AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS:
LIFE AS A SINGLE PARENT

A Project

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by
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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS:

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by

Iyeisha Nycole Miller

This research project examines African American single fathers in their role as single parents. Since 1970, the population of single fathers has rapidly grown, as has the population of African American single fathers, yet the needs, concerns and challenges of this population have yet to be fully identified. In addition, it is not fully understood how this population of fathers is adjusting to and managing the role of single parenting.

Eleven men from Sacramento and the surrounding areas participated in the research study. The findings suggest that the needs of these fathers are very similar to the needs of their female equivalents. Adjustment to and managing the role of single parenting does not seem to be a challenge for these fathers. In fact, these fathers appear to adjust fairly well. However, the disparities these fathers encounter from the stereotypes placed
upon them by society as well as their interactions with government agencies seem to be of great concern for the fathers.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................................ vi

Chapter

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ........................................................................................................ 1

   Background of the Problem ................................................................................................................. 4

   Statement of the Research Problem .................................................................................................... 5

   Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................................... 6

   Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................................................... 6

   Definition of Terms .............................................................................................................................. 8

   Social Work Research Justification ..................................................................................................... 8

   Study Limitations ............................................................................................................................... 10

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ......................................................................................................... 11

   Single Parent Households in the U.S. ............................................................................................... 11

      Statistics of Single Parent Households .............................................................................................. 13

      Single Mothers vs. Single Fathers .................................................................................................... 14

      Trends of Male Headed Single Parent Households ........................................................................ 16

   Main Issues Compared to Two Parent Households .......................................................................... 18

      Custodial vs. Non-Custodial Parents .............................................................................................. 18

viii
Poverty and Other Children’s Outcomes…………………………………20
Programs and Resources for Single-Parent Households…………………………………23
Public Assistance: Welfare and Child Support…………………………………………………………….23
African American Single Fathers…………………………………………………….26
Income, Poverty and Well Being……………………………………………………………26
Adjustment to Being the Primary Caregiver……………………………………27
Social Life, Personal Life, and Professional Life…………………………………30
Societal Acceptance and Interaction with the Family Court System……33
Access to Resources, Public Assistance and Child Support…………………36
Summary………………………………………………………………………………………………………38

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY……………………………………40
Study Objectives …………………………………………………………………………………………….40
Study Design ……………………………………………………………………………………………….40
Population Description and Participation Criteria………………………………41
Data Collection and Procedure…………………………………………………………………………42
Instrument………………………………………………………………………………………………….42
Data Analysis…………………………………………………………………………………………….43
Protection of Human Subjects …………………………………………………………………….43

4. RESULTS…………………………………………………………………………………………………44
Overall Findings.................................................................44

Specific Findings...............................................................45

Circumstances Leading to Single Parenting..........................45

Factors Influencing the Decision to Parent............................48

Participant’s Relationship with Their Own Father..................50

Adjustment to Single Parenting..........................................51

Changes and Challenges Faced..........................................53

Social Life...........................................................................54

Professional Life...............................................................57

Access to Resources and Suggested Resources......................59

Societal Acceptance...........................................................60

Summary.............................................................................63

5. CONCLUSION, SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS...........65

Summary of Study .............................................................65

Implications for Social Work ..............................................68

Limitations .........................................................................69

Recommendations .............................................................69

Conclusion .........................................................................70
Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In today’s society when the topic of single parenting emerges, more often than not the image of a woman with one or more children comes to one’s mind. However, there has been a recently growing trend of single parenting being done by men. In today’s current culture men are not often viewed as caregivers for their children and therefore the idea of a household being headed by a single father is a hard concept for many to grasps (Coles, 2003; Coles 2009). While the concept of fatherhood has been constantly evolving and men are beginning to reject society’s traditional gender roles of fathers (this is evident with more and more men opting to become “stay at home dads”), the mainstream depiction of fatherhood is one of being a provider, protector, disciplinary and decision maker (McAdoo, 1993; Storhaug & Oien, 2012). With this being the definition of what fatherhood is, it is understandable that the concept of single fatherhood is more or less a foreign thought to society.

Prior to the 19th century and the Progressive era, this was not society’s experience of men as neither fathers nor single fathers. Historically, women were less than likely to acquire custody of their children through the court system following the deterioration of the family unit. During this time, women and children were seen as the property of men, therefore, if a family was to break up and the man wanted to have custody of the children he would get it. Additionally, prior to the 20th century it was very common for women to
die during childbirth and/or due to disease, thus leaving the man with the responsibility to
care for the children (Greif, 1995). The emergence of the 19th century and the
Progressive era brought about a shift in the view of parenting; it is also the time when the
tables begin to turn in favor of women. It was during this time that children and women
were able to break away from their legal attachments to men; they were no longer seen as
a man’s property but rather seen as individuals. This in conjunction with the growing
Industrial Revolution, which caused men to have to be away from the home more
frequently, allowed women to assume the role of the primary caregiver and in many ways
shift into being the more essential parent (Greif, 1995). Fast forward to current times and
it is clear the impact the Progressive era and the Industrial Revolution had on how the
roles of parenting are viewed and it continues to linger on.

As previously mentioned, the notion that single fatherhood exist is a hard concept
for many if not most to grasp. Even harder for society to comprehend is a sub population
of African American single fathers. These fathers are even more highly disregarded and
in many ways are habitually degraded. Society’s representation of African American
men in the family is very bleak. African American men, for the most part, are not seen as
a part of the Black family structure in any facet. This population of fathers frequently has
terms such as “dead beat dad”, “absentee father” and “non-existent father” placed upon
the population as a whole, completely disregarding the African American fathers that
actively participate in their children’s lives (Coles: 2001; Coles, 2002; Coles, 2003;
Coles, 2009; Prince-Bonham & Skeen, 1979). Many research studies show that there are
a much larger percentage of African American fathers that actively participate in the rearing of their children than what is portrayed in modern culture (Coles, 2003; Murray et al., 2008). Given that such negative connotations are associated with African American fathers, the idea of a household headed by African American single father, is a notion that is often times rejected (Coles, 2003; Coles, 2009). Therefore, the idea that African American single fathers even exist is difficult for many to comprehend or even appreciate. (Coles, 2003; Coles, 2009).

Since 1970, there has been a steady increase in the amount of households being headed by single fathers; regardless of their race and socioeconomic status (Coles, 2003; Hook & Chalasani, 2008; Ziol-Guest, 2009). Today, the number of single father headed families continues to grow and is doing so at an even faster rate than that of the single mother headed families (Zhan & Pandey, 2004; Ziol-Guest, 2009). As of the 2003 Census Bureau, households headed by single fathers represented 18% of all households headed by a single parent (Hook & Chalasani, 2008). Single fathers, in comparison to their married counterparts, are more likely to be African American (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Although the population of single fathers is rapidly increasing and the likelihood of these fathers being African American is great, there is little information known about African American single fathers.
Background of the Problem

The traditional family structure of two married parents living in the home and raising their children is no longer the norm for society (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005; Kleist, 1999). The family structure is a constant evolving structure that changes as society evolves. Single parenting is one of the family structures that have been evolving. Although single parenting has been around for since before the 19th century, it has grown to higher rates than most would have expected. In 2012, 28% of all children in America were living in a single parent home and it is estimated that at least half of all children in America will live in a single parent headed household at some point during their lives (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005; ChildStats.gov, 2013).

Since single parenting has, for the most part, been a phenomenon known amongst women. As a result there has been little research done about single fathers. In fact, in comparison to the research that has been done on single mothers, the research that has been done on single fathers is less than minuscule. To take it a step further, the lack of research done on African American single fathers is even smaller and has left a gap of knowledge regarding the impact that single parenting has on these fathers, the impact it has on their children, and what resources and/or programs, if any, may need to be developed as resources for this population (Coles, 2003; Greif, 1995; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Patulny, 2012). It is important to understand the impact that African American single fathers have on their children and the impact that the children have on
their fathers. African American fathers, whether the custodial parent or the non custodial parent, have been stereotyped as being absentee fathers, thus the need to understand what influences these fathers to go against the grain is equally important to understand. Given the various social structures that work against African American children and the social injustices that impact their lives, it seems almost negligible to overlook the need for understanding this population.

**Statement of the Research Problem.** Due to the lack of research that has been done on African American single fathers, it is unknown how these fathers are fairing in their roles as single parents. For African American single fathers, single parenting does not seem to be something that is sought out by them or even planned, but rather something that is placed upon them with little to no warning. The impact that this has on their ability to parent is imperative to understand. For all parents, whether male or female, single parent or not, the role of parenting requires a significant amount of adjustment to one’s life (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Simple everyday task such as going to the grocery store, cooking and maintaining the home and indulging in recreational activities are no longer simple task to undertake. Therefore, examining the adjustment of African American single fathers in their transition from a participating parent to a single parent is necessary.

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of knowledge on the sub population of African American single fathers. Currently, it is unknown if there are adequate enough
services and/or resources (i.e. welfare, shelters, housing assistance, etc.) available to help these single fathers. Additionally, the needs, concerns and challenges for this population have not been identified and therefore cannot accurately be addressed. In order to sufficiently provide African American single fathers with adequate services and/or resources to address the needs, concerns and challenges of this population, the needs, concerns and challenges must first be identified.

**Purpose of the Study.** The purpose of this research is to study African American single fathers and gain insight as to how these fathers are adjusting or have adjusted to their role as a single parent. The study will look at the fathers’ social and professional lives to gain insight into this area of their lives. This study will also explore the needs, concerns and challenges of African American single fathers in the aforementioned areas. Additionally, this research will look at African American single fathers’ access to community resources, their interactions with government agencies, and their perception of societal acceptance. Finally this research will explore whether or not there are an adequate amount of services and/or resources available to these single fathers.

**Theoretical Framework.** Most research done on African American men and African American fathers is rooted in two models; the deficit model as well as the matriarchy model (Cochran, 1997). Research of African American fathers that is centered on the deficit model tends to focus on all the negative aspects of African American men and them as fathers; taking great interest in the fathers who have chosen
to neglect and/or abandon their responsibilities as fathers (Cochran, 1997). Moreover, these research studies give little focus to the African American fathers who remain in the home or the fathers that actively participate in their children’s lives after separation from the mother (Cochran, 1997).

Research studies anchored in the matriarchy model mirror several of the principles found in the deficit model (Cochran, 1997). Studies using the matriarchy model reinforce the belief that African American women have no choice but to function as the head of the household because African American men are not capable of operating in such a role (Cochran, 1997). From this perspective African American women are praised and in some cases pitied for their sacrifice and willingness to ease into this role, thus making the role of African American fathers devalued and marginalized. Both of these models pigeonholed African American men and African American fathers into demeaning and negligible definitions of what it means to be a father and even more so an African American father.

For the purpose of this study the ecological model will be used as the foundation of the research. By using the ecological model, this research study can explore the various social structures that impact and/or influence the roles of African American men as fathers. The use of the ecological model in this study allows for the exploration of other factors influencing the fathers in their single parenting role. The ecological model
also offers this research study the opportunity to debunk some of the myths and stereotypes surrounding African American fathers.

**Definition of Terms.** For the purpose of this research study the phrase “single father” will signify that the father is the parent with primary physical custody of their biological children; excluding adopted children and non-biological children (i.e. a partner’s child or children). The phrase “custodial parent” will mean the parent that has primary physical custody of the children and will be used interchangeably with the phrase “single father.” The phrase “primary physical custody” will indicate that the father has the children more than 50% of the time and the father’s home is the children’s primary place of residence (Superior Court of California Sacramento County, 2013). The phrase “social life” will refer to the father’s interaction with friends, going out for a night on town, and their participation in any other form of social gatherings. The phrase “professional life” will refer to the father’s occupation, job, or career. The terms “Black” and “African American” will be used interchangeably to describe the same population of people.

**Social Work Research Justification.** As previously stated, single fathers and more specifically African American single fathers are a growing phenomenon in today’s society. As a social worker, one must be equipped with the knowledge of the types of barriers that African American single fathers face during their journey as single parents. Social workers working in child welfare have an even greater need to be equipped with
the knowledge of the needs, concerns, and challenges of this population as this knowledge directly impacts the work that is done with and for the children served in the child welfare system. The focus of social workers in child welfare is on family reunification and family maintenance. The goal of child welfare workers is to keep families together and/or reunify children with their parents (Samantrai, 2004). As the population of single fathers continues to grow at a rapid pace, the likelihood of a child welfare social worker encountering a single father headed household increases as does the likelihood of encountering a single father household headed by an African American single father. Thus, it is essential for child welfare social workers to have a working knowledge of the needs, challenges and concerns for this population so that when creating case plan goals for families it is done so in a manner that takes into consideration all factors influencing the family’s crisis so that the family can successfully reunify (Samantrai, 2004). Child welfare social workers must also be aware of the resources that are and are not available to single fathers. This knowledge holds even greater significance in that it is from this knowledge that social workers working in child welfare can refer the fathers to programs as well as programs and resources can be created to fill any lack thereof.

It is important to note that child welfare social workers need to understand not just the barriers African American single fathers face, but rather the barriers that all single fathers face. Social workers in all aspects of social work can benefit from the knowledge this research study is attempting to bring awareness to. If the effects that single parenting
has on these fathers are examined, social workers, in all fields, will be more capable and better equipped to service this rapidly expanding population.

**Study Limitations.** One limitation of this research study is that although households headed by single fathers are a rapidly growing population, the population does not present itself in the same manner that single mothers do. There are minimal organizations that cater to and/or service single fathers. The availability of programs for single fathers is minuscule at best. Therefore, access to single fathers is limited. Furthermore, access to African American single fathers is even more limited and thus the sampling population tends to be very small. As a result of utilizing such a small sample population, the results of any findings cannot be generalized to the population as a whole.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Single Parent Households in the U.S.

The structure of families in America has taken on new forms and challenges what society has previously deemed as the “traditional family” structure. The “traditional family” structure can be defined as two heterosexual married parents living in the home with their children. This is, or was, the previously held standard for being a “traditional family” in the U.S. In today’s society, however, there are a variety of family structures that have emerged. While the “traditional family” structure still exists, it is no longer the societal norm (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005; Kleist, 1999).

The single parent household has been a thread in the fabric of society for hundreds of years. Whether it was due to the death of one parent, the separation or divorce of the parents, or the children being born out of wedlock, single parents have long been in existence. Currently, it is believed that at least half of all children will live in a single parent home at some point during their lives (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005). Regardless of the circumstances leading to single parenthood there is one thing that is for certain, single parenthood is not going away any time soon.
Single parent homes, although they can provide a loving, caring and enriching environment for their children, they cannot operate in the same manner that two parent households can (American Psychological Association, 2014).

According the American Psychological Association (2014) single parent families face many challenges that two parent families do not. Some of the challenges they face are as follows: visitation and custody problems, the effects of continuing conflict between the parents, less opportunity for parents and children to spend time together, effects of the breakup on children’s school performance and peer relations, disruptions in extended family relationships and problems caused by the parents’ dating and entering new relationships. (para. 3).

These are just some of the challenges that single parents have to work through and manage.

Single parents also have the daunting task of assuming multiple roles within the family unit. They are responsible for being the sole financer of the family. They must maintain the upkeep of the home. They are the nurturer and caregiver for the children as well as their support system. The list of their roles and responsibilities can go on and on. In being responsible for doing all of this alone, single parents tend to have a limited amount of time for themselves; often times forgoing their own needs to meet the needs of their children (Coles, 2009). With so many responsibilities on their shoulders, how do single parents maintain? What are the affects of single parenting for children? For the
parents themselves? This next section will focus on some of the traits unique to single parent families and its impact on all of those involved.

**Statistics of Single Parent Households.** According to ChildStats.gov, as of the year 2012, 28% of all children in America lived in single parent homes (2013). This statistic is regardless of race and/or socioeconomic status. It is important to note that this data referred only to the current living situations of the children at the time the data was collected. Similar data compiled by Kids Count Data Center for the year of 2012 breaks down children living in single parent homes by race; 53% of American Indian children, 17% of Asian and Pacific Islander children, 67% of Black and African American children, 42% of Latino and Hispanic children, 35% of children of two or more races and 43% of Non-Hispanic White children live in single parent homes (2014). According to the University of Washington’s West Coast Poverty Center in 2009 the median income for single parent homes headed by men was $48,084 while the median income for single parent homes headed by women was $32,597 (2011). This disparity in median income has a major impact on the risk of poverty for single mothers. This will be discussed in further detail in a later section.

What these statistics show is that almost 1/3 of children in America are living in single parent homes; these rates are growing and show no sign of slowing down. Furthermore, the statistics show that majority of minority children, primarily Native American, African American and Hispanic children are living with single parents and at
severely high rates. Finally, the statistics show that although single parenting is not the ideal situation economically, single fathers as a whole are far better off than single mothers.

**Single Mothers vs. Single Fathers.** One of the most vital and distinguishing differences between single mothers and single fathers is the choice to parent. Due to the ascribed roles of mothers and fathers created by society, mothers have less of a choice in the decision to parent than fathers do (Coles, 2002). Let us for a moment, put this idea into context. The woman carries the child for ten months, the woman delivers the child and the woman is always present at the time of the child’s birth. These different stages of bringing a child into the world are non-negotiable for a woman; she cannot choose to not participate in these stages. The man, on the other hand, has the option to be present and/or participate in any or all of these events. Thus, the decision to parent is largely made at the time of conception (and the decision to carry the child) and then fostered throughout the pregnancy through the assigned roles and responsibilities endorsed by society. It is important to note that while there are predisposed circumstances that heavily influence a woman’s choice to parent this is not always the case; after a child’s birth a woman can choose to not parent. So what does this all mean? Very simply put, the established societal norms for men and women, when it comes to parenting, make it very easy for a man to opt out of parenting. This point is heavily reinforced by the fact that the majority of single parent homes are headed by women.
It is the popular belief of society that a man cannot parent their children as well as a woman can. As mentioned earlier, fathers are viewed as the provider, protector, disciplinary and decision maker. So the ability to have a softer and more nurturing side is not seen as something men can do; at least not without their masculinity being called into question (McAdoo, 1993; Storhaug & Oien, 2012; Schindler & Coley, 2007). However, it has been argued that men can offer their children a comparable level of support for their children’s emotional, social and physical needs (Hamer & Marchior, 2002). This finding challenges the societal norms of what masculinity means for men. Pleck coined a term for the variance between societal norms of masculinity and what men actually feel within them, he called it “gender role displacement” (1995). This idea of gender role displacement can be a challenging thing for men to manage, in that men use society’s characteristics of masculinity to quantify who they are as men (Schindler & Coley, 2007). None the less, single fathers seem to be handling this challenge just fine.

In a study done by Zhan and Pandey about higher education and economic well being of single fathers and mothers, in comparison to single mother headed households as well as two parent households, single fathers typically had smaller families and were more likely to live in extended households (2004). In the same study done by Zhan and Pandey it was found that the attainment of a four year college degree allowed for better economic status for both single mothers and single fathers (2004). However, in comparison to single mothers, single fathers tended to be better off economically; White
single parents typically were better off than their African American counterparts (Zhan & Pandey, 2004; Coles, 2002).

Although there is limited research that has been done on single fathers, there are some conclusions that can be made in comparison to single mothers. Based on the above mentioned research, the major differences between single mothers and single fathers are the choice to parent, family size, living arrangements and economic well being. Outside of the fore mentioned areas it appears that when it comes to meeting the needs of the children, households headed by single males and households headed by single females are more alike than different. In order for this conclusion to be more definitive, more comparative research would need to be done on single mothers and single fathers.

**Trends of Male Headed Single-Parent Households.** During the last fifty or so years, there has been little research done on single fathers in comparison to the research that has been done on single mothers. Through the research that has been done on single fathers, there are some trends that have emerged.

One trend focuses on single fathers’ adjustment to the role of being a single parent. One research study found that a single father’s adjustment to the role of single parenting is heavily influenced by the circumstance which brings them to single parenting (Risman, 1996). So, a father who actively pursues the custody of his children may have an easier time adapting to the role of a single parent versus a single father who became a single parent due to circumstances that were out of his control. Nevertheless, despite the
circumstances bringing fathers to single parenthood, single fathers tend to be less stressed out in their role as a single parent (Coles, 2009). Thus showing indications that single fathers may adapt to the role of single parenting more easily than originally anticipated.

Another trend relates to the task of housekeeping, which conventionally is gendered as task designated for women. One study shows that when it comes to the completion of household chores and responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, single fathers have a tendency to rely less on female relatives and outside help (i.e. paid help and/or help from friends) to complete these task (Risman, 1996). What this finding does is debunk the stereotype that men are not natural homemakers and/or capable of being homemakers. Single fathers have also been found to rely less on immediate and extended family in other areas of parenting (Risman, 1996; Mendes, 1976).

Although according to studies, single fathers adjust fairly well to single parenting, in a study done by Hook and Chalasani it was found that single fathers have a difficult time balancing their roles as a single parent while also being the sole financial provider. It was also found in this study that in comparison to their married and cohabitating counterparts, single fathers spend more time with their children. Finally, this study found that single fathers are more prone to live with older children versus younger children (2008).

What these different studies show us is that overall single fathers adjust well to the role of single parenting and they do so with little to no help from family. These
studies also show that in spite of their ability to adjust to their role as a single parent they
do experience some difficulty with balancing the role of sole caretaker and sole provider.

**Main Issues Compared to Two-Parent Households**

**Custodial vs. Non-Custodial Parents.** When two parents decide to divorce, separate or end their relationship (for those who are not married), there is always one parent that becomes the custodial parent and one that becomes the non custodial parent. As previously stated the custodial parent is the parent with primary physical custody of the children. In some cases, parents will have what is called joint or 50/50 custody of the children, meaning the parents each have the children an equal amount of time (Superior Court of California Sacramento County, 2013). The role of the custodial parent in comparison to the non-custodial parent varies depending on how the custody arrangement is set up between the two parents. Up until this point the focus has been on single parents, who as previously stated are the custodial parents of their children, therefore this section will focus mainly on non-custodial parents.

Within the non-custodial parent population there are some variances in perception. Society seems to be more accepting of non-custodial fathers than non-custodial mothers (Henderson, 2008). This is not to be misconstrued with the idea that society is approving of single parenting, but rather that when there is a non-custodial parent society is more accepting when it is a father than when it is a mother.
Non custodial parents often times do not get to spend much time with their children, although they are required to pay child support for them (Henderson, 2008; American Psychological Association, 2014). This lack of time able to be spent with their children results in a type of parenting that Meyer calls the “secondary role” which reduces these parents to visitations with their children and consequently keeps these parents from experiencing the day to day pleasures (and even the distresses) of raising their children. Moreover, Meyer suggests that non-custodial parents have less of a say in the ways in which their children are raised; whether it be what schools they attend, their religious practices, the type of music or movies they have access to etc. (2006).

For decades now, non-custodial parents, mainly non-custodial fathers, have been fighting for their rights to be an active presence in their children’s lives and feel strongly that they should be able to do so without the interference of the courts and the custodial parent. However, the various social systems already set in place (i.e. schools, courts, etc.) often disregard these parents’ role in their children’s lives (Meyer, 2006).

It is easy to get caught up in the disparities of the custodial parent and completely disregard the ones faced by the non-custodial parent. The lack of time, influence and rights given to non-custodial parents has a significant impact on the children as well as the custodial parent. The way society views the non-custodial parent is one of disapproval, especially if you are a woman. In this sense, non-custodial parents seem to get the short end of the stick in many aspects.
**Poverty and Other Children’s Outcomes.** Single parent headed households have a higher chance of being in poverty than households that have two parents (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005; Zhan & Pandey, 2004). However, single fathers, when weighed against single mothers, are typically better off economically than their female equivalent (Ziol-Guest, 2009). According to the 2001 Census Bureau, 25% of single mothers were living in poverty, whereas only 12% of single fathers lived in poverty; only 5% of two parent households were living poverty (Zhan & Pandey, 2004). More current data shows that in 2009, 38.5% of single mothers lived in poverty whereas 23.7% of single fathers lived in poverty; only 8.3% of two parent households lived in poverty (West Coast Poverty Center, 2011). This shows a significant increase in poverty levels for both single fathers and single mothers with a 10-15% increase in both categories. The two parent households only increased slightly by a little over than 3%.

The factors that contribute to the poverty level for single parents vary. However, there are some expenses that are universal to all families, whether headed by one parent or two. In two parent homes, monthly expenses such as rent, electricity, food, child care, etc. are a shared responsibility amongst both parents. Whereas, in a single parent home the responsibility of these expenses falls on one person (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005; West Coast Poverty Center, 2011). This in no way is to imply that a household headed by a single parent cannot meet these needs nor is it to imply that this is the primary cause of poverty in single parent homes. This data simply highlights the fact that two parent
homes have the advantage of having to adults who are able bodied and capable of working in order to share the obligation of meeting these needs.

As previously mentioned, single mothers are more likely to live in poverty than their single father equivalent. One factor influencing this fact is that women typically make significantly less than men do. According to West Coast Poverty Center, in 2009 women made only 80% of what men of comparable age made weekly (2011). Another factor influencing the issue of poverty is that single mothers struggle to put into force child support orders awarded by the courts or agreements made between the two parents. In 2009 only 61% of awarded child support was reported being collected by the parent it was awarded to; this is a drop from the 77% reported in 2003 (Grall, 2011; West Coast Poverty Center, 2011).

Poverty has many negative consequences for children. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan identified five specific areas of child well being impacted by poverty. They are as follow: “(1) physical health, (2) cognitive ability, (3) school achievement, (4) emotional and behavioral outcomes, and (5) teenage out-of-wedlock childbearing” (1997). In respect to physical health the study suggest that children living in poverty are more likely to be in poorer health than children not living in poverty. Children growing up in poverty face challenges in the cognitive development. These children have a higher chance at having a learning disability and developmental delays; scoring lower on IQ and other standardized testing. Emotional and behavioral concerns present themselves more often
for children growing up in poverty. These children also have a higher chance of becoming teenage parents (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012; Mueller & Cooper, 1986).

The effects of poverty have ongoing and lasting effects for children. The challenges these children face in their cognitive development have a significant bearing on the likelihood of them completing high school, the likelihood of attending college, as well as their possible future earnings potential. In addition, growing up in a single parent home increases the likelihood that the children will need public assistance, increases the chances that they will go without some of their needs being met due to financial restrictions, and decreases the probability of homeownership (Mueller & Cooper, 1986).

Children from single parent households are at a disadvantage in other ways as well. In comparison to children who grow up in two parent households, there is a known lack of economic and social resources for children raised in single parent homes; this impacts future prospects (Ziol-Guest, 2009). For example, research has found that single mothers and single fathers supply their children with different types of resources. Single mothers are more likely to have additional interpersonal skills whereas single fathers are more likely to have additional economic resources (Ziol-Guest, 2009). Thus, children being reared in single parent homes are more likely to miss out on the vital resources that either a father or mother, depending on the circumstances, can provide for their future success.
From these studies it is clear to see that growing up in a single parent home poses great jeopardy for children and their future lives; these are just some of the risk children have growing up in single parent homes. Children growing up in homes headed by single fathers have a slightly smaller chance of growing up in poverty; however the likelihood is still great. Even armed with this information it is important to acknowledge that this is not applicable to all children who grow up in single parent homes. There are many children who do not experience the aforementioned challenges and grow up to be successful and productive citizens in society. However, these numbers tend to be on the smaller scale.

**Programs and Resources for Single-Parent Households**

**Public Assistance: Welfare and Child Support.** There are many public assistance programs available to help single parents in an effort to undercut the effects of poverty on children. One of these programs is the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) also known as welfare. This is a federally funded program that is structured and organized by each state to meet the specified goals of the program which have been delegated by the federal government (Office of Family Assistance, 2013). Families participating in the TANF program must first meet all of the eligibility requirements. Once it is deemed that a family is eligible to receive benefits, the family receives time limited monetary support based on family size to help with the cost of living. Parents receiving TANF are provided with job preparation to help them enter or re-enter the
workforce. Due to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), participation in the job preparation program offered is not optional and failure to participate could result in a loss of benefits (Office of Family Assistance, 2013). Of the single mothers who live in poverty, only about 10% of these mothers receive TANF. This is due to the welfare reform act of 1996 which replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with TANF. The introduction of TANF placed stricter requirements and timelines for eligibility, causing many single mothers living in poverty to no longer be eligible for benefits (Casey & Maldonado, 2012). Single fathers are eligible to receive these benefits as well as long as they meet the eligibility requirements; statistics on single fathers receiving welfare was not available.

Another program offered to single parents is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program; often lumped in with welfare but it is a separate entity. This program provides what is called, monthly allotments, to help with the purchase of foods. A single parent with two children can receive a monthly allotment of $526 to use for the purchase of food. Items such as hot food (already cooked food), alcohol (beer, wine, and liquor), vitamins and medications, and non food items (paper goods, pet food, etc.) (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). Much like the TANF program there are eligibility requirements for this program as well, however there is no job preparation requirement to maintain the monthly allotment and the eligibility requirements are less stringent (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). The statistics for SNAP recipients shows quite a
different picture than those of the TANF program. In the year 2010, 42.04% of single mothers received SNAP allotments, whereas only 25.39% of single fathers received SNAP allotments (Bean, 2011). That is almost a 20% difference between single mothers and single fathers.

A third program for single parents is the ability to receive financial support or child support from the non-custodial parent. The outlining for child support requirements varies from state to state and tribe to tribe (when applicable). Each state or tribe has its own format for calculating the amount of support to be paid/received. There are three ways to enter into a child support agreement: a parent can voluntarily do so (formally or informally), it can be ordered by the court, and finally it can be done so by a government agency (these agencies are typically the agency that handles the administration of TANF) (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2014). In 2009, $35.1 billion in child support was to be paid by non-custodial parents; only 61% of that support was received by custodial parents (Grall, 2011). This means that $13,689,000 was never paid to custodial parents.

In comparison to single mothers, single fathers are less likely to receive welfare and child support (Coles, 20002; Coles, 2003). This may be the reason that there are practically no statistics available regarding single fathers and their receipt of TANF benefits. In a study done by Brown of single fathers, it was found that less than 25% of the participants received public aide and/or child support combined (2000). The study
done by Brown and all of the studies discussed in this section supports the findings of other studies regarding single fathers and their use of public assistance programs and child support.

**African American Single Fathers.** Up until this point, the discussion of single fathers has been about the population of single fathers as a whole. However, the findings for the general population of single fathers cannot be completely generalized to the sub population of African American single fathers. The following sections will address some of the variances in the findings of single fathers as it relates to African American single fathers as well as areas not previously discussed.

**Income, Poverty and Well Being.** As previously mentioned, only about 12% of single fathers live in poverty, however this is not the case for African American single fathers. In comparison to their White counterparts, African American single fathers have significantly lower incomes, thus the likelihood for these fathers living in poverty is higher (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Although African American single fathers do not have the same economic and financial stability as their white counterparts, they are not as prone to receive welfare and/or help from public assistance programs as their female equivalent. While African American single fathers do not fare as well as their White equivalents, they still fare slightly better than African American single mothers (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002).
**Adjustment to Being the Primary Caregiver.** There are many reasons that can cause a man to become or influence his decision to become a single father. As a population whole, death (primarily due to cancer) of the children’s mother and divorce or separation of the parents are the most common reasons for single parenting amongst men (Greif, 1995; Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012). This information, however, cannot be generalized to African American single fathers. Among African American single fathers there are three major reasons that influence their position as a single parent. These reasons are as follows: the mother has chosen not to parent the children, the children were removed from the mother’s custody by a government agency (i.e. Child Protective Services, Children and Family services, etc.) due to neglect or abuse, or the children requested to live with their father (Greif, 1995; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Of the men who decide to take on the role of custodial parent do so because of a desire to take on a more constructive role with their children (Coles, 2001; Coles, 2002). While most of these fathers willingly assume the role of the custodial parent, it is significant to mention that not all of these fathers choose to assume the role of custodial parent, even when the mother has been deemed incompetent or unwilling to care for the children. In these cases the children are placed with family members or foster care families (Coles, 2002).

African American men are less likely to marry the mother of their children if not already married to them prior to the birth of the children. Due to the low likelihood of marriage between African American men and the mother of their children, the above stated main reasons for single parenting, tend to be the most prevalent for the parental
status change (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). It is important to note that these are not the only reasons for African American men to become single fathers. Some African American single fathers actively seek out primary custody of their children while others were at one point married to or in a relationship with their children’s mother and gained custody due to separation and/or divorce and in some cases the untimely death of the mother.

For African American single fathers, the decision to take on the role as the custodial parent comes with drastic changes in one’s life and a fear of the uncertainty. According to a research study done by Coles that analyzed the factors influencing the choice of single parenting amongst African American fathers, it was found that access to adequate resources (i.e. income, child care, stable residence, etc.) was a point of major deliberation (2002; 2003; Murray et al., 2008). Although not a factor that is heavily weighted in the decision to becoming a custodial parent, these fathers now have less free time and freedom to do the things that they once did (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002).

Since, according to research, the majority of African American single fathers became the custodial parent of their children due to circumstances out of their control, it raises the question of how this transition from being a part time and/or inactive parent to a custodial parent affects them physically, mentally and emotionally. Everyday duties, such as caring for the children, helping with homework, cooking and cleaning, and child care are now the sole obligation of these single fathers. According to research, African
American single fathers tend to have a fairly easy time adjusting to duties such as caring for the children and household chores, however, in the area of finding and maintaining childcare, these single fathers tend to have a harder time (Greif, 1995; Risman, 1986).

In a qualitative narrative study of 20 African American single fathers done to measure stress levels and coping skills, the research study looked at different aspects of single parenting. One of the areas that were evaluated was coping with the responsibility of finding adequate and affordable childcare (Coles, 2009). According to this research study when it comes to child care, African American single fathers tend to use relatives, primarily their mothers and sisters, for assistance with caring for the children (Coles, 2009). In a similar study of 24 African American single fathers which examined how these single fathers were transitioning into full time parenting, a similar conclusion was found (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). In a third study of 181 respondents to a questionnaire fathers reported a similar use of family and friends as child care providers (Risman, 1986). According to all three studies, these fathers tended to lean on family members for childcare primarily due to financial reasons (Coles, 2009; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Risman, 1986). These findings contrast with the findings of single fathers as a population whole. Due to the lack of awareness of the population of African American single fathers, it has been proposed that these fathers, more often than not, receive a higher level of sympathy and support from family and friends and thus a higher level of help (Coles, 2003). This may be a possible explanation for the variance.
In a study of 20 custodial mothers and 7 custodial fathers, which measured differences in children’s behavior with mother’s and father’s, the research found that single fathers tend to have a harder time managing and caring for their children if they have girls versus if they have boys (Ambert, 1982). Other studies have found that father’s are more prone to take on the role of custodial parent for their male children than their female. This is attributed mainly to perceived shared interest between fathers and their sons (Coles, 2002; Coles 2003).

The circumstances surrounding the reason(s) why a man becomes a single father has an influence on their adjustment to single parenthood (Greif, 1995; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Yapp & Rosenstein, 2012). Additionally, the very sudden changes in their roles and responsibility in relation to their children seem to have an impact on them. African American single fathers adjust to the role of single parenting fairly well but struggle in the area of child care; often times leaning on family to fulfill that role. Furthermore, depending on whether these single fathers have boys or girls also impacts their adjustment to full time parenting (Coles, 2002; Coles, 2003).

**Social Life, Personal Life, and Professional Life.** Becoming a parent requires significant lifestyle changes; becoming a single parent requires significantly more lifestyle changes. Single fathers, whom are often used to being part time parents or not parents at all, find the adjustment to the lack of freedom and more constrictive schedules hard to adjust to (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). According to Patulny, those whom are
parents, particularly parents of young children, tend to see a decrease in their social lives (2012). In a qualitative narrative study of 10 African American single fathers which focused on the experience of these single fathers discovered that African American single fathers, although they maintain a social life, experience a considerable change in the amount of time being spent away from the home (Coles, 2001). According to the research findings there are a number of reasons why African American single fathers see changes in their social lives, however there are two prominent reasons for this change (Coles, 2001). The first reason found was that those whom the father associated with had the potential to be a negative influence on the children. These fathers expressed concerns about their children being exposed to drinking, drug use, and friends who didn’t work and/or lacked ambition. The second reason was that the father had to relocate due to having to accept better paying jobs in different cities and/or states as well as moving closer to family and friends for support with the children (Coles, 2001).

Although African American single fathers are able to maintain some manner of a social life, when it comes to dating they face additional obstacles (Coles, 2001; Greif, 1995). According to Coles, most African American single fathers are not dating regularly nor are they in serious relationships, but most expressed that eventually they would like to become married (2001). One of the challenges that these single fathers face is finding someone who is willing to date a man who has primary custody of their children. According to the research, these single fathers found in their dating experiences that women who do not have children of their own lack an understanding of the role and
responsibilities that they have as single fathers (Coles, 2001). It is important to point out that the issue is not that the men have children, but more so that they are the “custodial parent” of the children and as a result the time they have available to nurture a relationship is minimal. One would think that dating a woman who is also a single parent would alleviate this problem because she would be able to understand the father’s role as a single parent; unfortunately this is not the case. The research states that for most African American single fathers, dating a woman that already has children brings about fears of complications surrounding the blending of the two families (Coles, 2001). When these single fathers do find someone that is understanding of their parenting role they face the challenge of when to introduce the person they are dating to their children and often are apprehensive about allowing their dates to interact with their children (Coles, 2001).

Among the many changes single fathers face, their employment also takes on a new meaning and a new role in their lives. Being a single father requires that the father has to occasionally take time off work, leave early or arrive late, and may not be able to work as much or any overtime in order to attend to the needs of their children (Coles, 2001; Greif, 1995; Hamer & Marchioro, 2001). For these fathers, flexibility in their employment is key and very important (McArthur, Zubrycki, Rochester & Thomason, 2006). Findings from the previously mentioned studies done by Coles and Grief state African American single fathers often find it hard to take time off from work to take care of their children and were often fired or had to quit as a result (Coles, 2001; Greif, 1995).
In a study done by Coles, it was found that the fathers were faced with having to decline promotions and/or positions that required excessive travel as it would conflict with their parental duties (2001). For some African American fathers, the choice to take on the custodial parent afforded them some perks in their careers. Some of these fathers noted that their role as a single parent forced them to become more committed to their jobs and/or careers. While there are those African American single fathers that have found their single parent role somewhat beneficial to their employment, some of these singles fathers expressed that they feel as if they have to endure and maintain less than satisfactory jobs due to needing the income in order to adequately take care of their children (Coles, 2001).

The changes that African American single fathers experience in their social, personal, and professional lives once becoming the primary caregiver are noteworthy. Their lives and their identities of who they are take on new meaning. Based on the findings in the literature review it reveals that African American single fathers experience significant changes in their social, personal and professional lives. Based on this evidence it would appear that they would a lower level of satisfaction in the areas of their social, personal, and professional lives once becoming the custodial parent of their children.

*Societal Acceptance and Interaction with the Family Court System.* Being a single parent in general comes with a host of negative stigmas and connotations attached
Being a single father comes with its own barriers as well. So what is the perception of single fathers in society? According to a study done by Goldscheider and Kaufman, society is more approving of women as single parents than they are of men as single parents (2006). In addition, single fathers are viewed drastically different than their single mother counterparts. Fathers who are no longer in a relationship with their children’s mother are confronted with a double edge sword in their roles as fathers; if they are the custodial parent they may be viewed as not capable of handling such a role and if they are not involved with their children then they are viewed as negligent fathers (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006). Often times, as a result of this dual negative perception, single fathers feel that they have to parent like a mother would while simultaneously maintaining the ascribed social and cultural roles of a father (Hook & Chalasani, 2008; Storhaug & Oien, 2011). Positive views of single fathers do exist, but they are heavily predicated on the father’s ability to do well at raising his children and are done so in comparison to single mothers (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006).

There are some variances in the level of acceptance of single fathers based on race, age and sex. Younger adults tend to be more accepting of single parenting in general. Hispanics and African Americans are more accepting of single parenting whether it’s being done by a man or a woman. Women tend to be more supportive of single parenting done by mothers, whereas men were equally supportive of single parenting done by men and women (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006).
African American single fathers are viewed even more differently than single fathers as a whole. As previously stated African American men are not regarded as part of the familial unit and therefore are often times discredited in their roles as fathers (Coles, 2003; Coles, 2009). Several societal stereotypes of African American men help reinforce these negative perceptions of them as fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2005). Additionally, in one study, African American single fathers expressed feelings of discrimination towards them as single fathers (Coles, 2009). Even with all of the negative connotations associated with being a Black single father, most of these fathers do not view their decision to take on the role of custodial parent as a way to undo or prove wrong these stereotypes. These fathers feel that they are doing what is best for their children (Coles, 2002).

It is not all desolate and dreary views of African American single fathers. Family and friends often offer these fathers praises and accolades for being single parents. It also appears to increase the amount of female attention these fathers receive as well (Coles, 2002). Coles suggest that the commendation that African American single fathers get is more of a testament to the fact that African American fathers are not viewed as a part of the Black family rather than admiration for their decision to parent (2002).

Now let us shift focus to the family court system. The experiences of African American single fathers and the family court system in many ways mirrors that of the overall perspective of society. When seeking help from the courts regarding custody of
their children these single fathers feel that their viewpoint is often dismissed and or disregarded by the judges (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). African American single fathers have expressed that they feel as if they have to do more than prove their identity as their children’s father, even when the mother has stated that they are the father and they have in turn acknowledged to the court that they are the father. Fathers who had been actively involved in their children’s lives often times will lose sight of the role of being a father in an effort to prove their paternity (Hook & Chalasani, 2008; Roy, 1999).

Based on the literature societal acceptance and support of single father headed households appear to be non-existent. African American single fathers receive even less support than the single fathers population as a whole. The lack of support received from both the court system and society can be detrimental for these fathers and their ability to effectively parent their children. It can, in many ways, detour African American fathers from seeking custody of their children and/or their willingness to attain custody of their children.

**Access to Resources, Public Assistance and Child Support.** For African American single fathers the use of public aid and other government resources comes with a host of obstacles. When seeking public aid African American single fathers expressed feelings of disapproval, distrust and disingenuousness by the serving agency’s employees (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Additionally, outside of the federal programs TANF and SNAP, there are little to no noncash services available for men with children. Local and
state programs such as food pantries and clothes closets, just to name a few, are typically geared towards women and children.

A great example of this is the access to emergency shelters. In the county of Sacramento in California, single fathers seeking emergency shelter for themselves and their children due to homelessness essentially have little to no options available to them. According to a 2-1-1 information search in Sacramento, CA there are only two out of sixteen shelters that accept men with children. It is important to point out that these shelters do not only cater to men with children. In addition to servicing single fathers with children, these shelters also serve two parent families and families with teenage boys, thus limiting the amount of space for single fathers and their children. All of the other shelters within the county are for women and children only, women only, men only or children only (2013). Thus, single fathers in this situation often times have to make the very hard decision of sleeping on the streets, sleeping in the car (if they have one), leaving their children to stay in one shelter while they stay in another or try to scrounge up enough money for a motel room. This is just one example of the lack of public assistance programs accessible to single fathers.

African American single fathers also face challenges when dealing the child support system and attempting to receive financial support from the mothers. Many of these single fathers continue to have their wages and tax refunds garnished, even after
they have shifted into the role of custodial parent, in order to pay back money the mother received during times of receiving TANF (Coles, 2002; Coles 2003).

Due to the fact that these fathers fair better economically than the female counterparts, typically these fathers do not qualify for programs like TANF, SNAP or any other income based subsidies; thus limiting their accessibility to them. In addition, the majority of these fathers do not receive any financial support from the mother (Coles 2002; Coles, 2003). These two dilemmas, coupled with the fact that these fathers are more than likely to have their wages and tax returns garnished, there leaves little to no financial incentive to becoming the custodial parent.

Based on this information it appears that there are a lack of services for African American single fathers and single fathers in general. The vast majority of programs that support single parent families are often exclusively limited to women and children which essentially discriminate against these single fathers. Thus many of their needs can and often do go unmet.

**Summary.** The literature gives one the impression that due to the circumstances which bring African American single fathers to the role of being a custodial parent, as well as the many changes that they must make once transitioning into the role, African American single fathers have a hard time adjusting to the role of single parent. It is plausible to assume that the reasons influencing these fathers’ decision to parent also influences the adjustment. Furthermore, the likelihood that these fathers, and essentially
their children, will live in poverty is very high. This can compound the already mounting pressures that these fathers face in becoming the custodial parent. To take it even a step further, the lack of resources available to the fathers and the negative perceptions associated to them as a population whole, further exasperate what is presumed to be an already difficult transition. So how are African American single fathers actually adjusting to the role of custodial parent? Do the circumstances leading up to single parenting and the factors influencing the fathers’ decision to parent impact their adjustment. What role does the lack of resources and societies perception of the truly have on impact on their adjustment?
Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Study Objectives

The objective of this research study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how African American single fathers are adjusting to and managing the role of being a single parent. To accomplish this objective, the researcher examined the changes and adjustments that were made in the father’s social and professional lives. The researcher also looked at if these changes affected the father’s satisfaction with their personal and professional lives. The father’s perception of how they are viewed in society and what impact this may or may not have on the fathers was reviewed as well. In conjunction with this, the researcher examined what resources were needed for these fathers. The father’s relationship with their own father and its impact on their decision to become a single parent was explored as well.

Study Design. The design study used for this research study was a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative section of the research study collected demographic information of the father’s age, relationship to the children at the time of the children’s birth, number of biological children living in and out of the home, income, education, number of years as custodial parent and the age and gender of the participant’s biological children both in and out of the home. The qualitative section of the research study collected data from the fathers about their experiences as single
parents. The interviews conducted focused on the fathers’ adjustment and changes in both their social and professional lives. The interviews also explored the circumstances leading to becoming the custodial parent and any barriers that affected this decision. Finally, the interviews looked at how the fathers perceived themselves to be viewed in society and the impact society’s perception has on them.

The researcher chose to do primarily qualitative research because of the limited amount of information that is available about African American single fathers. There is also a limited amount of research that has been done on this population. Additionally, this population of fathers, while rapidly growing, is not easily accessible and therefore limits the amount subjects that are available to study. Finally, in order to better serve this population and address their needs, their needs must first be identified. By utilizing a qualitative research approach it allows for a more in-depth look into this population.

Population Description and Participation Criteria. The population of interest in this research study was single fathers who were the custodial parent for their children. More specifically, the research study focused on African American single fathers who are the primary care givers for their biological children. All participants in this research study currently reside in Sacramento County or the surrounding areas. To participate in the study the respondent had to be an African American single father and the custodial parent of his biological children. For the purpose of this study primary custody or custodial parent was defined as having one’s biological children in one’s care for 50% or more of the time. Additionally, participants needed to have at least one biological child
18 years of age or younger currently residing in their home. Participants could be cohabitating with a significant other, however that significant other could not be the other biological parent of the children. In this respect, although the father may be cohabitating with a partner, he is still raising his biological children as a single parent. In addition, if the father’s cohabitating partner had children of their own, they were not included as part of the father’s children. The participants were selected through snowball sampling. The researcher solicited participants through the referral of friends and family. From the initial group of fathers that were referred to the researcher, they themselves referred friends and family to the researcher for participation in the research study. The use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were also used to recruit participants to take part in the study.

**Data Collection and Procedure.** The research study had 11 African American single fathers participate in the study. The data was collected through semi structured, one on one interviews with the participants. The researcher used a voice recorder to record the interviews and the interviews were later transcribed. Additional data for this study was collected through the use of a brief questionnaire which gathered demographic information of the participants and their biological children. The questionnaire was completed by participants prior to the commencement of the interview. The data was collected and viewed by the researcher only.

**Instrument.** The instrument used in this research study was a structured one on one personal interview with participants. The researcher used open ended questions to
allow the participants to ability to answer freely to the questions versus pre selected answers. The researcher asked questions about the circumstances leading to being the custodial parent, adjustment to single parenting, factors influencing the decision to be a single parent, satisfaction and challenges in the social and professional life of participants, and access to resources. The researcher also used a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire collected demographic information.

**Data Analysis.** The qualitative data was analyzed by the use of coding in order to identify themes and/or trends from the response of the participants. The researcher used inductive codes (codes preset by the researcher) as well as priori codes (codes that emerge through reviewing the data) for this process. The quantitative data will be analyzed through the use of frequency tables; focusing on averages.

**Protection of Human Subjects.** The Protocol for the Protection of human subjects was submitted and approved by the Division of Social Work as exempt research; Human Subjects Protocol application number 13-14-047. The participants were given a letter of informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire and the interviewing process. All interested participants signed a letter of consent before participating in the study.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Overall Findings

The research study had 11 participants whose ages ranged from 28 years old to 58 years old. The average age of the participants was 40.73 years of age. Of the 11 participants, at the time of the children’s birth, one of the fathers was not in a relationship with the mother, three of the fathers were in a relationship with the mother, one of the fathers was in a relationship and living with the mother, and six of the fathers were married to the mother.

The highest level of education achieved by all of the fathers was a bachelor’s degree and the lowest level of education achieved was a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Of the 11 participants, 36% of the fathers possessed a high school diploma or GED equivalent, 27% of the fathers possessed an associate’s level degree and 36% of the fathers possessed a bachelor’s level degree. The income levels for the participants greatly varied. Two of the fathers (or 18%) had an income of $15,000 or less, one of fathers (or 9%) had an income of $15,000 to $25,000, one of the fathers (or 9%) had an income of $25,000 to $35,000, one of the fathers (or 9%) had an income of $35,000 to $45,000, three of the fathers (or 27%) had an income of $45,000 to $55,000, and three of the fathers (or 27%) had an income of $55,000 or more.
The ages of the participant’s children ranged as young as 1 year of age and as old as 17 years of age. The average age for the participant’s children was 8.32 years of age. The average number of years the participants had been the custodial parent for their children was 6.8 years; the shortest amount of years was 2 years whereas the greatest amount of years was 14 years. The average number of children the participants were the custodial parent for was two; the smallest amount of children was one child and the greatest amount of children was four children. Fifty-five percent of the participant’s children were male and 45% of the participant’s children were female. There were two participants that had additional children whom they were not the custodial parent for. One of the fathers had an additional three children not living in the home, however all three of these children were above the age of 18 years old. The other father with children outside of the home had only one male child 13 years of age. This participant’s child, who lives outside of the home, was a result of a previous relationship and who resides with the mother.

Specific Findings

*Circumstances Leading to Single Parenting.* Of the 11 fathers participating in this study, two of the fathers became the custodial parent for their children at the children’s request. In these situations the father and the mother ended their relationship and subsequently the children requested to live with the fathers. In both cases the father
spent less than a few days away from children during the separation process. One of the fathers explained how the conversation came up between him and his children:

I remember I was picking up the last of my belongings from what used to be my house and my kids were just crying. That really killed me inside, to see them cry and know that I couldn’t do anything about it. Their mother and I sat them down to explain to them that I was still going to be a part of their lives and tried to assure them that it wasn’t their fault and that we both loved them. I remember so vividly my son looking at me and saying “Daddy I want to live with you, I don’t want to stay with Mommy.” Man, those words broke me all the way down. Then next thing I know his sister was saying the same thing. I thought that their mother would’ve put up a fight and that worried me, but she didn’t. When we talked about the kids living with me she was okay with it. I think it was because she was the reason we broke up and she probably felt guilty.

The other father whose children requested to live with him expressed a similar experience with his children, in that his children requested to live with him and the mother did not put up much of a fight.

Three of the fathers became the custodial parent due to drug use of the mothers. In each of these situations the fathers and the mothers had already separated and the fathers subsequently petitioned the court for custody of their children due to the mother’s drug use. None of these three fathers reported any involvement of the local child welfare
agency. Each of these fathers recalls going through a very hard process trying to attain custody of their children through the court system. One father explains his experience in pursuing custody:

I found out that she was on drugs again after I had helped her get into a rehab program. That was it for me. I didn’t want to take my child from her mom but I knew I couldn’t leave her in that situation; she didn’t deserve that, she was innocent in it all. Plus, I wanted her to have a better life than that. So I went to the family courthouse and filed to get custody. I fought like hell to get custody of my daughter but eventually the judge saw things my way.

All three of the fathers expressed very similar battles with the family court system. One of the fathers even expressed his disgust with the fact that he had to prove his paternity to the child before he could even be considered for custody.

Five of the 11 fathers requested custody of the child. Each of these fathers expressed a desire to be in the household with the child and not just a weekend parent. These fathers expressed a deep desire to maintain the role of an active parent in their children’s lives and not wanting anyone else to fill that void. One father stated, “I didn’t want anyone else around my child but me.” While others fathers made comments like, “I couldn’t imagine being away from children. They’re my whole world.” One father stated, “I’ve always wanted to be the primary care giver for my children. So when their
mother and I separated it was a no brainer for me. I had already made up in my mind that they were coming with me.”

There was only one father that became the custodial parent of his children due to the death of the mother as a result of cancer. The father explained, “My wife was gone and my kids were without a mother. I had no choice but to step up. I did what I had to do. I would do it all over again if I had to.” This father further discussed how although the circumstances leading to his single parenting was anguishing he felt that his wife would have been greatly disappointed if he had not done so.

**Factors Influencing the Decision to Parent.** Each of the 11 fathers participating in the study openly expressed their desire to make sure that they were looking out for the best interest of their children and that was ultimately the driving force in making the decision to become the custodial parent. One explained his rationale for this:

“...I love my kids. Like, I mean I really love my kids. Them not being able to be with both me and their mom in one house was hard for me to deal with. I even thought about working things out with the mother just so they could grow up with both of us in the house. Ya know? Then, when I found their mom was on drugs I knew I had to do something. I really didn’t want to take them from her, but I had to. Their grandma offered to take them until their mom got it together because, ya know, I wasn’t really in a place mentally to take care of them; I was still trying to
live my life. Then I thought to myself, I would be less of a man if someone else was raising them. I just wanted what was best for them.”

All of the fathers shared the underlying theme of acting in the best interest of the children, even if it meant the children not being with them but rather with the mother.

The fathers participating in the study unanimously expressed factors such as their income, living situation and current marital status had little to no bearing on their decision to parent. Each of the fathers conveyed that these were things that they considered but were in no way factors that tipped the scale in one way or the other. All of the participating fathers communicated a concern regarding the lack of a constant maternal presence in the children’s lives; however each father stated that they had close female friends and family to help fill this void. Fathers that had female children expressed great concern regarding the ability to meet the needs of their female children when it came to grooming and hygiene needs. One father had the following to say:

I didn’t what I was going to do with my daughter. I didn’t know how to comb hair. I didn’t know the proper way to keep her little stuff clean. I worried about what I was going to do when she got boobs or even her period. Oh God, I was really concerned about the period thing. Luckily I had my mom and sister to help with that.
Each of the fathers that had female children expressed a higher level of concern regarding taking on custody of the child but only in the areas that came to the female anatomy and grooming.

**Participant’s Relationship with Their Own Father.** Each of the 11 fathers participating in the study expressed that their relationship with their father, or lack thereof, influenced their decision not only to parent but how they parent their children as well. Four of the 11 fathers stated that their father was never in the home and/or in their lives. One father stated:

My pops was never around. I couldn’t even tell you the last time I seen him honestly. I remember being a kid and wondering what I did to make my pops hate me so. It wasn’t until I got older that I understood that it had nothing to do with me and everything to do with him. I also had to understand that this didn’t necessarily mean that he didn’t love me either. Once I understood that, I promised myself I would be different if I ever had kids of my own. I didn’t want my kids to grow up feeling like I hated them or that they did something to make me stop loving them. I didn’t want to miss out on sports, plays, and just seeing them grow up. I wanted to be the exact opposite as my pops.

Each of the other fathers who stated that their fathers were not in their lives growing up expressed similar feelings of not wanting to be like their fathers and not wanting their children to feel the way they did growing up. One father even stated, “I made it one of
my missions as a father to make sure my children never have to feel that kind of hurt.”

Similarly, each of the fathers who grew up without their own fathers expressed a profound need to be the exact opposite of their fathers; using the lack of his presence as a blueprint of what not to be.

The remaining seven fathers stated that their fathers were very present and active presences in their lives. The majority of the father stated that they were trying to emulate the parenting that their fathers did with them with their own children. One father stated:

I had a great relationship with my father. He was always there for me when I needed him. He did whatever it took to put food on the table, clothes on our backs and keep a roof over our heads. My father was a great man. I always knew that I wanted to be just like him in every; a father, a husband, a man. He really taught what it meant to be a father and provider. I pray that I am to my children at least half of what my father was to me.

While the majority of these fathers wanted to mimic the parenting done by their fathers others communicated a slightly different approach. The fathers with a different approach to their upbringing stated things like, “My dad was great. I use what I learned from him and apply it in my own way with my kids.” One stated, “My father set a good example of being a good dad. I just want to be a good dad to my sons.”

**Adjustment to Single Parenting.** The fathers in this study, as a whole, agreed that the adjustment to being a single parent was very hard. The majority of the fathers
expressed having to learn or become better in certain areas of their lives in order to be an affective parent. One father stated, “I had to learn how to be more patient, understanding, have higher tolerance and become more responsible. All of that at once is a lot to deal with.” Eight out of the 11 fathers stated that when they first took on the role as custodial parent they weren’t sure if they were going to be able to handle the responsibility because of all of the changes that were happening and happening suddenly. One father stated:

I had to come to the understanding that it was no longer about me but it was about her. Her needs came first and my needs were no longer important. This was very hard for me to come to terms with. You have to understand, I wasn’t planning on raising any more kids at my age; all my kids were grown at that point. I was living the single life and enjoying it. So when I got my daughter and all that stopped I really questioned if I had made the right decision.

Although all of the fathers reported that the adjustment to being a custodial parent was hard initially, they unanimously stated that with time they became better at it and it became easier to manage. The youngest father in the program stated: “I don’t know if I was going to make it at first, but then one day it wasn’t hard at all.”

Each one of the fathers expressed changes within themselves. Several of the fathers made statements like, “my kids saved my life.” These credited their roles as custodial parents with giving them the motivation to make the necessary positive changes needed in their lives. Other fathers stated that their children helped them become more
responsible and less selfish. One father stated that he became “less wild and calmer” once he became the custodial parent.

Only one father expressed a physical and mental impact once becoming a custodial parent. He stated:

Once my wife died my whole life became about my friends and as a result my health suffered. I became overweight because all I did was eat to deal the trauma of losing my wife and the pressure of being a single parent. I ended up being admitted to the hospital due to hypertension and high blood pressure. On top of all that I was suffering from the depression because of my situation. Don’t get me wrong, raising my kids wasn’t optional for me, but I think how it all came about really affected me.

This father also stated that he felt if the circumstances leading up to he becoming a single parent were different, the change may not have had the same type of impact on him.

**Changes and Challenges Faced.** Every father participating in the study expressed significant changes to their lives once taking on the role of custodial parent. Some of the fathers’ experiences differed but overall there was an underlining theme that each father expressed; these fathers’ lives had changed in ways that they had not predicted nor wanted. Some of the fathers stated that the biggest adjustment they found was managing their time much more carefully. One of these fathers stated:
Before, if I wanted to stop by the mall or something after work I would. Now I have to think to myself, “Do the kids have anything going on today?” It’s crazy because I never had to that when they were with their mother. Now I have to balance their schedules and mine to make it all work so everyone can get done what they need to get done. That doesn’t include household stuff and the miscellaneous things that pop up from time to time.

Two of the fathers expressed that the amount of free time or down time that they were once used to having had become almost nonexistent. Making statements such as, “Coming home after a long day and just relaxing is not an option anymore” or “I used to be able to come home, have a beer and watch a game. Now I come home, cook, clean and do homework.”

Regardless of all the changes experienced, the fathers as whole agreed that they were okay with the changes because the changes were made for the sake of their children. One father stated, “It was a lot. It’s a lot now, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

**Social Life.** The social lives of the fathers are one of the many areas of their lives that changed once taking on the role of custodial parent. As a whole, the fathers expressed a drastic reduction in the amount of time spent with friends and doing activities outside of the home that did not involve their children. With the exception of two of the fathers, the fathers stated that they had to forgo participation in certain activities because it was not conducive to their role as a single parent. One father stated, “I used be a big
clubber. I was at the club every week Sunday through Saturday. Now I’m lucky if I make it to the club once a month.” Another father stated, “I’ve been given the term Mr. Mom because I spend so much time at home with my daughter.” Although these fathers expressed significant changes to the amount of time they are able to spend with their friends and outside of the home, they unanimously expressed that they were okay with the sacrifice. These fathers made statements such as, “I don’t get to kick it like I used to but I’m cool with that. My kids are worth it” and “I mean, it would be nice to be able to see my friends more but I enjoy spending time with my kids so I’m okay with.”

When it came to making the decision to disassociate themselves with certain friends and family because of the influence those people could possibly have on their child the fathers were split almost equally. Six out of the 11 fathers stated that they had to cut off relationships with friends and family, while 5 out of the 11 fathers stated that they did not have to cut off relationships. One of the fathers who discontinued some of his relationships had this to say:

When my kids came to live me I took a real hard look at my life and what needed to be changed. I knew that I wanted my kids to grow up in a positive environment so I had to remove those things that would or could keep that from happening. All of the people that I had to cut loose were people who wasn’t doing nothing with their life. I didn’t want my kids to think that was okay or cool, so I stopped hanging with those people.
These fathers expressed a great deal of sadness or unhappiness with having to disconnect from people whom they once were close with. Of these fathers only two had to end relationships with relatives. One father conveyed that he discontinued relationship with some friends not because of their influence on his child because the activities these friends were involved in put his life and well being in jeopardy. He further communicated that if something was to happen to him it would in turn affect his child. Each of these six fathers stated that although it was hard for them to remove certain people from their life they felt it was necessary for the development of their children.

Of the fathers that did not have to discontinue some of their relationships, one father had this to say:

I didn’t really have to remove people from my life because I didn’t hang out with those types of people in the first place. I was already in the mind frame, even before I got my kids, that if you weren’t doing anything with your life or trying to make yourself better we couldn’t be friends. I wanted to have like minded people around me. So that didn’t change when my kids came to live with me.

The fathers who communicated that they did not have to disassociate with certain people from lives shared a similar mindset of this father. Each expressed not leading a lifestyle or surrounding themselves with people who they felt were negative.

When the fathers were asked if they were satisfied with their social lives as they stand right now, all but one father stated they were satisfied with their social life. Of the
ten fathers who stated they were satisfied with their social lives, four of the fathers expressed feelings of being more satisfied with their social lives now than they were prior to becoming a custodial parent. These fathers spoke of doing more activities that were family oriented and less detrimental to their well being. The one father who expressed not being satisfied with his social life was the youngest father, had the most children of all participants and also had the youngest children of all the participants.

**Professional Life.** The professional lives of the fathers participating in this underwent changes as well. As a whole the fathers expressed some changes in their professional lives but not many changes. The fathers, with exception of two, shared that they found it hard a times balance the roles of them as the professional and them as the single parent. One of these fathers stated, “It’s hard getting the kids where they need to go and on time when I have to punch a clock and be somewhere for a specified amount of time.” Other fathers expressed having to pass on overtime hours at work even when they could have used the extra money. Four of the fathers stated that they had to pass on job promotions, special projects at their job and job changes because it would have conflicted with their role as single parents. One father had this to say:

The company that I was working for was downsizing and offered me a new and better position at the headquarters in Washington, D.C. I went out there, looked at houses, looked at schools and was going to accept the position. Then they dropped a bomb on me. They told me the job would require me to travel around
the country, sometimes for weeks at a time. I couldn’t do it. I didn’t have any
family in D.C. and I didn’t know anyone out there. Who was going to care for my
kids while I was gone? I couldn’t just leave them with anyone. Not to mention, I
didn’t want anyone raising my kids but me. So, I decided to pass on the
promotion. Ultimately, I lost my job because of the downsizing and we struggled
for a bit.

The other three fathers that stated they passed on promotions and job advancement shared
similar stories and explanations of why they had to pass on the positions. One father
stated that becoming the custodial parent helped him to get better and more stable hours
with his job because he could no longer work a flexible schedule. One of the fathers was
disabled and his disability prevented him from working.

All of the fathers in the study stated that they felt that they received an adequate
amount of sick leave and vacation time which would allow for them to take time off with
pay. In addition, although some of the fathers had to pass on promotions and some found
it hard to balance the two roles, almost all of the fathers expressed feelings of
understanding from their employer as it related to their role as a single parent. Only one
of the fathers expressed feeling that they had a lack of understanding from their employer
about their role as a single parent. He stated this:

I had just been awarded custody of my kids and the childcare that they had was
one of their mother’s family members. When the judge awarded custody to me
the family member refused to keep the kids any longer so I was without childcare. I was able to manage for a few weeks relying on family and friends to help but eventually that ended because they had to work themselves or had other obligations. Childcare for three young kids is expensive. I started having to miss days and as a result I was getting written up. My supervisor knew what was going on and didn’t have any sympathy for a brother. I ended up getting fired for my attendance. So I guess you could say they were less than understanding.

When asked if they were satisfied with their professional lives as they stand right now, all but one father stated they were satisfied with their professional life. As with their social lives, some of the fathers were more satisfied with their professional lives than others. Those that were more satisfied with their professional lives referred to their work as a “career” whereas the other fathers referred to their work as a “job.” The one father that stated he was not satisfied with his professional life stated he was not satisfied because he is not where he wanted to be professionally at this time in his life.

*Access to Resources and Suggested Resources.* When asked about their knowledge of available resources for single fathers none of the fathers were able to identify social programs and/or other resources that were specific to single fathers or fathers in general. Several of the fathers mentioned programs such as TANF and SNAP, but also pointed out that these programs were not exclusive to single fathers. All of the
fathers expressed a desire to have more programs available for just single fathers in order to address their unique needs as single parents. One father stated:

I would like to see a program where single fathers and single mothers can come together and exchange tips and techniques. The fathers could help the mothers with issues concerning male children and the mothers could help the fathers with issues concerning female children. Almost like a support group of some sort.

As a whole, the participants stated that they felt that the existing social programs available were catered to single mothers. Furthermore the fathers felt that if they were to attempt to utilize any of these services they would have to first address barriers set against them because they were fathers and not mothers seeking the help. One father stated, “Every time I see programs offered to help single parents the programs are designed or rather catered for single moms. They say single parents but when you really examine them, the programs are for single moms.” Two of the fathers conveyed that there was not enough emphasis and awareness placed on the few programs available to single fathers. One of these fathers stated, “It would be nice if I knew what was out there to help me, if there’s anything at all.” Overall, the fathers agreed that there was a lack of services available for single fathers and not enough knowledge about what services are available.

**Societal Acceptance.** Single parents have a myriad of stereotypes on them and African American single fathers are no exception. All the fathers participating in study
expressed a degree of disapproval by societies of African American fathers. More than half of the fathers stated that they often felt that they were under some sort of scrutiny by others when the fact that they are a single father is known. At other times, these fathers stated, they receive a mixture of responses to their single parent status. As a whole, the fathers communicated that on several occasions they receive responses of shock, admiration/praise and disgust; hearing statements such as, “It’s amazing what you’re doing for your kids” or “Really, you’re a single father? Where is the mother?” or “It’s really good to see you taking care of your kids.” Many of these fathers expressed feelings of anger and frustration from hearing such comments. One father stated:

I was in the mall one time with my kids and this really cute woman walked up to me. We talked briefly and then she asked if I was married. I told her no. Then she asked if I was single. I told her yes. She then proceeded to ask me how often I get my kids. I told her that my kids lived with me so I had them all the time. The look on her face said it all; she was shocked. Then she told me that it was good to see a Black man taking care of his kids (she was White) because so many of them do not. I know she meant this as a compliment but I was pissed off by this comment. I don’t feel like there’s anything special about what I’m doing. These are my kids and therefore my responsibility. This is what I supposed to do; it’s not some grand gesture.
Another father stated, “I don’t see anyone patting single moms on the back.” All of the fathers who expressed frustration from receiving responses such as this communicated similar experiences when people found out they were a single father. Each of these fathers, who found comments like the aforementioned ones offensive, attributed these comments to the negative depiction of Black fathers in the current culture. These same fathers also alluded to the fact that they felt they were only getting these comments and/or responses because they were Black single fathers. One father stated, “Do you think I would get the same reaction if I was White? I think not.”

Many of the fathers in this study had some experience with either the family court system or the child support system. Each of these fathers had negative experiences. Of the fathers that have had experiences with the family court system stated that the system was orchestrated for mothers and completely negates fathers in the process. These fathers also felt as if they were walking into a battle already lost when fight for their children. Of the two fathers that stated they had experience with the child support system, both expressed ill feelings towards the process and stereotyping just from their presence in the child support office. One father describes his experience:

I’ve had my children for a while with no financial support from the mother. After trying to work it out between us and having no success I decided to file for child support. So I go to the child support office to file for support for my kids and the first the lady at the counter says to me, “If you’re filing for a reduction in support
you have to first fill out the appropriate paperwork.” I was pissed. I’m like hold on lady, I’m not here for a reduction I’m here to file a claim for support. The look on her face was priceless and you could tell she was embarrassed. This happens to me all the time when I have to deal with government agencies; people automatically assume I’m a deadbeat because I’m a Black man.

All of the fathers participating in the study commonly agreed that there should be an equal or level playing field when it comes to single fathers and single mothers because as it stands right now, single mothers have the upper hand. Each of these fathers expressed a deep desire to be treated fairly and equally to single mothers.

**Summary.** To summarize, the circumstances leading up to single parenting for the participants did not completely align with what had been found in previous studies. Additionally, factors such as income, place of residence and marital status had no bearing on the fathers’ decision to become the custodial parent. All of the fathers took on the role out of a sense of responsibility to their children. The fathers’ relationship with their own father plays a part in how they parent but had no bearing on the fathers’ decision. The fathers have had to make several adjustments to themselves and their lives to accommodate their role as custodial parent but all of the fathers did so with little to no distress. The fathers experienced drastic changes in their social lives and freedom, however this has not affected their satisfaction with this area of their life; this contradicts what the literature states. The fathers also experienced changes in their professional
lives, but much like in their social lives these fathers, for the most part, maintained a fair level of satisfaction in this area of their lives. When it comes to access to resources these fathers did not express much need for more programs (although some of the fathers would like to some father based programs) for single fathers but rather more acceptance and accessibility to the existing resources. The fathers expressed wanting there to be what many of them called an “even playing field” in comparison to single mothers. Additionally, these fathers expressed a strong desire for there to be more awareness and acceptance of African American single fathers.
CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

African American single fathers appear to be adjusting just fine to their role as single parents, despite the circumstances that may lead them to single parenting. Managing task such as household chores, children’s schedules and their personal free time do not seem to be an area of major concern for these fathers. While almost all of the fathers expressed some level of difficulty in transitioning into the role of a single parent, they all later communicated that with time they were able to adjust and even enjoy the role of parenting. What this implies is that African American single fathers adjust to single parenting no differently than other populations of single fathers. These findings mirror that of earlier research.

The factors leading up to the fathers in this study taking on the role of custodial parent differs than that of previous research. Previous research suggest that African American fathers acquire primary custody of their children primarily due to the mother’s decision to not parent, the removal of the children from the mother by a child welfare agency, or the request of the children. However, the majority of the fathers in this study acquired primary custody of their children due to their own volition. There were a few fathers that gained custody due to the drug use of the mother, however there was no child welfare involvement, as well as fathers that gained custody due to the request of the
children. This discrepancy from the results of this study and the results of previous research requires further investigation to see what, if any, variables could be influencing this disparity.

In considering whether or not to become single parent, income nor place of residence had a major impact on these fathers’ decision to parent or not. This contradicts what existing literature states. Previous studies have found that African American single fathers heavily consider their income and income potential as well as their living circumstances when considering whether or not to become the custodial parent. Much like the circumstances leading to single parenting, this is an area that needs further exploration.

The impact of the relationship these fathers had with their own fathers was evident in each of their responses. Whether it was the absence of their own father or in some cases the regular involvement of their own father, each of these fathers used that relationship as a blueprint of how they fathered their own children. It appears that these fathers’ relationships with their own fathers, or lack thereof, play a small but important role in their parenting.

When it comes to their social lives all of the fathers stated that they experience a significant decrease in their social lives; spending less time with friends and participating in social activities that didn’t involve their children. Although these fathers experienced a change in their social lives they each conveyed that the change was a necessary and
willing sacrifice. Much like the existing literature states, the fathers in the study had to sever relationships with people whom they felt would not be a positive influence in their children’s lives. This, however, does not seem to impact or even impede on their ability to adjust to parenting.

The findings regarding the satisfaction of the professional lives of the fathers in this study offered very contrasting results than that of the existing literature. The fathers in this study expressed satisfaction with their professional lives, as well as feelings of understanding from their employer and an adequate amount of paid time off. Whereas, the existing literature states that African American single fathers tend to unsatisfied with their professional lives and often feel trapped in their employment because of feelings of responsibility they have to their children to be able to provide. The fact that the fathers in this study expressed satisfaction with their professional lives may be influenced by their socioeconomic status and may also be the reason income was not a factor in making a decision to become a custodial parent.

The fathers in the study expressed deep concern and even frustration with the treatment and judgment they receive from those in society as well as government agencies. This is consistent with existing literature that suggests that these fathers do not feel accepted by society and government agencies. More importantly, these single fathers appear to be looked at differently than single mothers, even though they are operating in similar roles.
Overall, African American single fathers are handling single parenting as well as other single parents do. They face many challenges as single parents but not that differ than the single parents as a whole. The main area of concern for these fathers is the treatment they receive from those in society, primarily social welfare agencies.

**Implications for Social Work.** The population of African American single fathers is rapidly growing and is showing no signs of slowing down. Therefore, the likelihood of coming across these types of single parent headed households is growing as well. Those working in social welfare agencies and will come across these fathers will need to develop a hyper-sense of understanding and awareness for their needs. The frame of reference used to classify these fathers will also need to evolve. One will have to look past the stereotypes portrayed in mainstream culture and set aside one’s own biases in order to effectively service this population of fathers. While these fathers face very similar circumstances as their female equivalent they also have their own unique needs and challenges exclusive to them, which requires an adjustment in how one operates when dealing with this population.

A hard look also needs to be taken at our social welfare agencies that are impacting these fathers during their journey as single parents. The negative stereotypes associated with single fathers and furthermore African American men need to be weaned out of the fabric of our social systems. African American single fathers should not have to be forced to deal with various social barriers that hinder their ability to parent due to
their sex and ethnicity. Government agencies such as the Family Court System, TANF, SNAP, Child Welfare and Child Support, to name a few, need to be restructured to take a more friendly and welcoming stance towards African American single fathers and fathers in general. These fathers should be held to the same standards and requirements as their female counterparts; nothing more and nothing less.

As this population continues to grow so will the likelihood of these fathers encountering at least one, if not more, of the above social welfare agencies. Thus the need to become more accommodating for these fathers will become stronger and stronger; no longer optional but a requirement.

**Limitations.** There were many limitations to this research study. The main limitation of the study was due to the small sample size. There was also a limitation to the access of African American single fathers. The selection of participants was not done by using a random sampling method and therefore many of the participants came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. A larger sample size and the use of random selection could have benefited the results of the research study. The study did not look at other areas of the fathers’ lives, such as income, dating, and the relationship with the children’s mother, which could impact their adjustment and management of the role of being a single parent.

**Recommendations.** Exploration of other possible factors that could impact these fathers’ adjustment to and the management of single parenting should be explored. From
this it may be possible to better gage these fathers’ ability to cope with single parenting. A larger sample size would strengthen the validity of the results and allow for generalization to the population as a whole.

Controlling for variables such as income, education and number of children could reveal variances in the population. By controlling for these variables it would make it possible to discover whether not these factors impact the adjustment of these fathers. Additionally, by controlling for these variables it would allow for better predictions of the adjustment of these fathers.

Finally, a more in depth comparison of African American single fathers and their non African American male counterparts should also be explored. Much like the dissimilarities found in the comparison of African American single mother and their non African American female counterparts, a comparison study allows for the understanding of and the prediction of success for this population.

**Conclusion.** African American single fathers appear to adjust well to the role of single parenting. However, they do face challenges along the way; as do any single parent. The circumstances leading up to these fathers being a custodial parent affects the initial adjustment but over time these factors become a non issue. The social and professional lives of African American single fathers undergo many changes but overall do not seem to impact the level of satisfaction experienced by them in these areas. There does not seem to be much difference in the needs of this population than that of their
female equivalent, but rather a need for more accessibility for these fathers. African American single fathers desire to be accepted and acknowledged by society and would like to see some form of equality between them and single mothers; especially when dealing with government agencies. Overall, African American single fathers do not appear to be doing any worse or any better than single mothers in the aforementioned areas and are handling their roles as single parents just fine.
Appendix A

Interviewee Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. What is your age?

______________

2. What was your relationship status to the child(ren)’s mother at the time of birth?

___ Single (not in a relationship with the mother)
___ In a relationship with the mother
___ Co-habitants
___ Married

3. Highest level of education completed?

___ No High School Diploma
___ High School Diploma/GED
___ Associates Degree
___ Bachelors Degree
___ Masters Degree
___ PhD or Doctorate

4. Annual Income Level

___ Less than $15,000
___ $15,001 to $25,000
___ $25,001 to $35,000
___ $35,001 to $45,000
___ $45,001 to $55,000
___ $55,001 an up

5. Please indicate the number of years you have been the primary care giver for your child(ren).

______________
6. Please indicate the number of your biological children currently living in the household.

_____________

7. Please indicate the age and gender of each of your biological children *living in your household* (Please do not include any of your children whom live outside of the home).

   ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F
   ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F

8. Please indicate the age and gender of each of your biological children *living outside of your household* (i.e. biological children living with the other parent or a relative).

   ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F
   ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F    ______ M or F
Appendix B

Interview questions

1. How did you come about being the primary caregiver for your child(ren)?
2. What influenced your decision to become primary care giver?
3. Did your income, place of residence, or marital status affect this decision?
4. What role did your relationship with your own father affect this decision?
5. How are you adjusting to the role of primary care giver?
6. What changes have you noticed within yourself once you took on the role of primary caregiver?
7. What challenges have you dealt with in your social life now that you’ve taken on the role of primary care giver?
   a. Do you get to hang out with friends as much?
   b. Have you had to disassociate with certain people because of their potential influence on your child(ren)?
   c. Have you had to change some of the activities that you do?
   d. Are you satisfied with your social life?
8. What challenges have you dealt with in your professional life now that you’ve taken on the role of primary care giver?
   a. Do you find it hard to balance?
   b. Do you feel you receive an adequate amount of sick time and/or vacation time?
   c. Is your job/employer understanding of your role as a parent?
   d. Are you satisfied with your professional life?
9. What resources are you aware of that you could benefit from?
10. What resources do you feel should be available to you?
Appendix C

Informed Consent Letter

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Iyeisha Miller and I am a student researcher pursuing a Masters of Social Work degree at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this form is to provide you with details about the research study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

**Purpose:** The interview, for which you are being asked to participate in, is part of a research study that is focused on African American Single Fathers who are the custodial parent. The researcher is interested in identifying the needs, challenges and concerns of African American Single Fathers. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how to address the needs of these fathers.

**Your Participation:** Your participation in this study will consist of an interview which will last approximately one hour. The researcher will use a voice recorder to record the interview. The use of the voice recorder is not mandatory and you may request that the voice recorder not be used. During the interview you will be asked a series of questions regarding how you became a single father and your adjustment to this role in various areas of your life. You are not required to answer the questions and if at any point you feel uncomfortable with a question you may choose to pass. If at any time you would like to stop the interview, please notify the research immediately. If at any time you would like to stop your participation in the research study, please notify the researcher immediately. There are no penalties for discontinuing participation in the research study.

**Benefits and Risk:** The benefit of your participation in this research study will be a contribution to a small pool of information known about the needs and concerns of African American single fathers. The information gathered in this research will help inform what programs and/or resources may be needed for this population. The risk associated with participating in the study is that you may discuss information and/or circumstances that are or were not pleasant experiences for you.

**Confidentiality:** The interview will be tape recorded. Your name and/or your children’s names will not be associated with any part of the written report of this research. Any other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of this research. All information and responses provided during the interview process will
be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your responses with anyone other than the research supervisor.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the researcher Iyeisha Miller at (916) xxx-xxxx or inm22@csus.edu. You may also contact her research supervisor Dr. Kisun Nam at (916) 278-7069 or knam.@saclink.csus.edu.

By signing below I acknowledge and consent to the use of a voice recorder being used during the interview.

__________________________________________  ____________
Signature                                      Date

By Signing below I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am also aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

__________________________________________  ____________
Signature                                      Date
Reference


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