the longest, and this makes a lot of sense, keeping in mind that he is the only one out of the six with full custody and would have the most contact with his son and thus the most to share.

He was never married to his child's mother although they were engaged when she was pregnant. He told me that his son was "not an oops" and putting a spin on it, defining it as an "unplanned surprise." He also said that he "will never have regretted him." His current relationship with his son's mother is strained and he sees and speaks to her very rarely. Their relationship is nearly non-existent. She has not seen her son in 4 years and according to Adam, his son has little memory of his mom and does not recognize her in pictures. His son is currently in school and he has been described by the school system as "educationally autistic." Adam said

he was in the process of obtaining a diagnosis for his son, but the results were not clear and it could only be “suspected” that he is autistic. For purposes of this dissertation, I will refer to it as “autism” for simplicity’s sake.

His son lives with him full time and has primary custody. The mother has agreed to give him full custody but he said they have to wait two years to get the agreement readjusted. Despite that, however, he reported that she has signed a parental agreement however which gives him "final say on absolutely everything.”

Adam does make ends meet but struggles financially and is “living off savings.” Where he is currently living, in a different city from his family and girlfriend, he said “there isn’t a lot of support for me here.” He receives assistance from different formal sources such as food stamps², and he also receives child support and medical expense support from his Ex. However, according to Adam, she does pay some child support and should be paying 50% of the medical expenses, but she has only paid up about half of what she owes him and he said this was frustrating. He also receives financial help from his parents, and also from his girlfriend at times for things like gas or meals when he travels to visit her.

He explained that he does not qualify for childcare assistance because he already has a '4-year degree' and because he’s unemployed. He was very open in discussing from where or whom

² Fathers who were eligible for assistance in the form of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) referred to it as EBT Benefits (Electronic Benefit Transfer) or as it is most commonly known, “food stamps.” <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

he receives financial assistance however he is a very proud man who probably would not normally readily admit that to the average person because he doesn't want to be seen as relying on others.

Overall, Adam wants to spend time with his child – it is very important to him, and he wants to be the best dad he can be. When I asked Adam what his definition of a good father was, he stated: “Well, better than *my* father.” He then continued on to explain why he felt that way:

And I'm not saying my dad was bad. My dad, work, was always the priority. What he wanted, was the priority. My mom was a stay at home mom, since I was in first grade. And kind of everything was whatever my dad wanted...

In the same conversation, he talked about fearing his father in the past and how he tries to be different:

No, I've *tried* to be more understanding than my father. [I] try not to be *quite* so heavy-handed with the discipline. I know that I've *feared* my father at times. You know, what he would think, what he would do, even at 27, there's a few times I've [been] Oh God, what will he say if he knew about this, kind of a thing. But, you know, it's one of those things for me...Joshua needs to respect me. But at the same time, I would like him to know that he can come to me if he has a problem, you know.

Even though he wants to be different than his dad, they have a good relationship and he still models himself after his own dad in some ways:

For my parents, especially you know, my dad, with his career...he's pretty well off. And so for me...that's how I equate, in my mind...success, you know. When I was in high school and you know, my dad, dad married his high school sweetheart, my mom, after he got done with college. When I was in high school, it was my idea...here, you're my high school sweetheart and in the back of my head it was okay, you know, ultimately I'll end up married to you. Which ended up after we broke up the first time, coming back years later, after she was getting divorced, trying again, to find out she was cheating on me. So...a lot of those conceptions of you know what my parents did and that's what I should do.

Adam also talked about the regrets he has as a parent. He felt guilty that he pays to have his son in childcare when he's not working and talked about balancing his need for time for himself and searching for a job with the money that it costs to have his son in care. He said:

I can't justify sitting on my butt in my apartment looking for a job. But least I'm looking for something, in theory, you know. End up napping a bunch too...But it gets frustrating and, you know, what can you really do? So...there's lots of regrets when it comes down to [when] you don't feel like you're doing a good enough job. And, I don't know. You do the best you can, and pray in the end that you know there's more good times than bad times.

Adam's advice to other single fathers relates to having a good support network and having someone that can listen to you:

A good support network is probably the biggest thing. And that kinda goes...regardless if you [are] a dad or a mom I think, it's just having those people there that can you know relate [to], or are willing to listen. I'm really bad about that, myself, you know, developing those supports, and yeah, it would probably help if I actually got out a little bit more. I do have that difficulty, 'cause, I prioritize Joshua probably more than I should. I gotta have a life outside of him. But, at the same time you know, there's a lot of phone calls to my mom, the girlfriend...You need to have that communication and it can't all be about just the two of you in this little, you know, cell. That oh yeah you go to school, your child goes to school and stuff like that, but, you do need that support, and it is difficult when it's farther away, like it is for me. But...even if...my girlfriend was here in town, or parents were in town, they can't always be available...But no, that's about the biggest thing I could recommend is the support network. You know, even when my son was a newborn, and you know, here I am, barely 21 years old...closest thing I had was, I was 7 when my sister was born. And I'm sitting here going, Okay, I kinda remember what I'm doing, from what I did with my sister, but my sister was actually premature. She was on a ventilator for the first 4-6 *months* of her life. We actually had a live-in nurse practically...And it was just like okay, this child...is crying, and it's "Joshua, you need to go to your crib. I need to put you down, 'cause I'm getting frustrated." And then it would be, okay, *mom*, I need to talk. And it didn't help at the time that I worked overnights, [and] my girlfriend worked during the day. So I got really good at operating on like 2-3 hours of sleep and then being up for the next 20 hours. And, you know, 7 years later, guess what, I *still* do that. Where I can go and operate on 2-3 hours of sleep, and it's not necessarily always the best thing. But it's what I have to do to get through. So...but again, throughout all of this, there's always been that support network. People ...are, if nothing else, willing to listen to you complain and, talk about how yeah, the bills are getting here, you know, the medical bills are there, the rent is due, electric bill, daycare, all that stuff is there, but, you know, you've got that other person there willing to at least listen. And say okay, what's the most important thing.

Ben's Story

Ben is a single father of two in his late thirties. He became a father in his mid-twenties while married to his now Ex-wife, and they had two children together, a boy and girl: Kevin (age 13) and Rachel (age 11). He has been divorced for about 5 years. They share joint custody but

his Ex-wife has primary physical custody, with the children living with him every other weekend, at holidays and during the summer. He lives with his girlfriend and a roommate. He commented that he's had the children all summer for the past two years.

Ben is not happy with the living arrangement of his children when they are with their mother. They live at their grandmother's house which is very small, along with other family members, and their mother is not around much. His relationship with his Ex is strained but they do go to parent-teacher conferences together sometimes. Ben seems to bear hurt from the divorce. He indicated that the divorce was a sudden decision on the part of his Ex at the time and she locked him out of their home and wouldn't let him see his children. He said:

I had *zero* contact with them. She wouldn't let them contact me. Everything I had set up before so they *could* contact me, they wouldn't allow. And I don't know what it was...they were stackin' their deck for the court system or something. I have no idea, it didn't make any sense....No...nothin'. Just sat there at home, the whole time.

He was ordered to pay child support to his Ex-wife and finds that to be affordable in most respects, however what is not affordable are the unexpected expenses. Despite his income, unexpected expenses are difficult to come up with in a short period of time, as evidenced by an example he provided about recently suddenly finding out his daughter got dental work done and was bombarded by these extra expenses.

During our first interview he was only weeks away from graduating with his Bachelor's degree; by the second interview he had already graduated and was job hunting and I am happy to report that he did get hired and he told me it is a job that he loves. He indicated his girlfriend's parents helped pay off his last semester of school. He is fairly financially secure in that he lived in a house and had a steady income - however that seems to be due the fact that when he wasn't in school, he was working various types of jobs. He reported that this was not ideal however

because it took him away from spending time with his kids when he had them. Ben also indicated that he lived with his girlfriend and a roommate.

Ben began college near his home when he was younger, and then transferred to another college somewhere else in the country and really enjoyed it because it was one of the best schools he could go to for his field. He explained he had his first child and then eventually, he moved back to the area but in the end he could not afford being in school. Then with the financial difficulties he's gone through because of the divorce, and coming back to school, he even had to take a semester off, and he talked about it being a "vicious cycle," trying to find the money to get back into school and said that the financial issues is "basically...why it took so long to get done."

When I asked Ben what his idea of a good father was, he talked about being supporting your children and being accessible to them, including emotionally:

Good father – Be someone that can inspire, and hold your hand at the same time... They're able to be out there...to actually try to be like or...become like, but yet he isn't such a *deity* that you know they won't come down and just talk with ya. And someone that will be there to support, everything, every decision that you make and whatever else, good or bad. You know. And just to make sure that you're on the right track, at least about experiences that they've gone through and they know that if you go down certain roads that you're probably not gonna get the results you're lookin' for....just makin' sure that everyone's safe, and everyone has what they need, and can be all you can *be*...

More so than the other fathers, Ben tended to use words with negative connotations to describe himself such as "weirdo" or "dirt bag." These words and more used by the participants will be discussed later in Chapter 5. But in the above passage, he had described very positively what a good father is, and it was clear to me through our conversations that he follows these values but that he seems to be underestimating himself. I asked him if he felt he's lived up to the ideal. He said, "Not sure yet [*laughs*]. Not sure. Nah – just had so many doubts for so long. I just keep pluggin' away."

Ben talked about his own dad in our interviews, and talked about how his father was an unexpected role model of sorts:

I didn't think of my dad, until about 10 years ago [*laughs*], when I realized that...that if somethin' had to be done, things needed to be made, whatever else, he was always the first one in line, didn't say anything about it, that's how it worked. And I ended up realizing that I was doin' the same thing, so apparently *he* was definitely one... Yeah, I don't know, probably my mother, but I don't know, can't think of anyone else.

He saw his dad as a good role model, and a very hard worker who provided for his family, and he was very nostalgic about his childhood, however he did comment on his father not being around a lot when growing up:

Ahhh, growin' up was *good*. It was good. Ahh, I'd say my mother was more involved, than my dad, as my dad was the provider, and he worked overnights...until he retired like 4 years ago now...So, no, we would see him, but it wouldn't be as much. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, so, she was always around.

His mom passed away of cancer years ago, and his dad is now remarried. He does not care much for his stepmother and said that his dad is "whipped" by her, as she seems to make most of the decisions. He talked with me about his relationship with his dad now, and also what his dad has taught him over the years:

Relationship with *my* dad? Right now, I try to avoid him just because if I do start talkin' to him, he starts goin' off on these [tangents], he's gettin' lonely...He's out in his farmstead now and he likes to play farmer...and he's getting close to 70...so he's gotta slow it down but he keeps making it bigger [*laugh*]. He was...he was just *dad*. Don't know. Just made sure you stayed on the straight, and he didn't let you by with all that stuff. I just remember one of his two key pieces of advice from him was that if you ever go to jail, you're finding your own way out [*laughs*]. And, the only thing beer is good for is an expensive way to get a headache [*laughs*].

I asked him about his experience growing up and he said "it was all fighting and sports." He also talked about what raising his children has been like and began to connect it to his own experience growing up:

My daughter now, she's always been independent. On her own, all the time....and she just has a bunch of her artwork that she does. She really likes doin' the art stuff. So, yeah, so she was a lot *easier*, other than that, you realize, is...when I was growin' up, I was

with all boys. So, all I know is *boy* stuff. Whatever else, I never had like the sister-daughter experience. And, I remember them growin' up and everyone having that controversy of like, you can basically turn your son feminine or turn your daughter masculine and *no!* [laughs] You can see right away that's just how it, they're not like that. My boy'll pick up anything that has gun. [My] girl'll pick up anything that's a doll...So, I don't know. Those are the few things I remember.

I asked him if he thought they were pretty gendered, like his children just *knew* somehow and he said:

Yeah...I was just surprised at how gendered it was, because she had all this boy stuff. And that's all I was into, and she just [would say] 'Nope!' She was off drawin' and you know, just dolls, and make her little house things, and [laughs]. That and then when you put 'em into sports back then, 'cause we were in town...they both really liked the hockey...

Within the first 10 minutes of the interview, Ben showed some tears twice. I had asked him to talk freely about what it's like being a single dad and he said, "Uh, what it's like, is I sit there, well at least I do. And just wait until the next time you get to see 'em." As he was finishing, that's when he got tears in his eyes and began to cry. I knew there was a lot behind that, so a few minutes later, I probed about missing his children and asked him more about the fact he had said being a single father was lonely. He became emotional again and said:

Well, it's that. You come home, and there's nothin' there...And that's not how it was [before]. Sorry.

No that's okay.

It's just that first summer. [long pause]. It was just *bad*.

Not havin' them around, and...

Yeah, well, and they wouldn't let me have any...I gotta take one [a tissue] Sorry. [laughing a little]

I then said, "No, don't apologize!" And he ended by saying, "I didn't think I'd be like *this*. Ugh." This passage depicted our exchange, as he reacted to himself getting emotional. It seemed as though the emotions he expressed were surprising to him. In my opinion, Ben was the

most gendered of all the dads in my study, however he also was the most outwardly emotional, as I watched him clearly become so touched when he talked about his children.

Ben's advice to other single dads in college is to simply keep going. I asked him what he would say to other young dads out there and he said "It's time to grow up, son. 'Cause this ain't goin away, so you might as well get it done now." He then lastly said, "Stay the course. 'Cause it *will* end. And you will find the finish line as long as you stay the course. And don't get discouraged."

Casey's Story

Casey is in his early thirties and is a single father of two. He has a daughter named Alicia (age 11) and a son named Chris (age 10). He is currently a graduate student, served extensively in the military and also has earned an undergraduate and graduate degree in years past.

He became a single father approximately 8 years ago when he was divorced from his Ex-wife. The divorce was very amicable and they filed what he described as a 'joinder' as to the custody of their children, as opposed to a court-ordered arrangement. He described the custodial situation as joint custody, and neither parent pays child support; their relationship seems to remain fairly amicable. His Ex-wife has the children during the school year and he has them during the summer. During our second interview, he was preparing to leave the next day to pick them up for the summer from out-of-state. As to the future, he described how that it's been agreed-upon that once the children are of high school age, they can decide which parent they want to live with. Casey wasn't in school when his kids were born but was in the military at the time. He's never had his kids living with him during the academic year when he has been in school.

He struggles financially and indicated being homeless in the past, in addition to the fact that he grew up in poverty. He is currently working part-time. He has been married twice and has dated, however he does not see himself getting married again.

In all reality, his dad was not the ideal dad however he really looked up to him when young and he *was* the ideal for him for a time. It was clear he doesn't want to be like either his mom or dad, nor take on their parenting patterns. In talking with Casey about what his ideal of a good father is, I also asked how he learned to be a father and he responded:

My dad, from my first memories...was in *my* little 7 to 16 year old heart, probably *the* ideal father [*pause*]. We went fishing. He gave me his time, *generously*. He worked hard. He *wasn't* educated, but nonetheless, he got good jobs somehow...he, I don't even know [*pauses, very reflective*]....what specifically he did. To earn *my undying* loyalty as a child. But he did. And he probably *shouldn't* have...I don't wanna go too far off topic. [*laughs*]. He was arrested, that was the impetus for their divorce. For uh, sexual child abuse, of [a family member]. And as a 7 year-old, my mother made sure that I read...his private journals, that he kept...And that was my first exposure...to *sex*, in general, was you know, finding out about my father...I was in 3rd grade, I believe. And the parts that I couldn't read, she read to me. [*long pause*]. It - did *strange* things to me, to have that knowledge, at that age. And it quickly became public. Which, uh, affected me socially, to put it mildly. But I think that the hardest part was being *betrayed* by this man that I had put on such a *high* pedestal. Who would take me fishing. He could *pull over* along the side of the road, if I said I was thirsty, he could pull over on the side of the road, he knew that area so well, that he could find a spring. It was *magic*!

As he said the word, "magic," I will never forget the huge sense of emotion when he said it. It truly sounded magical, despite the upsetting actions and betrayal of his father. Casey then paused and continued on: "He knew *everything*. Could *do* anything. And, I don't know how my children think. But, trying to live up to my 7-year old belief in my father, would be *impossible*." For Casey, he said that the ideal father does the following:

[He] *gives* of his time. He *shows* his expertise, whatever that happens to be. It can be musical, it can be natural, it can be computers. Doesn't matter. But *sharing* of his expertise. And [*pause*] he is *slow* to anger. But *quick* to correction. And he's a *rock*. Some place where *you* can go, to feel *safe*. So yeah, that's [an] ideal father for me.

I asked him if he feels like he's lived up to the ideal and he said:

No...Course not, nobody can. Nobody that's really trying, can. But that's not a bad thing. On the contrary, I think it's what keeps you striving to be better all the time. So, I don't ever wanna be satisfied with my performance as a father. Because if I am, I'll stop trying.

As a father, it's clear that Casey always wants to do better, and wonders if he's doing enough. In this same vein, he talked about his role as provider:

I think it's a struggle because men in general, or at least *I want* to provide. I want to give them a better life than I had. And I think that I have. But it's a struggle because it's always you know, a question of "Am I doing enough?" You know? And I don't think they care as much as we think they care. I think that they're happy with whatever they end up, you know, whatever situation they end up in, especially my daughter. She seems to be able to see the bright side of everything. So yeah, I think that, the whole 'single fatherhood' thing is characterized by self-doubt and then moments of euphoria when you realize that you are doing better.

On the flip side, he also wonders if he's "doing *too much*" when it comes to parenting, or trying too hard with school:

You know, at times I'm like well, I've got a degree, I've come far enough! I look at how many people in the U.S. have graduate degrees and it's like, you know, why am I *still* pushing? Why not just stop now and work like you need to.

To Casey, of utmost importance when parenting is simply giving kids your time:

I think that you as a father have to evaluate what's best for you, what's best for your kids, and figure out what the best decision is, and *know* that the best thing that you can give your kids is your *time*. So, if you are taking too much away, to get *too little* back, then that's a calculation that doesn't add up. But if you're getting enough *from* what you're taking away, then you know, it adds up. And it adds up for me.

As a footnote to Casey's story, I wanted to mention that after assigning the pseudonym of Casey, I was curious as to the name's origin and found that its general meaning is *brave in battle*. This was a powerful descriptor of him and it reflected my internalized perception of him as a brave soul, in addition to his military experience which is obviously a key part of his identity. He is an extraordinarily articulate and reflective person, which was evidenced through our conversations, and he seems to have spent a lot of time reflecting on his life and the concept of masculinity and being a parent.

When I asked Casey what piece of advice he would want to give to other dads like him, he began by saying, “God, I’m hardly the person to give advice to anyone.” And then laughed a little and paused. He then said:

I guess, *know* your priorities. If you’re *in college* to make a better life for your kids, make sure that you’re not taking away their life with their father, in order to give them a better life when they’re older. You know, make that calculation. I think that...for me, I could work outside of having a...degree, but I *would not* be the person that I wanna be. And I wouldn’t be *the* ideal person for them. And so I *make* the choice to pursue my...degree, so that I can be in a situation where you know, when they need something, they have it. And when they *want* something, most of the time they can get it. And, that’s not gonna be the same situation for everybody. Somebody can be happy with a bachelor’s degree and make a *great* life with a bachelor’s degree. That’s just not me. Because I don’t [*paused*], my experiences in life have made me a person who *has to do* things a certain way, and with my [graduate degree], I’m gonna be able to say, this is the *way* things need to be. And that’s not gonna be the same for everybody. So yeah, I think that you as a father have to evaluate what’s best for you, what’s best for your kids, and figure out what the best decision is, and *know* that the best thing that you can give your kids is your *time*. So, if you are taking too much away, to get *too little* back, then that’s a calculation that doesn’t add up. But if you’re getting enough *from* what you’re taking away, then you know, it adds up. And it adds up for me. But, you know, that’s up to everybody else to make their decisions.

Dan’s Story

Dan is in his early forties and has one daughter, Alyssa, who is 9. Dan was married and became a father in his early thirties and was finishing an associate’s degree when his daughter was born. He had two years off before starting his undergraduate degree, and now he’s been in school for 6 years. He was married for a total of 7 years to Alyssa’s mother, however they got a divorce early in their marriage, and he was single throughout most of his undergraduate and graduate education, until he got married again. He has been married to his new wife Melanie since last year.

He and his Ex-wife have a very amicable relationship now and their divorce was also amicable. They did not use a lawyer. They share 50/50 joint custody of their daughter. Dan pays child support to his Ex-wife but it is a negligible amount due to the comparison of their incomes

at the time it was assigned. He said they have made a “running joke” of it as it came out to be only \$32 a month that he is paying but he is still obligated to pay it and neither want to go through court again to change something as small as this.

Because of where Dan chose to pursue his current graduate degree, he and his Ex-wife had been living in different cities for a few years, and his daughter stayed with him during the summers and on some weekends. On those weekends, he would drive to pick her up and bring her back to his home in town. Now as of this summer, his daughter has begun living with him full-time and will attend school here and see her mother fairly regularly. He enjoys watching his daughter and new wife bond.

He is a very well-spoken and educated man whose personal interests also tie into his educational interests. He will soon finish his graduate degree and is already working in a full-time job related to his field and seems financially secure now with that job. Although financially it was tough before, and he previously had rental assistance and EBT benefits, and also used financial aid.

I had asked Dan to have him tell me about his experience growing up and his relationship with his dad. I felt that many of his dad’s characteristics sounded like what a good father may be described as. So I then asked him if these traits would be the traits of an ideal dad and he agreed. He told me about how he’s reflected on the fact that his dad impacted his life more than his mom did and talked about a time he got his dad something in a gift shop but completely forgot to get his mom anything:

They had in their gift shop...like a military tribute thing and they had an air force mug that had a lot of the different fighter jets, and...it was like, I *knew* my dad would love it. 'Cause he loves coffee, he's retired air force you know....so we got that for him and gave it to him, and then after, ...well I think it was just yesterday, my wife and I were talking she's like, did we get your mom *anything*? And I'm like yeah, yeah, we had to have right? And I realized 'cause we drove up *there* and we bought all of the meat and we

bought everything for a cookout to have at her house but we didn't bring her a specific *present*. And so I was like, well nuts! [laughs] You know, 'cause I guess I just didn't *think* about that. But, I found that *interesting* as I thought about this interview coming up as well. I was like wow you know, I mean, I guess it goes to show that to *me*, at least, my dad made the bigger impact, on me... 'Cause I'm always thinkin' about stuff like that. I mean I think about my mom too a lot and it's not like I *don't* love my mom and stuff, but it was just...interesting like, why did I buy a present for my dad the minute I saw it, 'cause I'm sure I've seen things that would remind me of my mom you know, so I was like man, like we gotta do somethin', get mom somethin'...

Dan is someone who seems to always strive to be a better person and wants to provide safety and security for his daughter. In response to a question about how others see him or how he wants others to see him, he responded:

I feel like I'm providing that security and safety, 'cause I see how she is...I watch her emotionally and how she thrives...So...that's how I think of myself as a father. I think, I honestly feel like I'm doing a good job. I always want to do more and maybe that's why, 'cause I am my own worst critic. And I'll be beating myself up like I didn't get her to 'this', and I'll have other people be like holy cow I didn't even do any of that...so I think some people think that I'm trying to be super dad or something, and I honestly feel like I'm just doing the *bare minimum* of what everybody *should* be doing.

Dan's response to my question about advice for other single dads began with simply, "Oh man" as he contemplated the weight of the question. I asked him for example to connect it to before he was married for a second time.

I would say, the best piece of advice I could give is the understanding that the understanding that it's gonna be tough. There's gonna be *really* tough days, so *acknowledge* that, to *start* with. And just determine that you're going to go forward, no matter what. And seek out as best you can, and *create* the best support network you can. I mean if that's your family, that's great. If it's your friends. Whoever it is, find somebody...who can help support you, 'cause you'll need it at times. You'll need people to help pick you up. But just go back to that. Have that determination that no matter what happens, you're *not* gonna check out you know. You just, you're not going to. And you will come through. It will get easier, as the kids get older...it gets easier. You build those skills and eventually...if you let yourself, you'll learn more from them than they probably learned from you.

Erik's Story

Erik is a graduate student in his late twenties and has a 9-year old child named Matthew. He was never married to his son's mother and has been a single dad for about 7 years, since his

child was about two. At first, the mother would not let him spend much time with his son and wasn't able to spend time with his son alone until that was ordered by the court. He told me about that process of trying to get more time:

This is why we broke up. She wouldn't let me take our son and do anything with him, on my own. She wouldn't let me take him to my mom's house. She wouldn't let me do *anything*. She lived with her...mother...[who] was at the time, very overbearing. She lived with her mom, and her 4 siblings...It was just a tough environment. I wasn't happy there...I didn't feel like it was a very healthy environment for myself. *Or* for my son. Our son. And, she didn't wanna move out. She had opportunities to move out. She didn't want to. And I basically got to the point in time, where we had broken up. And she wanted to get back together and I said you know, I'm not gonna get back together with you *until* you agree to let me basically have this time with him, you know, if you go to work and I don't work, I should be taking care of him. But that wasn't allowed. And so then we broke up and then that was final, and then you know, we went to court...there wasn't any...time where I watched him or had time with him alone, until *after* the court ordered it, basically. So, it was very one-sided, and that's why we weren't together. It wasn't gonna work out...

So...you were trying....

Oh I was definitely trying...*I was very happy to be a dad*, and I was...providing and everything and it was very one-sided and she was very immature...I think it had a lot to do with the [controlling] by her mother. And so, unfortunately, that's the way it went...

Erik also explained that the break-up had been made worse because she assaulted him, and she was then arrested for that. He explained: “[T]hey were charging her with a couple different felonies. I actually called up to the district attorney and said hey, you know...go a little lenient on her, you know. She is the mother of my son...so they *did*.”

His situation is unique in that he lives in a different state than his son, and that is made more difficult by needing advance permission to take him out-of-state, so his son rarely comes to spend time with him. Instead, Erik returns to his hometown to stay with his mom regularly, about every third weekend, and his son comes to stay with them during that time. He typically has him for a month each summer and then every other weekend for the rest of the summer. This summer was different in that he was doing an internship out-of-state. When Erik returns home, it is clear

that this time is intended specifically for spending with his son. I'm glad to report that he received a job offer over the summer, however he is still actively looking closer to the area so that he can be closer to his son.

He does pay child support to Matthew's mom, and he classified his custodial relationship as 'joint-legal' – however his Ex-wife has more physical custody in that he lives with her more than with Erik. He works part time and I would consider him to be financially stable. He's been able to budget so as to not “live outside of [his] means”. His relationship with his Ex was previously very strained however it has improved and become more cordial over the years. His own father passed away a few years ago.

As far as his big role models in his life, he mentioned both his dad and stepdad, but in a different way than expected:

I guess I learned a lot about parenting from I guess, the two main role models in my life. My dad and my stepdad. I learned how to be a dad based on what I thought they did *wrong*. Not so much what they did right.

However, he continued on to talk about what his dad taught him about such as “good values and hard work” and the “lessons” he imparted. But he said, “His *style* was not” and that he felt his dad learned that style from his own father. He said he learned some nurturing behaviors from his mom and that she was “very caring.” As a father, this is how Erik described in full how he wants to be seen:

I don't wanna be seen as *authoritarian*, I guess. That's kind of how *my* dad was. But, I guess being, I'd like to be seen as you know...a *good* father that's going to instill some *good* values and teach lessons from mistakes, or you know, really instilling good values. And not letting the *little* things bother you.

Erik knows there was a positive side to his dad, and begins connecting what his dad taught to how he practices being a father, and how he wants his son to trust him. He said:

So there was a good side to our dad... instilling good values, and you know, being able to think ahead, have critical thinking skills, and I remember...he'd always talk about like

what about the ‘what if’s’ like, what if this happened, what if that happened you know. Have contingency plans *for* your plan that you have in action right now. ...[My son’s] only 9 right now, but I mean, as he gets a little older, that stuff’ll start comin’ into play. But, you know, sometimes I feel like...I’m definitely not tryin’ to be a friend to him. But you know, I think you know a lot of people say don’t be friends [with] your children. But then...I look at people when they get a little bit older and you know, some of my good friends that are girls...[who say] ‘My mom’s my best friend.’ That kinda thing you know, so I mean, I think *parent* first but then you definitely have time to be a friend to your children, because...I want Matthew to be able to come to me, with whatever. And he *knows* this, I’ve told him this. So you know, if something happens, whatever happened, you just come to me. I’m not gonna be *mad*. You know, don’t worry about me gettin’ all mad and pissed off and freaking out at you. I want you to know that you can come and talk to me about it. We’ll figure it out. So. I guess, you know, to your question, where did I learn to be a dad. I think it was just through my experience, and how I thought...would be the best way to be a dad.

Erik’s advice for other dads centered on being there for your child and maintaining a positive outlook on life, something that was very clear from my interviews with him:

I’d have to say that [pausing throughout], you definitely wanna make your presence felt for your child. Because you know, they *need* that, from you...I think one of the biggest things I could say, is don’t get deterred by having the tough relationship with the mother and, just keep doing positive things every single day that you can, to move yourself forward, in the most positive way. And [if] you do that, it’ll show. And in the end, you know, your child will see that and will be like, wow, I’d rather be like my father than maybe someone like this. So. Just stay positive [*laughs*]. That’s the biggest advice I can give, is stay positive.

Shawn’s Story

Shawn is a single-father of one child, a boy named David (age 7). He is a full-time student in his early thirties. During the summer when the interviews were conducted, he was working two jobs and seems financially stable to some extent. He was never married to David’s mother and until now has not been able to have the means to get his rights as a father.

When his child was very young, Shawn’s Ex took his child and moved out-of-state with him to Nebraska before he could get papers filed to stop the process. It was very difficult on him and his son when they were far apart. Many miles were driven and many trips taken by both

Shawn and his parents so that he could make it possible to have time with his son. He indicated that his son's mother got full custody automatically.

His Ex has moved back to town and at this point, she has him most of the time but he gets his son every other weekend and some weeknights scattered throughout the month, and he said that he does not have any court-ordered rights although they have had a mutually-agreed upon visitation schedule. He characterizes the custodial arrangement as "about 50/50." Because Shawn is currently in school, and because his son is in elementary school, it is difficult for him to have him more often than that at this point.

His relationship with his Ex is strained in his opinion of her, however it is semi-amicable when it comes to their son, and he has a good relationship with his Ex's parents when it relates to his son as well. Shawn is a very determined man, as evidenced by his attitude of not giving up, even though now he has no court-ordered rights to his child. He is just waiting for the right time to pursue something, in addition to finding the money to do so:

So as far as custody...I either need to get the money to hire a lawyer to get it official, to keep her from doing that again. But right now she's kind of in a stable job so I'm not so worried. But it's *expensive* to get a lawyer, or as I try to do it myself which some people recommend, is that it's not that hard, you just go in and you get your time. Like, really? 'Cause I feel like I get like one shot at this and if I can't prove it, I can't go back and try again. So I don't know, but right now, it's working and I'm trying to save up for it.

He gets some financial help from his parents, and his Ex's parents help with watching his son. When his David was born, he was working full-time and going to school and had to drop out of school to provide financially for his son. He reports using financial aid to help with his rent expenses at this point in time.

As a child, he felt forced into things by his parents, and he doesn't want to be like that with his son. His dad was a good role model for him, however he said he was emotionally not there for him. In contrast, through Shawn's words, it was evident he is very open emotionally

with his son. I asked him to compare his relationship with his son to the relationship he had with his own father and talked about how his father had an “alpha male” attitude. He said:

Emotional sharing. With my dad, there’s none. ...he takes that stereotypical portrayal of an alpha male, kind of thing, where you don’t cry, you know don’t show your emotions, *real man, you’re tough, walk it off, rub some dirt on it*, kinda stuff. Which at you know, younger, I didn’t really think any different of it. A lot of males in my family are that way. My mom was like an emotional roller coaster though. She was all over the map and every time I did something wrong, it was like full-bore emotion of like everything that was going on in her life, like dumped on me. And...I would shut down and wait til she got done and then I would just leave the room ...there was no two-way street about it, it was always one way. Even kinda with my dad, when he did, express like, frustration in me or disappointment or something like that it was always just him telling me how I should be, rather than...how are you, you know?

He then continued on to explain why he’s doing it differently with his son:

Which...when it comes to my son, is [why] I’m trying to be exactly opposite of that. It’s like, when he’s feeling blue, I’m like you know, “What’s wrong...what are you feeling, how does this make you feel?” Especially when it comes to his mom and I being apart. You know, “Is it difficult? Do you like the person living with you know, is it hard for you when you talk about your mom and dad not being together with your friends in school?” and stuff like that. And he’s not really forthcoming with information, which is fine, I’ll let him kinda come on his own. But, I keep asking him over and over again, like you can talk to me. We gotta be open, ‘cause I want you to trust me so when you do have a problem in the future, you can come to me. ‘Cause...if you got a problem, I probably already done it and I probably already done it like the wrong way, so I can tell you how to do it the right way or whatever...Because that’s how I was when I was doing everything wrong and then I had to be corrected. According to them.

As for another male role model in his life, Shawn really admired his grandfather. He told me a little about his grandpa, and became emotional when he told me he had passed away earlier this year:

I looked a lot up to my grandfather. He was a farmer, and as a kid I was gonna be a farmer, for, forever. That’s *all* I was gonna be. But it was like, it was his hard work, his dedication. Like, his *love* for what he did. And, his ethics. How he treated his neighbors, how, even like how something as simple as like how he plowed his field. If they had two adjacent pieces of land, he wouldn’t drive his tractor on the neighbor’s land. He would back up and plow. It’s just simple stuff like that that made him a great man, and that’s what I kinda like to strive for. And I just lost him too...

Above, Shawn talked about what made his grandfather a great man. It is clear that he uses this to guide him in being a father. When I asked Shawn what advice he would give to other dads like him he talked about being there for your kids and it all being worth it in the end:

Single dads like me? Piece of advice....I just keep working. Keep working hard at what you're doing, I mean, to *be* that role model. You just got to keep doin' the next right thing, and be there for your kids. It's not gonna be easy, *not at all*. But it's that, it's the perseverance and the hard work, the dedication, and the sacrifice, it'll all be worth it.

Three Words to Describe Being a Single Father

Near the beginning of all first round interviews, I asked the following question of the fathers: "If you could pick three words or phrases that would describe to me your experience as a single dad, what would those three things be?" Where needed, I also sometimes followed up to that question by then asking what it's like in general, being a single father. The "three words" question allowed the fathers to concisely encapsulate their experience in a few words, and this primed us for the interview to follow.

The first word Adam chose was "patience," followed by some laughter. He then said, "frustration and a lot of devotion." Recall that Adam's son Joshua has autism. When I asked what it's like being a single father, Adam began by describing his son as a "unique child" and also told about how he was engaged to be married within the last few years but that the relationship broke up, and he said this change was very hard on his son. It was especially difficult because they had been living with his parents before living with his fiancée, and then all of a sudden, they were on their own. Adam experienced a lot of role strain since then, trying to manage parenting and being a student, describing the experience as a "never ending battle."

Ben stated the following in response to my question: "Determined, lonely..." and "inspiration. Just want to be the inspiration." I followed up by asking, "So you wanna be the inspiration to your kids?" and he said, "Yep." I then asked Ben to talk freely about what it's like

being a single dad, and he became emotional, with tears in his eyes. He said, “What it’s like, is I sit there, well at least I do – and just wait until the next time you get to see ‘em.”

The first word Casey chose to describe his experience was “lonely.” Listening back to the interview, his voice even had a pang of loneliness to it as he spoke of it. The other two words he chose were “rewarding,” and “hopeful.” This is the full context of how he eloquently described it to me:

Lonely, is one of them. You know, it’s a hard, hard thing sometimes to raise kids alone, because it does feel like it should be a two-person job. So, yeah, but it’s also rewarding, as a second word. Because, I get to see the result of everything in that I’m doing...I do still talk to their mother, and I get to hear it from her...how what I’ve done over the summer is helping them you know, in the start of the school year. Because I always try to keep them up with their schoolwork over the summer. [Pauses] Hopeful? I think that having as much influence for as an intense, as intense a time as possible, as I do...it gives me hope that they’re going to [pause] grow up in a way that maybe I would have been able to give them, had I stayed with their mother...had things worked out differently...you know, that’s what children represent right. *We have them so that we can hope for a better future. And...they’re designed to replace us, yeah?* So...I think hopefulness is what every parent has, when approaching parenting and then you know, the other things, they come along, but you have to parent from a place of hopefulness I think.

Dan first responded to this question about what things come to mind by saying “Oh wow...that’s a great question.” Dan said the experience was “terrifying, but totally worth it” and described a feeling of empowerment that arose for him from parenting, especially the parent of a girl. In full, he answered the question as follows:

Oh, wow...that’s a great question. Um, 3 things...I would say, it’s *terrifying* but totally *worth* it. Would be one phrase. Um, and I would say another one and maybe this is cliché, but you really get *out* of it what you put into it. Just so important. And then [pauses] I would say...it’s *very* empowering. That would be a good word. And I would say the reason why is because...I really think that’s the reason why a lot of fathers abandon their kids or are only willing to take them for a certain amount of time. There’s selfishness, but I think there’s a lot of *fear* involved. In that we think of moms as the traditional more caretakers and so I think when a guy finds himself with kids by himself he has no clue. And he’s afraid and unfortunately I think a lot of times that *fear* stymies them from even *trying!*? And if they fail which all, every parent will, no matter what the support structure, you will have failure moments, they just won’t push forward. And so if you do, you find out that you *can* do it, you know, you can! And, you absolutely get those

rewards back, you know. And then that empowerment I think comes, the longer you do it. It's the exact same thing as we say, as we tell single moms right, you know. As you do it, you feel like oh I *can* do it, you know? And this isn't going to break *me*, I'm actually not breaking my kids, you know, I can actually *accomplish* this. And then, that feels really good. I mean, it made me feel like I could do *anything*. I mean if I could raise a little girl, I feel like I could do anything.

Erik used the words “dedication,” “sacrifice,” and “motivation” to describe his experience:

Definitely dedication, and sacrifice, you know, and there's a lot of times...[when] I've had my son, so it's like, people'll say, 'Oh what are you doin' next weekend?' “Well, I have my son.” So that's just the end of that. That's the way it goes, you know...I don't see it as a hindrance at all you know. He's been a very motivating factor for me, to get as far as I have. Being able to go to grad school, and being asked to come back here to do the research that I'm doing. And it just motivates me...[motivation] is a big one.

When I asked Shawn the question, his first word was “frustrating.” He then paused to think a little more and then continued on by saying,

Really exciting and fun. Having a little boy is awesome. And rewarding. Yeah, the little guy saved my life, in a way...yeah. I mean, I don't want it to be all bad, I mean bad stuff happens but we came, I mean we got through it, you know.

When Shawn said that “*the little guy saved my life*” – it made me wonder where he'd be today if he hadn't had his son nor the skills to persevere.

Footnote

As an addendum to this chapter, I wanted to mention how encouraging it was to hear the enthusiasm from the dads when they talked about how happy they were that I was doing this research. Shawn was the first dad to respond to my recruitment email – and his email came in within about 20 minutes of the message being sent out. When I told him he was my first response, he said: “Oh nice!” And he then continued on to say with lots of emphasis: “I was excited when I read it. I was like ohhhhh I gotta talk about this!” That energy is an accurate depiction of the interest I felt from the dads who were a part of my study. In the findings section on the topic of dads feeling overlooked or dismissed, I will address more about their opinions

about how men are left out of this type of research and why they were so very excited about participating.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

The findings of this dissertation are being provided in advancing stages. In Chapter 4, I presented the father's profiles or *stories* as a way to begin with some basic information on the fathers and who they are which allows the reader to experience the fathers' situations on a more personal level. In addition, the "Three Words" section from the previous chapter was also intended as another step in getting to know the participants. This type of process is being undertaken to hold true to the phenomenological research perspective, so that the reader can begin to understand what the collective lived experience of single fathers in college is like, as I slowly introduce the fathers. Through this, the reader can have an overall feeling for the similar experiences they have had as a single dad, but yet at the same time being able to view every dad's situation as being very unique.

Now, the main Findings chapter is being presented. I will review the rewarding nature of being a single father, including experiences that contribute to their success in life as a student and parent and provide them with certain *affordances* in life as a man. Secondly, I will address other evidence found to the contrary—the negative influences on their identity or disadvantages of the single father experience which disconfirm the overall positive experience of these fathers. Next, areas of challenges in the fathers' experiences will be reviewed, where the experience was context-specific and either positive or negative given the circumstances. And lastly, I will also discuss the effects of traditional masculinity on these fathers' experiences, where patriarchy became visible even if just for a fleeting moment.

Many examples will be provided to illustrate how these experiences played out for them in a patriarchal world. The reader will witness the formation of the identity of the single father in college. I will illustrate the divide between the positive identity that these men share because of

being parents, and the negative world of *Guyland*. We will learn that these men have made a choice to not ascribe to the values held by typical college men. This has either been a conscious decision on their part, or something that was learned by design, as their identities were being formed through becoming parents.

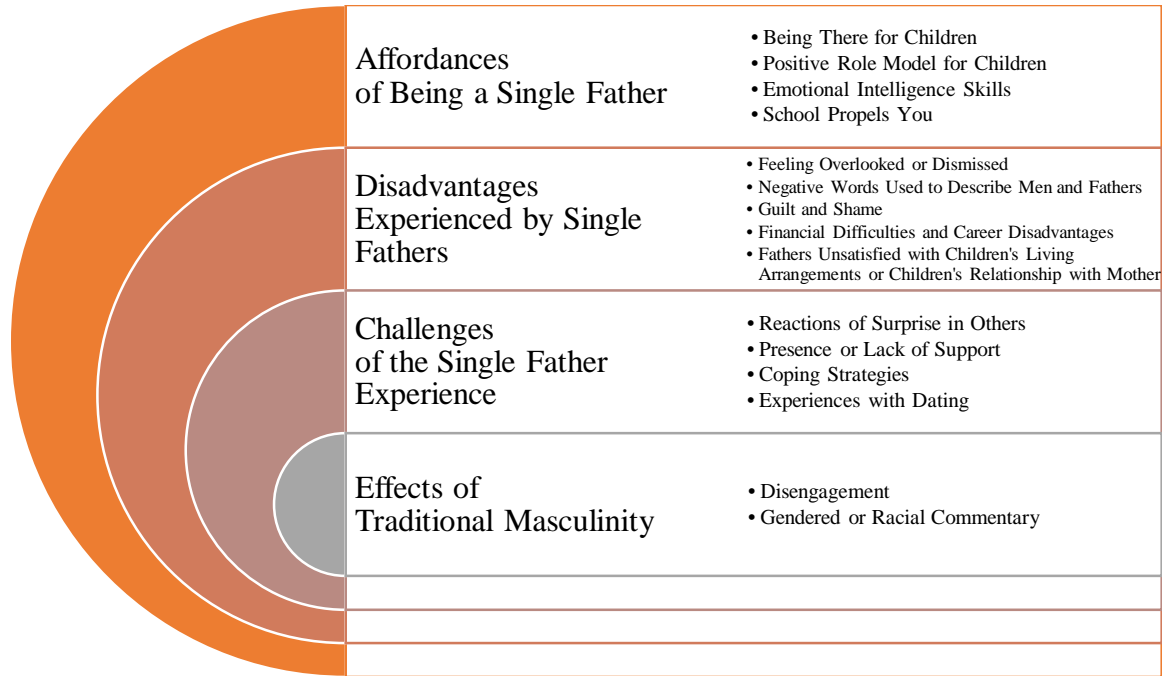


Figure 4. Contributions to the Formation of the Identity of the Single Father in College

As evidenced in Figure 4, the men had certain affordances provided to them through their role of father. In this positive space of being a father, they are able to project themselves as involved, nurturing fathers who are allowed to be in touch with their emotions. This contrasts significantly against *Guyland*, the world in which other college men find themselves. This is a world in which many of their classmates may try to belong—the culture of drinking, partying, women and no responsibility. But for the fathers in this study, the world of the typical college guy is completely foreign. They understand it and may even have ascribed to the *Guyland* rules

at one point in their lives, but since becoming parents, their identity has shifted so much that the world of the typical college guy is almost laughable now.

From a gender performance perspective, the participants in my study did not seem to always portray ‘typical’ masculine behavior. They were atypically androgynous—they were men who cried, were in touch with their emotions, and had clearly reflected a lot on who they are. They also were men strong in convictions, with good values, who seem to feel very comfortable in the role of parent, caregiver, and nurturer. They wanted to be seen as a good role model for their children, and school is something that propels them and motivates them in the quest to be that person their children can look up to. In understanding their identity as single fathers, of note as well were some typically masculine reactions or behaviors that bubbled up at times during the interviews and this caused some closer examination of the findings, as I tried to figure out what is going on beneath the tip of the iceberg that is the experience of being a single father.

Affordances of Being a Single Father

Fathers reported certain things being afforded to them as men, due to their role of parent, and it was clear they had a sense of pride surrounding this role as parent. Being a father was described overall as a positive, very rewarding, and even empowering experience. The motivation that comes along with parenthood was commonly mentioned, in addition to the positive influence of school on their lives. This positive space can be illustrated through the particular entailments that these dads have experienced, such as a sense of responsibility and being a role model for their children. It was also very important for the men to hold the role of provider, but it is important to note that to them, it is not just in a financial sense. The dads are making it a point to put their children first, and it is clear these fathers were very proud of their children. Casey quite poignantly had said that being a parent “gives me hope.” That is just one

way we see fathers being hopeful about their futures and those of their children. School can be seen as one of the connecting factors that allows these fathers to succeed.

These fathers obviously put their children first. Ben stated, “I see myself as the provider. That’s always my big thing, just makin’ sure everyone was taken care of, then I’ll take care of myself.” In terms of one’s priorities, Dan talked about how children change their parents:

I really do believe our children do help shape us. *If* we are concerned parents, you know. We all know the parents that are more selfish...and you’re like why did you even have kids? But if you really are putting your kids’ priorities in perspective, I think it really will define you know, where you go.

Shawn considered himself a little older than the average student and I asked him if the differences he sees between himself and other college guys is mainly due to being a dad. He talked about the responsibility that he feels, and regarding the difference, he said: “[A] little bit of it’s age. And it’s definitely having a kid. It’s realizing that you are now responsible for a life.”

Overview of their Role as Parent

In this section, I will discuss an overview of their role as parent, in addition to more specific information regarding fathers being a positive role model for their children, and the importance they place on ‘being there’ for their kids—no matter what. I will also present evidence of the fathers’ abilities when it comes to understanding their own emotional intelligence, and I will end with examples of the positive impacts school has had on their lives and what it has taught them, including the distinction they draw between themselves and the ‘typical’ college male.

Casey sees being a parent as one of the most important roles he plays in life. I asked him whether or not he mentions to other students that he’s a single dad. He stated:

I talk about my kids, yeah. Like any *father* would. You know, and I guess maybe some of them assume I’m married or something. Which I was when I started here. But no, I don’t think that if you’re trying to get to know somebody, you can’t hide that about you, ‘cause it’s one of my defining characteristics.

In response to me asking how his life has changed through becoming a parent, Casey described putting his children first, and he eloquently explained how his life is different now. He was very reflective talking about this and I remember myself feeling emotional as I was listening. He said the difference was “the focus” and talked about what he called the *Old Casey* and *New Casey*. He then responded, connecting it all back to providing for his children:

I look back at *who* I was when I started, when I became a father. And think that maybe that life began, *anew*. Maybe I was born that day too. Because, it’s a 180. I, before they were born, I was full speed ahead in the [military], rising quickly through the ranks. Made sergeant my first two years...Afterward, I started to take time off work, get chubby again. I cared more. It was not as easy to compartmentalize when something needed to be done for work. It was *harder* to separate that from life. I moved into on-post housing, and started becoming a member of a community, and you know, I started adjusting my life to living with kids. And um, you know, even though, I didn’t *end up* with the white picket fence, and dog and two and a half kids, I *do* think that my priorities changed, as soon as I saw my daughter. And there’s a picture of me holding her for the first time, and it’s, I can see, that it’s *utter euphoria*. So, yeah, I think that, I will sometimes refer to Old Casey and New Casey. Old Casey was skinny and pretty good looking and, [laughs], you know, would...did *all kinds* of things that, I embraced popular culture, and I dated women *unscrupulously*, and you know, I would drink deep and you know, just, in general, I had a conception of life that was more dedicated to *myself*. [long pause]. Maybe *that’s* it. The difference is the focus.

Before, I was focused on myself. And now, I’m focused on *them*. And, yeah, I wouldn’t say I don’t *care* about myself, anymore, but I care more about *them*. So, yeah. And, you know, I could be happy doing a lot of different things, but I’m getting [this degree] so that I can provide for *them*.

One of my favorite quotes of his is when he said that when he became a dad, “Maybe I was born that day too.” It was very clear that Casey has reflected on how his children have changed his life and overall he seemed like he was not your typical college guy. So soon after this, I asked him about his perceptions of the typical college guy and he connected it back to how he used to be:

They’re Old Casey. They think about themselves. Yeah, they’re interested yes, in getting an education, for lots of different reasons. And I can’t say that they’re all selfish bastards, you know [laughs], but, they’re usually going to be people that went to college out of high school. People that have not had to support themselves. Or do anything really, besides college.

Casey was so reflective on this topic, and I was really interested in finding out what he thought his life would have been like, had he not had kids. He answered my question with the following words, in regards to what it would have been like without them:

What's funny is I had that opportunity. On September 11th, I was headed to my first day of bachelor's school. I already had an associate's degree. I was going to attend [college name]...And so that opportunity was *there*. I would have had my master's degree at you know, 22 or 23, if I'd gone *right through*. Been teaching by the time some people hadn't even moved out of their parents' house [*laughs*]. And I think that that person would have been *very* different. *But...I don't know which would have been better for the country. I know...that person would have been different.* But I think that person would have focused on *himself*. And, he probably would not have married my children's mother. He would have probably struggled in college, because he didn't understand what was at stake. He didn't understand the realities of trying to work, and trying to make money, and needing to. 'Cause he had always had everything sort of handed to him.... Anyway, that person would have been a very different person. And I don't know if in the long run, he would have been better or worse a member of society. 'Cause he would have succeeded. *But he wouldn't be who I am, and I don't know if I'm better or worse for society.* [*Long pause*] Can't imagine a world in which my kids don't exist though.

I asked Casey who he was other than a dad and a student. In his response, he described himself as a guardian and tied that into his military experience:

Father and student are up there. I am also a teacher. And that's another big role in my life, is teacher. And I wouldn't say *that* [being a teacher] need be extricated be from student and father. So, I'm also a writer. I sing sometimes. I consider myself an artist...I'm a nerd [*smiles and laughs*]. I'm a fan, of lots of different things....I joined 7 days after September 11th, because I felt like that was my duty. That was the war of my generation. My grandfathers had joined the army for World War II, and Korea. Had an uncle in the army for Vietnam. And, you know, I felt like that was my duty. But I think that people don't always understand where that sense of duty comes from, and I think that that movie, *American Sniper*, describes that feeling very poignantly. And that is, that soldiers who volunteer during a wartime do so because of the feeling that they're guardians. That they need to stand up [*pauses*] when others can't, or *won't*. Not because they're better. But because they have the [*pauses and sighs*] the desire, to [stand up]. *They have made the commitment to shield others, and I feel like that sense of being a guardian has pervaded a lot of the things that I've done in my life* [*pauses*]. And I try, I try to make it something that at times is helpful to me. But generally speaking, it never is [*laughs*]. It's always at the expense of something for me. So I feel like yes, I'm a father, and a student, and a veteran, and an artist. But...if there's one *role* that describes me, it's *guardian*.

I then asked him if that translates well to parenthood and he said: “At times,” and then we both laughed. He then continued on: “At times I wonder if I’m not doing *too much*.”

Clearly Casey cannot even picture a world without his children. Recall from an earlier section, he said that “[Y]ou have to parent from a place of hopefulness.” Despite the difficult things he may have experienced in the military, it is clear the military changed his life and he is grateful for his experience, but his children *also* changed him.

A bit later, I probed more to ask if there was anything else that specifically resonated with him after the first interview, or if he found himself thinking about anything in particular since then. He continued the theme of becoming more aware of his role as a dad:

I mean, I feel like when I *become* conscious of my role as a father, when that comes to the fore for some reason. Usually it comes right to the fore as soon as the kids call, you know, it’s like, okay dad mode is *on*, you know. But I try to...do things every once in a while - one thing that I’ve taken to doing you know, every couple of months while they’re away is sending them a care package of stuff. So, basically what I’ll do is I’ll keep a box, and whenever I see something that I think oh they’d probably like that, I’ll throw it in there. And when it’s full, I ship it out. And that usually amounts to you know, once every 6 weeks or so. But, yeah, I find that I *found*, that after our last interview, I was thinking more about, you know, fatherhood for just *a little bit* you know. And it gave me that extra boost, pushed it to the front of my head for a little bit.

Towards the end of our second interview, Casey very directly stated he knows who he is and related that to the importance of having his children see that he is getting what he wants out of life:

I’m gonna get what I want. You know. I know who I am, I feel. And I know what I’ve wanted always. And I’m close, like I said, I can taste it. Can touch it. It’s very close. But they’re just starting that. And it’s more important for me, to make sure that they see *me*, *getting* to that point. And realizing that there *is* that point. And realizing that nobody can tell them *what* that point is, or where they’ll be when they get it. That they have to *find* it. And they can use who *I* am to inform that. They can use, you know who their mother is to inform that. But that ultimately, it’s part of life to find that. And I don’t know that we all do. I think most of us don’t. Which is why I feel that’s an *ideal*.

Like Casey, who talked of the “utter euphoria” when he held his child for the first time, other dads also talked about the first moments they held their children and how it changed them as a person. I had asked Dan how his life has changed since his children were born. He said,

Wow. ...The biggest thing I remember, I remember when I was holding her for the first time. Looking at her and having just this thought that not only is everything going to be different I mean, you know, duh. But, just looking at her and realizing that for the first time in my life, I really really wanted to do my best at whatever I was doing. Up until that point, I really believe I just, I kind of had, had it easy? You know? ...Sometimes this sounds like I'm bragging or whatever, like I was always really smart through school and so the jobs I had, they were easy. You know. And life just felt easy. And so therefore I was just completely taking advantage of it and...well, I didn't exercise at that point in time. The only fruit I ever ate was if it was on like ice cream. Like I would only eat a salad if it was at like a salad bar where you know the salad probably ended up being [2,000 or] 3,000 calories...I had no interest in taking care of myself and taking care of anything. Like, I had only gotten married really because we had kinda fallen together and really we got married because it was like...why not, you know. I mean...all of the wrong reasons...And up until that point I could clearly mark that I, my life...I was not...trying. I wasn't really trying to do anything with myself. And, looking at her I realized I wanted to be better. You know?

Dan poignantly discussed how he feels children shape their parents, but talked about how parents have to be intentional in what they do to put their kids first:

I really believe our children do help shape us. If we are concerned parents, you know. We all know the parents that are more selfish you know and you're like why did you even have kids? But if you really are putting your kids' priorities in perspective, I think it really will define you know, where you go.

In discussing men and responsibility, Shawn talked about the moment his son stole his heart. This exchange began with me asking if a sense of duty is what gets men to stand up and take responsibility and Shawn had stated:

It's up to an individual too. I mean, I could see those dads that they'll have a kid and they just leave. I had a counselor who just said, 'They're bad seeds. They just don't care.' And there's nothing you can do about it. And it's just unfortunate. And there are people like that. But I mean, for the rest of us that aren't, you know, there is a part of duty, but that duty, that feeling of duty comes from the heart. You know, from that love, and that's the source, so that's what drives it. Yeah. And it's crazy. My son has my exact eyes, and it's like looking at me when I look at him, it's spooky. Yeah, ever since I first held him when he was born, he looked up at me with those alien eyes and I was like...Yeah. You got me buddy. You got me.

Shawn told of when his Ex moved out of state with his son and it became very clear how much love he has for his child and how that love got him through:

That move – devastated me. I never felt such a sense of loss in my life. And I had no coping skills at the time...it was just dark. Dark days. But I've fought tooth and nail to see him every chance I got. And she did not make it easy at all. But I kept fighting, I kept fighting and that's where I've gotten to today, 'cause I didn't give up, or say screw it, because I wanted to see him. He was part of my life you know. *He's my heart.*

It was clear Shawn's son wasn't just "part" of his life, he truly meant everything to him and he persevered even through really difficult times and as he said, "He's my heart."

Being a Positive Role Model for Their Children

Dads talked about knowing that their children look up to them. In a conversation about his son being proud of his dad being in school, Shawn talked about being a role model and how important it is to keep at it. He stated: "Yeah and that's so relieving 'cause I can see that he's lookin' up to me and he's following me. So it's like, ok you know, stay the course. You're doin' the right thing." Recall in Ben's story, he also used the exact same words of "stay the course" in regards to his advice to other single dads.

Erik talked about how from the moment he found out he was having a child, he did not want to see it as a hindrance. I had mentioned before Erik's views on the traditional college guy, and it was clear that he was different from the typical guy. I had asked him if he feels like he is a different sort of person because he had Matthew, and he talked about wanting to be a role model for him:

Yeah, I think it's definitely because that I had a child at 20 years old. I don't know, it's tough to say where I'd be right now, if I hadn't. I can only speculate on that. But, I think what kind of separates me from maybe a vast majority of single fathers or young parents in general is the fact that *they* have looked at their child as a *hindrance* to where they want to be. I look at Matthew and I see, someone that's motivating *me*. Because if I don't, I don't want to be a *poor* role model for him. I want him to be able to say 'Look what *my* dad is doing!' You know. So yeah, I think where I'm at today is *directly* because of that, and I think it's because I *chose* the mindset that I wanted to have, and a lot of people don't...

In the 'three words' question response, recall Ben saying that he wants to be the inspiration for his children. On a similar note, Adam talked about how he wants to push his child, in the sense of not expecting things will be handed to him his whole life. He wants to teach his child responsibility:

And, I worry that Joshua will go down that path that, 'Oh, I have a problem. I don't *have* to do the work. *You* can do it *for* me. And then *I* can still get the credit.' And I know the school system...they remind you that, oh, no, that's not what we're gonna go for. You know, we don't do that kinda thing anymore. And I'm sitting here going, well *you* may not do that *here* in the elementary school, but what happens when he's, 'Oh, I get to take my tests for 2 hours.' Instead of you know, the half hour it takes. I understand there are people that they do need that kind of you know, accommodation. But I don't think that needs to be where you start. So, I've pushed [that] Joshua still needs to take his tests, he still needs to...be under the same restrictions all the other kids are under *today*, so that you know, it may make him upset, it may frustrate him.... I will make some reasonable ones, but I'm not gonna basically say, Oh well, you didn't make the deadline, well, you have til tomorrow. Nah, that's just not the way the world works. And even like with, like video games and stuff with him, there are days yes, I will let him win. There's other days I will absolutely trounce him, just because he needs to understand, [if] you play right, you'll still lose. And, you know, is that nice, is that appropriate? I don't know?

Adam also talked more about how his own experiences from the past shape the way he parents his son:

Don't give him a participation award, you know. Yes, I know, it bolsters self-confidence and all this. But you know what, *I have done way too many things in my life where it's been I have done everything the right way and still come out, losing*. You know what, that's part of life. I don't want Joshua to sit here and be, 'Oh, I lost, but hey, I should still be able to you know, get ahead.' No, you need to work harder. And you're still gonna get knocked down some days. And you still gotta get up and keep goin'.

When I talked with Dan about what caregiving and nurturing meant to him, he talked about how he models good behavior for his daughter, and how he teaches her to be strong:

Oh wow. Honestly, I took the tact from when she was little, that I just wanted her to be ...the best that she could be at whatever she wanted to be. And I always told her that...I never tried to trap her into any kind of gender roles...if you wanna wrestle, you wanna be king of the mountain, *you* go right ahead, you know. Which led to some fun you know, calls from teachers when the little boys were intimidated by her in second grade and I'm like, I fought, told the teacher, I was like, why, well I asked why? You know and like she wasn't being a bully and like no, it's just out on the playground, she just can completely *dominate* them. Then I'm like, I asked the teacher, I'm like, am I supposed to apologize?

I said I'm not gonna tell her that she can't roughhouse. That's what they're all doing, you know, if the little boys won't wrestle or think that that's intimidating, *like tell them to man up maybe?* [said with humor] I don't know. Some of those parents may have not appreciated me being like that. But I just felt like she wasn't being mean. She was playing hard. Which, I know she needs, and... that's what I've always told her. I'm like you know what, *whatever* you want to be, I'm going to support you...with that, I will help you with that, and I really don't care what you want to be. Just do your best at it, you know. It's you know, 'cause I don't wanna pigeon-hole her into anything. And she's *so* bright...she's always reading, and doing things and she's so creative that so for me, it's taking care of her *emotions*, you know, of *being there*, being *just* enough *off* stage that she knows I'm there and can help her and can pick her up if she falls down. But allowing her to take those challenges...on, at times, and when she wants to take them on by herself, okay, you know? And you know, it's hard, I'm sure you know this with your son as well, it's really tough when they wanna take those first steps and they wanna do things and you're like, you wanna be right there and you know they're gonna knock themselves out doin' somethin'. But you're like, you know you gotta kinda let them have that, and yeah...to me, that's what it is. And then you just, just providing that unconditional love you know, the knowledge no matter what they did, you know you love them. And there's nothing that's absolutely gonna change that, ever.

Later on, Dan also talked about wanting to nurture his daughter's "voice" when I asked him how others interact with him as a dad, and he described it as fun:

Well... I'd say that the most fun is a lot of people when they see us interacting, I see a bunch of smiles...people like my advisor, she loves when Alyssa comes by, and...she's commented many times on *how much love there is between us*. She'd just see that and that I've really nurtured Alyssa to have her voice. Because she can talk more than I can even...but she's *very* expressive like and she's very, very *articulate* in her conversations, so people really enjoy you know, that she'll just talk to anybody. Shopping is an interesting experience 'cause I've been teaching her modesty as we grow up and like you know the average clothing fashion isn't, and especially for little girls...And so I've taught her this and she *remembers* this enough that she hasn't learned her filter that she'll very *bluntly* say something as we're walking by me like, 'Dad, that girl isn't dressed modestly' [*laughs*]... and she'll even use that word you know! And I'll be like, "You're right, you know?!" [*more laughter*] And sometimes people hear, and I have no idea what that does for them, and stuff. You know, we don't hang around and *ask* their opinion on what we just said. But I *have* noticed, I've actually gotten compliments because my daughter growing up has learned to...and this was her own personal, I didn't try to force her to wear skirts and dresses, she just *likes* to wear them. I think that might have a lot to do with she has a really special bond with my mom, you know, and my mom wears dresses and skirts all the time, that's what she grew up doing...But I've had like older people especially comment on how well-behaved Alyssa is and how well dressed she is, and that she you know and stuff, and I'm thinkin' to myself yeah you didn't see her you know, 30 minutes ago in the dirt when we just had to have her [*laughs*] change clothes or whatever, but I think those interactions go really well...I see a lot of positive reactions around us and stuff...

Dan also referred to his daughter as a “little inspiration” for him and talked about what happened after his divorce:

At that point in time, I got into counseling. I started doing everything I could to better myself. I started going to the gym, I started actually paying attention to what I was eating, to make sure that I was feeding myself so that I could take care of her. Because at that point in time, I couldn't even bend over to pick her up without getting out of breath. And I was thinkin' you know, if I'm getting out of breath while she's *crawling*, what's gonna happen when she gets up and starts *running*. And so, I would really say she inspired me to just, to really try to reach for my own potential, you know? So that I could be the best that I could be, because I wanted to be an example for *her*. I didn't want *her* to grow up and, and be like well my dad's lazy, or you know, he's not doing anything for himself. And so I would say that that really she's just been this little inspiration for me, over the years, and as she's grown, I feel like I've learned *as much* from her as I do trying to teach her.

So not only does he value being an example for her to follow, but it is also a reciprocal relationship in that he has learned a lot from his daughter in return. And I would have to say that this holds true for all the fathers in this study, not just Dan.

Dads leading by example and being a good role model, plus the theme of “teaching” was found throughout all the interviews. It was demonstrated either through actions towards their children, but more specifically, all but one father used forms of the words *instill* or *teach*, in regards to imparting good values to their children.

As an example, Shawn concisely said: “I try to teach by example. Like do what *I* do, don't like listen when people tell you to do somethin', and they do the opposite. *It's a confusing signal.*” Shawn has clearly reflected on what it means to set a good example for his son and that consistency is important.

And in the following thought-provoking passage, Shawn talks about how he has reflected on how he is going to teach his son differently than how his parents taught him:

I guess from what I hear, like, these are the easy years. Because you know, he's gonna look up and he's gonna listen to everything I say, whether he likes it or not you know. It's when he starts getting in his teenage years. When he starts experimenting, I don't know, like, when do I talk to him about girls, you know, talkin' to him about partying, stuff like

that. I've thought a lot about how I'm gonna approach it. It's not like I'm gonna try to stop it, because then...I think it would draw like a wall there 'cause it did for me when I was a kid. That there's no trust, like he doesn't trust me to come to a situation or if like I always think like if he's at a party and he's been drinking and or the people have been drinking and he needs to get home or somethin' like that, I want him to be able to trust me...to know that I'm not gonna get *mad* and yell at him. You know, but to help him in the situations like this. I'm not gonna really condone underage drinking, but it happens. You know, and maybe he won't, who knows....but, to be there in those learning lessons. I don't want him to learn the hard way. Sometimes it's inevitable, 'cause I learned a lot of things the hard way...I mean it's hard to try to predict it, but just to be a teacher, not like a...judge-jury-executioner. You know. Like, this is *not how we did it* and stuff....just teaching like okay, you made a mistake you know, how do we learn, how do we do this. Or, you know, something happened at school, how do we make it better...Let's work together...that's how I think of nurturing...When I was young, it was always like I did something wrong and then I just got yelled at for it, and then it was over. And didn't learn anything. Actually, and then it was like, I ended up *resenting* more. So, I kinda wanna do [the] opposite of that. We'll see how it works, I mean, it may not. There's probably gonna be times where I'm just like "*Oh my God!!!*" ...and it's just gonna happen. But you know, but the biggest thing is I just want there to be a trust between us....I'm still a parent figure and all, you know, you gotta do what I say, I'm gonna have rules, but we gotta trust. I don't want you to be like *hiding* from me, or *feel* like you have to. That's just the biggest thing for me.

In Erik's story, remember him talking about how he saw his dad in that *leader* role, as somebody who taught him lessons about his mistakes. In asking Erik to find out what other roles he plays besides being a dad and a student, he responded:

Well, I guess I've had a lot of leadership roles. So I mean...obviously a *dad* is a leader...I helped start a new student organization, I've been assistant manager at a restaurant, before I came to school here. I've helped open new stores. So I've kind of had this *leadership* role, where people come and you know...and the thing that I think helps me a lot with leadership that I've learned, is, whoever you have below you or working with you, everyone's just so different. And everyone has their own needs. And so you can't try and guide everyone the same way. So you have to kind of have a relationship with that person, you know. I've seen a lot of different leaders that come in and just think everything's you know, everything's the same, everything's homogenous, and everything's gonna *run* smoothly. But you have a bunch of different personalities in the room. It's a challenge to get 'em all to work together. So if you have one guy that knows everybody, and has had conversations with every person and understands how each person thinks, you're gonna have a lot better chance to get things working smoothly, and I think I'm able to bring that to the table, with organizations and where I've worked at...And then I also manage [an] amateur baseball team in the summertime. I've done that for the past 5 years since my dad passed away. My dad did that before. And so, you know, baseball's always been a big part of me...I always play baseball in the summer and stuff.

Following up on the concept of a dad as leader, I then asked Erik if he felt if being a leader translates well into being a parent and he said:

Yeah, you know, I think back to when I was 20 and when I had Matthew, I didn't have *any* leadership experience. Now, I have a lot [*laughs*]. And you know, I think that might have been the starting point for it. For me to, to just step up and step into that natural ability, natural role of mine, so.... that's a blessing, yeah.

Erik had referred to himself as "pretty adaptable to different situations" in another passage. I then asked him if he'd always been that way, or if there was something in particular that he thought has helped him learn to be adaptable. He spoke about how all the change in his life, even when bad, has allowed him to flow with things he has experienced.

I don't know necessarily if I've always been that way. But I've had a lot of *change* that has happened in my life and, you know, my dad died about 5 years ago. I had a son when I was 20...And I've moved numerous times, since I graduated high school, and so, I've been able to you know really *adapt* to change, very quickly. And, just you know, not get so angry at things when they don't go my way, I guess.

From everything Erik told me, it seems evident that he models this behavior for his son. And like Erik, Shawn also talked about being a role model and used the phrase *lead(ing) by example* three separate times in our first interview. I had mentioned to him that I thought his sense of responsibility has changed through becoming a parent and how he's changed as a person and he stated:

I definitely have - I don't know how to put feelings into words. I'm not very good at this. He has become a priority. I do things now in order to take care of him, what's in his best interests, as far as aside from what's in *my* best interest. I mean, as, that's financially, I guess you know, prioritizing, and making sure he's got *his* needs...And you know, I'm finishing my career, that's for *me*, that's for myself, pride and stuff but that also is gonna better his life by being a role model, instead of just being kind of a fly-by-night, I'm doin' this because I *want* to kinda thing. Now I'm setting an example and that's one thing I pride myself on, is my ability to *lead by example*. *And by changing other people by changing myself, kind of mentality*. And that's what I want to portray to him, you know, and how I respect people, how I'm considerate. Um, oh yeah, and how I just like to have fun. Just try not to take stuff *too* seriously you know, you don't have to be serious all the time, that's why when we play around, I like to act like a kid, 'cause that's how I am at heart. My inner child loves to play...but yeah, tryin' to instill the values that *I've* learned throughout my life. The ones that I still believe in. And just give 'em to him, and it's

gonna be *his* choice you know, what he follows. But I wanna show him how *my* life has turned out because of by following these [values], and that's the 'leading by example' kind of part.

Remember from Casey's story, when I asked him who he is other than father and student, he called himself a "teacher." And with Erik, he talked about being present for his son, for those "teaching moments." I asked a follow-up question in the second interview with Erik to tell me more about those moments he spoke of and he told of a story with his son where he was able to show him how much he cared by 'being there':

Matthew kind of got you know an example...recently, when my brother was back and we were taking him to the airport. And I hadn't gotten a chance to really you know sit down and...just be around my brother very often, you know since last couple of years...And, we were upstairs and I told Matthew that I wanted to ride in the car with [my brother] because you know, I wanted to spend some time with my brother. And he started crying, and like I think he felt like I was saying...I don't wanna spend time with you. I want to spend time with my brother. And he got very upset and then started crying about that and you know I went over and sat by him and said "You know, Matthew...all these times that I come back...and now I come back from [where I'm doing my internship], I said, who do you think I'm coming to spend time with? It's you. Every single time, I'm coming to, *specifically* spend time with you." And that kinda changed his whole outlook on it. So I think that was a moment where he kinda realized 'Wow you know, my dad's driving quite a distance, all the time, just to spend the time with *me*.'

Ben said that he's a "teacher at heart, so [I] try showing them everything I possibly can. And they *like* that. Just doin' activities." In response to a question I asked him about what caregiving and nurturing is to him, he said it's about knowing

they're bein' nourished, and you can have a conversation with them like oh, what can we do later, what we can do now, and just, bein' able to help them, you know, start developing...Guess that'd be my opinion on it.

Recall other examples where fathers mentioned the concept of teaching things to their children. Take for example Casey who in regards to his aversion to spanking had said "that's not teaching them anything." Or with Dan who talked about teaching his daughter about physical fitness, consequences to her action, and modesty. In Erik's story, he said he didn't want to be an authoritative figure like his dad and wanted to "teach lessons from mistakes" yet also saw the

good in his dad who taught him a lot of good values. Shawn had mentioned the concept of teaching his son many times in our interviews in the form of being a good role model for his behaviors, and even provided a more literal example of teaching in the sense of helping teach his son with math homework to help ease the burden on the mother, or teaching his son to not hold his feelings in.

Importance of ‘Being There’ for Kids

Overall, for the dads in this study, it was very important for them to be present for their children. Sometimes the idea of ‘being there’ arose when I asked the dads questions about what caregiving and nurturing means to them. Whether that was eating meals or cooking together, doing homework, playing baseball, going grocery shopping, or taking trips, it was also about simply ‘being there’ in whatever way possible and nurturing them and taking care of their needs. Or this may also manifest in the sense of leading others like Erik, or with Casey who sees himself as a guardian.

The fathers told about the lengths they went to, in order to spend time with their children after the separation from their Ex. Recall Shawn’s experience where his Ex took his child out-of-state which led to a lot of driving. And with Casey, the day after our second interview, he was taking a long drive out-of-state to go and pick up his children so they could stay with him for the summer. Dan told of how for a few years he travelled out of town to pick up his daughter so she could stay with him over the summer and on some weekends. On those weekends, he would drive to pick her up and bring her back to his home. These types of examples having to do with travel logistics really illustrate the perseverance in these fathers to continue the strong connection with their children.

In the first interview, Ben had been talking about the importance of having his children around the supper table to get them talking, so in the second interview, I asked him to clarify a little more about what he meant. In response, he stated that he enjoys *getting to know his kids emotionally*: “You just make sure they have everything they need. Just, everyone’s a different person. So it’s fun gettin’ to know, like what they’re thinking.”

It became clear that ‘being there’ isn’t only about being physically present when interacting and spending time together, but it is also about continuing the caring connection and being an emotional support for their child, even if living apart. Erik currently lives in a different state from his son. I asked Erik what caregiving and nurturing meant to him. He put it well by saying:

It’s being able to be there for you know, those *teaching moments* I think...It’s tough for me, because I’m not there on a daily basis, but there’s times when he’s called me up on the phone or we you know, we’ve been together where you know, he’s had issues, or sometimes I’ll have to talk them out of him. But really it’s all about being *there* and being present as much as you can. And that’s, that’s kinda one of the tough things that I’m having to deal with, is you know...I haven’t been there *present* for a lot of the time that he’s been growing up. But, I try to make the most of it when I *am* there. Just show him that you know, hey, no matter what happens you know, no matter where you are, where I am, I’m gonna be there. I’m here for you. So I think that’s, that’s nurturing and caregiving, is how I’d look at it, from my point of view.

I then responded by summarizing and confirming his thoughts saying, “Being there.” And he responded,

Yeah. Not necessarily in the same room or in the same area code, but *knowing* that that person, that your dad’ll be in your corner when you need him. If you know [that] when you need him, he’s always gonna be there.

Erik’s view of being a provider reflects his values and what he’s experienced in life. I asked him what his perception of the word is. He explained it in the context of being there and that it’s more than money and how it is connected to sacrifice:

Well...it gets a little bit deeper than just providing you know, *money*, for him to live you know, child support and stuff...like we’ve talked about a lot...making sure that he knows

that I'm there...if he needs me or if he wants to just talk or something like that. I think the provider is you know, someone that's gonna you know, have to *sacrifice* some things to...actually be there.... You know, like maybe spending time with friends, or girlfriends or whatever you know. You have to you know, really make you know, your child a priority. To be [an] adequate provider.

In addition to being physically present, fathers talked about being emotionally available to their children, in the event they needed to talk about something. Adam stated, "Joshua needs to respect me, but at the same time, I would like him to know that he can come to me if he has a problem." To illustrate the strong bond he has with his son, later on in the interview he talked about classmates wanting to go out and he said he's told them,

"I'm going home. I'm taking care of my son!" And I've had people say, 'God, that sounds so boring' and I'm sitting here going, *I love it*. I would rather do that than anything *you* guys are doing, just because...I know my son will be there for the rest of my life. The people you're sitting here, saying are your...best friend that you're gettin' drunk with. I'm sitting here going, yeah in two years you wouldn't even want to...know this person anymore

Later, Adam was talking more about comments from others on- or off-campus, when they ask him what he did over the weekend. He would say,

"I sat with my son, we played video games, we read books, we went to the park. What'd you do?" He said the response would be, 'I went and got laid.' "Well, good for *you*! I'm glad that's the priority. That was the highlight of 48 hours for you!! Is [that] you got laid for 20 minutes. Good for you." *I will take the time with my son.*

Leading by example is another phrase that arose when I asked Shawn who he strives to be as a dad, and if he's lived up to his ideal. We both laughed and he started out by saying, "Oh, I don't know if there's such a thing as an ideal dad. I do my best. Um, yeah, I think so?" And then he continued:

Like I just explained before, I want him to be emotionally stable and *I've* found that...the best way is by talking about it. I wanna be, you know, playful and fun. I don't wanna be the "You must do *this*," like force him into stuff, like for example, sports. I just asked him, do like you wanna play this or this or this? And he wants to play 'em all. I'm like, well even better 'cause then you can play 'em all and you can choose if you like it or not. I wanna...allow him to have that freedom of choice. Which I had, you know, I got to choose which sport I liked and then I excelled at it. I couldn't really choose which one I

wanted to quit...so yeah, I want him to just kinda be himself and I just wanna be able to *let* him do that. You know, with *boundaries*...I'm not gonna let him go free reign, but just to kinda just nurture him. And then when he finds something that he really likes...ok well, what can I do to help you, in doin' that. That's, that's basically all I wanted to be as a father. I don't know, see...I don't know if it's the right way to do it... 'cause if they change their mind, which is gonna happen. I don't know. It's a learning process. Very much so. But all I can be is just supportive, and be *there*. And just lead by example, that's huge you know.

I asked Adam how he thinks others see him and he soon began talking about being there for his son:

I think a lot of people would say I'm a very attentive father. I'd *like* them to say that...that'd probably be the biggest thing, is that I try to be there for my son. There are days where it's *difficult* trying to treat him as if he's 6. I know my girlfriend, current girlfriend, she comments a lot, how yeah, she wishes her Ex-husband was this good with his kids. And, you know, Joshua by extension, things like that...but then you know, from the personal side, when you're out in the public and stuff, I'm very cautious [with] Joshua. At home, you know, there's days where you question that, okay, you know, am I pushing him off to do homework, and to try to have a little bit of time just for me. And, things like that you know, play video games, read a book, and. You know, it's kinda hard even when the bathroom is you know a team process some days. And, so you know, there's that difficulty. But, for the most part, I try to do the best I can. You know, I've been described as *overprotective*...my Ex-fiancée she would make a few comments how it was, in her opinion I seemed almost abusive at times, in that you know, Joshua would run out in the middle of the street, or run ahead at a parking lot, and I would yank him back. And, because, even now, at you know, 6 goin' on 7, he doesn't look for cars. And, there's a lot of that spatial awareness that doesn't really connect with him. So there's a lot of difficulty there, and, sometimes you know...the yelling and stuff like that, sometimes that's the only way to really connect with him, that what he's doing isn't safe. I know, my parents did a lot of yelling. There was a lot of spanking involved. My mother disagrees. She says 'Oh no, you were only spanked once or twice.' And I'm sittin here goin, no, there was a *lot*. *Trust me*. At least in my memory and recollection, yeah there was a lot of disciplinary actions taken. And, I've done my best to try and *not* to do that.

I asked Casey him what type of a dad he is and for him to tell me about his parenting style. He told me about how he feels criticized by others who think he does not discipline enough and explained his outlook on that as follows:

I'm a pushover [*smiles*]... You know, I really hate the sort of idea of [corporal] punishment, and spanking, and all that kind of stuff. And I get criticized for it. Because some people say 'Well you just need to *crack down*'...I never needed to get spanked, and I always felt it was *injustice* when I did. So, I *have* spanked them before...But especially now they're getting, they're getting older, they understand what's a rule and what's not,

and they make *choices*. They make choices about which rules to obey and which ones not to. And, well their brains aren't fully myelinated and they don't have a fully developed frontal cortex, so their judgment is *flawed*. Which I think would be of vital understanding for a lot of parents. You know, while that's the case, they *do* have the ability to reason, so...if something goes terribly wrong, I really try to resist the urge to spank. Because that's, that's not teaching them anything. It's just saying, you know, 'I don't know how to deal with this, so I'm just gonna resort to what my parents did to me.' And so you know, my strategy, I guess, is just to talk them, to *know* them.

The examples about disciplining or setting boundaries for their children belong in this section because it's all about the fathers being there for their children and through that, they strive to teach them right from wrong. But later in the section regarding guilt and shame, I will provide examples of dads who feel other people judge their actions either overprotective or the opposite, not strict enough, and it will become clear that it has more of a negative effect.

Cultivating of Emotional Intelligence

Overall, the men in my study had very androgynous ways of being and of parenting. By this, I mean that in many ways, these dads practiced an alternative definition of masculinity in the way they spoke and in the way they described themselves as a man and as a parent. Overall, they valued open communication, and were reflective, and thoughtful. The fathers were emotional, and sensitive, with some becoming emotional in their tone of voice, having tears in their eyes, and a few cried during the interviews. They seem to be good at caregiving, and nurturing their children is important to them. They are a very present parental figure in their children's lives, even if they don't live near them such as in Erik's situation, and they are involved in their children's schooling as well. They are conscious of their own behaviors, and this allows them to fulfill their need of being a good role model for their kids. Their children serve as that motivation for them *to be that good role model*.

All men were very reflective on their lives so far and their experiences as parents. Casey, in particular, was extraordinarily articulate. I would also possibly consider him the most

emotionally fragile of all the men in my study. He is probably the most educated and has had the most varying and meaningful (if not painful) life experiences. He was probably the most sensitive – however he did not show outward emotion in the form of tears in the interview, as other fathers may have. He was very measured, even when retelling painful times, and was very reflective. He was probably the most atypical of all of them, yet still his experience as a single father was so typical, as I compared his experience to my group of participants.

Casey is not your typical male, but he did talk about the need to shut down his emotions. Many men may not be so open about the process of shutting down and compartmentalizing to cope with difficult things and emotions, but he was very open about this fact. In addition to being so well spoken, he also probably brought me the most sadness. Throughout the interviews, I feel that I gained a deeper understanding of what shaped him throughout his life, more so than with the other participants. But clearly much lay below the surface and this research project was not the time or place for this exploration, given some of the difficult subjects that he brought up.

With Casey, at a few moments throughout the interview I teetered on wondering if something I would ask *could* lead towards something potentially sensitive, but as I learned, he was very open and willing to discuss many things and our interviews were truly a conversation. There was a strength in his words, and he let himself be vulnerable to me. As a researcher, I am grateful. Every time I read his words, they are so poignant but they also bring me to a sad place. Because I know that so much more is behind what he is saying—so much pain.

Like Casey, Erik was also more measured in his speech, however I think he has had an easier life and has not been as lonely. Casey feels very lonely and specifically used the word *lonely*. However with Erik, he values his friends in a very high regard. It is evident he is financially more secure and has a better support system from both family and friends. He seemed

to be the most level-headed of all the dads, keeping in mind he was actually only twenty years old when he became a father and had to grow up very fast.

Because of all of this, it is my opinion that these men function with a good sense of emotional intelligence overall and practice what I would call an alternative definition of masculinity. The men in my study were thoughtful, reflective, sensitive, and very vulnerable and open with me as a researcher. A theme that also ran throughout was humor, and the participants and I both laughed separately and together at times, and sometimes the humor came was for the purpose of lightening the conversation or perhaps to show some nervousness. And so, to illustrate the emotional quality of the interviews, and how these men demonstrated that they were in touch with their emotions, I will provide some examples in this section.

I would consider three of the fathers to have had the most emotional interviews, with two of them, Ben and Shawn, tearing up or crying at times during the interview. Those that cried did so during the first interview only. The third father I'm referring to, Casey, did not cry, however there were times where I felt the emotion very close to the surface of what he was saying. Casey's words by far hit me the most with sadness, when listening back to the interviews during the transcription process. As mentioned, he was very articulate, and almost all of his words had this emotional charge to them and the way he phrased things was truly beautiful and I think this is confirmed in the quotes of his that I chose to include in this dissertation. In comparison to the other dads, all three of these dads in my opinion had the most difficulty in their lives, whether that was a difficult custodial situation and divorce such as with Ben, or Shawn who until this day has no legal custodial rights to his son. Or, with Casey, who had a fairly amicable separation, however had considered himself homeless in the past a few times and has experienced a lot of life-changing moments due to his military experience.

As mentioned in Ben's story, he became teary when talking about his children and missing them when he said he just waits until the next time he gets to see them. After he said this, I found myself taken aback by the emotion, and I struggled to ask the next question. Right after that, I asked him, "Yeah...and so what type of a parent are you?" He remained very emotional and said, "I'm not understanding the question." I felt awful because in the moment, it was my perception that I didn't handle it right. But in listening back, it didn't sound as bad as I had recalled it in my head. On the recording, I had clarified by asking, "...what type of a dad are you....How do you want to be seen by others?" And then he said, "Well, I'm just a *dad*." and then he laughed. He said, "I know they like it at my place better."

It is interesting that in asking him how he wants others to see him, he responded by diminishing himself by saying he's "just" a dad. It was heartbreaking to hear him say that, and this phrase left me with a lot of sadness. And he never really answered that question in that moment about what *others* thought – he moved right onto focusing on his kids and what they like. I then asked him what the kids like better about his place and he explained how they are more isolated with their mother:

We do things. Yeah, I don't know, I'm a teacher at heart, so try showing them everything I possibly can. And they like that. Just doin' activities. 'Cause apparently at the other place, they just get thrown outside and just told to not come back in or something, like, their stories change every time.

Shawn's demonstration of emotions came in a few different ways. He became emotional when he talked about his grandfather's death earlier in the year, and there was a quality in his voice when he talked about his child—a tone that just spoke to the love he has for his son. Remember how he said, "He's my heart." It is one of my favorite quotes from the fathers.

Shawn also told a story about his son dressing up for a music performance, and the way he described it really showed the pride and happiness he has because of his son:

He was sooo cute and...he's got this gray pinstripe suit with a vest and this lavender shirt...it's even got the little...handkerchief in the pocket. And the tie, a clip-on tie, but he won't wear it. Oh he was adorable and he was up there singing and he was waving at me. Ah, it was awesome!

I could also feel the emotion when he talked about the frustration he's had with the whole experience, either being frustrated by the child support system and feeling like he's being "harassed" by his son's mother who was "begging" for child support, and in the general sense of not having legal rights to his son. I asked him why it was determined he would have to pay child support, and he told about missing the hearing in which it was determined:

It was 'cause there was no court order at the time and she was the mother...I don't know if I was invited to be at the hearing, I think I might have been. But it was done so fast that...I didn't really *know* what I was doing basically. Like I didn't know how I had to go to *this*, I didn't know I had to do *that*. And that she automatically got custody or that I didn't know that I could contest for it.

I then asked him who was communicating with him about the fact that the hearing was going to happen and he said:

The state of ND, when they send out those automated letters that are written in all capital letters so it feels like the letter is yelling at you? [*laughs*] Yeah. And it was just, plaintiff, defendant, this such and such has been determined and you...are liable for this amount per month. And I was like where do they come up with these numbers even? But. Yeah so that's, yeah, that's how it was determined. I didn't, I suppose I had an *idea* it was coming. I was just not included.

I wanted to clarify that I wasn't asking about child support – I was still asking about the hearing and was curious how he didn't know how important it was for him to be there. He then talked about him just being naïve and was very reflective, in talking about the lesson that he learned:

Yeah, that's exactly it. I was naïve. I didn't know, I even had a right *to* be at the hearing, I mean, they sent me a letter, I think stating...that this has been set up, and I don't know if I was required, or I, you can volunteer to appear. But yeah, I didn't know. And I think I might have forgot about it and I didn't show up. Which makes me look bad but you know ... I didn't know how *serious* it was. 'Cause maybe right there I could have been considered part-custody, I don't know. See that's just...it was, it's kinda stupid on my

part. But I mean, you know, I'm single on my own, my first kid. There's a lot of stuff I don't know, and I'm kinda learning on the fly and this is just a *hard lesson*.

The words "hard lesson" just rang with regret as he said that, and that was evident in how he explained he thought this made him look bad and how he had been "stupid" with the way he handled it. It seemed as though he was processing this even today, and moving from feeling like a victim to taking responsibility for his lack of action on that day.

Shawn also showed an ability to reflect on being able to put himself first, balancing that with the focus on his son:

It's tough 'cause I don't wanna *stay* here - But, at least be close [to his son] that *I'm* happy, 'cause I mean, I need to be happy before I can make anybody else happy. And that I can be close and still see him as much, 'cause I wanna be you know at all the ball games, I dread...hearing that 'Oh dad you never came to my games' or whatever, 'You were never there' you know, because I'm not there during the week....but *I was* there when I could be. Which isn't enough, you know.

In the following poignant exchange, Shawn talks about how he teaches his son to be open with his emotions. I asked him how he learned to be that way with his son, and asked if that was because he didn't have that experience, or if there was someone that taught him to be open and he said:

Yeah, I think it's both. Because I didn't have a relationship and that was something I kinda craved, because it was not really what I wanted...or what I felt. Like for example, I hated playing basketball, but they always made me play basketball and I could never stand up and tell 'em until finally, like I broke down and cried. I had to make a scene. And then they finally let me quit. And but that feeling though of like, *I can't even tell 'em that I don't like doing this*. I didn't want my son to feel that same way towards me, to the point where he wouldn't come to me with other things and that. It's almost like a sense of pushing him away. And I wanted to avoid that at all costs. And then I've learned, from people too is you know, expressing your emotions, there's no sense holding it in, it does you no good, and *it just rots you from the inside out*. So I learned to, to talk to people about how I'm feeling, especially in times of pain and stuff like that. That I want him to do the same thing.

He then addressed the idea of stereotypical masculinity, and how he encourages his son to cry and show emotion:

I wanna teach him that you don't have to be the stereotypical male and hold your feelings in. If you have to cry, you can cry. It's okay, 'cause you feel so much better when you're done. But yeah...that's what I, at least wanna show him like it's okay to talk about, it's okay to do it, you know. I'm here, I'm not gonna judge you...

Earlier, Casey compared who he is now with who he would have been, had he not joined the military or had children. He had said he wasn't sure which version of himself "would have been better for the country." I felt this phrase was one of the most profound that I'd heard. So during the second interview, this is one of the topics that I wanted to follow up on, and I asked him to clarify what he meant. My intuition was telling me that there was a lot behind these words, especially given his military background. And I was very right – and it fortunately led me to another very poignant moment in my research:

Okay, so, I'm more *aware*, having been a veteran. Of the things that I've come back to, of the waste of capitalism, of the American *neo*-colonialism of manifest destiny and its effects on the cultural values of our society. And, as a veteran I see that, and I can understand you know, what's going on and I understand that it's bad, that it's wrong. And, I understand a lot of things, I think about the world, and about and you know obviously I don't know everything, about it. And you know, *going* to a war doesn't make you an expert on anything. Except maybe killing.

As he said this I remember thinking to myself how profound that was. I knew that there was a lot hidden behind this sentence and as a researcher I was curious to know more to understand his situation better, but it did not seem the time nor place for me to ask to delve into this issue, for fear of bringing up some very sensitive psychological issues. This is how he continued on:

But, I think that the person that I would have been, had I instead of reacting by joining the [military], reacted by getting my degree as I was on my way *to* do. I would be more *naive*. I would probably be more *liberal* than I am. I would not have as much patience as I do when army vets do the things they do. I mean, it's like...imagining what happens in 2000, in the election. If Al Gore wins...Like, *how* is the country different if Al Gore wins? Holy *cow*. You know? And it's around that same time that this is happening to me [sigh], I think that the *person* that I am today is much more motivated than I would have been, and, I think that the person that I would have been without the military would have been *less* aware of the society around him, and more *concerned* about perpetuating the values he was fed without understanding that there are 2 sides, or *multiple* sides. So, yeah, I think that I'm *most thankful* for *this* life in that I feel *that* life would have been more *naive*, yeah...and the question of who is better for the country. I mean I think that

we would be better off with more people doing government service right out of high school. Whether that *was* the military or, the post office, or, Peace Corps. Or something. Some sort of mandatory two years, government service. You've just received you know, 10 years of public education. You may as well, do something to give *back*. And I feel like we would have a better country with that. So my being a part of doing some government service is not right for everyone. I will be the first to say the draft would be stupid. But, I think that *doing* that government service would be helpful for just about everyone. And would make the country that much stronger.

Undoubtedly, Casey seems to have made reflection part of his life. We remember him talking about how he associates his experience in the military with stress and this led into a discussion about empathy:

But, you know, it doesn't *matter* you know. Everybody has their spectrum of *feeling*, yeah? Their *worst* worst. And their *best* best. And *their* worst worst is no *worse* or better than my *worst* worst, to *them*. Right? So, maybe their *worst* worst is losing a dog, and my worst worst is losing a friend. But the *emotion* right, because they haven't experienced *my* worst worst, is no different to them, right? So, the things that make me cry, just because I'm not gonna cry over their dog, doesn't mean that I shouldn't say hey they're crying, you know. That's the same emotion there. And coming to that realization, through a lot of *personal* work, has been *freeing* for me, in that I can allow myself to *not live* in a, in a position where I don't have empathy for people. Because like a lot of veterans, you come back from a deployment and you, you look around and people have all these *trivial* concerns. And you don't get it. You know....[*laughs*]....Why do you *care* if your cell phone takes 5 minutes to start up? Why do you *care* if a website is slow. It's *going to space*. *Give it a shot!* You know? [*laughs*]...so coming back and learning to deal with that, is you know, is a big part of being successful, when you re-integrate. So yeah.

Having focused this section thus far on Ben, Shawn, and Casey, I wanted to provide other examples relating to Adam, Dan and Erik. Even though they weren't as outwardly emotional as the others, there was still a lot under the surface and they were very reflective. So, I wanted to utilize the last part of this section to demonstrate why I feel they also demonstrated a high degree of emotional sharing and vulnerability.

Throughout this dissertation, there are examples of dads reflecting on their own gender, and what it means to be a boy or a man now. One example of this is Adam who was talking about exposing his son to a balanced skill set:

There's that difficulty too, where it's you know, not trying to be the great big macho guy, 'cause I hate sports. I think...my ability to throw *a* ball is not contingent on me being successful in life. So, I've always pushed you know, the science, the logical, you know, reasoning, the math skills...know your history, all that kinda stuff. The physical therapist and me don't see eye to eye, 'cause I don't care that my son can balance on his foot for 30 seconds. I don't think I can do that, really...I care more about his cognitive abilities than his physical and I know that's counter-intuitive where a lot of guys especially it's, oh we gotta watch football, we gotta watch basketball...

Adam has also taken time to think about whether or not he's been a good parent and what his thoughts are about how that plays out in day-to-day life with his routine with his son:

There have been days where it feels like you're not a very good dad, you know, between trying to go to school, and, like this semester, I've had several group projects and group homework assignments. It's, Joshua, we need to go, you need to go - be quiet. And I can't pay attention to you right now, and that's something he's not used to. And, you know, at the end of the day, and then it's, you know, there have been days where I've, okay, I'm gonna do dishes and then we'll go upstairs, we'll read a story and stuff and, go upstairs and Joshua's already asleep...On top of normal school frustrations, there's also that okay, you know, my son is getting bigger. He doesn't necessarily need me as much. And trying to find that balance [of] being the good parent...

Erik reflected on his experience after his son was born and how the mother made it very difficult to see his son and how he made the decision to take her to court:

So a lot of it, [there] wasn't much I could do. So I had to make the decision and take the whole issue to court and you know, I was only able to see him very sparingly. And, I think that you know...it was just a *tough* situation, not to you know, have that ability, and not to really have for some reason have his mother's *trust*? But, I think that's definitely starting to change.

I asked him how often he was able to see his son back then and I could hear some emotion in his voice when we were talking about this topic and how tough it was on him. He said:

Well it was very infrequently...that wasn't for a very long period of time, it was probably for maybe about a year or so. But you know, it was difficult. Yeah, maybe a little bit around a year but it was maybe like every month or every other month or so, so it was tough. And you know, it was like no doubt in my mind that I had to, you know, either take her to court or just not, just give up. And that wasn't even really an option in my mind, so.

Erik was very thoughtful when I asked him about in what ways he has changed inside since his son was born, and he talked about how it has made him learn responsibility and also even how to have more compassion for others:

I definitely have become a lot more responsible....I was very *gifted* athletically. I played baseball on a scholarship, and so I was very cocky. I was very, you know, that kind of an attitude. Maybe like the typical male that you'd, that you'd talked about before. But I got a lot more responsible with *myself*, a lot more, I matured very *fast* [because of becoming a parent]. So I've, I think I've been able to see...like different perspectives, able to put myself in other people's position, and see like maybe what they've been, what they, what's it like for them, 'cause I can, it's easy to judge from the outside, but, if you look at somebody going through a certain situation, no matter what that may be, I always, I have you know, I feel like I can, [have] a little bit better ability now to say, "Ok. What's it like from your point of view?" Because it's very hard for someone, I mean a lot of my friends are just like, I can't even imagine what it'd be like to have a child when you're 20 years old, you know. But since I've been in that situation, and some other situations, I'm able to put myself in and, and be a little bit more *compassionate* towards others, and understanding that you know, we do make a lot, we do make *choices* in life. And the choices lead you to certain situations, but, it doesn't always mean that *life* is over, or you're *done* for. Like, where there's a will there's a way, and I think, I try to be a good role model in that sense...

He then brought it all back around to being there for his son:

I've gone through a lot of adverse situations but I'm still, I feel like I'm doin' pretty well. I mean, I'm getting my [graduate] degree...and doin' some very positive things, and I've been able to be *present* for my son...

In our second interview, I asked Erik if there was anything he found himself thinking about after the first interview. He talked about how it was the impetus to make it a point to spend more time with his son, and possibly seek legal assistance to make it a reality:

I'm the type of person, I don't really ever *dwell* in the past....some people it's natural to think about the past and get all mad about what happened. I'm of the frame of mind that I can't change what's happened. And that's the reality of it. So I just kinda think about and learn from it. And so I was thinking about you know the last time that I got done with school. And how Matthew's mom was a little bit *hesitant* or unwilling to allow me to spend *more* time with him now that I was living closer...She wasn't really *willing* to you know, between *us*, change the visitation agreement. And so I guess [after the interview] I had started to think of okay, as I'm getting closer to being done with graduate school and maybe getting a job, wherever that may be. How am I going to approach the fact that...Matthew and I should be spending a lot more time together. And so I was kinda thinking about how to approach her and even have an attorney ready to go, just in case.

It was powerful to realize that my interview may have helped him come to this point, so I asked him how long after the interview did he find himself thinking about this. He stated it happened almost immediately:

Pretty much right afterwards because after I had left that interview, I think I immediately left and had Matthew that weekend so...I think about some of those things when I'm on a long drive like that. So I thought about that a little bit, and I have a friend that has a dad that's an attorney so I contacted him, and just kinda slowly got the ball rolling on that, so. Yeah, that's pretty much right away I just kinda you know contemplated all that.

It is clear that Erik has thought about how important it is to be there for his son. Near the end of the second interview, he talked about spending more time with his son being the priority, in light of a very recent conversation he was having with a friend:

He was just really impressed on how I've been able to you know, he knows other people that have kids and they aren't doing anywhere like near the things that I'm doing and, he's just really *impressed* with that. But you know, at the same time, I kinda had to remind him how you know, yeah, it's great and it's fulfilling. I've you know accomplished a lot. Got a lot of good knowledge and stuff like that, and the high level of education. But you know, I *have* had to you know, sacrifice maybe some time that I could have been spending with my son. So, moving forward I'm really hoping and working towards having a lot more time with him. And not you know, as he's getting, I don't know what he'll be involved with in high school, if any he'll wanna be in, but, I wanna be able to set it up so that I am, I'm able to be at a majority of his events, because I know that they're only gonna happen once.

School “Propels” You

In this section I will discuss what role school has played in the fathers' lives, separated out into three main themes of the general benefits of school, how it leads to bonding with their children, and how it provides structure and goal setting opportunities. School is a salvation for them, makes them proud, and it helps them bond with their children. The role of student is clearly central to their lives.

School serves to regulate their schedules and provide structure, but yet it must be noted that it may be a contributor to stress, in the sense of juggling the roles of student and parent. But I am including the topic of school in the positive section because of the regulating factor that it

plays in their lives, since the majority of comments about school were positive and that the dads agreed it has been worth it for them.

General Benefits of School.

A number of general concepts related to schooling were found to positively influence the fathers' lives. School is a means towards providing and making a better life for their children. One could argue that the act of being in school *added* something positive to each of their lives.

According to Erik, school could be seen as stress-relief in his case. He began by saying that “physical activity, meeting new people and hanging around [his] friends” recharges him.

And then said,

Also...I kinda get a little bit recharged from, which is maybe a little *weird*, but just over the summer I've had some time to work on my thesis a little bit...if I spend a half hour on it or whatever, it's very rewarding I think.

He also has built many good friendships with people he met in school, those he calls “life-long friends:”

You really kinda start to see what's important and really *who's* important and who isn't, and, I think that also going to school has kinda given me, you know it's really helped me meet some of the, some of my best friends that I have now. And that we keep in touch. We actually just had a fourth of July weekend. A bunch of us got together and so, I think my best friends have come from going to college so I've gotten *that* out of it, some life-long friends.

Shawn said that returning to school has been a pleasant surprise in his life: “[I]t has been kinda different than I *expected* it to be. Which is terrible, I shouldn't have expectations. But it's been a pleasant surprise.” Casey also said that he hopes that school has had an overall positive effect on his life. He first paused and sighed then said:

School? [sigh] I *hope* it's been a net positive. I think it has? I've done a lot of it...so I've been in a lot of class. And I do think it *has* been a net positive. I've been able to expand my knowledge and expand my worldview, and *learn* how to think in some ways. Yeah, and I think that specifically, a liberal arts education is something that everybody really *needs*. Maybe that's just an associate's degree. But, again, sort of an *informed citizenry* would really help things, for the country. Maybe that's the...school component, I don't

know. But yeah, I think that school has been a *good* thing for me. And *yet*, it's taken a lot of time to get where I wanted to with it. And I think part of that is me, the farther I've gotten in school, the less advice I've had, that was good advice. I'm the second generation to go past a bachelor's degree...and that's in the whole history, of my family, as far back as I can find. Which is 17 [hundred]-something. So I have, I have a lack of mentors and I feel like that's contributed to how long it's taken, for me to get to a place where I felt like I could get the job that I wanted. And I guess, in the end game, it will be *what now?* You know. Pretty soon, I'll run out of federal loan eligibility, right. I'm getting close to that marker. And whether I'm done or not, it'll have to be 'what now', *then*. So I hope that, these opportunities that have presented themselves recently are the first and not the last....And I think that maybe that's part of the generational thing that's happened with me, being the first to pursue a [past a master's/graduate] degree. How I have sort of a family values system that very much values practical application, and is confused and wary of *theory*. Of...[pausing] *thinking* too far ahead, you know. Thinking outside the realm of the *useful*, and inside the realm of the *possible*.

Above, Casey mentioned that he is going further in his education than most in his family. Erik and Ben also mentioned something similar, that few people in their families have the type of education they are getting, and Ben in particular expressed concern about his Ex-wife's family because he didn't think anybody had more than an "eighth grade education." The fathers definitely value education and that bodes well for their children as they grow up seeing the worth their own dad places on it.

I asked Dan what he thought life would be like when he's not in school anymore. He stated:

Oh man! That's, that is an *awesome* question, because that *has* crossed my mind a few times. I literally, about a month ago, I sat there, after having gone through all the pros and cons of going after [another degree]. And I sat there and I was like, man. I *love* learning. I love it. I'm like, do I just wanna go *slowly* through some of these other classes? And then I was like well, you know, and then of course you're like well then I can't start paying off my student loans and they just keep getting bigger, you know, 'cause I mean, I've, I'm working for a grant-funded position so it's not like they're gonna *pay* for me to go to school you know. So that's more debt that I'd be getting into. And I'm like, uh you know, so I kinda went back over it. So *really*, I think *two* things. One – I think gradually I'm gonna get happy to not have homework [*laughing*] again, you know! Deadlines won't go away. I mean, being in a grant-funded position you always have things you're doing, but also, in my position, every *day* is different! And we're always planning this, and setting it up. I mean, I'm booking things out through the end of the *year* already....so that's exciting and there's lots going on.

He then continued on to talk about how not being in school will free him up to spend more time with his daughter now that she's moving to the same city he's in, and how he'll find time to do some research on his own related to work:

We'll be helping her to get to more activities and things like that. So that will give me *time* for that. But I think I will definitely fold some of that into my job. Because I really *like* the aspect of always learning something...and so I think I'll find myself you know, doing my own little research or, or learning projects here, in class, or not in class but at work. You know. To try to bring that on. And I'm keeping my ties with State for sure, in that I let them know that over time, I would love to like teach a class or something like that. I know some of my professors definitely want me to come in and *talk* to them. I've already been contacted actually by my undergraduate as well, by some of the people, professors I knew at [previous school] 'Hey you wanna come down and say somethin' to the kids?' you know? And I'm like, "*Sure!*" You know. And then...we have some pretty strong ties with [other area schools] here, as well. So, so, I think that I will probably try to keep that connection *more* than if I had graduated 6 years ago, or something. You know, just because I like that.

But Dan then talked about being a little unsure during the adjustment period after he graduates:

I think there will be a little bit of almost floundering at first, not having that, until I adjust to not having that. You know. Because I have really enjoyed my collegiate experience. I just, if I had known how much fun it was, back when I was 20, I'm sure I would have done it you know. But, then again I don't know that I would have enjoyed it back then.

Not the Typical College Guy – Little Need to Fit In.

Earlier Casey said that the man he was back in college was the "Old Casey," and that in his mind, back then, he was the typical college male. All of the fathers, not just Casey, drew a big distinction between them and the typical college guy. Some mentioned a few comments about a need to conform to specific behavior, but it wasn't about conforming to being a 'typical guy' as I will explain.

As mentioned in the literature review, *Guyland* is Kimmel's idea of the world in which college men live, and in it, they are assigned rules to which they should adhere. This section as follows is a summary of how the *typical college male* was described by the participants, and where they find themselves in this culture, if at all. This discussion can be used to frame the

remainder of the findings section, as it helps bring clarity to the distinction between them and other college men.

Pure and simple, these fathers don't fit the "Guyland" mold. First of all, they don't find themselves age-wise within the bracket of 16-26 years of age so there could be a slight generational difference as the first reason for the differences—plus, they are parents. However, more importantly, the responses to my interview question about fitting in while in college was sometimes met with laughter because most just didn't care at all what others thought about them. Some identified with having been 'that' guy back before they had kids, but that becoming a parent changed them. Interestingly enough, they all had very similar opinions of the common traits of the typical college guy.

The two fathers that mentioned a need to fit in, in some way, were Casey and Shawn. Casey presented it in the form of professional conduct in graduate school:

[T]here's pressure to conform to you know, professionalism. But I feel like I embody some of those traits to begin with, so it's not a *stretch*. I've never felt pressure to go out and party, *and do all the things that we're sometimes known for as college students*. But yeah, I mean, as far as bureaucratic organization, yes, there's pressure to conform but it's not something that I wouldn't do anyway.

Earlier, Erik mentioned how he feels he is a leader and that being a dad is a good match for a leader. Shawn has also found himself to be a leader in school, and talked about his experience in returning to school as an older student. Notice how the reality ended up being much better than Shawn had anticipated:

You know what—first coming back [to school]...not like I was *scared*, but it was kind of an anxiety of being an older than average student. And it wasn't necessarily about fitting in, but how am I gonna interact, especially in [program], you do a lot of ...group work. Like how am I gonna interact in these situations. You know, are people gonna look down at me 'cause like oh he couldn't finish this in his twenties? That's kind of what I thought it might be, but it's exact opposite. More like, I've become the unspoken leader because, I kind of lay out what needs to be done. That's how, I've turned into because of maybe having a kid too, is that this is what, you know, we need to lay out a plan about what might be expected and how we might go about it if this happens or that happened. Or

taking the initiative to go talk to teachers about a certain problem you know, if something in our lab didn't work out.

Adam explained how he is different than the typical college guy by describing how he perceives the behavior of people in his classes.

I'm sitting here [at age], and you see all the kids sitting there you know looking at their phone or at the computer, and you know, are just *blatantly sleeping*. And you know, here's this teacher that's trying to give a conversation, you know, trying to teach you, and, you might as well not even show up, and at that point, why did you attend college to begin with? And, both times in college it's definitely something that I've experienced where it's, I've had that filter of well I'm a dad, you know. I don't get to go home and screw around and you know go drinking and, go do whatever *I* want. I *have* to have that responsibility there. And, I know that even now, it makes some people uncomfortable, ...that's my concern.

As to whether or not Adam felt a pressure to fit in, he said: "I guess as far as like conforming or feeling that pressure [as a student] – not really?" But he did explain that the biggest issue is the "social commentary" for example when he brings his son along to a group meeting:

If we're like going to...the computer lab or something to meet up for group. And then it's okay...we're trying to work as quickly as we can so we can get out of there, and Joshua is sitting here trying to talk to everybody, and he's trying to show everybody what's going on, on his iPad, and, it's, Joshua, no...we need to work. And it's gotten better. He's gotten used to it a little bit more, but it's a little more difficult for *him*, to you know [understand], 'Okay I have to be quiet, I can't be you know, my normal self.' And, you get that frustration of the other students.

The other fathers had absolutely no need to fit in and some even laughed it off. In asking Erik about if he ever felt any pressures to fit in in college, he described the feeling by saying, "No, no. It's just because I don't care." And then he laughed. He continued on to say:

I really don't care if I fit into any [group], whatever crowd, it doesn't bother me, because I feel like no matter what, things will work out as long as you keep that positive attitude...I don't try to fit in with any crowds. I've had a lot of different you know, people want me to hang out, wanna go do this and that, and, if I can, great...But *no*, I guess, I've never really felt, I know a lot of people *feel* pressure to fit in—[like] "I wanna just, I just wanna fit in." *I* just don't care. [*laughs*]

I then asked him if he was always like that even in junior high or high school and he said:

Yeah, I've always been like that. I've always had friends from you know, different 'cliques' I guess you could say. So I mean, I would hang out with all my baseball buddies. And then I would hang out with I don't know, people that were in the band or in the choir I mean like, so I have a very *diverse* group of friends. And maybe that's kinda why I didn't care, because if well, if you guys you know, whatever, I don't need to feel accepted by any *one* individual person or any *group* of people. So. I don't know why, I just *always* have had that outlook. [laughs]

Because Erik seemed to have never needed to fit in and was friends with a lot of different types of people, I wanted to know what his idea of the typical college guy was, and he stated:

Just party person you know, and like, you know not really worrying about too much about the future. Not really *thinking* about it? You know, and just making choices based on what feels good in the moment. You know, a lot of people, you know, there's nothin' wrong with *living* in the moment. But, you have to you know take a calculated risk I guess, you know, you just can't go out and be sleeping with numerous people, and you know, *drinking* all the time, doin' a bunch of drugs, you know, *that* type of lifestyle will catch up with you real quick. And I think that's, you know, a *lot* of people that get to college, they don't, maybe they just, you know, they have a lot of peer pressure and stuff like that. So, typical college guy I mean...you look at like you got all these frats up and down the road here and you got, that's kind of what the typical [college guy is about]. I was never in a frat, but that's the typical college guy you think about, the big jock guy, gettin' hammered all the time, chasin' a buncha women, right. The person I am, you know, I'm very, very hard working, I mean I'll put in 12-16 hour days during the week you know, work 8 hours on the weekend. I see where I wanna go. I see where I wanna get to. I wanna be able to you know, give Matthew opportunities that I never had, that I had to, not necessarily just give them to him, but to *show* him what can be attained through hard work, and that's where that motivation comes in. And so I've become a lot, a *lot* more responsible. A lot more better able to like relate to people like I said...

In response to the question about fitting in, Dan also responded with some laughter. He first paused and then said "Uh – No" and had said 'No' very pointedly. He explained:

Once people realized that I was that much older, I never, in my undergrad, I would laugh at times. I never got invited to any parties, I didn't get invited to go you know, when everybody was turning 21 and they were doin' the bar hops, no one every invited me to those! [laughing]

Did that bother you?

Uh, no. Not even, not even the slightest. I was *not* interested. They would come and then, or they would be mentioning it, I'd be like, "Hey, have fun, don't have too much fun. See you tomorrow, make sure your homework's done." Like I said...in undergrad especially, I almost felt like I was everybody's dad...And then in grad school, not really, no...the only time in grad school I *ever* had any moment like that, was there was a Christmas

party that we were gonna have, that our dean was putting on. And there was gonna be alcohol involved in it. And I was like...I don't wanna go, I mean I know it wasn't gonna be like a *slosh party* or anything like that, but I was just like, I don't feel comfortable doing it. And I had *one* classmate that I'm close to, in particular, [who] took it the wrong way. And thought I was basically trying to say that everybody else that was going was gonna get drunk and whatnot. And I had to explain to him you know, what was going on, and I think he eventually understood. But that was the only time I ever, I mean I told, right away from the beginning, the, we went out to like after our first test ever, the whole group of us went out to like Buffalo Wild Wings and stuff. And people were getting drinks with their meals or whatever and I didn't, and they asked and I was like, hey...I just don't drink. And they were like 'Oh, okay!' So when they go to the bars, they don't ask me to go to the bars, I'm like, "That's cool....We'll hang out if you wanna have a barbeque or somethin'."

Adam used the topic of his physical appearance and also general perceptions of others to describe his feelings on conformity in general and not feeling a need to fit in:

I don't, it never has [been an issue]....[E]ven when I was in elementary school and stuff, I was the short fat kid. It wasn't 'til I was a senior, or I got to high school, that I shot up and I actually gained like 6 inches and I think now, and I still was you know 230 pounds, and so I guess to me, appearance is never, you know, how other people perceive me, has never really been a factor.

Ben talked about how now, he has a little more freedom to go out but he just doesn't care:

I can't believe how it used to be, until these past few years and it just seems kind of nice to have the freedom, you know, just well, it's Friday night, I can go out, if I don't have them, but, I don't, really don't even care [*laughs*].

You don't feel like you need to have that time to go out...

No.

You'd probably rather be with them?

Exactly...There's only a couple of times they took advantage of that whole situation, it's like oh, it's Friday and I can go out, and oh okay. It wasn't even fun, it was just like, [*laughs*]...used to [think] this was great? Must have.

I then asked him if it bothers him at all that he can't go out and he said, "It did at first." He continued by saying:

[When] I was younger then and they're all out havin' fun, and I knew I had to go back home and it's like well...wished I could still do that. And then, you know, these past five years now, that wasn't even an option. Just like, oh, you're gonna go to a party? Have fun! *[laughs]*

I was curious if people asked him out now and asked if they would understand if he couldn't go out:

Well, they have, until, these past year and a half is when I've been really *scarce* and now I go back into the department and I *barely* know half the people. Before, I knew *everybody*, so....Some would keep beggin' me, had a couple of guys...really that wanted to hang out all the time....[T]hey always wanted me to come out and I was like....I got things I gotta do. And you got the other ones that just thought it'd be cool, 'Hey you should come out!' Nope. And they just gave up too after a while, but yeah every once in a while, they'd try to poke at me again, 'You should do this, come out with us' *[mimicking voice]*.

I then asked Ben if it was more about him being a dad, or more because he was a little older than the other students and he said:

I think it's both again, is that they're gonna go out and do dumb things, and you already *know* what's gonna happen. That, and you know, the responsibilities that you've had before, 'cause that's, that's what really mellows you out, *I* think. So I've known a...couple of guys...that are about my age. They don't have kids and they still act like they're 23 and you're just like...*[laughs]*...I shake my head at 'em, but you know *[laughs]* that's just how they are.

I then directly asked Ben what the biggest pressure he feels to fit in in college and he said, "Biggest pressure, I just never cared. Just like this is, this is what I gotta do to get done, let's do it. No." I then asked him if he felt any sort of pressure when he was younger and first starting out in college. He said the only pressure then "was practicing to keep up with those guys 'cause they were good. They were really good." I then asked if that probably isn't even a concern for him now and he said:

Nooo, gosh....No. Well the first few days, I was back full time and I'm back in these freshman classes, so I'm like the old guy out front and I was always like, I'm gonna be the front guy, in the front, I'm gonna take care, take advantage of everything. You know, it felt weird at first, but *[laughs]*, you got over that quick. At least I did.

I asked Ben before that about life as a student, and he said: “I’m just older than everybody anyways....oh man.” I asked him how that dynamic worked and he began with a laugh:

Well you just look at ‘em and you just wonder if you’ve been so stupid in your life and you know you have, you know you have *[laughs]*, it’s just, all the life experiences I’ve gone through, compared to them, it’s just really tough to like, not *synergize*, but it’s just, it just doesn’t blend very well.

Interestingly enough, even though none of the fathers identify with the typical college guy now, a few did look back fondly on that time in their lives and admitted they were that typical guy, such as Casey when he was referring to what he called the “Old Casey” and “New Casey.” Shawn also said something similar when describing what the typical college guy is like in his mind:

I’ll work as hard as I have to not to fail...and then oh this weekend we’re gonna go rip it up, or we’re gonna party or we’re goin’ to this game...no real responsibilities, kinda just free, free will kinda do as you please kinda thing.

He then concluded with, “That’s how I was when I started.” And with Ben, despite feeling guys didn’t have their acts together when going to college, he spoke of those times with nostalgia:

Stereotype? I *was* the stereotype. Back in the mid-90s...typical college thing, was, figure out where the party is, you find the women, you do your work, when you had to, and then you stayed up way too late *[laughs]*, you know, it was just, you had that freedom, and you just went out and explored everything and yourself and whatever else...One stupid story is that we were in [city name], and we had 24-hour movie theaters going...You know that’s when *Showgirls* last came out and we waited until the 3am showing of that to go see it, and I was like, lookin’ back at it, what was the point of that. It was stuff that you could do, at least that’s what I think of it like that, the typical college male is that...it’s not all *goin’ on* up there *[laughs]*, so they’re just goin’ out and doin’ their thing.

In this section, we saw into the minds of the fathers to know what they feel others think of them, what they think of themselves, and why they feel they are different than the typical college guy they are attending school with. In the next section, I will present the positive and rewarding side of being a single father, as a way to continue to get to know the participants.

Bonding with Kids – The Valuing of Education.

The men in this study valued education and want to be good role models for their children. There is a reciprocal relationship here in that being a parent is motivating in itself because they want to do better for their children. At the same time, school offers a structure that helps them get to the next level and do better like they wanted to and this leads to perseverance.

They bond with their kids over homework whether that is setting aside a time to do homework together, giving time for both the dad and the child to get their own homework done. And, children seem to show a positive interest in their dads being in school. In talking about what a typical day is like with his son, Erik explained how he makes helping his son with his schoolwork part of the routine, all the while tying it back to *being there* for his son:

We'll get up and you know, get some breakfast. He likes me to cook him breakfast, he likes, he also likes to try to cook too. But he doesn't like to go by recipes, he throws whatever in, just fun you know. Sometimes [we] watch cartoons, play. He's really into Legos, so we'll play Legos...I like to challenge him to do some critical thinking...and bein' outside and active, when we can. And...a lot lately, we've really gotten into a lot of reading. He's gettin' really good at reading, so...he had a little bit of a struggle there and so I kind of place an emphasis on doing some sort of reading or schoolwork type of thing, while we're together. We have a lot of different fun things we do, you know, and in the evening time, we usually go outside and go on a 'night walk' as he calls it. Walk around, just chat, you know. I think he really likes the time that we spend together is a little bit of an escape for him, to get away from...I mean he lives with his mom who lives with her mom. They live with her siblings still. And so it's a pretty full house for them. And I think he's somewhat controlled on what to do, and he's a very free spirit type kid, and so I'm not that type of a[n] authoritarian, where I get really upset and angry when he you know *does* break something or something like that. There's been plenty of times where he's broken something or done something you know, like just an accident, and [he says] 'I'm really sorry, I'm really sorry!' I'm like, "Don't worry about it. It's not a big deal." But, you know, basically the theme for when we spend time together is just spend it *all* together. You know, I don't like, sometimes I'll invite a friend or something over to hang out with us. But a lot of the times, and my mom knows this too, that we you know, we just. We know that we don't get a *whole* lot of time together, in the grand scheme of things, so we wanna make that time be *quality*. 'Cause that's what it's about, so.

Erik also talked to me about coming back to graduate school and how that motivates him.

I then asked him if he thinks his son Matthew looks up to him in this area. He stated,

Oh yeah, I think so. He doesn't just say it. But, he does. 'Cause we'll talk about school, and then I'll tell him about what I'm doing in school. And then he can tell me about what he's doing in school. One time when he wasn't wanting to read, wasn't wanting to read... I was reading a journal article that was written by one of my professors, you know, quite lengthy, a lot of mathematical stuff and it was very complex and so I laid it out the next morning and he woke up and he looked at it. 'This is what you're reading?' And I said "Yeah, so it's time to read, are we gonna read *that* or are we gonna read one of your books?" So he just went right for his book, that he wanted to read... And he'll ask me about school and my teachers and stuff like that, so he's very interested in that, because I'm tryin' to show him that you know, because none of his mom's side of the family, well, his mom, none of them have a 4-year degree. So I'm the only person really in his life that has a 4-year college degree. Besides my brother. But he lives out on the west coast, so doesn't see that side very, too often. So yeah, we do talk a lot about school and what's goin' on, and so this weekend actually, when we get done here... I have him this weekend, and so... I have some work I probably have to do, so I'll call him on the way down and say hey, bring some schoolwork with, and we'll do some schoolwork together. And we've done that before, where we'd sat at a table and done schoolwork together, so. I think that's a unique thing for a child to do with their dad, is do schoolwork. And he sees I'm getting a very advanced degree, so.

I then told him I'd already heard from two other dads that also share in homework time together, and he said:

Yeah, that's unique, you know, I didn't do that with my dad. My dad was a lot older than I am, when Matthew's 10 years old, and when I was 10, my dad was 50 [*laughs*]. Yeah, so, a little difference.

Dan talked about how he made it part of his routine when he had his daughter for the weekend and makes homework a priority:

Now, obviously I can't get all of my homework done during the week with everything else going on... and she'll have homework she brings home... We try to make Fridays, a [day] just to relax, 'have fun' time. As she eases into it. And then Saturday morning, she'll do her homework and she'll sit at the table and I'll be at the computer right behind her, I'm typin' my papers while she's doing hers, and so I'll help her with her homework. And once that's done, then we move on, to more fun activities and stuff. And I'll let her to try to interspace it if she has a lot of homework or something like I'll be like, okay do this assignment and then you can have like 20 minutes to read. And then you can come back... I mean if she wants to read I'm not gonna [*laughs*] stop her from doing that! But, as opposed to getting into a whole bunch of cartoons and things like that. We save all of that kind of stuff until afterwards.

Shawn recalled how he and his son bond over schoolwork and how he is clearly proud when his son talks about being like him:

Now that we're both now going to school at the same time, he takes a lot of pride in it. We put our backpacks on at the same time and he's like, 'Yeah, we're goin' to school.' And I ask him...are you gonna do my homework for me this weekend? 'Cause he doesn't have any. You don't have any homework, you should do mine. [Son says], 'No Dad, it's too hard.' I'm like, "Come on, it's just a couple of numbers, you can do it"...So, and he likes to say like 'Oh I'm gonna be a [name of dad's profession]." And I'm like, you don't have to be, you don't have to be like me. This is just what *I* do.

Structure and Goal Setting.

In our second interview, Ben and I were talking about the role school played in his life and it became clear it has played a huge part in who he is: "In my life? *It was* my life for the past 8 years!" And when I asked Dan the same question, he stated simply, "Structure. *Bigtime* for structure." He also talked about how his time in school has advanced his ability to be a provider:

I view my whole education process as...a series of steps but one *very very large* step forward for my family. I started all the way back at [school] for [major]. To start with. *With* the concept that I wanted to be able to have a job that I both enjoyed, so I mean there was some personal involvement right. It wasn't a 100% like I was *only* doing this for my child. You know, even though I'm gonna hate it for the rest of my life...but I wanted to be, have a better level of a job so I could *provide* you know, not, not *all* the things I think, 'cause my parents were wonderful. They were wonderful for me. And the things I didn't get like the G.I. Joe aircraft carrier. I did just fine with my imagination and a cardboard box you know, I did *not* have a poor childhood. I had a very *wonderful* childhood. So it wasn't about that. It was about being able to provide her with *more* than just living in a one-bedroom apartment and driving, you know, whatever car we could make, work with duct tape and bailing wire right. And not being able to you know, afford new shoes ever, and you know, and I mean, *it was about being able to provide this certain level of life, to her.*

Dan also talked about the role school has played in helping him feel a sense of accomplishment and how school has propelled him. He explains how it doesn't give you an opportunity to feel sorry for yourself and how the sense of accomplishment works for men:

Whether you believe that your Ex left you, and there was something you needed to better about yourself, or whether you just feel like they left you and that was awful and you were...pretty good anyway, you *are* getting better...And when that *sinks* in, you're like, huh. If I'm gonna be a better person then *I'm going to be okay*. And at that point in time it's *really* easy to start lettin' that stuff just roll off your back. But I don't think a lot of people...if for example you were 2 years into a job and now you're 10 years into a job, and you haven't really gone anywhere, in your job...you might still feel like you're in the *exact* same spot. You know. *And, through school, that propels you.* You're *never* in that

same spot. You're *not* a freshman anymore, you're now a senior, or whatever you know. And...especially men I think are very much *built to need* to see that next stair you know. And as you're taking those, you're leaving behind the awful thing that happened in your past.

Like Dan, Casey also talked about how school is a means towards providing for his children:

Before, I was focused on myself. And now, I'm focused on *them*. And, yeah, I don't, I wouldn't say I don't *care* about myself, anymore, but I care more about *them*. So, yeah. And, you know, I could be happy doing a lot of different things, but I'm getting my [graduate degree] so that I can provide for *them*.

The above passage was said during the first interview, and at another time in the same interview he talked about getting even further graduate education is a path for him to "make a better life" for his children. Interestingly enough, in the few weeks between the first and second interviews, his opinion on that seems to have changed. In his story, he said, "Why am I *still* pushing? Why not just stop now and work like you need to." He had some opportunities arise in the meantime between the two interviews, and these opportunities led him to question his need for further education:

I've finished the first year this year. It's supposed to be a 5-year program. But I'm transferring in some, and I'm taking extra classes. And I hope to be done *sooner* than that. *That said*, I have been looking at other opportunities. There are jobs that I'm qualified for [with just my current degree], that I've been *heavily* pulled toward. And that's actually since our last interview, but I don't know if it's *because of*, I should think that it's not, but, yeah, and you probably *hope* that it's not [*laughing*]....If I were to take that opportunity, and I've been *really* seriously considering it, and it would mean a *big* life change, but I would be closer to the kids, and I wouldn't have to do all of the *hoop-jumping* that I have to do here. [*pauses*]...And it's really tempting. It's *really*, really tempting. I've done some preliminary like, work, to figure out how I would support myself, if I was doing it. And it's *possible*. So, yeah. That's a thing that could happen. [*thinking*] It's *scary*, 'cause there's no, nobody's gonna be writing me checks. It's gonna be you know, what I do is what I make....So, it's you know, it's a *tempting* and yet really scary offer...And there are other jobs that I've applied to lately, just, in the industry....And, [*it*] pays well.

When Casey laughed above during the middle of the last passage, he was making a commentary on the fact that he thought that I, as a researcher on this topic, would be surprised and

disappointed to realize that during the course of this study, that he would now have even been considering leaving school.

Erik stated that school has given him the ability to “really set goals.” He continued on to talk about how through school he was able to maintain focus through returning to grad school:

Just seeing how you know if you stay focused on something, and if you want something bad enough and you just go out and make it happen, that you *can* make it happen and ... you know, there's, especially, the very beginning of graduate school was a little bit of a difficult transition but, just knowing that if you stick with *something* and don't stray too far from it that you can you know really get a lot accomplished, if you stay focused.

Some dads described school as being almost kind of a salvation for them. In talking with Ben about freedoms he wish he had now but doesn't, he talked about the stress of having to work multiple jobs to make ends meet and how school has gotten him through life:

Well, the freedom is like, is that I should have been done with school a year and half ago, so this clawing and trudging along, and just dragging everything out, it's killin' me. But, now it's getting to the point where you're like saying why, why are you doing this? Why does it matter? Just...go and start working construction again, just call it quits. Just because, now I don't know, just at this point, just I get to spend *so little* time, the time I *do* get to spend, I have to use most of it in order just to make money. That it doesn't *feel* right, I just don't like it, but, you just keep pluggin' til the end result if I can, not *if*. *When* I get the job and stuff, and is able to show them, that, here, you don't have to live like what your mom and your grandma and all those other people are doing, food service until you can't walk anymore. And then, you know, barely makin' ends meet, that you can't make something out of yourself and you can do what you wanna do, instead of being miserable all the time. That's what I was before, until I went back to school. I was so miserable, those days you don't even wanna wake up but you know you have to.

I then asked, “So you think school has kind of helped get you through in some ways?” and he stated affirmatively, “Yeah – oh yeah.” Remember that Ben's journey to finish school has taken longer than normal and he saw school as something he just needed to finish: “I'm missing that much more of my life. Just get it done. Just get it done.”

Adam made it clear that school has complicated his life in some ways as to his routine, however turned it into a positive thing, saying it is worth it because he is trying to be better for his son, Joshua. Adam stated that school is:

A reminder of why I want a job. As much fun as it is to have been living on savings and not having to work and stuff like that, I miss the, having that full-time job. And, you know, when you, you come home from school in the evening and you pick Joshua up and I'm sure a lot of the other dads, kind of have the same feeling, is okay, and then it's, alright I gotta make supper. I gotta do this, that and the other thing. And you know, like well the first time I was in college, it was oh well here, I need to, I'll just make a quick pack of Ramen and then I'm good for the evening. Ehh, you don't have that luxury. Yeah, you gotta actually cook somethin' actually half-way decent and, unfortunately a lot of times it's pizza and stuff like that but, you know, better than just nothin'. Yeah, you keep up on laundry a little bit better. Yeah. Nothin' else 'cause you know, the school starts complaining when the kid wears the same shirt 3 days in a row, but, in Joshua's case he obsesses over the color green. And you know, at one point, he actually was *smuggling* his green shirt to school. I'd drop him off, he'd run into the bathroom, swap shirts out....So, but no, school's been a kind of a pretty much constant reminder of *I need to get out of here.* [laughs] As bad as that is, it was a *choice* to come back to college. But no, it's definitely, it's a reminder of why I came [back], why I want the degree, why I want to, do better for Joshua.

I asked Adam if school moves him forward and he confirmed that with me: "Yeah, it's a definite reminder that I don't wanna be in here any longer than I have to be."

Like Adam, Shawn also feels like school has given him a way forward. He talked of the difficulties when he was fighting to see his son and how he learned to cope, and also how school is bringing it all together for him:

Stuff in my life kinda turned to chaos for a while 'cause I kinda lost sense of direction you know. And every time I would get him for like a week and I'd see him and then he would leave and *I would have that same feeling of loss, all over again.* It was like I would have to *cry*....my parents were like, 'We're worried about you. Every time he leaves, you know, we have to be around you' 'cause I would do somethin' stupid, go out and get wasted or somethin', 'cause I didn't know how to cope with it. But yeah, but perseverance and just keep on doin' it. Doin' what I *can* to get closer to him. Like I said when I moved to [area], like I'm closer now, you know, it's only a 2 hour drive to go get him and not a 6 hour drive, and that worked. And then her stuff fell apart and she came back and I was like, okay, well she's back here...then my opportunity to go back to school came up and I'm like okay, you know...my hard work, it's like I can see kind of a path now, where I can go. Where this might come together. Yeah but it was all about my work which gave me this pride, like I've been workin' at this. And I'm kinda startin' to see some benefits. You know, my sacrifice, and my getting short-changed and my compromising all the time is starting to pay off now that....I can get some of what I feel I deserve. I don't like *saying* that, but you know, that word *deserve*. Like, you kinda have to *earn* it, but. I don't know. It was a lot of work. And on my whole family, not just me. My family was driving, they were paying for gas, and yeah, it wasn't even their responsibility but they understood my situation and how it was tearing me apart and this

was their way to help me do it and I couldn't be more grateful. 'Cause if I didn't have their help, I probably wouldn't be here, you know...the choices I made in how to handle that situation were terrible. And, I'm not blaming *her* for doing it. She's not the cause of *my* choices you know, but it was my ability to cope, I didn't know how to handle it, and, yeah. But I made it.

Shawn also talked about how school helped him feel like it was getting him somewhere and told about how he felt upon leaving school when his son was born:

Well, when I first started, I started in [major]...because I was under so much pressure, I dropped instead of like telling my parents or whatever, because I couldn't do it anymore. That was the first time I dropped. And then I was kind of in limbo, tryin' to figure out which direction to go. And that was a couple of years and then I decided to, I tried [the same major] again, and didn't do it and then I decided to go into [related field]...then he was born and I had to drop for, it was a couple of years, because I was working. I finished one semester 'cause he was born in April. I finished that following Fall semester, but I couldn't do it, I was a wreck. So that's when I dropped. And then I worked for the next 2 years, 2 and a half years, maybe longer. Before I went back [to school]. Wow. It's so hard to remember. It was like a lot of time in there...I went back for a semester, and then I ended up moving... I was out there for 3 years and then I decided, that's when I was like, I gotta finish this undergrad, because, the work that I was doing and it was like, I'm not getting anywhere. And it was actually driving me mad. Like I knew, I knew I was better than this. I was, I'm better equipped for something else than this. So then I decided to come back. Yeah, and I've been on fire here ever since. Killin' it. [both laugh]

Shawn also talked about school being an obstacle to conquer, yet rewarding at the same time:

I guess it's been a *challenge* in some ways. You know, like in, almost an obstacle to overcome. It's been rewarding for you know, having come back and being able to complete it, it is kinda like, a milestone. Saying that I have a 4-year degree, yes I have higher education. I can be considered a professional now. That's the biggest thing, having self-confidence you know, that comes *with* that. And having I suppose, integrity, but being taken serious in a field. At least yeah, I need a piece of paper to tell people that I know what I'm talkin' about, but you know, that's how it works. And yeah just havin' that respect, and. Yeah.

Shawn also talked about how he is happy at this point in his life and how school has made that possible for him. He had been talking about his frustrations with child support and said:

After goin' through all that stuff, right now where I sit, I am *extremely* happy. And a lot of it's 'cause I've done stuff for myself. I've kinda gotten selfish...I'm doin' my school, I'm goin' forward, and that's benefitting my son. And he sees that, it's working. It's covering *everything*, so. Took me a while to figure it out but I got it [laughs].

In my first interview with Dan, I asked him what he thought about my idea that school is a regulating factor in the men's lives, in comparison to the dads from my Master's thesis where none of them were in school. He said:

You know, that makes...a lot of sense. Because, you don't have time to go home, if you've got a 7-page paper, on up, due, you don't have time to go home and sit there and if you're a drinker, drink, or just sit there and think about woe is me, this sucks, this happened or that happened you know. You don't have time to go out with your buddies to the bar or just hang out with your buddies wherever and be bitter, about stuff. And talk about it. Which really, some, unfortunately in those kind of situations, isn't therapeutic, it's more like, your buddies think they need to support you so they're like yeah that was awful and that was, and she was such a...you know. And you know, and you, yeah, you know, so it really makes you focus and I think, I think you work things out better then, if you're busy, especially, at least for men, at least for me. But for guys that I've known as well, seems like the, if you keep yourself busy, you get time to deal with your emotions a piece at a time. You know. And then, as, and especially as you're bettering yourself, you realize that you're working towards something, and especially if you've incorporated that you're doing this for your kids, you know, at that point in time, well, quite frankly at that point in time, somewhere along the way, *it clicks in your mind that you're like okay.*

Disadvantages Experienced by Single Fathers

Being a parent is a very enjoyable experience for a single father, and school is also a very positive influence in their lives. However, there were a few themes that arose which clearly impact their lives in a negative way and would be considered drawbacks of being a single dad in college. Firstly, fathers reported feeling overlooked or dismissed in many ways. Secondly, I will address some of the words used to describe men or fathers. Next, I will show evidence of how feelings of guilt and shame ran throughout their stories, and they also reported financial difficulties in terms of money and feeling restricted in job opportunities. Lastly, it seemed as though in general, the fathers felt unsatisfied in some ways about their children's living arrangements or the relationship with the mother. A common theme was fathers reporting their children not wanting to go back to their mother when their time with them was coming to a close.

Feelings of Being Overlooked or Dismissed

Fathers often reported situations or comments which left them feeling dismissed, overlooked, ignored, or that their opinions had been discounted. This happened in many areas of their lives, whether that was with their children's teachers, at the doctor's office with their child, or in the court system or at social services. Examples of this have already been woven throughout the findings, but I will include additional examples here.

Specifically, feelings of being left out was very evident when I talked with the dads about the topic of my research. Shawn and I were talking about how he felt when reading my recruitment email, and mentioned how he feels dads are overlooked in the research:

It was that you said oh you're doing a study looking [at single dads], 'cause nobody's ever like asked me about my side of it you know, it's always about his mom. You know her struggles or whatever. And everything's *tailored* towards her and not what I was doing...we're underrepresented....I've never been asked you know...what am I going through or what do I have to do in order to see *my* son or get *my* rights to him.

And to fast-forward to the very end of the second interview, Shawn commented:

I don't know, I guess, I just hope, and I'm sure you will, is you know, provide a *good accurate* portrayal of how single fathers really are. You know, we're not in the, that picture. You know that we do, we work just as hard to *love* our children, to be there for our kids. We love 'em just as much.

Adam even mentioned how his own mom questioned his involvement in the study. It may seem like an innocent comment but it is a depiction of yet another examples of single fathers being dismissed:

I know, after the first interview I told my mom about it and she was like were there a lot of people involved? [*laughing*] And she didn't...my mom was like oh yeah, you're gonna actually be able to do this, and she'd question it. I'm like, well apparently there's more than just me at State.

When Ben responded to my initial recruitment email, he told me in his first email contact with me that being a single dad was "not a glamorous position." I immediately felt sadness and could tell this may be a sign of things to come, and it reminded me a lot of the underlying feeling

I had after interviewing the fathers in my Master's thesis. At the end of my first interview with Ben, I told him how I'd like to do a presentation or get the study published because I haven't seen anything actually published about single dads in college and he said, "Which doesn't surprise me." And then he said, "It's all about the moms."

It is also of note that almost immediately upon sitting down for our first interview, Dan acknowledged the lack of focus on men or boys in his field. I hadn't started the recorder yet and had to stop him so that I could turn it on right in the middle of what he was talking about. I asked him why he felt they hadn't been focusing on boys, and he talked about how male scholars are normally focused on certain specific areas in his field, but he still offered a criticism:

I mean, *good* topics but they're not turning that *inwards* right, a lot of times... And it seems like whenever I see the research, based on the little girls and stuff like that, a lot of times it's you know driven from, from like female professors and female researchers and stuff. Which, I mean, we know naturally they're going to think more inside and like and follow that through so it's, it's yeah, it's been interesting. I mean, I try to think about that and I'm like, I hope I'm not being sexist by saying that but, you know, but it is interesting. And there is starting to be some research into men.

When I asked Dan in the second interview what may have come to mind after the first round, he said he had been dwelling on something and talked about how men have been "forgot about":

I don't know that much *new* came in, except... just kinda dwelling on you know, just the whole concept. Like I told you... I don't know if this is chauvinistic to even say, but I am just so *impressed* that someone is doing this research because like I said, I had *looked* for any kind of research on men, and it just wasn't there. You know. And I *realized* that... you can go to college all the way through the Ph.D. [in] women's studies. And that's awesome you know. Because for the longest time in history, I understand you know, it was all *about* men... but from about the 1950s forward... there became this just this real *radical* turn and men were off to war but then they came back and then all of a sudden it was like, they were forgot about. And a lot of them I think took that as a like oh well you know, if I'm not *expected* to do something, why should I? And that really has become a really sad state. And also so, like you said, I was very like wow you know, someone's doing these studies...

In addition to Dan, the other fathers also commented on the lack of research and their hopefulness about the fact I was conducting such research on men, in addition to their generous willingness to help. In the beginning of my first interview with Erik, I was mentioning the lack of research on dads in college and how the research on single parents is mainly on single moms, and he commented: “Well, that’s mostly what people think about when they, when they think single parents. They think about oh the poor single mom, you know.” A bit later, I then asked him what his first thoughts were when he saw my research email come out. He said,

My first thought, well, I guess I *don’t* know very many single fathers in college. I think...we’re definitely a minority. And then...something about what you had just talked about, how it hasn’t really *been* researched, and, I thought hey, if I can share *my* experiences and share *my* thoughts, and what I’ve gone through, to be helpful, to put towards that, I’m *more* than willing to sit down for a couple hours to go over that.

Near the end of our second interview, I asked Shawn what were his final thoughts as I set out to analyze all my data. It is clear that Shawn’s experience thus far with custody has been less than positive, and he has felt fairly powerless. In responding to my question, he stressed how single fathers are left out of the research and also commented on the importance of fathers to a child’s life:

I don’t know, I guess, I just hope, and I’m sure you will, is...provide a *good accurate* portrayal of how single fathers really are. You know, we’re not in the, that picture [of research or not thought of at all]. You know, that we work just as hard to *love* our children, to be there for our kids. We love ‘em just as much. I mean they *need* both mom and dad, but you know, they need ‘em [fathers]. There’s, I mean and there’s statistics all over the place about kids that grow up without fathers. And they’re all *bad* you know, so it’s always a missing piece...And I, I’m confident that it you know, that you’ll take what we said and you know and put us in a good light.

Fathers also reported feeling dismissed by their Ex, or their children’s doctors or school staff. Shawn explained in particular how he feels like he is discounted by his Ex, and said he feels like she does not involve him in very important decisions about the wellbeing of his son:

As far as some of the situations though that he is in, I don’t, some of my opinions are discounted or whatever. Like ‘cause after that relationship in Nebraska, she started this

other one without telling me. And before...before we broke up even, we said, you know, if we started seeing somebody else you know, the parents should meet the other person before the son is introduced. Which is fine, 'cause she came up with the idea and never *once* followed through with it. But she met this other one, and he had the same problems that the guy in Nebraska [had], the drinking, the, he's got two other kids with two other moms, and I was like, what kinda situation are you putting my son in? You're not even asking me...I think it's because she knows that I would *object* to it. So she's *avoiding* the conflict or whatever. She's doing what she wants to do. But yeah...but she *does* have his best interests at heart...She gets clothes for him when she can, she takes him to these sporting events. Well I started the sporting thing, and you know, she finally takes him out to haircuts. Which is impressive, because that was my thing. It was almost like a tradition. Every time I got him, I got him a haircut...But, she is good with him. It's just some of her choices are...I don't know. But, I can't do anything about it. I can't tell her where, or who to date. And that's not really my objective, is to tell her who to date, But I want her to recognize [it]. You know, to try to see what he sees, 'cause that's when I asked, do you like so-and-so? ...[My son says] 'No.' I'm like, "Well does he do somethin', does he say stuff to you, you know, you can tell me, I'm not gonna get mad, you know..." [Her boyfriend has] his own issues but I think it's just with *him*. He doesn't put it out on the kids, which is good, I mean, 'cause you know, the kids aren't gonna help you get better and they're not gonna, they're not the 'cause of your problem either, so—I don't know, I don't know.

Adam told of a time where the school called him because his son had injured his head.

This example illustrates the intersection of his role of father and the competing role of student, because he had to leave class to take care of his son. He told the story as such and described how the school handled the situation:

[When] Joshua comes home with a bruise or a scratch, I don't think much of it, because well, he's a boy. And even if it was, even if he was a girl, I'd be like, well, you hit something. If you have a broken bone then I care...[O]ne day he fell out on the playground and he fell...I don't know how he gouged out a chunk of his head... and the school called up and 'Oh he might be having a concussion, and you need to get him all cleaned up, he's all full of blood, and he won't let us touch his head.' All this kinda stuff...so I left class...went home, got a change of clothes, brought them to the school, 'cause I figured oh, he had something on his clothes, okay we'll change him quick, he can go back to class. No, they wanted him to go home so he could get cleaned up. Okay, alright, we will go home, we will get you cleaned up. Sat down, got, got him home, had to...shave his head...[to get a] decent look at what he'd done to his head. And okay, he got a little bit of, you know, you can tell he fell and he hit a rock or something, and cut into his head. Okay, it's a head wound, they bleed. Not gonna freak out too much about this, got out the peroxide and stuff, got him all cleaned up. Joshua's all ready, he *wants* to go back to school, he didn't wanna leave.

He then explained what happened when he returned his child to his school and how the nurse got the principal involved and they second-guessed Adam's handling of the situation and how it all seemed to escalate:

Now the *nurse* has actually come in, 'cause this happened right away in the morning. So okay, nurse wants to look at him, make sure everything's okay. Well, we didn't have a small Band-Aid, we had a *big* one. And Joshua wouldn't let me cut his hair that much...we were gonna stop in the nurse's office and say, hey just gotta get a little round Band-Aid, it's not a big issue whatsoever. She took one look and was like 'Oh god, you have to take him in for you know, 'Cat' [CT] scans and stuff, he could have a concussion, you know, all this kinda stuff. And, I'm sitting here going, Okay, I'm the *parent*, and I'm not freaked out about this. A head injury. *You're freaking out* - umm, doesn't quite match up here. What's going on here? And so finally...after 20 minutes, *trying* to let the school let him back in. At this point, the principal has become involved and stuff, because the nurse is freaking out, I'm *not*. And, so finally I said, okay, I *will* take him to the doctor, we'll get him cleaned up, you know, *officially*. Okay, so then we go into the walk-in clinic, and we're sitting there, and Joshua's sitting here. The head injury has stopped bleeding by this point. He's perfectly fine, you know, beyond the fact he's got a bald spot from when I shaved his head. And, okay we go to the walk-in, 2 hours later we're walking out, Joshua is pissed off at the world because they put a staple in his head. And, all this kinda thing. So then we're goin' around, and, get him back to the school and again still have this big to-do, you should have let him stay home, all this kinda stuff. And I'm sitting here, "I have class! I have already missed two of my classes, I have one more. I'm going to my class"...yeah no, it was a fun-filled day. Of, you know, conforming to what the school wanted.

Adam told of another experience he had, this time which was related to his son's asthma, where he felt discounted both by a doctor and by his son's teachers when his son was younger:

We were with the asthma specialist. And talking about things and it's well...wanting to know mom's history. And I don't know all of mom's medical history....I think this asthma specialist, he *was* tryin' to do a little bit of a scare tactic here to push and, maybe he's tryin' to push drugs. I don't know....And, so no, there's dismissal...and I don't know if it's just I'm a single dad or if it's, well, you're the parent—you don't [know], you're not objective. You know. They could be that too, especially when it comes to a doctor and stuff like that. But, you know, I think I know my son better than the doctor that just met him for the first time.

I then told him a similar story that I'd experienced where I felt I'd been discounted by a nurse when it came to a virus that my son had. Adam then said:

You know, that also kind of poses a question...when I take Joshua in to like the walk-in clinic, there's a lot of comments about well where's mom. [She's] not there?...there's

lots of questions well what's mom's history. I don't know. I could tell you the history of her two kids better than hers....is it just the fact that it's Dad bringing in the kid...I don't know, I've never actually thought about that. 'Cause it's just somethin' that's always been asked, is well, you know, what's the family history. Well, what's mom's side - good question? *[laughs]* You can call and ask her. Just don't tell her *why* we were in please.

After Adam finished talking about not knowing the mom's medical history, he then connected that to his current girlfriend being questioned at the school:

I've got standing agreements with the school system that even if [my son's mother] showed up, they won't let her go see him. And they won't let her pick him up, unless I've, and even my girlfriend has gotten questioned with me standing you know 10 feet away talkin' to the teacher. 'Why are you interacting with Joshua? Who are you? What's your relationship to him?' and it's, you know, you're gettin' grilled by teachers that Joshua doesn't *interact* with, you know. *Obviously* they're communicating that okay, be very *mindful* of who's picking this child up. And, so yeah, you know, you kinda set those things up, and I legitimately did have that concern she was gonna show up at some point. More so when we were in [city] because that's where she also lived. But, I know now, she's moved to [city] and [is] working at [place], I think. She won't tell me for sure.

I asked Adam to explain a little more about some surprised reactions from others that he had been talking about at child services or other places. He talked about surprise from others as to why the mom is not involved, as they were not assuming it was her decision to leave:

There's definitely an *undertone*. Even when it's...the parents you know. Like Joshua's birthday party. And, [they say] 'Oh, this is mom,' when they meet my girlfriend..."Well no, this is my girlfriend." And, [they say] 'Oh well you're still Joshua's mom.' "No...she has her own kids." ...[And] they kinda look around for an instant and it's like they're looking for...*mom*. And...well, mom's not around, you know. Hasn't been for years. And then you get, and even the people that are like really supportive and stuff, there's still kinda that undercurrent of well you know, mom should be in the picture and I'm Dad you know, I'm strong-armed into the situation or she got pushed out, and it's, "Nooo, it was her choice to walk. To not be involved..." and, uh, I'll say a lot more about her when there's not a...microphone.

Shawn told me about a fathers' rights issue that was on the ballot last year and talked about how someone was on television speaking out against it. Shawn was very angry after seeing this person's attitude about the measure:

I got fired up this last election they had, that measure on the ballot...that the man and woman have equal rights at birth, to start out with. And they got *voted down*....Right after [the local news] they have this show where they spotlight like a hot topic that's

goin' on in the area. They brought on *some clown* that was advocating to vote no on that measure, because he said it would take away from the livelihood of the family practice lawyers...I had never heard such *putrid, foul*, sounds, come out of a person's mouth in my life. Because you're gonna, like, *withhold* somebody's rights on one side so *this* person over here can make *money*, getting them their rights? ...I was floored. I was almost ill, like that's the conservative republican point of view in North Dakota that I *can't stand*. ...I was so fired up about that...I'm never going back to North Dakota by the way...They let me vote because I go to school here...so I voted for it, so now I can probably speak out for all the idiots that voted no on it, because I did vote. But there was a Facebook page for the people that came up with this measure, and they were making fun of that guy that was on TV and how he's such an idiot, and whatever, but they said there's...a committee or whatever, for the lawyers that do family practice or whatever, that donated more money to advertise for *no* on that, than this team got for the Yes vote. And I can see where, why that was why, 'cause there was only like 120,000 votes for this, because it was, the word wasn't out there, the message just wasn't there. So by throwing a little bit of money at the lawyers' association guy, a few more votes, if people wanna put it that way. Might not be the only factor, but. But it was just like, Ahhh, but it was *on* there [the ballot]. Even when I would tell people about it, they had no idea it was on there. I was like, but would you have voted for it if you would have [seen it], oh yeah yeah yeah. But *because* I told it to you with such passionate conviction, that's why I convinced you. Should put *me* on TV and I'll get the whole state. Oh no, I'm just kidding...

Remember that Shawn does not have any official custodial rights to his son. After talking about the ballot measure, he spoke of the frustration about the law in the state which he said shows a preference towards women getting custody.

That was frustrating, because it was just like, here's the law. It's on the books, and I wanna know what year that law was written saying that the mother automatically gets custody, 'cause I'm guessing it's probably circa 1916. So outdated. Yeah. But, there needs to be some reform, and maybe this was just the first step in this trend that you say that you witnessed, that single fathers are growing in size, and you're right. I mean there *are* deadbeat dads, but there's deadbeat mothers. I'm not saying my Ex is a deadbeat, but she made some terrible decisions. I did too, we're equally as guilty, we should get [an] equal starting point. It just seems like the right thing to do, is everybody starts equally. You are innocent til proven guilty, not the other way around, like that's how I've been in a lot of this. Is I'm guilty, and I have to *prove* I'm a worthy father, capable.

I then said to him, that it sounds like men are guilty until proven innocent, but women are innocent until proven guilty. He then said:

Yeah...with...*overwhelming* evidence to the contrary. But we have to have overwhelming evidence that we're not deadbeats. And I remember, very early on, was like, I'm not gonna be a deadbeat dad. And that was my motivation. What a *sick* form of

motivation, to not be a deadbeat! Even though I wasn't. I instantly already felt like I *was* and had to prove that I *wasn't*.

Here, we have a father who says he's using what he feels is a "sick form of motivation" in that he does not want to be seen as a deadbeat. When Shawn spoke these words, it was one of those moments my research where I just wanted to exclaim to everyone that I just heard the perfect example of *what* the research problem is and *why* I am doing this research.

To conclude this section, I wanted to mention that towards the end of our first interview, Shawn talked about needing a voice for fathers. I told him that I hoped I could make a difference with this research and he thanked me: "Yeah, that's excellent. I couldn't be more appreciative. I mean, a voice for us, anywhere, it's a help. It's tough I mean, [to] make any kind of change. But...yeah, I really appreciate it."

Negative Words Used to Describe Men and Fathers

As evidenced by how the fathers described themselves as being very involved with their children and how important it is to be present for them, they respect themselves as parents. As students, the fathers spoke of themselves positively as well overall. However, there were times when they spoke of themselves as men or fathers in particular, and the self-dialogue turned extremely negative. This was also noticed when comments were made that 'bad' dads do exist out there – almost as if it were a bias against *other* men.

They used the following words to describe fathers or men in a general sense: Being lined up like rats in court, being buffoons, deadbeats, dangerous, or "forgot about." The following words, in summary, were used by these fathers to describe themselves: the "mean dad," stuffy, dirt bag, being a "slave to the state," weird or weirdo, creepy old guy, pushover, or short-changed.

Being considered as “stuffy” is one of the things Adam discussed, when he told about how his girlfriend’s coworkers perceive him. Adam talked about how his girlfriend’s co-workers have told her, “God, he’s really stuffy” and that he’s “too serious.” He described how he feels so different than those she works with, even those that are older than him:

The one co-worker's 35. His biggest priority is getting drunk, in life. And I'm sitting here going, No - I got other stuff to do. If that's all you got goin' on in your day, then, I can congratulate you on your simplicity.

As he said this, he clapped as if feigning the congratulations he was talking about. He also told me, “I’m the mean dad... I’ve had a couple of Joshua’s classmates tell me, I’m the mean dad.” I then asked him if they actually told him that and he stated,

Yes, because Joshua’ll go and he’ll complain to them about what I do and it’s like, yeah, well, you know what, of all your classmates, I would trust *you* if I left you in a car all by yourself. You know. And I go into the store. You know, if I go into the gas station, I’m content leaving you in the car and knowing you’re not gonna get out of the car. That I can trust that if we’re pushing a cart and there’s no cars coming and I say you can run up to the car and start getting in, on your own, you can do that. I don’t have to be watching you like a hawk because you’re gonna run off. And, I’m sorry that it makes me a really bad parent or whatever, in some people’s eyes, I’d rather know my kid’s gonna be safe, ‘cause *he* knows what’s right.

I asked Ben if he gets much help from others and he said in a deadpan manner, “No. Just a *dirt bag* on the side, yep.” When Ben was telling about his experience in the court system, he said that you become a “slave to the state”, in reference to the system of paying child support and how he felt men were disregarded. He stated,

Oh...we’re, we’re not taken seriously *at all* [laughs]. It’s just that, you’re the guy that’s gonna pay up and they’re gonna get everything else. And, I don’t know...Maybe it’s just my own biased opinion....it’s just the tone of voice that I’ve gotten from ‘em, and then when I got *brought* in again for child support, because all of a sudden they drug me in for 8 months before that, and I couldn’t come up with the cash in time. Well, there’s just, there’s no sympathy. None. It’s just like I’m workin’...I’m tryin’ to do it. ‘Well you don’t have it.’ Yeah! No kidding! What do you want me to do? ‘Well, get another job.’ No! Okay, so you become just a slave to the state, it’s really what it is.

In talking about visiting his children's school out of town, Ben said he's that "weirdo that comes in." He said, "I have no idea who these people are. They know who I am. And it's just like, like you're gettin' eye-balled down." He also talked about how he felt other college students perceive him:

[A] lot of the times, the college kids either, they see me as the *creepy old guy*, I'm just being honest. The creepy old guy, or just that...I'm the person that they don't want to hang out with. I'm just different than them.

Casey also referred to himself in a similar way, stating that "other adults...they just think I'm weird, you know."

Both Casey and Dan specifically referred to the stereotype of men as *buffoons* and they both also specifically used the word *dangerous*. When Ben and I were talking about his experience in the court system, he was telling me about the other men in court on one of the days he appeared. I asked him who the men were and used an analogy about rats to describe how the men were treated. He said, "I don't know, they were just two people that were ahead of me...They just line you up like rats."

Father's Day fell directly in the middle of scheduling my second round of interviews and I showed some of the fathers a Facebook post that had been shared by a friend of mine. The post had multiple images comparing mothers versus fathers. There were a series of about 10 images showing on the left side of the picture what a mother hypothetically does in a certain situation, compared on the right to what a father would. The images clearly showed the mother being knowledgeable and nurturing while the father was shown to be doing silly or even unsafe things. It perplexed me as to how we can joke about fathers in such a way on Father's Day, a day meant to honor dads, so I thought it would be an interesting conversation starter.

In one of the images, the mother dressed her child up as a princess where the father dressed their child up as Hannibal Lecter and the child even looked scared. In another image, this

time about shopping, the mother had her child safely in the cart, and the father had his child in a stroller with groceries piled on top of the child. Another image showed a mom reading a book with her child and the dad playing video games with the children. Shawn described these images as the fathers being depicted as “crazy, or wild, or different” and said that he felt the images were really “insulting” and “stereotypical.” Later on in the interview, I was mentioning to Shawn the types of sitcoms I see on television where dads are not depicted in a good light and he summed it up by saying, “Yeah, dad doesn’t know what to do [with a] crying baby.”

I also showed this post to Dan and he agreed that it made it look like dads don’t know “exactly what they’re doing” and he continued on to say “And at *worst* case, you know, being almost *dangerous*, to leave kids with them.” We continued talking and he began discussing television. In our first interview, Dan had spoken about television as well and its influence on our perception of men and lack of good male role models on TV:

You look at the TV in the 1950s. And you had things like Leave it to Beaver right, where Beaver’s dad went to work. He came home, he was *masculine*. He took care of his son...he played ball with his son. He did you know, different things. And then you look at, one of my favorite shows growing up was Home Improvement. I mean who doesn’t love Tim Taylor right? But when you really stop and consider that show, he was a buffoon! If his wife wasn’t there, their family would have fallen apart. He had to have the *old* guy next door give him some advice which you know, that was kind of a good thing I mean, we *should* listen to our elders. But I mean, and then the other example on the show was Al – who they never said was gay, but I mean, he was real close right, I mean he was so effeminate you know, he couldn’t do anything for himself, he lived with his mom. And he was a 30-something year old man. He was always apologizing for everything he did, etcetera. And that was kind of the male role models. But you can look in like comic strips and stuff like Blondie. Dagwood can never get *anything* right. He’s always taking a nap, shirking responsibilities. This is what we’ve been taught now is *manhood*! You know, and these are the *nice* shows. I mean you don’t get into the thing, the shows where the guys are doing the drugs and they’re all, they gotta be this or that. It’s really hard for me actually, a lot of times, to watch TV anymore ‘cause...when I see some of these male role models...I’m like are you kidding me?

So in the second interview, after the conversation about the Facebook post, he brought me back to when he had mentioned the comic strip *Blondie* and explained:

I mean, how long has that been going on? I don't know, but I mean I know my parents said it was in the papers when they were you know, like our age. And yeah, so, and people laugh at it and they're like oh yeah it's kinda funny you know the dad comes home from work, and he doesn't wanna do the chores. He wants to take a nap instead of mowin' the lawn, and the wife kinda has to kinda get him to do it. And trick him into it or something. You know...It's such a stereotype...that *that's* what to do. And, the sad thing is I think, a lot of guys, because it's a stereotype, just think oh that is what I'm supposed to do, especially if they didn't have a father figure, in their life, you know. Then they don't know. All they have is TV and whatever you know. And whatever and the sad thing is, whatever they do *do*, is better than whoever left them. You know. So, at least, at least they're doing something. But, it is sad whenever, whenever fatherhood becomes something to [laugh at]. I mean, I love to laugh....and in our house...we're laughing all the time you know...But, when it becomes a grain of, well, what people assume is a grain of *truth* behind it as well.

Casey also mentioned the idea of men being seen as buffoons. I asked him how people in general interact with him as a dad. The other dads reported fairly neutral interactions with people in public, but Casey went right for the heart of the matter and explained:

I mean, in general, I'm not going to be perceived as *nurturing* as a mother. You know, our popular conception of dads is that they're *buffoons*. And a poor substitute for mom. And *dangerous*.

And, you know, it's a pervasive opinion of men in general that they're buffoons...And whenever I see it, *I sort of cringe*. You know, it's especially popular in commercials right now....and it's a popular opinion not only in that it's in our media, but also *in people*. People believe it. You know, the dad joke, is a *groaner* that usually relies on some low form of wit...And it's pervasive in the courts as well, which is why you know I've tried to *avoid* having the court decide *anything* about what happens to my children. It's pervasive even in psychology, whose claim to objectivity is in doubt when they do things like that. I think that there's nothing a father can't *be emotionally* that a mother *can* be. And so, I don't *like* the popular conception of men as buffoons. Or as *less than* in some way. But, I understand that it's there, and I will sometimes make a point of being articulate around people who have power over me...in order to account for that [stereotype]. *Because* I have the ability to be articulate. And generally, they either have one of two perceptions over me. Generally if they're educated, they're not threatened by it. But if they are not educated, generally they seem to be intimidated by it. But both effects achieve what my goal is—and that is to be taken seriously.

So you think dads aren't taken seriously?

No, they're not. I don't think they are. They're taken as a poor substitute, I think. And I think my children would disagree with that.

It pained me that he felt dads were seen by people as a poor substitute for a mother. And when Casey said the word *dangerous*, his voice even took on an ominous-sounding tone.

Later on, Casey talked more about the bias against fathers in our society, again, using the word buffoon:

There are scads of inherent biases in our whole population, against fathers. And I think that the basis for these originated around you know, of course the Judeo-Christian belief that father is provider and mother is homemaker. But also, the whole popular conception of father as buffoon. And *male* as buffoon in general.

In our second interview, I followed up with Casey about these poignant statements about masculinity. He explained how he views things as follows and likened it to an “inside American joke”:

It’s something that I see very *plainly*, like when a film or an advertisement is portraying dad in a certain light to reach a certain audience, right, especially advertising products to *women*, right. They will show dad fumbling around to do something and then mother comes in and she’s *elegant* and graceful and you know, and it’s you know, it’s pervasive in the culture. You look at movies like *Daddy Daycare*, right. There’s no reason that a male can’t run a daycare facility, right? But when you put Eddie Murphy in it, and *package* it as something preposterous, right, where the children are put in danger, and it *supports* this common conception as fathers as *idiots*. As buffoons. As comic relief for when, for recognizing how much we need our mothers. And it’s a really *horrible* attitude, that is *completely untrue* in a lot of ways. You know, it goes to gender politics, it goes to feminist theory, it goes to a lot of different *views* of how we stereotype and then perpetuate and then enforce with cultural values and cultural artifacts, and it becomes just sort of this inside American joke. And it’s really something that we need to get away from. In the same way that we need to get away from a lot of our pervasive views about *different* marginalized groups. I know I’m saying that dads are marginalized. And you know, that’s not [usually acceptable to say], [*he chuckles*] but in *this* way, I feel that they are.

In the initial minutes of my first interview with Shawn, I had been discussing my background and the lack of research in this area. I told him that it didn’t seem like much had changed since I did my master’s thesis twelve years ago and he responded:

Yeah, that’s exactly it! And you’re right when you say, we’re so *stigmatized* when it comes to this. We’re already assumed to be the *deadbeat* dad or the do-nothin’ dad or whatever. And it’s like yeah, without even doin’ anything we’re instantly labeled that, and we’re *treated* as such, by government and you know all those facilities, child support.

He concluded this with an audible sigh, which I noted in the transcript. And he also told me about a classmate of his that is also a single father and said how he respects him and their commonalities:

It's always that, like the quiet confidence, you know. I don't know, it's a sixth sense...you see it. At least I can. I think I can, anyway. You know, but I mean it's also not true because I didn't notice that he was a single father right away, but you can't tell by looking at him. But once you find out, you can kinda see some of the attributes that you do have in common. As far as stereotypical, he...reminds me of me, like, this *isn't* the stigmatized dad. He's doin' exactly what I'm doin'!... But he's out here, he's doing it, and he's doing it in a respectful manner, like I am. Like yeah, I just kinda had that respect for him right away.

Ben used the word 'worthless' twice in the first interview. The first time, he was talking about a moment he had with one of his female teachers. He said that during the middle of his divorce, it was right before Easter break, and he told about their conversation and how it scarred him:

When we were leaving and she said something about that I have to, I should go be a parent and...you know it's like, 'Your kids, go be with them!' And at that time, I was just like, "I can't get near 'em!" And that really scarred me, and I still remember that to this day. It just took me by surprise...So that'd be a lesson, don't let anyone else tell you that you're worthless [*laughs*]. Even though sometimes you feel that way.

The second time the word was used by him, he and I were talking about an interaction he'd had with a judge about him being in school and how the judge unfortunately didn't seem to think much of that and Ben had felt *demeaned*:

And now's the weekend of the custodial stuff, so next thing I'm on the phone in the backyard, while then I'm on speaker phone in their court system and it's just, the questions they were asking, it's just like, 'When were you gone?' Well so they locked me out in April, what can I do, you know I couldn't get *back*. I *asked* them to come back 'cause I don't know why the heck I'd get locked out of my own house. When I was payin' for it... And, like okay, and then they're like, 'What are you in school for?' What do *you mean*?? Tryin' to *better* my life, you know, show the kids you don't have to sit there and be these janitor jobs and all this junk. God I hate that. And they're like, 'Well, what are you gonna do with *that* degree?' [*laughs*]...And this is the *judge* asking those questions...just *the demeaning manner*. Yeah. I'm just like well so I can go teach, 'cause that's all I've ever done. I just love doin' that. And well they go 'How much are you gonna get paid?' Again, what...what does that have to do with any of this. So I'm like,

well, you know what, I think it's 35,000 you start off, 'Well that's it?' [*mimics grumbling from judge*]. Whatever. Yeah. And then they're of course they do the deliberation stuff and they cut me off at that point. So I didn't get to hear any of that, I just remember that since I was in school, they'd have a smaller cut for child [support] And, they asked my Ex at the time, of course it was just like, 'Is that gonna be enough for you?' And she...what are they all gonna say, *No?* No. So they bumped it up a little bit but it's like, I didn't really have a *say* in there. It's just kinda like, this is what I'm doing and then they're just kind of accusing me for just, it felt like they were accusing me of just walkin' away. When it wasn't the case at all, so.

So in reference to this situation, later on in the interview, he said:

That was the thing that took me back, was like, 'What are you gonna do with that?' What the hell do you mean? [*laughs*] Why, why do you go to school? Why are you a *judge*? What are you gonna do with that? And you just wanna throw it back at him, but you know obviously that wouldn't work very well...

I then asked if there was really anything he could have said to the judge that the judge would have been happy with. Ben explained in light of men not wanting to ask for help, and that feeling of worthlessness he had felt:

None that I came up with you know, you go through scenarios in your head all the time when you're just drivin' around [*laughs*]...everything that would have felt good at the time, it probably wouldn't have been good. Ahhh. Just the complications of everything, yeah, if there was just a way, to be able to figure out how you can make everything work. Like that point-person you're talkin' about. But there again, it's like, I don't see males really seeking things out. At least for help, 'cause then they just feel like they're worthless, so.

Guilt and Shame

Woven throughout the findings, there is evidence of dads 'feeling bad,' in the sense of feeling guilty or being ashamed about something. In addition, as in the preceding section, they felt a sense of disgrace when they were being dismissed in various ways. What connects all of these examples to follow are the internalized expectations the fathers have, and then how these feelings and experiences have affected them emotionally.

For example, Casey talked about feeling like he was a burden on his own mom when he was young: "I felt the need to leave home because there wasn't anything there for me. Mom

couldn't support herself, why would I stay around to be a burden on her?" Right before that he had been telling me about how he wanted to finish school so that he can provide a life to children so that they wouldn't feel they had to leave like he did:

I think that life *afterward*, is going to be interesting, simply because of how long it's taken me to get here. And the fact that yeah, I'll be comfortable and I'll be happy, and I'll be sane and doing something that I love. But, what'll I be doing it for? Is a question that I'll have to answer. Maybe so that my kids can finish high school, and be the person that I'm glad that I wasn't? I don't know. Uh, maybe so they *won't*, um, so they won't feel the need to leave.

And Shawn feels guilty because he wonders to himself if wanting to spend time with his son is selfish, in that it takes his son away from other people or activities:

And even if I got him 50%, you know, that's only in the summertime. And then I feel guilty because that summertime is when you're supposed to spend time with your friends and you play sports and stuff and it's almost *selfish* to *take* him like that...

I asked him if there were other times that he felt the guilt coming out and he told me more about his time with his son:

Yeah, I don't know if it was like very *strong* guilt but like...yeah, last summer, I had him for like two and a half months. And that's when this first came up, is am I being *selfish* for *wanting* him for long, you know? And it's kinda like you know, am I requesting him against his will, does he wanna be here for that long? He says he did. And it worked out like it, you know, was fine, because he was between kindergarten and first grade, you know, so he's *just* starting school. But that's where I first thought, I was like wow, you know, if I get him you know for two months again next summer is he even gonna wanna be here? 'Cause I know when I was a kid, my summers were you know ridin' bike to my friends' house and ridin' out to the mall even though we weren't supposed to, just biking everywhere, playin' sports, and stuff. And that's what I wanted to do. I wasn't even really hardly around my parents. It was like, sweet we got the whole day, my parents are at work, let's go ride bike! And I think that's how he's gonna wanna be, is be around friends. And I don't wanna be *selfish* like that. *[pauses]*

He then went on to describe something fascinating, in saying that he was "imagining guilt in the future" and described that feeling. It was almost like was realizing some things in the moment as he was talking to me:

Yeah, that's just the biggest thing I feel *guilty* about. Well slightly guilty in the past but like imagining guilt in the future kind of thing....I get him on holidays you know. Am I

taking him away from his other grandma and grandpa on holidays. There's not so many great-grandparents left, but, I don't know. [pause] ...I suppose I kinda feel guilty too is like, I don't know if I've acted on it. Like someone like *me* wanting to have him and me wanting to be *so* influential [to] him, is just *despite* her. Like I wanna instill *my* values on [son] because I *hate hers* so much? That could [be], yeah, I think that's kind of a big one, 'cause...I don't like how she *treats* people or her attitude or how she's *condescending*. Kinda like I *don't* want [my son] to be, you know behave that way, kinda, you know a little bit like he's selfish, but it's, that could be minimal things you know. Only child, and he gets spoiled on both sides but I don't know.

Adam talked about feeling ashamed particularly when he depends on financial help from others. He said that when he goes to visit his parents, that he leaves "with a little bit extra [money]. Which frustrates me a lot actually...[at] 28, I should be able to support myself." He also referred to himself as a "bump on a log" when his girlfriend helps out. He said:

Because and I feel bad 'cause she has a job and she pays for everything and then I'm sitting there like okay well, I'm a bump on a log...I feel bad that you know, we go like to Applebee's or somethin', and yeah it's \$20 and stuff. But yeah, I feel bad.

Recall from earlier that Adam doesn't qualify for childcare assistance. He knows he needs it though, and that he also needs food stamps, but he talked about how he feels humiliation when using food stamps in particular and even how he avoids the busy times for shopping because of those feelings:

Well, I need child care assistance, and I need food stamps and things like that. And, it actually took my mom, my aunt, and my sister and the girlfriend all hounding me about the food stamps 'cause I *did not* want them. When my son was first born, we were on food stamps. We had housing assistance, we had Medicaid, and it was very *humiliating* for *me* you know, and then I was in a relationship but even now, like today's the 1st, I won't go to Walmart and buy groceries with the food stamp card. ...but I know I'll probably swing by there at some point this weekend, even without my son. And, for one reason or another...you'll see everybody with the carts full of food and stuff, and I'm sittin here going God, I can't do that. You know. To pull out that card, is very, to me, *bothersome*, and I think it's more of a personal pride thing. That you know, I'm 28, I *could* have a job, I did have a job, that you know, I could have supported myself off of, very effectively. But I wanted better, you know, hours, better everything kinda. And, so then you kinda touch on all that kind of thing and it's you know, there's a lot of subconscious things. It's not a lot of overt other people making comments.

I asked him if he felt this was more of him thinking what people might be feeling and if he is just noticing their expressions and he confirmed that yes, “You notice their expressions.”

Adam talked about how he fears others seeing him as overreacting and talked about feeling a need to conform. When we were talking about any need to fit in, he explained that he never has felt that need. However, he began talking about what it’s like for him after having a child and how he thinks about the perception of others:

Now that I have my son, to an *extent* it has become more of a priority again, like with the, you know, leaving my son in the car for 5 minutes, you know. There's that *perceived* you know, okay, these people *could call* you know Child Services on me, you know, for abandoning my kid for a few minutes. Or, I’m, you know, *overreacting* towards you know, him running out in the middle of the street. And, so you know, I...there is that *perceived* you know, need to conform, a little bit. But at the same time, it's, if these people have kids of their own...they'll look at it and be like, oh no this is perfectly fine.

Adam talked about something he called “Muffins with Mom” where children invite their moms to an event. He said his son brought something home about it and said:

Joshua brings it and it’s well, here you need to sign this so we can go. And it's like umm, technically I'm not mom. The closest thing you have to a mom is my girlfriend and she's 90 miles away. She won't be able to be here ‘cause she works, so yeah, I'm not sure how I'm gonna do this. And I've talked with the school, and they're fine you know working with it. You know, I'm not gonna be the only dad there, kind of situation.

He talked about the “Muffins with Mom” event in both of the interviews, so it was obviously something that struck a chord with him. When it was brought it up in the second interview, it became a discussion related Mother’s Day. He was talking about a ‘confessions’ page that he sees on Facebook and he said:

And I thought it was kinda interesting how you know, you get all these moms that are like well, if the dad would actually be involved in the child’s life and I’m sitting here going, on Mother’s Day, I didn’t feel that way about Joshua’s mom. We called and we talked to *my* mom, Joshua and I both did. We spent time actually with my girlfriend and her *kids* you know, for mother’s day. Joshua knows that she’s not his *mother*. But he treats her sons like his brothers. He looks up to her, but he won’t call her mom. And I’m fine with that. I won’t push it. And you know, it’s just kinda that expectation I think that some people have, well, he should be with his mom, it’s Mother’s Day. Well he’s not. That’s her choice. You know. If she wanted to, yeah. At this point, I’d probably really

have a concern about her sayin' 'Well, I wanna spend time with Joshua'...Ehh, it's been 4 years. No. We're not just gonna jump in there and you're gonna take him for like the weekend...But you get, you get those parents, and like at the therapy and stuff, it's all the moms. That are sayin', there are some dads too, but they usually come in *with* the wife or girlfriend, or baby mama or whatever you wanna say...but then there's me and it's, the therapist you know, which, are women, will sit there and then they'll start talkin' to me, and there is that *moment* where it's, you feel like they're talking *down* to you, because you're the dad, you know....dads don't have you know the emotional attachment and all that kinda stuff. Well, maybe. Maybe not. I have no idea. *I just know that I'm doin' the best I can.* And, you get to a point where you just kinda get numb to it and you don't really pick up on it, or it's just kinda that *undercurrent* of people saying oh, well that's nice that you're the dad. It's like when I tell people I don't drink. Well good for you. And, at that point, it's like yeah, you probably think I'm a recovering alcoholic or something and it's no, I just choose not to drink, because, I just don't like drinking. And it's expensive! And, you know, you get those issues and, I don't know, you get used to 'em.

Like Adam, Dan also said other people think he's overprotective and tells about how he thinks people perceive him:

But I think people see me as a father as very *protective* of my daughter...I've had some people who are like way more, I would call them *loose* with their kids, they just let them kinda do whatever, have told me that I'm *overprotective* - In that I know, I watch what my daughter watches on TV, I make sure that I'm listening to what music she listens to, so I know what it is. I know what's going on in her life. And I've responded that if that's overprotective than I'm *fine* with that you know? I don't mind creating a bubble of safety around my daughter. I think some people think that maybe I'm too strict because of that, because I do have rules, for her. And I expect her to obey them, and there, I mean there is a system which she *clearly* knows, is this is what happens you know, if you break the rules you know, you might lose this privilege or that privilege or whatever.

Erik was telling me about how others think he isn't strict enough with his discipline and talked about a specific incident that happened a few weeks earlier:

[A] couple of weeks ago I brought Matthew over to a friend of mine's house. And we were in the backyard playing...he likes to throw things sometimes. We're outside and he jumps around and he learned some....*bad* words sometimes at school and so he'll say some of those words, and I don't necessarily get all super mad and fly off the handle at him. I'll go and I'll sit down and *talk* with him about it. Like, just like a human being you know, I'll sit there and talk. And I think my friend's dad was there and saw that and said, [he] had made a comment to my friend and said something to the effect of 'Well, with some of the things that Matthew said, I would have probably whooped you kids for that. And Erik just handled it a little bit differently than I...think a lot of people would.' ...I don't believe in all that like, hard discipline, with physicalities. I think most of my learning in my life has been through experience and making mistakes, and so I wanna just

you know, be able to instill that into Matthew. And be able to talk about things, and let him know that he can come and talk to me about whatever instead of, if I just blow up and get all mad and send him to his room or ...I *will* put him in time out for things, yeah. That's good to get him to think about it. But I definitely don't believe in any kind of....violent acts or anything like that. 'Cause I know he, you know he, his feelings are fragile too and I can tell he doesn't you know, if something goes the wrong way for him, he gets very temperamental and emotional. And so, I try to you know, kinda talk to him about that, why do you feel like that and stuff like that.

Just one experience can affect someone's future behavior. As an example of this, Adam told of a very unsettling experience he had when changing his son's diaper in a public restroom. This sad experience unfortunately changed his outlook from very early on. He told about how he was shopping with his son at Walmart when he was only a few months old. While he was changing his baby's diaper, security came into the restroom. He tells the story as such:

I was changing his diaper, and he was giggling while I was getting him all cleaned up. And, you know, you're sitting there and talkin' to him and just kinda goffin' around kind of a thing, trying to keep him entertained. And [the] next thing I knew, security came in and questioned me on molesting Joshua. And I'm sitting here going, What?? Well, I was sittin here...and they questioned me and...if the way it was initially described was it was like a small child that I was sitting here like reaching in their pants fondling them. And I'm like what? No, it was a 2 month old *baby*, what am I doing. I am cleaning a poopy diaper, I'm sorry!...I think somebody else came in and they commented that oh yeah no, this guy is sitting there and he's laughing and this kid is laughing and I'm sitting here going, "I'm sorry, what do you want me to do? The kid thinks it tickles, not going to sit here and argue with him [his son]"....After that experience though, it was just, I don't care how wet you are, I don't care how sticky you are, we will go home. I just left the diaper bag at home after that point if it was gonna be a short trip to Walmart, or if we were going multiple places, just run home and do it to alleviate the issues.

This is an example of how just one situation scarred him as a man from doing something as basic as changing a small baby's diaper, and how shame was inflicted upon him. So from early on, he was discouraged, even in the most natural sense of taking care of the basic needs of a baby. He let the opinions of other men influence him because of that shame he felt. He also had mentioned another perception of being afraid that others in general could call child services on him, like if his son were to be left alone in a car for a few minutes. I have to wonder if that early

experience in the public restroom affected him and how he thinks more intensely about the perceptions of others.

Other examples of this type of effect can be found in my conversations with Shawn when he and I were talking about male stereotypes. I was telling him that through talking with him and the other participants, plus the men from my thesis, my experience has been so contradictory to the typical stoic man who isn't sensitive. I commented how he and the others are so willing to open up, and be emotional, and I said how I found that so interesting. He responded, connecting his response to the idea about boys feeling like they can't cry. He also tied emotional support into the act of providing and described it as the "primal duty of a male:"

Well, it's just that this is how they expect you to behave...you have to be the breadwinner, you have to be the, you know, the *role* model, and hardworking and stuff like that. Which I mean some of it, it's true to an extent. You know, you should be taking care of your family and you know, treating women with respect and providing for and making sure they're safe, that's you know, the kind of the primal duty of a male. But also to be there emotionally and supportive and, it's just a side that doesn't get really talked about you know, 'cause you know, it's like...you can't cry. That's...in all the conversations I've had with other people and doctors they say it's, you know that, that stigma of you know, *boys don't cry* kinda things. It puts a lot of unnecessary pressure on a kid. Without them really even knowing it kind of thing.

Right away, I then asked him if he remembered any defining moments growing up, where he felt he was being taught to hold back emotion. He agreed and that it usually had to do with feeling pressure about sports:

Oh yeah...most of it, it's sports-related. And I don't know why like I enjoy sports but some of the things that come along with sports are, I don't really agree with it and that's kind of like one of 'em. Like, I was kinda taught to be tough in that way, 'cause a skinned knee is nothin', you just get out there and keep playing. I had slid into a catcher one time at home plate, I wasn't out, but I slammed into his shin guard and I gouged a chunk of skin out of my knee. Like that big [*showed with gesture*] and it was deep. Um, I didn't cry though. *Couldn't cry*. But I went out and I got it bandaged up, and I couldn't play the rest of the game because it was like little league rules, this is little league. But I played the second game, it was that bad. Oh man the size of that skin chunk that came out of my leg, it was huge. Still have the scar from it. But yeah, that kinda thing. It was...*I don't have time to cry, can't cry about it, I gotta just walk this off, I gotta figure out how to make this pain go away so I can play the next game*. Which I mean, I don't know,

probably at the time I'm like 'Oh yeah look at this, I'm bleeding and I'm still playing. I'm a *tough* kid.' [mimicked 'big' voice] But it was because of that unseen pressure, that's why I had to behave in that manner. I don't know. We still kicked butt though. We won.

When coding Adam's comments from the second interview in particular, guilt was a theme throughout, more so than the other fathers by far. So I wanted to take some time to address some more of these examples here. This feeling was something that arose particularly strongly in the second interview we had together. In general, Adam seems to feel ashamed that at his age, he should be more self-sufficient by now. I noticed that the topic of guilt was coming up often in our conversations so I asked him what he thought about the concept of *dad guilt* – in comparison to what we hear about *mom guilt*. He then explained the following:

Well, I'd definitely say there's guilt...you feel the guilt when you put the kid to bed and it's you know, oh I could have let him stay up a little longer. We could have read a story tonight. You know, that kind of a thing. And, you always feel that guilt of you know, when you could have spent more *time*, you know. Did I really need to let him play upstairs in his room by himself. Could I have been up there playing with him, you know. That kind of thing.

And, I think that's something every parent goes through because you want to be the one to sit there and protect them and coddle 'em and all that kinda thing. And even when he was a baby you know, when I was even still with his mom...Joshua would cry, your instant thought is okay I need to go check on him. And, no, I can't do that. Now he can't always expect that I'm gonna be the one to run in and save him. And take care of him, for whatever's going on. Sometimes he needs to do it himself. So, and Joshua's done really well in that regard...He knows how to brush his teeth, he knows how to get dressed on his own, he knew that long ago. You know, like in the morning if on Saturday if I don't wanna get out of bed right away, you know, he knows where the cereal is. He knows how to do that kinda stuff. And, but at the same time, it's okay, I get up, and he's you know, there are 2-3 bowls of cereal that have been eaten and I'm sittin there, like well let's make some breakfast now! 'Well I'm not hungry.' [son says] Oh! Well now I'm not gonna make the eggs and bacon and you feel kinda bad about it, but at the same time, it's, you know, thank god I'm not havin' to get up and...do all this for you. So it's kind of a double-edged sword of you know, God, I feel really nice, I don't have to be watching you 24-7 but at the same time, it's okay, I kinda miss that too. And, but I think you know, if it was from my standpoint, you know, I'm 28 years old. My parents still think of me as bein' 7 years old too. As frustrating as that is, for me, there's days, it's *nice*. I know [my] girlfriend came with me to the lake to see my folks this past weekend. And, she was sittin' there, commenting on how yeah, you know, my parents are well how can we help you. And she was commenting how 'You never talk about how your parents are offering you help.' And I said 'cause I don't *want* them to help me. You know, I'm almost 30

years old. I should actually have a job and be able to support myself. Not be like hey I need help with gas money. You know, and just because I came, we wanted to visit. And, it gets frustrating, and I don't know if it's just that male role of oh I need to be independent and stuff like that. It's, I think it's more than that because you don't wanna always be under your parents' shadow.

He then continues on to talk about wanting to protect his son, yet at the same time allow him to learn:

You know, there's that difficulty that you know you're always gonna wanna look out for your kids. But, as I told one of my girlfriends you know, Joshua will eventually figure out the concept of hot. And she always freaked out like Joshua getting close to the stove and stuff and I, and all I could say, is "No, let him burn himself. That's the only way you only ever learn the belief of what is hot." You get burned and he's got a scar on his arm from where he touched the stove and burned himself! And I got a couple on myself and it's just okay, well, you learn! And sometimes that's the only way you can learn. You get, you know, that lovely you know, pain is one of the greatest you know, teachers there is, so. Don't *want* him to do it that way, but that's just the way it is.

He also spoke of the guilt he feels, because he has some nice things and feels like he isn't as deserving as other parents who may need help from social services:

Like when you go...to Social Services here. And you go and you see the, you know, the Native mom or whatever. And sittin' there with half a dozen kids and I'm sitting there with Joshua or even just myself and it's like, it's not that [because] I'm white or anything like that, it's just, I have a college degree. I have my own car. It's a very nice car. You know, I have video games, I've got lots of electronics.

His voice became quiet and said, "And yet I'm sitting here, asking for food stamps." He then continued on, talking about how he "chose to step off the cliff" in the sense of choosing to go to school and not be working:

You feel really awkward. And, you know, I left a job at 15 and 16 dollars an hour to come back to college. [Sigh] You know, you get that feeling of okay, I put myself in this situation. Other people *didn't* put themselves into this situation and yes they need that help. They need that safety net. And, here I am, you know, saying well, I *jumped* off, of my own free will and all, I didn't get knocked down. *I chose to step off the cliff.*

And now hey, the state needs to help me. [sighs] So you know, from my standpoint, it's, well, do I really *deserve* this support. And *honestly*, even today, after being on it for almost a year, I'd still argue that no, I really don't *deserve* to be on food stamps. I should be able to go out. I *did* have the ability to support myself without, needing the state's

assistance and all that kinda thing. And, I chose *not* to continue that policy with the hope that after a couple of years you know, I'd be even more...*well* off...

It is powerful to examine this in the sense that Adam is doing something quite noble, in choosing to seek more education in order to provide for his son. However, he still seems wracked with guilt over it because he feels like he's not always letting his child be who he should be:

I've talked with my girlfriend's mom and she does in-home daycare. And she'll talk about you know, single dads and stuff, and the parents that she works with and you know, you get the parents that you know are single parents and it's okay, you know, you treat the child as more like a partner than as you know, the child. And I can say that yes, with Joshua, I *do* look for his input you know. When it comes down to well, what, what's for supper tonight. You know. Joshua will come stand next to me at the pantry and go okay, well here we got some pasta sauce, and we got some noodles, and I think we got a pound of hamburger. We can have spaghetti tonight! And sometimes...my suggestion gets vetoed and...well what else can we come up with. You know...okay, do we go to the store and what do we pick up. Well, you know, Joshua comes with and he voices his opinion and I think that's a *good* thing. Letting him sometimes, I take it a little too far. You know, I expect him to be able to do stuff, because that's what,...*I* need to be doing. And sometimes he's not able to be you know, the kid that I should probably be letting him be. But, you know, like we come home from [childcare] and probably tonight I'll probably still tell him, you need to go upstairs and clean your room. You know, if nothing else...get the Legos out of your bed. Clean a path. I don't care if you play Legos *afterwards*, but you gotta clean your room. And Joshua sometimes, I don't even have to say it. We'll walk in the door. And he'll [say], 'I know, I know, I'm goin' to clean.' I'm like, *thank* you! Bring out the dirty clothes you know. Help me out a little bit. If the toilet paper's gettin' low, put another roll in the bathroom. You know what needs to get done. I don't need to remind you of all this stuff, and, you know. At that point, it's like okay, it's [it] feels like I'm dealing with a roommate more than my son. But at the same time, well, technically I guess could make the argument that is kinda what we're at. And at [age], I still say I refuse to grow up. I'll be mature when I need to be. But I refuse to grow up. And, my parents hate it when I tell them that, 'cause I'm like...I will always choose to sit and play video games with my son or read comic books. And, I've got a Kindle and we'll sit and you know read the different comics that I've got on it, that I've picked up for him and, you know, sit down and throw the ball with him. I'd rather do that with him than anything else. But, at the same time, well, we gotta get all the other stuff done and you can help. And ultimately I still probably have to go back behind him and do it the *right* way, but he's at least trying.

He also expressed some guilt when he doesn't help his child with homework to the extent he feels he should, and about the expectations that he should be involved in events for his child:

Like Joshua's spelling words. They'd come home, we'd look at 'em. I always made a point, okay, Monday, you need to sit here and write 'em out 5 times. I'll test you Tuesday

after you've written them another 5 times. *Well*, it was great on paper. Real-life, unfortunately...you don't always get to them. And then you feel bad because Friday comes and it's oh God we didn't spend nearly enough time on this stuff. And, they come back and oh yeah, Joshua did pretty good. And then you feel good about it. But then at the same time it's like I'll do better.

And then, it happens again because of this, that and the other thing. And, I guess I kind of go back, and again, thinking of my parents. I remember being in band. And you know, having band concerts in junior high and high school and my dad not being able to make it because he had work stuff. And I know he felt miserable about it, that he had to miss 'em, and things like that. And I know when my sister was in choir, he made it a point. He *had* to make up for it. And, [*pause*] you know, you have that *expectation* [by the schools, groups, etc.] that you're supposed to always be there, you're always supposed to be really active, and unfortunately, I'm not. You know, we go to cub scouts and there's these parents, that oh yeah, we're gonna go off, and we're gonna do this for scouts and this, and I'm just sitting here going, Joshua, go have fun. I'm gonna go sit for a few minutes. And they come over and talk to me and I'm like that sounds nice. Have *fun* doing it. I'm not doing it. I know they did a [fundraiser] over at the [store]. And it was, okay, we're going to my folks' house both weekends. You still get all the emails about oh we need...we need people, we need people, and we got 2 openings here, and 2 openings there and I'm like, no. I would love to, I really would, but. And then you get there [to the scout meetings] and then you know, oh, it's, we're so thankful we had all these people come out, and, on their time off you know, takin' on extra shifts because we didn't have enough people. And it was like, *yeah thanks for the guilt trip on top of everything else I got goin' on*. And it's you know, last couple scout meetings we had, it's okay, everybody knows I don't have a job. I'm *looking* for a job. Why is it we're still 5 minutes late for scouts. Well, I'm sorry, it took 5 minutes extra for us to get, find his scout uniform. And stuff like that. But it's, well, you've had all day. What have you been doing. *Thanks*.

I was wondering if the leaders would be so blatant with making him feel ashamed, so I asked more about that. He said it was all about the way they act towards him. Through this exchange, it was clear that he was imagining himself in the eyes of others and feeling shamed because of this. It all related to him being unemployed as well and the difficulty in finding work that fits into his schedule:

It's the way they look, and it's the way people act, because it's like, the one...the pack is the big group of all the scouts and then it's the den per grade, basically. And our den leader, he understands. He's got 2, he's got 2, 3 kids of his own. He's got 2 jobs, his wife does two jobs and all this kinda stuff. But you can also tell that he gets frustrated when it's, I talk about that yeah, I was job hunting all day today. And, he'll say well, you know, McDonalds is hiring. He'll point out all these places that are hiring. And I'm like yeah, but again...I can only work until about 5:30 'cause daycare goes til 6...it's \$15 per *10 minutes* after that, if he's late. And if he's late repeatedly, if *I'm* late repeatedly picking

him up, they'll kick him out. And I can understand that. Their staff wanna go home, to do *their* stuff. I don't wanna work [weekends], I can't work weekends, dear God, how much does daycare cost on a weekend. You know. That all kinda plays into a part, especially when I'm like, a couple weeks ago I was talking to a lady at [restaurant] about working there....And she said, well, I'll pay you \$9/hour, 15 hours a week. For coming in during the lunch hour. Again, that's the only hours she really had available, in my...time frame....So, I *might* be able to cover most of daycare for the week? Uh, I don't think I can justify that. I can't justify sitting on my butt in my apartment looking for a job. But least I'm looking for something, in theory, you know. End up napping a bunch too, but. But it gets frustrating and, you know, what can you really do? So, you know, there's lots of regrets when it comes down to, you know, you don't feel like you're doing a good enough job. And, I don't know. You do the best you can, and pray in the end that you know there's more good times than bad times.

As for Erik, at the time of the study, he was living out-of-state and even further away from his son than normal. He spoke of how his focus on receiving an education caused him to sacrifice a lot, especially missing out on time with his son and the guilt he feels:

I was talkin' to my good friend...he was really, he was one of the few different people that have talked to me about it, like they're really *intrigued* and in *awe* and maybe *impressed* with the fact that I've been able to accomplish as much as I have, while having a son. But at the same time, I've had to sacrifice a lot...we were talking about his dad being at every single one of his track meets and how you know, even if *no* other parents were there, his dad was at every, *every* single one. And then I thought about my own dad who was *there* for every single baseball game. And so then I just started to think about you know, I've *missed* a lot, so far, of Matthew growing up, because I've been out getting my education and you know, tryin' to fulfill *my* dreams and so...I'm just tryin' to you know, make, you know, not be selfish about that and make sure that I'm gonna be present, for Matthew, as he continues to grow up and so you know, he [the friend] had asked me well, you know, 'Gettin' excited to be done with graduate school and you know the sky's the limit really', and he asked me you know is there any really limitations on where I would go geographically. And I said yeah you know, I really, I really can't see myself you know, moving that far away, to a place where you know, I couldn't see Matthew very often. I think I can still try and succeed in places close by and he will, he will you know, I think it's important for *me* to be there for the next you know, 9 years, until he's you know he's 18 and he can make his own decisions. And at that point in time if there's an opportunity where I can move a long ways, or further away maybe, maybe take it at that point. But, really, made me you know think and realize like you know, even though and I don't see it as a, I don't see it as like a hindrance, at all, you know, maybe it is, maybe I should go work at someplace a long ways away and make a lot of money but I think that would be a, I don't think that would be a wise decision, so.

When I asked Erik what he thinks his life will be like when he isn't in school anymore, he said the following, and talked about being apart from his son is something that weighs on his mind:

Yeah, that's a good question because you know its...it's the *second* time that I will, I'm be going to be getting done with school and so, I think the biggest thing will just be, you know hopefully the custody agreement, the visitation agreement –I'm really hoping to change that so I can have more time to be with Matthew and to you know, help him grow. I think that the time we do spend together, especially recently you know maybe over the past few months has really been beneficial. And he's *growing* very fast, and he's very, you know, wanting to *learn*. And I don't know if he's not you know, it's just that he wants to learn stuff from his dad that he's not gonna be able to learn from everyone else that he's around. And so, I know he really cherishes the time we have together, so and I think it's important that you know, I'll be able to you know really get closer and not have to worry about being so far away.

Near the end of our second interview, I asked Shawn what his hopes for the future were for himself and his family. He talked about how selfishness plays a role in how he's feeling: "Just hope it works out. I don't know...like everything seems fine right now." As he said this, I detected a little sadness in his voice here, as if he were potentially unsure of something. He then continued on:

Like for *me*, it's going great and I'm workin' towards somethin', it's on the other end, her side. It's like, it *seems* fine right now but there's always this bit of distrust and it's more like I'm just *waiting* for the other shoe to drop kinda thing, I'm like, I'm waiting for something bad to happen 'cause that's how it always seems to, be. But I'm gonna change that I think, once I get a career settled. I don't know. I'm gonna get it solidified *legally* to have my, my rights. Especially, if I have to move. I don't know, that's gonna be so hard. *That's like the ultimate question right there. Career or child, you know.* And depending on how far I move. And even if I got him 50%, you know, that's only in the summertime. And then I feel guilty because that summertime is when you're supposed to spend time with your friends and you play sports and stuff and it's almost *selfish* to *take* him like that...Ahhh, that's a difficult one.

Financial Difficulties and Employment Disadvantages

All fathers reported problems with finances at least in some area of their lives, whether it is budgeting, paying child support, or having to make hard decisions regarding job placements. A few fathers also reported the financial difficulties of running out of financial aid. And also,

because finances are very much tied to the act of being employed, this section will be written as one, combining examples from the fathers from both the realm of general finances to issues regarding professional opportunities.

Shawn told me how difficult it was to provide for his son when he first became a dad and then went on to explain how frustrations about providing led to their separation:

When he was born, I was renting a 2-bedroom apartment and I was working full-time and trying to go to school. For *myself*. And then he was born and I had to work full-time plus like overtime, whatever I could get, so I could...keep paying for the apartment and providing for all the new needs for a new baby, which is a lot of stuff. But she never worked so I was...covering all that stuff for the first year...about a year, year and a half of his life. And she never *did* anything....

Conflict arose you know between that because I was getting frustrated with her not providing, and I had to drop out of school to work, to provide for everything.

And then, that's why...around his second birthday is when we separated. And she lived on her own, well, she moved in with her parents and then she lived on her own. And then it kinda worked out 'cause like we got away [from each other] so we got along better, but she started seeing other people which was fine. And then, it was kinda this and that, we didn't have an agreement yet. I would just give her money for like daycare or whatever and then without telling me....she went to court....I was supposed to fill out a child support thing and she got custody automatically. And then without telling me, she got married to this guy she was seeing and she moved to Nebraska. And I couldn't file paperwork or anything to keep her in the state and this is why she did it this way. 'Cause I talked to a lawyer and he said we have to file before she leaves the state. And then, so she was gone so I had no custody there, and she was out there for 2 years....yeah, upped and left with him. And I was living [here] so I was driving at least to [area] and my parents would go to Nebraska and get my son, bring him to [where parents were living] and I would drive [there] to get him. And we did that for, like every time, we always had to drive all the way out there to get him. And then her relationship broke up, like bad. And she ended up moving back here. And then now, as she's back here and I'm here, it's easier now that, you know, he's a little bit older, but he's goin' to school part of the time, but, you know, we can trade off easier now. I don't have to drive 2 states away to get him, and stuff...

He talked about how he'd been thinking about what it would be like to file for full custody, but then explained how he feels held back from taking job opportunities and talked about the sacrifice of staying in the area:

Everybody that's worked...under this professor, either gets published...and gets a job. Or they get offered a job before they even complete with their work, and they're gone. I'm like wow, this is really awesome. But, they're getting jobs like in Washington, one in New York. You know....[I'm] even entertaining the thought of filing for full custody and taking him with me and well let's go to Idaho 'cause I'd love to live out there. I couldn't do that to him 'cause I would be taking him away from his mom. That, I don't wanna create a resentment there. So, that's the only sacrifice, is staying somewhere within the area.

Ben told me that the thing that causes him the most stress as a parent is “not having enough money.” He talked to me about difficulties he had with financial aid and why he thinks it took him so long to finish his degree:

Being a student, I should have graduated a year and a half ago. And now that was mainly because of financial reasons, 'cause when you're taking all your financial aid money that you had at the time and throwing at the child support and whatever else you had to do, and resetting your life, *'cause I had literally started from zero again.* And I walked in, I had 300 some dollars in my checking account. And I went and bought a bed and a TV, and I still have them to this day. But that's literally where I had to start back at, and then I had to build myself up from that and that's doing part-time jobs that you can't take a full-time job when you're doin' school. So I've been doin' that, no healthcare, no nothin'...

Man, so it just gets to be the point where it's just like, I had to take the one semester off, just because things weren't happening and then you know, when you're in school that long, all of a sudden they start cuttin' you off on the financial aid, as you've already taken too many credits or...which is, whatever. So you got cut off from that and then it's just tryin' to find the cash to be able to even get back in, and then when you get back in, you have to pay the cash to pay at the end. So, I mean, it's just a, it's a vicious cycle, that you go into... *it's all basically financial reasons why it took so long to get done.*

Casey also told me about troubles he'd had with financial aid. At the very beginning of the second interview, I asked him how things had been going and he said,

I mean, things are alright. I have been having some trouble with financial aid, trying to get them to pay out so that I have the money to go out there [to pick up kids]. I've sold some things and am trying to you know, get that money scraped together. I think I've got enough now?

He then ended this with some dry humor saying, “[Y]ou'll know if you don't hear from me that I didn't make it,” likely implying that it's been tough but he'll get through like he always does.

Casey then told me about how he has worked it out with his Ex-wife that whichever parent is going to be having the kids, has to be the one to go get them and pay for that travel. He explained it as such: “And in that way, we were assuring each other that we had the *money* to, to have the kids, you know. We weren’t destitute, we weren’t homeless or anything like that, which we both *have* been...” I then followed up with him about when he was homeless in the past, wondering if that was when he was married or not:

Both, yeah. Yeah. Together after I got out of the [military], I was having trouble getting work, because of the whole PTSD stigma. And I didn’t have like a *lot* of education. I had an associate’s degree but nothing big. So I didn’t have a lot of *skills*...Security was one of the things that I could do, but, you know, I didn’t have that opportunity. So, the house that I got in our hometown, with the expectancy of being to pay for it like I could when I was in the [military] – we couldn’t. Happily for us, we found one of my former pastors, allowed us to stay on the campground. And we were able to scrape enough money together to get a travel trailer. And we put *that* on the campground for a while. So together, that was the time that we were homeless together. I lived in cars a few times since then. About two months in a minivan and another three weeks in a car. Um, another 2 weeks in a van. Uh, usually I have a vehicle to stay in, which is nice.

Again, he then ended with some humor: “Haven’t had to *tent it* yet, under a bridge or something [*laughs*].” He told me more about the difficulties he had with financial aid disbursement and how that was linked to him being homeless in the past:

Two of the times that I’ve *been* homeless is because I’ve been waiting on financial aid. You know, the first time I moved to [a previous city] to go to school, and I was gonna live on campus and I got there and they said well we don’t have an apartment for you. But you know, if you hang out, well, we’ll wait and see what we can do. Well I got a hotel room for the first two days. And after that, it was like, do you have anything? And they said, “No we still don’t... We’re trying to get everybody settled. We’ll see if we have space.” So it was 3 weeks, living in my car, in the parking lot. ‘Cause I had to buy the parking pass [*laughs*], so...and then when I went up to [another school]...it was the same thing. We don’t have housing yet. Just, you know, wait and see what happens. I don’t know, I don’t *get* financial aid. Like, why can they not *figure out* that in order to go to a place and to *live* there, a student needs *money*. *Before* classes start. So they can buy books, so they can buy food, so they can put a deposit down on an apartment. I’ve been to one college that has distributed financial aid before classes start. *One*. In the 5 colleges I’ve attended. And it’s, idiotic. [*laughs*]

Dan told about having financial problems previously when his daughter was younger, and how his mom helped watch his daughter:

We did have...some child care assistance, like from the state, that helped...before school, and then once she was in school, no one helped me financially with like paying for after-school programs or anything, but for like those night classes and what not, my parents live in [previous city] and so my mom would watch her. And especially like those classes that are like 7 to 9 or whatever, my mom would come over and that way Alyssa could go to bed, and so she'd be asleep by the time I got back. And sometimes mom too on the couch, but, you know, but that was valuable. I thought about that quite a few times, and I'm like, [if] I didn't have someone...to ask to come over and watch her for that you know.

When I asked Dan how he makes ends meet as a single dad, he talked about the financial part being the hardest thing about being a single father. Like Ben and Casey, he also mentioned using financial aid to help him get by. He also talked about budgeting and priorities:

Ooh...that was tough. Now, is way easier. Obviously getting a job that pays, you know, was great. But that, that was honestly the *hardest* part of being a single dad for me, *because*, well first of all, I really didn't want to go back to university. I was hoping to find a good job and just work and take care of Alyssa, that was my plan. Which I realized wasn't going to really work out real well. But going back to university, 'cause I like I said, I had been in counseling and I talked with the, actually I have a couple different really good friends that were into counseling and stuff and that helped me and I was like you know, this is what I can do. I can, I could try to work full time and go to school part-time, it's gonna take even longer to get through it. At the time you know, I was already 32 and I was like, I'd kinda like to get into the career field and be working so what you know, and what we ended up working out is I went to school full time, and then basically applied for the social programs that are available for a single parent. And, so, I ended up getting rental assistance to help with my apartment. I ended up getting EBT benefits you know, to help with groceries, and then for the rest of the money, I just took extra financial aid when I could, *and I learned to live on an absolute like iron clad budget*. Like, I knew exactly where every dollar went. Every semester started with you know like \$5,000 or something in my account, and I steadily watched it go down and down and down and down you know until at the end of the semester there was like *nothing* left there. And so therefore there wasn't a lot of going out and doing fun stuff you know, I still had friends that I could hang out with and do things [with], but you know we weren't going to movies and things, we weren't. But at the same time, I found that *enlightening*, because not only did it force me to budget my money, and really learn what to do with that, it forced me to really learn to take pleasure in you know the simple things and to realize that you don't have to buy your kid a \$100 toy and play with them, you can go to the park. And it really taught me that spending *time* with your child is more important than *anything* else you could *possibly* do. And so...that's how I made ends meet.

Shawn expressed some frustration with not being able to have a steady income while in school. I asked him what he thinks his life would look like when he's not in school anymore and he talked about the flexibility that it would afford him financially:

Without having to be in school? Wow...it would be a change, I wouldn't have to worry about money all the time. You know, because I would have a steady income. I could have a nice apartment. I'm sick of living in 1-bedroom garden level apartments. You know, because it's cheap, it's easy and, yeah. And I told my folks is as soon as I graduate and get a job, I'm gonna get an apartment, and all the stuff that's in my current apartment I'm just gonna leave it there. Like I'm gonna grab my TV and my computer and some other things and theoretically, just leave it there. And then I'm gonna go to...[the interior design department] and I'm gonna hire a senior to come in and decorate my apartment, all brand new stuff!...That would be sweet. That would be my gift to myself.

He then digressed to tell me about what he saw as the real benefits of being done with school and how it would give him stability:

But yeah, mostly, is having a set schedule you know, working you know, 7-4 or...8-5, having you know a regular income, learning my profession and practicing my profession, and not just cranking out homework problems. *That's what I want—stability.*

I asked Erik what freedoms he wish he had but doesn't and he responded about how he feels held back on his ability to find employment as well, due to the restrictions in the current custodial agreement. Erik is obviously focused on his career but equally as focused on his son and being close enough to spend time with him:

I'd say about the only thing well, two things. One...I *could* but I won't, take a job, where I will have to be a long distance from him. Unless that was *very very* high paying. And the other thing is, in our custody agreement, I don't have the ability to take him out-of-state without her permission. That's one of the things that was put in there, that I didn't want, but it was kinda like, I guess going back to when we were talking about favors to the mother [in the courts], that was put in there. But then the same restriction's on her too. So she can't just decide to take him to California [named random state] without telling me and getting my approval. That's the joint legal side. So, I think those are the 2 things. Like geographic restrictions but I mean, I've taken trips to visit my brother and other trips and trips I planned or whatever, but, you know, this summer'll be a challenge, 'cause usually every summer in the past I've been home, or in [city]. And so close. But this summer, I'll be about the same distance I am from him [here], so, that'll be a challenge. So I guess it, it's good, just to kinda test it to see how that would work, because this is a place that might actually offer me a full-time position. So, we'll see, that'll...be told. So I mean I've always you know, when I've looked for jobs out of my

undergraduate, that was the big restriction is I didn't look anywhere but [city], so that was kind of the, the big downfall there...

Dan told me about the flexibility afforded to him by his employer who fortunately *does* allow him personal time when he needs to be with his family:

[A]nd then here, they're very understanding about that. Honestly I've gotta say this job is *amazing*. It's exactly the kind of job I would have, I *wanted* at the end of my grad program. And, being very, the way my boss put it, is, everyone's a professional here, and so we understand if you need to take time off for something, family-related, or personal, you don't even really need to tell us what it is, you know. We just, we expect that you'll get, you'll make up the time and, as you can, you know, and so...It's very nice.

As seen here, Dan has fortunately had a good experience, but not everyone felt supported by employers. I had asked Ben specifically if his places of employment have been supportive of him, he said, "I wouldn't say employers" and then moved into talking about what support he gets from his instructors instead so it was clear there wasn't any real support from those for whom he works.

Adam also has not had the best experience thus far and reports finding it difficult to locate a job that can work with his limited schedule of having to care for his child. He told a story about him getting close to being hired for a summer internship out-of-state. During the call, they were very interested in hiring him and they knew he had a child and seemed to want to make accommodations for him. But then things took a turn when he couldn't just leave immediately because his son was in school:

And they were like, we will hire you *right now*. We will fly you down, we will provide housing for you and your son. It was like, perfect situation and but it was, we wanna know when your last final is. And I told them, and they're like, 'Well, we'll have a plane waiting on the airport for you, you know, 3 hours after that.' And I'm goin' well...wait. Noo – my son's in school for another 3 weeks. I'm not gonna pull him outta school to come down there. I will come when he's done. And they said well, oh never mind then, we'll hire somebody else. And I went oh, well, you were so excited to hear about me you know, guy with real-world experience, I already got a degree, working on a 2nd one. They were so thrilled about me and then it was the instant I said no, my son...his education needs to come first, oh well never mind then.

Fathers Unsatisfied with Living Arrangements or Children's Relationship with Mother

Most of the fathers feel that their children are better off with them, in compared to with their mother, for many reasons. Keep in mind that only one of the fathers in my study has full custody and from what was described to me, it is clear in his situation that his living environment is better suited for a child. But other examples address the negative relationship with the mother, or when the living environment there is less than ideal. Another sign of this is that the children seem to become withdrawn or sad at the end of spending time with their father, when transitioning to mom. Fathers reported the children actually withdrawing emotionally during this transition.

Remember that Adam's son Joshua hadn't seen his mom in four years and she has disappeared from her son's life. Adam told previously about how his son did not want to go with his mom and that she eventually stopped coming:

And he *knew*, Sunday, we [go to]...grandma and grandpa's lake cabin. We came back, and then mom came and got him. Well after the first couple of weeks of coming back and not having her come pick him up, he was fine with it. Usually, it was more, he fought trying *not* to go with mom.

And now years later, Adam is afraid of his son seeing his mother and what might happen to his son psychologically. He talked about running into her by accident late at night in the town where she's living and talks about wanting to avoid her:

I made a mistake when we were in [city]...she worked overnights at [place] and I had forgotten which one she worked at. And I went in. Thankfully Joshua wasn't with me. But I was, I was coming back from work and it was like 2 in the morning...And it was, 'Well where's Joshua?' With my parents? Why do you care? You've not expressed a worry ever before? 'Well, what are you doing out, you out drinking?' No. You know I don't drink. And but yeah no, I won't go to [her place of work] right now, in [city]. But, nah, at this point, I'm more concerned that she'll screw something up in Joshua, 'cause I'm sure if she ever saw him she'd be like 'Oh my baby' [*mimicking an overly exaggerated high voice*] and Joshua'll just kinda look at her and go I have no idea who you are, please let go of me. And he's a very affectionate child but when it's the other way around, it, he gets very uncomfortable very fast.

And Ben, even though his children live mainly with their mother, it seems surprising that he can't spend more time with them because the living situation with the mother seems to be far from ideal:

So now my kids basically stay at grandma's house...I guess you can consider it [a] 3-bedroom 1-bath place that was built in the twenties. And, yeah, those two plus her other two [kids]... basically what happens, is they just they live at grandma's house. And then [my Ex-wife], comes by at night or something. That's the story I'm *getting*. And all she does is yell because she has 4 kids now, and coming at her at once.

Because of this environment, Ben feels his children would be better off with him and talked more about the situation at the grandmother's house:

I would think it would be much better here. I would think...then they can actually *do* activities and stuff with me, 'cause they can't, with Grandma. Grandma's watchin' her other 2 smaller kids that [my Ex-wife] just had and those two she, she's havin' knee surgery in a month so she already asked me and is like "Can they stay at your place?" [*mimicking voice*] Of course they can! [*laughs*] So, I don't know. I just think they'd have a lot more opportunities with me. Actually I *know* they would.

I asked him if he would try in the future to have them be with him and he said that he would and was hoping to try soon. And he told me how the children react when he's bringing them back to their mom's:

'Cause now they beg for it every time. "I don't wanna go back to mom's!" ...I had to take 'em back on Wednesday. "I don't wanna go, can't we just stay at [your place]?" I'm like, there's nobody there. Except the roommate. And he's not watching you. [*laughs*]

In our first interview, I had asked Ben if he felt his kids share much emotionally with him and he talked about what it's like when they are transitioning between parents and he's bringing them back to stay with their mother:

That's the whole good and bad part about them livin' in [city]...So goin' to get 'em, it's always exciting and then when I do get 'em...you get a lot of that information out right away. But the bad part is when you have to start heading back, is that for the, many years, they're starting to come out of it. I don't know, if it's a good or a bad thing, but. [There were] years you'd get in the car, they'd just [noise] clam up, they wouldn't even talk, they'd just stare out the window. And I know my rides home are always *terrible*. *I hate it*. It was time to get over it, and, so that's how that went. But lately, they've been more talkative until we get to the town and they're always just like "turn around!! Turn

around!”[*mimicking their voices*][*laughs*] No, the Sheriff would be visiting tonight if we turned around.

Erik described something similar about his son withdrawing as well, and that Matthew seems to have a hard time showing emotion around him and thinks it maybe has to do with the fact others are saying negative things about him:

It’s tough to read him on that, because when he leaves, he gets very - sometimes he’ll get sad but lately he’s been more like - it’s almost like he doesn’t wanna show emotion towards when his mother [picks him up], or, sometimes if his mom’s working, one of his uncles will pick him up. So he doesn’t want to show *emotion* towards *me*. I can only speculate on why that is. I’m sure that there’s been some bad words said about me, from that side. And that’s somethin’ I don’t *ever* do you know, I learned that from my, from my mom really, was you know, *you don’t back-talk the other parent*. Doesn’t matter what you feel about that person or not, just don’t say anything. I don’t think that *she* does, I don’t think his mom is saying anything. It might be one of the other family members, but, he has a tough time showing emotion like when he’s leaving. Maybe a little bit before, but when someone from his mom’s side is present, or his mom, he doesn’t really like to show emotion. So...Otherwise he does, yeah.

Shawn told about what it used to be like for him and his son when they were living so far apart, and the feeling of “emptiness” that he had, and how they both used to be very sad about that. He also connected it to what he feels even now, living in the same town and said: “He used to cry...just like I would.” And then he said, “[W]hen she was in Nebraska, and when he was here and I was still in [another city], it was because it was that separation thing again.” As he said that, I could hear the sadness creeping into his voice. He then went on:

It was like, having that loss, ‘cause I was, he was losing just as much as I was. Because, I don’t know, we’ve had a connection ever since he was little. I mean, father-son thing, it’s *unbreakable*. But yeah, even when I moved back here, the first time he came and spent the weekend at my apartment, on Sunday, we were packing him up, getting him ready to go back to his mom’s for school the next day, and I was in the bathroom doin’ something and he all of a sudden, just I could hear just him break down and cry. And it was like, you know he was like, ‘I don’t wanna go, dad, I wanna stay with you!’ Still, even when we were that close that, that separation, that *feeling of loss* and *emptiness* arose again. But that was the last time he did it, *because* I’ve been able to see him and he *knows* now that, you know oh, I’m gonna see my daddy again in a couple weeks, or I might see him then. And I tell him all the time, like oh yeah, you know this weekend you’re coming. Like today, I’m gonna pick him up after class, you know, so he *knows* now so he doesn’t have that anxiety of not knowing when I’m gonna see my father again. Which is *huge* because

that, it made me feel guilty. You know, like, Ahh, like I can't be there. He doesn't understand why, I you know, he can't be with me. And that's tough to take, because I know why.

In the second interview, he explained how he recently learned some more about his living situation and his Ex's boyfriend who seems to be troubled and also how the mother seems to possibly be withholding information from him on purpose:

I kinda got some insight into the situation he's living in, with her new boyfriend or whatever....it makes me feel a little bit better but, you know 'cause he's been in trouble and she's kinda let me in to see *how* he's taking care of his problems. Which helps. I'm still nervous because you know, is he gonna take it seriously. The only reason why he's doing some of this is because the state is making him do it, you know, so, kinda watching out [for] that....But he got his report card and he told me he did poorly in math. And then he said...it was because he missed so many days of school. And I was like, well how is that possible? I know he got a stomach bug a couple times and if he has watery stools they send him home, and then he has to be home for like a day after. But that was like twice and, so I'm not sure what happened there. And she, I asked for the report card like 2 weeks ago. And then she said she was gonna...send it to me. 'Cause she wasn't sure exactly where it was. Which is a lie because she knows exactly where it is...I went to watch one of his baseball games. She was gonna bring it then, she didn't. And then I picked him up Friday to go [out of town], she didn't have it then. And I'm like just give it to me. It's like, she's hiding something, because I'm, it's not, I'm not gonna confront her but you know you gotta let me know what's going on. If he's struggling in math, maybe he just needs a little bit more practice at it. And maybe *I* can work with him, 'cause I'm a little better at it? I don't know, I'm tryin' to come up with a solution, but I can't get a solution if I don't know what the problem is, you know. And then the more that she hides it from me or she *seems* like she's hiding from me, the more worried I become. You know like if he's missing more and more days, like she's holding him back from school for certain reasons that I don't know about, it's just a concern that I have.

He then continued on to talk about how regardless, his son is still doing well in school, as far as he knows:

No...he's doing exceptional in reading. Like he's in an advanced reading class and he really likes it you know, so maybe that's just like what he's good at and that's what he'll end up doing you know. But, it's still like, math, you know for the majority of the population, it's like 'I hate it, I don't understand what it's for, why do I have to do it? I'll never use it.' Maybe he's one of those...You know, but you still kinda have to do it. So if it's one of those things that he's struggling in, I can help teach him that you know, there may be a way to break up you know some of her responsibility, I'll take it on you know. But like I said, I don't know until I know...But it's a little worrisome but you know, otherwise he, he did good, he's going into second grade. He's really excited...I asked

him how it was, if he was excited for summer or whatever and he's like 'Well, I'm excited but I'm kinda sad,' like he's not gonna see all of his friends every day.

Shawn also talked about even though his Ex treats his son well, he still worries because of the types of relationships his mom has with others, especially the types of men she dates:

My parents always thought too, it was like well he's gonna get old enough, he's gonna pick up on, on his mom and what she's like. And then we'll let him decide for himself, I guess. And I guess I don't know. I mean, she, from what I know, she *treats* him well. Like I said, she has problems treating *adults* well. You know, she doesn't have many friends, she burns bridges. And she's, like I don't wanna sit here and psychoanalyze her but she, look at the kind of guys she's been with lately, I don't know. But it's not mine to say. But, I worry [gentle laugh]...That's a bad thing to end on [*laughs*]...That's terrible! [*laughing*]...No. No, no, no...But it's gonna work out. No, my son's got a, he's got a bright future. He's got a good head on his shoulders. He's quick. He's smart-witted, he's havin' fun. I mean, he's *healthy*. I mean there's nothin' more I could ask for there.

Recall that with Dan, a decision was recently made for his daughter to live with him full-time. And even though his relationship with his Ex is amicable, he has commented on the lack of parenting at the mom's home. His Ex got remarried a few years ago and has two more children with her new husband. He also said his daughter has been having some issues with her step-dad. He describes the parenting issues and lack of discipline that she experiences:

As each one has come along, Alyssa's had more problems, *with* her step-dad. Like her step-dad's pretty much kinda checked out. And...my Ex, has really, well, has just *flat* said to me, like, you know when Alyssa and her step-dad have arguments about things, she [the Ex] just kinda goes neutral. And also, to *me*, that's not really parenting, I mean, it's kinda *choosing* one side over the other. Instead of really trying to *help* mediate that? And, I feel like a lot of it comes back to me, in that they want me to, basically they want me to be the parent and they just want to be able to have, to try to have fun with her, and they're starting to realize that doesn't work. You can't change the rules all the time. They actually established all of their rules based on what I had *suggested*, to start with, which was, kinda trippy for me, that they were doing that. But I was, you know, okay, you know [*laughs*]. You try for consistency. But then they've really bobbled that back and forth. Like one day there's discipline for this and one day there's not. And one day, this rule exists and one day it doesn't. And then it's just gotten worse with, like I said each, each progressive extra child they've had, [in] Alyssa, I just see it. And she's got such a big heart for, even for them, that she still tries to do stuff and she loves 'em so bad.

Dan then told of a sad interaction that happened over Easter, regarding something Alyssa's mom said to her:

She had...kind of a meltdown with us and told us that her *mom* had said to her that maybe it would be best for her to just live with *me*, all the time, because you know, that way her and [her stepfather] would stop arguing. And I mean, she's 9. You know. That broke her heart to hear that, you know.

Dan told me what it was like before his daughter moved here, and when he had to bring his daughter back to her mom's. He told me how he could see the "anxiety building up" in his daughter. He described the transition as follows:

I would pick her up every Friday and then bring her back in time for school. And, that's been tough, because, for Alyssa *and* I, we're not seeing each other as much. I don't honestly know if it was tougher on me, I think maybe [*laughs*] 'cause of the separation at first, but getting to that end of it and her moving up here. Oh, what I was gonna say, is *every time* I pick her up...I've watched it, like, it would take her a few hours but she would, she would relax, like you'd *visibly* watch her relax. And then every Sunday morning when she knows by the end of the day she'll be back there, she starts having a little bit of not a panic, but it's like her attitude starts changing. And she'll start talking about not bein' real happy about goin' back...and she's started counting down the days til she's down here you know. And so I'm really looking forward to being able to just, to put more into that, in helping her 'cause I, I think the last couple of years have been...*extra* tough. Especially as...her little sister was just born earlier this year. And of course she loves her little sister, but once again of course there's gonna be a little bit of sibling rivalry in that she, you know, there's not as much *time* for her and already she wasn't getting much time. And something she doesn't even understand what that means, as I think most kids are there. But, but watching her step-dad steadily check out as well, has been, has really been hard for her as well, so. So I guess that's what it means to me, is just you know, unconditional love. And giving them the, giving her enough space to, to really you know, spread her wings but be there to catch her you know whenever she falls [*laughs*].

Naturally, what I was hearing from the fathers was one-sided, in the sense that I was not also hearing from their children or Exes. So in that sense, one could see this as limiting.

However, at least with their children, knowing what I do about how the men spoke to me about their children, and how they reported engaging in conversation with them, I am confident in saying that their kids know that they are loved and protected by their fathers beyond measure.

Challenges of the Single Father Experience

In this section, I will be looking at what I am calling the *context-specific* single father experience – that is, things in their lives whereby the effects vary by situation or individual

person. Sometimes, the result is a positive effect on their lives but other times it is not. But overall, I view them as challenges of the single father experience. The following areas will be discussed: Reactions of surprise in others; support networks, in particular a presence of informal support and a lack of formal support; coping strategies; and also experiences with dating.

Reactions of Surprise in Others

Surprise in general is seen as an emotion associated with positive feelings. However, in the context of single fathers, the surprise seems to be linked to some sort of bias and disbelief on the part of others, even if the person meant to show admiration. In this section, I will talk about the various situations in which these single dads have encountered reactions of surprise in their lives, illustrating the effects of this on the fathers.

Shawn told of a few students he's made friends with, and talked about how they couldn't understand he had a child without ever being married and put a humorous spin on it:

I was tellin' them how I have a kid and they could not get over the fact I wasn't married to his mom. I was like why are we so hung up on this? They were like, 'wait a minute, how do you have a kid and you're not married. How, you can't have a kid without being married.' I'm like, no, you kinda can.

But he could not get over the fact. But they didn't really like judge me or hold it against me 'cause then they made a comment and this is how I found out there was another guy just like me. 'Cause he's like, 'Oh yeah, like, [Name] come here, you have a kid, well this guy has a kid too and you guys are both writing this lab together, you must be the responsible father figures.' *[laughs]* I was like...we kind of are. But...I didn't even know he was a single dad too.

Dan also talked about the reactions from his classmates. A lot of the surprise he felt had to do with his age, and being in his late 30s but looking much younger than that - plus the fact he was a single father:

I will also say that in my undergrad, I felt really blessed...my advisors and my, most of my professors and stuff, whenever I would talk to them, they would, well first of all they were shocked that I was a single dad doing what I was doing and stuff. Because it's obviously far more often to hear about the single mom helping you know, her child, and stuff, and so, and being in the...program, there was only ever like 2 other guys through

the entire 4 years, so and they were both 18 as they were coming in, you know, and so here I was coming in older...so I guess there was a certain amount of respect given to me for what I was doing, and so they were a little more understanding I think.

I then asked Dan to tell me more about the shocked reactions of others:

Sure. *[laughs]* Well the first one I think was because coming in, older than what they expected that, 'cause I guess I had some thought that maybe professors somehow saw our ages or something, before we came into the classroom. So to find out that like one professor that I had had for multiple years, when I was a junior, found out that I was actually the same age as her husband. And that blew her away! She was like, Oh!?! And I actually had one professor that was younger than me 'cause she had gotten hired *right out* of university, after she got her Ph.D. And so whenever they would find out things like that, it would usually start with like some kind of an inquiry like 'Wow you seem to have a lot of experience about these different things.' And I'd be like, well, I am, you know like, I'm 40 years old, you know. Most people look at me and they're like 'Nooo, no you're not' you know. And I'm like well, yeah, you know.... I'm blessed with good genetics, I don't know...

I think [with] a lot of the reactions, there was some *respect* in that...it was the initial being taken aback and I think it...would be almost like you could see that they would just *assume*, like I think a lot of people do—that *if you're a single dad, you're probably the kind of person that only takes your kids on the weekend, when you have to*. Maybe twice a month or something like that. And that's sad, 'cause I've known those guys, you know. I think everybody has met or known those guys.

Dan also talked about how females in particular would really enjoy when he would talk about doing things with his daughter. However, he said:

It's interesting right, because we know that on one hand, it's kind of nice to receive that admiration, that 'Oh hey, you're a good dad, you're doin' this,' but at the same time, in the back of my, in the back of my head I would always be thinking like *man, how many just like crappy dads did you know, you know? I mean, what happened to men that they won't step up, you know, and take care of their kids, and do what they should do, you know? Just because something doesn't work out between you and the mother doesn't mean that you don't have a responsibility*.

Dan then talked about determination and friends being "amazed" by what he was doing as a single dad:

I think it takes...a certain determination. It takes—to say *guts* is so, so *unprofessional* right but I mean...it takes that knowledge that this is my responsibility and I'm going to do it. So it, I mean, whichever word you want to apply to that, that responsibility is so important. *But I think the bottom line is, do you really love that kid*. Or kids. You know. I mean, *will* you put them before yourself. And that's where unfortunately a lot of the time

the selfishness kicks in. But I think it definitely takes, even if you don't *have* that yet, no matter how scared you are, if you have a *determination* that they *need* you, and you *have* to be there. You *can't* curl up in a ball and die [*laughs*] you know, because of whatever's going on. They *need* you to be there for them. And I think any guy has the capability of doing that. They just have to make that choice, because they have that, the first choice is do I pick me, or them? And especially when there's a divorce going on, I mean, I don't think anybody comes out of that feeling *great*, you know, about themselves. And at the *moment* at least. And so if they won't take that [step], if you won't put your kids' needs ahead of your own at that moment, when you *really desperately* just *want* to take care of yourself, you know, but you can't. You just can't. And you need to take that step.

He then talked about the importance of having people around you that will help you, and even described people being "enamored" with what he was doing:

I think step two would be [to] make sure that you surround yourself with positive people that will help you, that will enable you. If you surround yourself with your friends that all wanna play video games and just party or whatever, then you're going to naturally want that more. And so you *may* lose some friends, along the way...I didn't. I had friends who...I think were completely amazed that I *rose* to the challenge unfortunately because I had been...lazy...before that, but they were completely like *enamored*. They didn't have kids of their own but they were like 'Holy cow, I couldn't do that you know.' And I'm like yeah you could, if you needed to you could do it, you know. And so if you have your own 'cheering section' so to speak, that is helpful. But, it still comes back 'cause you know, when it's 3 in the morning and your kid pokes you and says I think I'm gonna get sick and throws up right on your bed next to you...What are you gonna do [*keeps laughing throughout this*], *lay* there in it? You know? You have to take care of it! So, there are those days. You just have to know you're gonna do it.

In the following passage, Dan referred to a concept that he called "men-boys," as in men who haven't ever learned to grow up and take on responsibility. I asked some more about what it takes for men to step up and whether it has to do with a sense of duty, and he explained:

I think that can *help*...I really do believe here especially in the United States, I believe we've told people enough...that they *don't* have to, you know? And there's just been, in your studies maybe you've seen this too. I look at a lot of things and it seems like men have been doing less and less and less and less, you know. And [*sigh*] so it gets to the point where you do have those guys. That can do kind of what I did, you know, make it to 30 years old, without really doing anything...At least I wasn't living in my parents' basement right, you know. I mean there are those people that are still doing that because no one has, no one has *given* them a responsibility so yeah, I think *inherent* in every man is the ability to feel *good* at accomplishing a task. I think it's *why* you know if, the *men-boys* if you will you know, I think that's why they're so big into like some of these computer games and things, because there are, at least they're getting congratulated. There is an award system in the game like maybe you're just the best person in the world

at whatever the particular game is...But there is some sense of accomplishment and if they were given that *outside* of a virtual reality, if in the real world, they were given like hey, you *can* do this, and they were just given that, a little bit, just the tiniest bit of empowerment to kinda push them out of the nest, and get going, right. I think that there is inherent in any guy, the ability to do that. I mean and obviously I'm not including like if there was a mental health issue or something that could prevent that, but I think the average guy out there *absolutely* has the ability to pull themselves together and do it, you know. They just, they *have* to make those decisions.

In the second interview, I did some member checking with him on the idea of surprise mixed with respect and he said:

Well, it would definitely turn into that, 'cause the...*original* reaction would usually be surprise. Especially about you know that I was, especially when they *thought* that I was much younger you know. That I was a single dad, you know, really taking care of my child, would surprise them that that was, that was happening. ...[B]ut *then*, I would see a lot of, it would really quickly *reverse* and I think that had a lot to do with the fact that you know, so many people...a lot of them were women that I was going to school with you know, in my various programs. And...they probably knew lots from their friends and all, 'cause I would *hear* different things like 'Oh yeah, my friend...and man, her boyfriend just disappeared or whatever...things like that. Very occasionally be like 'Man, I wish my dad had stuck around,' like that, or something. So then I would *see* that respect. And when I would talk about Alyssa, because of course I could use that as a relation [in coursework]... I would definitely see them just kinda *glow* about that you know [laughed]. I have no idea, I never asked what they were thinking but you could also see that on their face. Like '...Man, I hope my fiancée is gonna be like that! [*mimicked high female voices being admiring of him*]...or whatever. So there would be, there would *that* and it would make you know, it would, it would be, yeah. Really, it would be turned into something really good. I didn't have any, any of the *guys* that I would have in class here or there. I never had any of them come up and be like '*Yeah I wanna be like that!!*'But I didn't expect especially when they would realize that I would be like 15 years older than them or whatever, that would, like I pointed out last time, that definitely kept me from *more* socialization, you know. So I have no idea what they would talk about once you know, they were gone. But I *always* was treated with respect afterwards. I never had anybody you know, be like, 'That's weird.'

I asked Adam what his interactions are like specifically with moms at the school. He talked about interactions with the mothers, assuming Joshua has a mother in his life, and details the persistent questions and the surprise he's been witness to:

Sometimes they ask, you know, 'Well, what's mom think?' My girlfriend's been in town a few times and helped pick Joshua up. And then they'll comment, 'Oh well is that your wife?' And I'll [say], 'No, that's my girlfriend.' 'Well is that Joshua's [mom]?' And eventually...you know, it comes up, 'Is that Joshua's mom?' 'No, that's not his biological

mom,” kind of a thing. And it's, oh, okay. Umm, there's not a whole huge you know, it doesn't seem to be brought up as an issue. Most of the time, most people are kind of surprised where it's oh well, you're a single dad, with full, you know, basically you know, sole custody of our son. And, there's no female *there*. There've been a few questions where it's been, like at the IEP meetings and stuff at the school or, there's kind of that concern about well, you know would that help a little bit.

Adam also talked about surprise that he encounters when he visits the social services office:

You go to like Social Services and things there, they're always kinda surprised that it's a dad.... Yeah, it's the dad that's pushing the...okay, I need the, you know we need to do the autism testing, we have to do this that or the other thing.

When I asked Erik to talk about what it's like in general, being a single father, he talked about the surprise and stigma that he feels:

Let's see, it's been a challenge, but I've always been up for a challenge, and you know....I kind of look at when I talk to people, they, I tell 'em that I have a child, a son you know, it *blows* their mind I guess, 'cause I think the stigma is that if you have a child at a young age, you're not gonna do anything, and you're *hindered* by that. And I, when I found out, this obviously wasn't planned, when I found out that I was going to have a son, it was tough, you know, right away, bein' like wow, you know, with that type of mindset [that it was a hindrance], but I chose right away to *not* have that mindset.

Support Networks

Fathers reported both a presence and lack of support in their lives in varying degrees in the realm of both informal and formal support. For purposes of this dissertation, informal support is being defined as personal or financial support from family and friends, whereas formal support would be support offered through work, campus departments or faculty, other campus services, legal services, or official channels such as financial assistance from the county. In general, the dads had great informal support networks, but the formal support was severely lacking.

Sources of Informal Support.

All fathers but one reported that their families were very helpful and supportive. The experiences described by the fathers ran the gamut from parents helping out many of the dads financially, to Shawn's parents who drove long distances to help with the logistics of

transporting his son who lived a few states away. Dads also reported having a very amicable relationship with the mother of their children, such as with Dan and Casey.

Casey's children are of school age, so I asked him about his childcare needs and whether or not he has people who help him with the children, either by taking care of them or helping him out financially. In response, he talked about the importance of having his children be taken care of by relatives:

Every once in a while, my mom will watch them. But no, I haven't paid for daycare for a very long time for them. Generally speaking, we try to, if they're not with us, have them with relatives. Just because there are fewer, there are fewer accidents that way. They don't have to interact with people that are, that are you know caged up in the...private daycares, and...we find that...it's just better.

Dan reported many supportive people in his life, including parents, friends, and his wife. He said that the support he got from his parents was "huge." He also talked about one of his best friends who was also a dad and said they would just "unload" with each other and:

help each other through different things but that was...I would say he was probably my *number 1* person I relied on for like just mental health if you will [*laughs*], you know! That *person* that you could talk to about things, and stuff...

Dan told me about another dad who was actually a classmate of his in his program, who served as a great role model for him. This father had many trials due to a baby being born very ill, and his determination inspired Dan:

I'll give you...[an] example, of an *amazing* guy....I met him in my grad program.... he's been like at the top of our class, continually. She got pregnant, and while he was in the program, and they found out half way through the pregnancy that the baby had [a diagnosis].... And starting from then, he would work, do his schoolwork, and as fast as he could then he would be driving [out of town]....he's been doing this for like 7 months now? And, I mean, he doesn't get much sleep, obviously. I mean, his heart's there, he's *constantly* just *driving*, back and forth, that's all his free time. He has no time for *nothing* else. But he does it. And when I *talk* to him about it, he doesn't complain. Not once, have I heard him complain. Almost *break up* [meant break down as in crying], yes. But, I mean, but he's...a farm kid, 3 generations you know...he doesn't *break up*! In front of other guys at least! [*laughs*] But they can't even hold their baby most of the time. She's had to have a couple different surgeries....I mean, it's just the *saddest* thing. You look through the pictures...Like, *I* almost start crying you know. I'm like holy crap, I can't

imagine not being able to pick up my baby...It's only been a couple of times they've been able to do that...I mean, you see things like that and...I don't lose hope! *[laughs]* For fatherhood and things like that right, you know, because...there are guys out there who will do *everything* for their wife and kids. *Everything*. And, he's one of those guys and so I mean...he's like a role model I think for a lot of men...[who] need to see that you know, hey, life will probably *never* ask you to do this. But, you *can*. If you're asked. If you need to, you *can* step up.

Dan knows he's lucky to have had the support system that he's had. He told me, "I think support is huge. And I had such great support myself, you know. If I had had to do this *all* on my own, I might be telling a *completely* different story and probably *not* sitting here *[laughs]*."

On the other end of the spectrum we have Ben for example, who when I asked if he receives much help from others, he stated: "Never got any monetary help. It was more if I had friends that were staying with me, they'd like watch 'em when I'm at work. That'd be about it." I then asked him if he got any other sort of help from others as a single dad and he laughed. He said: "Nope." And then very emphatically said, "Nothing." This is the conversation where Ben had referred to himself as just a "dirt bag on the side." I noted the laughter in these answers, wondering what was behind that. He also told me he doesn't know any other single dads, so that also may be an indication of why he doesn't feel much support in his life. Ben had a great childhood, but it doesn't seem like his family is very helpful to him as a single dad. But he did want to be sure to mention that his girlfriend's parents actually paid for his last semester of school.

Remember that Shawn's parents have been extremely supportive, but he indicated to me that his friends just don't understand his situation. He describes the friends as "indifferent" but then talks about how his family comes together all for his son:

Even when I talk with like *my* friends about being a dad, 'cause I was the first one of my group of high school friends to have a kid. They didn't understand the responsibility. They didn't understand how your priorities change, your feelings change, and stuff like that. And so they would, would almost do the same thing, like oh that's great. You know. And even I would tell my buddy, 'cause I had a feeling he was gonna get married and

have a kid soon and I was like you know, if you need any advice, on how to raise a kid or how to get 'em to fall asleep at 3 o'clock in the morning, or how to get 'em to soccer practice...or whatever, just ask me for some advice. 'Cause I've tried everything. And he never did, but, he has a kid now, and it must be goin' fine for him, but...Uh as far as like *friends* around my same age of people, I'd say *none*. Not even close. Like what's the *opposite* of caring. Basically. They're just completely indifferent.

But my family is amazing. My family's like everything. Well yeah, 'cause they love being around him, that's what I said, they helped me a lot in the past to get him. They helped me financially...And all of the family involved is really supportive. My family, her family...it's all because he's such a great little kid that they...we all kinda, that's our commonality, that we all, *we all put our differences aside for the benefits of him*.

Both Erik and Adam have supportive families, however they told of how their own dads, in particular, initially were not supportive upon finding out they were expecting a child. Erik stated:

When I told my parents the news that you know, they're gonna be grandparents, my mom had a very positive reaction. My dad was more *negative* like, your life is over, what are you doing. And then that's when I said yeah, my life is over if I *say* it is. And I'm not gonna let it be...And that's the kind of a message I give to other people...I've had a couple friends of mine who have had children since I've had Matthew and they'll come to me and talk about it. I mean...and I'll sit down and have a conversation with them or talk to them on the phone, and, you know, it's, I *know* what you're goin' through. I *understand* that it's a very *nerve-wracking* time. And a lot of emotions are goin' *on*. But if you just you know, stay focused on what you wanna do and not all the time [is it] always gonna work out like you think. I never thought I'd be at State. It's just a, a *blessing* that way, being able to be up here...

In the following passage, Adam talks about his father's reaction and telling him that he felt he wasn't ready to become a dad:

You know, bein' a single parent and having the...your own parents sitting there and 'Well, this is what we did with you.' And I'm going, 'Ehh...that's why I'm not doing it with mine.' And, but, I don't know. It's always a slippery slope being a parent. My dad always commented to me, especially when his mom was still pregnant, was, you know, 'You're not ready. You don't, you...' and my rebuttal to it was, 'Well you're *never* ready to be a parent.' You know, doesn't matter how much money you have, doesn't matter how much planning and stuff you go into it. That first poopy diaper... 'Oh God, what do I do.'

What is interesting about these two examples is that it involves other males in the lives, their own fathers in particular, underestimating them. Erik said his dad told him that his life was over. And Adam's father, directly said, 'You're not ready.' In defending themselves against the

judgments of their fathers, both Erik and Adam demonstrated a wisdom beyond their years and a responsibility towards the children they were going to have.

Sources of Formal Support.

As mentioned in the first half of this chapter, the men typically had great informal support networks. Recall from the dads' stories at the beginning of this chapter, some of the fathers reported utilizing county financial assistance programs that they qualified for such as food stamps, housing assistance and childcare assistance. Adam in particular mentioned how he couldn't qualify for housing assistance, however.

Fathers also talked about their experiences with their children's school, and those responses were varied. And some fathers found their experience in the legal system to be less than stellar and experience with child support as well, in addition to access to legal services for dads. There was a lack of other formal support, including the fact overall, campus services for dads were found to be lacking. This section will conclude with the father's comments on campus services and suggestions for improving what campus could offer to them.

Experience in Child's School System.

Erik reported his son's school being very accommodating for him and even letting him sit in the classroom. Erik told me,

His teachers are very open, like when I come in for lunch, very nice. [They let me] sit in the class. Not necessarily in the classroom during the class time because they, every one of his classmates wanted me to stay after and sit in on a class but I *didn't* just because I thought that me sitting in the back of the classroom was gonna be a big distraction. So you know I either go out for the recess or, just sit and eat lunch with him and kinda interact on that, on that level. And then his teachers have been pretty open, actually his mother and I, this year, we've gone to conferences together. So, that I think, that's pretty unique for parents that aren't together usually. At least in my experience it was separate conferences. So...I think the teachers maybe appreciate the fact that we're able to come together and be on the same page and then his mother and I will talk about you know, if there's an issue that comes up.

Ben however, had a much different experience with his children's school system and talked about how he feels ignored during parent-teacher conferences. I asked him what it's like when he interacts with others at his children's school:

Oh - yeah! That's another *fun* thing...everyone knows everybody, and I'm that *weirdo* that comes in. And, oh, yeah, 'cause they know who *I* am for some reason. Of course, it's small town. And I walk into that school and it's like...I have no idea who these people are. They know who I am. And it's just like, like *you're getting' eye-balled down*, and then you go into the conferences and I always try to make every one of them. But, that's another story. And I'll get there and they'll have 1 set of sheets all set up and that's for *her* [the mother]. And they always talk to *her* and then I'm just kinda like the sideline note. I would like documentation also. So you always have to take a second trip out to get it and I'm just like, why do you do this? You *know* there's two of us. Why do you *assume* that I don't want any of this stuff? Why do you *assume* I don't care? ...[Their mom] yells at them because they don't get their homework done, and she has no idea how to do it you know....Now, she won't share anything. She even told me to my face, 'I don't have to tell you *anything*.' And I haven't done anything to provoke that, I don't know why that's all there, but...so, if I need to know anything about what they're doin' in school, if they even have plays, band concerts, all that stuff, *I* have to go to the school myself and ask them, it's like what's goin' on? And they get kinda a little back-offish, but they do give up the information. ...the *teachers* will only have like one set of documents. Like, here's all their grades and stuff, and they just give 'em to her and then I'm just like oh what about me? I'd like to have some of this too you know. So then they have to go out and find it. If it happened once...oh, they just don't understand or didn't realize. But it's *every* time. *Every* single - oh one time they didn't. They actually had two copies. That was [*laughs*], yeah *once*.

Also, Adam, Ben, Dan, and Erik all had children who were labeled by the school as being at-risk or having behavior concerns or being placed on IEP's (Individualized Education Program) or even second-guessing men on their handling of their child's injury, remembering Adam's story about how the school questioned him on how he handled his son's head wound. This was also accompanied by a feeling of dismissal by the schools. Adam explained it like this, remembering how he was affected when he was a child in school:

I've had people question me...[on] his IEP. One of the big things I pushed was, I don't want Joshua being pulled out of the classroom. And, you know, he needs to be able to...yes, he needs these therapies and what not to help, but, when I was in elementary school, for the longest time, I got taken to special ed, and then you got drug out of the classroom, and you had to work with you know, the 1 special teacher. And, I ended up

missing a lot of my math classes and the science stuff. My sister was the same way. She missed out on the reading and history kinda stuff.

Ben told me that *both* of his children have been labeled in school. He said that his daughter is in special classes, but he understands that because she has trouble with words and symbols. But for his son, he's at a loss as to why he's been labeled "at-risk" and even described some profiling behaviors on the part of the school:

The weird thing is that they put my boy under a, oh, what do they call that again. *At-risk*. Which I thought was really interesting, why would they do that...they're saying it's because of the divorce. And now he's hangin' out with the *wrong* crowd. And I'm like, well he's, he was kind of *forced* in the wrong crowd. You know, you had 'em in band, and then she wouldn't let 'em do anything, and basically flunked out of that, and now he's back in there again. But obviously he's back *in* there. So he's, no, it doesn't seem like he's picked up *too* much *friendship* out of at least that part of it. But, you know he's not in any sports or nothin', they won't let him do anything, so. So who is he hanging out with, the other guys that are in the same situation. And in whatever IEP class or whatever they push 'em into now...No, I just thought that was interesting. Then he would always come back and talk about how he would bring a case into, he had this, you know what a Trapper Keeper is or what? Yeah...looked like that, except it had a zip-up on it and *he was talkin' about how the teachers would think he has a gun in there and stuff...and were like, where would they even get that [idea]?* So. I don't know. And then he'll say like, 'Another guy comes in there and they don't say nothin' to him.' I'm like, well, you never know how much he's exaggerating either, but, I don't know. Just kinda wondering what kind of [*laughs and pauses*], can't think of the word, at the moment. But what everyone's thinking about, like, where he's comin' from and what, what's his environment. It just makes me wonder.

I then continued to ask him if his son knows that he's been labeled as at-risk or if it's just something he knows from the school. He said the following with frustration, using some laughter to express his feelings:

That's what they told me at one point. At least right away...they would consider him at-risk. And then I kinda argued the point too, I was like why, you know? And they're always, 'Well, the divorce [*mimicking voices*] and he's havin' a tough time you know with that" and I'm just like, "Well he should! You know, why wouldn't you?" It's like, it kinda just jumped up on all of us, it wasn't just building up and it was gonna happen. No. It's just one day, heh, you're gone. ...Okay...so I could see what they're comin' from there, but it just seems like it's still *lingering* on, and I'm still tryin' to figure out like *why* they place him that way? You think he's gonna leave school or whatever? Like, no. He doesn't have a choice! So. I don't know, I don't know what else to say about it. It's just kinda frustrating....Well he thinks he's different 'cause he has to do those special classes

here and there.... He does have some problem with math, but nothin' that I could see them puttin' him in a special class [for], but, you know.

As noted above, Erik told me that his son's school is very supportive of him. However, they have been trying to tell him and the mother that their son has a reading disability.

For example they were talking about wanting to put him in like a special education type thing, because he was havin' issues reading. And I was at the conference and I said you know, I think you guys might be you know, from my experience I think, that Matthew knows *how* to read. He's just choosing right now *not* to read and you guys are gettin' frustrated with it. He'll read and not, not really be interested in *reading* at this point in time. He's very good at math. And I see a lot of myself in that. I was the same way. But I mean, for him, he's not putting forth the effort that he should be, and so we've kinda talked about that a little bit on, I said you know, I know you know how to read. And you know, just go out there and give it your all and really focus on what you're doing when you're doing it, and get it done and then you can move on to the next thing.

I then asked him if they put his son on an IEP, and he said:

No, no, they didn't. They had talked about it and I know they had spoke with his mom and then his mom got all mad about it and she called and talked to me about it. To see what I thought. And...Matthew and I...we spent some time during the school year reading on the weekends he was with me. And now he got a lot better, so...they thought he had a learning disability. And both his mother and I, were of the opinion, are still of the opinion that...he doesn't have a *disability*, at all...

Dan also talked about feeling dismissed by his daughter's school in regards to some issues with her behavior that they were having:

She was...half-way through kindergarten, and we had a teacher try to tell us that she had ADHD. Which I think, almost everybody gets told that their kid is hyperactive at one point or another because they're being a *kid*. And so, we *didn't* know what to do with that, because we're like, she was having outbursts in class and things that, that *made* sense why the teacher was saying this, but both my Ex and I were like, she's not doing this when she's at either of our houses, why? What's goin' on?...and I'm like, I think she just needs more *activity*. And of course, as we know, they, they weren't gonna do that. Well, eventually...I mean there was enough outbursts where we took her to a psychologist, just, just to see what was goin' on. And the psychologist said, well yes she is hyperactive. But, that could be normal, that could be a phase, you know. And they did the tests for the attention deficit and they said you know, maybe a *little* bit? But that could be the hyperactivity.

He then told me about how he and his Ex "caved" to the pressures and put their daughter on medication, only to realize that it was not the way to go:

And so I took this back and I was like, well this is what's goin' on and the school, the school was like, well are you gonna put her on medication and we're like well we don't want to! And then, there was a couple more outbursts. And 'cause I was just, I was *sooo* against getting her on medication. But I caved for about 2 months, we did, we went ahead and did this. And she turned into this little zombie, like I mean, she would come home and she wasn't having fun, she was just *not* the same kid. And so I was like, *no*. This isn't gonna happen. And we went ahead and, and took her off of that, and took her to an occupational therapist, 'cause we had some friends that said you know, this often *masks* as ADHD....So all of these things develop in such a way, they, they *look* like ADHD but really all you need is really *vigorous* play.

He then continued on, explaining how he felt ignored by the school:

And so I brought this back to the school and it didn't happen. Well in *researching* all of this, I realized holy cow, *I* had this as a kid! And they didn't even know what it was back then. Because *I* remember, I would always fidget, I would move, I would have a problem you know. But if I got out and ran and played, I was just fine. So, I would do that with her when she was with me and her mom would make sure she was active when she was at her house. And, we didn't have any problems. She'd go back to school and we're tellin' 'em, '*Do this!*' And they wouldn't do it....That's a whole frustration that has nothing to do with this. [*laughs*] Or maybe it does and stuff 'cause it's been a frustration with the school system and trying to apply what *I know* as evidence-based research that I've provided them but they've *completely* ignored it.

I then asked him if he thought he was feeling dismissed because he's the dad or if it's just because they feel they know best. He said:

I think it has a lot to do with two things. One, I think *they* don't have the time. I mean...I think they hear what I'm *saying*. And they think to themselves well, how do we make this work, you know, in the system. [*sighs*]....But two, I think that...being a parent, they just kind of were like 'Yeah, whatever, we have our experts'...We just had a meeting, not even a month ago. And I found out that they had their own school psychologist, who they share with like 4 other schools, come through, and evidently...did a[n] *observation* on Alyssa? I had no idea this had happened. And according to her observation, Alyssa had no fine motor skill problems, which, had nothing at all to do with the situation. And so they took the [diagnosis] out of her IEP but they *kept their belief* that she has ADHD, *with* a nice note that is...as nicely put that her parents have decided *not* to have her on medication. And, whenever they read that as they were going through, I just looked across at my Ex and we both shook our head. 'Cause it really summed up how we felt about her experience in that school. It was like, they *just didn't listen*. Now, interestingly enough, Alyssa is still doing just fine, in school. [*laughs*] So, and the outbursts and things have gotten smaller, you know, 'cause she, as she's growing, you know, she's learning. And that's exactly what I did. I started to grow out of it....I had a lot of different awkwardness based around things like this. So, I've been able to help Alyssa, so it's, I guess that's just an example of how things that I help *her* with, I see them in my own life. And so we *really* have this connection that her mom even completely sees. Like...if

Alyssa's havin' an issue with something while she's at her mom's, she'll have her call *me* and we can talk it through and stuff, and it *helps* her, because I *get* it, what she's going through at the time.

Despite Adam feeling dismissed at times by his son's school, he also feels they have been supportive of him overall, especially with him being in college at the same time. But yet this illustrates how it also causes him to miss class:

But I know, even like at the school system, you know, they've been extremely accommodating with me, especially the fact that I'm in school... They'll call me up during the day, and, especially the first semester there was a lot of issues with Joshua, wetting his pants, you know, different things, trying to get out of being at school, and this kind of thing. You know, running away. And, the school would call me up and they'd be very apologetic... 'We know you're in school but we need you to bring in a change of clothes.' And, so I've ended up missing quite a bit of class.

The “Systemic Screwing” of Fathers: Bias in the Legal System.

Overall, most dads in the study did not have a good experience in the court system. Even those that had an amicable separation and continue to be amicable with their Exes, such as with Dan and Casey, they still see the bias against men. For example, remember Casey saying that the idea of men as buffoons is something that he feels is “pervasive” in the court system. Yes, Casey's divorce was amicable, but they did so because they didn't want to experience what they've seen happen to others, even their own parents on both sides who were divorced.

Casey told of the sad experience of a former classmate of his who he said got “screwed” by the courts:

And he's just starting out being a single dad, so, he's got a long road ahead. *Especially because the courts screwed him.* His wife was the primary income in the family, and he's paying child support to her. He had a GoFundMe for a plane ticket to go down to Disneyland with them, because now that they're divorced, his wife was going to take his son to Disneyland, and... He wanted to be there, to see his kid's face, I mean, his kid loves Tigger. Been obsessed with him since he was born. I don't know if he's gonna get to.

At the end, Casey said that he donated to the fundraising account for his friend, but wasn't sure if he was going to be able to get to go to Disneyland as he hoped.

Casey also told of his brother's situation, who also technically is a single dad. But it is a unique situation where the mother of his daughter strings him along and at times even claims that he is actually not the father. Casey talked about something he called the "systemic screwing" of fathers:

I hesitate to mention him, just because he doesn't see his daughter...[The woman] accepted him as the father for a while – and then went back to her husband. And he didn't see her for a while and then you know, a few years ago, she contacted him again and said you should come see your daughter. And, so he went out and saw her and lived with her for a few months, and then she kicked him out again. And I think that he has had to emotionally separate himself from the situation at this point. Because every time the woman calls him back to say hey, you know, I'm having trouble with my husband, you should come out and see your daughter, she leaves him with the *parting gift* of 'Oh she's not really your daughter'. Which, you know, makes my other brother and I sort of roll our eyes because she looks just *like* him. But, yeah, he's had to emotionally separate himself from that situation. He is diagnosed bipolar anyway. So, it's not a situation that he can deal with. Safely. *So, there again, we have a systemic screwing of father[s].*

On the contrary, Dan said that he felt he was treated well as a man in the court system, but told of someone he knew that did not have such an easy time:

I had one friend in particular and I've heard of others where he went in and I don't know how, I didn't pry much, but what I did know I mean he was *sooo* bitter and angry towards his Ex. And she somehow, he got raked over the coals and...he was paying like \$270 or more....anyway, the guy was an *amazing* dad. He would do anything for his son. Beyond the child support, that he could *barely* afford, I mean, he was driving a broke-down car...he would buy all of the clothes, shoes, anything, [if] his son, needed anything he would buy it for him. And meanwhile this other gal, she was the one that you always hear about. You know, the one that's taking advantage of the system, 'cause she went on, around the time I knew [friend's name], she went on to have a kid with another guy and dump him almost right away afterwards. And I believe she was with a third guy...she was drivin' a brand new car. You would see her, she had like the \$100 hair-do, always, like just *freshly* done, like pretty much every other week. Wearing brand-new clothes, etcetera, etcetera. Not spending any money on the son or the other kid that she had, you know. Had never worked more than a part-time job ever in her life, you know. So I've seen that. But then I've seen the other with my sister. My sister has had very bad experiences with men. She's been divorced twice and she's remarried for the 3rd time. The second guy, we *thought* was great, was just a winner, I mean, he came, he, not only did he marry my sister, but he adopted the boy that she had *had*. And I mean, everything seemed to be going good there, married for 5 years and then out of the blue, all of a sudden he's just like, I don't wanna be married anymore. [*pause*] And, well, there's probably a lot more to get, to that story that I won't go into. But he has to pay child support for both of them. And he has fought it...like he doesn't show up for the kids. I

mean, his natural daughter hasn't seen him in over 6 months, right *now*. And she's 13. I mean he's just barely ever there for them...It seems like every decision he runs into where he could go one way or the other, he chooses the selfish side of it. And that's had a huge effect on the kids.

He went on to explain that he doesn't think the system is unfair and that it has to be that way because of men who are "like that:"

So I've seen it both, so I, I don't think that the court system is unfair. I realize that sometimes it's extra strict because there are guys like that, you know. And it *has* to be there, so. But my experience was great [*laughs*].

Ben previously said how he felt the men in court were lined up like rats his feeling dismissed by the judge who didn't seem to care that he was in school to make a better life for his children. Remember that he also called himself a "slave to the state" when it comes to the paying of child support and how he felt men were not taken seriously in the court system. Shawn also felt slighted in the process and said he felt like he had no voice in the process. He talked about how he would like to go for at least half-time custody of his son and explained why he wants a custodial decree:

So I have a right, I have a say, that we have to agree on something before we're moving or going anywhere especially now that I'm close to graduating. I don't know where my field is gonna take me, where my job is gonna take me. I mean, there's a lot of opportunities here in the state, particularly don't *want* to stay here but *for* him it's a decision I'm willing to make, I would stay here for him you know. So, it's still kind of a, gears are still moving, but, you know I just *want* that, you know, my *voice*, so I'm not always the one that has to compromise to do stuff, *because I don't have a say in anything according to the law*.

I asked him if there was anything that his Ex stopped him from making a decision on and he said:

Yeah, yeah, like moving. I get *no voice* whatsoever. Even like what daycare he was going to. He was going to a provider that she just did it out of her home and she habitually would put the kids in the basement and then she would go upstairs and like take showers or she'd be on the phone, so she would leave 'em alone for extended periods of time. And I was like, why are we doin' this? And I was paying for it too. And I'm like why do we keep going there [to that daycare]?...Like every time I'd go there, she would treat me like I was the bad one...because I was speaking out against it....and also she kept bad

financial records, I was like I already paid her, she claimed that several times. But no, she kept staying with her because they were friends... Yeah, as far as school goes, like his elementary school...it depends on where she lives. She lives out in [city] and he goes to [school name]. And I've been to the school, and it's pretty good. And he really likes it, so. I mean, that part I accept. But that wasn't really her choice so maybe that's why it works too...I mean those are, those are big ones, yeah.

Shawn talked about how he knows a few dads in the area that gave him some legal tips and even asked for custody without an attorney and seemed to be successful. He said one of the people had a friend who was a lawyer who helped him do the paperwork. Even with talking to these other dads, he doesn't know someone who can help him with that. He said: "I gotta find a lawyer friend now." Shawn also got a free consultation from a lawyer before his Ex moved out of state with his son, but in the end, he was too late:

'Cause I found out the day before 'cause she posted on Facebook...he gave me a free consultation that's where he said, let's get this started, let's get this paperwork written up right away so we can file it and she gets served before she leaves. And...like just missed it [snaps his fingers] you know. And then...I can't remember, I think I started like lawyersfordads.com or something like that and kinda found my way, or navigated my way through some of those, and found a place and they have a lawyer call you and they gave you some advice and stuff like that. I don't even think they're in the state though. But they would help you prepare paperwork and give you advice as to what you're gonna need to know, going in. So, it's the cheap route. Otherwise...some places it's [a] \$3,500 retainer, it's like, really?...But right now, it's stable enough...our relationship is stable enough, she's stable in her job that nobody's going anywhere that I can finish up my degree here and know for sure at least the next couple of years where I'm gonna be, and get it figured out.

Shawn expressed a lot of frustration surrounding the child support payment system and reported difficulties of how the money was being withdrawn because he works for two different places. The following passage is very long, but I found it important to include almost all of it because it really shows the frustration he is experiencing:

Every time I try to talk to 'em and deal with 'em [child support services], *it's like I've already done something wrong*. And I'm just tryin' to get my balance. Like, *she* gets an email every time there's activity on the account, and she can see how much is owed, how much was paid, and how much to expect or whatever. I can't *even* get a statement of my past payments without going in to the office and kinda raising a *stink* about it, 'cause they

don't wanna give it out, a payment history...Like *Why?* Why? Why do you have to do this?

And then, like this last year I was mailing it off. I started this separate checking account that I would put money into, and I had automatic payments go out of it, I didn't have to touch it. It was sweet. And that would pay over the amount that I was supposed to pay for the month, so I would never be behind. And it was working so great, and I started this job...and they automatically started taking it out of my paycheck. And which is fine, they didn't tell me they were gonna do this or when it was gonna happen. But, which is fine, but if I'd have known, I would have prepared for it. But the hours I'm working vary, and they can only take out so much per paycheck. Which right now, until I start full time, is less than what would be needed to make my full payment for the month. So I'm gonna be behind at the end of the month, even though they're taking out. So then I have to go try to find my balance somewhere, to see how much I have to pay in. And, because they didn't tell me that, my regular checks have gone in. They withdrew twice...I was \$400 *over-paid* for a month of child support. Like, *what* is going on? Why did you guys do this? Why are you still taking money? You don't even look at my current balance? They just *take*.

As he said "They just take," he made a gesture on the table like someone swiping money away from him. He then continued on:

I was late on my rent and I had to ask for help, because they'd taken out \$159. They took out more than I had owed, *and* it was more than the 50% of my paycheck. Which is like, it broke two of the things you told me were supposed to be in place. And I didn't know it was gonna happen, 'cause I was already paid up *and then some*. ...'cause I had to ask my parents, like, I need help, I just got screwed over by child support. I can't make rent. I'm \$100 short, because it was supposed to be in my paycheck, and that just happened. And then I call 'em and I'm like, "Why is this happening?" 'Well, it's automatic.' "Well, can I change it? I had a system, it was working great!" 'No.' Why? ...It's child support services, where does the *service* part come in? This is like you telling me how it's gonna work, but I have a better solution that works for *me*. I thought you were *servicing me*. *Us*. As a family. I wanna get him the money. We have an agreement, everything's going fine. *You're* interfering.

...I am just kinda ranting, but this is a part of the fatherhood that's so frustrating. You know...I got a system and it works for me. Why do you have to change it? It's working for me. You know. I don't know...but ...it is what it is, and you just have to adjust. Can't sit here and dwell on it, can't get mad about it, what am I gonna do. Call my congressman? Good luck with that. And he's a Republican. Not to be judgmental...but it is what it is and it's just a battle we fight...[B]ut it's tough, I mean, like advice, don't let that get you down. Don't let that get you discouraged, 'cause it's so easy to. It got me discouraged for a while too, because there's just, there's no help from them.

Don't ask any help from 'em. You get your help somewhere else with somebody you can trust. You just deal with 'em...and [child support is] gonna mess stuff up for you all the time, on accident, on purpose, you know, it doesn't matter.

Erik reported no problems with the child support payment system and said it's gone "really smooth" for him. He appreciated how he can go online and see what he owes. But, he is not satisfied with child support in the sense you can't guarantee that it goes towards the child. He talked about what he observed when his own parents got a divorce, relating it to his experience, and he said that it:

was kind of from when my dad and my mom went through it, it seemed like everything was...at least from what I saw, you know. I was really young. But just seemed like everything was, you know, more geared towards what the mother *wanted*. What she thought was right. I think that I guess I'm not necessarily basing this on the visitation side. More so the child-support side. Because, I think that you know, the money that's paid for child support doesn't always go towards the child. So I mean, I pay around \$350-400/month, but, I don't really know. There's no, there's no guidelines to say what she has to spend it on, so she doesn't necessarily, you know, we don't know. Does she spend \$350 a month on the child? I don't know. And there's no you know real any kind of guidelines in place to check and balance on that. And so I think that is one of the things that could definitely use some re-balancing, or...get looked at again.

Erik also said that because of the experience when his parents were getting a divorce that he felt the court system isn't always fair to dads. He said it is:

kind of sided towards the female. And I know...my mom and dad were divorced, since I was like 4. And it always *seemed* like that. when I was 13-14, I wrote an affidavit and went and lived with my dad. So did my brother. So, I know that at a certain point in time, if the child really wants to live with the other parent, it can be *done*. But I think there is still this bias toward, the female, the mother, in the court system, for whatever reason.

Adam's situation is unique in that the Ex did not contest his custody at all. She stopped being involved in her son's life completely about 4 years ago as mentioned in Adam's profile. But he did talk about the difficulty in getting money from his Ex, and had said she only pays about half of what she should. He talked about the differences in the treatment based on what city he was living in at the time and I asked him if there's anything he can legally do to make it happen:

Um, not really. When I've tried to get ahold of Child Services and stuff like that, tryin' to push the issue, there's a lot of *dismissal*. I've been told if I pushed it here, when I got my son evaluated through [hospital], they had a social worker come talk to me and she was saying that yeah, in [city], they're a lot more strict on the equality between single...fathers and single mothers. Having equal representation in [previous city], it was very much, if I called, it was well, we'll get back to you. You know, there's lots of red tape. Where I know that if, when we lived in [previous city] and it was a 50/50 split, every time *she* had a concern it was almost instant. There was letters coming to my door, phone calls being made.

Campus Support.

Dads felt supported academically overall, but the general consensus was that the State campus does not offer much to them as a father or male student in general. This section will also include some suggestions from one of the fathers for getting dads involved on campus.

Academic Support. When I asked Dan if there would be a particular person or office on campus that he would consider his "lifeline" to get him through, he talked about how important the support of his advisors from his previous degree were and how they helped him realize his potential:

I wouldn't say there was any one person on the campus that, as far as campus is concerned, I would say there were *two* people that did influence my career path.... that would be my advisors [in my previous program]...I had an advisor that was able to help me realize that the [specific degree] path was more what I wanted. And then I was only going to get a minor in [program]...but went over and I talked to their program advisor and he was able to help me realize that I could double-major. It was gonna continue to be tough you know, but, but I could do it.

In his current program, he told me about someone in his department who allowed him the flexibility he needed as a dad:

She met Alyssa...Early on...and I explained to her the situation, and so she was very *open* to if I needed to go do this or that, and allowed me to do actually a lot of the work I did for her...even from home, and stuff. Was so helpful. And then here, they're very understanding about that.

In asking Adam about his supporters on-campus, he spoke highly of a department chair, however didn't really feel like there was any one true source of support:

Um, not really. There hasn't been one person in particular...the head of the department...she'll catch me every now and then and she'll ask about you know, how things are going...the secretary will ask how things are, kind of a thing. You sit down with the professors and stuff you know after class or whatever. They'll you know kinda hit you up and wanna know what's goin' on, you know how things are goin'. And, you know, I'm sure they do that for everybody. But it is nice, that you know, there are these people, [who] understand, okay, you've got a kid. And, you know, they're not pushing the issue...but no, as far as like, a real defined lifeline on campus, not really.

He talked about supportive instructors in general but yet this evidences where roles conflict as a student and parent, in a particular situation of having to take a test:

[I told my professor that] "the school's saying he has a fever. I have to go." And, a couple of weeks ago actually, my son had pink eye. And they call, the school literally called me like 15 minutes before I had a test. So quick, it was run to the teacher, apologize profusely to him. And he's sitting here saying, 'Why did you stop and talk to me? Go! You know, email me, I don't care, we'll figure it out.' And then later in the week, I met up with him and we took the test. But...I think there's a lot of understanding, and it helps that you know, a lot of the teachers have kids of their own, and, you know they've had that situation too, where...the school calls, you can't exactly blow them off and say well, I'll pick him up in an hour. 'No, you need to be here now.' And so...they've been pretty understanding.

He feels guilty but in the end, talked about a moment of connection with one of his instructors:

I don't see any of my teachers socially or even really any of my classmates, you know on that social level, with Joshua. But we've run into a few of them like at Walmart and stuff and it's like, 'Oh you *do* have a kid!'...When I was at my old job, there was a lot of concern, was, okay, are you just using your son as an excuse? And so, I always kinda have *that* feeling when it's like 3-4 days in a row, it's I can't go to class. Or, you know, like last Fall when...I'm running up to them and...I can't come to class...I had one teacher who commented, at a new class...And I'd be walking in, always like 5 minutes late, and he'd always comment on that *to* me and one day he actually called me out *in his class*, you know, why I was about 5-10 minutes late. And I sat there, and this was...maybe a month or two into classes, and I sat there, and told him, "Well, I'm sorry, that I have my son, and he's having problems in school, and you know, realistically in the mornings, is the only real time I have a chance to sit and talk with the teacher and stuff." And, unfortunately, when he's had a bad day, in the morning, or you know the day before in the morning, I will get drug into you know talking to the OT, and the physical therapist. The principal will all catch me, and it's you know, what should take 5 minutes turns into an hour, or *two* sometimes, even. And then it's, you know, unfortunately *they're* trying to understand Joshua. Joshua and I are trying to understand them. And it gets very difficult, and it becomes time-consuming...

And the teacher apologized to me, and he was like, 'Well...I knew you had a son, but I didn't know it was like *that*.' And then it turned into him talking about his actual

grandson, having a lot of problems too, and so there was that you know, kind of that connection made. And I think even especially nowadays, you know if you say somebody's autistic. We all unfortunately have that view point of that really *bad* child, that's really uncontrollable. You know, the stereotype as it were. And, Joshua isn't like that, 95% of the time. But he does have his moments where he is absolutely inconsolable, and he's throwing things...because he's having a processing issue, and it takes him a while to deal with it. And then I have to try to figure out how to deal with this. And you know, there is that frustration of okay, I've got a class. I'm walking in late and then you're sitting there, and you have to walk all the way from the front of the classroom to the back, 'cause the only room, [where] spots are available or whatever. You know, it's disruptive, and you apologize like crazy as you're goin' in, regardless of it being Joshua or whatever...but, for me, it's not like ...walking in and it's "Oh God, Joshua's was havin' problems" and just tryin' to make a big deal, it's, I try *not* to. Because, as much as I try to stress that Joshua can't have all this special treatment, I don't want it either. Because it doesn't help *me* in the long run either.

Ben felt his instructors were supportive to a point, and explained how he felt shut out by a few different people in his department. He said "some of the teachers have been" supportive. He then said:

So that's been nice. 'Cause they understand like if I don't have all my homework done exactly when they want it to [be done], it's not because I'm sittin' out with the boys having a few beers, it's not that. It's [*laughs*], [that] there's only so much time in the day.

I then asked him if there has been anyone on campus that has helped him get through, and he talked about feeling disconnected from one of them in particular:

See that's what I *thought* would happen, 'cause I don't know but my two main teachers would I figured would have been a little more helpful, and there was one I even asked him, just to have a talk, 'cause I just wanted to explain my story 'cause I think there's like other just random stuff goin' around the dang [department], about what happened to me. So and I could...you know it came up every once and a while with a couple of people that knew me better would actually ask me these questions, that they're completely untrue. I don't know if I wanna go into that.... And I asked him, for you know just have a talk so I could explain my side of the story so you're not gettin' all these stupid whatever stories that are going around about me and he just kinda blew me off. And now it's like, I don't know. And then it's just been basic disconnect from there on....now it doesn't seem real *personal*. But it just seems like he's, like okay we're done with what you need to do and we'll just move on to the next guy. And I'm just like, um, okay. It felt weird.

So, he had tried and hoped to build a connection but it didn't happen. He also talked about the other instructor he was referring to and talked about how he attempted to open up to him too.

However, there seemed to be a lack of ability to connect on the part of the instructor and he described kind of an uncomfortable exchange and talked about the “dark cloud” which is his story of the divorce:

There was one point he actually had me come out with him and help him carry [something] for his daughter, which I thought was kind of just *random*, like I never go to your houses and help you with things. But, I don’t know if he was at that time trying to connect with me about what happened. That’s what was going through my head. But he never really asked any like *real* questions, he just [said], how’s everything goin’, that type of stuff. And at that point I’m like, I don’t know what you wanna hear. [*laughs*] Do you wanna hear the truth? Do you wanna hear everything’s fine? You know, I don’t wanna be that, that *dark cloud* over everybody, so...

Shawn talked about the support from his advisor, who is also a father, but also reported that he feels this person doesn’t see his full potential. Shawn explains the situation and how it motivates him when someone underestimates him:

As chance may have it, he was just randomly selected to be my advisor. And he’s been my advisor since I started this charade, or used to be a charade at school and then now back and forth, good grades and bad grades, [and] until now, he’s been the same one. So he kinda knows my story, ‘cause he sees me and then he doesn’t see me...he’s spoken with my dad in the past and he knows that I have a kid and he speaks to me on that level, of knowing that...this is good for your son...and he has kids...there’s that empathy. He understands my situation. So, yeah, he’s been great, but I found out he underestimates me. So, I *live* on that.

People underestimate me all the time and I thrive on it. Yeah. Because I was talkin’ to him about this possibility of starting a [graduate degree]...and... I’d gotten some F’s, ‘cause I had dropped a class in the past without withdrawing, an idiot kid move. So it dropped my GPA but I was talkin’ to him about this opportunity and he’s like, well your GPA is not that good. You might wanna look at going to a school with lower standards. [*laughs*]...But, it was just because of the GPA and I was like you know what, like, I can, if I get straight A’s or close to it for these last four semesters, my GPA isn’t gonna go up a lot but I’m gonna have four of those little pieces of paper they send you for makin’ the Dean’s List.don’t look at the GPA, it’s just a number and it’s overrated anyway. Here—four semesters in a row [pointing at table like he’s pointing at Dean’s List certificates]. “This is the work you’re gonna get now. This is what I’m doing right now”....But he didn’t see it that way, he was just like [your] GPA, no. I’m like, “You *underestimate* me...watch, it’s a miracle I’m doing what I’m doing right now.”

Other Campus Services. As to non-academic campus services that were mentioned by the fathers, they reported feeling like some campus services were lacking in regards to serving them

as parents. Areas mentioned included housing, childcare options, counseling services and veterans' services.

Regarding housing, as mentioned previously, two fathers lived on campus. One father talked about his routine being difficult in the morning since there was only one bathroom in his on-campus housing, and the other father expressed some dissatisfaction with on-campus housing, saying: "I'm not their priority." I asked him if he was referring to parents as a minority group, and he explained as follows:

Yeah... they have other things to attend to. And there are too many people that live on-campus for them to make any one minority group a priority. So they do their best and I'm not [a priority]... You know, I think that parents have learned to take care of themselves. And so not only do we not *need* those extra services, but generally speaking, we don't *ask* for them. So yeah, I'm sure that there are things that they could do to make life easier for me. But, I haven't needed them to yet. And, so I'm happy with a relationship of attrition, and apathy.

I asked Dan about what services on-campus has helped him as a parent, and he explained that there wasn't much to the best of his recollection but also said he didn't really seek anything out here on-campus:

....you know, at [previous school], there *was* a...program through TRIO³ but I gotta say I didn't use it. I really didn't [*laughs*]! They always had their meetings when I had classes, and all, so I couldn't go to any of theirs. So I didn't really get to use that, it was available, if I had needed it and then when I came up here to State, I guess I kinda felt like I had enough of a handle on it that I didn't even look, so. So, not really, no.

³ TRIO: "The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs." Information retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>.

I had asked Casey in general who he reaches out to, who can understand his experience as a dad, and he began referencing some campus services. During this conversation, he indicated he felt alone. As to if he has anyone to support him, he answered very quickly, “Nope. No.” And then continued:

Yeah, I don’t feel kinship with family members really at all, as relates to my situation. One of my brothers married, has three kids of his own. But, you know...he wouldn’t know what it’s like. And, both my brothers are half-brothers, they have a different father which made it easier for them to cope with when my father was gone. So, I, as far as somebody who really understands me, I am *alone*.

I then asked him he would feel comfortable going, to talk to someone about what he’s experiencing and where would he want to find that person. He then went on to explain he had made an appointment with a counselor on campus:

Where would I want to find [someone]? *[laughs]* I don’t know of a place where people like me exist. And I don’t feel like anybody who’s *not* like me can understand me. I’ve made an appointment now with [the] counseling center on campus but I’m not sure yet if I’m gonna keep it. Because, psychologists have not been a positive influence in my life, thus far. *[pauses]* So I don’t know. I *may* have that outlet at some point, but I can’t imagine a world in which somebody will know what I’ve experienced and understand it in a way that I would ideally like someone *to* [understand it]. Veterans sort of understand *parts* of what I’ve been through. You know, *lots* of people understand *little* parts.

I then commented about the veterans’ service office on campus and he said: “[Y]eah. They don’t offer much. It wouldn’t be anything that would help.” A bit later, I asked him if there was anything else that campus could offer to him and he answered quickly and said, “I don’t know of anything.” I also asked him about the counseling appointment, and he commented on a lack of time, and that he wouldn’t maybe have the time to keep the appointment.

Lastly, Shawn explained how he’d found a lot of his resources outside of campus and also didn’t know of any on-campus ones in particular:

Umm, I’ve used none. I really haven’t even *looked* for anything on-campus. Most of my advice or sources are, I’ve found on my own outside. And not because they’re not here or they’re not available, like I wouldn’t know where to go to find some on campus, but it’s because I wasn’t on campus when a lot of this happened, so I developed sources outside.

But I mean, if I were to you know, if I had a kid just now and I would have to start looking on campus for help, if there was any, would be the counseling center, or that there's that office of student affairs in [building]. I don't know what they do, but that's where you start and they point you in the right direction. But I don't know if there's anything here.

A few dads mentioned their childcare options on campus. Casey didn't seem too aware of what campus offers for childcare, mainly because his children are of school age, but assumed campus would have something. He said he doesn't feel like he needs to be aware of offerings in this area. Others suggested a need to strengthen the childcare options on State's campus. Shawn told of frustration with drop-in childcare while he was in summer school and not finding a good fit for childcare on campus:

I did run into a problem while I was taking a summer school course here with the daycare they offer here on campus. And they don't take part-time daycare, you have to pay for a full week whether you use it or not. That pissed me off, because for one, we're students and we're poor. You should know that. And two, is...it's a lot of this is part-time, I just need you to watch him while I'm in class. That was tough...I started it and I couldn't keep up with the payments and I had to...run to like my buddy's place like 'Dude, can you watch my guy for like, like two hours 'cause I gotta go to class and I'll just pick him up right away.' And...nothin' against him, but... I mean he's babysat for his family in the past. But he doesn't care about kids, he wants to do his own thing. And I had an aunt that lived in town. I would do the same thing, but she was unreliable and I didn't trust her, but I had to kind of. It's just two hours, would you please just, for two hours, I *need* to make it to class. I remember my final for summer school, I had to go beg her I was like "I will mow your lawn! Like just watch him for 2 hours, I need to take this final. I'll mow your lawn for 2 weeks, I just need this time. 'Cause I have an A in this class and I'm gonna go fly through this final."

But yeah, it was all because I couldn't afford to pay for a full week of daycare that I never used...and that's relevant everywhere. You have to pay so much *minimum* whether you use it or not...But pretty much, I had to strike it from my list of possibilities...I was like, I can't use that, can't afford it. I even went to that...[center where]...they teach students, right...I even tried to get my son into there and the long list of people that were, yeah. Not even close. But I tried...That's why I went to the [campus health center] and then that was, that didn't work either. Yeah. But other services – I don't know.... that's about it.

Shawn didn't have a lot of people he could trust in his life for childcare short notice, and Adam described a similar need for childcare in his own life and talked about how he is actually "paranoid" about finding qualified people to take care of his son:

That's kind of the biggest thing...for me, is just that ability to have that *support* that you know is more qualified than the random person that you call from like the grocery store and okay is this person, am I gonna come back and there's Joshua tied up on the floor and all my stuff's gone?

He then went on to explain that he knew a co-worker who that actual situation happen when she enlisted someone unqualified to come into her home and take care of her 7-year old:

She got a hold of this high school kid and yeah a bunch of his buddies showed up, they cleared out the house and left the kid there...yeah it was bad...Yeah, well she was very scared, 'cause literally, the kid was tied up in his bedroom. They left *his* bedroom alone but the whole rest of the house was just stripped...They tied him up and then gagged him and stuff and they just cleared everything out....I don't know how it all worked but yeah no, they basically just left him there and took *everything* that basically wasn't nailed down....Ever since then, I've been extremely paranoid. Plus, when we lived in [previous city], we were actually just across from a trailer park.

He then continued on to talk about the diverse group of people in the trailer park and from the way he was saying it and nonverbally, I could tell he disliked talking about it like this because he wanted me to know he wasn't being mean intentioned when on the topic of other ethnicities:

And there were, as much as I hate [to say it], there were Natives, there were Blacks, there were Hispanics...and, some of the parents, I did actually get along with. But, during, especially during the summer there was this group of kids that would run around and on one occasion they had a bunch of sticks and they were wailing on each other. And out came this one great big you know, Native guy and he grabbed one of the sticks and he started beating on all these kids, and you knew they weren't all his! But...they would always try to come over and play with Joshua. And I'd be like, Joshua, go in the house, don't play in the front yard. And, so that kind of, it was unfortunate 'cause I know it would have probably done him a lot of good to have that social [interaction] but at the same time, is this the best social interaction *for you*?

So, for Adam, having qualified childcare is very important and he wants to know that the interactions his child is having is of quality. He described some frustrations with campus daycare in particular:

It would be nice if the daycare was open later? That's at the [campus health center], that's one of my difficulties, is that like next Fall, I actually have a class that goes until 7 o'clock at night. The after school program goes until 6. And I've already talked to them and they're trying to finagle something there, but they're not too helpful. Which I can understand, it's, you know, it's college students and high school students that are coming in, and you know, they have their own stuff they have to deal with too. So I can understand that. But it would be nice if like the [campus health center's] daycare was open a little bit later. You know, if there was that capability of picking students up from school, I don't know if they have that, I don't think so. But you know, it would be nice if, you know especially 'cause Joshua is just right off campus from school...because Joshua does have that kind of that autistic component too, that's always been kind of a leery thing...about a babysitter, is you know, is Joshua gonna take advantage of *them*, are they gonna take advantage of him. And, it would be kinda nice if you know, like the school system actually had like the early childhood development center, you know, people that staff the [campus health center], if there were people there that you know, you could get ahold of and say hey, you know, I need a babysitter, so I can take this test, or I've got this going on, can you, would somebody be able to come over...Or you know that...I could drop *him* off, kind of a situation. And, allow some of that flexibility, you know. *That* would be nice. And I'm sure to some degree, that is there, it's just not overly *advertised*? ...That's kind of the biggest thing. I don't know, it kind of is the biggest for me, is just that ability to have that *support* that you know is *more qualified than the random person*.

Ben suggested the following needs for fathers like him, and told about how he himself didn't have many resources and explained what dads like him *would* want:

A place to stay, and food. Just to take that part of the edge away. 'Cause as much as you want to take care of everyone else, you have to take care of yourself too, and just, there's really no one out there to help you do that, unless you find friends or somebody that take you in to do it. Like I said in my situation, I didn't really have that. So. I don't know... but I don't know how we implement that [here] though because it's like oh you're gonna be a single person, okay, here's a dorm room. That doesn't seem right. Don't know. That, and maybe some legal advice, legal advice would be *great*. 'Cause that was always the thing that I lacked on completely. I know, they knew everything else goin' on. They had the money to get the lawyers and stuff, and I'm sittin' here...

I then commented that it seemed like he didn't know where to start when it came to the legal process, and he continued:

Yeah, where to *start* is a good spot! [*laughs*] Much less defend yourself, like how do you defend yourself against that, I don't know. It's like what are you gonna do, sell that house? No. *then* where are you gonna live, an apartment? Well, your credit's completely shot at that point because everything got ripped apart. Yeah.

In asking Erik what types of services he'd like to see on campus, he focused on legal services as well. He first commented on how he wasn't sure what childcare services there are on campus, and this is understandable since his son rarely spends time with him here so he doesn't have the need for childcare in town. But then he talked about his experience and how the finances that are needed to obtain legal counsel are also a barrier:

That's a good question. I guess I haven't really thought about that too much. I mean, I obviously I know that...they have childcare stuff. I don't know if it would be beneficial or not to have a, you know, a group that gets together. I don't know if that would be. I think one of the things is...you know, actually, now that I think about it, is the ability to seek [legal counsel], you know, 'cause I think, a single father in college, there's obviously financial restrictions. What if you had the ability to seek out some counsel for...if you were a single dad and you didn't have visitation. And you *wanted* visitation. But you were [financially] restricted. What if you had the ability to, not necessarily have representation in *court*, but have the ability to talk to a lawyer on the campus or *through* the campus somehow instead of havin' to you know, take a *lot* of time to find out, 'cause I know, that's the biggest thing, like...if you have a mother that's *unwilling*. You know, in *my* case, it was really *bad* you know. And I had, there's some situations where...like in your case, you went and lived with your dad right away. Where maybe the mother just doesn't want anything to do with her kids. But what if the mother *doesn't* want the *dad* to have anything to do with their kids, and I think that's the biggest thing that's overlooked, is, the mother who doesn't, who tries to push the father away. And I don't think that happens as often. Maybe it doesn't happen very often, but it happened in *my* case. Where the mother was like I just don't want the father, she didn't even put my name on his birth certificate when he was born. So I had to go through court to get that done.

Erik then continued on to talk about how he felt he didn't have any rights to his son and explained more about why he thinks legal help would have been so important:

[W]hen we split up, I had no rights. I couldn't even visit him. So, if there would be something, some kind of support like that on campus. I don't think it happens too often, but even if you know, say in my case you know, what if I want to go back to court for more visitation. It'd be great, if I could just go talk to a guy on campus here, that could give me some guidelines, some things I could do on my own to cut cost for a lawyer, maybe even that person would have just some connections to send you in the right direction, so, I think the legal counsel is huge....

He then stressed how financially, having legal services provided to him would have been a big help:

But I think that the legal side is the biggest, is the biggest one, 'cause I know I was kinda lost, and it costs a lot of money. It set me back a little bit. And, it took me a while but, and so then I mean then it's a deterrence to, say if I wanna go back. If, you know, when I get done with college the next year, I know gettin' done and you know, you know, whether I move to [city, state] or [city, state], I'm gonna tell her, tell Matthew's mother you know, okay, the agreement's gonna have to *change*. And if you *don't* want to, I guess we're gonna have to go to court. 'Cause where I was working at [a previous place of employment], they *provide* legal assistance for you. Some workplaces will provide legal assistance for you. So you know, if you, you know, I think that it would only, even when I first started college, it was very stressful, because I didn't... *here* anyways. I moved up here with my girlfriend and it was very stressful because I wanted to see Matthew but I couldn't. So, you know, I didn't have any, there's nothing here for that, so, if there was, even if it only helped a handful of people, I mean. So.

Shawn mentioned he didn't ever use any campus services that helped him as a single dad.

But in asking him the question of what could campus do for him, he reflected on what *would* have been the most helpful to him. Like Erik, Shawn felt that the area of need for men like him would be legal assistance but also mentioned counseling and social programs:

You know, what would have benefitted me the *most*, is especially being a first-time father, is knowing stuff about what's coming in the future. Like you know, I said that I didn't know anything about child custody or what, how important it was to appear or what I had, what options I had available but I felt like I was trapped. This is how it is. The *law* says this has to be this way. That would have been *huge* 'cause you know, I would have had someone to talk to, somebody to explain things I never would have thought of...I mean I don't know if they would have...[*pause*] Yeah, like, she went to a place that gave her counseling on you know, taking care of like, what kind of vitamins and stuff she needed for her body, what kind of formula to use while she was, like, all that kind of advice. I guess, the dad, I was never included in that, I mean that was a lot of *biological* stuff, You know, taking care of yourself, which I don't to be a part of. But she would also get advice, like she'd get coupons for formula, she'd get so much money like a month, [WIC]...Like if there was something for men, to know, to get an idea of how much stuff was gonna cost. Um...knowin' that daycare is \$150 a week, ha ha ha. Good luck finding anything cheaper I mean. Or, you better mend your relationships with your family or you know, start one [a relationship with them], or whatever. To take, to alleviate some of that cost. How much cost diapers cost, formula, time, priorities, some kind of counseling. 'Cause yeah, the, my biggest thing was just, I didn't know *anything* of what to do. And I was tryin' to, I was making it up and learning as I went...like I said, I *stopped* pursuing a career to pay for what was happening now. Which is just, is sacrifice, I guess....I don't know.

And as to getting men and their children involved on campus, Dan had some great suggestions:

Yes. Two things. Two things I think would be *really*, really good. One, we *have* like a campus daycare kind of run out of the [campus health center]. I think that could definitely use some better, no - not better. I think the *age* needs to be addressed, because...if I was here by myself...say I had Alyssa...last school year. And I needed an after school program, it would have been greatly helpful if she could have been part of the after school program they have there, but she was too old already. And so that would have forced me to find something else. So something that could *be* there, that could be linked into us being a student, and maybe even you could pay with your financial aid or something like that, would be very helpful, I think. Both, I think, for moms and dads, you know. That was one thing I was disappointed in, because they have an *amazing* program and I wanted to have Alyssa in it last summer, and all, but you know, I couldn't.

And the other would be, I think that it would be helpful if, and I don't know what shape this would take. But I think if there was some kind of a club, or a counseling group, or something that would invite single dads together. To kind of like give them that opportunity. And maybe even based, something just spit-balling, something like out of the [campus health center] where there [could be]...like a free or [an] inexpensive like program where the kids could be having fun and the dads could be doing something...like maybe dads and their kids playing together you know....and being directed, just so that they get that camaraderie and that extra help you know...surrounding something that's healthy, you know. I think that would be really helpful, just to remind them that you're *not* the only one doing this. 'Cause I know I had an amazing support structure but I know not everybody does, you know.

Dan then generously indicated his interest in helping if he was able and said:

As much as I could be, I would be willing to try to be helpful in something like that, if you get something moving.... everybody just sometimes needs to know that there are other guys going through the same.

Coping Strategies

In this section, I will discuss the coping strategies that the men use in their daily lives. Some of the ways of coping are very healthy, and others may lead to emotional disengagement. However, the fact they are using coping strategies at all and as men are *admitting* to compartmentalizing their lives shows that they are very in touch with their emotions and what they need to do, to get through the day and relieve stress. Dan illustrated this concept quite succinctly: "For guys that I've known as well, seems like...if you keep yourself busy, you get time to deal with your emotions a piece at a time."

Most of the coping strategies mentioned by the fathers could be found in the positive category such as physical activity or abstinence from drinking for example. Alternatively, one could argue that coping mechanisms are also a path to avoidance, to escape the stressors in life. In particular, Casey seemed aware of the fact he is using strategies in his life to *escape* but he says this is why school is important to him: “[I]t’s one of the reasons that I’ve always pursued education as well. So *getting* to that, I feel like, will be the point *in life* where I can stop escaping and start living.”

Shawn really values working out at the gym. He sees it as a time to relieve stress, and he said it refreshes him. He said it was a way to “BS with some guys and hang out and get...some good exercise.” He also mentioned he likes to keep balance in his life and play softball, golf and ride bike. Simply put, he said, “I like to be active.” To be even more active, Shawn also got a second job where he is able to move around a lot.

I would liken Shawn’s mention of physical activity to the place that baseball occupies in Erik’s life. And, neither Erik nor Shawn seemed typically masculine about it. Dan values physical activity as well, for his own health and that of his family. Yes, physical activity may be easily associated with normal behavior for men. However, the way it is practiced seems to have a more gentle approach, as if it simply has been incorporated into their lives on purpose for health, stress-relief or bonding with other men or even their families as with Dan, below.

In explaining how he got into fitness, Dan explained this happened after becoming a father. He finds it important to include his wife and daughter in these activities as well:

While I’ve been a dad, I really got into physical fitness, about the same time I *became* a single dad. And that *really* recharged me...any stress I mean it’s easy to pound that off on the weights or on the treadmill or whatever. And that was a *huge* help for me. And, just you know, dealing with stress and things like that, and then I would feel like I could come home...And...it would be gone. It would just *melt* away you know. And so I didn’t have *that* [stress?], when I was dealing with Alyssa. And that was...really, really good.

And it helped me teach her that you know, the physical fitness is a good thing, but it's not the *only* thing you know. We come home and we have family time. We work, and we play and then, and we can do that *together* as a family. Then we have calm times too....and *that* actually kind of shifted when I moved here for grad school. And I know now the reason why I kept getting sick, as I've said, living in [an apartment with a mold problem] didn't help. Because I haven't been able to *be* as physically active in the last couple of years and so that's one of the reasons we're *so* excited to get back into that because Melanie was as well...But, we've just, we've been taking care of each other back and forth. But that really healthy *home* life, just completely recharges me. I go home, we have great conversations...and we talk about what each other's days were like, so we can get that...off of our chest. And then just kind of, enjoy, just hangin' out together....we like to go out whenever there's like art walks or, anything like that. Just go out and you know, kind of get out together and do stuff and bring Alyssa with us when she's there, so she can be *part* of that.

Both Adam and Dan specifically mentioned they do not drink. Another father, Casey, talked about not drinking in front of his kids, although he did not address the nature of the extent of his drinking when his children are not around. None of the fathers mentioned any other vices for coping but that does not mean those vices don't exist. However, nothing about current behaviors related to other vices such as gambling, smoking or drugs were mentioned by the fathers.

In the second interview I had with Casey, I asked him how he wants others to see him. He told me that after our first interview, he thought more about being a father, and he connected his thoughts to why he enjoys playing video games to cope:

I mean, it's not something that I normally start to think about, is being a father, right? You know, it's funny when I talk to people about my life, generally I get the same reaction all the time. "Wow, you've lived so much. You've done so much...you haven't had a boring life." And I tend to agree with that. But, you know, I don't *think* about that from day to day. I don't think about well, my philosophy of a parent, as a parent '*is*' or I don't think about wow, I'm a disabled veteran, single father, college student, with years of experience teaching. Gosh, I'll find an affirmative action job right away you know [said in jest]. I don't think about that, you know? So when we talked about it, [in] the last interview, it brought that stuff up, at least for a time. But you know, since then, it has fallen back into the background because I can't, I can't *juggle* all those things at once. I mean, what do you do with that? ...and that's probably a coping mechanism right. You compartmentalize your life, and you focus on the things at hand, and I think that's actually why I like *immersive* video games...you can go to...the world of the game, and you don't have to think about [state where he lives], you know. You don't have to think

about [the countries you've served in]....You don't have to think about all that. You just have to think about okay, how can I you know, beat this guy up and become a god [in the video game], you know. And that's *relaxing*, I think, for me.

In the above passage, Casey talked about compartmentalizing his life and how he uses video games to escape from life at times. I asked him if he found himself wanting to escape more when he had the thoughts of his military experience or is it other things that make him want to escape and he said:

I associate my time that I spent in the military with *stress* directly. And so usually when something in my life is stressing me out a lot, that's when I *crave* going into those sort of 'fantasy reality' situations.

Erik even talked about escaping, but in a positive sense, and how his son actually fills that role for him:

It's been very rewarding, to be able to go and spend time with him, with Matthew, because it's, it's almost like an escape at times, from not necessarily the 'real world' but it's just *getting*...an 8-year old's perspective on life, can really bring me back to reality. And keep me motivated, is a big thing, and you know, he's very energetic. He's a lot like I was when I was younger, according to my mother [*laughs*], so....and I like to be able to you know, we *relate* and I think as he starts to get older and as he grows, *that* is gonna keep building...I wanna you know, have a really close relationship with him.

I asked Adam if he would consider himself an introvert or an extrovert, as far as where he gets his energy from. He stated that he's an introvert and talked about what he enjoys doing in his free time:

Mostly I'd say I'm an introvert. Most of my free time is you know like at night, you know, can't really go out. And I got Joshua, don't really have a job so can't afford to go out and you know oh yeah, let's go out for supper, and we'll go out see a movie or whatever, even just the two of us. So, there's a lot of gaming. That kinda stuff. I enjoy reading...I like cooking....I do enjoy going out like with my girlfriend. And we go to ...her mom's, you know she lives with her mom and she's perfectly fine watching my son and then you know, we can go see a movie or go spend some time with her friends or whatever. But, no...definitely I'd rather be home.

Even though others try to put pressure on Adam to socialize, he does not seem to be bothered by it and is comfortable in his way of life:

And, I've had people that you know, they feel, it's almost like they feel sorry that I'm a single dad, because I can't go out to the bar. I can't go out just because I want to, you know. I have to plan things around school and daycare. And try to think of all that, and it's, at the same time, I think that's a good thing. You know I think I said last time I was here that, you know, I'd been put in a lot of situations by co-workers and it's "Well, I'll have my son." "Well, then don't come." Well, that's fine. I've used my son as an excuse *not* to go to things in the past. I'll readily admit to it, I'll admit it to the people that I've done it to. You know, I've completely used Joshua as an excuse to *not* do things. But at the same time, well, if he, if it's not appropriate for him to be there, at 7, is it appropriate for me to be there at 28? Probably not.

When one is a parent and student at the same time, there are obviously many scheduling challenges that must be constantly addressed. Casey talked specifically about compartmentalizing his life, and talked about how scheduling things is important for him. In light of being a student, he provided this very appropriate summary:

You know, it takes some concentration to do what we do, right, as graduate students. So, you have to, you have to do some of this compartmentalization and automatically I feel like my life *begins* to become especially with this, this class that I've been doing, my life begins to become sort of this *binary* between working and then *trying* to take the time off to rest. Right? And I can get *really* caught up in that binary. It helps when I schedule things, like, I've been going to...a Dungeons and Dragons session, once a week, where...we just do one little...adventure. But it's better I think for me than playing the game, even though the game is basically the same thing, because there is that social interaction component. I have to deal with the body odor of the guys around me, *[laughing]* but, it's a small price to pay for actual face-to-face interaction, I feel. 'Cause again, that *binary* can get very lonely. Of, you know, now I'm working. Now I'm at home. And either sleeping or playing a game. You know? So yeah...the kids open up another facet and I'm glad that I have them while I'm not *really* thoroughly engaged in working, because that would give me a lot more stress I feel. Having that *third* thing to engage in. And I try and keep things simple.

Experiences with Dating

Two fathers, Casey and Dan, have been remarried since they split with their children's mother. Recall that Casey's second marriage recently ended, and Dan was happily remarried within the last year. Adam had a fiancée, however he is no longer with her at this time and now has a new girlfriend. The remaining three all have dated to different degrees. When dating, some

fathers saw the fact they had children as a good situation to be in, such as the fact they were allowed to be selective but yet at the same time there were disadvantages as well.

For example, Ben was the only father that had the extreme view that being a father only brought with it drawbacks. Ben has a girlfriend now, and I asked him if he thinks being a single dad is an advantage or disadvantage when dating, and he told me: “Disadvantage. You’re *tainted* goods. Oh yeah. *[laughs]*...you just don’t bring that part up until you *think* you should *[laughs]*.” I asked if his girlfriend has kids, and he said:

No. She’s still having a hard time gettin’ along with these two, I don’t know. I don’t know if it’s a jealousy thing or something, ‘You’re taking time away from me.’ She’ll get over it. If she don’t, she can leave *[laughing]*.

The men also told stories about how women react to them as a dad. Shawn explained to me what it’s been like for him when dating and how it has been difficult for him to find someone. But he also explained he has not been specifically looking to date, either:

I’m not very good at dating yet...the only dates I’ve been on were like co-workers when I was in [another city], and they I mean, they weren’t really even dates, it was like we’d go out and have dinner. Or we’d go out as a group. And nothing really came of it. And I think that was mostly me, that I wasn’t *seeking* a relationship, maybe, because I was still trying to put myself back together...those couple [of women], they didn’t really seem to mind that I was a single dad? It was more like they just kind of avoided the conversation about him, because they didn’t have kids. And then it was kinda made me, like, I don’t know what to talk about because, you know so much of my life revolves around my kid, that I kinda start talkin’ about him on accident and then I carry on and I ramble. And it’s kind of a turn off, and I think...that I talk a lot about me and about something they don’t know anything about. As far as now, I haven’t really been actively looking. I’ve been so busy...including class, and actual work, that yeah, it’s always been in the back of my mind though...’cause it could go both ways, be like ‘Oh you have a kid so you have prior commitments...you’re not gonna have time for me’ or it’s gonna be, ‘Oh you’ve got a son...he’s so cute and you’re such a good dad and you’re [a] responsible person’ that maybe it’s a turn-on ...*[laughs]* I don’t know. We won’t know until I start tryin’ or whatever. And even that is difficult to find a place with lots of single women, ‘cause, I mean, you do a play date and you know, other people that do the...child raising thing...the right way - they’re married, and they have a house and two full time jobs ...There’s not a lot of single women that hang out...in playgrounds and you know, on jumping gyms and stuff like that.

Shawn and I then continued on, and I mentioned how like him, another dad had talked about conversation stopping when he would be talking to a date, and Shawn understood what it must be like for people that don't have children: "[T]hey don't know how to respond to it, really, or how to contribute to it."

Like Shawn, Erik also can see both positives and negatives to dating as a single dad. He said:

That's a good question...I think I can see *both* sides of it. I think right away, some of the girls I've known, they get really, 'Oh he's got a son...he's you know, got himself together and...Matthew's a great kid.' But then I see from the other side, I had a girl mention one time to me you know like, it would be very *tough* because you're limited to where you wanna move. You know, or where you *could* move. And so...I see the advantage and the disadvantage to that. Definitely an advantage is, an example...in my wallet I have pictures of Matthew. And a friend of mine one time...we were with a group of girls, and he thought that it would be [*pauses*] *funny* to, he thought that basically that I was hitting it off with them and he wasn't, and so he thought...if he told them that I have a child that they would be like 'Oh, I don't wanna talk to this guy anymore.' So he did that. Then I said, oh yeah yeah, let me show you a picture. Showed them a picture and they were like 'Oh man, he's sooo cute!' [*mimicking girls' voice*] so that kinda *backfired* on him. So right away, I think there's like an initial *attraction* maybe, but then as time progresses, there might be a disadvantage to see 'Hey, I can't be the '# 1' you know, your son is your #1. And he's not *my* son.' So there's definitely *both*, and so then the disadvantage might come down to like, being like, the girl would feel like she *couldn't* be the most important person in your life, and you know, if that's the way it is, so be it, then, you know, you can move on. That's fine. But if you can be you know, both of you can be just as important, you know.

Notice above, Erik's experience where women may not be satisfied almost taking second place next to his child, for example. Dan said something on a similar train of thought, about how women would not be able to be a mother to a child that is not hers. I appreciated Dan's thoughts on this topic because it was clear he had taken the time to really think about this before:

Umm...both. It was a disadvantage in that I found that if a woman was single and heard that I was a single dad, I usually didn't hear from her again. And the only times I ever got any kind of an answer as to why, was that they felt that I already had had a family and so they didn't want to take that on. Which I spent some time thinking about, how fascinating that is, in that a single mom would not want to hear that from you know, from a guy that had no kids you know. And in fact, a guy that dates a single mom is almost lauded in that like 'Oh you're willing to take on her kids too! That's great of you, you're willing to

raise somebody else's kids you know'...but then...that's probably the one place I noticed the biggest, oh what's the word, you know, like two-facedness or so or whatever was that I had a couple of women flat tell me like, 'You have a child that wouldn't be mine and so I couldn't do that. I couldn't do that.' I was like, huh. But the advantage was there are a lot of single moms...and whenever they would hear my story you know, and that what I was doing, they would be like 'Holy crap, I wished that you know if my Ex had been like that, we would be together still.' And so that was kind of an advantage.

He then continued on, speaking of how he took a break from dating to better himself:

The biggest thing for me, was I had taken 3 years no dating, like, I just did that for myself and I said I'm going to better me. I'm gonna be a better dad. I'm gonna be a better person, before I even think about dating. And that helped me like actually kind of weed through things, because I had things in my mind that I was like okay, this is who I am now, 'cause I'd found that out. And...this is what I can offer, and this is...what I need in response, and stuff. And so that made, that actually more than anything probably made dating slimmer, but I liked that because I felt like it was more *quality*. You know. Like the people that I would try to date, were closer to what I was looking for, if that made sense....I think I offended a few people whenever I would tell them like, I don't think this is [working out], but I was very up front, through the whole thing and been like, I don't want to waste your time 'cause you're a single mom and you don't have a lot of time, so I'm not just gonna you know just go out and have a good time just to go out and have a good time....So yeah. I was, actually, well, this is probably something completely different with my wife, it was very funny. She still tells me that she's like, 'You tried to get away from me!' [laughs] And I'm like, "No, I just took, I just took the time to make sure we were absolutely right, you know. Before I was going to propose to you."

Casey was very clear in explaining that he does not imagine himself ever getting married again for a third time. He has been remarried once and explained to me why he doesn't see marriage again in his future:

I asked the kids for enough, in asking them to accept one more woman [when he remarried], that I don't need to put them through that again. It's bad *enough* that I couldn't make it work with two...I remember when my grandpa got remarried after my grandma died...And I felt deprived of him. So, you know, I think that maybe I'm done with marriage.

He also talked about what he saw his mother do when it came to dating men, and he wants to avoid that pattern:

My mother's experience, going through men like hotcakes, both boyfriends *and* husbands. Has, has I think made me committed *not* to marry. Maybe *forever*. Um, *sorry ladies* [with humor]. But yeah that's, that's not gonna happen.

Adam talked about the difficulties he had with his Ex-fiancée, and how those disagreements actually revolved around him wanting to be in school:

Last year in February, I was actually engaged. And it was a girlfriend I'd had for roughly a year. We got engaged just before Christmas. And at that point, you know...I'd talked to her a few times you know before that you know, about [me] coming back to college, you know, being an ultimate goal. And between the two of our 2 incomes and stuff, and we'd put a lot aside wedding-wise and such. And I said "Well, I'd like to go back to college, you know, get it done right away." And all that kind of thing. And she was all on board with it, and then it was a little after January, when I started looking into you know getting the FAFSA turned in and getting registered for college and everything like that, getting tours and everything arranged. She started getting really stressed and making complaints about, you know how *difficult* this is being, you know, if we were a little more stable...waited a year or two, how much easier this would be...[and] I held to the belief that well you know what, we wait a year, okay the stress goes away right now. Next, you know, December, January, that stress is gonna come back and then it's gonna be, oh, well we don't have the money, we don't have this or that...again, and it's, next thing we know, here I am you know 40 goin' on 50 and I still haven't done it. And, you know, she accused me of cheating with my son's mom, which was not *true*. But couldn't prove otherwise to *her*, unfortunately. So eventually it just came to a point where it was no, we have to be done.

He also talked about how his son really missed his fiancée after they split up, and how her leaving was a big change in both of their lives. He explained how he leaned on his parents for a lot of support during this time:

And at that point, it was a real culture shock because prior to moving in with her [Ex-fiancée], I actually had been living with my parents. So, you know, yes, I was a single parent, but had that...in-house support. She left, and then it was okay, here it's me and Joshua, realistically for the *first* time, just the *two* of us. And, it was really hard! And there was a lot of frustration, there were a lot of evening phone calls to my parents, complaining, and venting off frustration. You know, just the, you know, God, now I gotta do dishes, I gotta do laundry...I'm sitting here listing off what I gotta do yet tonight, kind of a thing. *It's just a never-ending battle*. And Joshua took it really *hard*. It wasn't an *overt*, you know, 'I miss [fiancée's name]...'...But...there was a lot of "Well, she's not here." You know, she did things *her way*...[and] he got very comfortable to that, and there was this very drastic change. And, it took several months for Joshua to really get over that. And then, you know, we ended up coming here and again...huge life change. And it's okay, Joshua, how do we handle this, and it's, you know, there were a lot of nights where it was okay, I'm up til 3-4 in the morning doing homework because, from 3 o'clock 'til 9-9:30 at night, here I am still sitting with Joshua, trying to give him that time and attention, and try to help reassure him that okay, I'm not leaving.

Adam told of his experience interacting with women in light of him having a child, as this is something he has taken time to reflect on in his life. He also talked about his philosophy surrounding being invited to go out, and he made it clear that he doesn't drink and that he considers his mom to be an alcoholic. So he said, "I do my best *not* to do that kind of thing." He expressed some frustration on the part of others that he doesn't "get out and socialize" but stated,

My philosophy's been, ever since he was born, that well, if I can't take my son, I probably don't need to be there. So...that's just kind of been a general policy I've had, and I know like, when it comes to girlfriends, and stuff, it frustrates them. And things like that for relationships that I don't really feel comfortable leaving my son for hours on end. And, 'cause you know, it's a package deal. It's not just me, it's both of us. You know, even when it was a 50/50 split with his mom, if it was my week I'd try to plan stuff that...could include the three of us. And honestly, most of my girlfriends have had...kids of their own...but even then, it's been kind of surprising how...there were a lot of people you know, you'd go out on a date or somethin' and oh, they'd talk about *their* kids but as soon as you start talking about yours, they get very uncomfortable.

I asked him why he thought they reacted that way and he described the double standard that he's experienced:

I really don't know! It kind of frustrated me 'cause it was like, yes be a part of *my* child's life, but I don't wanna know *yours*? And you know I guess that's always kind of been that stereotype that oh, well, you know the...single mom, and then there's that boyfriend comes in but then they don't really connect with the child, and, I know with several of my girlfriends that have had kids, I've tried very hard to connect, with their kids.

For a single father who has decided to date again, it seems to be a mixed collection of advantages and disadvantages. They also seem to have experienced double-standards having to do with women's reactions to them, as alluded to in this section. Even though some have entered into long-term relationships again since the separation from their children's mother, their children clearly are always a priority, and that is extremely admirable.

Effects of Traditional Masculinity

As mentioned, the fathers seemed to express a good handle on their own emotional intelligence and were very open, vulnerable, and therefore androgynous in many ways as

previously discussed, and they do not always fit into the box of the typical male. Despite the openness and sensitivity of the fathers, at times, however, there were expressions of typical masculinity that I became conscious of either during the interviews or during the transcription process, noticing some expressions later after combing through my data and the coding process. All of these particular comments surprised me, because overall the men struck me as not your typical guy, especially not one that identifies with the typical college student and is thus not caught up in fitting into the world of Kimmel's Guyland. So as a researcher, when I became aware of this interesting dichotomy, I knew it was something I needed to pay attention to.

There were moments of very gendered or even patriarchal dialogue – however these moments were still very few and far between. I noticed some slightly anti-female dialogue as well. I wouldn't go as far as to characterize it as misogynistic or expressly hateful. If negative things were said about women, it was in the sense of fathers commenting on how the courts seem to favor women, or the commentary was directed at their Ex. Such comments directed at the Ex seemed expected to some extent because I was aware of the frustrating and sometimes upsetting situations the men indicated they were in when separating from their Ex.

This atypical dialogue seemed to fall in two different areas: 1) Disengagement; and 2) General gendered or racial commentary or behavior. As mentioned, such gendered or racial commentary was rare. Especially in examining the richness and volume of data which spoke to the contrary, it truly was very seldom that the fathers' dialogue with me struck me in a way where I questioned it. A few comments had stuck with me, but I specifically went back through my data to find other similar instances as I knew that looking for these comments would add meaning to my data. In searching, it was sometimes subtle at times, not being consciously noticed by me on first glance and it would take me by surprise. As the reader views this section,

keep in mind the juxtaposition between the extreme vulnerability and kindness displayed overall and the unexpected nature of the comments which were still few and far between.

Disengagement

The dads in this study were typically very open and sensitive but there were a few times during the interviews where disengaging male behavior was detected. This disengagement was found in examples where the fathers tried to explain away their expressiveness, in addition to other examples that were specific to each of the fathers and how they try emotionally to keep stress out of their lives.

For example, it is of note that four of the fathers felt they were talking too much and specifically told me that. They commented on the fact they were “rambling” or one even said “I talk a lot, and I mumble,” while one referred to himself as babbling on. Remember Shawn saying that he doesn’t “know how to put feelings into words. I’m not very good at this.” Shawn’s words were very powerful and out of all the fathers, the word “love” entered my mind in context of his emotions for his child, as I was analyzing his data and the way he spoke of his son. So it is interesting that he underestimated himself in the realm of being able to put his thoughts into words, as he seemed quite adept at speaking from the heart in my opinion. Again, this shows a theme of the dads underestimating themselves.

After hearing these types of comments a few times, I began to wonder what was behind that. Was it something they felt they had to do in order to counter their expressiveness and openness with me—something that is maybe typically seen as a characteristic of feminine behavior? The comments also could just have been a sign of humility and wanting to be fair with my time. However, it seemed to show a pattern of needing to apologize for what they felt was profuse talking, when in all reality I did not see it that way and more than welcomed what they

would call “rambling.” If they ever made comments that they felt they were talking too much, I made a point to tell them that it was okay and this is what I want, to hear from them. So were these comments an attempt at disengaging from their emotions after feeling vulnerable?

Another area of disengagement could be seen when Adam talked about being unsure of his role in disciplining when interacting with his girlfriend’s children and mentioned how he just removes himself from the situation:

There’s been days when they’ve you know, Joshua and her two kids will end up getting into fights. And, it’s you know, sibling squabbling, you know. It’s my turn, no it’s my turn kind of a thing, and, she gets very frustrated and then she looks at me, you know, ‘You need to deal with Joshua’, ‘cause she won’t deal with him when he gets upset and stuff like that. And, you know, it kinda puts me into that situation of what do I do. And do I be the dad to Joshua, do I do the dad [thing for]...all 3 of them, do I do what my girlfriend wants you know as the boyfriend which is to step in, but then I just ultimately just say, “I’m not touchin’ it. Let ‘em fight.”

Another moment in Adam’s story when I felt some detachment was when he told of a time where his son was looking at a picture of his birth mom. I anticipated a story of him explaining to his son who she was and making it a teaching moment, but instead he chose not to explain nor the “push the issue:”

Joshua walked into the room and he looked at the picture, and ironically it was a picture of his mom holding him...about an hour or so after he was born. And he sat there and he looked at the picture and I said “Joshua, do you know who that is?” And he said, ‘Well, that’s me!’ You know, I mean, he usually doesn’t see pictures of himself. But he, he could make that connection. [Adam says] “Well do you know who’s holding you?” ‘No’ [his son responds]. And it was just like okay! Well, we’re not gonna push the issue...but no, he’s never really expressed an issue over you know, well ‘Where’s Mom?’ It was like the first couple weeks because we traded on Sunday nights, and then she just stopped coming.

Adam went on to explain why he didn’t force the topic, however it still surprised me because he went as far to ask the son *who* it was in the picture, but didn’t want to go further and explain.

Recall that Ben’s mother passed away from cancer when he was younger. His father remarried about a decade ago after his mom’s death, and when we were talking about his dad,

Ben mentioned how his dad seems to be controlled by his stepmom. I asked if his dad seems different than how he was with his own mom. He said,

It's hard to say, you can tell he's pretty *whipped* by her. So, any decision that he makes, you can tell he doesn't like *making* it, unless she *knows* about it. Which is kind of aggravating, 'cause don't remember that bein' a problem in the past.

And then in a conversation about what is the right way to reach out to men, in general, Ben described the experience of being pulled aside out of class to attend a cancer support group offered by his school:

I don't see *males* really *seeking* things out. At least for help, 'cause then they just feel like they're worthless, so. So even when my mom was dying, in high school, they had like a, a cancer kids outreach thing, and we never signed up for that. Just one day they walked into your class, and just pulled you out and all of a sudden you're in a circle and you realize there's other people with parents with cancer too and you're like....uh, okay. And they just ask a bunch of weird questions like 'How do you feel today?' [*mimicking voice*] which I never thought was actually helpful, you know. [*laughs*]

Many men in general may not tend to be open about the fact they shut down and compartmentalize to cope with difficult things. But Casey was very honest about how he does this:

I very much try to *avoid* stress. And that's been a *gradual* skill that I've developed since the [military], that, I've *had* to [avoid stress]...Self-preservation, preservation of the people around me. I won't drink around people that I don't know or don't like. Simply because it's not *safe* for me to be out of control. So if there's something that comes, that comes across that's going to be stressful, I try to take care of it in isolation. *Isolate the event, focus on it, take care of it, get done with it.* Without affecting anybody if I can. And that allows me to, to approach my kids with a much more reasoned, I think, if possibly less *emotional* attitude. But it's, you know, I've never *hurt* my kids. But it's *safer* for me, probably for *me*. Not for them. But for *me*. Emotionally, and just yeah. The army turns people into weapons. And weapons have a safety for a reason. *Being stress-free is my safety.*

I then went on to ask Casey if he feels himself keeping his emotions in check with his kids, even the emotion of happiness and he responded:

Sometimes. You know, you can't take away one side of the spectrum without eliminating the other side. But I feel like I'm removed enough from the [military] at this point, I've been out for 10 years. That it controls my life less and less, as I progress, and I've

become *more* emotionally available to other people in my life. But it's still a *switch*. And *if I feel a situation getting out of control, I can flip it*.

At the beginning of the second interview, Casey began talking about his military experience and how he associates that time of his life with stress. He talked about the "discomfort" he feels with all the different pieces that make up who he is:

*There's discomfort with the dichotomies inherent in my multiple identities. I identify as a veteran, yes. But I also identify as a liberal... And I also identify as an American. I identify as French. And I identify as English...I mean, what, there are only so many disparate identities that you can practice at once. And it seems to me that all of those things *inform* who I am? But that I can't just *say*, I can't just think about 'em all at once, right? I can't say well what would the French Casey do? You know. What would the 'Father' Casey do? I can't think about that. I just have to, you know, *allow* those things to influence me and give up control, which is difficult for me. But, you know...part of trying to de-stress, and trying to maintain a *livable* lifestyle is learning that you know, *trauma is separate from real-life*.*

He then continued on to elaborate on what he meant, and you will notice how connected it is to loneliness:

Things *will* happen, yes. And you have to deal with them in that moment. But you can't *carry* them with you. You can't let them *occupy* your thoughts. And when you do, you have to express that, get it out, and then you know, go on with your merry day, 'cause if you don't, you *descend* into you know, depression, into all kinds of stuff. It's no good, to dwell on things like that. And, you start to think that you're *alone*, right. You start to think well, you know, I'm the *only* special forces-business major-single father, that I know. And I *am*. [smiles]

In the first interview, Casey heartbreakingly described to me how he struggles with building relationships with people and that he describes people as temporary in his life:

It's a struggle. It's a struggle to find what's *safe*? As compared to what's *real*. 'Cause you wanna try and be real for people, but you don't want to...expose yourself to risk. And people have been very *temporary* in my life. So, *loving* people, is *really* difficult for me....At this point, I have *less* control, I think, over my *ambivalence* toward people. I think that it's a natural resting state for me at this point. That I just view people as temporary.

Interestingly enough, like Casey, Erik also used the words “stress-free” to describe how he tries to live his life. I asked him what causes him the most stress as a parent and how these stressors affect him and his son. He stated:

Well, I like to say that I live pretty stress-free, which I’m pretty good at handling stress. I know I’ve hadn’t, my mom and my sister are just amazed at some of the things that I don’t *let* bother me. Um. A lot of the stress, I think looking back on it has been, was you know, working out visitation and getting along with his mother. Which you know, there’s certain things that you know still aren’t where they could be, but, it’s a *lot* better than what it was. So she, she was definitely a lot of stress. Her *family* was a lot of stress on me for a while, but you know, I took the approach of stopping and looking at it and saying hey, there’s certain things, just, I can’t control how people act. So I’m not going to try to control *them*. And I’m not going to let what they do stress me out to the point where I can’t function. But it is, you know, it’s a little stressful being this *distance* from him. Havin’ to travel as much as I do, back and forth. Um, that’d probably be about it, I can think of. And it’d be nice if I could get him to come up here some, but, um, that’s just the way it was written out in the custody agreement.

If one compares Casey’s perspective of being stress-free to that of Erik, there are many differences in how that same concept presents itself in their lives. Casey is very lonely and does not have a good support network of friends, views people as temporary, but he does seem to have an amicable relationship with his Ex. However with Erik, the relationship with his Ex was fraught with more stress as he explained, but he is far from lonely and enjoys the relationships in his life. Even though Casey’s way of dealing with stress depends heavily on the compartmentalization of his life, it is encouraging to me that he was able to be so open with me about this so he clearly as reflected on how he handles stress, and he is very *aware* of how the military changed him from an emotional standpoint. I find this awareness encouraging.

Gendered or Racial Commentary

Gendered behavior noticed in the interviews included such things as comments about housework, the role of women or how women experience emotion, and also the condoning of physicality with their boys. There were also some examples of bias towards other men which sometimes had some slight undertones of racial bias.

I asked the dads about housework in particular in the second interview, and Ben described a fairly gendered environment at home where his son mows the lawn and has taught his son how to change oil, and said his daughter is interested in baking and “has to keep the kitchen clean.” I immediately wondered about his life growing up and if that was a similar environment and the gendered nature of his younger days was confirmed.

Ben grew up with all brothers and said at an earlier point in the interview that “I grew up with two other boys, and you know, most of our stuff ended up with blood, and then whatever happened.” Ben told about how his mom “kept the house,” and she asked them to help with clothes and outside chores as needed, including peeling apples. Ben was very nostalgic about his childhood and said “growin’ up was good. It was good.” He said his dad worked really hard but he wasn’t around much:

I think my childhood [went] really, really well, other than we didn’t see him, ‘cause that’s all he did, was go out and make sure that we *had* enough to get by or, get what we wanted or whatever. So that’s what I’d always thank him for, I’m like “*Thanks Dad. [laughs]* All I got was your work ethic.”

And then in a conversation about raising his own kids, he said:

When I was growin’ up, I was with all boys. So, all I know is *boy* stuff...I never had like the sister-daughter experience. And, I remember [his kids] growin’ up and everyone having that controversy of like, you can basically turn your son feminine or turn your daughter masculine and, *No!* [laughs] You can see right away that’s just how ...they’re not like that. My boy’ll pick up anything that has gun. [My] Girl’ll pick up anything that’s a doll....Those are the few things I remember.

So...you thought they had their own interests obviously but they were pretty gendered I guess....like they just knew?

...Yeah....I was just surprised at *how* gendered it was, because she had all this boy stuff. And that’s all I was into, and she just ‘Nope! Ehh...she was off drawin’ and you know, just dolls, and make her little house things, and. [laughs]

A few dads talked about bullying at school and how things are different from when they grew up, and what they think it takes for kids to stand up for themselves these days. Adam told

what seemed to be different pieces to the same story about how his son punched someone at school - a kid who had been bullying him. Adam stood up to the school and said he would not discipline his child for it. Adam told the parent of the other child directly that he has watched his son bully Joshua. He then told the following to the teacher:

You've told me that this child antagonizes Joshua. This child knows about Joshua's triggers. They know that Joshua will overreact. This child has actively gone out of his way. This *whole* school year. When he has the opportunity, to *piss* Joshua off. And make Joshua blow up. Joshua finally had enough. He stood up for himself. I will tell him that it is inappropriate to punch someone. *But I won't get after him for standing up for himself.*

Adam said he had a conversation with Joshua about not punching anyone again, but he said was glad that he stood up for himself. However he concluded with, "If anything else, let him punch you first and then lay him out and just say [to others that] I dealt with it."

From his own past, Adam expressed concern about how when he was in school, if there was a bully, "you go to the teacher and then you get bullied even worse for it." He also said:

I remember being [in] 7th grade and coming home with a black eye. My mom refused to do anything about it. She told me I had to deal with it. Couple weeks later, the kid did it again. And I clubbed him over the head with my backpack! Never got bullied again. And well, unfortunately, as much as I love anti-bullying and all that kinda stuff....I think kids need to learn to stand up for themselves. And if that means Joshua has to haul off and punch somebody, well, unfortunately, that's probably what it will take. 'Cause all it means is that the kids are gonna get more sneaky about their bullying.

So in essence, in the playground of previous generations, boys fought and it seemed normal and that's how disagreements were dealt with, but today the scene seems to be different. We recall Dan mentioning how when his daughter roughhouses, he said how the boys should maybe just "man up." He described the environment similarly to Adam, almost insinuating a need for physical violence for problems to get dealt with so kids can move on like years ago, according to him:

You go to school and the little boys are gonna get dirty. It's gonna happen. We wrestled with, I think about when I was in school and we were allowed to and now they can't even touch each other. There's no wrestling. I remember playing games like Slug Bug, have

you heard of that one?...Boom you just punch 'em. And we did that *all* the time and we didn't go and complain to the teacher. We didn't get in trouble from the teacher. I mean there was... 'Is there any blood? Nah, you're fine,' you know, mentality. And I think they [little boys] *need* that to encourage them to *be* men you know and stuff, so, I think it really starts all the way back there.

Shawn also brought up the topic of bullying in regards to his son, and he has a more balanced approach:

You know, as far as like with the kids at school, I know he, there was an altercation between two other boys, but one of them was his friend. And his friend got pushed, so he pushed the kid back. Kind of like in *defense*. Or protecting him or whatever. And, he didn't really get in, I don't know, what he got punished with? Or if he really got punished, 'cause it wasn't that severe, yet. But it was, he explained why he did it, he was like 'Oh because [friend's name] got pushed, and then you know, and I wanted to protect him.' I'm like, "That's a really good thing, you know. But you gotta be careful because you know, violence isn't necessarily the way to go, and you could have hurt him and then you would have been the one in trouble." But I thought, I don't know if [Ex's name] has done this yet or not yet, about having that conversation about bullying and kinda how do you handle it. If you see other kids doing it you have to go to the teacher. You can't step in and do it, 'cause then you might be the bully.

In asking Dan what the experience of a single dad is like, he talked about moms historically being caretakers, and that for him, the experience of being a single parent is "empowering" and how men sometimes have "no clue." In explaining this, he stated:

I really think that's the reason why a lot of fathers abandon their kids or are only willing to take them for a certain amount of time. There's selfishness, but I think there's a lot of fear, involved. In that we think of moms as the traditional more caretakers and so I think when a guy finds himself with kids by himself he has no clue. And he's afraid and unfortunately I think a lot of times that fear stymies them from even trying! And if they fail which all, every parent will, no matter what the support structure, you will have failure moments, they just won't push forward. And so if you do, you find out that you can do it, you know, you can! And...you absolutely get those rewards back, you know. And then that empowerment I think comes, the longer you do it...it's the exact same thing as we say, as we tell single moms right, you know. As you do it, you feel like oh I can do it, you know? And this isn't going to break me, I'm actually not breaking my kids, you know, I can actually accomplish this. And then, that feels really good. I mean, it made me feel like I could do anything. I mean if I could raise a little girl, I feel like I could do anything.

And Dan's words below illustrate the difficulty of masculine emotions and his experience thus far in his new marriage and how he values the presence of his wife:

I value her advice and I *ask* her before I make decisions, and get her advice because females have intuition for a reason and she's saved me from makin' some bad decisions already. And I respect that advice, as my partner and I want my daughter to see that.

Even though I would consider Dan to have the most emotional intelligence and self-awareness of all the participants, he still showed some apprehension when learning to deal with the emotions experienced by females in his life. He feels there's a place for female intuition, as something to help round out a man's perceptions. However in doing that, in all reality, he draws a gendered line:

I think a lot of guys though when they go into the *tough* thing, whatever their choice is, if it's you know, weight lifting or if it's whatever. They adopt this persona that they think they *have* to be like. 'I'm, you know, I'm King Kong and this is *my* domain' you know...But a certain amount of toughness. You have to be able to support, if you're gonna be a rock for your family, you have to be able to support that. You can't just crumble the first time your wife comes to you crying - for no reason you know. I had to remind myself after 7 years of being single, I had to remind myself that that's right, my wife's gonna cry sometimes. And she's not gonna *have* a reason, and I can't fix it! I gotta you know, so, you just have to be able to sit there and be like I'm not sure what I'm doin' but I'm gonna hold her and pat her on her back you know. And with a little girl, the same thing. You know, times when she'll be, she'll just have an emotion, and she won't know what to do with it. And I'm like, uggggh, so I'm very very thankful that Melanie came into my life, *before* Alyssa started hitting some of these and stuff 'cause she could help me if I have something like...what's goin' on over there? *[laughing]* I have *no idea!!*"

Dan also talked about the positive relationship that his daughter Alyssa, and new wife, have developed. He is very thankful that his wife can be there for his daughter, to teach her things that he feels he can't, since these things seem to be found in the feminine realm:

Only recently has her mom even tried doing things that most moms and daughters would do together. Like do hair *together*. Or go to Bath and Body Works and get her a lotion or something and kinda try to show her...On the other hand, it's one of the things that has made a huge tie with my wife, Melanie, and Alyssa, have really bonded 'cause Melanie is not knowing, coming into this...I mean she met Alyssa when she was 8... Alyssa's almost 10 now, yeah. And [my new wife] not knowing how to bond with this little girl you know, she's just trying to do fun girly things with her and stuff and Alyssa has eaten that up and just completely bonded with her. I mean, they do nails, Melanie's been incredibly patient with her, and letting Alyssa...like put makeup on her which becomes all kinds of interesting stuff...and so she's been finally like blossoming like that, which is good that it happened as I met Melanie, because one of the things as a single dad...with Alyssa as she's growing, is knowing she's coming into these...girly things that I have no

clue about you know. I learned how to you know, put her hair in a ponytail, and you know, and keep it clean, you know? *[laughs]* Like I couldn't do a French braid or something for her! So...I appreciate that she's learning more of these girl, like things that just normally happen, you know, and stuff. But she... wasn't getting [it] from her mom and stuff.

Remember how Shawn said that his counselor told him that there are guys out there who are just "bad seeds." And in talking to Dan about his experience in the court system, he said something similar. He explained he'd seen it both ways, where both women and men have not had good experiences in the courts and said: "I don't think that the court system is unfair. I realize that sometimes it's extra strict because there are guys like that, you know. And it *has* to be there, so. But my experience was great" and then laughed.

As to racial commentary, recall Adam's story about living in a trailer park and how he mentioned the racial diversity of who was living there. He had said the following:

There were Natives, there were Blacks, there were Hispanics...and, some of the parents, I did actually get along with. But, during, especially during the summer there was this group of kids that would run around and on one occasion they had a bunch of sticks and they were wailing on each other. And out came this one great big you know, Native guy and he grabbed one of the sticks and he started beating on all these kids.

In the findings when this was addressed, I specifically took a moment to mention that when he was saying this, he was not completely comfortable addressing it in this way where it seemed negative. I felt he was concerned I would think he was showing prejudice.

And Dan told of something he saw in a grocery store, the day before our second interview. This passage was really deep, in that it took on the topics of masculinity, machismo, racial profiles, and reflection on the topic of fatherhood. He actually took the time to discuss this with his family on purpose after he saw this happen:

I saw a real *interesting* event yesterday, that made me think, and in fact I was just talkin' to my wife and daughter [about it] right after. We stopped at [grocery store] and went in to pick up some medication. And as I was coming out, you know how they have like the doors and then there's like a little entryway and stuff. And, there was this guy standing on the *inside* of [the grocery store]. Big guy, I mean, had to have been like 6'4", he was

Hispanic. He was, he was dressed like you would expect someone that was maybe had been in a gang or thought he was or something you know, very *thugged-out*. Tattoos, everything. Just *big guy*.

And he's *pleading* with his 3 or 4 year old boy. Who is basically just dancin' around on the other side of the door. *Not* wanting to come in. And he's *trying* to get his son to do that. And I'm just thinkin' to myself...he's probably got *all* this machismo you know and all of this, I mean...if it was another one of his *friends* he'd be like you know, a whole different story you know! About how he would handle it. But he had *no clue*, how to get his son to get what he was supposed to do! And I'm like—that's *sad*! Because he's probably not *seen* that but the Hispanic culture is usually *really tight* family you know....And that's what I told my family, I'm like, I just saw one of the *saddest* things I could think of to see on a father's day, you know, is a father that doesn't know how to *relate* to his *child*! You know. And, it turned into a really good conversation with Alyssa about how like there are times when I tell you *no*. Or when I'm *firm* with you. But there's a whole *reason* for that. I want us to always have this dialogue, that we can, you know, where I can tell you hey this is not good, and this is *why* it's not good. But, you know, but it's also for those times when you're acting like a little hellion and I need to tell you hey you need to *stop*, you know. And you know, 'I need to stop.' You know. There might be consequences otherwise. 'Cause obviously this kid did not think there were any kind of consequences to his actions *at all*...And I know that...if you don't have any consequences to actions, that's when the kids will grow up and eventually it's gonna be the *police* or *somebody* bigger than them, that's going to *teach* them consequences to their actions. And that's of course what we *don't* want to have happen you know. We want them to be able to be self-disciplined and...be *productive* members of society you know [*laughs*]. And it turned into a really good conversation amongst Melanie and Alyssa and myself. And all, which was really good. But I just felt bad for that guy, you know, um...being there, it was just a very interesting, just this *mountain* of a man, his kid was like maybe as tall as this table and was obviously running the show. You know? [*laughed*] So, and I think, I mean, I had to walk *around* them, and I could tell he was embarrassed that another *guy* was walking by seeing this happen, and I was just like hmmm. [*laughing*] I mean, I guess I *think* about these kind of things a *lot* you know. And stuff, so I can't say that there's been any one time that I've sat down and been like, *let's think this all the way through* [*mimicking an academic type voice*]. But, it just kind of sticks with me.

This particular discussion about this happened in the second interview, so it is interesting to consider that what he thought about after the first interview may have caused him to take more notice of the situation he was observing. Recall that Casey said the first interview brought being a father "to the fore." I was surprised that Dan was judging this man. Recall that Kimmel (2008) stated that men are the gender police for other men. In this situation, Dan was imagining that the man was embarrassed by being controlled by his young child. I wondered if that man felt any of

that at all. This type of an example is a good illustration of the gender police concept and how race factors in, as his own *thugged-out* stereotype of Hispanic men may have influenced his perception of how he felt this man should have acted in relation to his child.

Thoughts on the Findings and the Materialization of their Identity

In this chapter so far, I examined what concepts have positive or negative influences on the life of a single father, in addition to some evidence on how traditional masculinity was visible, despite their otherwise generally androgynous behavior. All of these effects add up to the formation of the men's sense of identity over time. This findings chapter is a good illustration of the dichotomy that *is* masculinity, in that men spend most of their time trying to defend themselves against being defined a certain way, however the role of parent and student has given them something very positive that they are allowed to identify with.

I had asked Dan to talk about the dichotomies of being tough and strong but yet sensitive, and he began by explaining a little bit about the history of our masculine idols in films. So, I will begin to conclude this section with a quote from Dan, which illustrates this double-bind that men as parents find themselves in:

For *so long*, strong was like the *cowboy*...Clint Eastwood right, or John Wayne, you know, the guys who don't show any emotion at all. And I think that *hurt* us actually, because it took away from, from the fact that you *can* be strong but be *soft*, as well. And I think it really boils down to *leadership*...I think that's what you *need* to have when you go into a relationship, is the belief that you know, I *can* be...where the buck stops, you know? ...and you have to balance that. Because so many men are like, you know, I'm gonna do it this way. And my wife and my kids can just follow along. And that's how it's supposed to be, because I'm supposed to be the man. And that's going to provide nothing but a *negative* image of themselves to their wife and their kids, and to anybody else that watches that...Nobody's going to respect that. That's a *dictator* you know. You might be able to physically be big and strong and force everybody to do what you want, but that's no leader. And nobody wants that. On the other hand, you can't be *the*, the one who can never make a decision. And be like oh what do you guys think, what do you think...and then nothing ever happens. Because then you're just this wishy-washy person that nobody respects either.

I thought his quote illustrated very well the restrictions placed on men because Dan is contrasting a dictator attitude against that of a man who is seen as wishy-washy, and neither way is preferable. Herein lies the reason for why the traditional notions of masculinity do not serve men well because many of those ideas place them in a very difficult position with little room to move within the confines of patriarchy.

Remember when a few of the dads talked about the moment they first held their children in their arms. Thinking back on this, I wonder if they had ever articulated it in this way to anyone ever before. As they reflected on their lives and being a parent, they described these types of moments as life-changing and it is clear these types of moments have impacted the creation of their identities.

Vygotsky believed that people create their own identities and that identity is something that evolves. According to Holland and Lachicotte (2007), it was Vygotsky's opinion that the self is a "complex emergent phenomenon, continually produced in and by individuals in their interchanges with others and with the culturally transformed material world" and that "*mind and personality...develop over time*" (p. 104-105). Holland and Lachicotte stated that Vygotsky's "developmental concepts help us to understand how people come to be able to organize themselves in the name of an identity" (p. 134).

Johnson, Brown, Carlone, and Cuevas (2011) examined the formation of identities amongst women of color who are practicing in the field of science. The authors reported that the women all were seen as "fending off" the "racist...and sexist identities ascribed to them" (p. 339). Johnson et al. were interested in finding out what qualities the women had which helped them survive in the context of a typically male-dominated field and how they create or *author* their identities. The process is described as such: "[T]hey perform combinations of behavior,

speech, and artifacts perceived as ‘appropriate’ as they enter new settings, drawing on their histories as resources for these performances” (p. 344).

One particular example of a father employing a type of speech was when Casey talked about his ability to be articulate. He told me that he sometimes “makes a point of being articulate around people who have power over me” and the reason he did this was to fend off the idea of men as buffoons because he does not want to be perceived that way and wants to be taken seriously. While transcribing, I was struck by how articulate he was but then wondered if he subconsciously thought I had power over him as the researcher, therefore he made an extra effort to be perceived as articulate.

What does someone do when others are putting upon them an identity that they do not feel belongs to them, such as Casey not wanting people to see him as a *buffoon*? Johnson et al. (2011) referenced the terminology of Gee who discussed the use of “bids for recognition” and the authors explained the actions as such, in the context of women in their study:

Bids can fail; individuals can simply be ignored. Worse, insiders in the setting may not only reject an individual’s bid but can, in Gee’s term, ascribe another, unwanted identity onto the hapless bidder, based on elements that are outside her control. (p. 344)

The authors also commented on the abilities required in persisting in an environment that is less than ideal: “Reading a new situation, a situation where one is in peril of being seen as an interloper, where one is constantly in danger of being judged through the lens of negative stereotypes, requires skill” (p. 361). Casey, in admitting to this particular skill of employing his articulate speech, is a perfect example of a bid for recognition and how he tries to author his own father identity.

Again remember Shawn’s comment about needing “overwhelming evidence that we’re not deadbeats” and how he said, “What a *sick* form of motivation, to not be a deadbeat!” So why has Shawn, for example, been able to persevere and get to where he is today? He clearly is trying

to fend off this *deadbeat* label. When defending yourself against these identities that have been ascribed to one's self, it's like you are implying, "I'm not who you think I am" (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 363).

Johnson et al. (2011) stated that the women in their study had "survived because they are particularly good at playing the game; but they are good at playing it because they have had to play a harder game than anyone else" (p. 362). Johnson et al. (2011) concluded the article with a metaphor that I think is beautiful and also can be closely related to the experiences of a single father:

To borrow the metaphor of Jones (2000), just because these women were able to bloom from dry, rocky soil, and bloom as high as others planted in better soil, does not make it fair. Justice and the greater good let us imagine, given what these women have accomplished in their dry, rocky dirt, if others like them were to be planted in rich, fertile soil, what heights could they attain. How can we look at this system and call it fair? (pp. 363-364)

As the single dads in my study persevere through the challenges in their lives, whether that be as a parent, an Ex-partner or a father, they are forging on. Just because they made it through the tough times doesn't mean that they have always been treated with fairness in life. Remember the surprise they encounter from others who are either amazed by what they are doing, or others who are just surprised or shocked when they find out they are single dads.

Johnson et al. (2011) referred to the skills the women in their study possessed as something that Anzaldúa (1987) calls *La Facultad* or "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning" (p. 38). Anzaldúa continues on:

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced

on the most have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.

When we're up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know *when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away* [italics added]. We'll sense the rapist when he's five blocks down the street. Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us. (pp. 38-39)

I am by no means equating Anzaldúa's experience as a lesbian and Chicana feminist to that of men, nor do I claim to have the knowledge to be able to address in this dissertation the complexity, depth and beauty of her writings, but I think her words are a powerful illustration of how the single fathers in my study have developed the skills in life to be successful and be able to persevere, and be survivors, despite society telling them they are 'worthless,' a 'deadbeat,' or a 'poor substitute' for a mother. The dads in this study are *not* who others *think* they are. They are so much more than the very unfortunate caricature of a deadbeat dad, and I think this dissertation shows that beyond a doubt.

Never apologize, mister. It's a sign of weakness.

Actor John Wayne, in the 1949 film, "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"

Conclusion: The Life of a Single Father and the Sadness Paradox

When first hearing the stories of these men, I felt so encouraged and impressed with their perseverance and with their commitment to, and love for, their children. I also thought about how school may be that special factor which enabled some regulation of their lives in a positive sense. Only after I delved more into the findings did I get more of an overwhelming sense of sadness that ran throughout their experience. This feeling was most likely exacerbated by the fact that I felt little had changed as to the bias against single fathers since my Master's thesis research. Why did they seem to me to be less "bitter" towards their Exes than the men from my Master's thesis? What makes these men in this study different?

For the men in this current study, being a father is certainly a very positive experience. However, in addition to the affordances provided to these fathers, there were also a number of drawbacks. As I began to take note of these drawbacks, and the connection to patriarchy, I was unexpectedly overwhelmed with the sadness that is their experience as well. So in my head, I began thinking about this feeling as something I called the *sadness paradox*.

A *paradox* itself is defined as “something...that is made up of two opposite things and that seems impossible but is actually true or possible” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Yes – the single father experience is a very happy experience but it can also be full of heartache. And after combing through all the data, it is true that both of these overall feelings can exist and be real at the same time. This also fits with the idea that *masculinity itself* is a paradox.

Much of the sadness came from the way the fathers were talking about themselves, or when they were describing how men and fathers are perceived in society. When Ben talked about being lined up like rats in the courts, or when Shawn didn't want to be seen as a deadbeat and called it a “sick form of motivation.” Or, when Adam said the stress he feels between being a student and parent is a “never ending battle,” or when Casey said that “trauma is separate from real-life” and that he views people as temporary and that loving people is difficult for him. But the phrase that was the most memorable for me was when Casey discussed what he called the “inside American joke.” It obviously impacted me a lot, because the idea to use this phrase in the title of my dissertation came to me. It embodied the perfect mix of being provocative, evoking a feeling of sadness when thinking about that phrase, but yet at the same time getting to the heart of the *positive identity* of being a single father in college. And, from a phenomenological perspective, it is important for me to fairly report their experience and what better way to do so than to use a participant's own words in the very title of the project.

The crux of the “inside American joke” is that no one would ever doubt that fathers are respected and that as men they should have privilege. But on the other hand, society is telling men they are buffoons and can’t do anything right. Men have power yet they are also invisible, as shown in the literature review, and in the many examples of the fathers from this study feeling overlooked or dismissed by many. This is most likely because the male gender is seen as the norm as noted in the literature review. In sum, it is difficult to make sense of this paradox. Consider how their discussion of a good father mirrors what they are practicing in their own lives. They have a healthy and balanced sense of what a good father is, and they seem to be doing this in their own lives. But on the contrary, they are severely underestimating themselves.

Ben expressed how he wants to “[b]e someone that can inspire, and hold your hand at the same time” yet when talking about himself he used words like dirt bag, weirdo or creepy old guy. Another example of this comes from Dan, when he said “I honestly feel like I’m doing the *bare minimum* of what everybody *should* be doing.” But in my humble opinion, he is far exceeding expectations just like all the fathers in this study. The following chapter will give insight into these contradictions that are based in patriarchy and how this aforementioned sadness plays out in their lives as students who are single fathers.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if, one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past the wires to get anywhere. There is no physical property of any one wire, nothing that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way.

It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers.

It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.

Marilyn Frye in *The Politics of Reality* (1983), p. 4-5

It has been said that we as humans live *storied lives*. According to Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992),

Just as no one's life is designed in advance, there is more than a single life story to be told. This is reasonable because the stories people tell are not only about their lives but also part of their lives. What is told and what is lived promote each other....A life story is more than a recital of events. It is an organization of experience. In relating the elements of experience to each other and to the present telling, the teller asserts their meanings....For in telling their stories individuals make claims about the coherence of their lives. In effect, the storyteller says, "This person I am today is who I have been years becoming." (pp. 8-9)

As the fathers told me their stories, they told me *how* they have become who they are. In essence, they described to me how their identities were formed.

This discussion chapter is about bringing the findings forward, and thinking about what we now know about the experience of the single father experience. We are now familiar with all the affordances they have, but yet also are aware of the drawbacks and challenges they encounter. I am presenting their experience through the lens of patriarchy and will now re-

examine the social influences which disadvantage men, especially fathers. What we are seeing is that these single fathers have become victims of the same system that usually would afford them privilege.

Even though these men find themselves in a world among many other college men, these men do not identify with Guyland. Recall that Guyland is a very negative space where the rules of masculinity for young men are very harsh. Many of the rules related back to not being weak or not being feminine. The fathers in this study agreed on their perceptions of the typical college guy and felt such typical guys focus on partying, drinking, carousing with women and ignoring responsibility. It is of note that these types of behaviors are definitely not a part of these men's lives. The men in this study *reject* that world *completely*. On the flip side, the men very much embrace the positive space afforded to them through the identity of being a father. Being a father gives them purpose.

With the idea of *bros before hos*, Kimmel (2008) discussed the importance of the relationships between college men:

Guyland revolves almost exclusively around other guys. It is a social space as well as a time zone—a pure, homosocial Eden, uncorrupted by the sober responsibilities of adulthood. The motto of Guyland is simple: “Bros Before Hos”...Just about every guy knows this—knows that his “brothers” are his real soul mates, his real life-partners. To them he swears allegiance and will take their secrets to his grave. And guys do not live in Guyland all the time. They take temporary vacations—when they are alone with their girlfriends or even a female friend, or when they are with their parents, teachers, or coaches. (p. 13)

Remember that the men from this study live in a world that is the opposite of Guyland. They don't feel a need to have the same type of camaraderie with other college men, and their everyday lives play out where most other college men are taking their *temporary vacations*, using Kimmel's words from above.

So what is at the heart of the experience of the single father in college? To determine this, we can return to the concept of phenomenology. Creswell (2007) said that a “phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” and also refers to the concept of the *essence* of an experience when one is using phenomenological methodology (p. 62). Polkinghorne (1989) has stated that upon reviewing a phenomenological report, a reader should think: “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46). Creswell stated that such a description should focus “on the common experiences of the participants” and gives an example related to the experience of grief: “[A]ll experiences have an underlying *structure* (grief is the same whether the loved one is a puppy, a parakeet, or a child)” (p. 62).

The core of what we have learned from this study, as to the phenomenon of single fathers in college, is that the men were being vulnerable in telling me something in-depth, and something very personal. Through the telling of their stories, they were essentially telling me, *this is what it means to be a father*. Even though they were comfortable telling their stories, they also find themselves in an in-between world, where they reject Guyland and at the same time take on what society may view as typical feminine roles.

Rogue Waves: Navigating the Open Waters of Masculinity

As a female researcher, it is critical that I present a fair representation of these fathers’ experiences. As someone who got to know each of these fathers over a period of approximately two to three hours each, and continuing to get to know them via the data even after the interviews were over, I want to be honest about my own bias and my internal desires to defend them and present them in the nurturing light that the findings will show. This step in analysis was very natural to me, because I have a propensity to cast them in a positive light. As mentioned in

the Methods chapter, this tendency can be connected back to my experience with my own father and the fact that I am also a single parent.

It was a challenge to sort through the nagging feelings of confusion I had when I heard patriarchal commentary from them; commentary which did not hold true to my original perceptions. However, I want to be honest about this because this affords me credibility in that I did want to find positive results with this study, however my data indicated that I needed to pay attention to other things going on beneath the surface. This was evidenced in the Methods chapter where I described my process of searching for disconfirming evidence during the data analysis.

To explain where I'm coming from, I will provide an example from my second interview with Shawn. Towards the end of the interview, I had asked him what his hopes for the future were, for himself and for his family and asked what he wanted to leave me with. He said:

I don't know...I just hope, and I'm sure you will...provide a *good accurate* portrayal of how single fathers really are. You know, we're not in...that picture....we work just as hard to *love* our children, to be there for our kids....we love 'em just as much. I mean they *need* both mom and dad, but you know, they need 'em [fathers]. ...and there's statistics all over the place about kids that grow up without fathers. And they're all *bad* you know, so it's always a missing piece. And I'm confident that it you know, that you'll take what we said and you know and put us in a good light.

This was one of those moments that stuck out to me from the moment it was said and found myself very torn. On one hand, he just confirmed to me my underlying feeling all along, that these dads would be all very interested in seeing my research, in addition to how I have a responsibility to show them in a fair light. However, on the other hand, I am a single mother and was not sure what to do internally with the comment about "bad" statistics regarding kids who don't have fathers present.

Granted, my situation is very different, and I hadn't shared with him exactly how I became a single mom. But through my lens as a parent, I momentarily saw it as a bias against

single mothers. But as I transcribed and thought about the passage again, it seemed less a criticism of single mothers, and more of an emphasis on the importance of fathers making the choice to be present—along with the fact he was entrusting me with a responsibility to present the findings fairly.

Because all of the men were interested in my research and finding out what my results would bring, I have a strong need to present their side of the story with integrity and feel I owe it to them to not present them in a negative light. But in a vein of being a responsible researcher and representing the data I found, I did also need to present the findings that struck me as unexpected, and I presented these in the “Effects of Traditional Masculinity” section.

Again I want to stress that in comparison with the other evidence found, these comments were rare. But these comments might be a key to demonstrate how these men navigate their own masculine identities. So in conclusion, mentioning the comments that I would consider outliers are so important, because it is showing something of mystery going on beneath the surface.

As to these outliers, please bear with me as I first provide a quick lesson on ocean waves. According to the National Ocean Service (n.d.), there is a phenomenon called *rogue waves* which are defined as waves that are *large, unexpected, and dangerous*. These unexpected waves are also referred to as freak, killer, or extreme storm waves and are defined as waves that are “greater than twice the size of surrounding waves, are very unpredictable, and often come unexpectedly from directions other than prevailing waves and winds” (para. 1-3). The true source of them is unknown, but it is assumed to be caused by the interactions of multiple waves.

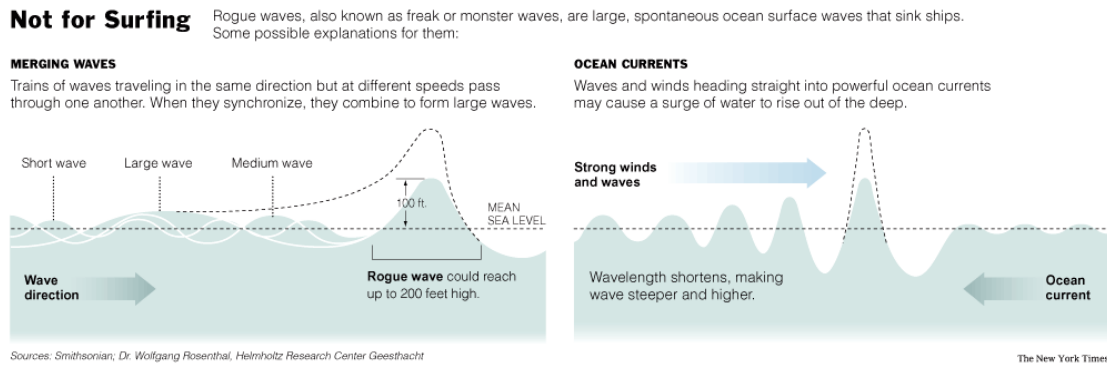


Figure 5. Depiction of Rogue Waves.
Note: Obtained from Broad (2006)

For the men in my study, it is as if they find themselves in an ocean – the ocean of masculinity itself. The waters have calmed as they have settled into their lives as a parent and student. They still may feel alone at times, and feel unique; like they are the only person going through what they have gone through. But despite their challenges, they have developed a way of navigating through the waters, staying afloat, primarily using their identities as first a parent, and then also their student identity, to feel comfortable.

They have developed an almost androgynous and at sometimes what one would consider sometimes typical feminine behaviors when it comes to communication and the raising of their children, and in addition, they seem comfortable with these behaviors. But every now and then waves caused by typical masculinity “rise from the deep” as noted in Figure 5 and crash down. What is it about these fathers that have allowed them to successfully navigate the waters of masculinity and maintain control, staying in touch with their emotions? Again, does school have anything to do with it?

When a man tries to prove they are not something, they are put on the defensive. Think of this as a rogue wave. What is a man to do, when they are frequently required to be on the defensive and prove something? Remember the words of Kimmel (2008) who stated:

“Masculinity is a constant test—always up for grabs, always needing to be proved” (p. 51). And Fisher (1972) described how masculinity is seen regarding emotions and defensiveness:

The masculine role is defensive. Men are to be hollow fortresses, safe from attack or loss of status from without, safe from inappropriate emotions and uncertainty from within. American men are not encouraged to know other men. We think of women as intuitive, possibly because they are permitted to stay in touch with their deeper feelings to a much greater extent than men. (p. 55)

First, note that the fathers in this study do not seem to have a strong overt need to disassociate with the feminine, because they do seem comfortable in their caregiver role and most mentioned a good relationship with their own mothers and female children. So, they are comfortable in this somewhat androgynous ocean. But when they have a negative label to contend with and are put on the defensive, they may reach again to the masculine. They find something in their arsenal that one would consider to be a disengaged masculine response every now and then, without even knowing it, to make that connection back to their innate masculine beliefs. And then the wave recedes, they are once again comfortable in the calm waters, again, with their more androgynous ways of being.

Looking back at the last section from the findings chapter, “Effects of Traditional Masculinity”, there are examples of some atypical comments related to gender or even race. To hear some biased comments from the men cannot be a complete surprise, because they know the rules of being a man in our society and are perhaps responding out of how they have been conditioned as men. And as men that are white, or at least *white-passing* as with one of the fathers, the fact a few comments related to racial bias were heard should not be surprising from time to time, as patriarchy runs deep through all of this.

Gardiner (2007) explains in the following passage how the concept of white privilege can be used as a tool to explore masculinity:

White privilege is the set of advantages that accrue to individuals, frequently without their conscious awareness, from being perceived as members of the dominant ‘white’ or ‘Caucasian’ racial category, especially in Europe, North America, and countries formerly colonized by Europeans or American. In many societies’ racial hierarchies, whiteness is connected with power, status, beauty and authority. The concept of white privilege has become useful to masculinity studies in two overlapping ways: as an analogy to help explain male privilege and as an essential concept for intersectional analyses of power, gender and status, such that masculine, white, heterosexual and middle-class privileges reinforce one another in hegemonic masculinity and the institutions that uphold it. (p. 634)

Remember how Adam discussed his previous living situation in the trailer park with people of other ethnicities present, and him wondering if the aggressive behavior he was witnessing from one of the Native American fathers was the right type of interaction to which his son should be exposed. I also saw this reflected in Dan, who talked about the “thugged-out” Hispanic man who could not seem to control his young son, and also when he said that the character of Al on Home Improvement was effeminate and most likely gay.

In these examples one can clearly see the intersection of gender and race in the discussion of patriarchy. And as was established in the literature review, patriarchy is socially constructed. Johnson (1997) paraphrased Baldwin to say that “race and all its categories have no significance outside of systems of privilege and oppression and it is these systems that created them.” Johnson then says, “This is what sociologists call the ‘social construction of reality’ (p. 22).

Johnson (1997) succinctly explains how we falsely begin to believe things in an objective sense, as opposed to *something that has been socially created*:

What makes socially constructed reality so powerful is that we rarely if ever experience it as that. We think the way our culture defines race or gender or sexual orientation is simply the way things are in some objective sense. We think there really is such a thing as “race” and that the words we use simply name an objective reality that is “out there.” The truth is, however, that once human beings give something a name—whether it be skin color or whom you like to sleep with—that thing acquires a significance it otherwise would not have. More important, the name quickly takes on a life of its own as we forget the social process that created it and start treating it as “real” in and of itself. (pp. 22-23)

Take the idea of the “deadbeat dad,” for example. This phrase was socially constructed to describe men who left their families and did not pay child support as expected. We believe in the mythology of the deadbeat dad and it carries a lot of meaning with it. Yes, there are some men like that, just like there are also some women who do the same, such as in Adam’s case. This phrase became pervasive in society, and took hold in particular to describe men over the years. That identity is one the men in this study have spent a lot of time trying to fend off even when they are involved in their children’s lives and are also responsibly paying child support.

Brod (2007) has described what he calls the *fragility of masculine identity*. I think it is very complimentary to the idea of the rogue waves of masculinity that I have presented here in the discussion, along with the idea of men having to defend themselves. Of special note is the visual of *re-engulfment* that he discusses below; again, this being another match for the analogy of masculinity as an ocean. Brod stated:

[M]asculinity appears as a defensive reaction formation against earlier maternal identification, rather than as a primary ground of identity. Emphasis is placed on the difficulty and pain of the male’s rejection of and by the mother, so that female rather than male development emerges as a more continuous and secure process, with the result that masculinity is always fragile, requiring strong defensive mechanisms against re-engulfment within the feminine. The violence that accompanies male domination is therefore in this new conceptualization not evidence of some deep aggressive instinct constituting some essence of masculinity, but rather evidence of the fragility of masculine identity, of precisely the lack of depth to which it can be internalized. Masculine identity is at best a temporary achievement, standing always under the threat of regressive dissolution. Hence the need to marshal and deploy massive resources of aggression in its defence [British spelling as-is from text]. (p. 477)

I found the last part of this paragraph extremely meaningful, because by my guesses, the author was using the military-related vocabulary on purpose as a metaphor for the aggression communicated by the rules of masculinity. I also feel that the aforementioned quote from Fisher (1972) about men being “hollow fortresses, safe from attack” also was used to illustrate that purpose (p. 55).

Recall Adam talking about his experience as a student and parent being a “never-ending battle,” and think back to when I recently used the word “arsenal” when discussing rogue waves. And, Casey said that saying that “going to a war doesn’t make you an expert on anything. Except maybe killing.” Casey also said there was “*discomfort* with the dichotomies inherent in my multiple identities.” And in talking about discipline, Shawn said he didn’t want to be a “judge-jury-executioner.” In the literature review, there was a discussion about the invisibility of men in violence including as perpetrators and victims, remembering the statistics according to Cooper and Smith (2011) who reported that males, in comparison to women, were many times over more likely to be murdered and more likely to commit murder. And hooks (2004) talked about patriarchy and how it asks of men “that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves” (p. 66).

Also according to hooks (2004), “Men caught up in the logic of patriarchal masculinity have difficulty believing that their souls matter” (p. 148). It is of note that in this section we have heard words such as ‘caught up’ and ‘engulfed’ in terms of patriarchy. Through the discussion of rogue waves, it is clear that concepts related to water and also then to war, violence, and pain are very powerful metaphors for how men navigate the ocean that is their masculine identity.

The Double Bind of Living in a Patriarchal World

The fathers in this study live in an *in-between* area where they are confined but yet where they also have room to be free. Perhaps because they have an identity as parent, along with the identity as a student, both providing motivation and goal setting, they are able to identify with two very special and positive roles. But they still are subject to many double binds. So this section will help illustrate the origin of the rogue waves we are seeing.

As demonstrated in the literature review, masculinity from the perspective of patriarchy is all about *not* being something and experiencing masculinity “in negative terms” as in the

words of Chodorow (1999), and most importantly, dis-identifying with the feminine. I can also reference back to Bem's (1993) idea of gender polarization wherein there are presumptions based on biological sex differences. If something is sexist, it is something that "characterizes anything whatever which creates, constitutes, promotes or exploits any irrelevant or impertinent marking of the distinction between the sexes" (p. 18). Through the notions of gender polarization and sexism, it can be seen that problems occur when differences are assumed based on the male-female binary.

In *Daring Greatly*, Brown (2012) referenced Marilyn Frye and her birdcage analogy of oppression included at the beginning of this chapter. Frye (1983) explained the aim of the analogy as such:

It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced. (p. 5)

This particular analogy reminded me of the "inside American joke" that is fatherhood in the United States, as described by one of the participants. In general, men have privilege and are seen as having power, and one would not expect them to be held back. In talking to a father I know who went through a divorce years ago, he told me that he was aware of the privilege he'd experienced his whole life. But through his experience in the courts, it was the first time he knew what it was to not have privilege. He said he felt powerless.

So, if you look again at the birdcage, and back up and take in all of the prescriptions placed on men, especially those placed on men as fathers, one can see how single fathers are contained by the wires of the cage. What the birdcage is symbolizing is a double bind. Frye (1983) defines the double bind as: "situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation" (p. 2).

The term double bind found its origins in psychological literature in the 1950's, with the term being used by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland (1956) in regards to their research on schizophrenia. We normally hear the term double bind in regards to women and the incongruent messages surrounding the topic of women and work. For example, women should have it all but are judged when others think they are placing work over family yet are still expected to succeed in the homemaker role.

But we can use the idea of the double bind in looking at men, as well. In particular, Goldberg (2009) explains with clarity the various “impossible binds” between which men find themselves caught:

The male in our culture finds himself in countless “damned if you do, damned if you don't” no-win binds. He is constantly being affected by gross inconsistencies—between what he had been taught was “masculine” behavior as a boy and what is expected of him as an adult; between inner needs and social pressures; and between contradictory expectations in the many roles he has to play. He is *psychologically fragmented* [italics added] by these many contradictory demands. For survival's sake, he is literally forced into functioning in a machine-like, emotionally attached, and extremely repressed way. In other words, the traditional male façade—cool, detached, controlled, guarded, and disengaged—is a protective mechanism that allows him to respond simply to external cues or inputs, like a programmed computer, rather than having to wrestle with constant conflict and ambiguity. (p. 104)

Goldberg then addressed 19 separate binds that men experience, and I will list a few below as follows which spoke to me in context of this study:

- The Gender Bind
- The Child-Rearing Bind
- The Identity Bind
- The Spontaneity Bind

Firstly, the Gender Bind relates to the bond that is forged between a mother and son, only for the son to “[a]s if by magic, by the time he reaches the age of five or six he is expected to

become 'all boy.' The heavy female component to his identity must be repressed" (Goldberg, 2009, p. 104). Goldberg then states,

Either way he loses: If he is in touch with an expressive of his feminine component he may be subject to great feelings of anxiety and humiliation. If he successfully manages to repress, disown, and deny this critical part of himself he will have to live as an incomplete person, alienated from an important part of himself and consequently susceptible to emotional and interpersonal rigidity and numerous psychological and psycho-physiological problems that result from this repression. (p. 105)

The Gender Bind plays out in the fathers who expressed being taught to not show emotion when a child, even when injured. It also comes to mind for the fathers who told me their own dads were emotionally absent and we wonder how they learned to restrict their emotions.

The Child Rearing Bind very clearly illustrates the effects of patriarchy on the single fathers in my study. The description provided by Goldberg was specific to strains between a husband and wife who are raising a child in a relationship, but I still find it very applicable to single fathers. Goldberg (2009) stated:

Either way he loses: If he tries to involve himself heavily in the child rearing he may be resented for having a divisive influence. If he tries to stay out of the picture he may be resented for being a passive, uninvolved father. (p. 108)

Remember that some of the fathers in this study felt judged by others for either being too lax in discipline or too overprotective. And recall the surprise the men felt in the reactions of others when people found out they were single fathers, almost in disbelief that they were so committed to their children. So in this bind lays the foundation for the paradox that is masculinity and how men who are fathers can find themselves in a lose-lose situation.

Another bind related to the fathers in this study would be the Identity Bind. This mainly addresses who a man must be at work for example, in comparison to how he lives his life at home. Goldberg (2009) stated:

At work, if he is success- and achievement-oriented, he will develop a study of being dominant, aggressive, emotionally controlled and detached. At home with his family, however, he will try to be tender, empathic, sensitive, selfless, warm, and caring.

Either way he loses: If he tries to be an emotionally integrated, unified, whole person, he will either be too soft at work or too harsh at home. If he tries to be all things to all people, the aggressor at work and the lover at home, he will have to split up his personality, controlling and monitoring his responses in each setting and paying the price of being overly controlled and *only partially himself in both settings* [italics added]. (p. 108)

The fathers in this study seem to be free to express themselves and their emotional side at home with their children. They also felt free to do that with me in our interview setting. However, the topic of who they are at work versus who they are at home, emotionally, was not addressed via this research. I would venture a guess that the way they present themselves in the working world is much different than the picture they presented to me. This area is an idea for future research, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

On a related note having to do with family, we have the Spontaneity Bind. Goldberg (2009) begins by saying:

As an adult male he is often accused of not being spontaneous, of being afraid to let go and be playful and uninhibited. He is told that he is too self-conscious. When he does let go and expresses himself in a spontaneous, uninhibited style he may be likely to make other people uncomfortable and embarrassed.

Either way he loses: If he is serious in his attitude he is told to loosen up, not be so rigid, inhibited, and self-conscious. If he behaves in a spontaneous, free, and uninhibited way, others may become uncomfortable and accuse him of making a fool out of himself, call him childish, and label his behavior inappropriate. (p. 113)

The Spontaneity Bind, like the Child Rearing Bind, reminded me of those fathers who said others view them as overprotective, and those that find that they are not enough of a disciplinarian. Or when a father mentions he is afraid others in public would call child services on him because of his decision to leave his child alone in the car, even though he has made an informed decision on his own that his child is old enough and that he fully trusts his child. Or,

remember Adam's story of tickling and laughing with his baby in the restroom as he changed his diaper. He was being free and having fun with his child, but in the above keywords used by Goldberg, Adam's behavior made someone 'uncomfortable,' and this person more than likely thought he was being 'inappropriate'.

In the words of Goldberg, with each one of the binds, we have seen that he summarizes the implications with the phrase, "*Either way he loses.*" The men in this study are definitely finding themselves in many double bind situations, held captive by the biases placed on them by society in general and by the legal system. But are they oppressed? More discussion will be provided on that at the very end of this chapter as a conclusion to this dissertation.

The Role of School in their Lives: Making Perseverance Possible

My data show that when these men experience the drawbacks and challenges of being a single father in college, these disadvantages play out in many different areas of their lives. But viewing it through the lens of school provides a context so we can see how these challenges are evidenced in their education and their lives as students, in particular.

The one thing that all fathers in this study have in common is a propensity for perseverance, both in their education and in life in general. Along with that comes sacrifice and that is very much a part of illustrating what these fathers have given up to be in school in order to provide a good life for their children. Remember Shawn's advice to other single dads, above, which perfectly sums up the idea of perseverance in a nutshell:

Keep working hard at what you're doing, I mean, to be that role model. You just got to keep doin' the next right thing, and be there for your kids. It's not gonna be easy, not at all. But it's that, it's the perseverance and the hard work, the dedication, and the sacrifice, it'll all be worth it.

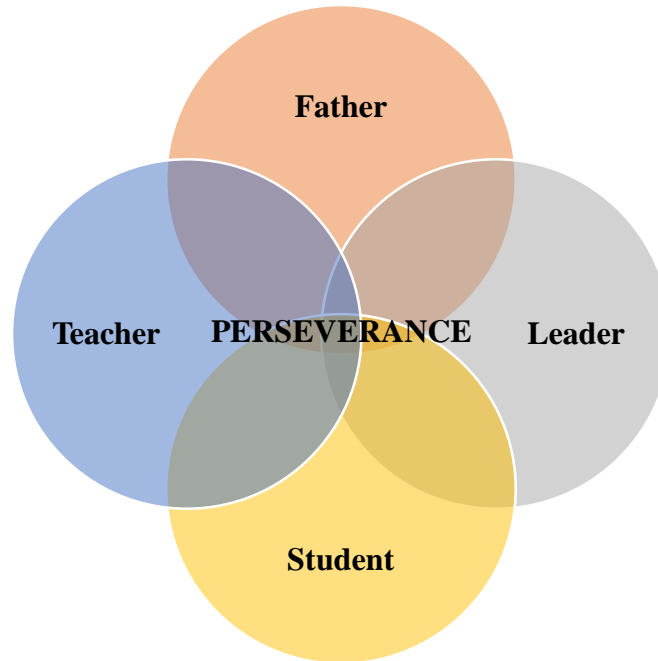


Figure 6. Intersection of Identities which Contribute to Perseverance

Again recall the “three words” question I asked of the fathers. This was a very meaningful question, and it led them to truly begin describing their personal experience of being a single father. The responses were interesting, in that most provided one positive aspect, one negative, and then another concept that seems to be a type of connecting concept. One could see this connecting concept as the link which makes perseverance possible. Please see Table 2 for a depiction of this phenomenon:

Table 2.

Three Words or Phrases to Describe the Participants' Single Father Experience

<u>Father</u>	<u>Three Words or Phrases</u>		
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Connecting Concept</u>
Adam	<i>Devotion</i>	<i>Frustration</i>	<i>Patience</i>
Ben	<i>Inspiration</i>	<i>Lonely</i>	<i>Determined</i>
Casey	<i>Hopeful</i>	<i>Lonely</i>	<i>Rewarding</i>
Dan	<i>Empowering</i>	<i>Terrifying, but worth it</i>	<i>Get out what you put into it</i>
Erik	<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Sacrifice</i>	<i>Dedication</i>
Shawn	<i>Really exciting and fun</i>	<i>Frustrating</i>	<i>Rewarding</i>

The connecting concepts of patience, determination, the rewarding nature of the experience, and getting out of it what you put into it are all related to the motivation that the fathers have experienced in their lives. The understanding of their experience has ensured that the fathers have persevered. Collectively, one can view all of these words as a description of the phenomenon at hand – the experience of the single father in college.

There are two words that we see repeated twice above – lonely and rewarding. This probably epitomizes my concept of the sadness paradox from the first part of the discussion. The majority of things in the above table is positive. Even the negative things are not extremely negative. But all of these feelings co-exist at the same time. This also reflects my perception of it overall being a very happy and positive experience, but then there is a sadness that runs through it. The following quote from Adam sums this idea up perfectly:

I have done way too many things in my life where it's been I have done everything the right way and still come out, losing. You know what, that's part of life....And you're still gonna get knocked down some days. And you still gotta get up and keep goin'.

An area that is clearly affected by occupying the additional role of student would be time for self, and the role strain that comes along with that, and possibly a need to compartmentalize their lives to handle all the very important yet competing roles of father and student. As an example, remember Adam's routine being a lot more complicated because of having a child with autism, and then you add on top of that breaking up with a fiancée, and moving to a new city and then returning to school for a second degree. And, keep in mind that Adam's relationship with his fiancée broke apart mainly because of a conflict over him *wanting* to be in school.

It is clear throughout that school complicates the men's lives – however none of the fathers mentioned that they regretted being in school nor indicated that it stressed them out to a large extent. So in sum, it seems as though school is still a very positive factor. Remember that according to Goode (1960), role strain happens when there is difficulty in “fulfilling role obligations” (p. 483). And we also recall Goode's words, saying that “we begin to experience strain, worry, anxiety, or the pressures of others if we devote more time and attention to one role obligation than we feel we should, or than others feel we should” (p. 488). Even though school is most likely a “net positive” in their lives, using the words of Casey, the idea of role strain clearly intersects with being a student. Naturally, the strain from all areas of their lives is a result of the guilt and shame the participants feel because of how they experience being men and parents.

In addition to the role of student, the role as leader or teacher in context being a role model for their children is vital to the success of these fathers. Being a leader or teacher is a fitting description of their roles in an academic sense because of the high value they place on education. School seems to be a regulating factor in their lives, and it provides some general benefits such as stress-relief and friendships or connections with others. One could even extend this idea into the idea that being in school has helped them cope with the challenges in their

lives. In addition, school provides time to bond with their kids over homework and teach their children the value of education. Lastly, it provided structure and helped them with goal setting. If you roll all these benefits into one, one can see why school has had such a positive impact on their lives and how it is a fitting illustration of perseverance.

Recall how Erik told of how he gets recharged from working on his thesis, or how he met “life-long” friends in college. Shawn mentioned school has been a “pleasant surprise,” and Dan said school has been a great contributor of structure to his life. These are just a few examples of the many benefits school has afforded to the fathers in this study. It is clear that for these dads, school is a very rewarding and motivating factor in their lives.

However, woven throughout the findings, we saw examples of how the societal bias against men and fathers plays out in the context of school. First of all, the men felt left out in the academic research. Even though none of them would be considered experts academically on this topic, they just knew they were being ignored and that it was “all about the moms” as Ben said. Dan did feel like in his field, that research on boys in general was lacking. The reason this is important to mention is because it ties into their readiness to help me raise awareness about single fathers and contribute to my research.

Fathers also reported feeling dismissed or labeled by their children’s school at times. Whether that was Adam who adeptly handled the situation with his son’s minor head wound but was discounted by school staff and who also feels left out when events at school seem to focus on the involvement of mothers, or Dan who felt ignored by his daughter’s school when it comes to diagnosing behavioral issues. Or, remember Ben who said his son was labeled “at-risk” simply because of the fact he was a child of divorce, or when he described feeling like the “weirdo”

coming into the school because he felt he was the out-of-towner that was being disregarded in many cases.

The academic support dads felt on campus was good in most cases, however a few situations stand out to illustrate the challenges of being a single father in college. Shawn seems to really respect his advisor but in the same breath said he feels that the advisor underestimates his abilities, despite his recent run of being on the Dean's List for multiple semesters. Ben also had concerns about his department because he felt rumors were going around about him and had recounted some situations with people from the department who did not accept his attempts at reaching out. He even reported feeling "worthless" after a particular situation with a female instructor.

Shawn said he looked forward to not being in school because that would lessen the financial difficulties on him and would allow him "stability" and a "steady income." But recall that Adam sadly already had a negative experience a job search, where he told of how the employer was so interested in hiring him for an internship almost on the spot until the person found out he couldn't just yank his child out of school to go there immediately and then the tune changed. He felt like they just dropped him because of that, and all enthusiasm that had been shown through the extensive phone interview was sadly gone.

The fathers also reported some reactions of surprise in others, in context of them being in school. Recall Shawn's story about how some of his fellow students could not believe that he had a child without being married, or Dan who encountered a lot of surprise both in the area of his age and the fact he was a single father and described instructors being "shocked" and students being surprised as well. But at the same time, he saw "respect" in those reactions.

Even though the academic support was good overall, they did not feel that campus offered much to them as fathers so in this sense they feel invisible on campus. One described not being the “priority” when it comes to on-campus living, and probably most troubling was the lack of knowledge on the part of the fathers of the childcare options on campus or difficulties they’d had securing quality short-term childcare while they’ve been in school. A few fathers, when asked what they would most like to see on campus, mentioned a strong need for legal services.

Yes, they are college students but their positive identity as fathers makes them a very awkward fit for Guyland—the world many other college men are a part of. The single dads in this study don’t fit in Guyland, and don’t ascribe to typical male stereotypes in most cases. Because of that, patriarchy exerts its pressures down on them in different areas of their lives because they aren’t following the usual rules. They feel dismissed or ignored, and have lost privileges that have usually been automatically provided to them as men. They are victims of the same system that gives them privilege. They don’t fit in the patriarchal world of Guyland, and importantly, they have actually made decisions to actively distance themselves from it. Being fathers who have actually made that choice to dis-identify with patriarchal attitudes is something that makes the unfair treatment of these dads stand out. That is what this discussion chapter is all about —dissecting what is going on beneath the surface of the otherwise positive experience of being a parent.

Vulnerability: Men and Emotional Intelligence

To always wear a mask as a way of asserting masculine presence is to always live the lie, to be perpetually deprived of an authentic sense of identity and well-being. (hooks, 2004, p. 138)

The fathers in this study were in touch with their emotions and very willing to talk about difficult times and even very sensitive issues. One of the fathers even told me that his father sexually abused a family member. Keep in mind that this was shared with me very quickly, about half way into our first interview. Revealing that information showed a great deal of vulnerability and courage.

Therefore, I'm making a claim that the men in this study exhibited a healthy degree of emotional intelligence. But with that comes having to deal with the double bind that society imposes on men who are in touch with their emotions. According to Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004), the notion of emotional intelligence is defined as:

[T]he capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (p. 197)

And to explain the concept further, Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes, and Wendorf (2001) have provided an overview of specific theories of emotional intelligence.

Below I will refer to two of the theories they addressed:

Gardner's (1993) *theory of multiple intelligences* encompasses intrapersonal intelligence, including knowledge of one's own emotions and thoughts....Saarni's (1999) *theory of emotional competence* is similar to other theories of emotional intelligence but places an additional emphasis on the social context of emotional functioning and on emotional self-efficacy.

Goleman (1995) hypothesized that emotional intelligence plays a role in establishing and maintaining relationships, and Saarni (1999) posited that the related construct of emotional competence is a crucial component of social development and contributes to the quality of interpersonal relationships...Because emotional intelligence, theoretically, includes the ability to understand and regulate others' *as well as one's own emotions*,

emotional intelligence may be related both to characteristics that build relationships and to the quality of those relationships [italics added]. Four building blocks of relationships may be empathy, the ability to self-monitor in social situations, good social skills, and cooperation. (p. 524)

One typically may assume that men have a lesser ability when it comes to practicing emotional intelligence, due to it being acceptable (and *preferred*) in society for men to not show emotion except that of anger. In the study by Schutte et al. (2001) which looked at 77 persons on a university campus, the results showed “no difference between the emotional-intelligence scores or the social-skills scores of the men and the women.” Furthermore, in an article by Goleman (2011), he addresses the topic of whether or not women have more emotional intelligence (EI) than men and explains it’s not easy to determine:

There are many tests of emotional intelligence, and most seem to show that women tend to have an edge over men when it comes to these basic skills for a happy and successful life...

On the other hand, it's not that simple. For instance, some measures suggest women are on average better than men at some forms of empathy, and men do better than women when it comes to managing distressing emotions. Whenever you talk about such gender differences in behavior, your [sic] are referring to two different Bell Curves, one for men and one for women, that largely overlap. What this means is that any given man might be as good or better as any woman at empathy, and a woman as good as or better than a specific man at handling upsets....

Neither is better - both have advantages. The male tune-out works well when there's a need to insulate yourself against distress so you can stay calm while others around you are falling apart - and focus on finding a solution to an urgent problem. And the female tendency to stay tuned in helps enormously to nurture and support others in emotional trying circumstances...(para 2-3 & 9)

So, men may have equal ability when practicing empathy but in practice it may appear different in comparison to women. In my opinion, the single fathers in my study showed both logic in solving people-related issues, and sensitivity in being aware of their children’s emotions. The emotional intelligence skills of the men in my study was demonstrated in moments that ranged from talking about their holding children for first time at the birth, looking back on their

experience in the early days when their children were younger, talking about their legal battles, and even when they were telling about their advice to other single dads. The men talked about demonstrating empathy and compassion, and being considerate towards others. They demonstrated the ability of reflection in multiple ways.

I experienced moments like this over and over, where men showed emotion such as sadness or frustration—feelings that amazed and overwhelmed me. After some of the interviews, I left feeling very emotionally drained because of the depth of emotions and storytelling experience that I was so lucky to have been a part of. It also made me realize that I had created a comfortable space for them and had some sort of ability to help these men feel comfortable enough to share this information with me – even though I was basically a stranger to them.

The dads used humor often in telling me their stories. As mentioned in the Methods chapter, I decided to leave the notations about laughter in the transcripts, to document the use of humor, because the timing of it seemed to play an important role in what they were conveying to me. In a study by Yip and Martin (2006) about humor and emotional intelligence, the findings showed that

self-enhancing humor was found to be positively correlated with emotional management...The use of humor as a coping strategy and ability to maintain a sense of humor in the face of adversity appears to be one aspect of a more general ability to manage and regulate one's emotions....The two positive humor styles were positively related to personal disclosure...suggesting that humor may be one way of revealing personal information about oneself to others. (pp. 1205-1206)

There was evidence of self-deprecating humor in particular with the dads, with two specifically referring to their appearance in the sense of their weight, revealing the comments to me in a humorous way. Adam had said that when he was in grade school, he was “the short, fat kid.” In two different places in Casey’s interviews, he also referred to his weight either as him becoming “chubby again” in the past, or another time when he referred to himself as “old and

fat” when I asked him about his experience while dating. Also along the topic of age, recall Ben’s comment about himself saying he’s the “creepy old guy.” This was definitely said in jest – however there has to be something else behind this, something possibly very painful.

Guilt and Shame

This is...the great secret of American manhood: *We are afraid of other men.* Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay....Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed...Our fear is the fear of humiliation. We are ashamed to be afraid. (Kimmel, 2004, p. 88)

When I was writing my findings and discussion chapters, my advisor recommended I take a look at book written by author Brené Brown, a researcher who focuses on shame and vulnerability. Being able to read Brown’s (2012) book, *Daring Greatly*, during this stage of my writing provided me with a good lens through which I could view my findings and begin to dissect what their implications were. Guilt and shame were topics that arose a lot in the sense of ‘dad guilt’ in my research, and despite these feelings, it was evident that emotionally, the men were still able to be very vulnerable – to themselves, to their children, and also to me.

I find the preceding quote from Kimmel to be very poignant in that it draws a clear connection between the themes of shame, fear, masculinity, and homophobia. It also continues the discussion about how shame causes men in American culture to hide behind a mask because they are afraid of showing their true selves to others. Also remember in the literature review that Pollack (1998) stated boys go through what he termed a “shame hardening process” (p. 11). I really appreciate this phrase because it is a helpful visual when thinking about the rigid rules men are subjected to in society. And in contrast, Brown uses the words *shame resistance* throughout her book to describe the traits someone has when they don’t allow themselves to be destroyed by shame. And also according to Brown (2012), “[W]e often use the terms *embarrassment, guilt,*

humiliation, and *shame* interchangeably” (p. 71) but according to her research, they are very different concepts.

Brown (2012) defines *shame* as the “fear of disconnection” or more fully, “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.” (p. 69). Traditional masculine ideals espouse that being disconnected is an accepted practice for a man and it is a common stereotype many believe. What I think is so troubling when thinking about men and Brown’s above definition of shame is that men are *taught* to disconnect. But in turn, they experience shame in so many areas of their lives because deep inside they fear that disconnection. In my mind, this is an impossible and very unfortunate bind in which to be put.

Brown (2012) then defines guilt as follows, drawing the distinction between shame and guilt: “The majority of shame researchers and clinicians agree that the difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the difference between ‘I am bad’ [shame] and ‘I did something bad’ [guilt]” (p. 71). Between the two, shame has much more power to be harmful. She explains it as such:

We feel guilty when we hold up something we’ve done or failed to do against our values and find they don’t match up. It’s an uncomfortable feeling, but one that’s helpful. The psychological discomfort, something similar to cognitive dissonance, is what motivates meaningful change. Guilt is just as powerful as shame, but its influence is positive, while shame’s is destructive...*shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we can change and do better* [italics added]. (p. 72)

Brown also compares the ideas of shame with humiliation and included a quote from Donald Klein who said: “People believe they deserve their shame; they do not believe they deserve their humiliation.” (p. 73).

It is interesting when one can take the concept of guilt, and flip it on its head, and think about it actually having a positive influence. Take for example, Shawn who talked about

“imagining guilt in the future” when he was wondering if he was taking his son away from other people during holidays or being able to have fun in the summer. He was reflecting on his own behavior, thinking about whether or not his actions match up with how he feels about who his son is able to spend time with and when. And with Adam, who talked about feeling guilt when he puts his child to bed, thinking “I could have let him stay up a little longer. We could have read a story tonight.” These types of feelings may lead Adam to reassess his need for time with his son, balancing it with time for himself and the time he takes for his studies in the future.

Remember that Erik does not live very near to his son, and he expressed guilt over chasing his own dreams in trying to obtain an education. It made him feel bad about missing out on the time he should have had with his son. And Shawn also related feelings of guilt when it comes to job opportunities in his field, in that he said the “ultimate question” had to unfortunately be “career or child.”

Contrast those types of comments with Adam, again, who talked about feeling shame through others in his son’s scout troop who he perceives pass judgment on him about why he’s late or doesn’t have a job or feeling like a “bump on a log” when his girlfriend pays for things when they are together. Or Casey, who talked about leaving home when he was young because he didn’t want to be a “burden” on his mom. In these examples they don’t just think they’ve done something bad, they feel that they *are bad*, in the words of Brown.

At least guilt can be seen as something productive – however shame is what is worrisome. Brown (2012) states that shame “keeps us small, resentful, and afraid” (p. 64). So how do we move past shame? Brown believes that the cure for shame is being able to be vulnerable. Vulnerability itself, as defined by Brown is “uncertainty, risk, and emotional

exposure” (p. 34). She eloquently explains our incorrect assumptions about vulnerability and that it is *strength*, not weakness:

The perception that vulnerability is weakness is the most widely accepted myth...*and* the most dangerous. When we spend our lives pushing away and protecting ourselves from feeling vulnerable or from being perceived as too emotional, we feel contempt when others are less capable or willing to mask feelings, suck it up, and soldier on...vulnerability isn't good or bad: It's not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. (p. 33)

If we look at vulnerability in the context of masculinity, the act of showing emotion or crying is generally perceived as weak. This paragraph above screams of traditional masculine values—looking at the ideas of *masking feelings* or *soldiering on*, for example. So we can infer from this that society does not approve of men who want to be vulnerable. In Brown's (2012) research, she said when her team asked the question “How does vulnerability feel,” one of the answers from a participant⁴ was as follows: “It's taking off the mask and hoping the real me isn't too disappointing” (p. 37).

The following list illustrates, according to Brown (2012), how men tend to experience shame in many different ways:

- Shame is failure. At work. On the football field. In your marriage. In bed. With money. With your children. It doesn't matter—shame is failure.

⁴ This comment was provided in a summary of comments from her participants. It was not made clear in the book if any of the comments in this particular section were from men or from women. Although, the comment itself does seem to fit the idea that a male participant could have easily said this so that is my assumption but I wanted to note for clarity that this point was not clear.

- Shame is being wrong. Not doing it wrong, but being wrong.
- Shame is a sense of being defective.
- Shame happens when people think you're soft. It's degrading and shaming to be seen as anything but tough.
- Revealing any weakness is shaming. Basically, shame is weakness.
- Showing fear is shameful. You can't show fear. You can't be afraid—no matter what.
- Shame is being seen as “the guy you can shove up against the lockers.”
- Our worst fear is being criticized or ridiculed—either one of these is extremely shaming. (pp. 91-92)

Brown then ends this passage with a powerful statement: “Basically, men live under the pressure of one unrelenting message: Do not be perceived as weak” (pp. 91-92). A bit later she then says, “It didn't matter if the man was eighteen or eighty, if I asked, ‘What's the shame message?’ the answer was ‘Don't be a pussy’ (p. 92).”

Brown (2012) tells in her book of the analogy of a box that she uses when she talks to men. She said it could be viewed as “something that looked like a shipping crate—to explain how shame traps men.... for men, every rule comes back to the same mandate: ‘Don't be weak’” (p. 93). The following powerful passage is Brown's depiction of a story that she tells about when she was interviewing some college men, on the topic of the “box:”

I'll never forget when a twenty-year old man who was part of a small group of college students that I was interviewing said, “Let me show you the box.” I knew he was a tall guy, but when he stood up, it was clear that he was at least six foot four. He said, “Imagine living like this,” as he crouched down and pretended that he was stuffed inside a small box.

Still hunched over, he said, “You really only have three choices. You spend your life fighting to get out, throwing punches at the side of the box and hoping it will break. You

always feel angry and you're always swinging. Or you just give up. You don't give a shit about anything." At that point, he slumped over on the ground. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Then he stood up, shook his head, and said, "Or you stay high so you don't really notice how unbearable it is. That's the easiest way..."

After the group interview, he told me about his experiences growing up. He had been a passionate artist as a child, and he winced as he described how he was sure from an early age that he'd be happy if he could spend his life painting and drawing. He said that one day he was in the kitchen with his dad and uncle. His uncle pointed to a collection of his art that was plastered on the refrigerator and said jokingly to his father, "What? You're raising a faggot artist now?"

After that, he said, his father, who had always been neutral about his art, forbade him from taking classes. Even his mother, who had always been so proud of his talent, agreed that it was "a little too girly." He told me that he'd drawn a picture of his house the day before all of this happened, and to that day it was the last thing he'd ever drawn. (pp. 93-94)

She then concluded the story with this:

That night I wept for him and for all of us who never got to see his work. I think about him all of the time and hope he has reconnected with his art. I know it's a tremendous loss for him, and I'm equally positive that the world is missing out. (pp. 93-94)

Found within this story, we see the effects that living in patriarchy has on men. We see men policing other men's behavior, and even women doing the same. We also see mention of coping behaviors to numb the pain, plus we see rejection of the feminine and homophobia as well. And over all of this, there is just shame and sadness which I have to admit almost brought tears to my eyes when I read it.

The word mask has already been used a few times in this chapter, and remember the "mask of masculinity" itself, mentioned in the literature review. In the study by Edwards and Jones (2009), a participant talked about putting "his man face on" (pp. 214 & 216). On a related note, Katz (1999) and Brown (2012) both use the analogy of the Wizard of Oz as another metaphor for the mask of masculinity. Katz (1999) said that the movie scene "where Toto pulls back the curtain to reveal a nervous, tragic man pretending to be the Great and Powerful Oz

represents more than just a classic moment in American cinematic history” (para. 1). And Brown (2012) talked about the “small, curtain-concealed box that the wizard stands in as he’s controlling his mechanical ‘great and powerful’ Oz image” (p. 94).

So whether it’s a mask or a box, or the curtain in front of the Wizard of Oz, it all presents an idea of men feeling a pressure to cover up their true selves, which in turn does not allow them to be vulnerable. Thinking about the moment in the film when the curtain is drawn back – is that not the epitome of vulnerability, when his true identity is revealed? Connecting the box back to shame, Brown (2012) states:

As I’ve learned more about men and their experiences with shame, I still see that image of a shipping crate with a big stamp across it that reads, “CAUTION: Do Not Be Perceived as Weak.” I see how boys are issued a crate when they’re born. It’s not too crowded when they’re toddlers. They’re still small and can move around a bit. They can cry and hold on to mamma, but as they grow older, there’s less and less wiggle room. By the time they’re grown men, it’s suffocating. (p. 94)

In conclusion, I wanted to end this section with another quote from Brown (2012) which I feel sums up the courage the men from my study showed in sharing with me their stories, and why I feel their words are evidence of their ability to be vulnerable: “*Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage*. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness. (p. 37)

The Dangers of Disengagement: Men, Crying, and Isolation

...touch me with noble anger, And let not women’s weapons, water-drops, Stain my man’s cheeks!...I have full cause of weeping; but this heart Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws, Or e’re I’ll weep. –O fool, I shall go mad.

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (as cited in Reichbart, 2006, p. 1067)

If men are taught to not be weak, an obvious ‘solution’ for that is disengagement from the situation. Very often, this is the avoidance of tears, since crying is associated with the feminine,

and weakness, and men are taught since boyhood to avoid the shame of being seen as weak. Remember that Brown (2012) defined shame as *the fear of disconnection*. It is very interesting then, to contemplate the idea that through the very idea of teaching men to disengage and not share emotionally with others, that these taught behaviors can bring shame on—along with the dreaded disconnection and isolation that was created inside themselves and through the perception of the other.

Before we begin talking more about disengagement, for context, remember the words of Real (2002) from the literature review. He stated, “[t]he way we ‘turn boys into men’ is through injury...The very phrase ‘Be a man’ means suck it up and keep going. Disconnection is not fallout from traditional masculinity. *Disconnection is masculinity* [italics added]” (p. 78).

After my data had been collected and transcription was complete, I visited with a counselor friend of mine for some insight. I told her some of the things the fathers were saying and she said that one of the fathers sounded lonely. I told her the word lonely was a word I had already scrawled down on his transcript, so she was definitely on the same track as me. She then talked to me about a tool that she uses with clients; an analogy about a castle and moat:

When clients I work with have been hurt, often times they retreat to protect themselves. It is like they are in a castle which is surrounded by an impenetrable moat. They are protecting themselves from getting hurt by others, no one can enter, and they stay safe. At the same time this can be very isolating and not only are they preventing themselves from being hurt, they are making it difficult to let others in to love them. I talk with clients about needing to at least have a drawbridge to let that down to let in those who will love them, while still having the ability to raise the drawbridge when needed to protect themselves. (R.A. Blumhardt, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

So, allowing yourself to be lonely is like not wanting to let that drawbridge down. This analogy reminds me especially of Casey, in that he felt like he was the only person like him and because of that, he felt like few people understood him. He openly talked about compartmentalizing his life and seeing people as temporary. And in addition, one of the three

words he used to describe his experience as a single father was the word *lonely itself*. Recall how he quite poignantly said that “I don’t know of a place where people like me exist” and how he had some reservations about visiting the counseling center on campus.

As we saw, the men in this study often felt dismissed, overlooked, or ignored. After feeling that way over and over again, that feeling can also lead to feeling accustomed to isolation. In the book *All about Love: New Visions*, hooks (2000a) talks about what she calls “rituals of disregard” in terms of love, and I found that these phrases were very applicable to what the single fathers in my study may be feeling:

Often our spirits have been broken again and again through rituals of disregard in which we were shamed by others or shamed ourselves....Embedded in our shame is always a sense of being unworthy. It separates. Compassion and forgiveness reconnect us. (p. 217)

Something that seemed very important in the success of these fathers is the support from their families. For example, Casey and Ben probably had the most sadness cast over their interviews, and interestingly enough they also had the least supportive families amongst the participants. These two fathers in my opinion were the loneliest of all of the participants, so I think this goes to show that a good informal support network of family and friends is critical in lessening feelings of isolation that a single father may experience.

Even though it was clear through this study that there were times the fathers had said they were taught to be tough or not to cry, they still showed emotion to me. Some cried, and some expressed frustration or were exasperated. With others that did not cry, you could tell with their tone of voice that emotion was just under the surface, or you could see tears building in their eyes at times. It was encouraging that they were trying to engage with me as a researcher and not further isolate themselves.

Reichbart (2006), a psychoanalyst, provided a history of men's crying throughout the ages, and also presented case studies from his own practice regarding two male clients and their journey of psychoanalysis. In regards to the crying of men, he said,

As tempting as is the proposition that Western cultures have uniformly adopted the idea that crying for men is womanly and weak, it is not true. What is true is that there has often been conflict about whether it is manly to cry, and that there have been vastly different standards in various Western cultures, at various times, and even contradictory standards at the same time.

To illustrate his discussion of men and crying, Reichbart (2006) used the story of Shakespeare's *King Lear* as the backdrop in his article to discuss the issue:

In a play written four centuries ago about an elderly king who grieves the betrayal of his daughters and ultimately mourns his best-loved daughter's death, Shakespeare elaborates on the special prohibition of weeping for men: King Lear prefers to go mad or even die rather than express his grief in tears he considers womanly. In a sense, he experiences crying as castrative. He stresses that he is a man, not a woman or—by his emphasis—a child, and he rejects crying, yearning to experience in its stead the purportedly more manly manifestation of “noble anger.” (p. 1068).

So, the danger of disengaging from a situation emotionally—or of holding back your tears—can have negative effects. Reichbart (2006) stated that “In many ways it seems apparent that holding back from a spontaneous process by not crying will have deleterious psychological consequences in the long run” (p. 1091).

Reichbart (2006) also referenced Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus cried “every day for seven years,” (p. 1071) and he listed a number of other male characters from the classic poem who also showed tears. Reichbart also said:

There are, then, in different cultures, in different eras, under different circumstances, and even in the same culture, varying standards of appropriate manly behavior regarding crying. This does not gainsay the basic proposition, however, that there tends to be a traditional notion today, to which some men with an internalized prohibition against crying adhere, that crying is unmanly. It is that traditional notion to which King Lear subscribed, until transformed by play's end into a less narcissistic and more feeling father. (p. 1072)

In his article, Reichbart (2006) also addressed that one of the goals of psychoanalysis was encouraging the patient to be spontaneous, in a stream of consciousness way when telling their stories in a session in that they “encourage the patient to say things he often automatically censors, whether they appear to the patient too trivial, too embarrassing, too angry, too sarcastic, too perverse, or too humiliating.” (p. 1091). He also cited one of Freud’s analogies about looking out the window of a train: “Act as though...you were a traveler sitting next to the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views which you see outside” (p. 1091).

When I read this section of the article, I immediately thought about the venue I had provided to the fathers in my study. It was an outlet to tell their stories and share their feelings, in a way they may never have done before. In looking back at the conversations with these men, I do feel like they described whatever came to their mind. Very rarely did I ever get the feeling they were holding back something they had started to say.

However, one example I do remember comes from Adam’s interview, when he stopped himself short of saying more negative things about his son’s mom and he said, “I’ll say a lot more about her when there’s not a ...microphone.” Even though he does not care for his son’s mom, he never called her any names, and must have felt it would be disrespectful to say much more than he already had and chose to keep those comments to himself. And other examples come from my conversations with Casey and skirting sensitive topics, especially when he was talking about his experience related to his experience in the military and adjusting to civilian life after the military.

Remember when Shawn talked about the phrase “boys don’t cry” and how his father’s outlook was “you don’t cry...don’t show your emotions, real man, you’re tough, walk it off, rub

some dirt on it.” But yet, he somehow developed into this very sensitive man, in my opinion, talking about how he encourages his own son to cry and talked about how he would cry when separated from his son early on. Or with Ben, even though he grew up in a fairly gendered environment with all boys and a father who was not around much, he became emotional quite quickly in our first interview and cried twice during the first 10 minutes. But still, remember that he said, “I didn’t think I’d be like *this*,” expressing some shame over showing that emotion.

I found it important to include another quote from Reichbart (2006), in which he tells about how crying is “not only an inevitable part of life; it is essential to survival” (p. 1093) and continues on to explain how crying is necessary from the moment we are born, bringing it back to King Lear and how he evolved by the end of the play:

Most immediately the infant cries when hungry, and then learns that its cries are answered by its being fed and satiated. The infant cries when cold or hurt, and these cries are answered by relief of the child’s distress. Thus, the natural tendency to cry acquires meaning—it is part of the infant’s first language—and is reinforced by maternal behavior. Initially, human beings cry to survive. As Lear, who enters almost into a disquisition on tears during the play, states when he finally accepts that it is an integral part of being human to cry: “We came crying hither / Thou knowst, the first time we smell the air / We wawl and cry.” (pp. 1093-1094)

As I’ve shown here, crying is something natural that we learned from birth as a part of our own survival. But yet I’ve mentioned that little boys from early on are taught that crying is not what boys do, so then they disengage for their survival. It is sad to think that men may feel like King Lear – that they would rather die or go crazy than cry. The next time you see a boy or a man cry, send them a message that it is okay to cry, whether that be with an embrace or your words—or, cry with them. To take this idea further, to show women’s responsibility in confronting patriarchy, I will conclude with a passage from hooks (2004) from her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*.

A feminist future for men can enable transformation and healing. As advocates of feminism who seek to end sexism and sexist oppression, we must be willing to hear men

speaking their pain. Only when we courageously face male pain without turning away will we model for men the emotional awareness healing requires.

To heal, men must learn to feel again. They must learn to break the silence, to speak the pain. Often men, to speak the pain, first turn to the women in their lives and are refused a hearing. In many ways women have bought into the patriarchal masculine mystique. Asked to witness a male expressing feelings, to listen to those feelings and respond, they may simply turn away. There was a time when I would often ask the man in my life to tell me his feelings. And yet when he began to speak, I would either interrupt or silence him by crying, sending him the message that his feelings were too heavy for anyone to bear, so it was best if he kept them to himself...I did not want to hear the pain of my male partner because hearing it required that I surrender my investment in the patriarchal ideal of the male as protector of the wounded. If he was wounded, then how could he protect me?

As I matured, as my feminist consciousness developed to include the recognition of patriarchal abuse of men, I could hear male pain. (p. 142-143)

Through all of my research, I have come to the understanding that women are the key to understanding the male pain that hooks speaks of. When men are held down through the hegemonic system of patriarchy, the same system that gives them privilege, women can help by breaking through the patriarchy on behalf of men. My awareness has been raised about patriarchy and the treatment of men in our society. It has given me a new outlook on thinking about comments I have heard from males in my life or others around me. It's given me a new perspective to help me look for what is going on underneath the surface of their behavior: Where are these rogue waves coming from? And, how do I learn to pay attention more to that pain and possibly help to resolve it by listening for that underlying message.

Implications

We all know that a great deal of trouble surrounds issues of difference in this society, trouble relating to gender and race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class. A huge store of knowledge, from scientific research to passionate memoirs, documents this trouble and leaves no doubt that it causes enormous amounts of injustice and unnecessary suffering.

For all that we know, however, we still don't seem to have an understanding of the trouble we're in that allows us to do something about it. We are, both individually and

collectively, stuck in a kind of paralysis that perpetuates the trouble and its human consequences.

All of us are part of the problem. There is no way to avoid that as long as we live in the world. But we could also make ourselves part of the solution if only we knew how. (Johnson, 2006, p. vii)

In the voices of the men whom I studied, the power of the research I have conducted becomes clear, when I hear them thanking me over and over again for doing this research. I feel confident that this research will reach at least someone who needs it, whether that be the participants in this study, other men or fathers, and even for women as they parent young boys. I hope it will provide a greater understanding from first-person accounts about how men are viewed in society.

For me, the implications of this research it is all about awareness and starting a conversation and using the words from Johnson (2006), getting us “unstuck” (p. vii). Johnson stated that the “only thing that gives us the potential to make a difference” is to “see not only where the trouble comes from, but how we as individuals are connected to it” (p. vii).

I have had many a conversation with friends, colleagues and family members and have gained interesting perspective through what they have said, and I have gained confidence in myself that I am knowledgeable in this topic, and most importantly I now feel worthy of having become knowledgeable. I feel I owe it to my participants to do what I can to create whatever awareness I can.

So in this section, I will address specific implications for certain populations, including women and mothers of sons, men and other single fathers and various types of practitioners. After we review these implications, I will address some recommendations for future research which are very closely tied to the implications themselves.

For Women and Mothers of Sons

Through this dissertation, it has been clear until this point that the patriarchal value of emotional separation between a mother and son can lead to a lot of psychological impacts for young boys as they grow into men. And remember that women have a lot to teach boys about becoming men. As moms, we must reject patriarchy. hooks (2004) has said that for “[m]others who align themselves with patriarchy cannot love their sons rightly for there will always come a moment when patriarchy will ask them to sacrifice their sons” (p. 64).

We should think about the things we are teaching not just our little boys, but also our little girls, about gender norms. And when the boys and men in our lives are connected enough to us to let their guard down and show their vulnerability and emotions, embrace that and encourage it. Consider yourself honored that they were comfortable enough to be vulnerable with you.

Brown (2012) stated that if “we want to cultivate worthiness in our children, we need to make sure they know that they belong and that their belonging is unconditional” (p. 233). One way to do this is to take a slightly more gender neutral parenting approach as you feel comfortable. If before, you would have possibly scoffed if your son wanted to put on a skirt when he plays dress-up with his friends, let him wear it. If he wants to always color with a pink crayon, or wants to play with a Barbie doll, don’t scold him for it nor let anyone else scold him for it. This type of discouragement just brings shame upon boys, and it is clear how harmful shame can be, especially for men. Remember that according to Brown (2012), for men, shame equates to failure. I will leave you with something else that Brown said about shame in regards to parenting:

Shame is so painful for children because it is inextricably linked to the fear of being unlovable. For young children who are still dependent on their parents for survival—for

food, shelter, and safety—feeling unlovable is a threat to survival. *It's trauma* [italics added]. (p. 225)

For Men and Other Single Dads

I think this research has a huge opportunity to be helpful for other single fathers. And not just for those that are single fathers in college, but also any single father and even men in general. Especially for those who decided to put off college for their family, this research is meaningful because they will see men who have been successful in pursuing school, and it could be very motivating.

All of the dads made positive comments about my research topic, and I wanted to include a comment here in this section from Dan. It was very motivational for me to hear that he was so excited about what I was researching:

I *love* this research...I hope you're able to keep doing it you know, 'cause...it answers questions that I know I'm not the only person that comes up with you know. And, I think it will really *help* and I'm sure this is one of your goals as well but I think there are guys *out* there or that aren't, haven't even come into the situation yet where they're single dads. And, are going to school...you know, looking out there for who else has this happened to and seeing that hey, there's actual research that shows this happens. And, you're *not* alone. And you *can* succeed. I think that will be amazing, to have that out there...I mean, there's not even much of a body of work yet so it's such a *great* beginning category to like grow and stuff so I think that's really neat.

This quote alone emphasizes the implications and power that this research has among men, especially single fathers.

As to getting men to talk about *being men*, I first learned about something called consciousness-raising groups when I was introduced to bell hooks' (2000b) classic, *Feminism is for Everybody*. To explain the idea of such groups, she provides a history of it in the context of such groups for women:

Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation. On a basic level, many hurt and exploited woman used the consciousness raising group

therapeutically. It was the site of where they uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual. Through consciousness-raising women gained the strength to challenge patriarchal forces at work and at home. (pp. 7-8)

hooks (2000b) explained that over time, such groups lost importance and in her opinion, that “dismantling...all but erased the notion that one had to learn about feminism and make an informed choice about embracing feminist politics to become a feminist advocate” (p. 10). She talked about how in such groups for men, their “resistance to sexism can be affirmed and valued” (pp. 11-12). hooks then describes how this process can be empowering to both men and women and how both sexes play a critical role. She talks about how we all have to look within ourselves to make real change:

Without males as allies in struggle feminist movement will not progress. As it is we have to do so much work to correct the assumption deeply embedded in the cultural psyche that feminism is anti-male. Feminism is anti-sexism. *A male who has divested of male privilege, who has embraced feminist politics, is a worthy comrade in struggle, in no way a threat to feminism* [italics added], whereas a female who remains wedded to sexist thinking and behavior infiltrating feminist movement is a dangerous threat. Significantly, the most powerful intervention made by consciousness-raising groups was the demand that all females confront their internalized sexism, their allegiance to patriarchal thinking and action, and their commitment to feminist conversion. That intervention is still needed. It remains the necessary step for anyone choosing feminist politics. The enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside. The threat, the enemy, is sexist thought and behavior. As long as females take up the banner of feminist politics without addressing and transforming their own sexism, ultimately the movement will be undermined. (p. 12)

hooks (2015) addresses consciousness-raising groups (C-R groups) in another of her classics, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. This time, she focused specifically on such groups for men and said that the “[R]ecognition of the painful consequences of sexism in their

lives led some men to establish consciousness groups to examine this.” hooks then continued on and quote an essay by Paul Hornacek⁵ who stated:

Men have reported a variety of different reasons for deciding to seek a C-R group, all of which have an underlying link to the feminist movement. Most are experiencing emotional pain as a result of their male sex role and are dissatisfied with it. Some have had confrontations with radical feminists in public or private encounters and have been repeatedly criticized for being sexist. Some come as a result of their commitment to social change and their recognition that sexism and patriarchy are elements of an intolerable social system that needs to be altered. (p. 74)

hooks then went onto state that men “in the consciousness-raising groups Hornacek describes acknowledge that they benefit from patriarchy and yet are also hurt by it” (p. 74).

So, I challenge men to think about their privilege and what patriarchy does to them. Katz (2012) stated:

This is one of the ways that dominant systems maintain and reproduce themselves, which is to say the dominant group is rarely challenged to even think about its dominance, because that's one of the key characteristics of power and privilege, the ability to go unexamined, lacking introspection, in fact being rendered invisible in large measure in the discourse about issues that are primarily about us. (para. 5)

Recall Katz’ (2006) idea of the bystander in preventing violence. Bystander training is transformative because he is challenging primarily men to be more aware of their own reactions to situations that could be violent and how to intervene. Katz’ perspective is feminist at heart. In

⁵Hornacek, P. C. (1977). Anti-sexist consciousness-raising groups for men. In Snodgrass, J. (Ed.), *For Men Against Sexism: A Book of Readings*. Albion, CA: Times Change Press,

regards to a heightened awareness of men's issues in the last few decades, Katz (1999) stated that:

the purpose is *not to push women aside and put men back on center stage* [italics added], but to understand the ways that male dominance functions in the hope that this understanding can hasten the process of breaking down sexual inequality and improving the lives of women and men. (para. 16)

Through the adoption of feminism, we can break down inequality between the sexes.

hooks (2000b) advocates that men also “take up the banner of feminism and challenge patriarchy” and continues on to state that the “[f]eminist movement is advanced whenever any male or female of any age works on behalf of ending sexism” (p. 116).

For Practitioners

In this section, I will address implications for various types of practitioners including university and college administrators, those working with children of single fathers, policymakers and legal services, and lastly, mental health professionals.

University and College Administrators.

The first question to pose in this section is how do we get men interested in seeking assistance? It is a commonly held stereotype that men avoid seeking help and may see counseling or discussion groups as too touchy-feely, for example. Ben in particular recommended that people have to reach out to men to get their attention. But how do you identify the population in order to reach out, if there is no way to know every student who is parenting?

First of all, we need to have a system in place to identify parenting students. We need to know not just those living on-campus in family housing, but any student who is a parent. Brown and Nichols (2012) had discussed how there are no true national statistics to know how many

students are pregnant and parenting, especially those of traditional age. In referencing the NCES data mentioned in the literature review, the authors stated that:

Aside from this report and a few isolated studies, there is no definitive count of how many P&P⁶ students are attending school. However, as the rate of nontraditional students increases, it is almost certain that the rate of P&P students will follow. To prepare for, attract and retain this population, schools need to become more versed in the policy and programmatic elements which will assist P&P students in degree completion. It is theorized that extra services and programs are needed to assist pregnant and parenting students in successfully negotiating their multiple roles but little literature is found addressing this area. (p. 501)

The first step at the campus level would be to create a system to track parenting students, and the larger goal would be to work on this topic at a national level so that the data collected is consistent across campuses and can be accurately tracked and compared over time. Such a system probably would not be as easy as it sounds. Questions would arise regarding privacy and whether or not this information should be collected and if so, would students be self-reporting on a voluntary basis? If it is voluntary, it is not likely that the data would be accurate because some may choose to not identify, or if they feel they don't need special services catered to them.

Also very important to remember is that single fathers in college (at least the ones I interviewed), are usually not your typical college male. The fathers from this study are older than the traditional 18-24 year old college student, so they do not find themselves in the same world that the traditional-aged ones do. However it is still important to note that the comments from the fathers seemed to indicate that there is a lack of campus services for them in particular.

⁶ The authors' shorthand for "pregnant and parenting" students (Brown & Nichols, 2012)

Financially speaking, many fathers commented on the use of financial aid and even used it to help with household expenses including rent. That is, if they haven't run out of financial aid eligibility like Ben indicated had already happened years before. Some fathers, either now or in the past, had utilized financial assistance from the county as well. The avenues to explore in the area of financial aid or financial assistance are too numerous to address here. But, if we had a way to track students who are parenting on the campus level, that could be a good place to start addressing what their individual needs are from a financial standpoint.

Remember the one father who commented how he didn't feel like he was "their priority" in regards to campus housing. And the other father commented on having only one bathroom. Also recall Ben stating, when I asked him what campus could offer to dads, he said simply: "A place to stay, and food. Just to take that part of the edge away." Perhaps a suggestion for family housing could be the addition of an additional bathroom in future apartment designs, or at least an additional separate toilet or sink to ease the routine for students with families, which would in turn encourage them to live on campus and feel that support that they need, even if they don't feel they need anything or want to admit it.

Another father talked about veterans' services being lacking. In looking single parents who are veterans, assessing the needs of such students could be an avenue very much worth exploring. Next, fathers also showed a need for qualified childcare on-campus that is affordable, with flexible hours that fit their schedule. Fathers also commented specifically on a need for legal services, or at least a place to go for advice on finding legal services. A large barrier to legal services in general would be the financial cost, so administrators could think about what campuses could do to provide access to inexpensive legal services for fathers. Other ideas include creating a center on campus which centers on parenting or even masculinity, adding a

men's studies minor to the women and gender studies programs, or having committee in campus housing to specifically focus on issues for students who are parenting and living on campus.

As to getting men involved and talking on campus, a few dads mentioned that in lieu of your traditional support group, you could get kids and their dads together for activities. Dan in particular said this and tied it back to the importance of support:

I think something like maybe dads and their kids playing together you know...and being directed, just so that they get that camaraderie and that extra help ... surrounding something that's healthy, you know. I think that would be really helpful, just to remind them that you're *not* the only one doing this. 'Cause I know I had an amazing support structure but I know not everybody does, you know.

For administrators reading this, I will leave you with another quote from Jaschik's (2008) article in which he interviewed Michael Kimmel about "Guyland," relating it back to the helicopter parent mentality that men of that age have grown up with and the culture this creates on college campuses:

After growing up with helicopter parents micromanaging every nanosecond, they enter a world in which colleges have backed away from the old "in loco parentis" model, so that young people increasingly define themselves through media images and peer groups. And on campus, guys rule. (para. 3)

Those Working with Children of Single Fathers.

In the *War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Hurting our Young Men*, Christina Hoff-Summers (2000) paraphrased a New York Times Magazine article⁷ wherein Carol Gilligan was quoted. Hoff-Summers stated that:

⁷ (Norman, 1997)

[Gilligan] said she hopes to develop a research method, in particular a way of relating to her boy subjects, that “will free boys’ voices, to create conditions that allow boys to say what they know” and allow her to learn what the boys are suppressing. Through her earlier studies she claims to have learned how to reach and “free” the repressed voices of adolescent girls; now she hopes to repeat that feat with boys. The aim is to devise a new kind of socialization for boys that will make their aggressiveness and need for dominance things of the past. Gilligan envisions a new era in which boys will not be forced into a stereotypical masculinity that separates them from their nurturers but will be allowed to remain “relationally connected” to those close to them. Once boys are freed of oppressive gender roles she feels, far fewer will suffer the early trauma that leads to so many disorders. (pp. 127-128)

Of particular note from the last passage is the last sentence about Gilligan’s thoughts on boys needing to be freed of “oppressive gender roles.” Hoff-Summers also explained how Chodorow’s theories have influenced Gilligan: “[She] was especially impressed with Chodorow’s idea that patriarchy dictates styles of child rearing that are responsible for developmental deformation in both males and females” (p. 126).

In the article by Norman (1997), Gilligan explained her focus on boys and how that arose:

I noticed that there was an asymmetry between boys and girls. Girls are more at risk psychologically in adolescence, whereas boys are more at risk—more stuttering, more bed-wetting, more learning problems—in early childhood, when cultural norms pressure them to separate from their mothers. I was observing a boy just yesterday. His face was very still. It didn't register a lot of emotion. He was around 6, when boys want to become "one of the boys." They feel they have to separate from women. And they are not allowed to feel that separation as a real loss. (para. 4)

This topic of the biological influences on development or proclivities towards certain medical conditions in boys versus girls could be the topic of a completely different dissertation in its own right. I am not claiming to be covering even the tip of the iceberg here. But, this may shed light on the labeling that the fathers encountered with both their female and male children when it came to being placed on IEPs as with many of the children or simply being labeled “at-risk” because of having gone through a divorce.

Policy Makers and Legal Services.

There should be a network in every major metropolitan community, or state, where dads can go to get legal assistance, especially if they feel they have historically been left out of the picture or have felt like decisions in the court always favor the female. Fathers in this study have experienced the court system in regards to their custody in approximately four different states in the U.S. Throughout this research and in talking to people I know, I heard a few different times that North Dakota in general is not very fair with father's rights. It was explained to me that if the mother wants full custody, it is very easy for her to get it uncontested. Also, the treatment of fathers even seemed to vary within a state, depending on what city you were in. One participant mentioned to me that he is not living in North Dakota specifically because of how the court system treats fathers and said "I'm never going back to North Dakota." Also remember Shawn mentioning an issue on the ballot in recent years, regarding fathers' rights. I hope to hear more about this in the future and hope the group can gain more traction next time around with informing the public of the implications of the measure.

Regarding Title IX protections for pregnant and parenting students, I mentioned how fathers seem to have been left out of the discussion on the topic, even in the official materials from the U.S. Department of Education. How can we make sure that Title IX in the sense of pregnant and parenting students is in writing, and in practice, inclusive for men? And in general, what issues are administrators seeing with Title IX and men in general? Obviously this could be politically charged and would need to take place at the national level. But it is still worthwhile to contemplate what changes could be made, to increase fairness for male students who are expecting a child or currently parenting. But on a campus-level, a committee could be started to look at the needs of parenting students on campus as a whole, with separate subcommittees

focused specifically on the rights of men and those of women as parents, to ensure campuses are meeting Title IX guidelines as called for in the previously mentioned Dear Colleague letter from 2013.

For Mental Health Professionals.

It is a general stereotype of men that they would rather not ask for help. So, certain help-avoiding behaviors like disengagement or procrastination of seeking help may be evident when reaching out to men. So how do we get men the mental health services that they need, if they are exhibiting these types of help-avoiding behaviors?

I asked most of the dads what they would think about a support group on campus. Ben said this:

See there's gonna be a problem...is that you get so many male egos on that, that would they actually show up to something like that? 'Cause right now, just like something that I do. A student of mine...he started up this...new program... and we're gettin' mostly females. And the males you really have to talk nice to, in order to for them to just even kinda buy *into* the idea that this is good for ya....At least from where I was at....I felt like a failure, like something didn't jive, something I did, broke the system. And you wanna talk about your failures to somebody else? *Maybe?* I know I wouldn't have, because everyone that was around me that I could have talked to, I just didn't.

It was obvious that Ben wanted to talk, so it got me thinking. After hearing him tell this story, I started telling him how I found it interesting as a female researcher that there is this stereotype of men that they don't want to share or open up, but with what I saw in my thesis with all those dads and with the dads I've interviewed so far now, I told him that everyone has been very open and wanting to share. He then said:

Ohhhh I see what you're saying. 'Cause one-on-one, when someone asks and are interested in your story, I'll tell you *all day long* what happened, what sucks and what doesn't...you don't feel that someone else is interested, it's just 'cause how you grew up with a bunch of males you know, someone starts you know, bellyachin' about somethin', you just push 'em aside, 'Shut up!' You know and just keep goin'. So, somethin' like that, like a one-on-one, actually counseling, but you'd actually have to approach *them*,

I'm pretty sure to get any kind of result. That's what I saw when that thing came through [my email]...

As he finished, he was telling about the moment that he got my email asking for participants.

With his hands on the table, he then began mimicking the sound of typing on a keyboard, reenacting how quickly he wanted to respond back to my email. He said that when he saw that it was about single dads, he just said: "Yes." So, in that moment, he decided he wanted to talk about his experience and responded to me.

I had a very similar conversation with Dan, and I asked him as well about the idea of a 'support group'. He said:

First of all, I think if you said it that way... *Nobody* would show up... 'Cause most men, it's weird, because we think of men, a lot of times of men as *speakers*, but [pauses], but if you say that, they panic and run [laughs]. I used to be the same way. Until my very first year. Just a quick aside. My very first year in the... program, when we were voting for our ... club, being the only guy, all the girls went [mimicked voices] "You can be the president!" So I got to talk in front of all of these girls, *every* month, which at first was terrifying for me. And then... really just took all of that away so now, I mean that's part of my job, is presentations and I'm like eh I don't care who I'm talking to, that's fine. But I think if it was surrounding like, if it was presented in a way that's like you know, just come and hang out, you know. Bring your kids, and there's gonna be other dads with their kids. And, we're gonna do something fun. 'Cause I think as a single dad as well, it's kinda *weird* that we would be this way [saying this in a questioning tone], but we kinda panic like what am I gonna do with my child you know. And you know, I know that this child of mine needs something but what do I do with them, you know... I think that's why a lot of the times it works really well when... there's a man and a woman, because you know, there's times when, when especially us guys have those moments [laughs] you know, and the wife's just like 'Oh you just do this' ... or you know if you ask your mom or some female, I'm not saying that you have to be married, but, you know, and it's so simple! *It's so simple*. But if there was you know, so I think, just having it something like that like hey, this is just an activity for dads and their kids you know. And that, I mean, and it could even, it could *even* benefit dads even if they are married or something like that you know, because it would get that interaction. Kind of like a real *small* version of like the father-daughter dances and things like that you know. Something that would be like you know, hey, you don't have to get dressed up for this. It's not gonna cost you a lot of money, it's just gonna be fun. And then have, if there's either someone running the program or you know, someone that's strong *in* the group that's willing to start the conversations and just have some you know, some of the downtime when the kids are havin' snacks, dad's havin' snacks, talk a little bit about this. This is what I ran into this week, you know. Guarantee [you] somebody else has you know, and just kinda a sharing type of a thing. That's how it seems to open, it always opened up really well for me

whenever I would you know...like I said I would get together with my friend and have coffee and we'd talk a lot and stuff. But we'd get our kids together and let them play and talk, you know...because you have to do that. I mean, whether you're a single dad, or you know, even married, mom needs a break or something you know. I mean you've got the kids so what do you do, you take 'em to the park. They can run and play and you can talk with your friend, like, "What's it's like bein' a dad? [laughs] You know what *my* kid did this week?" You know, those stories. And I think you would, that would be a *really* strong, I think support would happen out of that.

Along the same lines of the idea of a support group, I also asked Erik how you get men together to talk:

Yeah I don't know, I don't even know if that's even advisable, or if that would even be possible, I mean I know everyone's so busy and what not...Like in my case, you know, Matthew's not up here too often so you know maybe for the guys that live here that you know, it's a place to meet people that are in like the same situation as you, where you could bring your kids and you guys could you know, go to the park or whatever. I don't know.

I asked him if he meant some sort of *activity* where parents could be together with their children and he agreed. He also felt like the idea of a support group would not sound appealing to guys.

In asking Shawn about how campus can get men involved in a support group or how campus should reach out to men he had a really positive reaction to the question and talked about how something that was game- or sports-oriented might get them involved. We were both laughing as he began:

Yeah, that's the question. Is *how* do you do it. Just from you describing it and me picturing it, and it would be pretty fun, 'cause it'd be just a couple of guys, sharing cool stories with their kids. Which I think would be a blast. But...when you say like "support group" it's kind of a turn off, that *term* kind of turns guys off...Not to me anymore, but...they automatically assume that it's gonna be like counseling and you need help to attend, kind of thing. And there's a little bit of pride that will prevent 'em from going...and busy schedules, fathers, their schedules are all over the map and getting all of 'em together at one time, is difficult.

One thing that really gets *all* fathers together, for me, is softball. We, people will either have to bring their kids or they're like honey the kids are yours, you know, it's my night to play softball, like somethin' like that. Scheduled activities I guess, with...maybe that's why I was kind of drawn to softball. Was kind of a little male camaraderie, but you know, but we're all, I'd say yeah, 80% of them, it's we're all dads. That's kinda how we get it out, 'cause it always comes up, somethin' about kids, or you know, well there's a lot of

wife jokes, but, I don't know...I'm not in that situation. So it's something to get you and, or dads and kids together, some sort of *like* activity right, you know....Yeah, I guess, a group where you could bring your kids or you don't *have* to. I mean, 'cause a lot of times...like at softball...we're all fathers but we're getting away from them [the kids]. It's our time to just kinda decompress and kinda burn off some steam, 'cause it does get stressful. And then...sometimes you need time away. But yeah, I mean, to get a bunch of 'em together....I would suggest somethin' like that. Not like a softball game, but you know an activity, which I don't know what you'd do. Bean bag toss [*laughs*].

I then asked him how you facilitate guys talking together because I know they want to talk, but how do you really do it. He responded:

Yeah exactly...and that's...not how I got some of my advice, but advice is spread that way, as far as you know like a single father coming in like, well, how do you go about getting custody and you know. Then there's somebody in the group that's done it, or knows, I mean that's, it's kinda like networking....Yeah and there's like oh you're going through this situation, same thing happened to me kinda thing and they exchange experiences. Yeah. They do love to talk about it, and then they talk about their kids and there's pride and stuff like that, of course. But, you kinda got to get through that male ego, figure out....gotta like....what's the word.....break down the barrier through it, whatever, I don't know.

As we can see, the dads so far didn't think the idea of a support group would necessarily work with men and that the consensus would be that you have to go to men and approach them and possibly have some sort of activity where kids and dads could be involved. And notice above how Shawn is explaining how a sense of pride can basically empower dads, if they were in an environment to talk about their kids and share stories. As we continue into the implications for practitioners, I recommend we keep the opinions of these dads in mind, regarding how to help men on campus.

Recommendations for Further Research

What can we do to free boys and men from the hold that patriarchy and gender prescription has upon them? A good place to start is to create awareness and to simply start having a discussion about patriarchy. The aim of the literature review was to raise awareness about the myths surrounding masculinity, and in turn to create awareness within myself about

what I can do as a mom in raising my son. In addition, I also want to create a more general awareness about how men are disadvantaged in society despite the privilege they may assume in a patriarchal society. Providing a voice to single dads by means of this dissertation is my main goal, and this section on implications is the result of what these men have told me is their experience.

According to Johnson (1997), we can't understand something if we don't have the words to talk about it:

[Y]ou can't deal with a problem if you don't name it; once you name it, you can think, talk, and write about it...When you name something, the word draw your attention to it, which makes you more likely to notice it as something significant. (pp. 11-12)

My hope is that with this dissertation, others' consciousness will be raised about patriarchy, and thus we may begin viewing masculinity in a new light. We should step back from our assumptions about single fathers, and should think about male invisibility and how that is really the confusing paradox of a patriarchal society. How can fathers be invisible or feel dismissed when the center of society is men? Why do these fathers feel powerless in the court system? What is the origin of the roadblocks that have been set in place in the legal system? Some of these questions could be answered in future research opportunities.

The topic of the research at hand could have many applications in research due to the mere fact that research on single fathers in college is almost non-existent until now. A number of different avenues could be explored to continue this line of research not only in education as in this study, but also in other fields such as sociology, psychology, communication, law, and even political science. However, this section will focus only on research opportunities in the higher education sphere.

Conducting a Similar Small-Scale Study.

Firstly, a suggestion would be to complete a similar study, but examine fathers from different institutions, comparing public versus private, or 4-year programs with 2-year programs. One could also consider study a larger group of men at one particular institution however I am fairly confident due to my experience researching the topic that the results from a small group would be similar and transferrable to a larger group. One's time may be better focused on having more thick and rich description of a few fathers in particular, such as with the current study at hand.

Consciousness-Raising Groups for Men.

This brings me to my next idea, starting a consciousness-raising group for men on a college campus. A qualitative study could be conducted which follows the evolution of participants' opinions throughout their time in the group. It could involve a male researcher-as-participant in the group, or a female researcher-as-observer. Some may say that having a female conducting the research may not allow the men to let down their guard, however from my experience with my participants, I would disagree and feel that if done right, it brings a helpful dynamic to the situation for discussion.

Topics to discuss would include sexism, violence against women, and homophobia and how men contribute to these notions or simply see these problems in their everyday lives. The group could watch documentaries or read books related to masculinity and feminism. However, we must keep in mind men's possible aversion to participating in such a group, as they may not be interested in what they envision as a support group type setting, as I mentioned with some of the dads' comments in the previous section. The aim of this could be to investigate the feasibility

of continuing this group past the end of the study, to provide an outlet for men on campus to openly discuss a variety of issues and create awareness.

Other Diverse Populations.

One could also do a study on only dads that identify as multicultural, which could include fathers that were born in the U.S. but identify as non-white, or immigrant fathers that were born in another country but are U.S. permanent residents or hold refugee or asylum status. One could also look at persons that identify as non-immigrant international students. The idea of having an international community focus actually arose from a comment of one of the dads in this study, who recommended looking at fathers that are international. Dan said, “[W]hen you start getting to the international communities, their families work differently. So I mean if they end up finding themselves as single dads, that could be really fascinating.”

Work Identity versus Identity at Home.

The major day-to-day disadvantage in being a single father is related to financial reasons. The men used financial aid to support themselves, some worked multiple jobs, and most are contending with child support payments. They also reported feeling held back in some ways regarding job opportunities in other cities because they do not want to be apart from their children and because it is important for them to be there physically and emotionally.

In addition to the Identity Bind as previously discussed, Goldberg (2009) also referenced what he called the Breadwinner Bind:

Either way he loses: If he is a hard worker he may be resented by his intimates for being a neglectful family man and for having his values out of place. If he withdraws from the rat race, he will tend to compare himself and may be compared by his family unfavorably with those who are more successful. (p. 109)

Future research could examine the intersection between the financial difficulties and the need to advance their career, and the bind they find themselves in due to being a parent and student.

One could also examine the dynamics between how masculine norms play out at home and at work, and how they find themselves changing their behaviors in the different environments. And if they are a single father and not remarried or living with a partner, they have the additional restriction of not really being able to *choose* to not work, nor take a more flexible job, as they must still be responsible financially for their children while they are with them, plus still pay child support and other financial support to the mother of their children—outside of providing for the children when they are staying with them in some cases.

Pilot Project for Campus Legal Services.

Research could be done on the need for legal services on a college campus for students, for men of course but also for any student. A survey could be conducted and the results of that study could gauge whether or not such services are needed, in addition to if those duties could be split up amongst others already on campus or if there was a new position that would need to be created to handle such a demand. Because there seemed to be such a need for the fathers in this study to have legal services, this may be the most important area to pursue, next to that of childcare needs.

Final Thoughts on Research Opportunities and Doing Feminist Research.

When one conducts research with men from a transformative perspective, consider it an opportunity to possibly change a man's life for the better. It has been mentioned that a few of the fathers indicated that as a result of the interview, they thought more about being a parent or spending more time with their children. Recall when Casey said that after the first interview, he became "conscious of" his "role as father," and he talked about it giving him "that extra boost" as it "pushed it to the front of my head for a little bit." And in between the interviews, Casey also had talked about a business opportunity which would require him to leave school. He said, "[I]

t's a *tempting* and yet really scary offer." It was fascinating how his opinion changed in just a few weeks between interviews. Or, when Erik said that because of the interview, he wants to try and get something arranged through a lawyer to adjust the custodial agreement so that he's ready for that when the time comes. In the five or six weeks between interviews, a few fathers also received job or internship offers. With these examples, it began to become clear how much one's life can change in just a matter of a few weeks. And I began to wonder, what will these dads' lives be like in just a year from now?

I've been talking about my dissertation often to many people, including family, friends and co-workers and other colleagues. I feel like it's my duty to represent the men and raise some consciousness about the issues these fathers are experiencing. Feminist researchers and authors, men and women alike, can continue to study men and help redefine the landscape of what feminism truly is. Remember hooks' (2000b) words when she said "Feminism is for everybody" (p. 118). As feminists, I believe we have a calling to remind others what feminism is. It's not just about women. It's not about hating men or man bashing, and it's not about the binary of men against women. It's a theory that means you want everyone to be able to be free to be themselves regardless of the false gender binary.

In talking about how negative ideas about masculinity are "pervasive" in society, Casey spoke directly to how we can use feminism to examine the bias against men in the legal system:

I feel like I feel like we could queer theory, or feminist theory, to *expose* some of the stereotypical perpetuation of this trope that isn't useful and has found its way into our legal system. With courts always - *well, not always* - very *often* ruling in favor of the mother figure. Whether that's grandma, or mom, or mom's mom. As opposed to dad's mom...It's [big exhaling sigh] *frustrating*. There are a lot of systemic issues that are frustrating. This is just one of them.

If one understands that feminism is for everyone, I think we have a responsibility to help to redefine the landscape of what feminism truly is. And we need to know, and accept, that men

can be vulnerable and can show emotion and that to do this is healthy and encourage this in men that we know. As hooks (2004) stated:

Women who want men to love know that that cannot really happen without a revolution of consciousness where men stop patriarchal thinking and action. Because sexist roles have always given women support for emotional development, it has been easier for women to find our way to love. We do not love better or more than men, but we do find it easier to get in touch with feelings because even patriarchal society supports that trait in us. *Men will never receive support from patriarchal culture for their emotional development* [italics]. But if as enlightened witnesses we offer the men we love (our fathers, brothers, lovers, friends, comrades) affirmation that they can change as well as assurance that we will accept them when they are changed, transformation will not seem as risky. (p. 178)

Coda: Are Men Oppressed? The Mask of Masculinity

I'm concluding this chapter with a discussion on the oppression of men and the mask of masculinity to bring the information from this discussion chapter full circle, back to the literature review. So now, let's think back to the birdcage analogy that began this chapter. Are men in this study oppressed in the traditional sense?

Traditionally, most would say that men as a group are not oppressed, due to the privilege they are afforded. But are boys brought up in a society that systematically attempts to limit men in many different ways? Yes, quite definitely, as evidenced throughout this dissertation. But can we consider the individual men in this study oppressed? I believe that they have achieved some sort of freedom from these restrictions by doing *something* different. But what is that *something different*? Whatever the reason is, it has a connection to perseverance and the ability to be vulnerable and open themselves up emotionally. It is interesting to watch what is going on, on a systemic scale, for all men, when you see evidence of men being disadvantaged by the system that claims to afford them freedoms.

According to Johnson (1997) and Clatterbaugh (1996), men in general cannot be considered an oppressed group. Johnson (1997) stated that: “[M]en cannot be oppressed *as men*,

just as whites cannot be oppressed as whites or heterosexuals as heterosexuals because a group can be oppressed only if there exists another group that has the power to oppress them” (p. 40). Clatterbaugh (1996) examined three theories others have posited regarding the fact men are oppressed, which examined the following general areas: a) socialization and strict gender prescriptions, b) the “costs of being a man” such as men being “more likely to commit suicide, die younger, be homeless, die in battle, be alcoholic, go undiagnosed for certain mental diseases, take steroids, and suffer other harms that fall primarily on men” (p. 300); c) men being considered expendable and not valued. In addition, he theorized a fourth separate idea of oppression, d) the subsequent dehumanization of men which is related to expendability. But in Clatterbaugh’s opinion, none of these areas proved the oppression of men, because the theories

either depend on an inadequate notion of oppression as limitation or they simply beg the question by assuming that if only men are drafted [into the military], then men are valued less or by assuming that if there are harms that fall most heavily on men, then men are oppressed. (p. 302)

Johnson (1997) has indicated that it is possible for privileged persons to “feel bad in ways that can resemble oppression” (p. 40), and that men in particular could claim oppression if they identified as a sub-group that is oppressed such as because of sexual orientation or race, but as mentioned, men alone are not oppressed. The misuse of the term *oppression* “distorts the nature of what is happening to them and why” and “tempts us into the false argument that if men and women are *both* oppressed because of gender, then one oppression balances out the other and no privilege can be said to exist” (Johnson, 1997, p. 40). Johnson has cautioned against the belief that just because a person is part of an oppressive group, we must remember that the particular person is not necessarily oppressive as an individual, or that if someone is part of a privileged group that this doesn’t automatically equate to happiness and a successful life.

Jones and Abes (2013) indicated that when we are looking at categories of social identities like gender, it “draws attention to the constructs of privilege and oppression because these categories take on their meaning in relation to systems of inequality that rely on privilege and oppression” (p. 38). Johnson (1997) explained male privilege in particular by saying that “every man can *identify* with power as a value that his culture associates with manhood, which makes it easier for any man to assume and use power in relation to others” (p. 98). Our current system of patriarchy makes it possible for men to assert control, however at the same time, patriarchy still does lead men to be invisible in some regards, or for example, feeling dismissed or ignored such as the fathers in this study.

Like Johnson (1997), Frye (1983) is also of the opinion that men are not oppressed and talks about how the word “oppression” is misused:

It is a fundamental claim of feminism that women are oppressed. The word ‘oppression’ is a strong word. It repels and attracts. It is dangerous and dangerously fashionable and endangered. It is much misused, and sometimes not innocently.

The statement that women are oppressed is frequently met with the claim that men are oppressed too. We hear that oppressing is oppressive to those who oppress as well as to those they oppress. Some cite evidence of their oppression their much-advertised inability to cry. It is tough, we are told, to be masculine. When the stresses and frustrations of being a man are cited as evidence that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing, the word ‘oppression’ is being stretched to meaninglessness; it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering, no matter the cause, degree, or consequence....Human beings can be miserable without being oppressed, and it is perfectly consistent to deny that person or group is oppressed without denying that they have feelings or that they suffer.

We need to think clearly about oppression, and there is much that mitigates against this. I do not want to undertake to prove that women are oppressed (or that men are not), but I want to make clear what is being said when we say it. We need this word, this concept, and we need it to be sharp and sure. (pp. 1-2)

And Frye mentions later in the same chapter:

For any woman of any race or economic class, being a woman is significantly attached to whatever disadvantages and deprivations she suffers, be they great or small. *None of this*

is the case with respect to a person's being a man [italics added]. Simply being a man is not what stands between him and a better job; whatever assaults and harassments he is subject to, being male is not what selects him for victimization; being male is not a factor which would make his anger impotent—quite the opposite. If a man has little or no material or political power, or achieves little of what he wants to achieve, his being male is no part of the explanation. Being male is something he has going *for* him, even if race or class or age or disability is going against him. Women are oppressed, *as women*...But men are not oppressed *as men*. (p. 16)

Frye is assuming that a man can never be mistreated only because he is a man, however this dissertation provides strong evidence that *being male* is the reason for many of the things these single dads have experienced. For example, again recall Adam's story about choosing to let his son sit in a dirty diaper rather than change the diaper in a public restroom anymore. The fact he is a man is the reason other men perceived his behavior as wrong, accusing him of "fondling" his own child. Or with Shawn, the fact he was a boy is the reason he'd been taught to "walk it off" and not cry. Being a boy is the only reason he kept playing, even though he was bleeding and tried to keep thinking of himself as a "tough kid." And, because Ben is a man, he feels the court system is lining up him and the other men there like "rats." Or think of the statistics presented earlier on violent crime – men are so much more often the perpetrators and the victims. How is this *not* related to them being men?

Just like feminism isn't only about women – neither is sexism. This study helps us open our eyes to sexism and how it affects men on the whole, but especially single fathers. Frye's (1983) own words about sexism are as follows:

[T]he locus of sexism is primarily in the system or framework, not in the particular act. It is not accurate to say that what is going on in cases of sexism is that distinctions are made on the basis of sex when sex is irrelevant; what is wrong in cases of sexism is, in the first place, that sex *is* relevant; and then that the making of distinctions on the basis of sex reinforces the patterns which make it relevant. In sexist cultural/economic systems, sex is always relevant. (p. 19)

Shawn had used the goal of not being seen as a deadbeat dad as his own personal motivation, or Ben feeling helpless when trying to prove to a judge that pursuing school is a worthwhile endeavor. Also remember Cooley's idea of the looking glass self, mentioned in the literature review. Recall when Adam was afraid of others' views of him regarding his parenting style, and he said, "these people *could call* you know Child Services on me, you know, for abandoning my kid for a few minutes." In these short 3 examples, we have seen dads imagining themselves through the eyes of someone else, as a deadbeat, as a loser who just needs to get a job, and someone in danger of having child services called on him.

Throughout the data from this study, we see examples of both actual bias from others – and also bias that they experience through *imagining how others are perceiving them*. Examining Frye's thoughts on sexism, she stated that the "locus of sexism is primarily in the system or framework, not in the particular act." Yes, these men have experienced direct bias directed at them as individuals, but what is even more important is the entire picture of how they have learned what it means to be a man, ever since they were young.

Yes, men (especially men who identify as white) are privileged in our society but are they truly free? Cooley (1964) stated that freedom is achieved "in cooperation with others" (p. 50) and defines freedom as "the absence of constraint" but yet says that this definition is not fully true because society always constrains, so the definition must be redesigned to include societal influences (p. 422). Cooley also framed freedom in the sense of opportunity and that one should "regard it in the light of the contrast between what a man is and what he might be, as our experience of life enables us to imagine the two states" (p. 425)

Also on the topic of freedom, Wendy Brown (1988) speaks of it in context of women, but I believe it makes a good case for how men are held down through patriarchy:

Freedom cast as freedom from the body, need, and necessity is therefore inherently oppressive as well as ultimately impossible – living things cannot transcend or overcome themselves, the fact of their lives. This construction of freedom breeds a politics against life, dooms the activities and persons involved with necessity to organization under domination, and renders life an instrument rather than a cause of freedom. The utter bankruptcy of this approach to freedom was revealed by Weber: under modern systems of power, the quest for freedom as control of necessity has utterly subverted itself and man appears dominated by and trapped within the cogs of his own machinery of mastery. (p. 194)

The phrase above about being “dominated by and trapped within the cogs of his own machinery” is a powerful visual which explains why in a system where men have privilege, that it is still possible to be inside the birdcage of oppression and not be able to get out, due to their own actions of perpetuating the system.

An argument could be made that men are not free, due to the gender straightjacketing rules of conformity placed upon them and the mask of masculinity itself and what those portrayals require men to sacrifice. Men can become so much more than the behavior code that is placed upon them since birth.

Goldberg (2009) and Kimbrell (1995) and Farrell (1974) all have suggested that men are indeed oppressed. Farrell, outspoken against the idea of the military draft and its effect on men, has also controversially claimed that “Men don’t oppress women any more than women oppress men” (Svoboda, 1996, para. 33). In the 1995 book, *The Masculine Mystique*, Kimbrell (1995) speaks of a “growing crisis” (p. 4) for men and lists approximately 25 areas of concern from men being discriminated in terms of incarceration and child custody, and the overwhelming statistics of men being homeless, fighting addictions, being victims of violent crime or suicide, or having a lower life expectancy (pp. 4-13), in addition to statistics showing boys are being “diagnosed and treated for a variety of behavioral and mental disorders far more frequently than girls” (p. 7).

Kimbrell sums this up as follows:

Virtually every statistic on health or survival, and most on economic well-being, show that despite rumors and myths to the contrary, the vast majority of men are being devastated by our socioeconomic system. Though American society continues to empower a small percentage of men, and a smaller but increasing percentage of women, it is causing significant confusion and anguish for most men. (pp. 3-4)

Goldberg (2006) has stated that men are repressed and *in harness*. According to

Goldberg:

Unlike some of the problems of women, the problems of men are not readily changed through legislation. The male has no apparent and clearly defined targets against which he can vent his rage. Yet he is oppressed by the cultural pressures that have denied him his feelings, by the mythology of the woman and the distorted and self-destructive ways he sees and relates to her, by the urgency for him to “act like a man” which blocks his ability to respond to his inner promptings both emotionally and physiologically, and by a generalized self-hate that causes him to feel comfortable only when he is *functioning well in harness* [italics added], not when he lives for joy and personal growth. (p. 15)

Recall Durkheim’s concept of social facts – these social facts are the prescriptions upon men to behave a certain way, and it has been mentioned throughout that men tend to be the ones regulating the behavior of other men. Philosopher Paolo Freire, the originator of critical pedagogy, dedicated his writings to the topics of social justice and oppression. As to his thoughts on oppression, Freire (2007) stated the following:

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (p. 47)

Freire’s words about *self-depreciation* also ring true to me in the context of this study, when I recall the negative words that my participants used to describe men in general or themselves as fathers such as buffoons or deadbeats. On the topic, Freire (2007) specifically stated,

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—that they are

sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (p. 63)

Now, remember Brené Brown's (2012) analogy in that when people experience shameful feelings, they think they *are* bad. Single fathers seem especially prone to shame and feeling they are *unfit* in the words of Freire, above, and feel unworthy. These feelings seem to be brought on from themselves but also from society.

And now, remembering that Frye (1983) does *not* believe that men are oppressed, I wanted to include here the following passage for effect:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped. (p. 4)

Yes, we know men have privilege and have a great ability to be mobile in society but they are still confined to a box which restricts their behavior in the most dangerous way possible – in being free to be themselves at the most basic level.

We can return now to Frye's birdcage analogy of oppression. Could we not say that with men, "you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past the wires to get anywhere"? Some feel that men are not oppressed and that it diminishes the female experience to even assert that. However, using Frye's own words, it may be proving the exact opposite that yes, people can't see that men are oppressed but if you "take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere" (p. 5)

Recall that Clatterbaugh (1996) does not find that men are oppressed. To the reader, he proposes a world in which men could be considered oppressed and how it is not the world we live in now:

Such a world would be very different from the actual world. Imagine that our world is suddenly controlled by humanoid aliens who establish a new hegemony over the traits

that are valued as human-making. They reverse or revise the traits that have been held to belong specifically to males and for which males have been socialized. An elaborate science develops that teaches that men are overly controlled by their genitals and the emotion of anger; their so-called rational abilities are, in this new world, seen as rationalizations to support their biological and emotional demands. Male achievement in the arts, literature, philosophy, and sport are expunged from the pages of history and/or treated as trivial accomplishments. The new set of valued traits installed as human-making include many of the traits in which men have not traditionally excelled. A crisis ensues in which men lose confidence in themselves and strive to live up to the new concept, although hardly any are seen as doing so. *In short, men do not fare as well as women in this new society; they are viewed as defective women and, therefore, by that norm as defective human beings. In such a world men would be oppressed* [italics added]. (p. 302)

In reading this, in some ways, I can already imagine a world like this. Not to the Orwellian extent that Clatterbaugh imagines, however if you take a step back and see how fathers are viewed by society as “defective women” as noted above, and because we know there is a stereotype of college men in particular as being aggressive both physically and sexually because of evidence presented in the literature review, being “overly controlled by their genitals and the emotion of anger” as also stated above. And if we look at the words by the fathers in this study to describe themselves throughout, such as “dirt bag,” “rats,” or “deadbeat,” can we not say that we are already living in a world like he is describing where they have *lost confidence* in themselves?

During the course of this dissertation, a case was made for the fact that gender prescriptions are especially restrictive for men. And remember that such prescriptions are a necessary evil in oppression. Frye (1983) describes the origins of the word oppression:

The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press.’ *The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button.* Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce. (p. 2)

Regardless if one feels men are oppressed, I think we could all agree that men do have different scales of harm inflicted on them because of their sex and that they have been molded in some way to hold back emotions and through that they are emotionally immobilized. According to hooks (2015):

Men are not exploited or oppressed by sexism, but there are ways in which they suffer as a result of it. This suffering should not be ignored. While it in no way diminishes the seriousness of male abuse and oppression of women, or negates male responsibility for exploitative actions, the pain men experience can serve as a catalyst calling attention to the need for change. (p. 73)

Through this study, I think evidence exists that there is systemic oppression of men, and single fathers in particular. It is society itself that oppresses them through the culture that has been built around masculinity in America. They are “caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent...motion or mobility” (p. 2) as stated above by Frye (1983). It may not be happening in the same way or to the same extent that it does for women, persons that identify as transgender, or persons who belong to other historically underrepresented or mistreated groups for example. However, something systemic *is* going on.

But if it's not oppression, what is happening to them? Johnson (1997) stated that “[a] more subtle way to deny oppression and privilege is to call them something else, thereby creating the appearance of being in touch with reality without having to do something about it.” So if we coined a new word for what men are going through, wouldn't we be diminishing and ignoring their experience?

People can experience oppression in many different ways, even people within one class such as women as a whole. In the section on rogue waves, the word *intersectional* was used in the mention of white privilege. In pop culture, I have noticed we are now hearing more about

feminism and in particular what has been termed *intersectional feminism* to look at those differences of how women of different identities experience discrimination in different ways. For example, you could examine what life is like for single moms that are White and affluent versus those that are Black but low-income, and focusing on the issue at hand but how their experience varies in important ways because of racial categories and financial abilities.

The term intersectionality arose with Crenshaw (1989), in an article about Black women in the context the effects of sex and race and how we see discrimination playing out. She said people tend to use a “single-axis” view, for example, just looking at women as one group and ignoring the different identities within the group. She said that we should look at the “life chances and life situations of people who should be cared about without regard to the source of their difficulties” (p. 73).

Similarly, Hill Collins (1991) uses black feminist theory to discuss what she calls the *matrix of domination*, a spectrum on which everyone may find themselves in light of oppression:

In essence, each group identifies the oppression with which it feels most comfortable as being fundamental and classifies all others as being of lesser importance. Oppression is filled with such contradictions because these approaches fail to recognize that a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives. (p. 229)

Hill Collins then explained what she refers to as the *interlocking* mechanisms of domination:

A broader focus stresses the interlocking nature of oppressions that are structured on multiple levels, from the individual to the social structural, and which are part of a larger matrix of domination. Adhering to this inclusive model provides the conceptual space needed for each individual to see that she or he is *both* a member of multiple dominant groups *and* a member of multiple subordinate groups. (p. 230)

I find that this viewpoint is extremely helpful in understanding what is going on with men. It gives us the *conceptual space* that we need to re-frame our views on oppression and men in particular.

We can use the idea of the matrix of domination, understanding that men experience oppression in very different ways than women. It could be controversial to begin adopting the term intersectionality for men, as women could claim that it diminishes what they are going through, especially black women, since intersectionality arose with that particular focus. The problem we face is “due to the influence of a way of thinking about discrimination which structures politics so that the struggles are categorized as singular issues. Moreover, this structure imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 31). One could argue that we see sexism as something happening only to women – again a narrow view of the entire issue. Also of importance is when Crenshaw (1991) mentions how this way of thinking *reinforces the status quo* in that when we don’t stand up for men, we are essentially saying we are okay with the way things are and that implies nothing should change.

I propose that we could take a similar stance, looking at what men are experiencing and accept that it is *not okay* to make single fathers feel like they are deadbeats or somehow less than a mother – or in Casey’s words, a “poor substitute.” Crenshaw (1989) offered the following explanation for her argument for *intersectionality*:

I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “women’s experience” or “the Black experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast. (p. 58)

And now, to illustrate why intersectionality can be used with men, let’s replace some of the words above and *hypothetically*, create a new way of looking at the issue:

I argue that [men] are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including [men] within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which [men] are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of [men], the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “[men]’s experience” or “the [male] experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.

Rewording this passage brings to light how men have been rendered invisible when it comes to the discussion of gender and how men are harmed by the gender binary. Just like the matrix of domination, this type of exercise helps us reframe the issue at hand, seeing it in light of the experience of men instead.

To explain more, Hearn (2007) offers a helpful description of how the socially constructed concepts of race and gender can be viewed along with the very complex system of masculinities:

Recent work has emphasized multiple masculinities in terms of ways of being men and forms of men’s structural, collective, and individual practices, their interrelations, and complex interweavings of masculinities, powers, other social statuses and, indeed, violences. There has been strong emphasis on the interconnections of gender with other social divisions, such as age, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, racialization, religion and sexuality. For example, relations of gender and class can demonstrate how different class-based masculinities may both challenge and reproduce gender relations among men and between women and men. Masculinities are placed in cooperative and conflictual relations with each other: — in organizational, occupational and class relations – and in terms defined more explicitly in relation to gender, such as family, kinship and sexuality. Such relations are complicated by contradictions, ambiguities, and paradoxes that persist intra-personally, inter-personally, collectively and structurally. (p. 393)

I find this passage to be an excellent summary of all the ideas at play in my dissertation, and why we can use an intersectional framework to examine the study of masculinities.

As a parallel, a brief description of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used as a tool to understand how patriarchy affects the core of society. According to Jones and Abes (2013), CRT

theorists propose “that the individual is always situated in a larger system in which race and racism are central” (p. 180). CRT theory “shifts attention away from solely the individual to an examination of how structures and systems influence the individual” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 179). This brings the focus towards the fact that racism is socially constructed: “If race is always at the center...then how this macrosystem, of which one element might be racism, influences the individual in turn affects how the individual constructs an understanding of her or his race” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 180). Merton (1948) wrote: “Ethnic prejudices do die—but slowly. They can be helped over the threshold of oblivion, not by insisting that it is unreasonable and unworthy of them to survive, but by cutting off their sustenance now provided by certain institutions of our society” (p. 210).

One could say that like the socially constructed concept of race, the system of patriarchy is also central to our society and also is a societal construct, and that it continues simply because society allows it to go on. No one has yet been able to *cut off its sustenance*, in the words of Merton (1948), above. Dads are feeling marginalized because not enough people are challenging the institutional ways in which American society portrays men and fathers.

In looking at these institutions, I remember Casey talking about fatherhood and what he called the “inside American joke.” He said that “we stereotype and then perpetuate and then enforce with cultural values...and it becomes just sort of this inside American joke.” He then continued onto say:

It’s really something that we need to get away from. In the same way that we need to get away from a lot of our pervasive views about *different* marginalized groups. I know I’m saying that dads are marginalized...but in *this* way, I feel that they are.

Patriarchy directly affects how someone views their own gender for both men and women, and it affects how someone perceives the idea of being male, just like how racism affects one’s perspective on their own race or ethnicity. If there are misfortunes in society

affecting men, patriarchy is so influential on society's structure that we cannot look just at an individual man or group of men to find the answer. We must look at *what type of culture* has been created for all members of society through patriarchy, and what we are all doing to further it, before we can understand how to end it.

Since men without question have traditionally held privilege over women in our patriarchal society, it is perhaps slightly controversial to use parallels from feminist theory, in particular Black feminist thought or Anzaldúa's lesbian feminist writings, in addition to other perspectives such as intersectionality and Critical Race Theory as tools to examine men. But making the changes in the way we view things is less about politics, because we can all agree that men, especially White men, are the ones with power and privilege in our economic and political system. However, we have a more difficult task at hand with lessening the oppression of men because we have to change the whole culture at a very basic level – the way men and women of all races and ethnicities relate to men themselves, and how we raise our children and what we are teaching little boys and girls about what it means to be a man and how to dismantle the gender binary.

As I wrote the findings and discussion chapters, I realized a need in myself to be provocative. I realize that not everyone may understand the connection between sexism and being a single father. Some people may think men have it easy. And in many ways in life, yes, men may. But they are also suffering at the hands of the rules of patriarchy that we all play a part in perpetuating.

I hope that through this entire dissertation, from the cycle of raising boys, to the culture of Guyland in the college-years, to the myths about masculinity, the double-binds men find themselves in on a daily basis, and the rich data provided through the voices of the single fathers

in my study provides a clear picture into what the “inside American joke” is and how we can address it.

As a mother, I have an exciting and challenging job ahead. Pollack (1998) described the progressive and far-reaching influence of mothers to boys as follows:

As we’ve seen, a mother is often an expert at coaxing a boy to be more emotionally expressive, feel more confident about himself, and reveal his complete personality with more courage and honesty. But she’s also especially talented at showing how boys can merge these new “sensitive” qualities with some of the traditional qualities celebrated as typically “masculine.”

*By giving her son the love and support he needs to satisfy society’s two-sided rules about masculinity while still being the person he truly is, a mother is training him to become a man who can share his feelings in an authentic way [italics added], a man who can be forthright about what he likes and doesn’t like, a man who’s able to share his genuine self with friends, family, and colleagues alike. By connecting closely with her son, she’s giving him the energy, confidence, and savvy he needs to meet all of society’s expectations of him, old and new, while still honoring his true self, the *real boy* behind the mask. (p. 112)*

So, because of my personal level of awareness, I have a rare opportunity to try as much as I can to foster a healthy gender development for my son as I am aware of the patriarchal constraints society places upon him.

I have demonstrated through this dissertation that patriarchy has “stripped men of certain rights, imposing on them a sexist masculine identity” (hooks, 2000b, p. 68). It is important to know that feminist theory itself can do a lot to end patriarchy:

In our nation masses of people are concerned about violence but resolutely refuse to link that violence to patriarchal thinking or male domination. Feminist thinking offers a solution. And it is up to us to make that solution available to everyone. (hooks, 2000b, p. 66)

Using a feminist paradigm, we can all play a part in ending patriarchy, helping make the world a more accepting place for all of our children, across the gender spectrum. And a critical piece of this belongs to men—if they agree to bring their perspectives to the discussion and serve as positive role models for boys and young men.

As I stated in the literature review, I wanted to conduct research from the transformative perspective. According to Mertens, Harris and Holmes (2009), “[T]he transformative researcher feels a moral imperative to challenge the status quo for the purpose of contributing to a more just society” (p. 98). I do believe my work was transformative for many reasons: Firstly, it was transformative for the participants who were given an opportunity to bare their souls, and they were finally able to talk about what their experience has been like to someone who cared. Next, it was transformative to me, as a researcher and as a person. As I reflected on my Master’s thesis research and my experience as a single mom of a son and the treatment of boys and men in American society, my aim was to raise awareness and allow the men to be heard, and I hope I achieved that goal. And lastly, I think – and I hope – that this will be transformative for those who read this dissertation, even if they are not a single father in college.

This dissertation is all about creating awareness about what it means to be a single father, especially one that is brave enough to take on the extra role of focusing on getting an education for themselves, in turn to better their children’s lives. And with this, I have brought a feminist and transformative perspective to the topic of masculinity, and allowed the voices of these men to be heard; voices that are often silenced in many different ways. In regards to the use of feminism, hooks (2015) has stated that:

Individuals committed to feminist revolution must address ways that men can unlearn sexism. Women were never encouraged in contemporary feminist movement to point out to men their responsibility. Some feminist rhetoric “put down” women who related to men at all. (p. 78)

Yes, I am a feminist. And with this, I want people to know that feminism does not need to be equated to my being a supposed man-hater by any stretch of the word. There are many males in my life that I care about a great deal and I hope that in whatever role they play in my life, that this study will help them and men in general unravel the binds they find themselves in a

daily basis, be aware of those binds, and be encouraged to express their feelings and be more free on the outside to be the person they really are in the inside. I also hope that parents who read this think about the types of messages they are sending to their boys and girls about what it means to be a boy, a father, and a man in general.

In conclusion, I'm brought back to thinking back to the passage from the *Velveteen Rabbit* that I used as the very introduction to this dissertation. I included it without explanation and never addressed it anywhere else in the dissertation until now. It spoke to me about perseverance, and how their 'father' identities have been in constant formation. It illustrated how through offering this opportunity to these men to tell their stories, they were given a chance to be vulnerable and *real*:

Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand. (Williams, 1975, p. 12-13)

So to my participants, I hope that the experience of participating in these interviews gave you the voice that you had felt was lacking until this point and that it helped you reflect more on what being a father means to you. If I was able to play any part in this, however small, I am extremely honored.

The choice isn't about whether to be involved in privilege and oppression. It isn't about accepting blame for a system we didn't create. Nor is it about whether to make ourselves better people so that we can consider ourselves above and beyond sexism as a social problem. The choice is how to participate in this system differently so that we can help to change not only ourselves, but the world that shapes our lives and is, in turn, shaped by them. Ultimately the choice is about empowering ourselves to take our share of responsibility for the patriarchal legacy that we've all inherited.

Allan Johnson in *The Gender Knot* (2005), p. 50

CHAPTER 7. EPILOGUE

In this epilogue, you will find a collection of stories and reflections that I have been working on as I have been writing my dissertation. The trio of stories found below are stand-alone writings, but they are meant to be read together. Despite them being separate, a common thread does run throughout. And that thread is my reflection on being a mother and how that relates to masculine stereotypes and to this study in particular. As I began writing these journal entries, I wasn't able to put it all into one cohesive idea and was struggling with *how* to write it. But through input from my advisor, I was able to see that yes they were separate stories, but with commonalities which paralleled the story I am telling in this dissertation from start to finish.

Haircuts

My son is now just over 3 years old and last year, I was letting his hair grow long. To be honest, I was not ready to let go of my baby and did not want to cut his hair. As my consciousness has been raised regarding motherhood, I have realized my unwillingness may be part stubbornness manifesting itself in a type of social experiment as I watch reactions from others regarding the topic of his hair length. For example, my father told me that a neighbor commented to him that my son "needs a haircut." This seems like a fairly innocuous comment, however to me as a mom who is aware of what society does to boys, it frightens me. He looks 'like' a boy and dresses 'like' a boy, yet someone who is not a parent to the child feels it is okay to exclaim that he needs a haircut?

In *The Courage to Raise Good Men*, Silverstein (1994) writes of a passage from D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* in which a mother awakes to find that her husband has just cut the locks off of her son's hair. The message on the part of this father was: "Don't make a girl of him" (p. 5). It was emotional for me to read this section in Silverstein's book because I could

immediately feel the pain and anger that the mother may have felt towards the man who made the decision to cut the hair, as to avoid any semblance of femininity on the part of her son.

I must mention that throughout the writing of this literature review over a year ago, my son's hair became a little unkempt so I did trim his hair a little. I feel some guilt—a guilt of which I was struggling to make sense. In some ways, I feel like I betrayed my son; wondering if glances from others will convey their satisfaction that I finally conformed, however slightly, to societal norms. But inside, I am wrestling with a harsh reality—the unavailability of being an unwilling participant in a patriarchal world.

As time has gone on, I have become unexpectedly skilled in cutting his hair on my own. Each time I cut it, I become more comfortable with cutting it shorter and have now graduated from only scissors to now using a clippers with special cutting guides. Strangely enough, I am beginning to like his shorter hair actually, and that is surprising to me. Before when his hair was longer, my dad would affectionately call my son his little “hippie.” Fast-forward to just recently where I cut it the shortest it ever has been, and then my dad said, “Where’s my little hippie?” Something as simple as that illustrates the double bind that boys find themselves under. On one hand, my dad is telling me that people think he needs a haircut. But then a year later when I cut his hair shorter than usual, he misses the long hair? My mom also made a few comments about his hair when I first began cutting it a little shorter, and I detected a little disapproval in her voice, although I don't think she meant it that way.

Ironically, two days before my dissertation defense, I cut his hair shorter than I ever had and shaved his hair close on both sides to create a cute undercut style. My parents both loved it and I recall my dad saying to him, “You look like a little boy!” In my head, I thought, you know, when people say things like that, what did they think he looked like 24 hours before? Did he not

look like a boy before? No wonder boys find themselves restricted in the man box as they grow up with all the mixed messages that abound even in a situation with something as simple as length of hair. Yes, I think he looks awfully cute with short hair. However, hair doesn't have to make the man (or the boy) and a boy's gender performance shouldn't be judged on length of hair or judged *at all* for that matter, in all honesty. I still feel some pangs of guilt as if I'm conforming and cutting his hair short. But the way I'm "conforming" is by cutting his hair in more atypical styles. I think that helps me disassociate from the societal pressures. Next on the agenda – maybe a mohawk...

Teaching Vulnerability

My son has always typically been a very even-keeled child, especially during the daytime. At night however....When he does get mad, ever since he was born, he's been known for what I call his "sad face" with a cute downturned pout, while his face becomes beet red. He is now 3 years old and I have noticed in the last 6 months or so, a little more defiance coming out, which I know is very normal for toddlers of this age. His usual tantrum happens over earth-shattering things such as getting mad when I take his plate to the sink instead of putting it on the table like he had asked, or if I try to take his shoes off for him – yelling "No, I gotta do it!" has been his latest mantra. Usually he will throw himself to the ground, with his behind up in the air and cry. He just has to get that out of him and at the end, he will tell me in his very cute and grammatically incorrect way, "Are you done crying?" And with that, sometimes he's done and that's that. He just had to get the little gremlins out of him.

I had heard somewhere that some children are very tactile and when a tantrum is had, the suggestion was to try holding and hugging them to calm them down. Sometimes he would let me hold him but other times he would push me away and just need to cry for however long felt good

to him and he didn't want me around. But, I continued to try to hold him. So I began to not stay away, like he wanted me to do, but trying to hold him when he was sad and having a tantrum. Sometimes he let me and other times he didn't. But I kept at it, and would always try to rub his back and also talk about the feelings he was maybe having so that he would have the words himself someday to articulate his feelings. I would tell him, I know you are mad, that's okay. I know it is frustrating when mama doesn't let you do this. It's okay to cry – it makes you feel better. Mama's here.

And then, when he was just shy of 3 years old, a miraculous thing happened. We had finished potty training a few weeks before and while going to the bathroom, he wanted a piece of toilet paper. I know, another earth shattering toddler need! I told him he didn't need any until he went to the bathroom. He leaped off the toilet and I braced myself for a slap or a hit, and he just jumped into my arms. He wanted to be held. He didn't throw himself on the ground or try to hit me like he usually did, nor did he push me away. He literally jumped into my arms, and simply cried.

The first time it happened, it was a very special moment. I had this clarity and thought, what is different now? Was this related to potty training and he feels less secure now that he has graduated from diapers? What has caused this change? I felt such a release of emotion inside for his action of love. He didn't want to push me away, he needed me to hold him and protect him.

In all that I know about my research on the topic of gender, I was so worried about him having a moment in his life when still young where he feels the pressure to pull away from me as his mother or in the words of hooks (2004), a "primal moment of heartbreak and heartache" (p. 15). Because of my reflections on this, I have been doing what I can to make sure he and I stay connected. He has continued to leap into my arms when he is sad. Each time it happens, I marvel

at what may be going on. Maybe I'm doing something right. Maybe I'm teaching him vulnerability.

Preschool

I was talking on the phone with my dad about my son starting preschool later this year and my dad said, "Do you think he'll like it?" I wholeheartedly said yes, as he loves to learn, and he talks about school and school buses even already. And then I just said, "Well, he sees me going to school and that's all he knows."

I talk about homework, and then he asks me "Are you gonna go type your dissertation?" And sometimes he puts a basket on his arm and says "I'm going to school!" Lately, as I've gotten closer to my defense, he has been saying, "Are you gonna get your Ph.D.?" I've also taught him to say "Dr. Mama" for fun and he loves saying it.

What I am modeling for my son makes me reflect on the fathers from my study and the strong influence they are having on their children's futures. Their children see them persevering, doing homework, and even graduating from college. How lucky those children are to have their own father as a role model for emphasizing the importance of education!

Because I was a student when my son was still very young, and during a time when he's starting to grasp the world around him, the concept of school is normal to him. His mom being in school is just an everyday occurrence to him. Again, this is the world my son knows – my mom goes to school. My mom has a doctorate. I wonder if he will be proud of that, and tell other people that as he gets bigger, not realizing that not every mom has a doctoral degree. Again, my education has normalized that for him. As he grows up, my goals and aspirations that he saw me fulfill while he was young may just influence him and allow him to set his educational goals high just like his mom did as he was growing up.

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APPENDIX A. SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES AND FIGURES

Table A1.
Codes and Sub-Codes

<u>Descriptive Coding</u>	<u>Emotion Coding</u>
Advice to Other Single Dads	Anger
Being a Provider	Being Emotional
Bias Against Fathers	-Sadness
-Society	-Tears
-Legal System/Courts or Child Support	Dismissal/Discounting
Support Network	Frustration
-Lack or Presence of Support	Guilt/Shame/Humiliation
-Informal Support	-“Feeling bad”
-Formal Support	Happiness
Seen as Overprotective or Overreacting	Hopeful
Reactions of Surprise	Humor
Comments about My Research	-Self-Deprecating Humor
-Excited/Enthusiasm for the Research	-Laughter
Comments about the Typical College Guy	-Sarcasm
-Definition of Typical Guy	Loneliness
-Used to Be That Guy	Love
-Do Not Identify with Guyland-No Need to Fit In	Nostalgic
Dating	Pride
Disadvantages	Reflective
-Miscellaneous Disadvantages	Regret
-Disadvantages for Kids	
-Isolation	
Emotional Intelligence	
Ideal Dad	
-Own Father	
-How they Talk About Themselves	
-Role Models	
Positive Nature – Being a Single Father is Rewarding	
-Role Model for Kids	
-Being There for Kids	
-Other General Benefits	
Role Strain	
Sacrifice	
School	
-Bonding with Children Over Homework	
-Motivating/Regulating Factor in their Lives	
Words – Negative Words used to Describe Themselves or Men	

Note: Codes presented in alphabetical order, not in order of frequency of appearance in the data.

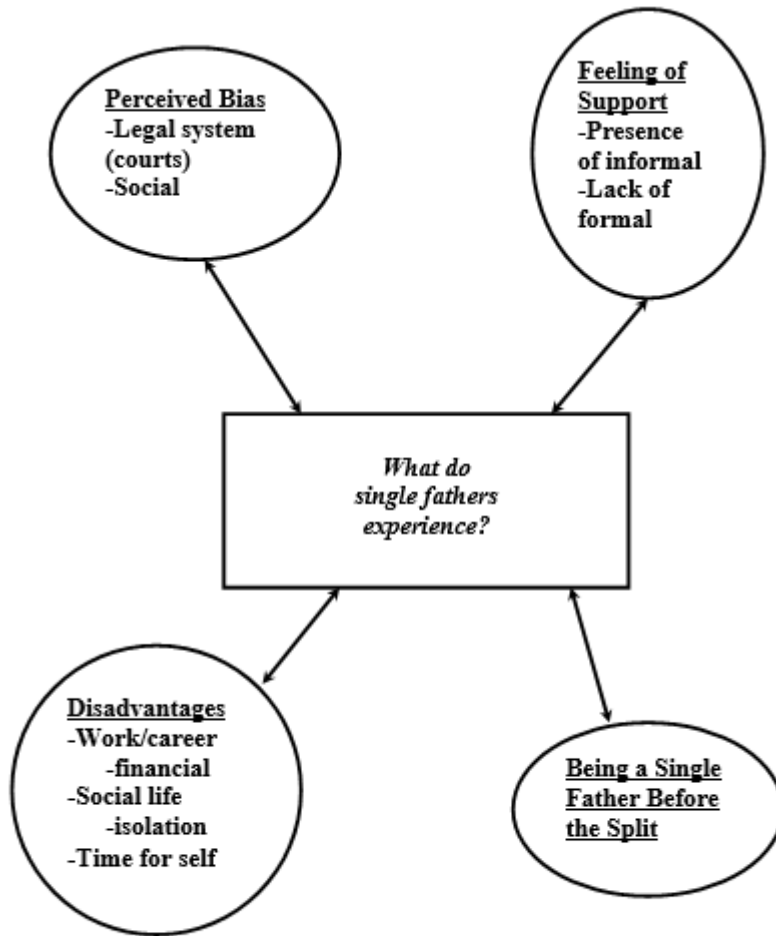


Figure 2. What Single Fathers Experience.
 Note: Size of circles in no way depicts the number of responses for each theme.

Figure A1. “What Single Fathers Experience” Figure from Master’s Thesis
 Table Note: Reproduced from: Johnson, 2003, p. 39.

APPENDIX B. IRB APPROVAL LETTER



April 24, 2015

****REPRINT****

Dr. Nathan Wood
School of Education

Re: IRB Certification of Exempt Human Subjects Research:
Protocol #HE15241, "Single Fathers in College"

Co-investigator(s) and research team: Sara Johnson

Certification Date: 4/24/2015 Expiration Date: 4/23/2015
Study site(s): NDSU
Sponsor: n/a

The above referenced human subjects research project has been certified as exempt (category # 2) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects). This determination is based on the original protocol submission with revised consent (received 4/24/2015).

Please also note the following:

- If you wish to continue the research after the expiration, submit a request for recertification several weeks prior to the expiration.
- The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol. Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
- Notify the IRB promptly of any adverse events, complaints, or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this project.
- Report any significant new findings that may affect the risks and benefits to the participants and the IRB.

Research records may be subject to a random or directed audit at any time to verify compliance with IRB standard operating procedures.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.

Sincerely,

Digitally signed by Kristy Shirley
DN: cn=Kristy Shirley, o=NDSU,
ou=Institutional Review Board,
email=kristy.shirley@ndsu.edu,
c=US
Date: 2016.01.04 10:47:55 -0600

Kristy Shirley, CIP, Research Compliance Administrator

For more information regarding IRB Office submissions and guidelines, please consult http://www.ndsu.edu/research/integrity_compliance/irb/. This Institution has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

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APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Education (Dept. 2625)
210 Family Life Center
PO Box 6050
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

701.231.9771 (office)
701.231.7202 (department)

Fax: 701.231.7416
Email: Nathan.Wood@NDSU.edu

Informed Consent Form: Single Fathers in College

You are receiving this form because you are student at [REDACTED] who is also a single father. Because single fathers in college have been understudied in the existing research, we are conducting a study to understand more about what a single father experiences while being a college student. We hope to learn more about the unique needs of single fathers on a college campus, and the results will help student services professionals understand how to provide better services to dads in college like yourself.

You may participate if you: Are a male student enrolled at [REDACTED] and a single father who does not live with your children's other parent and are no longer in a relationship with that person. You must have at least one child of the age of about 10 or younger, and your children must live with you at least some of the time. You must also be a U.S. citizen who was born in the United States. If you have questions about your eligibility for this study, please contact the researchers listed on this form.

We would like permission to conduct one or two in-person interviews with you about your experience as a single dad. Any interviews will be conducted in a quiet location on the [REDACTED] campus in a location convenient for you such as a private conference room in a campus building or a study room at the [REDACTED] Library. Please expect any interviews to take approximately 45 to 90 minutes of your time.

Your involvement and anything you say in the interviews will be kept confidential. The interview conversations will be recorded in audio, however, you will not be referred to by name on the recordings. All names and any other information that could potentially identify you in our data will be omitted upon transcription of the interview, before we begin our analyses. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and the names of any persons you mention by name in the interviews, so your information will stay private.

If you do choose to take part in this study, the research team will offer you a gift card [approximately \$20] to a grocery store as a thank you for your time while participating in our study.

The person listed at the bottom of this form is the researcher in charge of this study and will be the only person who will know who chooses to grant permission for their data to be used in this study. You should also know that even after you fill out this form, you can change your mind about whether you want your information to be included in our results – in which case, you can simply email the person listed below and ask to be removed from the study. If you have any questions or complaints about this study that you are not comfortable addressing to the people listed below, you can contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Office at 701.231.8908 or ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu.

Thank you for considering being involved in this study! If you are willing to allow your data to be used in the study please provide the following information below:

Your printed name

Your signature

Date

Contact for more information:

Sara Johnson
PhD Candidate, Education Doctoral Program (NDSU School of Education)
Sara.Johnson@ndsu.edu

APPENDIX D. FORMAL RECRUITMENT EMAIL THROUGH A STUDENT

LISTSERV



Tue 4/28/2015 3:29 PM

Participant List <[REDACTED]@LISTSERV[REDACTED]> on behalf of

Sara Johnson <sara.j.johnson@ndsu.edu>

Single Fathers in College: Participants Needed

To [REDACTED]

You forwarded this message on 4/30/2015 7:04 PM.

Dear NDSU student,

Are you a single father attending [REDACTED]? My name is Sara Johnson and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Education at NDSU. I am conducting a research study on the experience of **single fathers who are attending college**, and I am looking for participants for my study (IRB Approval #HE15241).

It has been found through a review of the existing research that college student fathers, and single fathers in particular, have been overlooked in the research until now. Because very little prior research has been done on the experience of the single father in college, the purpose of our study is to understand more about what a single father experiences while being a college student.

Through this study, we will learn more about the unique needs of single fathers on a college campus. The research will help student services professionals understand how to provide better services to dads in college.

This study would consist of one or two in-person interviews.

Please click the following Google Drive link for more information about the study: [https://drive.google.com/file/\[REDACTED\]/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/[REDACTED]/view?usp=sharing)
(This URL is public to anyone with the link - No login or password is required to view the document.)

If you are eligible and wish to take part in the study, please contact me at Sara.J.Johnson@ndsu.edu and I can provide you with the informed consent form that you would sign before participating.

Also, if you have any questions at all about the study, including criteria for eligibility, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for considering to participate in this study about single fathers! We feel this study will put a focus on an area that has been neglected in the research until now, and we look forward to hearing about your first-hand experiences as a single dad.

Sincerely,

Sara Johnson
PhD Candidate, Education Doctoral Program
School of Education
Sara.J.Johnson@ndsu.edu
www.ndsu.edu



APPENDIX E. STUDY FLYER

Single Father Study: Participants Needed

Are you a single father in college?

It has been found through a review of the existing research that college student fathers, and single fathers in particular, have been overlooked in the research until now. Because very little prior research has been done on the experience of the single father in college, the purpose of our study is to understand more about what a single father experiences while being a college student.

Through this study, we will learn more about the unique needs of single fathers on a college campus. The research will help student services professionals understand how to provide better services to dads in college.

We are looking for single fathers enrolled in classes at State University who meet the criteria below, and who would be willing to participate in one or two in-person interviews, in addition to a short web-based questionnaire.

As a thank you for participating in the research, you will be offered a \$20 gift card.

Who is eligible?

You may participate if you:

- Have at least one child who is about 10 or younger
- Are a single father who does not live with your children's other parent and are no longer in a relationship with that person
- Have 1 or more children that live with you at least part of the time
- Are enrolled at State University
- Are a U.S. citizen who was born in the United States
- Are at least 18 years of age

If I participate, what can I expect?

Any interviews will be conducted in a quiet location on the State University campus such as a private conference room in a campus building that is convenient for you. Expect any interviews to take 45-90 minutes of your time.

What should I do now?

If you have questions about the criteria of eligibility for this study, please contact the researcher listed on this form.

If you want to participate or just want more information to help you decide, please contact the researcher listed below and tell us you are interested in participating in the study. You will then be provided with an informed consent form which provides more details about the study and you can then make a decision if you want to participate.

Contact Information

Sara Johnson
PhD Candidate, Education Doctoral Program
NDSU School of Education
Sara.J.Johnson@ndsu.edu

APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, ROUND 1

What follows in the interview protocols are a list of potential overarching questions (bolded, numbered questions) to ask of most, if not all, participants. These questions are accompanied by indented and bulleted questions which are intended to be examples of possible follow-up probes. In an interview, the actual wording of the questions were handled in a conversational manner which matched with the natural flow of conversation.

I. PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- What is your age?
- Are you a graduate or undergraduate student? (What is your year in college?)
- What is your highest level of educational attainment?
- Are you enrolled as a part-time or full-time student?
If part-time, how many classes do you typically take per semester?
- Are you currently employed?
Yes - If so, how many hours per week do you work? What type of work do you do?
No - If not, are you currently seeking any work?
- How would you classify your race/ethnicity?
- How many children do you have? _____
- What are their ages and genders?
- Were you ever married to your children's mother?
If yes, how long were you married?
- Is your children's mother still living?
Yes - If yes, as of now, how long have you been separated?
No - If no, how long has it been since her death?
- What led you to become a single dad?
- Please describe your children's living arrangement. How often do they live with you?
If their mother is still living:
How often do they live with their mother?
Was there a court-ordered custodial arrangement? If so, in a few lines, please explain the custodial decree.
- Are you living with anyone else besides your children now?
- Does anyone provide you help with childcare? (Monetary help to pay for daycare, or providing the childcare itself)
 - a) Who provides help and what is their relation to you or your children?
 - b) Do you receive any money to help with daycare; aside from financial help, do others offer their time to help you? What other sort of help do you get when it comes to childcare?
 - c) Do you receive any other sort of help from others, not relating to childcare?
- Financially, how do you make ends meet?

II. EVERYDAY LIFE AND INTERACTIONS

1) Let's start by talking about your day so far. Would you say today is a typical day for you?

- How does it differ from a typical day? (A typical day with and/or without kids)
- How does school fit into your routine?
- How does work fit into your routine?
- How do you get all the things done that you need to get done on a daily basis?

2) If you could pick 3 words or phrases that would describe to me your experience as a single dad, what would those 3 things be?

3) In general – tell me about what it's like being a single dad?

4) Tell me about your parenting style. What type of a dad are you?

- For people that know you well, how would they describe your parenting?
- In thinking about how you parent your children, how do you want others to see you?
- What do I need to know about you, your children, and your background, to understand who you are as a father?

5) What are your daily interactions like with other people, when it comes to you being a dad?

- What is it like when you're out in public, shopping with your kids? Or at your child's school for example with teachers or other parents?

6) I know you are a father and a student – but tell me about the other roles you play in life. "Who" are you?

- What words or phrases would others use to describe the type of person that you are?

7) Tell me about your circle of friends. This could mean friends you met anywhere, not just at college. How would you describe the types of friends that you have?

- a) Where did you meet your friends?
- b) Out of all your friends, who would you consider to be your closest friends –and why?
- c) What do you do for fun with your friends in general?
- d) Are you able to maintain close relationships with friends if you can't always join them for activities?
- e) Do you have any friends you met at college that you feel really supported by, who listen well and with whom you can share your experience as a dad. Tell me about these peers and what your friendship is like.

8) What are experiences like of other single dads you know?

- a) What do you talk about with them?

9) Do you have time for dating and romantic relationships? Tell me about your experience with dating since you have become a father and single dad.

- a) If so, how do those potential partners relate to you as a dad?
b) For you, is being a single dad an advantage or a disadvantage when dating?

10) Tell me about your life as a student. What is it like to be a single father going to school?

- a) How does being a parent affect you being a student?
b) Tell me more about your daily schedule involving your children
 - Does it change your needs as a student (for example, having to attend class and take exams, study, participate in group work, etcetera)
- c) If you currently work – is your employer understanding of your needs as a parent with your own responsibilities to school?
- d) Do you usually mention to other students that you are a single dad?
 - If so, when do you find yourself talking about it?
 - Describe the reactions of other students.
 - If you don't usually mention it, why not?
- e) Do you feel you spend the same amount of time studying as other students? Why or why not?
- f) Do you use any particular services on-campus that help you as a parent?
- g) Can you think of anything that would be helpful to you on-campus as a dad? What else could State University do for you to help you be successful as a student?
- h) Do you take part in any on-campus activities for fun? Please tell me about the types of things you do on-campus for fun.
 - What do you do off-campus for fun?
- i) What are your relationships like with campus staff or faculty on campus? For example, instructors, staff members, or particular offices who have been helpful to you in important ways at school. Is there any one particular person or office that has been your "lifeline?"

III. BACKGROUND, FAMILY, AND IDENTITY

11) Tell me more about the separation from your children's mom – what led to the separation?

- a) *If children's mother has passed away, this alternative question would be posed:* If you are willing to share, please tell me about the circumstances surrounding the death of your children's mom. How were you most affected? How did your children handle the grief?
- b) What was it like in your family before the separation – which parent was most involved with caring for your children?
 - a. How has that changed now, if at all?

- c) If the separation involved divorce or custody handled through the court system, please tell me about your experience in the court system.
 - a. What was it like for you in court? What was it like working with the attorneys on both sides? Do you feel you were treated with fairness by the judge?
- d) How do you see your children being affected, in light of their mother not living in the same household?
- e) Would you consider yourself a co-parent with your children's mother?
 - a. What role in parenting does their mother play currently? Has it changed over time or remained the same?
 - b. If you were to compare the level of energy you put into being a dad, how would you compare her level of engagement and involvement in their lives?
- f) What things in your life cause you the most stress as a parent?
 - a. In what ways does this stress affect you?
 - b. How do you think it affects your children?
- g) Think about things you can't do in your life right now because of your commitment to your kids. Are there any freedoms you wish you had but don't?
- h) If you are able to speak on their behalf, can you tell me what it is like for your children, being a child of a single father?
 - a. Tell me about how you perceive your children's well-being (self-esteem, eating habits, aggression, any problems in school, health status, social lives)
- i) What does "caregiving" and "nurturing" mean to you in context of being a parent?
 - a. Depending on children's age: Do you feel that your children share a lot emotionally with you? When they do, is this easy or difficult for you? Do you (try to) share in return?

12) Who do you strive to be as a parent? And in your opinion, have you been able to live up to your ideal?

13) Think back to your family of origin and when you were growing up. What would you like to tell me to help me understand your experience as you were growing up?

- a) Were you raised by both your mother and father?
- b) Tell me about your parents (or other guardians) and how they were each involved in raising you.
 - Which family member would you consider to have been the most involved as a parent/guardian?

14) Paint me a picture of a "good father"

- a) How did you learn to be a father?
 - Who were your role models growing up? Father figures?
 - Who are your role models today? Same people or different people?
 - If you think about the male influences in your family life, and the relationships/bonds you have with other males in your family, how do those relationships influence the type of dad you are today?
- b) Is your family supportive of you being in school?

- Do family members help you with childcare? How often? In what circumstances? Who helps you the most?

IV. EXPERIENCE DURING BIRTH OF CHILDREN

15) In general, in what ways would you say your life has changed since your children were born?

16) What was it like for you as a student after the birth of your children?

- If you were enrolled in classes when any children were born, did you take time off?
 - If so, how much time? How did you make that time? Who supported you in taking that time?
 - Did you talk to your instructors about why you needed time off? If so, what were their reactions like? Positive or negative? What are some examples of things instructors said to you?
 - If you didn't take time off, why not, and what was that experience like for you?

V. COLLEGE PEERS AND FITTING IN

17) Now, think only of your peers that are male. Imagine a typical college male your age that doesn't have kids – how does the life you lead as a dad differ?

- What are the characteristics of a typical college 'guy'?
- Do you consider yourself to be similar or different from other college men your age? In what ways do you see yourself as similar or different?
 - Do you think that these differences are due mainly to you being a dad? Or would you already classify yourself different than other men in college anyway?
- How do your college peers react to you being a single dad?
- Think in particular about any male peers in class or students you are acquainted with. When planning other activities such as hanging out as a group or going out in the evenings and weekends, are they understanding of your more limited schedule as a dad?
 - Give me examples of their reactions.
 - What types of reactions do you get when you say you are not available or if you have to cancel/reschedule plans?
 - In general - do you notice different reactions from male vs. female students? Or different reactions based on age of person?

18) What's the biggest pressure you feel to "fit in" (or conform) in college?

- What does a male need to do while going to school to "fit in"?
- Do you feel like you fit in?

- c) Do you try to conform? Or do you feel like you are comfortable forging your own path?

VI. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

19) What type of services would you like to see the State campus offer to dads or men in general?

20) In conclusion, what advice would you offer to other single dads like you?

21) Is there anything else I need to know about being a single father in college that you haven't had a chance to talk about?

APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, ROUND 2

I'd like to start out and ask about the time since our interview last month.

- How have things been since our interview? How are your kids? Anything changed?
- Was there anything that you found yourself thinking about after the interview – that day, or in the days, weeks following?
- Did anything happen between then and now, that you now saw in a different light after we talked the first time?

Then, ask a few clarification questions based on their round 1 interview

Lastly, General Topics

School

- Imagine a life without having to be in school. So what are your plans for later, after you graduate...What do you think that will be like?
 - How do you think your life will be different then, as a parent, when school isn't in the picture anymore?
 - How do you foresee life being different when you're done, like when you get that job and begin your professional life.
- In the grand scheme of things - what role has school served in your life? Besides the degree eventually - what have you learned, what have you gotten out of it?

When your kids aren't with you

We talked last time about who you are, in addition to being a dad and a student. I just have a few more questions to help me understand more about who the dads are in my study.

First question. As you know, introverts get their energies from being alone, turning inward, whereas extroverts get their energy from others around them, being out there. Would you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert?

- What recharges you?
 - Then ask...if they don't cover it: Specifically, I'm curious if you do anything fun to take care of yourself... do you do anything that fills you back up again, what recharges you.
 - Like for example I like to go grab my favorite food for take-out, go home and eat it (by myself!), that makes me feel good to have

some time off. Or take a night away from my son and have him stay at my dad's.

- What drains you?
- Do you see the same tendencies in your child, or are they different?

Other than what we maybe talked about before. Is there anything else you want to mention about what you do, when the kids aren't around?

Doing the Act of Parenting

- Tell me about a time, or times, when you've just been totally stumped when parenting. Like something you just *did not* know how to handle.
 - Probe if necessary: What things make you the most uncomfortable as a parent?
- Last time, we talked about caregiving, and we probably also talked about nurturing and how you see that playing out as a dad. So I'm just curious about a few areas of caregiving. A few examples to get you started:
 - One: In your kids' younger years, tell me about taking care of them when they were sick, potty training, for example.
 - Two: If your kids have arguments with friends or family members, what do you do to try to smooth it over? Do you play that role?
 - Three: I know from my own perspective – washing clothes, doing dishes, two things that are just so hard to keep up with. When you have your child, housework, or stuff outdoors, like taking care of your home or your car, etc – how do you get it all done; and do your kids like to help? How do you view housework – is it a priority?
- Many dads mentioned the importance of providing for their kids. Tell me about your perception of the word provider. What does that mean?
 - Tell me more about how you see yourself as a provider.

Lastly

What are your hopes for the future – for yourself, your family, your kids, etc.