The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of single fathers attending a community college. Single fathers comprise one-fifth of all single parent families, yet little research has been done on this growing segment of the population. A phenomenological approach was utilized to examine the attributes, needs, and challenges facing single fathers who were community college students.

Seven single fathers attending a community college in the Northwest participated in this study. The fathers had primary responsibility for raising their children, had been enrolled at least half-time, and were attending the college for a minimum of one year. Data were collected through individual in-depth interviews and a focus group.
Seven main themes emerged from the data: 1) Ambivalence, 2) Stability, 3) Finding support, 4) Mattering, 5) Success Factors, 6) Barriers, and 7) How the college can assist single father students.

Three factors were identified as a result of the study. (1) Attending community college improved family relationships. The flexibility of class scheduling allowed the fathers to spend more time with their children. (2) The experience of single fathers and single mothers attending community college are remarkably similar, with the exception of how each accessed support networks. Single fathers were much less likely to initially identify and utilize support networks. (3) How single fathers viewed their identity and their definition of masculinity changed. Prior to attending community college, their primary identity was related to their work. As students, their identity shifted to being recognized as good students and good fathers.
Forging Their Way:
The Experience of Single Fathers on a Community College Campus

by
Tim S. Cook

A DISSERTATION
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the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing Education

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Tim S. Cook, Author
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Without question I need to give a huge thank you to my lovely wife Paddy. She was the one who initially encouraged me to enroll in this program and throughout she offered support by reading and providing feedback, through constant encouragement to persevere, and by giving me the time to do the work. I could never have accomplished this without my life partner Paddy. My kids, while too young to really understand this experience, were nonetheless a source of inspiration. Megan, my six year old, wrote and illustrated her own “dissertation” and even defended it in front of family. Owen and Holden, my boys, kept me laughing and insured that I stayed grounded.

Finally, I have an enormous sense of gratitude for the single fathers who participated in this study. The valuable time these men spent telling their stories provided the rich source of data for this study. These single fathers work hard to provide a good life for their families. For the most part they accomplish their goals in relative silence and receive no accolades. For their trust and willingness to participate in this study I am eternally grateful.
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Forging Their Way: The Experience of Single Fathers on a Community College Campus

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

When the film Kramer Versus Kramer won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1979, the concept of a single father being awarded custody of his children was a provocative idea. The movie starred Dustin Hoffman as an initially reluctant single father who learns to love his role and ultimately goes to court to fight for custody of his son. Hoffman’s character battled a prevalent myth that mothers are the best caregivers for children and fathers are not naturally suited for this responsibility.

Prior to Kramer Versus Kramer there were examples of single fathers on television; the best of these being Brian Keith on Family Affair and the epitome of single fathers, Bill Bixby in The Courtship of Eddie’s Father (Stanley, 1997). Both of these shows ran from the late 60s to the early 70s, and like other similar shows of the time, typically depicted single fathers as widowers who had help from a housekeeper or nanny who handled the “motherly” responsibilities.

Things have changed since these popular culture images were introduced. The number of single fathers has increased more than 300% since 1974 (Meyer &
Garasky, 1993). In 2000, the Bureau of Census identified approximately 2.2 million single fathers in the United States. Even with this large increase, there is little attention given to single fathers. Boss (1997) reported that single fathers are largely invisible in our culture and when they are seen, it is typically in a negative light. Myths regarding the appropriateness of fathers raising children continue to exist. John Sims, director of Single and Custodial Fathers Network deplored, “We’re still viewed as oddities. I’m always having to convince moms I’m not Jack the Ripper. It’s o.k. for their daughters to sleep over” (The Dad Alone, 1999, p. 63).

The changing demographic of single fathers raises questions regarding the specific issues facing this population. One of these questions is whether single fathers are accessing higher education, and more to the point, community college. Since community colleges tend to be microcosms of the world around them, it would seem the number of single fathers attending community colleges might be growing as well. At Clark College, a comprehensive community college in Vancouver, Washington, the number of single fathers has increased by 67% since 1992 and comprises 2.1% of the entire college enrollment. In comparison, the number of single mothers increased by 8.1% and comprises 7.3% of the college enrollment (Student Management System, 2002).
Focus and Significance

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of single father community college students. Specifically, the researcher wanted to understand what it means to be a male single parent at a community college. A single father student was defined as a male with primary custody of one or more children who was enrolled at least half-time at a community college. The father could have been single due to divorce, been widowed, or never married. Additional elements that guided the study were: availability of support systems both on and off campus; barriers the fathers encountered as students and strategies they developed to overcome these barriers; the fathers perception of services available to them on campus; and what additional services might be helpful to these students.

There were four reasons why this study was conducted: 1) single fathers are a growing population, 2) little research had been done in this area, 3) researchers called for more research to be done, and 4) the issue had personal significance to the researcher due to current work responsibilities.

Gillenkirk (2000) noted that single fathers make up one-fifth of the single parent population and are growing at a rate almost twice as fast as single mothers. The number of single parents is expected to continue rising, with some demographers predicting the majority of children will be raised by single parents sometime this century (Doris, 1996). Boss (1997) reported, “families headed by single fathers constitute the fastest-growing type of family in America” (p. 19).
As shown in Table 1, at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington the number of single fathers increased 62% from 1991 through 2001 and single fathers comprised 2.1% of the student body (Student Management System, 2002). This 2.1% was the same as the national percentage of all single father households in the United States in 2000 (Bureau of Census, 2000a). Thus, the number of single fathers attending Clark Community College appears to be growing and is also representative of the national population of single fathers.

Table 1

Comparison of Clark College Single Parent Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Single Mothers</th>
<th>Single Fathers</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>10,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>9,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>10,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>10,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>10,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>10,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>10,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>11,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>12,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>12,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>12,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Increase</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Increase</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
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One of the fastest growing subsets of the non-traditional population is single parent students (Huff & Thorpe, 1997). While much has been written about the needs of single mothers, very little has been written about single fathers (Meyer & Garasky, 1993). While searching the ERIC databases, Dissertation Abstracts, and Academic Search Elite database using the descriptor, single father, fewer than 30 articles or dissertations were found. Many of the articles discussed the recent growth of single fathers and contained demographic information. When the descriptor, single parent, was used, a far greater number of research articles was found. Upon closer inspection, however, the majority of these articles described single mothers.

Examination of dissertations pertaining to single fathers or single parents did identify a call for further research. Stenson (1989) studied the effect of social support on single mothers in community college. In her recommendations, Stenson called for further study at additional community colleges, and for broadening the scope through the inclusion of single fathers. Casteele (1986), writing in *Parenting: The Single Father and Society*, noted that scientific research has not kept up with the growing number of single fathers. Casteele (p. 57) states that studies “in the legal, social service, educational, and mass media fields” would be useful.

Finally, this topic was of personal and professional interest. As a community college counselor I had become aware of the increasing number of
single fathers who were seeking assistance. The majority of students I see are single mothers, and the resources available to these students are clear and often readily available. The number of single fathers seen has grown, and it is often difficult to access services for these students. An example was an emergency fund the college foundation established for students who needed assistance with rent, child-care, or transportation. The fund is currently only available to single mothers. Studying the experiences of single father community college students has ramifications for the work I do as a counselor and was, therefore, personally and professionally significant.

The goal as researcher was to understand the phenomenon of being a single father student. Were the traditional college support systems adequate for the needs of single father students? If not, then what does the college leadership need to do to improve the experience for this population? While single fathers may be a small minority on the campus, it is a growing population that has yet to be examined. It is expected the findings of this study will serve to inform the practice of student development professionals, faculty, staff, and others who encounter these students.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of single fathers in the community college. To provide appropriate background for this study, the literature review focused on two areas: single mothers who are college students, and issues facing single fathers.

Single mother college students were reviewed because they may provide insight into the experiences of single father community college students. This was not to imply that the experience of single mothers and single fathers are the same. The wealth of information on single mother college students provided a context and history of what it means to be a single parent attending college from a female perspective. What is lacking in the research is the male perspective. While their experiences might be dramatically different, the information gleaned from the review provided a starting point for interview questions, as well as a basis for reflection. In addition, there existed a recent body of research on single mother college students that contrasts with the relatively few articles regarding single father college students.

The second section of the literature review focused on the general issues facing single fathers. Developing an understanding of the challenges confronting single fathers helped frame the study and allowed me to be better informed during
the participant interviews. At the same time, caution was taken to avoid directing the interviews. The information must emerge from the experience of the single fathers. Preliminary review indicated issues with discrimination, lack of social/family support, and economic difficulties for some single fathers (Casteele, 1986; Copes, 1988; Kirn & Sachs, 1999; Meyer & Garasky, 1993; Platt, 1987; Roy, 1999). This research provided a basis for understanding how the experience of being a community college student interacted with the experience of being a single father.

Single Mother College Students

Several of the articles reviewed made reference to single parents in their titles or throughout the article. Upon further review, the single parent was usually defined as a single mother, or in one case, the inclusion of two single fathers. The assumption was that the experiences of single mothers could be generalized to the experiences of all single-parent students. This appeared to be a grand assumption that was not supported in the research literature, pointing to the need for further investigation of single fathers.

The review of literature on single mother college students is arranged into two themes. The first is a discussion of the attributes of successful single mother college students, and the second pointed to barriers facing these students. Prior to
either of these themes, a brief overview of single mother college students was
provided.

Several studies examined the demographics of single mother college
students (Hamilton, 1997; Huang, 1995; Huff & Thorpe, 1997; Schobert, 2000).
The number of single mothers overall has grown. Huang (1995) points out that in
1970 single mothers made up 11.5% of all family types in the United States and in
1995 that number had grown to 26.5%. A study of 87 single mother college
students found these students tend to be older, have started college later, and have
higher rates of separation, divorce, or widowhood than a comparison group of 67
married and/or childless female students at two Iowa community colleges
(Schobert, 2000). This study also found that 25% of these single mothers had
fathers who had not completed high school, compared to 10% of the comparison
group. Nearly 22% of mothers of single mother students had not completed high
school. As Schobert (2000) pointed out, the degree of parental educational
attainment is a correlating factor contributing to retention and degree completion.
The higher the parent’s educational attainment, the more likely the student will
complete a degree.

Hamilton (1997) talked about the difficulty of adjustment that single
mothers confront:

The stress of losing the roles, rules, and rituals of their marriage;
the ambiguity associated with the lack of positive role models; the
physical and financial stresses; and the search for external
resources; such as community supports and positive social
sanctions, increase the difficulties in adjusting to life in a single-parent family (p. 9).

Finally, research on societal perceptions of single parent families suggested differing opinions. Hamilton (1997) presented two diametrically opposing views. The first was a sympathetic view suggesting that single parent families are an appropriate alternative to traditional two-parent families experiencing difficulty, and that these families deserve legitimacy. The second viewpoint depicted single parent families "as a deficient family structure that is harmful to children" (p. 7). Single parent families tended to have lower incomes and fewer social opportunities than traditional two-parent families. Hamilton (1997) suggested the development of coping strategies as a tactic for adjusting to the stressors of being a single parent.

Attributes of Successful Single Mother College Students

A significant number of articles focused on attributes of successful single mother college students. Boutsen and Lynds-Colbry (1991) conducted a survey of 28 single mother students that compared successful students with less successful students on the basis of the student’s attributions regarding academic performance. Students answered a 22-item, true/false attribution questionnaire and were sorted by comparing the results of students with grade point averages (GPA) of above 3.0 and below 3.0. Successful students were not likely to report that their grades would improve if they had more time to study or had access to additional childcare. They were less likely to report that poor study habits were reflected in their GPA.
Finally, they were more likely to report that motivation played a critical part in their success (p. 364).

A recent study focusing on the impact of the college experience on female single parent students found that participants felt a greater sense of personal empowerment through completion of a program specially designed for single parents (Watson, 2001). This study used qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of its single parent program. A survey instrument was used with 56 single parents who had completed the program between 1987 through 1997, and focus groups were conducted with five of the participants (Watson, 2001). “[40 percent] or more of all the subjects reported that they developed the qualities of leadership, commitment, ability to complete tasks, assertiveness, and personal balance. Just under one-half (44%) reported improved parenting skills due to attending college” (p. 193). What is interesting about this study, and is a good example of the richness that can be gained from qualitative studies, is that through the focus groups, students reported they personally benefited from the counseling, support services and peer relationship opportunities (p. 198). This information was not gleaned from the survey, but developed through the focus group process.

Several studies noted the importance of social support, defined as having emotional and/or financial support from family and friends as a key determinant of success. A study done by Doris (1996) found that a major reason for the success of single mother students was their support systems. This study utilized a
phenomenological perspective and conducted in-depth interviews with seven single mother students. The study found that while these students may have entered college for economic reasons, they were successful due to their support systems, and as a result they developed a respect for learning. McMurry (1996) found that financial assistance and psychological support were the program components that provided the most assistance for 12 displaced homemakers who were single parents.

A descriptive study of 51 subjects found statistically significant relationships between social support systems, self-esteem, family environment, and the general well-being of female single parent students (Lynds-Colbry, 1989). Jing and Mayer (1995), chemistry professors who were concerned about the needs of single parents, found the single greatest problem for these students was a lack of time, and proposed the establishment of a single-parent student network. Schobert (2000) found that for single mothers who were struggling academically, nearly half (47%) of their fathers and 25% of their mothers were not very supportive or not supportive at all of the students attending college (p. 111).

Anderson (1994) conducted a phenomenological study that looked at the characteristic of strength, defined by the subject, as it pertained to self-image and single mother students. She found that strength was not a solitary pursuit but was manifested through relationships with family and friends. Nine themes surrounding the idea of strength were discovered through the study. These were: introspecting
to discover self, emoting, knowing, freedom to create own destiny, resilience, transcendence, co-created family harmony, sharing family power, and humane connecting (p. 6).

The coping strategies of single mother students were explored by Hamilton (1997). The quantitative study found that single mothers used more coping strategies than married students and tended to take responsibility for family problems. Hamilton (1997) noted these students were better at positive reappraisal of stressful situations and had a fundamental challenge to develop coping strategies to manage the stress in their lives. This study did include two single fathers as participants. However, their results were not reported separately.

O'Connor-Davis (1993) examined whether there was a difference in success between never-wed and divorced single-parent families. Her study looked at adjustment after divorce, and concluded that for single mothers who had never married there is no alteration in the family structure and therefore nothing to adjust to. The study did not identify whether the never-wed single mothers had live-in partners. Nonetheless, it is difficult to compare the rate of adjustment between these two subsets of single mother students.

Barriers Facing Single Mother College Students

While the previous studies focused on attributes of successful single mother college students, it was apparent this group faces many challenges. The following
studies explored the barriers facing single mother college students. These included issues with time management, poverty, child-care, and dealing with the social stigma of single motherhood.

The majority of studies documented that single mothers returning to school were either impoverished or severely threatened by poverty. The reason most frequently cited for returning to school was divorce (Huff & Thorpe, 1997). Schobert (2000) found that these students tended to be older and have lower income levels. Eighty percent felt external commitments affected their coursework (p. iii). Watson (2001), in her study of 56 single mothers, noted using food stamps and experiencing general criticism about their status were social stigmas single mothers faced, along with the challenge of time management, poor financial planning, transportation, and car maintenance. In contrast to the studies citing attributes of single mother students, Schobert (2000) reported that 87 students surveyed in her study felt they received less emotional support from their parents.

In a three-year study of 45 low income single parents at the University of Wisconsin-Lacrosse, Krajewski (1992) found social barriers included time management, child-care, children with special needs, and financial burdens. This study also found high incidences of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as chemical abuse (p. 3). Recommendations were to end the invisibility of low-income single parent students and to provide a supportive environment.
Negative social perceptions facing single parent students have been cited in the literature as another challenge they encounter. In 1998, Malone administered the Sherwood self-concept scale to 111 participants. This scale was used to examine change in self-concept of recipients after receiving training in life skills and job readiness (p. iv). The author noted that single parents need encouragement because lone parenting is viewed negatively by society. Further, even though single parenting has become a major family structure, it is seen as a threat to the traditional American family (Malone, 1998). This study did include three males, but called for further research on the issues facing single fathers due to the small number included in the study, the growing number of single fathers, and the need to change negative societal views of single parents.

Summary of Single Mother College Students

External commitments, including work and raising children alone, clearly had an impact on single mother college students. Schobert (2000) stated that student development professionals and faculty need to be aware of the greater influence of external commitments on single parent students. Over two-thirds of the students in this study reported that outside commitments affected their studies (p. 112). The literature review pointed toward positive attributes of social support, self-image and positive coping strategies for single mothers. In addition, several barriers existed, including time management, finances, childcare, and the social
stigma of being a single mother. This review outlined the attributes of success and barriers that are faced by single mother college students. Whether single father students experienced these same barriers, reported similar success attributes, or had additional issues was a central question of this study.

Single Fathers

The literature on single fathers began to emerge in the 1970s (Hanson, 1981). The past decade has seen an increase in the number of studies focusing on the issues of single fathers. This review of the current research has been organized into five general themes that encapsulate the pertinent information. These themes are: demographics and stereotypes, custody issues, financial/economics, work, and social support.

Demographics and Stereotypes

In her review of single fathers on television, Hatfield (1990) found three similarities. The single fathers were either widowers or adoptive parents. They typically had some type of mother surrogate, i.e. a housekeeper, nanny or female relative. Lastly, the single fathers were usually financially well off and lived extremely comfortable lifestyles. While these stereotypes may have made for engaging television, they were not accurate representations of the experience of most single fathers.
As Burgess (1995) pointed out, there is a long history of widowers, "because of high maternal mortality in past centuries, widowed fathers were the original single father" (p. 458). While it may have been true that many of the single fathers in the past were widowers, this is not currently the case. In their study of the "myths" of single fathers, Meyer and Garasky (1993) reported that between 1970 and 1990 the number of children living with widowers decreased from 262,000 to 150,000 and the number of children living with fathers who were never married jumped from 32,000 to 488,000. Thus, 24.5% of children in single father families lived in households with never-married fathers (p. 78).

With regard to single fathers adopting children, the numbers appear to be low. Shireman (1995) found, "about one in seven people who contact the National Committee for Single Adoptive Parents is a man, but probably a considerably smaller proportion of men succeed in adopting" (p. 373). Shireman also reported that when single fathers do adopt, they usually adopt older, troubled boys.

According to the 2000 United States Census, households headed by single fathers jumped 60% in the last decade (Fields, Mattaliano, & Guzzeta, 2001, p. 15). The increase is attributed to higher divorce rates and redefined gender roles. Randall Turner, Vice-President of the National Fatherhood initiative noted, "older generations weren’t encouraged to be hands on but today’s dads take more responsibility" (p. 15).
Grief (1995) found that single fathers tended to be in their late thirties and to be raising one to two children over the age of five, with a greater likelihood of the children being male. The occurrence of young single fathers is rare according to Marsiglio (1995, p. 326), who reported that 5.5% of single fathers are under the age of 21. In an analysis of the March Current Population Surveys (CPS) for years 1983-1995, Brown (1996) discovered that single fathers were more likely to be black, had less education, and significantly lower incomes than married fathers (p. 1).

Educational attainment was contradicted by Casteele (1986), who in a sample of 20 single fathers with an average age of 35 found their mean level of education was 14.9 years and that 80% had completed one year of college. In addition, Meyer and Garasky (1993) analyzed single father research and found single fathers to be, “white, middle aged, relatively well educated, occupying prestigious occupational roles, and receiving relatively high incomes” (p. 75). In a later study by the same authors, the rapid increase of single fathers is called into question. An analysis of the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 1960-1990, found that when allowing for cohabitation, the number of actual single fathers dropped by half (Garasky & Meyer, 1996, p. 385). This information called for careful consideration when identifying potential single fathers for this study. The question of cohabitation was a factor that appeared to positively impact the experience of single fathers.
Single fathers also confront stigmas regarding their role. Donati (1995) found the only unstigmatized single father was the widower; divorced single fathers faced social condemnation for their failed marriages, and never-married fathers were stigmatized for their immorality. Platt (1987) observed the single parent family is generally viewed as being deficit—"it is the nuclear family missing one parent" (p. 1), and fathers are in some ways the forgotten parent after divorce (p. 36). Single fathers receive a mixed message from society. They are viewed as the hero for taking on the challenge of raising children, but there are often questions of how the family is managing in terms of childrearing and housekeeping (Kissman & Allen, 1993).

Custody Issues

Certainly one explanation for the increase of single fathers over the past 30 years is the rise in the number of men seeking and being awarded custody of their children. In an historical analysis of child custody and the law, Walters and Abshire (1995) found that as recently as the 1980s courts were insensitive to fathers who sought custody of their children. The authors reported, "when one man requested maximum visitation with his children, the judge became exasperated and belittled fathers who seek more time with their children" (p. 166).

By 1995, Fox and Blanton, found that while 35 states mandated a preference for joint (shared) legal custody, between 73% and 90% of all custody cases were
awarded to the mother. By the year 2000, Gillenkirk reported that more than 40 states now call for joint custody. In the same article, Gillenkirk also pointed out that even though more fathers are being awarded custody, the predominant image in the media of single fathers is that of the absentee or deadbeat dad. He cited recent popular books: No Fathers; Fatherless America; The Fatherless Generation; When is Daddy Coming Home? as a few examples.

In an earlier study, Hanson (1988), a pioneer in the research of single parents, wrote that fathers who were more involved with the child from infancy were the ones more likely to seek custody, and fathers were more likely to be granted custody of adolescents. Single fathers reported more satisfaction with their roles than single mothers, and children appeared happier in single father households (p. 167). Hilton (1996) found that single fathers proved to be competent parents with more positive behaviors than married fathers; specifically the single fathers were more nurturing, motivated, and involved with their children than the married fathers in the study. “There was no evidence that gender had an effect on the quality of parenting of custodial parents” (p. 6).

Mclean (2001) claimed that children being raised by single fathers did better academically, had fewer school absences and were less likely to be hospitalized. Mclean believed this had to do with the type of man who seeks to be a single father. He is more motivated, educated, and able to overcome the social barriers related to
men seeking custody. Kissman and Allen (1993) also noted the importance of motivation as a success factor for fathers seeking custody of their children.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the feelings of fathers who seek custody of their children is to quote two African-American men who sought custody of their own children. The first is Isaiah, a 40-year-old who won a long court battle to win custody:

"Before this I never knew it was even legal for a father to have custody of his child. All I thought the men did was go by there on weekends and pay child support. I thought the mother would have to die for the man to get custody" (Roy, 1999, p. 444).

The second man is Ezra Hunter, a 38-year-old tour boat captain and high school basketball coach with custody of three daughters (aged 11, 8, and 7). "I was going against the whole stereotype of the black man who leaves his family. You know – he can father kids, but not raise them" (Gillenkirk, 2000, p. 21).

Financial/Economic Difficulties

Several studies addressed the issue of income and poverty for single fathers. Lino (1995) observed the economic circumstances for single fathers have not been extensively researched and wondered whether fathers experience an economic decline similar to single mothers. In 1991, 47% of all single mothers lived in poverty, compared to 20% of single fathers, and 8% of married couples (p. 103). Meyer and Garasky (1993) examined the 1989 Current Population Survey and
found that 18.2% of single fathers live in poverty with nearly half of these families having incomes less than half of the poverty line (p. 79).

In a 1996 study, Garasky and Meyer remarked that while many single fathers live in poverty, overall, single fathers had a mean personal income twice that of single mothers. Whether this means single fathers are less likely to receive public assistance is unclear. However, further analysis of the subtypes of single fathers provided more detailed information. Eggebeen, Snyder, and Manning (1996) found that divorced single fathers were likely to have college education and steady employment, but never-married single fathers were more likely to have poor educational levels and unsteady employment. This information suggested that never-married single fathers were the high-risk subgroup of single fathers as a whole. In particular, the research of O’Connor-Davis (1993) pointed out that financial status is a key factor for success and that income was positively related to the parent/child relationship.

Work Related Problems

While steady employment appeared to be a key factor for the success of single fathers, many studies illustrated the problems that single fathers face at work. Workplaces are not particularly friendly to the needs of parents and their children, and fathers received less sympathy than mothers. Additionally, co-workers may frown on men who put the needs of their children ahead of work (Kissman & Allen,
Policies regarding flextime are more prevalent today, but when fathers receive flextime it is seen as a favor rather than a policy. "Even 'working mother' has legitimacy, but who ever heard of 'working father'?" (Boss, 1997).

As Burgess (1995) pointed out, men are so indoctrinated to the role of worker that they may themselves believe they cannot stay at home to care for their children. Indeed, the expectation is the father will arrange for a female to care for the children (p. 457). Grief (1995) found that fathers changed schedules by arriving late or leaving early, reduced travel, and missed work to care for their children. These changes caused some fathers to be fired or to quit their jobs. A survey by Gingerbread, a charity for single parents in Britain, found that nearly one-fourth of Britain's 179,000 single fathers quit work because they could not balance the job with the demands of raising a family (Bolton, 2001). Ultimately, most single fathers were able to adapt to the challenges of work and family. Of the roughly one-third who were unable to adapt, this was generally attributed to the transition period as they reorganized their lives (Heath & Orthner, 1999, p. 583).

Social Support

The final section of the single father portion of the literature concerned the issue of social support. The information was organized into: 1) how single fathers view social support, and 2) what can be done to improve support for single fathers. The first study identifying the types of social support used by single fathers was
published by Copes in 1988. The researcher interviewed 60 single fathers using a structured collection instrument (p. 1). Copes found that single fathers used both formal and informal social support networks. Social support must be continuously available throughout the father/child relationship and offered in a non-threatening manner (p. 109).

Single fathers named their parents as their primary source of support (Ekstrand, 1996; Hatfield, 1990; Horner, 1998). The parents tended to offer moral support, but not necessarily financial and childcare support. After parents, friends are named as a source of support, and then professional counselors. Families often offered assistance because of the belief that raising the children alone would be too difficult for the single father. Having the grandparents involved with raising the children is not without conflict. Differing opinions regarding how to raise the child can be an issue (Horner, 1998, p. 73).

Horner (1998), a single father of two boys since 1984, went on to say that support is essential to the success of single parents. He discussed the myth of the supportive family and wrote about family therapy sessions where he stated he was not getting the support he needed. The response from his parents was, “Steve we didn’t know you needed help” (p. 70). Horner came to the conclusion that “it remains up to you to find the kind of support that’s beneficial for you and your children. Support does not come knocking at your door, you have to hunt for it” (p. 80).
Kissman and Allen (1993) found one of the greatest difficulties facing single fathers is the lack of adequate social support. This has to do with socialization that has taught men to be independent and autonomous. Many men are threatened by a referral to a therapist, and view it as an attack on their masculinity. In working with single fathers, it is important to get at those beliefs of masculinity that may interfere with their accessing the support system their families need. The authors explained the need for single fathers to be able to meet other single parents and to join fathers groups and men's support groups.

In a comprehensive review of studies worldwide, Hanson (1988) found most single fathers did not avail themselves of income enhancement programs such as welfare, food stamps, and aid to dependent children. Casteele (1986) found that single fathers would benefit from asking for assistance from professional counselors and other agencies to help them adjust and cope with their roles.

Finally, Grief (1995) lists three ways mental health practitioners can help single fathers: “(1) educate community members, schools, employers, and childcare centers; (2) inform these community sites of the psychological needs of single fathers; and (3) form support groups to deal with issues of loneliness, difficulty adjusting, balancing work and family, and lack of knowledge regarding the raising of children” (p. 225).
Summary of Single Father Literature

The literature regarding single fathers was organized into five general themes: demographic information, custody issues, financial/economic problems, work dilemmas, and utilization/availability of social support. Historically, single fathers were usually widowers or adoptive parents. High divorce rates and the desire of more fathers to seek custody has resulted in a 60% increase in single fathers in the past decade (Fields et al., 2001). Financially, single fathers tend to have more income than single mothers, but many still live in poverty, particularly never-wed single fathers. Single fathers reported work related problems and stigma associated with putting their children’s needs before work. Parents were the main source of social support for single fathers, and the need for male support groups was identified.

Summary of Review of Literature

The review of literature served to provide background information on the experience of single mother college students, as well as the experience of single fathers in general. The literature suggested that single mother college students have well developed social support systems, self-image, and coping strategies. These mothers also encountered many barriers, including: time management, poverty, child-care, and the social stigma of being a single mother.
The literature on single fathers demonstrated that some of the issues single fathers face were the same as those for single mothers. In addition, fathers also have issues with finances and the stigma of being a single father, although in their case, the stigma concerns whether the father is capable of raising the children alone. Furthermore, single fathers deal with the issue of being awarded custody and how the societal mindset has changed toward awarding more fathers custody. Single fathers also face problems at work due to missed days caused by sick children and the lack of time to put in long hours.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of single father community college students. A qualitative study was used, utilizing a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of single father community college students. The data derived from the voices of the single father students. It was expected that a deeper understanding of single father community college students would emerge through careful analysis of themes. The emergent themes provide useful information for student services professionals and faculty, allowing them to better meet the needs of single father students.

Personal Disclosure Statement

I am not a single father. I am married and have three young children. My parents have been married for 37 years and still live in the house they bought when I was five years old. I feel fortunate to have had this long-term stability, and the ongoing support from my family has allowed me to accomplish many goals, one of which is completing a doctoral degree. I am the oldest of three children and a first generation college student. My father works in construction and my mother works part-time for my grandfather's business. It could easily be said that I grew up in an average, suburban, middle-class family.
It is my identity as a first generation college student that has shaped my professional career and continues to impact how I view the world. Education and learning have always played an important part of my life. My mom teases me by noting that when I was young I chose to read books rather than play with friends. When I was in junior high school I decided I wanted to be a teacher. I went to a teacher's college with the intent of teaching elementary education and graduated with a degree in English. What I discovered about myself while an undergraduate was that I really enjoyed being in college and that I was a good student. I felt like I belonged and enjoyed being around others who also liked to learn. It was also during this time that I met my wife, who is an elementary school teacher. Education is an important value for our family.

As an undergraduate I became involved in a variety of activities, including leadership roles in residential life and student government. Through these activities I learned that I wanted to work in college student development. My goal has been to help students be successful in their pursuit of higher education. It is my firm belief that education is the great equalizer, that it allows people to achieve their dreams. For the past 13 years I have worked in public and private, two- and four-year colleges. I was a residence hall director and an academic advisor, during which time I earned a master's degree in counseling/psychology. For the past seven years I have been a counselor at a community college.
It was through my job as a counselor that I came to be interested in the topic of single father community college students. In my role as counselor, I encounter many first generation college students facing a variety of challenges in their pursuit of a degree. I gain satisfaction from helping students overcome barriers to achieve their goals. As a counselor I have helped a number of single mothers, either through our displaced homemaker program or through the counseling center where I work. I am well versed in the resources available to these women and usually can help them through stressful times.

Over the last few years I began to notice an increase in the number of single fathers who were seeking help. As the only male counselor on staff, I tend to see the majority of the men, so at first I did not think much of it. However, many of the resources I knew existed for single mothers were not available to single fathers. In an effort to better serve these single fathers, I tried to learn more about their experience and what resources were available to them. I soon found that little information existed for single fathers. Our systems were set up for assisting single mothers, but it was as if single fathers did not exist. Consequently, I wanted to understand their experience, with the hope that what I learn will better inform my practice.
Phenomenology

Within qualitative research there are many methodologies (life history, ethnography, narrative analysis, action research, semiotics, phenomenology, human etiology, content analysis) (Cresswell, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999; Patton, 1990). The phenomenological approach was used for this study. Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. It seeks a deeper understanding of the meaning of our everyday experience and asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Gall et al. (1999) state the purpose of qualitative research is to understand individuals in their natural state. Qualitative researchers are working to make sense of the world around them. The theory is inductive and emerges from the bottom up rather than from the top down, as quantitative research does. Another way of describing it is like a funnel; information is open at the top but becomes more specific and focused at the bottom. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Patton (1990) notes the advantage of qualitative research is that it is less constraining in the sense that the researcher can approach the study with fewer preconceived categories of analysis and fewer methodological assumptions. The researcher is then able to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. As Patton states, “in qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument” (p. 14). To best understand the experience of single father community college students, I served as the instrument in an attempt to know the experience as it existed for the single father students. As
information was gathered, relevant themes and patterns emerged, providing a
deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology was first introduced by the German philosopher Edmund
Husserl (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Husserl had the following to say about
phenomenology in a lecture given in 1917 at Freibur im Breisgau:

It would be the task of phenomenology, therefore, to investigate
how something perceived, something remembered, something
phantasied, something pictorially represented, something
symbolized looks as such, i.e., to investigate how it looks by virtue
of the bestowal of sense and of characteristics which is carried out
intrinsically by the perceiving, the remembering, the phantasying,
the pictorial representing, etc., itself (Husserl, 1917/1981).

Phenomenology has been further discussed and refined by other researchers such as
Heidegger, Sarte, and Merleau-Ponty, and has been used throughout the human
sciences and education (Cresswell, 1998). Merleau-Ponty (1989) expounded on the
idea of understanding experience as a basic tenet of phenomenology, “there is no
inner man [sic], man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself”
(preface).

There are five main assumptions that guide the practice of
phenomenological research:

1. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) point out that phenomenologists do not
   assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying (p.
   23).
2. We can only know what we experience by attending to our perceptions (Patton, 1990).

3. The focus is on the understanding of a particular concept or phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998, p. 37).

4. The reality or existence of an object is related to a person’s consciousness [awareness] of the object (Cresswell, 1998).

5. There is a structure and essence to experience that can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

These assumptions are aligned with my personal worldview, and as such, were the methodology chosen for the study. Through listening to the stories of the single fathers I was able to develop an understanding of their experiences.

A research methodology must have a criteria for establishing truth if it is to be a viable and credible research methodology and the criteria must be founded on the prior assumptions. Cresswell (1998) pointed out the phenomenological standard for truth is that it is truth according each individual. That is to say, we each construct our truth based on our experience and interpretation. Truth is the experience as it is described by the person being studied. The basis of knowledge is held within his or her self. Cresswell also pointed out that truth begins with the perspective of the researcher. The researcher must first reflect on what the meaning of the experience is for him and then verify his understanding by checking for accuracy with the person being interviewed; this method provides for
intersubjective validity and a back-and-forth social interaction. (p. 207). Both of these elements are important factors in determining truth for a phenomenological study.

Within phenomenological research there are six key terms or concepts that need to be identified. These are:

1. **Lived experience.** Van Manen (1990) described lived experience as investigating experience as we live it and not as we conceptualize it (p. 30).

2. **Essential invariant structure or essence.** This concept is best described by Cresswell (1998), who stated that all experience has an underlying structure and the reader of the research should come away with a better understanding of what the essence of the experience was like for the person in the study.

3. **Intentionality of consciousness.** This concept was initially put forth by Husserl, and essentially means the reality of an object relates to our consciousness of the object (Cresswell, 1998). Therefore, if we are not aware of an object or phenomenon, then it does not exist for us.

4. **Epoch.** The researcher looks inside himself to identify personal bias and eliminate personal involvement (Patton, 1990). This process is typically manifested in the form of a personal disclosure statement outlining the researchers background and experience with the topic.
5. **Bracketing.** The researcher must set aside all prejudgments regarding the issue being studied. According to Patton (1990), “the world is bracketed out to see the data in pure form” (p. 408).

6. **Horizontalization.** This concept has to do with data analysis and how the original interviews are divided into separated statements (Cresswell, 1998).

Approaching people with the goal of trying to understand their point of view has the benefit of distorting the participant’s experience the least (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). My goal as researcher was to understand the experiences of single father community college students. The phenomenological approach was the best method for accomplishing this goal. The rationale explaining why phenomenology was the best method for this study was made by Cresswell (1998), who described phenomenology as determining what an experience means for the person who has had the experience and consequently is best able to provide a comprehensive description of the experience.

Regarding issues of design and technique for conducting a phenomenological study, Van Manen (1990) stated, “this methodology tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts” (p. 29). Nonetheless, Marshall and Rossman (1999) offered a useful guide for phenomenological studies that described using in-depth interviews. Cresswell (1998) provided further information in the form of a design
process which begins with the telling of a personal experience regarding the phenomenon, then writing questions that explore the meaning of the experience, conducting long interviews where people describe their experience, analyzing the data for salient themes, and reporting the essence of the experience (pp. 54-55).

There are shortcomings involved with conducting phenomenological research. The most important being that the findings cannot be generalized (Van Manen, 1990). Unlike quantitative research, phenomenology cannot be used to show or prove information. Generalization may not be possible, but it is possible to extrapolate information that might be useful to the reader (Patton, 1990). It is up to the reader to determine whether the information is useful. The other critique of phenomenological research is that it does not problem solve (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological questions are meaning questions; meaning questions cannot be solved and done away with (p. 23). It was not my intent to solve the problems of single father community college students. Indeed, until the research was done, I would not have been aware of what the single fathers perceived as problems. While the findings cannot be generalized, it is my belief the emergent themes and patterns are useful for readers who are working with single father community college students.
Data Source

The primary data consisted of complete transcripts of the interviews of seven single father students. After an initial interview of approximately 90 minutes, participants were asked to participate in a focus group to further discuss the experience of being a single father community college student. The advantages of conducting focus groups according to Marshall and Rossman (1999) are: a) they tend to be more natural and relaxed than one-on-one interviews, b) they allow for more flexibility to explore topics, and c) the results are more readily understood and appear more believable. The disadvantages of focus groups according to Marshall and Rossman (1999) are that the interview can be difficult to control and the data hard to analyze (p. 115).

Reflective field notes were utilized (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123) to augment the primary data with my subjective impressions of each interview. In addition, documents such as the college catalog, student handbook, college website, and related materials provided information as to what services were available to single father community college students.

Study Participants

Participants chosen were single fathers who were taking classes at Clark College, a community college in southwest Washington State.Criterion sampling works the best in phenomenological studies because it insures the participants have
experienced the phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998). Participants met the following criteria:

1. *Have primary custody of their children.* This was defined as having the children live with them for 51% of the year or more and was a self-report measure. Single fathers with primary custody were in the best position to discuss the experience of being a single father student, as opposed to a father with joint custody who may only have custody on weekends.

2. *Be enrolled for 6 credits or more.* This is the federal guideline for a student who is considered to be half-time. Students needed to experience the academic challenge of being at least a half-time student to effectively discuss the challenges of attending college while raising children for a minimum of one year. Students who had attended for at least a year have demonstrated they were able to be successful in an academic environment.

3. *Have primary parenting responsibility.* This was also a self-report measure and was intended to eliminate single fathers who were living with a partner or had additional live-in support. Single fathers with live-in support resemble married fathers, and may not experience similar issues. Participants who were living with their parents were also eliminated. Single fathers who were the primary person raising their
children were the best experts regarding what the self-perceived experience of being a single father was like.

I used the Washington State Community and Technical College Student Management System (SMS) to identify potential single fathers for the study. The SMS is a database used to track all community college students in Washington. I identified 57 students at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington who met the criteria listed previously.

Clark College was chosen because it is where I have worked for the past seven years, and as Van Manen (1990) writes, “[D]escribe the experience from the inside, as it were” (p. 64). The personal experience I have at Clark College provided depth to the study that would be more difficult to duplicate at an unfamiliar institution. For example, I was aware of grants and other support services available to students at Clark College. Since these services are not always published or readily accessible, it would have been more difficult to conduct this study at another college where I did not have access to all the information.

A letter was sent inviting students who met the qualifications to be involved in the study (Appendix A). Each participant was then called and asked if he would like to participate in the study. Cresswell (1998) noted a phenomenological study involves in-depth interviews, “with as many as 10 individuals” (p. 122).

Of the 57 potential participants identified, it became apparent that most were reluctant to participate. Some chose not to participate because of a lack of
time; two initially agreed to participate and then did not show up for the interview. Most did not give a reason for not participating and were not asked for an explanation. It is difficult to determine why so many were reluctant. It may have been due to time considerations, lack of interest, or not being comfortable talking to another man about their experiences.

Seven single fathers out of 57 that met the research criteria were willing to share their stories. This number allowed for a diversity of experience, including: age, length of time as a parent, and a mixture of divorced, and never-married single fathers. This number was also of a manageable size for conducting individual interviews, provided in-depth data, and was sufficient for saturation of information to occur. Three of the fathers were known to the researcher prior to the study taking place, one was recommended by a study participant, and the remaining three agreed to participate during the initial phone call and had no prior relationship to the researcher.

Due to the open-ended nature of the phenomenological process, all of the fathers appeared initially cautious as they tried to understand what was being asked of them during the start of the interview. It is not a common occurrence to be asked to describe what it is like to be a single father attending community college. The three students who had prior relationships with the researcher seemed much more at ease and engaged the questions more quickly than did the other participants.
However, once the remaining participants became comfortable discussing their experiences, it was difficult, in many instances, to get them to stop.

At times the participants expressed their anger at a system they felt ignored them, and other times they were eager to demonstrate their competence as students and fathers. All of the fathers were happy to discuss their successes and challenges in the hope their contribution could help others in similar situations. The candor and seriousness each participant put forth toward this study provided a rich source of data.

Data Collection Procedures

The interview guide approach (Patton, 1990, p. 288) was used to gather data (Appendix D). According to Patton, this method allows for topics to be prepared in advance, but the researcher has the option of how to order the questions, with help from the participants. Examples of the questions were: 1) What is it like being a single father attending community college? 2) What factors have contributed to your success as a student at Clark College? 3) What barriers have you experienced? 4) How did you overcome those barriers? Each participant was also asked if there was anything else they wanted to discuss related to their experience as single fathers as a final question. This method allowed for the interview to stay focused, while at the same time permitted flexibility if the participant chose to discuss additional topics that were not developed prior to the interview. This in-
depth approach assisted the researcher in identifying salient themes and patterns regarding how the participants made meaning of their experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 41).

One in-depth interview of approximately 90 minutes was conducted with each participant. The interviews were all tape-recorded and written notes were taken as well. The tapes were professionally transcribed and copies of the transcripts were given to each participant to check for accuracy and to clarify any of their responses. Three of the participants submitted changes to their transcriptions. After the initial data analysis of the interviews, a focus group lasting two hours was conducted. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the emerging themes from the initial data analysis and to gather more data regarding their experiences as single father students. The focus group session was also tape-recorded and written notes were taken.

Data Analysis

In conducting qualitative research, there is not always a precise point where data collection ends and analysis begins (Patton, 1990, p. 377). Qualitative research may involve the collecting of large amounts of data including: field notes, documents, journal reflections, handbooks, website information, catalog, field descriptions, and interview transcripts. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described data analysis as the systematic process of searching and arranging these accumulated...
materials to increase the researchers personal understanding of them and to enable the researcher to present what they discovered (p. 157).

Data analysis began before the first interview. I wrote a description of the setting, took field notes, and wrote in the margins of the transcripts. After each interview, and also after the focus group, I summarized the experience, including personal reflections of what I observed. As themes began to emerge, I began developing coding categories (Patton, 1990, p. 171). These categories became the basis for the themes and patterns that emerged from the interview transcripts.

Boyatzis (1998) explained the process of coding as observing that something important has been said and then describing what was said; specifically he called this "capturing the codable moment" (p. 4). For this project, an inductive method of establishing the codes from the raw data was used. Boyatzis noted, "the closeness of the code to the raw information increases the likelihood that various people examining the raw information will perceive and therefore encode the information similarly. The result is higher inter-rater reliability" (p. 30).

Approximately 90 pages of data resulted from the interviews. Each transcript was inputted into QSR NUD*IST version 4 Classic (QSR International, 2000), a qualitative software program. Just fewer than 4,000 text units of one line each were read and assigned codes. At first there was just a list of codes with no organization. As the analysis continued over several months, relationships among the codes became apparent and began to be organized into an outline form. This
was an extremely time-consuming and often frustrating process. However, as time went on there were several confirming “aha” moments where relevant themes emerged.

Once the initial themes were developed, a focus group session was scheduled with the seven interviewees. Unfortunately, two of the fathers did not participate in the focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to present the initial findings to the single fathers and get feedback regarding the legitimacy of the themes. It quickly became apparent that the focus group participant’s agenda was somewhat different than what the researcher had planned. While the single fathers did provide feedback on the accuracy of each of the initial themes, the bulk of the focus group became a discussion about being a single father. The men shared stories about their children. They talked about how school was going for them and which instructors to avoid. They swapped battle stories about dealing with the court system, and they commented numerous times on how important it was to meet other men who were experiencing the same issues they were. The focus group was scheduled for 90 minutes. The discussion was often raucous and filled with laughter, anger, and compassion as the men shared their experiences. In short, the focus group session went against the prevailing myth that men typically will not express themselves in the presence of other men.
Soundness of Findings

Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote that a researcher can trust the data analysis because "in his [sic] bones" the researcher feels the worth of the final analysis (p. 224). This intuitive faith in the data was a good beginning for data verification, but was not enough. I met with the subjects to verify my interpretation of what was said during the interview. Participants had the opportunity to validate the accuracy of what was recorded in the interviews and to provide additional information to further clarify that they said what they intended to say. One-on-one interviewing, a focus group, observing, and taking of field notes were utilized. The use of seven subjects discussing the topic of single fathers in the community college provided the opportunity for themes to emerge that were verified by more than one subject. Presenting the findings to the subjects provided clarification into their intended meaning, and the use of exact quotations provided a rich description of the phenomenon. In addition, two committee members and three colleagues gave feedback regarding the interpretation and soundness of the identified themes.

Strategies for Protection of Human Subjects

Protection of subjects involved in this study was of utmost importance. The Oregon State University Human Subjects policy was adhered to and approval was gained before the research project started. Written approval from the Vice President of Student Services at Clark College was also gained prior to the project
(Appendix C). In addition, all subjects were given an alias through the coding and subsequent writing of the research project. Finally, informed consent was thoroughly explained to each participant of the study and a signed copy of the consent form outlining the purpose of the research was obtained before proceeding with the interviews.

Summary of Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used to understand the lived experience of single father community college students. Phenomenology was uniquely suited to the understanding of lived experience. This approach allowed the voices of the single fathers to be heard.

Single fathers with primary custody who were taking six credits or more and self-identified as having primary parenting responsibility were identified for the study. Seven single fathers participated in in-depth interviews and five participated in a follow-up focus group regarding their experience as a single father enrolled in community college. Participants were given the opportunity to examine interview transcripts and make appropriate changes.

Through analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and college documents, an understanding of the essence of what it meant to be a single father community college student emerged. This information may prove
useful for student services professionals, faculty, college leaders and others who have the opportunity to impact this growing population of adult learners.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This study was designed to understand the experience of single fathers attending a community college. Qualitative research techniques were used to provide a rich description of what the experience of attending community college and raising children alone was like for these men.

Overview of Analysis

Participants were identified through the Student Management System at Clark College. They were each mailed a description of the study and a consent form. Each participant was contacted by phone to confirm their participation in the study and to set up a time for the interview. Each participant was interviewed once, for approximately 90 minutes. Over 90 pages of single-spaced transcribed text resulted from interviews with the seven participants.

Interviews were transcribed by two professional transcriptionists. Each single father was given a transcribed copy of his interview and invited to make any necessary changes. Three of the fathers submitted amended transcripts. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed and coded with the use of QSR NUD*IST (version 4), a qualitative software program. Once all the transcripts had been coded and analyzed, seven broad themes emerged with corresponding subthemes. All of the
participants were then invited to join in a focus group where each of the themes was presented and discussed. Five participants participated in the focus group. One single father chose not to attend and the other had moved from the area and could not be reached.

The following are brief descriptions of each of the participants. Demographic information is included, as well as information concerning how they came to be single fathers and why they are attending Clark College. After the participant descriptions, each of the seven themes is presented with its corresponding subthemes.

Participants

To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each of the participants. The names of children and family members were not used. The pseudonyms used for the seven participants were Patrick, Wes, Gary, Glen, Stuart, Cris, and George.

Patrick

Patrick is a 43-year-old single father of three boys, and states he has basically been a single father since 1983. Patrick has been a student at Clark College for two years and has approximately one year left to complete his Associate of Arts degree. Patrick’s goal is to continue with school and eventually become a
lawyer. Before attending Clark College he worked in the construction industry and decided he did not want to do that type of work for the rest of his life and started taking classes at Clark College.

The other reason Patrick decided to attend college was because he wanted to be a positive role model for his two young sons. Nightly homework sessions became a family affair, and now when report cards arrive, everyone’s grades are scrutinized, including Patrick’s. Patrick commented, “they’re both [two younger sons] a lot better [students] because of what I do here at Clark.”

Patrick is a recovering alcoholic who has been in recovery for approximately 15 years. He was married and divorced twice, with both relationships ending due to substance abuse problems. The second marriage ended because of his wife’s substance abuse issues and not his own. Patrick’s oldest son, age 19, is from the first marriage and Patrick called him, “the inspiration of my life.” He says that without his son he might never have had that “moment of clarity” where he realized he needed to seek substance abuse treatment. The oldest son was also tremendously helpful when it came to raising the two younger boys, and often watched his brothers when Patrick could not afford childcare. Patrick speaks proudly of this son and laments that both he and his two younger sons miss the oldest brother after he moved to Florida last year.

The two younger boys, ages 11 and 10, were from Patrick’s second marriage, which lasted just long enough to produce the boys. Patrick met his
second wife while they were both going through recovery. As he describes it, he was able to work through his substance problems and she was not. The boys had little contact with their mother after the divorce and she died two years ago from cancer.

Patrick is currently employed in a teaching/coaching capacity for about 10 hours per week. When he started college he was working this job approximately 20 hours per week, but found he could not effectively balance the demands of school, work, and family. His family now manages with a financial aid Pell Grant, student loans, the part-time job, and occasional side work in his former construction trade. He says it has been quite challenging, and at times frustrating, to live with this low income. However, he tries to keep a positive mental attitude and think about the investment he’s making in his family’s future. The family has also become quite adept at finding free or low cost activities they can do together.

Patrick has two sisters and the three of them were raised primarily by their single mother, who remarried when Patrick was a teenager. He had very little contact with his father. Both parents finished high school and had some community college coursework. Patrick’s mother did some work toward a nursing degree and he is not sure what degree his father was pursuing. His mother lives in the Midwest and he and the boys talk with her regularly on the telephone.

Patrick calls his children a blessing and believes single parenting can be done if you stick to it. It becomes a way of life and you have to remember that
whatever you do, it is for the kids. He says he is not the perfect example, but he does his best.

Wes

Wes is a 40-year-old single father of two boys. Wes has raised the oldest, age 15, as a single father since the boy was three. The second child, from a different relationship, is 12 years old and lives with his mother and stepfather. Wes sees him about once every summer for a camping trip or vacation. Wes is completing his final coursework at Clark College and is now dually enrolled at Washington State University’s Vancouver campus. His goal is to become a college professor, or work in college student personnel.

Wes has attended Clark College part-time for the past six years. Prior to attending Clark, he was employed for 15 years in an industrial corporation, the last several years in a managerial position. Wes had saved his money, quit his job, and took what amounted to a three year sabbatical. When his finances became depleted, he realized he did not want to go back to the type of work he had been doing. At that point, he made the decision to enroll at Clark College.

Currently, Wes is employed part-time with Clark College. He works less than 20 hours per week and says that the flexibility of his job schedule allows him to work around his son’s school schedule as well as his own. Furthermore, his son occasionally takes the bus to Clark College, where he does his homework until Wes
is off work. Wes describes this situation as a huge advantage because he does not have to worry about having his 15-year-old son being home alone.

Wes states he became a single father because his wife was too young when they married and was not ready for the responsibility of raising children. Wes felt he had done his fair share of drinking and going to parties and was ready to settle down and start a family. When he realized his wife did not feel the same way, they amicably divorced and stayed close friends for many years before losing touch approximately five years ago. In an effort to reconnect with his mother, Wes’s son spent this past summer living with her.

Wes communicates regularly via telephone with his mother and sees his father about once a year. His mother has a Ph.D. and several other degrees about which Wes did not specify. His father has a Master’s degree, is retired, and spends most of his time traveling. Wes’s parents divorced when he was six years old.

Wes says he does not know what life would be like without his son, because it has been just the two of them for such a long time, although he admits it was much easier to raise his son before he became a teenager. He describes his son as a bright kid who generally stays out of trouble. This past year, the boy ran away from home three times, and the two of them sought counseling to work out the issues bothering the young man.

Overall, Wes thinks he did a good job as a single parent but he feels badly that his son was raised without his mother. Wes believes that all children should be
Gary

Gary is a 46-year-old who has been a single father twice. He has a 20-year-old daughter he has raised by himself and who now lives outside Gary’s home. Currently, Gary is raising two more girls, ages 2 and 6, as a single father. The 2-year-old is his child and the 6-year-old is her stepsister. Although Gary is not the father of the 6-year-old, he and the child’s mother agreed he would be the best parent to raise her. Both of Gary’s relationships ended in divorce due to drug abuse on the part of the mothers. Gary has never had a drug or alcohol problem.

Gary has been a student at Clark College for two years and is majoring in Education. His goal is to eventually work with young children in a school setting. Initially, Gary planned to enroll at Clark College to study Chemical Dependency. His 2-year-old was born with methamphetamine in her system and he wanted to study the effects of drugs on babies. After taking a few classes, he then became interested in Education.

Gary says he has really enjoyed coming back to college. The opportunity to be around adults and be intellectually stimulated has been quite satisfying. He talked about a paper he wrote for his health class where he discussed how beneficial college has been for his own mental health. He also mentioned that he had not been
in school since 1976, and has experienced “culture shock.” He prefers night
courses, where there are more students his own age, and he has helped several of
his friends enroll in classes.

Prior to coming back to school, Gary worked as an activities director in an
Alzheimer’s unit. He currently works approximately 20 hours per week in the
childcare center on campus. He enjoys the job, which he describes as “basically
playing with the children.” His family lives on his income from the part-time job
and financial aid grants.

Gary’s parents are still married. His mother graduated from high school and
his father completed a General Equivalency Degree. Gary is one of the first people
in his extended family to attend college. He states, “higher education in our family
has never been a priority.” Gary’s family provided financial support when he
started taking Chemical Dependency classes, but were unhappy when he switched
to Education and are no longer helping him pay for school. In fact, he says they no
longer ask him about school at all.

When questioned about his daughters, Gary talked about his frustrations
with receiving custody. He feels the system is biased toward mothers, and detailed
the efforts he made to gain custody. He describes his 20-year-old as being smart
and as having practically raised herself. She is now pregnant and living with her
mother. The 2-year-old is “a social being” and “a little princess” who has the run of
the child care center. The 6-year-old chose to live with Gary rather than live with
her father. Gary says he is happy to have her, noting that not every parent chooses to raise their children.

Glen

Glen, age 49, is a proud man who worked as a machinist for 15 years before being laid off two years ago. He has been single father to his 16-year-old son for the past three years. Since his job was shifted out of the country, he qualified for the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) retraining program and has been able to attend Clark College. He is working toward an Associate of Arts in Business Administration and thinks he may continue his studies at Washington State University–Vancouver, but he does not like to think that far ahead because he will lose focus on his immediate goals. Glen had the option of taking a job in Texas but it involved working the night shift and uprooting his son, so he decided to enroll in school to provide stability for his son.

Glen has been divorced for six years. His ex-wife had postpartum depression after their son was born and suffered through a series of mental issues resulting in a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder. Glen said she eventually left him because he did such a good job of giving her whatever she wanted that she told him, “you leave me nothing to want.” He still has a hard time believing this and becomes frustrated when he talks about their relationship.
Glen is angry when he talks about the custody battle he went through with his former wife. He feels the court system is biased towards women, and even though he had psychologists tell the judge his ex-wife would do psychological harm to the child, the judge still granted her custody. He feels this bias is due primarily to the State of Washington receiving federal funds in the amount of 6% of every dollar paid in child support. For some time after his divorce, Glen was part of a father’s watchdog group that worked to implement policy furthering men’s rights in custody hearings. His wife relinquished custody after three years, when she could no longer control their son, and Glen has now raised him for the past three years.

Glen describes his son as being quite challenging and needing constant attention. When the boy first moved in with his dad, he was “terrible,” getting into trouble at school and receiving failing grades. Glen said that because the boy switched schools so many times he had an intense need to be accepted. Now Glen works with him every night on his homework and tries to supply a consistent environment. Glen proudly states that his son recently joined the wrestling team for the first time and competed in the regional tournament. While Glen feels he is making progress with his son, he notes that the situation makes it very difficult to maintain his nearly 4.0 grade point average.

Glen receives unemployment benefits and has found the decrease in income to be difficult. The positive aspect of the situation is that he is able to be home when his son gets home from school; something he could not do if he were
working. He wryly comments that he does not receive child support. Glen would like to take his son on a vacation, but he says they cannot afford it, so they spend their time working around the house or occasionally go camping.

Glen thinks his mother attended high school and says his dad dropped out in grade school. His parents divorced when he was a teenager and he has little contact with either of them. He attributes his success in college to his strong work ethic and general stubbornness. His advice is “pour it on from the beginning so you don’t get in a hole.”

Stuart

Stuart is an energetic 25-year-old father of a 2½-year-old daughter. Stuart decided to attend college in order to make more money. He knew he had lots of talent and skill related to communicating, but needed a degree to demonstrate to others that he was good at what he did. He is undecided about his major but thought it would be something in advertising or marketing. He has interests in acting and music, but feels advertising would be a good career to fall back on if these choices do not pan out.

Stuart has had joint custody of his daughter for 1½ years. His share of responsibility is approximately 60% of the time. His relationship with her mother was strained for the first year of her life, but has improved since he began sharing custody. Stuart and his daughter’s mother met through work and briefly dated.
They lived together for three weeks at Stuart’s house, but one day he came home from work and she was gone.

Several months later he was living in Seattle and received a subpoena seeking to determine if he was the father of the woman’s unborn child. Stuart was one of three possible fathers and the news that he was the father sent him into a bout of depression. He began paying child support and after a year he knew he wanted to be more involved in his daughter’s life and worked out a joint custody arrangement with the mother. This arrangement helped him through his depression, and now he cannot imagine life without his daughter.

Stuart works 20 to 30 hours per week at a local restaurant and attends Clark College full-time. His daughter is primarily at the child-care center on campus. Stuart’s mother and sister also watch the child, but lately he has found he cannot always depend on them, which causes him to miss classes or forces him to make other arrangements. He does not mind missing class because he wants to spend as much time as he can with his daughter.

Stuart sounded like a proud father as he described his daughter. He described how smart she is, expounding on her ability to count to 10 in Spanish and her knowledge of colors. He talked about her general awareness of her surroundings and ability to recall people and places they had been. Stuart also spoke about how beautiful she is and how trusting and loving she is, as well. It was very clear how proud he felt about his daughter.
Stuart does not share these same feelings for his father, who left his mother when he was nine. He described him as mentally and physically abusive, and once he was gone Stuart became the “man of the house.” His father did not graduate high school but Stuart thought he had received his General Equivalency Degree, commenting—“but who can’t go do that?” Stuart’s mother had a series of relationships that Stuart described as “ways to keep a roof over our heads and keep us fed.” He did not think badly of his mother for this because he realized she was doing what she needed to do to raise her children. His mother did graduate from high school.

Stuart owns his home and appeared very confident of his abilities. He attributed his successes in life and college to his being smart. Of all the interviews I conducted, his was the longest and most animated. During the focus group he clearly enjoyed having the opportunity to talk with other fathers about their lives.

Cris

Cris is a 22-year-old single father of a 4-year-old son. His experience has several similarities with Stuart’s. His girlfriend became pregnant during his last year of high school and he had to take paternity tests to prove he was the father. His girlfriend moved to a southern state to live with her mother and Cris did not see his son for the first year of his life. At the time of the interviews, Cris was finishing his last quarter at Clark College and planned to transfer to Portland State University
and major in Philosophy. His long-term goal is to study law and eventually practice in constitutional or civil liberties law.

Like Stuart and Glen, Cris had a frustrating experience with the court system. He felt the system was entirely biased toward mothers, and spent a considerable amount of time and money in an effort to gain joint custody of his son. He was unsuccessful in his court battle and began paying child support. For his son’s first birthday Cris flew across the country to see the boy for the first time, renting a motel room and staying two weeks. He described the initial meeting of his son as a “mind blowing” experience. He did not know what to do at first and could not believe that this person was his son.

Cris was able to see his son approximately every four months when his ex-girlfriend returned for visits to the Portland area. About a year and a half ago, the woman got married and moved back to Vancouver, Washington. Since her return, they have shared custody and Cris says they have a great relationship. Her new husband has two children from a previous relationship, so his son now has two brothers to grow up with.

Cris receives some financial support from his parents and grandmother. He states that while they were initially unhappy about his becoming a father because of their fear he would not go to college, they have become very supportive and love their grandson. Cris experienced difficulty with the Financial Aid Office because he did not have legal shared custody, and thus did not qualify as an independent
student. He felt discriminated against by the Financial Aid Office and said they made him feel like a "deadbeat dad" because he did not have custody.

In addition to attending college full-time, Cris also has a full-time job as a security officer. He works the swing shift, which he says is perfect for attending classes in the morning and still allows time to spend with his son. Having his son has provided him motivation to complete his education and become a lawyer. His goal is to be able to pay for his son's education. He admits his initial interest in law came from his negative experience with the justice system. He feels he has moved beyond that, and his interests have evolved into personal rights. He attributed this new interest to the recent passage of the "Patriot Act," to which he is strongly opposed.

Like the other fathers in this study, Cris is very proud of his son. He says he talks to him as if he was an adult and enjoys having philosophical discussions with him. Their relationship has become much closer over the past year and a half. Cris says it is hard to describe how strong his feelings are for his son.

Neither of Cris's parents attended college, although both graduated high school. They have always encouraged him to attend college, and do what they can to support him financially. He says they have been a great source of emotional support and also a great source of food, which he takes advantage of as frequently as possible. He attributes some of his success in college to the work ethic he learned from his parents.
George

George was the last single father interviewed. He is 35 years old, raising three daughters, ages 16, 14, and 8. Like Glen, he is attending Clark College because he was laid off from his job, and is receiving NAFTA benefits. He was in the military and also receives veteran’s benefits. He is in his second year of an Applied Science degree in Electronics Technology. He chose this major because he worked in electronics while in the military.

George was married for 10 years and has been separated and divorced for two years. He describes his family situation as “interesting.” The two eldest daughters were his ex-wife’s from a previous marriage. The youngest is his biological daughter. The older girls made a choice to live with George when he and his wife separated. He thinks it is more difficult to raise girls than boys, and mentioned as an example that he was going shopping for bras and panties after the interview.

George is a good student who is very organized. He described the time management skills he has learned while in school and discussed the planning systems he uses at home to keep up with the needs of his daughters, as well as his need for study time. He said that school is much easier than work but it is more stressful. He clarified this by saying that he could not leave the stress of schoolwork at school, that he was taking it home with him. However, the flexible
schedule made it possible for him to work around his daughters' schedules, something he was unable to do when working full-time.

George said that when he became a single father he learned from his counselor that he needed to get a support system. Prior to this he had never thought about this and was used to taking care of things by himself. He credited two friends at Clark College as being supportive. He also said his mother is a great source of emotional support via telephone, since she lives in Georgia. George's mother has an Associate's degree in accounting and his father has a Bachelor's degree in criminal law. His parents divorced when he was a teenager and both have been remarried for many years. George did not indicate that his parent's divorce had an impact on him and described his relationship with both parents as being amicable.

George described one of his challenges as being the perception held by some people that he is some sort of deviant or child molester because he is raising these girls by himself. He said he gets strange looks when he takes his daughters shopping, and described his recent trip to help his oldest daughter pick out a prom dress as an example. He also said that when he first became a single father his daughter's friends were initially not allowed to sleep over anymore. Prior to the separation, sleepovers were a common occurrence. He felt that this issue has largely disappeared and he is now trusted.

George does not work and lives off the benefits he receives from NAFTA and the Veteran's Office. He said he could not go to school and raise his family if
he had to work. He has had to learn to balance the demands of school and family and feels he has a good sense of what he is capable of doing. His first quarter he took 24 credit hours and said it nearly buried him, teaching him a hard lesson about balance in the process.

George was frustrated that no one at Clark College has ever asked him if he needed any help. He recounted an experience in the Advising Office when he saw a single mother being told about the services available on campus, including childcare and tuition. He wondered why no one told him about these services, and felt the answer was that everyone assumed he did not need anything. One of his suggestions was sending a letter to parents outlining the services available on campus. He was not sure how this could be done, but thought it would be an important gesture on the part of the college to reach out to all parents attending Clark College.

Results From Participants Interviews

The seven emergent themes from the interviews were: ambivalence, stability, finding support, mattering, success factors, barriers, and how Clark College can assist single father students. Listed below are each of the seven themes and their corresponding subthemes. Following the list are brief descriptions of each theme and an in-depth discussion of each theme and its subthemes.
1. Ambivalence
   1.1 Toward having children
   1.2 Toward children’s mothers
   1.3 Regarding roles as single fathers attending college

2. Stability
   2.1 Maintain a relationship with child’s mother
   2.2 Provide a stable environment and be a role model
   2.3 Children’s demands for attention

3. Finding support
   3.1 No support network
   3.2 Family and friends
   3.3 Support from other sources
   3.4 Attempts to create support groups

4. Mattering
   4.1 Do I matter to Washington State
   4.2 Do I matter to Clark College

5. Success factors
   5.1 Perseverance
   5.2 Acquiring study skills
   5.3 Assistance from faculty and staff
   5.4 Having clearly defined goals
6. Barriers

6.1 Feelings of discrimination

6.2 Childcare issues

6.3 Adjusting to school

6.4 Dating issues

7. How Clark College can assist single father students

7.1 Developing a support group for single fathers

7.2 Creating grants/scholarships

7.3 Providing a campus advocate

7.4 Affordable daycare

7.5 General recognition

Ambivalence concerns conflicting emotions or feelings that relate to how individuals think they should act in certain situations. The concept of ambivalence related to family systems came from the work of Connidis and McMullin (2002), who postulated that ambivalence is a useful theoretical framework with which to examine family relationships. Several of the fathers in this study discussed their initial ambivalence toward having children, and then acknowledged further ambivalence regarding their roles as single fathers.

Stability was an important theme for all seven of the fathers. Some of the fathers appeared apologetic that their children were being raised without two parents. As a result, nearly all of the fathers discussed the importance of
maintaining a good relationship with the mothers of their children. The opportunity
to provide a stable environment and be a role model was a primary factor for many
of the fathers in deciding to attend college. The majority of fathers maintained
relationships with their children's mothers. Predominately, attending college has
provided the desired stability for these fathers. The challenge of the children's
ongoing demands for attention have sometimes made it difficult to be successful at
college.

The fathers in this study had difficulty finding support for raising their
children and attending college. The majority reported initially having no support
networks at all, and two fathers reported having to learn they even needed a support
system. The support they did receive came primarily from family in terms of both
emotional and financial support. However, for some of the participants, this initial
support eventually waned and they sought support elsewhere. Fathers reported
receiving support through work relationships, girlfriends, teachers, and Alcoholics
Anonymous groups. Two fathers made efforts to find or create support groups for
single fathers, but were unsuccessful.

Mattering is a concept from college student development theory developed
by Rosenberg and McCullogh in 1981 (Schlossberg, 1989). Nancy Schlossberg
(1989) created a Mattering Scales inventory to assess how adult learners perceived
their value to the campus environment. The inventory asked questions such as: Do
I feel I matter to the institution? and, Do I feel appreciated or noticed? (p. 4).
Several fathers expressed frustration and, in at least one case, anger toward the college for what they perceived as not mattering to the institution.

The fathers were all asked what factors have contributed to their success at Clark College. Four contributing success factors were identified: perseverance, acquiring study skills, assistance from faculty and staff, and having clearly defined goals.

The fathers were also asked what barriers, if any, they had experienced as a single father at Clark College, and how they overcome these barriers. Four distinct barriers were identified: feelings of discrimination, childcare issues, adjusting to school, and dating issues.

Finally, suggestions regarding what Clark College can do to assist single father students were compiled. All of the fathers had ideas regarding this question and there was a lively discussion around this topic during the focus group. Five subthemes or suggestions emerged: developing a support group for single fathers, creating grants/scholarships, providing a campus advocate, affordable daycare, and general recognition.

Ambivalence

The term ambivalence has existed since 1910 when coined by Swiss psychiatrist Eugene Bleuler as a component of schizophrenia (Lüscher, 2002). Since then, the term has been adapted by many disciplines and has become a part of
everyday language. Recently the concept of sociological ambivalence was put forth by Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) and further modified by Connidis and McMullin (2002) as a construct to understanding family relationships.

Ambivalence can be defined as “simultaneously held opposing feelings or emotions that are due in part to countervailing expectations about how individuals should act” (Connidis & McMullin, 2002, p. 558). Three subthemes regarding ambivalence were identified: 1) ambivalence toward having children, 2) relationships with the children’s mothers, and 3) for some, the continuing ambivalence of their role as a single father attending community college.

Table 2

*Ambivalence Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambivalence</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
<th>Wes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s mothers</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stuart found out he was going to be a father long after his relationship with his daughter’s mother had ended. He was served a letter informing him he might be the father of her unborn child and would need to take a paternity test to confirm. After the test confirmed he was the father, Stuart initially was ambivalent about having a child and suggested an abortion.
It just comes in on you and you’re like, I don’t want the kid, I don’t know the kid, you know. And if you told anybody this, they’d say you’re a terrible father. They don’t realize that that’s just a feeling you get and you gotta work around that and you gotta grow out of it and once you do you find yourself inseparable from that child, but you realize that those were natural feelings to have; it’s just those feelings you don’t tell anybody about. And I don’t.

Later in the interview Stuart discussed how he hopes his daughter never finds out how he initially felt when he found out about her. Stuart doesn’t plan to ever tell her and,

would be crushed if someday, her mother said to her, ‘you know your dad didn’t want you. He thought it would be good to kill you as a fetus.’ Did I think that? Yes. But did I know it was my daughter? No, because I viewed it [baby] honestly as a cell. When I see a little girl, would I say I wish she wasn’t here? No. And I think that makes the difference.

At the outset, Gary was very clear that he did not want to have a child because he felt not everyone is cut out to be a parent. When his daughter was born, he was at first ambivalent toward becoming a father. As his marriage dissolved due to his wife’s drug use, his ambivalence disappeared as he made the decision to seek custody of his daughter.

The majority of fathers in this study sought custody of their children because they felt the child’s mother was unfit to be a parent due to drug use, mental disorder, or maturity level. In the beginning, continuing a relationship with the children’s mothers was often challenging and, in a few cases, not possible. Several of the fathers reported feeling, and continuing to feel, ambivalent toward these women. Despite feeling this way, the fathers acknowledge the important role these
mothers play in their children’s lives, and thus make an effort to continue some type of relationship with them.

Glen was unable to get custody of his son for 13 years until his ex-wife relinquished custody because she could no longer control the boy. Glen described his divorce and the years following as very frustrating regarding his relationship with his ex-wife. Nonetheless, even though his son shows little interest in continuing a relationship with his mother, Glen believes it is important to try.

When you have a son or a daughter and they're torn out of your life, you have them in your life from birth and then all of a sudden they’re torn out of your life. It totally destroys you. You miss them so bad, you want to be with them. You want to watch them grow up. You feel like you’ve been cheated out of their life. That in itself is a rather large satisfaction for a vindictive person. To be able to do something like that, and then they can deny you the opportunity to see your kid. Oh man. That’s a prize package, and then to force you to pay on top of that. It's horrible.

Wes has raised his son for 14 years as a single father and feels for the most part he has done a good job. During the interview Wes appeared ambivalent regarding his son’s relationship with his mother. He said that he recently began to wonder if raising his son alone was the best option for him.

[W]ell, I mean I don’t know about regrets, not necessarily regrets because his mom at the time wasn’t really fit, she was too young and doing the drug thing at the time. So it’s not really a regret, but I feel sorry for him growing up not having a maternal figure in his life. And I’m sure it’s going to take it’s toll, regretably, so I feel bad for him, but I don’t really regret it because I think he’s better off the way he is than having a mom that’s unfit.
During the course of this study Wes informed me that his son was starting to reconnect with his mother and that he was planning a two-week summer trip to visit her. Wes was excited about this opportunity for his son and looked forward to some time alone for himself.

Gary reported that his relationships with both of his daughters' mothers were difficult for a while, primarily due to drug use. For many years he was ambivalent regarding whether the mothers should be included in their daughters' lives. Currently, both are more involved and describe Gary as an excellent parent.

Cris and Stuart initially had a difficult time with their children's mothers. Neither Cris nor Stuart were married, and both of the births were unplanned. The relationships have improved, and Cris and Stuart describe the mothers as excellent and very involved with their children. However, both of the mothers are in new relationships, and one of them has married. Cris and Stuart discussed ambivalent feelings toward these new men and the type of influence they might provide for their children. While Cris and Stuart had primary custody of their children, the children did have regular visitation with their mothers.

Finally, Glen and Stuart also reported ambivalence toward raising their children and attending college. Glen reported that he has a difficult time studying because, "my son wants attention and will sabotage me by getting into trouble at school or taking up time at home when he knows I have an exam or project due." Glen says while this is very frustrating, and college would be a lot easier if he did
not have to deal with his son, he understands that much of his son’s behavior is an outcome of his first 13 years with his mother.

Stuart is pragmatic when he discusses his ambivalence toward attending college and raising his daughter:

I look back, honestly, I won’t lie, had I had the opportunity to not have a child I probably would not have because it would make my life easier now. I would be more ready for it, I would probably be through college a bit quicker, things like that. But would I trade her? Never. Not for the world would I trade her.

Stability

While it was reported that some of the fathers felt ambivalent toward their children’s mothers, the need to provide a stable environment for their children superseded those feelings. Mueller and Cooper (1986) reported that children raised in single parent households tend to have reduced educational and financial opportunities. A number of the fathers appeared to feel guilty or have regrets that their children were being raised in a single parent environment. Consequently, their goals and primary motivation involved the desire to provide a stable environment for their children. There were three subthemes identified with stability: 1) maintained a relationship with their child’s mother, 2) provided a stable environment and be a role model, and 3) children’s demands for attention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
<th>Wes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with child’s mother</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a stable environment</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s demands for attention</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wes, who has raised his son alone for 14 years, lamented about what his son has missed by not having his mother involved in his life:

Well, I don’t think I really do have the mother quality. That’s what our counselor is telling us. I don’t have enough emotion. Like he’s missing a whole side. I guess I’m not very emotional. And so I feel like he lacks that whole maternal side. [Pause] I feel sorry for him growing up not having a maternal figure in his life and I’m sure it’s going to take its toll, regrettably, so I feel bad for him...I don’t think any dad can replace the mom. We’re just one person. Or vice versa, I don’t think one person can take the place of both parents.

The mother of Patrick’s boys has been dead for more than two years, and while Patrick believes he has done a good job of raising them, he knows they would like a mother, too. “They want me to be married. They say; ‘dad, when are you getting married? We want a mom.’ They tell me that all the time and they’ve done it to me all their lives. And of course, they do need it. Everybody wants a mom.”
Knowing that children benefit from interaction with both parents, nearly all of the fathers discussed the importance of maintaining a relationship with the children’s mothers as a way of providing stability for the children. Glen, while not fond of his ex-wife, has worked for many years to maintain a relationship for the benefit of his 16-year-old son. Recently his son has been reluctant to spend time with his mother, but Glen requires him to call her regularly and to spend some weekends with her.

Kids need both parents. They don’t need just one, I don’t care what anybody says. It’s the wrong thing to do. Kids need both. That’s why since I’ve had him, I’ve insisted he go up and visit his mom. I don’t want him to hate her. What happened between me and her has nothing to do with him. He has to have a relationship with both of us, continuously.

Stuart remarked how lucky he was to have developed a good relationship with his daughter’s mother and “will never talk ill of her, no matter how I feel about her, because that’s her mother.” Gary noted that his daughter’s mother comes over much more often now that she is not using drugs and their relationship has dramatically improved. Cris thinks his daughter has “an amazing mom” and he feels fortunate to have developed a good relationship with her and her new husband.

The decision to attend Clark College was directly related to the need to provide a more stable environment for their children, reported several of the fathers. Glen had been laid off from his job, and while he could have moved out of state
and found another job, he chose to enroll in a training program at Clark College instead.

He lived with his mom for the first 13 years and there was a lot of movement from school to school and he had a really rough time, so I thought the best thing right now was to keep things stable for him. That was pretty much my motivation for doing this.

Stuart had already planned to attend college before he knew about his daughter being born. Her presence has provided him with the motivation to complete his degree and provide a more stable life for her.

I want to provide that better life for her. I want her to know I will provide that better life for her. I just want her to believe and trust me...Whatever, I want to support her, but just make sure she’s active and not sedentary and that she learns and grows and I’ll probably push college on her, a little bit, I won’t crush her, but I will push a little. I think it’s important.

Cris was succinct in his reason for attending college. “The whole purpose of going to this school and getting an education is breaking out...I guess I’d be the first person in my family to ever go on with my education.” Patrick, who owned his own tile-setting business prior to attending college, saw an opportunity to become a positive role model for his boys.

I needed to have a positive role model for my children. The experience with my oldest is that he isn’t in college right now. He’s a perfect kid for it. He’s smart and intelligent and he could do it but he’s not. So I figured I’ve always wanted to go to college, so let’s just do it. Better late than never. So that’s why I did it, [to] set a role model for my two young sons.

A positive outcome of attending Clark College has been the stability and additional time together that was not always present before. Wes, Patrick, Glen,
and George all remarked that school has allowed them much more time with their children than their previous jobs. This benefit of additional time has increased family stability because of the number of activities they can now do together. For example, Patrick has instituted a family study time for each evening where he and his boys work on their homework. This did not happen when he was working 14 hour days, seven days a week. Glen has found that while he didn’t pay attention to Trigonometry and Geometry in high school, he is now learning it as a result of helping his son with his daily homework. He hopes this knowledge will help him when he has to take these subjects at Clark College.

Wes was surprised to realize how much of a positive impact returning to school has had on his relationship with his son.

When I worked, I had much less time, getting home at 7:00 or 8:00. He was a little kid so that was about his bedtime, 8:30. So now, being a student, I get my schedule and get home at 2:00 or 3:00 and it’s the exact opposite. I think school has helped me be closer and spend more time with my son.

Wes is also an employee at the college and goes on to discuss the advantages of working at the college and how it has contributed to his family stability:

I would add to that is the fact that since my son has become an adolescent and has been having some problems, I’ve been having him ride the bus here everyday after school that I work, and he does his homework here and I don’t have to worry about him being at home. And so to me that’s a huge employment advantage because I don’t know of very many employers that would allow your teenage son come to your work.
Finally, increased stability and time with children is not always an
advantage. Glen and George both mentioned how their children’s need for
attention can get in the way of their success as students. Glen feels that his son’s
need for attention is so high that his son will sometimes get into trouble at school in
order to force his father to attend to him rather than spend time doing schoolwork.

I try to explain to him how important this is for me...but, I don’t
know...kids are kinda selfish, you know, they’re only thinking of
what they want... So I have to make a lot of concessions. My
schoolwork suffers.

George, who is raising three daughters alone, says that their need for
attention can quickly take up all of his time on a daily basis. His solution: “One
thing I do is set time limits. I tell them I will work for an hour and then we will do
something like run an errand. I found this works pretty well.”

The theme of stability was important to the fathers in this study. Some of
the fathers felt guilty that their children were not being raised by two parents.
Others realized the limitations of being a single parent. Nearly all of the fathers
understood the importance of maintaining a relationship with their children’s
mothers as a way of preserving stability. Making the decision to attend college was
based largely on the opportunity to provide a more stable environment for their
families. Some of the fathers have found that college has increased stability in
terms of more time spent together and shared homework activities. Finally,
increased stability has also meant increased demands, as two of the fathers looked
for ways to respond to their children's need for attention while still attending to their school responsibilities.

Finding Support

Studies have found that a major reason for the success of single mothers attending college is the strength of their support systems (Doris, 1996; Lyndscolbry, 1989; Schobert, 2000). How the single fathers accessed support systems was the third theme to emerge. This theme was then organized into four sub-themes: 1) having no support network, 2) family and friends, 3) support from other sources, and 4) attempts to create support groups.

Table 4

Support Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
<th>Wes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create support</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, the fathers were asked to describe their support systems. The following are a few of the initial responses: Glen remarks, "I live by myself. There's really nobody else." Wes replies, "I have learned recently taking classes at WSU that I really don't have one." Patrick laughs, "My personal support
system is pretty much me, myself, and I." Stuart adds, "Ultimately, it always falls back to me... Ultimately, I am the first and last [responsible person]."

The above responses are not necessarily indicators that the fathers will not be successful in college. In fact, all of them have been attending for at least a year and have maintained satisfactory grades. Upon further examination, it appears the fathers may be offering a classical male response; that is, appearing to have everything under control and not willing to ask for help. George articulated this phenomenon well:

The biggest thing was learning that I needed a support system. A counselor helped me figure that out. I don’t know if it’s a ‘guy thing’ or what, but I never really asked for help before getting separated. I think we’re taught to take care of things by ourselves.

Upon reflection, most of the fathers were able to identify sources of support. The support received came primarily from family members in terms of financial and emotional assistance. Stuart felt lucky to have the help he initially received from his mother and sister regarding childcare. George credited his mom as “a great source of emotional support.” Wes and Patrick both have mothers who live in other states and although they rarely get to see them, they talk by telephone on a weekly basis. Cris is grateful for the financial support he received from his parents, and notes that while his parents were initially reluctant to become such "young grandparents" they have warmed to the idea and have been a great source of emotional support.
Gary reported that his family provided the money for his first quarter at Clark College and then financial aid paid for subsequent quarters. His support all but vanished when he chose to major in Early Childhood Education, a major his family thought was beneath him. Stuart, while at first was pleased with the support he received from his mother and sister, noticed they had become less available recently. He was frustrated that he could not always rely on them: “I wouldn’t expect my mother to be the main party [primary parent], it’s not her job. I do expect people to be there when they promise to be there.”

Additional sources of support included: friends, older siblings, teachers, co-workers, Alcoholics Anonymous, and girlfriends. George named two close friends as being very helpful. His two older daughters also help watch the youngest daughter, although he is careful to not abuse this arrangement. Gary initially relied on friends to help watch his daughters but realized they had become less available as time went on. Gary cited three of his teachers in the Early Childhood program as being excellent sources of emotional support, as well as good resources.

Wes, Cris, and Patrick all mentioned their colleagues at work as being good sources of support. Wes, the only male in his office, noticed the number of surrogate mothers his son has found. He comments, “[W]e’re like a family down there. Everyone knows all about my son and about me and there are no secrets at all.” Cris works with three people whom he credits with being supportive. Patrick
acknowledges his job at a martial arts studio as being an important source of support for both he and his boys.

My real family that’s here, I would say is martial arts. The only people I really know for any length of time, I’ve been going there for six years...I can tell them stuff sometimes. I shouldn’t do it professionally, at work, but a lot of times they’re pretty much all I see. My children meet their needs there too. I mean, there are no mothers in their lives, but there are a lot of women there that are their friends. When they were little they used to jump up on some ladies laps and stuff.

Patrick also discussed the support Alcoholics Anonymous has provided him for several years. He has continued to attend a morning meeting where he “can go and dump my stuff.”

Some of the fathers talked about trying to find girlfriends who had “motherly” qualities, but they quickly realized that strategy did not work for them. Wes did have a relationship of over a year with a single mother who lived in his house. He described it as working out fairly well because they could take turns watching the children.

Three of the fathers joined or attempted to create more formal support groups for single fathers. Glen belonged to a father’s group for a while that he called a “watchdog group” that was following legislation regarding men’s issues. He stopped going when he lost his job. Cris was frustrated in his attempt to find a formal support group.

When I was first starting this situation, people would say; ‘go find some support groups.’ But I couldn’t find any. Maybe the health department had a single father group that met for an hour a
week... At one point it was real important to me but I couldn’t find it... Even the ones I could find seem to be all custodial single mothers.

Gary tried to start a parent’s group at Clark College for the purpose of having “play dates” for the children. He was not able to accomplish this due to conflicting schedules. Upon further reflection, Gary wondered if the group did not come together because there was a male organizing it, and possibly the mothers were uncomfortable with this. He comments, “I wonder if that’s why it didn’t get off the ground. If a woman was to have set it up, I wonder if it would’ve gone.”

Having a strong support network is a primary indicator of success in college for single mothers. The majority of the fathers in this study initially reported not having a primary support system, and that they were “going it alone.” Two of the fathers learned they needed to get a support system to be successful. Family members were reported as an important source of financial and emotional support. Other sources of support included: work relationships, girlfriends, teachers, and Alcoholics Anonymous groups. Two of the fathers attempted to find or create a support group and were largely unsuccessful.

Mattering

An underlying frustration for many of the single fathers was a sense of not feeling valued by the State of Washington, Clark College, and in two cases, by their children’s mothers. Three of the fathers mentioned the stigma of “deadbeat dads”
who do not take responsibility for their children and how this stereotype has been
unfairly applied to them. Out of all the interviews and the focus group, the issue of
mattering elicited the greatest emotional response, primarily anger, from the
participants. Two subthemes were identified: 1) Do I matter to society at large,
and 2) Do I matter to Clark College.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mattering Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark College</td>
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</table>

Mattering is a psychological construct that was defined by Rosenberg and
McCullough as “the feeling that others depend upon us, are interested in us, are
concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego extension (Schieman & Taylor,
2001, p. 469). Schlossberg (1989) applied this theory to higher education,
specifically to adult learners, when she developed the mattering scales to assess
whether these students feel they matter to the institution in the areas of
administration, advising, with their peers, in multiple roles, and with faculty (p. 4).
While the single fathers in this study were not given the mattering scales, several of
the comments made during the interviews confirm that for at least some of the
fathers, whether they matter is an important issue.
Stuart went through a difficult custody battle with his daughter's mother. Even though it had been more than a year, he still harbored frustrations toward what he called the “state system.”

[H]onestly, I hate the State [of Washington] because the State doesn’t care about me. The State says they’re neutral, but I don’t believe that. I believe the State cares about mom…I feel there is not a liaison there to help men out at all…They don’t care about us, and that really bothered me.

In addition to feeling like he did not matter to the State of Washington, Stuart felt like he did not matter to Clark College when he initially went to the Advising Office to enroll and was told,

Well, you gotta go do this and gotta fill out financial aid. Do you have any money? Well right now of course I went right in the middle of scheduling in between quarters or something, and they couldn’t help me. Well, we can’t help you for a month. I was rejected, I felt anger, I felt stupid, I left for a year, I didn’t even try to come back.

George felt like he did not matter to Clark College when he was in the Advising Office and noticed single mothers being given information about the childcare center and the free tuition program for working parents. George commented in the interview that no one asked him if he needed any of these services. George said he was angry that programs existed for the single mothers but not the single fathers. He stated, “I feel like the school thinks we’ve got it all taken care of.”
During the focus group, some of the fathers voiced the perception that single mothers were receiving preferential treatment in the way of grants and student support. Several of the fathers agreed with Stuart’s comments:

Right now I get loans, I don’t get financial aid. And yet, here I am, I recently got my job two months ago, but previously, I didn’t have a job for six months, I couldn’t find anything. The economy has been lousy. Did I get assistance? No, but I hear about moms walkin’ up there going – I’ve got a child and I want to go to school and I don’t have any money and they’re like, here’s a grant. And I think that’s BS, I honestly think that’s BS. I mean, I know there are a lot of deadbeat dads, but not all of us are deadbeats. And I think if you’re gonna’ give that – I mean we talk about equality and how women are the same as men, which I agree, so why aren’t men getting some of the grants?

Two of the fathers discovered they needed to face issues even greater than whether they mattered. George and Gary found that some people questioned their motives for choosing to raise their children. When George began raising his three daughters by himself, he learned that his daughter’s friends were no longer allowed to sleep over at his house as they had done when he was still married. George said they were eventually allowed to sleep over again, but it took some time to build this trust. Gary was surprised to learn that some people would make assumptions about his choice to raise his daughters and work in the early childhood center.

Oh there’s another one of these. I don’t know. He’s not married...why is he not married? Why is he single, why does he have a woman’s job? Why does he want to change diapers? I guess it was a revelation when I found out people thought that. I wondered how I could have been so naïve not to have thought that myself. It never crossed my mind. I’d never looked at the guys up there and thought that any of them were up there other than the fact
that we like kids. There’s nobody even halfway a fool that thinks we’re going to make any money doing this.

The issue of mattering was important to these single fathers. Whether they mattered to society at large or to Clark College was an issue the participants felt very strongly about. For two of the fathers, the issue seemed to move beyond whether they mattered and became an issue of their motivation for becoming single parents, as well as a question of whether they were trustworthy.

Success Factors

The single fathers were asked to discuss the factors that have contributed to their success at the college. Four common subthemes emerged: 1) perseverance, 2) acquiring study skills, 3) assistance from faculty and staff, and 4) having clearly defined goals. All seven fathers had been attending Clark College for at least a year and they were all confident of completing a minimum of an Associate’s degree. Several had plans to pursue a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree.

Table 6

Success Factors Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success factors</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glen contributes his A minus grade point average to the strong work ethic
that he has had throughout his life:

I’m stubborn as far as when I set my mind to doing something. I
don’t want nothing getting in my way. I’m gonna do what I want
to do. I’ll find some way to do it. [I have] a lot of perseverance.
I’ve always had this drive. It came from my background and the
way I was brought up.

Glen goes on to talk about how difficult school was and that many times he
wanted to “throw in the towel.” When he feels this way he reminds himself to take
it one day at a time and to keep trying. Glen relates an incident in a math class
where he had to dispute his final grade with the instructor. Glen believed his
classwork and exams warranted an “A” grade. After checking the work three times,
the instructor conceded that Glen had sufficient points for the grade.

Stuart attributed his success to a natural love of learning and a personal
drive that helped him overcome an initial negative experience at the college. Stuart
had attempted to come to Clark College two years prior to this interview.

I walked into the scheduling office and I tried to get information.
And all they would say to me is ‘where is your paperwork?’ Well,
I don’t have any paperwork. I want to find out if I want to go here.
I want to find out a little, I mean, I want to find out if I’m an idiot.

This experience was frustrating for Stuart and caused him to rethink
attending college. It was his desire for learning and just plain stubbornness that
brought him back to Clark College, and has helped him to persevere.

Patrick’s success comes from his long-time experience with martial arts,
where he has learned to keep going, and is positive he will eventually succeed. He
is also not afraid to ask questions in class and does not worry about being wrong. In fact, he notes he is often wrong. Patrick does not let his “attitude get in the way of it [learning]. “I think attitude’s everything.” He says his positive attitude and willingness to ask questions that no one else is asking ultimately helps himself and everyone else in the class.

Many of the fathers stated that improvement in study or self-management skills was an integral part of their success. George says he found out quickly that he would have to make changes if he was going to be successful.

I’ve really had to learn time management. We have a white board in the house where everyone has to write down appointments and other things they need to get done. [Also] turn the TV off. I used to come home and watch TV for a couple of hours. Now I can’t do that. I also watch my time on the Internet.

George also talked about how he learned that not taking as many credits each quarter was much better for both he and his family. He noted with some concern that his kids knew to stay away from him when he was taking 24 credits his first quarter, a completely exhausting schedule.

Learning to effectively manage time was a key factor for many of the fathers. Glen found he needed to study as much as possible while his son was in school, otherwise he had to “sneak off” to find time to study. Glen also commented that getting a good start is important, “pour it on from the beginning so you don’t get in the hole.” Patrick agreed that adjusting his schedule by taking fewer classes was the biggest factor of his success.
Gary points to a College Success class he took during his first quarter, where he learned about resources on campus, as being a big help to him. He also stated that this class helped him learn note-taking strategies. "[You] make notes of anything the teacher writes down. If the teacher thinks it’s important enough to write it on the board then you should write it down."

Faculty and staff were credited for assisting in the success of most of the single fathers. Patrick commented that the professors making themselves available was helpful:

Professor _______, for example, when I first took her class she had all these notes and I just couldn’t grasp the concept of how to study them. So I went in there and talked with her and she sat down and explained exactly how her notes operated and how to use them, then I excelled in her class.

Other fathers commented that faculty-sponsored math help sessions, English faculty, counseling staff, childcare center staff, the tutoring/writing center, and the computer help desk were helpful when they needed assistance. Two of the fathers known to the researcher prior to the study remarked that my assistance was one of the initial reasons for their success. Gary disclosed to a staff member in the Financial Aid Office that he was a single father, and after further conversation the staff member called the childcare center and secured a job for him.

While revealing his single father status was advantageous for Gary, several of the fathers stated they do not normally disclose their status. As Stuart puts it:

For the most part I keep my daughter to myself. She’s my business. I found with some single mom’s especially, I hate to say
this, but sometimes I feel they use their child as an excuse... I kind of honestly get tired of a mom who gripes about oh, I have a kid, and school and a job and oh, and maybe it’s because I’m a guy, but I kind of say “suck it up,” you know? I mean what are you going to do, send the kid off to boarding school? Well, no and you’re planning on going to school, right? Yes, and you gotta work to support yourself, right? So why gripe? You gotta do it all, so what are you gonna do? You know, woe is me my whole life? I think that’s a poor attitude to have and I think it rubs off on the kid.

Other reasons for not wanting to disclose their single father status in classes included: not wanting anyone to feel sorry for them, and not wanting to deal with people who question why they are a single father.

The final subtheme for success in college had to do with the fathers having clearly defined goals. All the single fathers were able to concisely articulate their educational goals. Two of the fathers want to become lawyers, primarily in response to their negative experiences in gaining custody of their children. Several spoke of the desire to get a degree that allows them to make enough money to provide a better life for their family. Still others commented that their main goal is to not go back to the job they had prior to returning to school. Most of the fathers commented that while they may have always been somewhat goal oriented, becoming a single father helped them develop a clearer focus toward their goals.

Glen and Patrick spoke about the importance of developing short-term goals so they do not lose sight of their long-term goals. Glen stated:

The way I work is that I try not to look too far ahead. I’m trying to look at ultimately I would like to try to get a Bachelor’s somewhere... I try to concentrate on the immediate target. Then set my goal after that. But if I start thinking of that I get frustrated
[thinking] I'm not even halfway there. So I try to set a lot of shorter goals. That way I can succeed.

Patrick continues:

[People] let excuses get in the way of their original goal. Or they get fear, or something happens that they feel like they can’t do it. They lose their drive I guess. I have a big task to achieve in school. I have my own goal and I beat myself up because I’m not halfway there yet. But I know that if I just keep going, I can do it.

The single fathers in this study have all been attending Clark College for at least a year. They have found several strategies that have contributed to their success as students. These include perseverance, developing self-management and study skills, help from faculty and staff, and having clearly defined goals.

Barriers

Many factors contributed to the success of these single father students. Several barriers also existed, creating challenges for these fathers to overcome. Four distinct barriers were identified: 1) discrimination, 2) childcare issues, 3) adjusting to school, and 4) dating issues. Table 7 is a rank ordered list of the barriers, cross-referenced to the father with which each barrier is attributed.
Table 7

*Barriers Encountered as Single Fathers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
<th>Wes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>Adjusting to school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating issues</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, and also in the focus group, the theme of feeling discriminated against surfaced repeatedly. Every father brought up discrimination at least once. The fathers felt discrimination from the court system, the welfare system, and Clark College. This was a theme that seemed to strike a nerve with the fathers. Their voices would raise and some became angry, while others seemed exasperated as they tried to convey their feelings of frustration at systems that did not recognize or value them.

Several of the men related experiences with the Washington State court system surrounding custody and child support. The general feeling was the courts were biased toward the mothers, even in cases of drug abuse and neglect. Gary described it this way:

For some reason the state was [hesitant to grant him custody]...it’s the law that she [the mother] should have custody. So you start like you’re a stranger trying to get custody of your children. There’s no system set up, there’s no quick route, you can’t sign a quick claim deed or anything like that just to get your kid. There’s quite a lot there, and as you try to go through the system as a father, it seems to be more difficult.
Cris, who had only recently been granted custody of his daughter, had a similar experience to Gary’s:

Basically I had no control over what was happening. The fact that she was in a different state made it even more difficult to fight for my rights. So for the past three years I’ve gone through two cycles of court battles. So it’s merely getting a fair shot.

Once the fathers received custody of their children, their experience of feeling discriminated against did not end. A popular myth suggesting that single fathers do not need financial assistance exists. All of the single fathers in this study received either financial aid and/or unemployment benefits. Glen talked about his experience at the welfare office.

It’s harder for a man. If you go in there they tell you right off that you’re capable of getting a job. I got unemployed once and went down just to get some food stamps. They said to write down everything I had, and when I did they said I wasn’t eligible. They told me I had two cars. I said, it [the car] doesn’t even have a motor. But they said; sorry you’re not eligible.

The fathers did not just feel discrimination at the state or federal level. They shared their experiences of feeling discriminated against by Clark College. The fathers reported feeling discriminated against by the financial aid office, peers in the Early Childhood Education program, and through the scholarship/grant process.

Financial aid offices at most campuses have difficulty pleasing every student. For three of the single fathers the difficulties felt more personal. Stuart spoke of his frustrating encounter with the Financial Aid office where he was told
to write a letter and have it signed by his daughter’s mother proving he had custody. His perception was that single mothers did not have to go through a similar process. Stuart also relayed that in the hallway leading to the Financial Aid Office there is a poster of a Latina single mother with her young son. This poster is one of many throughout campus as part of a diversity project. Stuart’s thought was, “why is it any different for women than men, and where is the poster of the single dad?”

Gary talked about experiencing frustration in his Early Childhood Education class. The class was watching a film that discussed men and women’s traditional roles in society, and how some men who work with young children may be seen as “gay pedophiles.” Gary continues to say how it appeared that everyone in the class seemed to agree with this stereotype, and he walked out of class with the intention of quitting school. After speaking with his instructor, he developed the courage to share his experience with the class of raising his children as a single father and his desire to work with children. Gary said he felt better afterward, but still believes this stigma exists. During the focus group, Gary also mentioned a discussion in his Women’s Studies class regarding parenting, and his perception that “his experience as a father was not valued by the teacher or the students.”

Finally, Wes shared his frustration regarding the lack of grants or scholarships for single fathers. At Clark College there is a grant for single mothers that is essentially an emergency fund to pay for books, rent, or other living expenses while in school. Men are excluded from this program. Clark College also has a
successful displaced homemaker program for parents who have been raising their children and are in a position of needing to work. While men may enter this program, no men have yet done so.

Securing adequate childcare was listed as a barrier for five of the single fathers. Quality, consistent childcare can be expensive, and for these fathers it was a constant challenge to insure their children were receiving quality childcare. At times, this meant engaging in activities or relationships that created feelings of guilt for the father.

Wes said one of the biggest barriers when he started school was finding childcare for his son, who was then eight years old. The childcare center at that time only took children until the age of seven. When asked what he did with his son, Wes replied, “I had to get a girlfriend to live with me.” As he said this he was glancing toward the ground and looked guilty. He commented further,

Sounds bad, but true, I basically had a girl move in with me, so somebody would be there when I wasn’t there. Otherwise, I probably wouldn’t have had her move in. That’s why I had that look. I feel guilty about it.

Patrick also felt bad when he talked about the childcare issues he had. He talked about needing to leave his sons home in the mornings to catch the bus by themselves when he first started school, and about the hour they were home alone in the afternoon before he was able to get home. What bothered him the most, though, was lowering his standards for quality care because he could not afford better childcare.
We want to have the best care we can for our children, but sometimes we sacrifice our ethics for childcare in an effort to get things done. That’s a crime. But sometimes there’s no choice.

Several of the fathers were fortunate to have an older child or other family members who could be relied upon to watch the younger children regularly. While these situations were financially advantageous, they were not without problems. George said he was careful not to "burnout" his older daughter, who was often the responsible person at home. George worked to limit the times she needed to be responsible and to make sure he made time for special events with her, too.

Gary reported that while it worked for the first quarter to leave his daughters with family members, they grew tired of this obligation and were less available during the following quarters. This created problems that required Gary to occasionally bring his daughter to class. While two of his instructors allowed his daughter in class, the others did not, and Gary was forced to miss classes as a result. During one quarter his daughter was often sick, and as a result, Gary had to drop his classes due to absences and was consequently put on probation with the Financial Aid Office.

Gary and Stuart also remarked that having a child can be an advantage, as they are a good excuse for missing class and one that most instructors will not question. Several of the fathers noted that after they had been students for several quarters, they were able to select easier schedules. Once they developed favorable
schedules, they reported they had more time to spend with their kids and fewer childcare problems.

Five of the fathers spoke of their initial difficulties adjusting to school. These fathers found that going to college is harder than working, and had initial difficulties managing time and school schedules. Glen came to college after being laid-off from his job of 14 years. As he described it, he went from a situation where he was the expert responsible for teaching new employees to being a full-time student taking a variety of general education requirements.

It’s so much harder. If I came here and I only took classes in one subject I could get very focused on one thing and I could be the best at it. There’s no doubt in my mind. But I have to take all these different classes, that go in different directions. And boy, they stress you and strain you to all these different extremes. Classes that I have no interest in, that I have to make myself interested in order to be good at it. Some things like Econ[omics] for instance, the subject is not that complicated. The structure of the way the class is... the way you have to learn it, the testing on it, is a nightmare.

George commented that school is more stressful than work. “With work you can leave the stress at work. You can’t leave the stress at school.” Patrick agrees that sometimes school is really stressful, and he sometimes takes this stress out on his kids at home:

Sometimes I’m really stressed out. Finals week, I’m not doing too well in school and bring that home. That attitude affects my kids and my kids’ attitudes start and then I have to adjust it all. It’s pretty tough.
Cris laments that he is working harder than when he had a full-time job, and as he continues with his education it will only get harder. Wes wishes he still had the time to procrastinate, which he says he is quite good at doing.

Glen further notes how the adjustment to college has affected his life with regard to lack of time and money:

Time is a serious issue. I'd love to have more time to spend with him. I would like to be able, when I have a break from school, to be able to take him somewhere. But because of finances, you can't take him anywhere. We sit around the house and work in the yard. We can go down to the river or go camping or something, but it's not what he considers a real vacation. He wants to get up and go somewhere and then I have to explain to him; 'It's not like it was when I was working.' It's just not the same.

The final barrier identified was related to dating issues. Cris, Gary, and Stuart found that contrary to popular belief, single fathers are not attractive as potential dates. Cris had this to say:

It's kind of hard for me to feel like a normal young college student, to go out and meet people. To ask somebody out on a date it's kind of like this secret that I have to bolt inside. Because if I open my mouth it's 'Oh, oh.' They...get kind of freaked out. Could just be me, I don't know.

Stuart talked about his frustrations with not really fitting in:

I'd have to say that sometimes with the students' age here, we have such a wide student age, but a good chunk of them are kids right out of high school. Being a father, I still feel like I'm their age in a way. I'll look at the girls and think to myself, 'Yea, I can date her,' as opposed to a 40-year-old mother. But the minute people open their mouths, it changes because all of a sudden I find myself identifying with the 40-year-old parent – yea I have a kid, been there, done that.
The single fathers in this study identified several common barriers as students at Clark College. These included feelings of discrimination from the court system, welfare, peers, and Clark College itself. They discussed problems maintaining quality childcare and the choices they made when they were unable to provide it. Several experienced challenges adjusting to school. The majority of the fathers did not discuss dating issues, but three described challenges related to dating. While the fathers often found ways to overcome these barriers, they were nevertheless eager to discuss how Clark College could assist them in the future.

How Can The College Assist Single Fathers?

The final theme identified was what Clark College could do to assist single fathers. The fathers offered several suggestions during the individual interviews and had a lively discussion at the focus group regarding this topic. Five subthemes emerged: 1) developing a support group for single fathers, 2) creating grants/scholarships, 3) finding a campus advocate, 4) finding affordable childcare, and 5) getting campus recognition.
Table 8

*Clark College Assistance Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clark College</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Glen</th>
<th>Patrick</th>
<th>Stuart</th>
<th>Wes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants/scholarships</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus advocate</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus recognition</td>
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Many of the fathers mentioned an interest in participating in some form of single father or single parent support group. An unexpected outcome of the focus group was that it became a pseudosupport group, allowing the fathers to vent frustrations and receive encouragement from each other. It was apparent that these fathers appreciated the opportunity to talk with other single fathers and to discover their issues were similar to others. There was some concern about whether the group would be well attended. As Gary pointed out though, "they [the college] might find out that nobody signs up, but I wouldn't mind having a chance to run across some other dads." Stuart also thought a support group was a good idea if men were willing to participate. He stated,

> I think that the whole testosterone driven thing leads to a lot of guys not getting that support that they could probably use...If I could have a guy that I could go do a guy thing with who had a daughter, we could sit there and talk about [our] little girls, that would be great!

The idea of a support group was not limited to single fathers. The suggestion of having a group open to single parents was brought up during the
focus group. Another participant recommended the development of a single parent club that would sponsor social events and provide awareness issues facing single parents.

The second suggestion regarding how Clark College can assist single fathers had to do with offering more scholarships or grants for these students. Some of the fathers were aware of a Clark College Foundation grant that was only available to single mothers. Several of the fathers held the perception that they would not qualify for scholarships due to their being male. George expressed his feelings: “The school assumes you have it all taken care of if you’re a single father. I’m angry that all these programs exist for single moms, yet there is nothing for single dads.”

In discussing this issue during the focus group it became apparent that while widely held, this perception was somewhat inaccurate. Clark College has a Displaced Homemaker program that is heavily advertised and targeted toward women. While men can theoretically qualify for this program, there has yet to be a male participant. In conjunction with this program there exists a small foundation grant that pays for rent, school supplies, or gasoline in emergency situations. Other private scholarships target women, minorities, veterans, and specific majors, among other categories. The vast majority of scholarships are need- or merit-based and are open to anyone regardless of gender. Wes suggested the Clark College Foundation could offer a scholarship targeting single fathers.
The issues of custody and legal issues were discussed previously. The suggestion that Clark College provide some kind of advocacy regarding single father concerns was shared by several of participants. The suggestions for advocacy ranged from having someone versed in men's legal issues, counseling, a Human Development course for single fathers, and a forum focusing on single fathers. Stuart lamented that it would be nice, "if we had somebody that knew a little bit more about the childcare system for the man's side."

The idea of a forum was brought up by Gary as a way to bring single fathers together. Stuart suggested it would be good to give current or new fathers an outlet to talk, "someone who could say, hey, look it's normal to feel this way." Chris wondered about the possibility of offering a class for single fathers. Having a campus father/child day was brought up during the focus group.

Regarding an advocate, Chris thought it would be helpful to have someone on campus who could educate the faculty about the challenges facing single fathers. He noted that while many teachers were understanding about his having to miss classes due to a problem with his son and allowed him to make up the work or do extra credit, there are some who are not interested in him at all, and it could get stressful when he had to miss class to take care of childcare problems.

Providing affordable childcare was suggested by a majority of the fathers. George, while admitting he no longer needed childcare, stated that just having
someone provide information about childcare on campus would be nice. Patrick felt strongly about this topic:

I mean, if they can cover [the cost of] 5,000 sodas in the quad area, once a semester, they can afford to let a few people in on the childcare. I’m just going by what I saw on the wall the other day, free food. I know we’ve already paid for that. Well, let’s make a fund to pay for childcare for people who honestly need it.

Gary, the only person in this study who has used the childcare center at Clark College, agreed the costs can be prohibitive.

The final suggestion regarding what Clark College can do to assist single fathers was somewhat less concrete. It has to do with the previous discussion of mattering. Stuart describes it well: “I mean, I don’t need the advertisement. I’m not saying we’re the martyr fathers, nobody’s lookin’ [sic] out for us. I’m just saying it would be nice if we were recognized for carrying our weight.” Chris talked about feeling invisible, “There’s definitely a significant population of single fathers coming to school here. Making the campus aware of that [would help].” While the single fathers were unable to offer specific suggestions, it was apparent they would like the college to make an effort in recognizing that this population exists on the campus.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The men in this study did not intend to become single fathers. They arrived at their position as a result of their involvement with women who had drug and alcohol problems, mental issues, or were otherwise not interested in parenting. However, it is not accurate to say any of the men in the study were forced to become single parents. On the contrary, each man made a conscious choice to become a single father, and some endured court challenges and significant life changes as a consequence of their decision.

It is a fair assumption that the majority of women do not set out to become single mothers either. However, the phenomenon of single women raising children has become more common and culturally acceptable. Role models and societal support systems are readily available to single mothers. Indeed, because of women’s historical image as nurturer and caregiver, the expectation remains that women are the best choice for child rearing.

This prevailing image creates a challenge for men who accept the role of raising their children alone. These men face social stigmas and stereotyping regarding their motives for being single fathers. Questions regarding their masculinity and suitability to provide a nurturing environment for their children are common barriers for single fathers. Some of the fathers in this study raised these
questions themselves and lamented their shortcomings as a man raising children alone.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of single fathers attending a community college. Through in-depth interviews and a focus group, seven themes emerged: ambivalence, stability, finding support, mattering, success factors, barriers, and how Clark College can assist single father students. Chapter 4 identified several factors related to the success and then barriers encountered by single father students. Also included were concrete suggestions about how the colleges could assist this population.

Over the course of several months, the data from Chapter 4 were further reviewed and reflected upon, with the goal of reaching “a creative synthesis or bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 410). This process included reviewing field notes, discussing findings with colleagues and committee members, additional participant checks, and numerous hours of reflective contemplation. The underlying question was how the findings related back to the purpose of the study. For example, what did ambivalence or stability really mean in the context of the experience of single father students. As a result of this deeper analysis, a richer understanding of the experience of these men was achieved.

In addition, over the course of several months, with the assistance of colleagues, committee members, and additional participant checks, these themes
were further analyzed as to how they related to the study purpose. The purpose of this additional analysis was to understand what the identified themes actually meant related to the father’s experiences. An outcome of this further analysis was the identification of three relevant factors that may have significance for single fathers attending community college and for those individuals who work with them.

Below is a brief introduction, followed by a more thorough discussion of the three factors.

First, attending community college improved relationships with their children and allowed them to become better parents. This factor was primarily identified through the theme of stability and it was also connected with the themes of ambivalence and success factors. The issue of providing a stable environment for their families was important to all of the participants. The demands of working and being a single parent created a hectic and often chaotic schedule that left little time for family involvement. Also, fathers who were initially ambivalent about having custody and ultimately raising their children found the additional flexible time available in their class schedule improved previously challenging relationships with their children. Finally, this additional flexibility contributed to their being successful students.

Second, as the themes of success factors and barriers were further analyzed, it appeared that single fathers had similar experiences to single mothers with regard to attending community college. A comparison of the literature review done in
Chapter 2 on single mothers and the single father themes of success factors and barriers was conducted. The experiences of single mothers and single fathers attending community college were found to be remarkably similar, with the exception of how each accessed support networks. Single mothers were likely to utilize support networks when attending college, while single fathers did not initially seek support.

The third, and perhaps most complex discovery, was how the fathers viewed their identity and how their definition of masculinity changed while attending community college. This final factor was discovered by a thorough analysis of the themes of ambivalence and mattering, field notes, and discussions with participants and colleagues. While the question of masculinity and identity was never asked during the interviews, it emerged as a common thread during the research process. The men were ambivalent about their role as primary caretaker and several gave examples of embarrassing or challenging situations where they felt uncomfortable assuming a traditional female role. During the focus group the question of what does it mean to be a man in today’s society was debated. Upon deeper analysis, it became apparent that these men lack role models for how the world expects them to behave as single fathers. Consequently, they appeared to struggle with the issue of masculinity as they worked to forge new identities as single fathers and students.

The following is further discussion of each of the three identified factors.
As reported in the literature review, Mclean (2001) found that single fathers who seek custody of their children tend to be more motivated, educated and better able to handle the social barriers related to men seeking custody. Mclean also found that children raised in single father households were happier, did better academically, had fewer absences, and required fewer hospitalizations than children raised in single mother households. Hilton (1996) found that single fathers had more positive behaviors toward their children than married fathers.

The factors listed above were apparent in the men who participated in this study. The men were highly motivated to excel in college. While they were not yet considered highly educated, it was clearly a goal for the majority to continue their education. Several reported frustration at the social barriers they had experienced, such as questions about whether they were suitable to raise their children alone, and what motives they may have had in choosing to raise their children. The men in the study appeared to have learned to successfully navigate these barriers. The fathers had most of the attributes of successful single fathers, as identified by Mclean (2001) and were attending community college in an effort to continue increasing their effectiveness.

Community colleges have been viewed as open, affordable, and readily accessible institutions where individuals can gain skills leading to a better career. The number of single parents attending community college was outlined in the literature review and shown to be significant. While the experience of single
mothers attending college has been well documented, the literature on the experience of single fathers is lacking. This study was done to increase the knowledge base regarding the experiences of single fathers attending community college.

Prior to attending community college, all of the fathers in this study were working full-time jobs and had limited daily contact with their children due to their work schedules. Consequently, their children spent significant time with relatives or in childcare facilities.

The opportunity to attend college, while intellectually challenging, was stressful for these men. For the older fathers, it had been several years since they had been in school, and the faster pace of college classes was initially difficult. While demanding, attending college also provided an unintended benefit for these men. It became possible for the fathers to set their class schedules around their children's school schedules. Previously, they were not likely to be home when their children got out of school, and in some cases, did not get home until much later. Now they were able to be home when their children were home. As a result, the fathers found themselves spending more time with their children. Several reported establishing family study times and were pleased by the increase in their children's grades as well as their own. Some who had challenging relationships with their children appreciated the time they now had to work with them and reestablish trust.
The fathers seemed to realize this benefit of time would not last once they completed their degrees and reentered the workforce. As discussed in the literature review, men have a more difficult time than women if they need to leave early or miss work altogether due to childcare issues. The predominant view is that men should put work ahead of all other things, including family. Understanding how this viewpoint clashes with their need to raise their children, some of the men were preparing for careers that allowed for flexibility to be with their families. Others, whose children were teenagers, recognized that the children would be legal adults about the same time the fathers were finishing college, and the issue of childcare would be irrelevant and unnecessary.

According to Eggebeen et al. (1996), divorced single fathers tend to be better educated and make more money than never-married single fathers. However, a growing number of single fathers have never married and have not attained a college education (Bureau of Census, 2000b). The option to have more time to spend with their children could be a motivating factor for these fathers to enroll in college. In addition, attending college may provide the opportunity for some of these men to select careers that are more family friendly and provide the flexibility needed to raise children as a single parent. Community colleges should provide outreach to single parent organizations and men’s support groups in order to demonstrate the advantages of attending school while raising a family.
The second finding of interest in this study was that the experiences of single mothers and single fathers attending college were relatively similar. Factors contributing to the success and barriers experienced were parallel based on the review of literature and the interview data from this study.

Table 9 is a comparison of the success factors for single mothers attending college as found in the literature review, and the success factors for single fathers that were identified through this study. The main difference appears to be that single mother's attributes are more introspective and focused toward self-improvement. The attributes of the single fathers represent a more individualistic, self-reliant orientation reflecting a determination to succeed.

Table 9

*Comparison of Factors Contributing to Success in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Mothers</th>
<th>Single Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal motivation and commitment (Boutsen &amp; Lynds-Colbry, 1991; Watson, 2001)</td>
<td>Perseverance and positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness and a strong self image (Anderson, 1994; Watson, 2001)</td>
<td>Study and self management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support from family and friends (Doris, 1996; Lynds-Colbry, 1989; McMurray, 1996; Schobert, 2000)</td>
<td>Support from faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed coping skills (Hamilton, 1997)</td>
<td>Clearly defined goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal motivation and perseverance are similar, in that both put the responsibility for success on the individual. Personal motivation implies that accomplishment will come as a result of an internal effort. The single mother will succeed because of an inward drive to finish. Perseverance for the single fathers suggests a rugged resolve to succeed in spite of challenges that may arise.

Both groups reported either already possessing or were developing self-management skills. For the single mothers, these were primarily focused on interpersonal traits such as assertiveness and self-image. The single fathers focused on skill acquisition, such as time management and note-taking. The difference in the category of self-management seemed to be that single mothers attended to internal development while the single fathers acquired external management skills.

The biggest difference in the category of success factors involved how each group accessed support networks. Single mothers attributed social support, defined primarily as family, friends, and college staff, as one of the most important attributes of their college success. The single fathers in this study were not able to readily identify sources of support. After some thought, they were all eventually able to identify some type of support, and gave examples of professors, counselors, and other college staff who had helped them. The fathers took pride in being able to succeed alone, but acknowledged the need to ask for help.

The ability to ask for and receive support appears to be a fundamental difference between women and men. This can be equated with asking for
directions when lost. To generalize, women do not hesitate to ask for directions, while men stubbornly drive around until they either arrive at their location or are forced to admit they are lost before asking for assistance (Evelyn, 2002). College can be a challenging place to navigate. The ability to ask for help can make the experience much more enjoyable and ultimately more successful. Unfortunately, some of the men in this study learned that lesson after enduring many setbacks.

The final factor contributing to success for single mothers was having coping skills. The corresponding factor for single fathers was having clearly defined goals. These factors are related in the sense they are both responses to stress. Raising a family as a single parent while attending community college is stressful. Developing effective coping skills is a method of dealing with stress. Having clearly defined goals is also an effective method of stress reduction. The ability to be proactive and to stay focused on a goal is empowering, and reduces stress.

The barriers experienced while attending college were also remarkably similar between single mothers and single fathers. Table 10 is a comparison of the literature review regarding barriers for single mothers and the barriers identified by the fathers in the study.
Table 10

*Comparison of Barriers Encountered in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Mothers</th>
<th>Single Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time management (Krajewski, 1992; Watson, 2001)</td>
<td>Adjusting to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare issues (Krajewski, 1992)</td>
<td>Childcare issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial difficulties (Schobert, 2000; Watson, 2001)</td>
<td>Financial discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social stigma (Malone, 1998; Watson, 2001)</td>
<td>Dating issues; questionable motives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both parent groups identified barriers regarding adjusting to college. The single mothers specifically identified poor time management skills as a significant challenge. They also identified transportation as an issue in transitioning to college. The single fathers likewise identified time management as a barrier, but a more significant challenge for them was making the shift from work to school. Several commented about the mental stress of attending college being more difficult than the physical nature of their previous jobs.

Single parents had childcare issues regardless of their gender. Inability to afford appropriate care, and inflexible hours of campus childcare centers were cited by single parent mothers and fathers alike. Grandparents, neighbors, and friends were often asked to watch the children while the student attended class, and in a few cases the children attended class with their parent. Parents of school aged children attempted to schedule their own classes so as to coincide with the
children's school hours. The problem of affordable, accessible childcare underscores the importance of colleges developing flexible and cost-effective childcare options for single parents.

Financial difficulties were barriers experienced by both groups. Single mothers were either impoverished or severely threatened by poverty (Huff & Thorpe, 1997; Schobert, 2000). Many of the mothers utilized food stamps and other federal poverty programs, but commented on the social stigmas related to these programs (Watson, 2001). The single fathers also faced significant financial difficulties. The majority of fathers were also severely threatened by poverty and were subsisting primarily on financial aid, including college loans. None of the fathers received welfare benefits, with the exception of one, who received childcare assistance. When asked why they had not applied for welfare, the typical response was that it was a program for women. This perceived discrimination permeated the behavior of the single fathers, as they were largely unaware or chose not to apply for local and federal programs that would benefit them.

The final barrier existing for both single mothers and single fathers is the social stigma of being a single parent. Single parenting was seen as a threat to the traditional family structure. Single mothers reported difficulties establishing long-term romantic relationships, and felt negatively viewed by other students (Malone, 1998). The single fathers also discussed challenges related to establishing relationships, and were initially tentative about revealing their status as a single
Some of the fathers also reported a perception that their motives for becoming a single parent were questioned by others. Specifically, three of the fathers stated they felt viewed by others as either potential child molesters or homosexuals because of their status as a single father. The fathers raising daughters made extra efforts to demonstrate they were quality men with the best intentions for their children.

Single mothers and single fathers experience remarkably similar success factors and barriers while attending college. This suggests that college efforts to assist single parents do not necessarily need to be targeted to either group. However, because of the lack of visibility of single fathers and their perception that programs do not exist for them, it is important to target single fathers specifically. In addition, because of the difference in how each group accesses support, it would be prudent to offer assistance in different formats. For example, while displaced homemaker classes and support groups are effective for single mothers, focused seminars and problem-solving workshops are more likely to be accessed by single fathers (McCarthy & Holliday, 2004).

The third and final finding may be the most significant revelation of the study. The concepts of male identity and masculinity changed for the men in this study. Prior to attending college, the primary way for these men to define their identity was through work. After they started college, this concept changed to being identified as a good father and student. At the same time, the definition of
masculinity, or what it means to be a man, changed as well. The traditional definitions of masculinity did not fit as these men assumed the roles of student and single father. The themes of ambivalence, stability, and mattering are reflective of this identity shift and underscore the challenges that single fathers encounter as they attempt to find their way in this new environment.

To understand how fatherhood impacts masculine identity, it is necessary to first discuss the origins of fatherhood itself. This is not referring to fatherhood in the biological sense of procreation, but rather in the sociological sense of how the realization of the ability to father children has shaped society. The concept of paternity dramatically changed these men’s view of themselves.

Shlain (2003), in his thought-provoking book about the origins of sex roles, *Sex, Time and Power: How Women’s Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*, discussed what it may have been like before and after the concept of paternity was understood by men. Prior to this understanding, millions of years ago, men were not able to make the connection between having sex and the birth of children. That is to say, they did not recognize their role in the creation of children. When they made this connection, they developed the thought process that having children was a way of avoiding death and achieving a type of immortality. This newly developed understanding of paternity caused women and children to become of great importance to ancient man.

A man’s fear of death began to ease as he watched his children grow... Increasingly, he was disposed to develop a closer
relationship with the mother of his children. Man gradually realized that intimacy enabled him to become a better man, a more nurturing father, and a more complete human being... Before men gained the crushing knowledge of death’s inevitability and grasped the mechanism of paternity, Homo Sapiens were just male mammals belonging to the order of primates in the family of apes and the species of Homonids. After these two insights reconfigured their psyches, men arose above their taxonomic classification to become husbands and fathers (p. 331).

This new investment in their families, particularly their children, caused man to develop qualities of nurturance and kindness that previously did not exist. More importantly, man was able to develop the idea of personal responsibility for his children’s future. He was determined to see his children thrive and in so doing, was able to relieve his own fears concerning death.

Indeed, this understanding of the origin of fatherhood dramatically altered how men viewed their role in the family. Men became involved, nurturing fathers to the point where they took on a primary parenting role. However, somewhere in history that idea became overshadowed by the need to be stoic, masculine men who demonstrated their familial commitment by being good providers.

Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) also discussed this tendency to only view fathers in the biological sense and mothers in both biological and sociological contexts. The authors decried this practice as “reductionist” and point to the need for recognizing fathering as a sociological component of masculinity.

To further understand the identity shift experienced by the fathers in this study, it is necessary to explore traditional views of masculinity and its relationship
to work. Specifically, masculinity as manifested in the patriarchal worldview that was common to these men. Johnson (2003) defined patriarchal societies as male-identity focused and male-centered. The family backgrounds of the men in this study were oriented toward patriarchies, and these experiences shaped how the men viewed their own identity in relationship to work and family.

In the current literature, and throughout popular culture, there exists an abundance of opinions about a perceived crisis in masculinity and the difficulty of being a man (Faludi, 1999; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Pease & Pringle, 2001; Robinson, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). These opinions range from the call of “Promise Keepers” for men to reclaim the role of head of the household, to encouraging men to develop more of their feminine qualities, and numerous other suggestions in between. The result is that men may be confused about their identity as a man and seek to define it through work, school, or family.

Kimmel (2003) offered a current definition of masculinity that demographically aligned with the men in this study. He stated, “masculinity in white, middle class, early-middle aged, heterosexual men is equated with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control” (p. 85). Johnson (2003) further describes masculinity as having,

qualities such as control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as vulnerability) (p. 166).
Johnson points out these qualities are in direct contrast to more feminine qualities such as cooperation, caring, and emotional expressiveness. Kimmel (2003) clearly articulates the problem with traditional masculine identity is that it is defined by its rejection of feminine identity and not by “direct affirmation of the masculine which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile” (p. 87).

Historically, the main source of masculine identity was achieved through work. A man’s ability to work hard and provide for his family was viewed as honorable, and contributed an important component of male identity. Indeed, when men meet other men, one of the first topics of conversation has to do with the type of work each one does. Men then make comparisons regarding the relative prestige of the job and how much money they perceive is being made. Some types of manual labor also convey masculinity. Men with physically demanding jobs are viewed as being heroic and brave by working class men (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003).

During the focus group, the topic of work and identity came up in the context of how the media portrays men. Stuart used the term “media man” to convey society’s image of the man who has the good job and comes home to the perfect family. The men in the focus group collectively felt this “media man” did not accurately portray their experiences as a single father, yet the message received was that they fell short as men because they could not attain this ideal image.
Kimmel (2003) used a similar term to discuss male identity and its relationship to work. He referred to these men not as “media men” but as “marketplace men.”

Marketplace man derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, and status... Marketplace man was an absentee landlord at home and an absent father with his children, devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment, a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men. (p. 84)

Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) found evidence that linked masculinity and work identity with Christian doctrine and the formation of a “breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy.” The male’s role was to earn the family wage and as a result, women’s wages were viewed as supplemental and paid less than men’s jobs. Consequently, work became a critical component to male identity formation (p. 21). Orloff and Monson (2002) concurred that, “healthy and able-bodied men are expected to be gainfully employed (p. 64).” The authors further pointed out that the only honorable way for men to live was through having a job and not through state assistance, except in cases of temporary unemployment. This provides an explanation for why men in this study were less likely to ask for financial assistance; it was viewed as not being manly.

Another component of male identity and work is that men’s social networks typically evolve from the people with whom they work. When men become unemployed, they have difficulty duplicating these social networks. As a result of the decline in manufacturing jobs, more working class men are now attending
college than entering this industry (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003). Attending college has the potential of being a new source for networking, but as demonstrated by the fathers in the study, it was difficult for them to meet new people.

If work has historically been a major source of masculine identity, there is increasing support for a contemporary viewpoint of masculinity that is inclusive of fatherhood. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) asserted that, currently, fatherhood is a popular masculine style (p. 10), and addressed the shift from a work identity to an identity of fatherhood.

Currently, various individual men and men’s groups, such as profeminist men, invoke the identity of fatherhood as a dynamic element of their lifestyle. This shift projects a contemporary version of manhood through a move from cultivating a public masculinity around work to the forging of a private masculinity around fathering. (p. 52)

In their study of first-time fathers in Britain, Henwood and Proctor (2003) found that the men seemed to embrace their roles as fathers, as well as a changing perception of masculinity. The expanded role of father included being present and involved with their children. This new masculine identity as a father was viewed as very important to them (p. 5). Specifically, some of the responses of the fathers in the study were: “You have to put yourself second; your child comes first.” Another participant stated, “A parent who is prepared to put work second and family first, you know, the father who’s prepared to do that, I think that’s a good father.” Lastly, “good fathers are described as being involved in the routine care or
nurturing of their child, and as being understanding, approachable and supportive.” (p. 5).

The previously mentioned study is relevant in that it mirrors many of the experiences of the single fathers in this study. The single fathers made the choice to put their children first in their decisions to seek custody, as well as to attend college. As reported in Chapter 4, work was no longer a primary source of their identity, and had been usurped by the importance of being involved with their children. While the fathers were found to be ambivalent about this new identity role, it should not be a surprise according to Henwood and Proctor (2003). The authors stated that because of the transformative nature of fatherhood they would expect fathers to “react more ambivalently or self-reflectively to issues of gender, power, status, and privilege (p. 3).

Given this shift in identity from work to being a father and a student, it was not surprising that the themes of ambivalence, stability, and mattering emerged from the interviews. As these fathers attempted to understand their roles as a single father and a student, it could often be confusing. Role models, for the most part, do not exist for these men, and consequently they must forge their way through in an attempt to understand and be successful in their new identities. At times they were ambivalent as they became involved in processes that were challenging and not easily understood. Shifting from an identity related to work toward identities of father and student created an unstable environment. Since humans naturally strive
toward homeostasis, it is not surprising that a major theme involved the desire to create a stable environment for their families. Given that the majority of male’s social contacts derive through work, it can be difficult for men to duplicate these contacts in a new environment such as college. Therefore, feelings of isolation and the sense of not “mattering” can arise. The fathers felt they did not matter to the institution because they did not see themselves represented in the campus literature and were overlooked by some of the student services, specifically advising, financial aid, and the childcare center. The lack of role models and lack of knowledge that other men like them existed furthered their sense that they did not matter to the college.

Three factors emerged from analysis of the themes in this study. The first was that attending college provided an opportunity to spend more time with their children due to increased flexibility in class scheduling. This additional time allowed the fathers to improve their relationships with their children, while also modeling good study habits. The second factor was that the experience of single fathers and single mothers attending college are remarkably similar. Success factors included motivation, self-management skills, and coping skills. The main difference involved access and utilization of support networks. Barriers encountered were similar for both groups and included: childcare, financial difficulties including access to grants, adjusting to school, and social stigmas related to being a single parent. The third factor was a shift from having a primary
identity associated with work to being identified as a father and student. This identity shift, while viewed as mostly positive, also contributed to feelings of ambivalence, lack of stability, and an impression that the father's efforts did not matter.

Limitations of the Study

This study examined the experiences of seven single fathers attending Clark College, a community college located in Vancouver, Washington. Whether the findings could be generalized to other regions of the country or to the experiences of other single fathers has yet to be decided. Many single fathers who met the research criteria were reluctant to participate in the study. The seven who did participate may have been motivated because of past negative experiences with court systems and their children's mothers. Participants who chose not to participate may not have had the same experiences, and thus lacked the incentive to participate.

The criterion for participation required the fathers to have attended Clark College at least half-time for a minimum of one year. The reason for this was to find participants who had demonstrated success as a community college student over time. There may be a significant number of single father students who do not persevere for this length of time. The experiences of these students could provide
useful information about the types of services the college could offer to help these students persist.

The ages and experience as a father were varied among the participants and resulted in two distinct participant groups. Five of the participants were in their mid-thirties to early forties and had been a father for at least 10 years. These five were able to offer a wealth of information based on their experiences. The remaining two fathers were in their early twenties and had been fathers for three years or less. While their experiences were no less valid than those of the other fathers, it was apparent that much of what they discussed had elements of looking toward the future rather than reflecting on the past. This difference may not be a limitation, as it did provide a method for comparison and contrast amongst the two groups.

With the exception of one participant who identified as being part Native American, the group was of European descent. While this homogeneity provided many common experiences from which to study, the inclusion of culturally and ethnically diverse participants may have provided broader data. For example, single fathers of Latin American descent may have larger family support networks available to assist them with childcare and other issues facing single fathers.
Recommendations for College Personnel

Acknowledging the existence of single fathers on campus appears to be the most important act the college could take. The previous suggestions for direct mailings, on-campus publicity, and education of faculty and staff would be a step forward in helping these men feel valued. This acknowledgment could reduce the social stigma that seems to exist for single fathers and provide information to the campus community that may help these men feel like they matter to the college. This publicity would also have the added benefit of letting single fathers know they are not alone, and could be a step in the facilitation of additional support for them.

Starting a men’s focus group on campus would be an important endeavor. Some of the topics could include the role of the father in today’s society and general issues facing students. Pierce College in Puyallup, Washington has a nationally recognized example of a men’s program that is effective (Evelyn, 2002). Their program provides mentoring, a focus group, and resources concerning men’s issues (Burkholder, 2003). If enough single fathers were interested, the college could start a specific focus group for them. As mentioned previously, for the group to work it must have an emphasis on problem solving and not on discussing feelings for men to become interested in participating.

Colleges need to examine their existing grants and scholarships. Do grants and scholarships exist for single parents? If they do, is the language inclusive of single fathers as well as single mothers? Advertising these opportunities to all
single parents would help remove the perception that grant money is not available to men. Colleges may want to consider developing a new grant or scholarship program that is specific to single fathers.

Finally, colleges must continue to look for ways to provide affordable childcare. Student fees may be able to subsidize the cost, or colleges could pursue federal and state grants that might defray these costs. Insuring that childcare is available for the hours that classes are in session is also important. When Clark College’s childcare center expanded its evening hours, many more students were able to take night classes and work part-time during the day.

Recommendations for Further Research

Single fathers comprise approximately one-fifth of all single parent families Gillenkirk (2000). As the number of single fathers increases, additional research needs to be done to understand and respond to the needs of this population. The findings of this study suggest the following further areas of research regarding the experience of single fathers.

The participants in this study were academically successful students and were able to comment on factors that contributed to their success. Many students, including single fathers, are not successful in college and either fail or quit attending for other reasons. Those single father students who were not able to persist may have experienced more pronounced or different barriers than the ones
represented in this study. Studying single fathers who did not persist at college could provide additional information about the needs of this population.

Conducting research with a more culturally diverse group of single fathers might also provide additional information on the experiences of these men. For example, African-American or Latin-American single fathers may experience additional barriers or utilize support networks in different ways than the fathers in this study. In addition, conducting similar research on a larger scale and in other regions of the country could add to the knowledge base regarding single father college students.

This study found that single fathers were not likely to seek out assistance. Additional research on help seeking behavior for single fathers would be beneficial. Specifically, an investigation of the effectiveness of intrusive efforts to provide assistance is warranted.

The issue of whether the fathers felt they mattered to the institution was a finding of this study. Further research using Schlossberg’s (1989) mattering scales might provide insight into specific areas of the college where these students felt they do not matter. This information could be helpful to student development administrators as they make resource allocations and develop support programs.
Conclusions

The number of men choosing to raise their children alone has increased in the last two decades. The number of single fathers attending community college has increased as well. Little research has been done which explores the unique needs of this population. This study was conducted as a way of contributing to the knowledge base of single fathers.

A phenomenological approach was used because it allowed the participants to tell their stories with the goal of understanding their experience. Seven participants were interviewed individually and a follow-up focus group was held. The transcriptions from the interviews and focus group provided the primary data source for analysis. The transcriptions were coded and seven relevant themes emerged: ambivalence, stability, finding support, mattering, success factors, barriers, and what Clark College can do to assist single fathers.

Three significant factors were identified. The first was that attending community college was found to be beneficial to their families because the flexibility in choosing class times allowed the fathers to spend more time with their children. Prior to attending college, the majority of participants had worked full-time jobs and had less interaction with their children. While attending Clark College, most of the men were either working part-time jobs or not at all. Consequently, the men believed they were better parents as a result of attending college.
Second, the factors contributing to success and the barriers encountered were remarkably similar with the literature on single mother college students. The one main difference which emerged was how the two groups identified and utilized social support. Single fathers were less likely to have support networks.

The third factor was that a shift occurred regarding the primary source of male identity. Rather than viewing work as their main source of identity, as has traditionally been the case, these men adopted identity roles of father and student. The men wished to be viewed in the context of being a good father and a successful student. The fathers were proud of their abilities in both areas.

It is hoped that the results of this study will further the understanding of the issues facing single fathers attending community college. College administrators can use this information to enhance services to this population that may help single fathers successfully complete their educational goals.

The men who participated in this study are to be commended for their efforts to persevere in an environment that is largely unaware of their existence and where their motives for being single fathers are questioned. With so much press being devoted to “deadbeat dads” who do not accept their roles as parents, it is inspiring to hear the stories of these men who are striving to be excellent fathers and excellent students. Colleges would do well to recognize their presence, and to actively work to support their success.


Hanson, S. M. (1981, October). *Single custodial fathers*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Milwaukie, WI.


*Student Management System* (2002) [Data file]. Olympia, WA.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: INVITATION LETTER

The Experience of Single Fathers on a Community College Campus

Recruitment Materials

Recruitment of interviewees to participate in this phenomenological study about the experience of single fathers on a community college campus will be conducted by sending the following letter. The Informed Consent Document will also be attached.

[Date]

Dear [PARTICIPANT’S NAME]:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a study examining the experience of single fathers at Clark College. Specifically the researchers want to understand what successes and barriers you have experienced as a single father student at Clark College and what the college could do to improve the student experience for single fathers. Little research has been done on single fathers who are community college students. The hope is that a better understanding of the issues facing single fathers can be developed and that this information could be used to improve the experience of future single father students.

You have been invited to participate in this study because of your position as a single father attending Clark College. This study will be part of doctoral dissertation at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. Dr. Alex Sanchez, Professor of Education, and Tim Cook, a doctoral student are the investigators. Mr. Cook is also a counselor at Clark College.

If you accept this invitation you will be asked to participate in an interview of up to 90 minutes. You will have an opportunity to review the information collected from the interview and make necessary changes. You will also be asked to participate in a focus group interview with other single fathers from Clark College. The focus group will also be for no more than 90 minutes. The purpose for the interview and focus group is to understand the experience of single fathers at Clark College and single fathers are in the best position to provide this information.

A full description of the interview process and your involvement is included in the attached Informed Consent Document. Your information will remain confidential throughout the study and all records of the transcripts will be destroyed once the study is completed. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse
to answer any questions that you wish. Mr. Cook will be calling you within the next week to determine if you are interested in accepting our invitation to participate in the study and to arrange a suitable time. Mr. Cook will also explain the Informed Consent Document which must be signed before the interview takes place. If you have further questions please call Tim Cook at 360-992-2848 or email tcook@clark.edu. Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Dr. Alex Sanchez, Professor of Education

Tim Cook, Doctoral Student
Oregon State University
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of the Research Project
The Experience of Single Fathers on a Community College Campus.

Investigators
Dr. Alex Sanchez, Professor of Education; and Tim Cook, Doctoral Student. Tim Cook is also a counselor and division chair of the Behavioral Sciences at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington.

Purpose of the Research Project
This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the experience of a single father attending community college is like. Specifically, the researchers would like to know what successes and/or barriers you have experienced as a community college student. In addition, what college services you used or would have liked to have used if available. The researchers believe the findings of this study may provide a better understanding of the needs of single father community college students.

You are invited to participate in this research study because you were identified as a single father with primary custody of his children who is attending Clark College at least half time. It is expected that between six and ten single fathers will participate in this study.

Procedures
If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for three and one-half hours. The initial interview is one and one-half hours. A follow up interview to check the accuracy of the first interview is one-half hour. A final focus group to include all participants is one and one-half hours.

The following procedures are involved in this study. Tim Cook will conduct the interview and focus group. Interviews will be conducted with between six and ten single fathers attending Clark College. The questions will be developed by Mr. Cook and used as a guide for the interview. The initial interview will take up to 90 minutes maximum and will be scheduled in person at your convenience. The interview will be recorded on audiotape and you will be able to have the tape recorder stopped at any time. If you choose you may ask Mr. Cook to take written notes instead of recording the interview. You may also request at any time to end the interview and may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.
After the interview Mr. Cook will have the audiotape professionally transcribed and analyze my responses to the questions. He will then review the transcription and analysis with you, either in person or by phone and you will have the opportunity to approve them or ask for appropriate changes to be made. You will also have the opportunity to provide additional information if you choose to do so.

Once the initial interviews have been completed and the transcripts and analysis reviewed a focus group will be scheduled. The purpose of the focus group is to gather the participants together to further discuss issues raised during the initial interviews. The focus group session will take a maximum of 90 minutes. The focus group will be audiotaped unless you request that notes be taken instead. During the focus group you can choose to not answer questions and ask for the audiotape to be stopped at anytime. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription of the focus group session and either approve or make appropriate revisions to the transcription.

**Foreseeable risks or benefits**
The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are minimal and include the potential for increased emotions due to discussing past family and/or other experiences.

There may be no personal benefit for participating in this study. However, the researchers anticipate that in the future, society may benefit from this study through increased awareness of the issues facing single fathers at the community college. Your participation is on a voluntary basis and you will not be compensated for your participation.

**Confidentiality**
Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified. Audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed once the study has been completed.

**Voluntary Participation Statement**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may withdraw from the study before it is completed all information that you have individually provided will be destroyed.
If I have questions
Any questions you have about the research study or specific procedures should be directed to Tim Cook at 360-992-2848 or Dr. Alex Sanchez at 541-737-8202. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at 541-737-3437 or at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the procedures described above and give your informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. You will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

______________________________  ____________________________
Signature of participant          Date Signed

______________________________
Participant’s printed or typed name
APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER

March 10, 2003

Dr. Alex Sanchez
Professor of Education
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331

Dear Dr. Sanchez:

This is a letter of approval for you to conduct your research project at Clark College. I recognize you will be interviewing between six and ten single fathers in an attempt to understand the experience of single fathers at a community college. The initial interviews will be followed up by a focus group including the original single fathers. I also understand this is part of a doctoral dissertation by Tim Cook a student in the Community College Leadership program and that you are the principal investigator.

Mr. Cook has discussed the project with me and given me a copy of the informed consent document. Clark College students who chose to participate in this study will be kept confidential and may discontinue the study at any time without personal ramification. In addition, there are no monetary benefits for students who chose to participate in this study.

As Vice-President of Student Development at Clark College I approve that yourself and Tim Cook may contact and interview single fathers at Clark College for the purpose of your research study. This authorization may be revoked at anytime without cause. The topic of single father community college students is interesting and may yield information that benefits future students.

Sincerely,

Blaine Nisson, Ed.D.
Vice-President for Student Development
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions are to be used as a guide for understanding the experience of single fathers at Clark College. The questions are intended to be starting points for discussion and will likely lead to follow up questions. In addition, the order of the questions may change as the interview progresses. However, for consistent information all questions will be asked during the interview.

What were the reasons you decided to attend Clark College?

What is it like being a single father attending community college?

What factors have contributed to your success as a student at Clark College?

What barriers have you experienced? How did you overcome those barriers?

Describe your personal support system?

What was the highest grade completed by your mother? Father?

Are you currently employed? What do you do? How many hours per week?

Tell me about your children, ages, gender?

How can Clark College assist in the success of single father students?