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SINGLE FATHERS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Mississippi

ELIZABETH HOWE-HUIST

July 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Single fathers have, for the most part, been overlooked in research, even though the proportion of children being raised by custodial fathers has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. This exploratory study aims to understand the factors that single fathers take into consideration when deciding which types of social support to use in helping them raise their children. By analyzing the results with the concepts of social exchange theory, we can better understand why some types of support are used and why others are not. Social exchange theory states that individuals will seek interactions with low costs and high rewards. I view decisions about the use of social support in social exchange terms: parents weigh the rewards and costs of using particular forms of support. To study the use of social support, I conducted interviews with twelve single fathers. Subjects were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling. During phone interviews, the subjects were asked a series of questions regarding social support, willingness to ask for help, and their relationships with the mothers of their children. I found the majority of single fathers in this study used friends and family members more for emotional support and advice, and less for physical support. Findings were consistent with the concepts found in social exchange theory. The fathers also stated they were encouraged to ask for help when they became the primary caregivers for their children. Overall, the fathers did use family members and friends for physical and emotional support and advice with their children.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father and a special friend. Their experiences as single fathers have inspired me to research this unique and important group of men. I would also like to thank my husband who has put his life on hold so I could pursue my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Elise Lake, and my committee members, Dr. John Green and Dr. Jeff Jackson. I would not have been able to complete my thesis without their guidance and advice.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Families with custodial single fathers have been increasing since the 1970s. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2010 that 1.8 million men in the United States were single fathers (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). This is a significant increase when compared to the 393,000 single fathers reported in 1970 (America's Families and Living Arrangements 2001). Single fathers make up 15 percent of single parents today in America. As reported in 2011, 45 percent of these men were divorced, 30 percent had never been married, 19 percent were separated, and 9 percent were widowed (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). In this exploratory study, I will focus on single fathers (divorced, widowed, or unmarried) who have either physical or legal custody of one or more children under the age of 18 or still in high school, and assess which types of social support they use or do not use to care for their offspring.

Few studies have been done on single fathers and even fewer studies have been done on single fathers and social support. The purpose of this study is to find which types of social support are or are not used by single fathers and why they choose to use some forms of support over others. Fathers were asked questions to find out the reasoning behind their usage of certain types of social support and what factors contribute to their decisions. Social exchange theory states these fathers will seek interactions with high rewards and low costs.

The study also aims to understand fathers' feelings about asking for help and accepting help when it is offered. Fathers were asked specifically if help was volunteered to them

following the separation between them and the mothers of their children or if they asked for help. Lastly, the participants were asked questions about their relationships with the mothers of their children to see whether these women are seen as a source of support.

I use Benjamin Schlesinger's definition of a single parent: A one-parent family "consists of one parent who is caring for his or her children, in his or her home, and who is a single parent due to widowhood, divorce, separation, or who is unmarried" (Schlesinger 1970:3). The terms "single parent," "parent without partner", and "only parent" are all used to signify a parent who is raising a child on his own (Schlesinger 1970). I chose this definition over other definitions because I felt it was a good representation of how people view single parents. By contrast, the definition used by the Current Population Survey states a custodial father "is a man who has a child of his own under age 21 living with him who has a parent living elsewhere" (Koball and Wheaton 2002: 1871). The problem with this definition is it seems to exclude widowed parents because it states that there is another parent living elsewhere. The CPS specifically states they exclude widowed parents because few of them are custodial parents (Koball and Wheaton 2002). Just because a parent does not have to advocate for custody after the loss of the other parent does not mean he/she should not be considered a custodial parent. The definition created by Schlesinger takes into consideration all the ways in which a person can become a single parent.

Fathers have been chosen for this study based on the eligibility requirements that have been set and their current relationship status. Fathers who have remarried are not included because they are no longer single. The fathers who volunteered for the study participated in a telephone interview, with their responses being recorded. They were asked questions about their children, current living situation, custody arrangement, social support used, and demographic

questions about themselves. These questions were designed to help create a snapshot of the fathers' lives and in what ways support is important to them.

Chapter I has provided a brief introduction of this study. Chapter II includes background information regarding divorce, custody, and a brief history of fatherhood. It will also contain information from previous studies done on single parents and social support and a short description of social exchange theory and how it will be used within this study. Chapter III is the methods section. It describes how the study was designed and how participants were recruited. Chapter IV is the results section. It describes the respondents' living and custodial arrangements, fathers' involvement with children, use of social support, and the fathers' relationships with their children's mothers. Chapter V, the discussion, provides a brief overview of the results that were found, how these results compared to previous studies, my interpretations of the data and how they relate to social exchange theory, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Single fathers have, for the most part, been overlooked in research even though the proportion of children being raised by custodial fathers has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. A study cited by Meyer and Garasky (1993) found the percentage of both white and black children living in single father households was higher for children born between 1975 and 1980 than for children born between 1960 and 1964. The change in divorce has been seen as the primary reason for the growth in the numbers of white custodial fathers since the 1980s (Garasky and Meyer 1996).

There are three factors I believe likely led to the increase in single parenting. The first is the introduction of the no-fault divorce. No-fault divorce is a divorce in which the dissolution of a marriage does not require a showing of wrong-doing by either party (US Legal Definitions 2012). The first state to implement the no-fault divorce law was California in 1969. Almost every state introduced some form of no-fault divorce within the next decade. No-fault divorce contributed to a steady increase in divorce rates. With the increase in divorce rates, America began to see an increase in single parent homes (Hershkowitz 1997). The second factor that may explain the increase in single fathers was the women's liberation movement. Geoffrey Greif, author of *Single Fathers* (1985), argues that the women's movement contributed to women's involvement in the workforce. This left children with less interaction with their mothers and more time spent with their fathers. Women were now able to define themselves in nonmaternal

ways (Greif 1985). This was not to say women's entrance into the workforce led directly to the increase in single fathers, but it was a factor that played a part in the change.

The third factor that led to the increase in single fathers was the change in custody laws. Prior to the Civil War it was more likely for a father to have custody of his children because of high maternal mortality rates and the father's higher status (Greif 1985). Fathers were still the primary choice in custody cases until the Industrial Revolution. Because fathers were increasingly leaving the home for work they were no longer seen as the best choice to raise a child. It was at this time that mothers became seen as the parent who would provide the best care for a child (McNeely 1998). In 1893 Congress passed the Talfourd Act (also known as the "tender-years doctrine") which awarded custody of children to the mother if they were below the age of seven. This created a bias towards the mother and the only way for the father to obtain custody was to prove the mother was unfit. For example, an unfit mother could be a woman who had a substance abuse problem or was abusive to the children. Fathers were seen as being less important to the well-being of the child and many fathers believed they would not get custody if they sought it; thus they were discouraged from seeking custody (Greif 1985).

Things have changed in the court system and today parents are supposedly given custody based on the best interests of the child. That is, "focusing on the child's 'best interest' means that all custody and visitation discussions and decisions are made with the ultimate goal of fostering and encouraging the child's happiness, security, mental health, and emotional development into young adulthood" (FindLaw. Focusing on the "Best Interests" of the Child 2012:1). The court system has also been moving systematically toward a more gender-neutral approach to awarding custody (Garasky & Meyer 1996: 385). Both fathers and mothers are now supposed to be considered when assigning a custodial parent after a divorce or separation. However, during

custody proceedings courts still have a positive bias towards the mother (Seltzer 1990), and it can be difficult for the father to receive custody. Recently, the Utah House of Representatives approved a bill that would stop gender bias in custody cases. *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported the bill states that “courts cannot discriminate against a party in a custody dispute based on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion” (Gehrke 2012: 1). While the judiciary system of Utah is not representative of all states, this legal change indicates that courts are moving away from gender bias and moving towards decisions that reflect the best interests of the child.

There are a multitude of custody arrangements that can be arranged by the courts. Physical custody refers to where the child resides. Joint physical custody is an arrangement in which the child lives part-time with each parent. Alternatively, the courts have the option to award one parent with sole physical custody, specifying that one parent has the child full time while the noncustodial parent is allowed visitation. Legal custody of a child allows the parent to make decisions for the child. When both parents are allowed to make decisions, this is known as joint legal custody. The court has the option of deciding if legal or physical custody will be shared by the parents. One form of custody is not a guarantee of the other. Sole custody is when one parent has sole physical and legal custody of a child. When a parent has sole custody of a child he or she is the primary decision maker and caregiver for the child (Nolo 2012). Some parents may choose to make custody arrangements that are informal. These arrangements are established between the parents without the intervention of the courts. Informal physical custody is typically arranged because the parents of the child were not married prior to the separation.

## *A Brief History of Fatherhood*

Prior to the Industrial Revolution in the United States, fathers were seen as the protectors of children because they provided for them financially. Women were seen as the property of their husbands and found it difficult to take care of children alone due to a lack of resources (McNeely 1998). Research has shown that fathers were very involved with their children during these times. However, the research fails to acknowledge the role of the father was typically that of “patriarchal fatherhood” (LaRossa 1997:25). The role of this type of father was to be the dominant person in the household and to receive respect from his children. While he may have had a relationship with his children, it was based on respect and authority, and not the close emotional relationship we consider to be important in parenthood.

During the Industrial Revolution, particularly in the middle and upper classes, fathers were the sole income providers, and domestic roles and childcare tasks became the responsibility of mothers. Society began to put a great deal of pressure on mothers, constantly reminding them that they were to create a morally sound home and were to always put their children first (McNeely 1998). Motherhood became so elevated and virtuous it was believed a father could not imitate this role, nor could employed mothers fulfill this high level of moral expectation. A woman’s identity was defined by her role as a mother; men’s identities were defined by their economic and professional success. The father began to take on the role of economic provider and this would be the primary role of fathers for many decades (LaRossa 1997).

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked with new expectations for fathers. They were no longer seen as just breadwinners; they were now seen as breadwinners and contributors to the home life. The era surrounding the Great Depression has mixed findings as to whether the

level of paternal involvement increased or decreased during this time. Since millions of men were out of work, they could potentially have the opportunity to spend time with their children. Research by Scott Coltrane (1996) has suggested that in fact men were no longer using work as their sole identity and began to strengthen their personal relationships with their spouses and children. However, a study done by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) found the Depression had a negative impact on father involvement because all aspects of these men's lives were affected by the economy. Fathers who had jobs were more involved with these jobs than they had been before because they feared at any moment they could lose them and those who had already lost their jobs were consumed with finding work.

It was during the 1970s that women increasingly began to create identities for themselves that did not focus solely on their children and homes. Women began to join the work force and had to learn how to balance work and their household duties (childcare and chores). Because many women found this balance to be difficult, they requested their husbands' help (McNeely 1998). Some men chose to step up and increase their participation with their children, but this change was more individual and did not occur among all fathers. Research indicates that while fathers were more active with their children, they were still doing little around the house (Coltrane 1996). Some believe women entering the workforce may have led to the increase in divorce. Women were no longer dependent on men to support them. This may have led fathers to have problems identifying their role in the family because being the provider was the role that had been taught to them by their fathers (McNeely 1998).

There are conflicting findings as to whether men's increased involvement with their children has led to an increase in single fathers. While it seems plausible that single fathers were more involved with their children prior to divorce, research both supports and discredits this

assumption. One of the first large studies of single fathers was conducted in 1985 by Geoffrey L. Greif, a professor of social work at the University of Maryland. His book, *Single Fathers*, described interviews with 1,136 white fathers and their experiences of raising their children as single fathers. Greif found it was not the level of involvement prior to separation that determined the outcome (the father obtaining custody); rather, it was what happened when the marital relationship began to deteriorate. When the relationship was happy, the fathers described their involvement with the children as no different from that of other fathers. Greif found there were three events happening when the marriage started to deteriorate that led to an increase in the father's involvement. If the father felt his wife was not parenting properly, he would step in and become more active. If there was a change in the relationship between husband and wife that had nothing to do with the mother's parenting, or if both of these events happened, then the father would step in and become more involved with the children (Greif 1985). Greif concluded the level of the father's involvement changed during marital dissolution, thus it was not something that could have determined the father requesting custody prior to the divorce<sup>1</sup>.

There is also evidence which suggests single fathers were highly involved with their children during their marriages (Smith and Smith 1981). In the Smith and Smith study, 27 single fathers were interviewed and asked multiple questions about themselves at different points in their lives. Pre-divorce involvement was assessed by asking the fathers about their parental roles before marriage. They were also asked about involvement during marriage, and now as single parents. It was found over 70 percent of the fathers in this study reported being very much involved in their children's care prior to divorce (Smith and Smith 1981).

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<sup>1</sup> While it was not discussed in the section on father's involvement, Greif does address, in another chapter, the involvement level of fathers when the mother deserts the family. He states that "fathers who were deserted by their wives are likely, during the marriage to have been more involved...than were other fathers" (Greif 1985: 46)

## *Single Parents and Their Use of Social Support*

Once men become the primary caregivers for their children they begin to learn the types of support and assistance they may need. I chose social support as the primary focus of my study because having support can be an important asset when raising a child as a single parent. I think it is important to know which types of support are used and to know why some types of support are used over others. Social support can be defined as emotional support, advice, and services received from friends and family (Coles 2009; Hamer and Marchioro 2002).

The social support that will be the focus of my study is that which is informal. Informal support refers to the services provided by family members and friends (Coles 2009). Support that is formal, such as daycare centers, will not be included because they involve paid transactions. Use of more formal support networks such as churches and clubs will also be assessed, but separately from the informal support systems. Informal support is important because has been found to have a positive impact on the parents' well-being and can reduce the problems faced by single parents (Gladow and Ray 1986).

For this study, social support was divided into three categories: physical support, emotional support, and advice. For my study, the components of physical support resembled the concepts on parental involvement introduced by Michael E. Lamb in *The Changing Roles of Fathers*. Parental involvement was defined as engagement, accessibility and responsibility. Engagement involved one-one-one interaction between a person and the child. Accessibility involved having indirect contact with the child, such as being in the other room, but still being aware of the needs of the child. Responsibility involved tending to the child's welfare and care

(Lamb, 1986). This includes taking the child to the doctor if needed. If the parent is unable to perform these tasks, then they may have to ask another person to help them.

Emotional support is someone the father can turn to when he is overwhelmed from being a single parent or having someone to talk to help with adjustments in the father and children's lives. Advice was kept separate from emotional support because the person one turns to for emotional support may not be whom they turn to for advice. Advice is defined as a recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct (Merriam-Webster 2013). When a person goes to another for advice, they often expect critical feedback and suggestions to help them with a problem. Fathers may turn to family members and friends for information that will help them with practical and logistical problems and the challenges of being a single parent.

The amount of social support a father receives may depend on how willing he is to ask for or to accept support from others when needed and whether or not he has family members who live nearby. One of the first studies done on single fathers was conducted by Helen Mendes, an assistant professor of social work. Mendes conducted an "exploratory, comparative case study of thirty-two single fathers" (Mendes 1976: 439). Her results indicated single fathers had a lack of help from their extended families. Even if the fathers had family members in their neighborhoods, they felt they could call on others for occasional but not continuous help with the children (Mendes 1976).

Research that has been done on single fathers since the Mendes article states that now fathers have more support from their family and friends than previously found. Some of the fathers in previous studies chose to live with relatives or other adults to help them care for the children (Coles 2003; Zhan and Pandey 2004; Brown 2000). While some fathers did not ask for

help in the daily care of their children, they did rely on friends and relatives for emotional support and advice (Risman 1986; Coles 2009). The participants in Coles study said they felt they could call on family for advice and did so from time to time (Coles 2009).

One of the leading researchers on black single fathers has been Roberta Coles, a professor in social and cultural studies at Marquette University. In regard to support, her study of 20 black single fathers found that fathers who used the most support “tended to be younger, had young children, and resided in close proximity to family members” (Coles 2009: 1325). African Americans, regardless of their income and class, have been found to openly accept support provided by family members and girlfriends (Hamer and Marchioro 2002; Coles 2003). Because most of the previous studies involved predominantly white samples, it is unknown if these results from African American single fathers can be applied to single fathers as a whole.

Following a divorce, the types of social networks that are present in a father’s life can change. Commonly when people are married or in a relationship they rely on one another for support. Once separated the father may have to start creating new networks with others and try to maintain the relationships which were present before the divorce. A study done by Gasser and Taylor (1976) on single fathers found that divorced fathers had more friends after their divorce. Widowed fathers reported that they had more of a relationship with neighbors following the deaths of their spouses (Gasser and Taylor 1976). When compared to married parents, it was found that single fathers have a smaller group of family for support and have a larger group of friends for support (Hilton, Desrochers, and Devall 2001).

A study done by DeGarmo, Patras, and Eap (2008) found it was the type of custody the father had that determined the type of social support he used with his children. This study

interviewed over 200 fathers who had full custody, shared custody, or no custody of their children, and had them fill out multiple questionnaires concerning the type of social support they used for parenting. Initially, the study revealed that fathers with full custody and shared custody relied more on their new partners for support. Fathers without custody relied more on relatives. However, at the 9-month follow-up, fathers with full custody were more reliant on relatives and went from not relying at all on their former spouse to seven percent stating they consulted their former spouse for support. Fathers with shared custody still relied primarily on new partners and fathers without custody increased their reliance on relatives from 32 percent to 49 percent. This study shows how social networks and those whom provide support can change following divorce and vary among single fathers. The study also noted the fathers, regardless of custody situation, used the same amount of support for assistance with parenting (DeGarmo, Patras, and Eap 2008).

A form of social support that is often overlooked is the contact children have with the noncustodial mother. Noncustodial mothers are not seen as a form of support for multiple reasons. Because society tends to see these mothers in a negative way, some of them may choose to not be around their children. Some fathers do not want to have interaction with their children's mothers. But research has shown that when mothers are involved, at a level with which the father is comfortable, it can be beneficial for the child and the father. Greif (1985) found that a quarter of mothers saw their children once a week or more, a quarter saw their children every other week, and the rest saw their children less than once a month. Only nine percent of mothers never saw their children; it was not indicated why these mothers did not have contact with their children. Fathers who had ex-wives who were still involved with the children stated that having these women in their lives made being a single parent easier for them. Fathers reported higher incomes when the mothers were involved and stated the children were easier to

handle because having contact with their mother caused the changes to be less traumatic (Greif 1985).

### *Social Support and Single Mothers*

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported almost 10 million women in the United States were single mothers. The majority of custodial parents in America are mothers (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). With such a large number of single mothers it may be assumed there is more research on this group of women and social support. However, as with single fathers, there has been limited research conducted on this topic.

A study done by Hilton, Desrochers, and Devall (2001) compared role demands, relationships, and child functioning in single-mother, single-father, and intact families. A total of 90 families--30 single-father, 30 single-mother, and 30 intact families-- were given multiple instruments of measurement. For social networks, the participants were given a revised version of a social support scale which assessed the “size, composition, frequency of contact, types of support given, and received, and reciprocity of parents’ social networks” (Hilton et al. 2001:39). Only one measure significantly differentiated single and married parents: the number of friends and relatives in their social support networks. Both single mothers and single fathers stated they had fewer relatives in their social networks and had more friends in their social networks than did married parents (Hilton et al. 2001). This study suggests that single parents, both mothers and fathers, have limited social support networks that consist less of relatives and more of friends.

### *Social Exchange Theory*

One explanation as to why a father does or does not use a specific type of social support may be found in social exchange theory. Social exchange theory focuses on the relationships

between individuals and how these interactions help in maintaining the family structure (Chibucos, Leite, and Weis 2004). From an economic perspective, social exchange theory posits individuals participate in transactions that will maximize profit and reduce personal cost (Bengtson 2005:408). The interactions between family and friends can be viewed as a series of transactions in which resources are exchanged, and the interactions with the most rewards and the fewest costs are pursued (Bengtson 2005: 42). A transaction that is greeted with approval is more likely to be repeated than one that is met with negativity (Andersen and Taylor 2003: 100).

The same can be applied to the rationales fathers apply when considering the types of support available to them. Many of the transactions fathers will participate in have rewards that are instant; other rewards may become apparent over time. There can also be underlying costs that will not be present during the initial phase of the interaction. Single fathers often use social support, such as services provided by family and friends, because of the benefits they gain that assist in the care of their children and their own personal needs. Social support can be provided in the form of emotional support, such having someone to talk to, physical support, such as watching the child, or advice, such as having someone to help guide you through a problem. The benefits of having others help is the child gets to spend time with other family members and friends and this allows the father to have a break from the demand of being a single parent. The primary reward for the father and child can be time apart, but a secondary reward can also be present for the child. If the children are spending time with their mother's family then they are getting to interact with relatives whom they are not around regularly. There can also be a secondary reward in this for the father, because he is allowing his child to be exposed to the mother's family and this helps to keep communication open between both families.

At times fathers must weigh the rewards and the costs of seeking various kinds of support because while some systems of support are easily accessible, others can be difficult. Asking others for support may be encouraged or it may be discouraged by family and friends. If a family member has already volunteered to help then the father knows he will not be met with an interaction that could hold negative consequences such as embarrassment or rejection. He is more likely to go to a family member who is supportive than one who has been unsupportive because the interaction between the supportive family member is rewarding and the father does not have to worry about his ability to parent coming into question.

The initial interactions that happen between the father and another person can be positive, but may have costs that arise later in the relationship. A father who has his children interact with a new girlfriend may not realize the costs that could develop if this relationship does not last. Initially, he may encourage his children to spend time with someone he is dating and it can be rewarding to have the children get to know this person. However, the father may not take into consideration that his relationship with this woman can end and the costs to the children can be very high. Also having the children spend time with the father's new girlfriend can cause friction between the father and the children's mother. The mother may feel threatened by the new girlfriend and may not want this person around her child. Most transactions are based on the foreseeable rewards and costs and a transaction that was once rewarding can become costly and unwanted at a later time.

In the article "Single Fathers with Custody," Greif and DeMaris (1990) discuss how fathers often weigh the effects of a mother's participation in their children's lives. They understand a mother's involvement in her child's life is important, but at the same time they may question her quality of parenting. It can be rewarding to children's development to have their

mothers in their lives, but if there are costs associated with this relationship, such as the mother being perceived as having poor parenting abilities, then the father is less likely to pursue it (Greif and DeMaris 1990). If the mother is going to put the child into a dangerous situation then this interaction will be avoided because the costs outweigh the rewards. Deciding if the child should interact with its mother has multiple rewards and costs that have to be evaluated by the father.

There can be interactions which seem to have high rewards and low costs, but sometimes these interactions can have consequences or problems that are unforeseen. For example, a family member or friend who wants to be involved with the child could become overly involved and his/her constant need for interaction may become bothersome. If this person wants to be involved in every aspect of the child's life then the father may feel this person is overstepping his/her boundaries and weakening his power in the relationship. It may be rewarding to have someone who wants to be involved in all daily tasks, however this person may become a troublesome figure in the father's and child's lives. This is especially true if the person does not agree with how the father is raising the child and begins to enforce his/her own views on the child. There is also the issue of the person who is providing support to the father and the child. If this person feels the father has become too dependent on him/her, then he/she may choose to end the relationship because the rewards acquired no longer outweigh the costs.

With the concepts of social exchange theory, I hope to learn if fathers have to weigh the rewards and costs of allowing someone else to help them. I would like to know if this is because he has not found a transaction that has outstanding rewards and low costs or if it is because he has chosen to raise his child without assistance. I also hope to better understand what fathers perceive as rewards and costs. One father may encourage his children to spend time with their

mother regardless of her parenting skills and it would be interesting to understand how this type of reasoning comes about.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The purpose of my study is to investigate the types of social support that single fathers use. To accomplish this goal, I used a convenience sample of 12 single fathers identified through snowball sampling techniques, conducted a structured interview with each of them, and content coded their open-ended responses to evaluate the type of social support. The following sections provide details regarding the process used to generate my results.

#### *Process and interview protocol*

**Participant Identification and Eligibility Requirements.** Single fathers were recruited for my study using snowball and convenience sampling techniques. I reached out to my family, friends, and colleagues and asked them to refer me to single fathers whom they know.

Participants were also recruited through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Mississippi for additional contacts. An email message was sent to the professors in the department describing the requirements and the details of the study. Furthermore, interview participants were asked for referrals on others to interview. The potential participants were contacted by either email or phone and were given information about the details and requirements of the study and then were asked if they would be willing to participate. Using these mixed sampling methods, 12 fathers were obtained for this study.

There were two primary eligibility requirements to be a participant in my study. First, the father had to have either joint or sole custody of a child who was under 18 or still in high

school. Participants had to be over the age of 18. If the father had joint physical custody or did not have custody of his child, he had to be the primary caregiver for the child when the child was with him. Custody could have been arranged formally through the court system or informally between the mother and father. The fathers in the study had to be divorced, widowed, or unmarried, and those who were separated or remarried were not included because they are still legally married.

Second, the father had to be the primary caregiver for more than one year. There were two primary reasons for this. First, a study by DeGarmo, Patras, and Eap (2008) found that fathers tended to change the amount of support they received from others following divorce and the type of support utilized by fathers changed dramatically over the first year of custody. Secondly, the first year is often a time of adjustment for the father and children. The types of social support used by the father can be affected because studies have shown that divorce/separation changes a person's social networks (DeGarmo, Patras, and Eap 2008). For example, following a divorce fathers are more likely to replace their married friends with single friends, perhaps to avoid feeling like the "fifth wheel" (Smith and Smith 1981). The adjustments to the father's life and the change to social networks should be in the process of settling after one year.

### *Sample*

By using convenience and snowball sampling techniques, 12 fathers, with a mean age of 47, were recruited for this study. Ages ranged from 35 to 61. All of the participants in the study identified themselves as white. There were 20 children among the fathers, nine girls and eleven boys. Five of the fathers had one child, six of the fathers had two children, and one father had

three children. All but one of the fathers in the study had been previously married to the mothers of their child/children. One father had been married multiple times and had custody of two children from his first marriage and custody of one child from his second. The average age for the children was 12 for both boys and girls. The oldest child in the study was 18 and the youngest was three.

### *Income*

As expected from previous research conducted on single fathers (Brown 2000; Meyer and Garasky 1993), all of the fathers in this study had high incomes within the past year. Allen, the only participant from Indiana, had a yearly income within the range of \$60,000 to \$80,000. The median household income for the state of Indiana was \$48,000 in 2011 (American Community Survey 2007-2010a). Eight of the respondents were from Ohio; only seven of these fathers reported their incomes. The yearly income for these fathers was also between \$60,000 and \$80,000. The median household income for the state of Ohio was \$48,000 in 2011 (American Community Survey 2007-2010c). Two of the fathers in this study were from Mississippi; only one of them reported their income. Ken had a yearly income within the range of \$80,000 to \$100,000. His income was higher than the median household income (\$38,000) for the state of Mississippi (American Community Survey 2007-2010b). James, the only participant from Virginia, had a yearly income within the range of \$60,000 to \$80,000. This was consistent with the median household income in this state in 2011 (\$63,302) (American Community Survey 2007-2010d). In 2009, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the median income for male householder, no spouse present, was \$41,500 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

**Interview Protocol.** Interviews, lasting no longer than one hour, were scheduled with the fathers at their convenience. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and responses were recorded using a telephone microphone and notes<sup>2</sup>. Consent for the interviews was done orally over the phone before recording had begun to ensure the privacy of the father being interviewed. The interview protocol was followed, in order, for each interview.

The interview questions were designed to understand the current social support situations of single fathers and their children, to explore the types of social support used by the respondents, and to understand why some types of support are used and why others are not. Some of the questions are modifications from previous studies that focused on single parents and were selected because they have been consistently used when interviewing this population. Questions were separated into four categories: information about the children and other residents, if any, in the home; custody arrangements; social support; and demographic questions about the father. In the social support section, fathers were told the definition of social support is “emotional support, advice, and/or services received from family and friends.” After hearing the definition of social support, the fathers were asked if they had help with their children and which specific friend or family member provided them with the most help. They were also asked to identify if they had a person to whom they turned to for advice. In-depth interviews were performed in order to probe and ask for examples and illustrations. The interview questions were a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The proposed study protocol was sent to the University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board. It was found to meet their guidelines and was approved. The questions that were submitted to the IRB and used in the telephone interview can be found in the Appendix.

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<sup>2</sup> Four of the interviews were not recorded due to a mechanical failure. Their responses were recorded using notes.

### *Coding and data management*

Each interview was assigned an identification number for the recording and notes. The names of fathers were kept separate from the recordings and notes, and the names of the fathers and their children were assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the recordings by hand. After all the interviews were conducted and transcribed the responses from each recording were added into a spreadsheet. Questions that could be answered yes or no were first added into the spreadsheet and their expanded responses to these questions were categorized. Fathers' responses to the question as to whether they had family or friend who helped with the child/children were added into the spreadsheet and categorized by those who did and those who did not have help. If they did have a specific family member who had helped them, then the responses of yes were added into one category and their response as to whom this person was added into an adjacent cell. Whether the support was physical, emotional, or a mixture was also added into the spreadsheet. The same was done for friends who had provided the most support. The question on the father's relationship with his child's mother was categorized by bad or good and then the options of cordial, indifferent, or something else were added. Questions that had interval numbers such as the age of the children, father's levels of involvement, the father's age, and their annual take home pay, were added and the mean number was reported in the results section of the spreadsheet. Expanded responses to questions were not answered into the spreadsheet; rather summarized responses were entered and expanded on in the results section.

Open coding consists of reviewing all the data and organizing the information into large categories. This was followed by systematic coding of findings to identify patterns and illustrative examples and quotations to serve as evidence. Coding was done based on topics represented by the questions. Because this was an exploratory study, patterns and contrasting responses were recorded by theme through a process of open coding. After all the data were entered into the spreadsheet, I began to look for themes and patterns in the responses. Themes that were included in the study included the gender of the person who provided respondents with physical or emotional support and advice. The father's proximity to other families was followed to see if the distance away from relatives had an effect on the type of support that was received. I also focused on who provided support and advice to see if fathers chose the same person for both and to see if a pattern developed among the responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The results section will begin with a brief description of the fathers and their children. It will also discuss the fathers living and custodial arrangements and the fathers' pre-separation and current levels of involvement with their children. The section on support is divided into six sections. It is followed by a description of the fathers' use of formal social networks and their relationships with the mothers of their children.

#### *Living and Custodial Arrangements*

Eight of the fathers were from Ohio, two of the fathers were from Mississippi, one father was from Indiana, and one father was from Virginia. Wayne had a 14-year-old son and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. Shawn had an 18-year-old daughter and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. Henry had a twelve-year-old son and a nine-year old daughter and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. Allen had a 14-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. Collin had a 17-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter and sole custody of these children. Collin also had a 10-year-old daughter from another marriage and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. Matt had a 13-year-old son and did not have custody of his child but was the primary caregiver for his son. Richard had a 17-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old son and had joint custody with his ex-spouse. Drew had a 16-year-old son and had shared parental responsibility with his ex-spouse. Brett had a 17-year-old daughter

and a 12-year-old son and had shared parenting with his ex-spouse. James had a three-year-old son and had shared legal custody with his son's mother. Roger had a fifteen-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter and had sole custody of his children. Ken had a ten-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son and had joint custody with his ex-spouse.

When asked if there was anyone other than their children living with them, nine of the fathers said no, one father had a live-in girlfriend, one had son over 18 who lived with him, and one had his mother and stepfather living with him. He explained that his mother and stepfather moved into their house about two to three years ago because the house they were living in had sold. Because the participants were from different states, there are different terms the court system used to identify their custody arrangements. Of the twelve fathers, only two had sole custody of their children. The father with children from multiple marriages had sole custody of two of his children and "shared parenting" with the other (fathers from Indiana and Ohio indicated they have what is called shared parenting<sup>3</sup>). Two of the fathers had joint custody with equal time spent between their houses and those of the mothers. The father from Virginia stated he has shared legal custody. Drew, who had been divorced in Florida, described his custody arrangement as shared parental responsibility. He went on to say it was "basically custody. Its bullshit. I've been the primary parent since he's been little." Matt was the only father in this study who did not have custody of his child. He indicated that his ex-wife had full custody of the child, but the child lived with him and the child was against visiting his mother. All but two fathers indicated they were the primary caregivers for their children. Those who were not the primary caregivers indicated they shared the responsibilities equally with the mothers of their children.

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<sup>3</sup> In Ohio, the term "shared parenting" is what other states refer to as "joint custody" (DivorceNet.com 2013). I was unable to find a difference between shared parenting and joint custody.

The average amount of time these fathers had been the primary caregivers for their children was six years. One father had been the primary caregiver for 15 years and several fathers had been the primary caregiver for two to three years. Fathers had physical custody of their children an average of five nights a week. Four of the fathers, three with shared parenting and one with joint custody, stated they had physical custody of their children an average of three nights per week depending on the week. Henry, who had shared parenting, said, "We have shared parenting so I have visitation three times a week. It's complicated right now because my son is actually living with me since December. Cause he said he had so much problems at his mom's house." Many of the children spent the weekends and an occasional evening with their mothers.

#### *Fathers' Involvement with Children*

In order to understand the level of involvement of the fathers with their children, I asked each to rank his level of involvement prior to divorce/separation and his current level of involvement. Fathers were asked to rank involvement from one to ten, with one being very low and ten being very high. The mean level of involvement prior to divorce/separation was nine and the mean current level of involvement was also a nine. James said, "That is kinda hard to answer. His mother kinda prevented me from being as involved as I would have liked." He stated that he would rate his level of involvement as an eight prior to separation. Shawn, whose daughter was over 18, said, "That is difficult to answer...She drives, she does her own thing but for the most part I am highly involved in what she is doing but she like having her freedom too." He decided to rate his level of involvement as an eight. The results are consistent with the results found in a study done by Smith and Smith (1981). Their study found that single fathers

perceived themselves to be very much involved with their children prior to divorce, and this could explain why these men chose to be single fathers.

### *Use of Social Support*

Fathers were given the options of “physical”, “emotional”, or “a mixture” to describe the type of support they had received. Fathers were also asked to specify if the help they had was volunteered or if they had to ask for it. Next, fathers were asked to how they feel about asking for help and if there is anyone they are more willing to accept help from than another. Fathers were asked to describe the relationship they have with the mothers of their children to see if this relationship has an effect on the child and to see if any of these fathers considered their child’s mother to be someone who provides support. Lastly, fathers were asked to specify who they went to when they needed advice on how to handle the children and certain situations.

**Do single dads use support?** Fathers were first asked if they had family or friends who help them with their children. Ten of the fathers said they did have help and two of the fathers said they did not have help. That is, they did not receive physical help, such as caregiving, or emotional help, such as having someone to talk to about their emotional issues. When asked if there was a specific reason why they did not have help, one father simply stated it was not needed. Shawn, father of an 18-year-old daughter, said, “There is no need for any of that. She’s been okay since she’s been 10. I’m gone out of town for a week or so and she’s been fine here by herself. So, no I haven’t needed any help.” Roger said he did not have family who lived near him and that he had some friends who helped him every now and then but not very often.

**Volunteered versus asked for help.** For those who did have support from family and friends, five of the fathers said that this help was volunteered to them before they had a chance to

request help. Two of the fathers said it was both volunteered and they had asked for help. Ken, father of a ten-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son, said, “It was made pretty clear to me by my friends that they would be there if I needed the help. I guess you could say that was offered but not formally. I always feel comfortable about it.” Three of the fathers said that they were open to asking for help. Henry said, “I would gladly welcome more support if it was offered. I don’t feel restrained or restricted or embarrassed.”

Two of the fathers had asked for help. Roger, father of a six-year-old son and a fifteen-year-old daughter, said if he needed help he could call his mother who lives a few hours away but that it was used only if it was an emergency situation. James, father of a three-year-old son, said, “I think you need to learn to ask for help...I’m not a person who tends to ask for help but it’s a situation that requires needing help sometimes.” He also said that his family had encouraged him to get baby sitters to help him when he became a single father. None of the fathers indicated they were discouraged by friends or family when asking for help.

**Social support and family.** Nine of the fathers indicated they did have a specific family member or members who had provided them with the most support. There was a mixture of whether the support was physical, such as watching the child when needed or if it was emotional, such as helping the father deal with the emotional challenges that come with being a single parent. Wayne said, “Not a specific one. I’ve had help from a few.” Two of the fathers did not specify high support from family members. Brett, whose family lived out of town, said he was supported by his mother by visiting her. When asked if it was more emotional support or physical support, he said, “Well, it’s more like visiting and things like that. I’m taking him up to see grandma this weekend. They play and do things. That kind of support.” Drew, father of a sixteen-year-old son, said the help he needed was more logistical (how to handle certain

situations), but that it was always good to have someone (his mother) to help emotionally, and she provided his son with a mother figure. When asked who had provided him with the most support, Henry, father of a twelve-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter, said:

Yeah, I guess my brother, he's got six kids and he's always willing to have my kids come over there. And my mother. Well, right now I don't ask her that often cause she is in her 80s and my dad has Alzheimer's. And she is caring for him full time.

He was then asked if he could call on her for emotional support and he said he did all the time.

Fathers who did not have family close by seemed to utilize them more for emotional support than physical support. Three fathers spoke with their mothers, one father spoke with his father, and four fathers said they spoke with multiple family members. Four fathers did not use family for emotional support. James said that since his family did not live nearby, it was more emotional support they provided. Ken said, "I talk to my mother and also my girlfriend studies childhood and play...so, she doesn't have children of her own but her perspective can be valuable."

Shawn was the only father who indicated his ex-wife was the family member who had provided him with the most support. He said if something bad were to go down he would ask someone for help and it would be the child's mother. He went on to say:

...I would go to possibly her mother. Just because she is her mother and we did have shared parenting. Out of courtesy I guess of her being her mother. Probably the first person I would go to if there was something I couldn't take care of myself for a second opinion I would go to her first.

**Social support and friends.** Six of the fathers said they had a specific friend who had provided them with emotional support and one father said he had a specific friend who had

provided him with physical support. Three of the fathers in this study said they had friends who had provided them with a mixture of physical and emotional support. Only two of the fathers indicated they did not have friends who helped them with the children. Five of the fathers said they had multiple friends whom they would turn to for emotional support. Henry said he speaks with a couple of his friends because “I know they will listen and not judge me and know they have had similar experiences and it helps to share. To have someone to lean on.” Brett said, “I have a few I guess, no one in particular, 4 or 5 actually. I know another single father because my son hangs out with his son.”

Four of the fathers cited that emotional and physical support had been provided to them by friends but only two went into detail about the physical support that had been provided. Drew said, “He’s always been a great kid so everyone has always been willing to help out. Whether it was watching, when he was younger, if I needed someone to watch him or take him somewhere while I was traveling somewhere else.” Ken said that he had friends who would watch his children occasionally or have them spend the night.

**Advice.** Nine of the fathers did have a specific person whom they turned to for advice. Six of them would turn to immediate family members and three would turn to friends. Collin said he received advice from his female neighbor about how to raise his female daughters. Wayne said he turned to a good friend because they had “been friends for a long time and he seems to have some good answers.” Drew said when his child was younger he got a lot of advice from his mother but now “I know how to be mom and dad and do domestic stuff. I can sew and I can weld. That covers everything in between.” Brett, father of 17-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son, said he had four or five different people whom he would turn to for advice. He said he would poll them and pick the best answer.

**Factors that affect support from others.** Half of the fathers indicated there were specific reasons for why they were more willing to accept help from one person over another. Allen, father of a 14-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son, stated it was a person's style of living that influenced him to choose one person over another. Collin, father of a 17-year-old son, 14-year-old daughter, and a 10-year-old daughter, said he usually accepted help from his neighbor because she was close and if there was an emergency he knew he could rely on her. This father had indicated his job is over an hour away from his home. Wayne, father of a 14-year-old son, said there was usually a specific friend he accepted help from because he had been the most helpful in the past. James said he believed "Some people are better at giving support than others. I think support giving is kind of a skill." Ken stated he generally accepts support from people who already have children because "they have a better understanding of what needs to be done, what support needs to be given." Four of the fathers said there was no specific reason as to why they would accept help from one person over another. Drew stated, "Anybody that is close to me, if they're close enough to me to trust my child with them, then they are close enough to ask."

#### *Formal social networks*

Only five of the fathers were members of social networks such as churches or clubs. Of these five fathers, two indicated they use these networks for advice or help with their children. Henry said he belonged to two different churches and when asked if he ever utilized them for advice or help with the children he said, "Yes I have on occasion. So that is another support group since you asked earlier people I ask for advice from. That's definitely a big one. In addition to friends and family." Wayne said that he used a social networking website but he "keeps personal stuff off of Facebook."

### *Fathers' Relationships with their Children's Mothers*

The fathers were also asked to describe their relationships with the mothers of their children. Each was asked if he had a good or bad relationship and then was asked to explain this relationship. They were also given the options of “cordial,” “indifferent,” or “something else” to describe their relationship. Collin, who has children from two previous marriages, said with his first wife he had a good relationship but with his second wife, the relationship was bad and they had limited interaction. Only two other fathers indicated their relationships with their children's mothers were bad. James said it wasn't as good as he had wanted it to be. Ten of the fathers stated the relationship was good and of those ten, six said they were cordial. Fathers were then asked if their relationships with the mothers of their children affected their children's relationships with their mothers. Those who had a good relationship with their ex said this relationship had a positive influence on the children. Ken said:

I think it has been able to keep things fairly normal for them. With my daughter especially cause she is old enough to remember back before the divorce. And so I think the two of us being able to maintain an amicable relationship has made the transition easier for her. Whereas my son he was two when we split up and pretty much all he knows is the situation we have right now. But I look at my divorced friends who don't get along with their spouses and I think it is much harder on the kids that way. Even if it isn't intentional, the kids get caught in the middle.

The concern about whether or not the relationship between father and mother had an effect on the children was present in some of the interviews. Four fathers indicated their children's relationships with their mothers had been affected negatively because they would be dragged into things or knew too much about the parents' situation. Wayne said that his son was “drug into things he probably shouldn't be drug into. And...he wants to tell me one thing and I get a different story from her.” Matt indicated that he was too honest with his son about his ex-wife's personal issues. These fathers seemed to be aware their relationships with the mothers of

their children did have the threat of affecting how their children would interact with both of them.

When asked if the children spent time with their mothers, only two fathers indicated their children did not see their mothers. Richard, who had joint custody with his wife, said his children do not spend any time with their mother and they have chosen not to see her in over two months. Brett had a daughter who tried to spend no time with her mother and a son who lived with his mother four out of seven days a week. When asked if there was a visitation agreement that stated his daughter was supposed to go see her mother, Brett said there was but since his daughter was 17 he did not think it mattered anymore.

Wayne and Drew, who each had shared parenting, said their children visited their mothers for the summer and one holiday a year. Matt, the only father in the study who did not have legal physical custody of his child but was raising him, said he tried to get his son to visit his mother. There was no formal agreement about visitation, but he takes his son to see his mother twice a month. However, every time he drops him off, within a few hours his son has returned home because he does not want to spend time with her. Shawn, who did not have a formal visitation agreement with his ex-wife, said his daughter spends time with her mother because of his irregular work schedule. Roger, who had sole custody of his children, said his son did not spend any time with his mother but his daughter always wants to visit her mother. He did not have a formal visitation agreement with his ex and was hesitant to let his daughter visit her because of a past substance-abuse problem, but said:

My daughter wants to see her all the time so I let her go even though you're kinda stuck between a rock and a hard place cause if you don't let her go then my daughter gets upset and blames it on me. And if I let her go it can be a dangerous situation where her mother is at sometimes.

Five of the fathers who did not have formal visitation agreements with the children's mothers seemed to encourage their children to spend time with them. They stated they wanted their children to be part of their mothers' lives. Roger went so far as to say that he lets his daughter see her mother because his daughter needs a mom.

Overall the fathers did use family and friends for physical and emotional support and advice. Fathers did not always provide details of what these types of support consisted of; rather they would simply state that they had had help with their children and specified who had provided them with the most support.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The goals of this study were to learn which types of social support were or were not used and why some types of support are chosen over others. Through the interview process it was found the majority of the fathers do have family members or friends whom they can turn to for physical or emotional support and for advice. I also found these fathers were willing to ask for help when it was needed, and family and friends encouraged them to reach out for assistance. Fathers did not always give direct examples of the rewards and costs they had to balance when receiving help. Because this is a qualitative case study, the examples that were provided by the fathers will be interpreted using social exchange principles where appropriate.

Previous studies have indicated single fathers are more likely to turn to females when needing assistance or advice on how to raise their children (Coles 2003; Hilton et. Al 2001). Three of the fathers in my study turned to their own mothers for emotional support, four of them turned to an unspecified family member, and one father said he turned to his father when he needed someone to talk to. For advice, three of the fathers spoke with their mothers and two spoke with family members. With this information, I could conclude that while fathers do turn towards females for emotional support and advice, it is more likely that these fathers turn to people whom they have a close relationship with and the gender of this person is not as important.

One study, from 1993, said it would have been rare for single fathers to have male friends whom they could turn to for advice about child care (Kissman and Allen 1993: 119). Three of the fathers in my study stated they had male friends whom they turn to for advice, most of them indicating these friends were also single fathers.

The majority of fathers in this study indicated they relied on family members and friends for emotional support and advice more than physical support. An explanation for this could be because of the high incomes these fathers have. They are less likely to need physical support such as babysitting because they are able to afford to send their children to daycare centers. Thus, in social exchange terms, higher income may minimize the need to negotiate with family and friends for this form of social support. A previous study done with low income single fathers found they rely more on family to care for their children while they are at work or when they need free time (Hamer and Marchioro 2002: 125). Because this was such a small sample it cannot be concluded that single fathers have higher income averages. However, the results are consistent with other studies that indicate that single fathers commonly have higher incomes when compared to a control group of single mothers and married parents. Almost all the fathers interviewed had children who were over the age of 13. This can also be an explanation as to why they do not currently have physical support—fathers of older children do not perceive a need for such help.

The study done by DeGarmo, Patras, and Eap (2008) had found it was the type of custody the father had that could determine whom he used as a source of support. The findings in this study were consistent with my study when looking at fathers who had sole custody or no custody. The fathers in DeGarmo et. al and my study were more likely to use family members as support over former spouses, new partners, or friends. However, the fathers who had shared

custody in my study were more likely to use friends or family for support. Those in the DeGarmo et. al study were more likely to use a new partner over friends, family, or former spouses. Only one father who had shared custody in my study stated he used his child's mother for support<sup>4</sup>. An explanation for why my results differ from those in DeGarmo et. al. could be because the fathers in their study were younger as were the children.

As stated in the results section, some fathers would accept physical support from others if it was within close proximity. However, if the father did not have family nearby they would rely on them for emotional support and advice. Two of the fathers indicated that they had sought out help. Henry said that when he asked for help he was never turned down so he felt that his family encouraged him to ask. Social exchange theory says that fathers will avoid interactions if they are met with negative consequences and will seek out interactions that are greeted with approval. Because most of the fathers indicated that they had been encouraged to ask for help they knew their request would not be met with negativity so the costs of asking for help were outweighed by the rewards of knowing help would be provided.

Few of the fathers gave reasons as to why they would not allow their child to spend time with another person. Allen said he would not let his children spend time with certain people because of their style of living. Roger went into great detail about the difficulties he had with allowing his child to spend time with her mother. The costs of her spending time with her mother meant she could be in a dangerous situation but he felt that she should be allowed to spend time with her mother. He said he often feels like he is stuck between a rock in a hard place because his daughter blames him for her not being able to see her mother.

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<sup>4</sup> The complete findings from DeGarmo et. al can be found in Chapter 2 on page 15.

For the fathers who had friends who were single fathers, they seemed to use them as a form of emotional support or for advice because they felt these friends were able to understand their situation better than others and could easily relate to them. Because these fathers felt that they would be supported by their single father friends, they felt that they could turn to them without risking the costs of being ridiculed.

For a number of men, the use of social support yielded multiple rewards. It allowed them to have time away from the children which was beneficial to them because they would get a break from parenting, and beneficial to the children who would be able to spend time around others. The children would be able to create emotional relationships with others while the father would have time for himself. Clearly fathers were taking into account rewards to both themselves and their children when making support decisions.

Very few of the fathers I interviewed stated they were members of formal social networks such as clubs or churches. A study done by Gasser and Taylor (1976) found few of their participants were involved in clubs and social groups due to a lack of time or feeling unwanted because they had been divorced. The fathers who were not involved in clubs or social groups in my study did say they were not involved because they were too busy with their children. None of them said it was because they felt unwanted. Some of them wished they could have been a member somewhere but it was not possible due to lack of time. Thus the potential rewards of involvement in formal networks such as parenting groups were likely foregone due to the time pressures of single parenting.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Finding participants and conducting the interviews with these fathers was challenging. Some of the fathers who were contacted to participate in the study refused because they were concerned about privacy issues. Of those who did participate, many of them did not provide very detailed information about their situations. It was unclear if this was because they were reluctant to discuss their private lives or if they were uncomfortable with the questions. None of the fathers indicated they had ever been asked to talk about their lives as single fathers.

One of the limitations of using social exchange theory was having the ability to only hear one side of the transactions between fathers and others. I do not know if those who volunteered to help my respondents did so because they wanted to help alleviate the pressure on the father or if they felt obligated to help because it was a family member. Few of the fathers discussed how it made them feel to accept support from others. Some of them said they were open to accepting help and one stated he was learning how to ask for help when it was needed. They did not say if the support they used ever had a tendency to be restrictive or unwelcomed at times. The problem with both of these types of relationships is they are hard to measure with interviews that only focus on the father and his support. Without speaking to both parties it is not possible to make a clear inference of the transactions that occur between them. The father may know he has a family or friend who has become overly involved but may feel if he turns this person away he is not being appreciative of the support that is being provided. He also may not know if he has become too reliant on another person. In order to understand if the balance between the father and his support systems has become problematic, the interviewer would have to talk with both the father and his support systems.

The findings in my study indicate single fathers do have friends and family who provide them with different types of social support. In the future, I think it would be beneficial to focus on those with shared parenting and to interview both parents. None of the fathers who had shared parenting indicated their former spouse was a form of social support. This may have been because they expected the mothers of their children to contribute and did not see their help as voluntary. It would be interesting to know why they do not see their former spouse as a form of support and why they do not go to them when they need advice with the children. It would also be beneficial to the academic world to have studies on single fathers that included multiple races and ethnicities. My study was conducted with white, middle class fathers, I would be interested to see if the results would have been different had I had a more diverse group of participants.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

#### *Consent*

My name is Elizabeth Howe-Huist and I am currently conducting a research study on single fathers and the forms of support they use while rearing their children. I am a graduate student with the University of Mississippi currently working on obtaining my Master's in Sociology.

The purpose of this interview is to learn your experience with different kinds of support while raising your child/children as a single parent. You may refuse to answer any question that you are uncomfortable with and you may choose to end this interview at any time. I will be taking notes but your personal information will not be connected with this specific interview and all records will be kept confidential.

The benefit of this research is it will help to improve the understanding of single fathers and their situations. There are risks involved with this research. Some questions may be uncomfortable to answer and there is always the concern of privacy. These risks will be controlled as much as possible. This interview will take approximately one hour.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at [\(662\) 915-7482](tel:662-915-7482).

Your name was given by (Insert Nominator if consent was given to use name) to participate in this study. You do not have to participate in this study and the participant who nominated you will not be punished if you choose not to do so.

Your willingness to continue with the interview will constitute consent to participate. Do you want to participate in this interview?

- No
- Yes

Are you over the age of 18?

- No
- Yes

This interview will be recorded in order to improve the quality of answers provided. By recording, I am able to ensure correct responses, request clarification if necessary, and ask for examples and illustrations. Do you consent to having this interview recorded?

- No
- Yes
  - We will now begin recording this interview.

First I would like to ask you a few questions about your child/children:

How many children under the age of 18 or still in high school currently live with you?

1\_\_ 2\_\_ 3\_\_ 4\_\_ 5\_\_

What is the age/gender of your child/children?

Child 1\_\_\_\_ Male or Female    Child 2\_\_\_\_ Male or Female    Child 3\_\_\_\_ Male or Female

Child 4\_\_\_\_ Male or Female    Child 5\_\_\_\_ Male or Female

What is your relationship to each of the children?

Biological\_\_\_\_ Step children\_\_\_\_ Foster children\_\_\_\_ Adopted\_\_\_\_

Is there anyone else who lives with you?

- No
- Yes
  - Please describe your relationship to the person or persons.

### *Custody Arrangement*

Next I am going to ask you some questions about your custody arrangement:

Do you have legal court arranged of your child/children?

- No

- How would you describe the current informal (arrangement not established within court) arrangement of custody
- Yes
  - How would you describe the current legal arrangement of custody?

Are you the primary caregiver for each child/children?

- Yes
  - How long have you been the primary caregiver for each of your child/children?
- No
  - Please explain your parental role

How many nights a week do you have physical custody of each child/children?

1\_\_ 2\_\_ 3\_\_ 4\_\_ 5\_\_ 6\_\_ 7\_\_

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low and 10 being very high, how would you rate your paternal involvement with your child/children prior to divorce?

1\_\_ 2\_\_ 3\_\_ 4\_\_ 5\_\_ 6\_\_ 7\_\_ 8\_\_ 9\_\_ 10

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low and 10 being very high, how would you currently rate your paternal involvement with your child/children?

1\_\_ 2\_\_ 3\_\_ 4\_\_ 5\_\_ 6\_\_ 7\_\_ 8\_\_ 9\_\_ 10

### *Social Support*

Now I am going to ask you some questions about social support. By social support I mean emotional support, advice, and/or services received from family and friends.

Do you have family or friends who help with the child/children?

- No
  - Is there a specific reason as to why there is no one who helps you with the child/children? Such as not having friends/family located near you or lack of others whom you would want to help you?
- Yes
  - Was this help volunteered or did you have to ask for help?
  - How did you feel having to ask others to help you? Did those others encourage you or discourage you about asking for help?

Do you have a specific family member who has provided you with the most support?

- No
- Yes
  - Which family member(s) have provided you with the most support? Please indicate if this support was physical, emotional, or a mixture of each.

Do you have a specific friend who has provided you with the most support?

- No
- Yes
  - Which friend(s) have provided you with the most support? Please indicate if this support was physical, emotional, or a mixture of each

How open are you to accepting support from others?

How do you feel about having to ask someone for help?

Is there anything/ any reason why you would not be willing to accept support from someone?

Is there anyone you are more willing to accept help from than another person?

- No
- Yes
  - Please explain why you are more willing to accept help from this person over another

Would you say you have a good or bad relationship with the mother of your child/children?

- Good
- Bad
- Is your relationship cordial, indifferent, or something else?
  - Cordial\_\_ Indifferent\_\_ Something else\_\_
- In what way does this relationship affect your child's/children's relationship with their mother?

Does/do your child/children spend time with their mother?

- No
- Yes
  - What amount of time does/do your child/children spend away from you with their mother?
  - Is this part of the mother's formal/informal visitation agreement?
    - Yes
    - No

- Is there a reason why you let your child spend time with his/her mother?

Do you have a specific person whom you turn to for advice?

- No
- Yes
  - What is your relationship with this person?
  - Is there a specific reason why you turn to them?

Are you a member of social networks such as churches or clubs?

- No
- Yes
  - Do you ever utilize these networks for advice or help with your child?

*Demographic Characteristics*

Lastly I would like to ask you a few general questions about yourself:

How old are you? \_\_\_\_

What racial/ethnic group do you most identify with?

White\_\_ African American\_\_Asian American\_\_Hispanic\_\_Multiracial\_\_

What has been your approximate annual take home pay (wages or salary before taxes) over the past year?

0-20,000\_\_20,000-40,000\_\_40,000-60,000\_\_60,000-80,000\_80,000-100,000\_100,000+

This will complete the question portion of our recording. At this time, I will ask if there are any single fathers that you would like to nominate to participate in this study. Please note that you do not have to nominate anyone and will not be punished if you choose not to do so. Are there any single fathers you wish to nominate to participate in this study?

- No
- Yes
  - Do I have consent to use your name as a reference when contacting this person?
    - No
    - Yes

## VITA

### *EDUCATION*

M.A., Aug 2013  
(expected)

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS  
Major: Sociology  
Thesis: Single Fathers and Support

B.A., Jun 2009

Wright State University, Dayton, OH  
Major: Psychology

### *TEACHING EXPERIENCE*

08/11-05/13

Teaching Assistant, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS  
Men and Masculinities. Dr. Ross Haenfler. Assisted in grading assignments and attended class discussions.  
The Family. Dr. Elise Lake. Proctored exams and attended class discussions

### *RESEARCH*

Study U.S.A.: Community Research in Okolona, MS

Field Research: Biloxi, MS, Clarksdale, MS, Mound Bayou, MS, and Okolona, MS

### *PRESENTATIONS*

Konik, J., Brewer, L., Vonderahe, J., Patten, D., Stuckey, V., Ritter, D., Carolan, S., & Howe, E. 2008. "Under the lavender ceiling: The effects of workplace heterosexist harassment." Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, August 8, Boston, MA.

Howe-Huist, Elizabeth. 2012. "Travel and Tourism in Harrison and Coahoma County." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association, February 17, Starkville, MS

### *PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS*

Member, American Sociological Association (ASA)

Member, Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association (A-MSA)