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The single-parent father in contemporary society

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The single-parent father in contemporary society

Abstract

The word "love" is perhaps the most widely used and abused term in the English language. We love our parents. We love our brothers and sisters. We love our pet and fruit, vegetables and meat, our home, and our car or truck. We love our country and flag. We love, both animate and inanimate objects. Human beings, today and throughout history, have had the need to love and to be loved. The search of finding or simply recognizing this love, first of all, and then giving and receiving love, is often a frightening experience. There also seems to be a kind of freedom and a gentle soothing while being loved and loving.

THE SINGLE-PARENT FATHER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Department of School Administration
and Personnel Services
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Mary E. Crawford

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Entitled: THE SINGLE-PARENT FATHER IN CONTEMPORARY
SOCIETY

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for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The word "love" is perhaps the most widely used and abused term in the English language. We love our parents. We love our brothers and sisters. We love our pet and fruit, vegetables and meat, our home, and our car or truck. We love our country and flag. We love, both animate and inanimate objects.

Human beings, today and throughout history, have had the need to love and to be loved. The search of finding or simply recognizing this love, first of all, and then giving and receiving love, is often a frightening experience. There also seems to be a kind of freedom and a gentle soothing while being loved and loving.

Speaking of love, most people love another person(s) at some time or another. Often, one becomes acquainted with a person with whom s/he wishes to spend a considerable amount of time. Typically, in the United States, this most demonstrative heterosexual relationship results in the legal union of man and woman called marriage.

Understandably, "love" is a word which has long been difficult to define. Throughout the context of this paper, the word "marriage" is a formal ceremony which

legally unites a man and a woman and which constitutes the forming of a husband and wife.

Gibran (1923) in his book, The Prophet, described marriage in the following manner:

Then Almitra spoke again and said, And what of Marriage master?

And he answered saying:

You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore.

You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days.

Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.

But let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:

Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.

Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.

For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.

And stand together yet not too near together:

For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow (p. 15).

Seemingly, it has been understood that this legal bonding between man and woman does not necessarily announce that a family has been formed. However, one or more children invariably provides an indication that the marriage is in fact a commitment between two adults for the purpose of a formation of a "nuclear family."

For most people, the word "family" brings to mind a picture of a husband, a wife, and a child or children living together in their own household. Social scientists call these units "nuclear families" while the United States Census Bureau, until the past few years, as a matter of convention, labeled them "male-headed families."

To a great extent, of course, this popular image accords with the facts since most of the population in the United States lives in these two-parent families. But a sizable and rapidly growing proportion of households are families that consist of a mother and her children living alone. By the same token, an increasingly number of households consist of a father and his child or children living singularly in a household. It is with the population of this single-parent family, headed by a man, that this paper is principally concerned.

The institution of marriage is no longer considered a lifelong commitment. In the United States, the divorce rate has doubled since 1950. It has been said that one out of 2.5 marriages end in separation or divorce. Between the years 1970 and 1975, there was a 45 percent increase in the proportion of children under majority age living with their mothers only (Beck, 1976). Currently, divorce means the loss of contact between father and child; in divorce or dissolution cases that involve children, 85 to 90 percent of the time, custody is awarded to the mother (Woolley, 1979).

To some, these changes in family organization - that is, a gradual moving away from the nuclear family living under one roof - are unsettling. Nearly everyone is a member of a nuclear family for at least some part of his or her life, and many individuals spend most of their lives in such families. Moreover, the family is a fundamental unit of social and economic organization in our culture, bearing major responsibility for the rearing of children, the achievement of adult satisfaction and social integration, and the distribution of economic resources. Thus, changes that give rise to male-headed single-parent families seem to alter a basic institution which touches the lives and emotions of almost everyone when such an awareness surfaces.

Purpose of the Study

The reason for studying the single-parent father is basically twofold: (1) the prevalence of such a family is increasing, and (2) a more complete picture of the special concerns and issues of this newly blossoming life-style, from the male parents' perspective, may provide assistance to professionals engaged in the helping occupations such as counseling, education, and health to more accurately understand this special family.

Limitation

The primary limitation of this study has been the fact that very little research in the area of male-headed single-parent families appears in publications and journals at this time.

Because of the lack of current literature that is available concerning this subject, personal interviews were conducted with ten (10) single-parent males. These interviews were conducted in Northeastern Iowa. The interviews revealed pertinent information regarding special concerns of the male who has been given (for one reason or another) sole custodial rights as a parent.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the text of this paper, several words and phrases are used frequently:

Male-headed single-parent family - A family consisting of an unmarried male and his minor child or children living in the same household. This definition includes widowers, divorced, and separated fathers, never-married males, and the single adoptive father. A single father is the parent of a child or children under the age of 18 years (majority age) and whom lives in his household all of the time or for long periods of time, and for whom he has primary responsibility (Lewis, 1978).

Custodial parent - A person of majority age who has guardianship, care, and control of a child.

Joint custody - The parents share in decision-making regarding medical, educational, and geographical concerns pertaining to the welfare of their child/children.

Divided custody - Children have equal time with each parent. The time is separate and the child lives with the mother for a period of time and with the father for the same period of time.

Shared custody - Any form of custody or visitation arrangement which allows both parents to have normal, day-by-day interaction with the progeny. This type of arrangement provides that the parents have responsibilities in the raising of their child/children as well as the disappointments and rewards of parenting.

Progeny - Children or offspring.

Split custody - This legal arrangement usually occurs when there are two or more children in the family and both parents are custodians. The school-aged children are likely to live with the father while the infant or preschool child/children lives with his/her mother. Traditionally, the son lives with his father and the daughter lives with her mother, however, this division is not always made by gender.

Again, Almitra spoke and the message seems to apply even still - some fifty years after the words were published.

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children.

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you.

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of
the infinite, and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be
for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable (Gibran,
1923, p. 17).

Within our particular social and economic structure,
the responsibility and challenge of raising progeny is very
valuable and of utmost importance. At times, the process
of assuming this responsibility can be satisfying and
rewarding, yet inversely, there can be consuming and
draining aspects of this endeavor which must not be hushed
or pushed into the closet.

Parenting is probably one of the most intense and
difficult commitments with which a person has the choice
of becoming involved. "Parenthood is such an old, old
preoccupation of men and women that it manages to survive
the severest shocks we can administer to it" (Calverton
and Schmalhausen, 1930, p. 479). And today, parenthood is
certainly in a time of transition. More and more females
head single-parent households. (The definition of a single-
parent female is used synonymously with the circumstances
of the single-parent male as described earlier, p. 5).

"Fathers usually are the outsiders in the modern
family..." (Napier and Whitaker, 1978, p. 13). Males are
becoming more aware of their parental rights. The
occurrence of the father assuming responsibility of sole-

custody of his child/children is increasing as steadily as is the single-parent female-headed family. Attention and a perception, as thorough as possible, is appropriate in the case of the single-parent father in the United States.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Goode (1964) stated, "The family is the only social institution other than religion which is formally developed in all societies" (p. 4). Ironically, recent searches and inquiries into the new formations or reconstitution of the American nuclear family seem to be lacking. In the 1979 Annual, Bureau of the Census Catalog, the introduction includes several aspects of the American family to be discussed and analyzed statistically. Among these are such topics as the composition and size of households, number and age of persons living alone, presence and age of children, and number and characteristics of families maintained by women with no husband present. The number and characteristics of families maintained by a male with no spouse present is not included in the discussion.

The walk through scattered bits of literature regarding the single-parent substantiates the concern that little has been written which specifically focuses upon the single-parent family headed by a woman, let alone the single-parent male-headed family. Seemingly, this issue continues to be an underdeveloped test with little responsibility for its well-being and security coming from the majority of this society's population.

The vast majority of divorcing couples assume that their children will live with their mother, while the father will assume financial responsibilities as well as an arrangement of occasional visits. The traditional division of responsibility between parents seems to be changing slowly.

Statistical Data

From all indications, divorce is no longer a taboo in most areas of the United States. Persons who have experienced separation or divorce are no longer scorned or pitied because of the growing acceptance in our society that marriage is not necessarily a lifelong contract.

During the last decade, the divorce rate has risen among couples of all age groups; however, the greatest rate of increase has occurred with couples between 25 and 39 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 1978). One or more children are usually involved in couples divorcing within this age group. Our present law views the person who has not yet reached majority age in the following manner:

The child is singled out be law, as by custom, for special attention. The law distinguishes between adult and child in physical, psychological, and societal terms. Adults are presumed to be responsible for themselves and capable of deciding what is in their own interests. Therefore, the law is by and large designated to safeguard their right to order their personal affairs free of government intrusion. Children, on the other hand, are presumed to be incomplete beings who are not fully competent to determine and safeguard their interests. They are seen as dependent and in need of direct, intimate, and continuous care by adults who are personally

committed to assume such responsibility. Thus, the state seeks to assure each child membership in a family with at least one such adult whom the law designates "parent" (Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit, 1973, p. 3).

Demography does seem to vary with different sources. For this reason the number of children living in the household of a single-parent father is not accurately known. There is a general agreement that the single-parent male-headed family has greatly increased during the 1970s and many speculate that this trend will continue (Lewis, 1978).

In 1973, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that during the previous seven years the percentage increase of single-parent families tripled that of the two-parent families; single-parent families represented one of every seven American families. There was a 71% increase in single fathers by divorce or separation between 1972 and 1973 alone, and the number of widower fathers, slightly under a half a million, remained constant.

In 1976, it was reported again by the U.S. Census Bureau that the divorce rate had reached 50%, with about a million dissolved marriages a year. Of these million divorces, it is estimated that 60% involved minor children, and that in 90% of the divorce cases which reached the courts, custody was ordered in favor of the mother (Lewis, 1978).

Paul Glick, senior demographer of the U.S. Census Bureau, estimated in 1977 that of the 64 million

noninstitutionalized children under majority age, nearly 18% of these minors were living in one-parent homes. Specifically, 16.3% of these children were living with their mother and 1.4% of the children are living with their father. The number of children under majority age rose from 64.3 million in 1969 to 69.5 million in 1970 and then, because of the declining birth rate, the population of children fell to 64.1 million in 1977. Thus, the number of children under 18 years of age was about the same in 1960 as well as 1977. However, the number of children living with a separated parent doubled, those living with a divorced parent tripled, and, in final comparison, children living with a newer-married parent increased by seven times.

Despite a threefold increase since 1960 in the number of children whose parents have divorced, the proportion of children living with a divorced father has not changed significantly. The number of children who live with the custodial father remains at the level of about one-tenth of all children under majority age (U.S. Census Bureau, 1978).

Lewis (1978) made some comments and conclusions regarding the single-parent male-headed family:

Fatherhood is still understudied and therefore misunderstood by many Americans; single fatherhood is even more so. Several factors, however, are working together to bring about the necessary public awareness: the women's liberation movement, the men's liberation movement, changing divorce laws, and the general move toward sexual equality.

It has been noted that the single-parent, male-headed family is often a family structure that exists in the interlude between two nuclear arrangements. Although it is true that the average single-father period is 2 years, more and more single fathers are delaying remarriage longer than that, and some plan never to remarry. For these men, single fatherhood is not a transitory experience, but one that offers a challenge to make good the principles of individual freedom, and lay to rest traditional sexist attitudes and policies (p. 649-650).

It was further stated that although the general public is unaware or reluctant to believe that parenting behaviors and attitudes are not innate, specialists in this area have well documented notes that parenting behaviors and attitudes must be learned by both genders of the human species. Single fathers are learning and demonstrating this phenomenon (Lewis, 1978).

The Father and the Court

Both parents and children have an enormous emotional and psychological investment in the bonds between them. This attachment becomes apparent even at the child's early age. Given the opportunity for close contact, recent studies of parent-child relationships indicate that infants (even at an early age), recognize and respond to mother and father more or less equally. "Certainly the idea that small children relate better to the mother than to the father appears to be a reflection of our cultural practices rather than any innate preference on the part of the youngsters" (Woolley, 1979, p. 23).

How then can it be explained that (as previously stated) in all custody cases which reach the judge's chamber, approximately 16.3 percent of the child population or 90 percent of all cases award custody to the mother, while approximately 1.4 percent of children under majority age are in the care and control of their father alone?

During a conversation with Attorney Robert Anders (personal interview, June 8, 1981), a prominent dissolution attorney in Black Hawk County, Anders stated:

The principles of the law concerning child custody does not differ in the treatment of either parent. Traditionally, judges have almost always awarded custody to the mother. Until lawyers my age move into those older judge's positions...

the fathers will continue to face a rough road in custody cases.

Since the beginning of the century, it has been the practice of the court to automatically award custody to the mother. "The father, it is assumed, either did not want custody, was unable to cope with it, deserved to be punished, or a combination of all three" (Victor and Wrinkler, 1977, p. xii).

When it comes to the court making decisions in cases of child custody, many people believe that this system has been notoriously biased against men. It seems that the courts continue to hold onto the outdated notion that the mother is automatically the better parent to raise a child. After all, she is the one who bore it and because of our society's cultural practices, the father is

less equipped to provide the nurturance and care for young children. This ideology seems to hold true in our courts today. An attorney from Northeastern Iowa disagrees that this traditional practice continues when he stated:

The courts have not been so biased against fathers in custody cases in the last ten years. The courts are changing and are much more willing to weigh the situation more closely and are awarding more cases in favor of the father.

Woolley (1979) is of the opinion that the actuality of most present custody awards is based on two classic sexist traditions rather than on the needs of the children involved. First, because parental roles have been clearly and rigidly defined, Mother knows best, at least when raising progeny is concerned. And secondly, "Father is an aggressive, competitive businessman who brings home the bacon" and provides final authority within the home. He is not by nature a supportive, "tender, nurturing parent" because he is made of "cruder and less sensitive stuff" than a woman (p. 26).

There is a general agreement that prejudice exists against fathers in most custody situations. When we speak of prejudice and discrimination against a group, whether it be ethnic, racial, or physically handicapped, we look in terms of deprivation and hardship suffered only by that group. However, in the case of the father seeking custody of his children, oftentimes the emotional hardship and suffering also includes the child/children. It has been said that children are often the victims of divorce:

A major contributing factor to the victimization of these children is discrimination against their fathers by our legal system combined with the studious avoidance of the problem by those who are not (or not yet) involved (Victor and Wrinkler, 1977, p. 175).

Obviously, there is no need for a custody hearing when children are not involved. Determining what custodial arrangement is in the best interest of the child's emotional, physical, educational, and social well-being becomes a matter of choosing the best alternative that will enhance the child's growth and development.

The classic case of awarding custody in the State of Iowa occurred in 1974. This case is referred to during most custody hearings: In re the MARRIAGE OF Joan Irene WINTER and Earl George WINTER. Upon the Petition of Joan Irene WINTER, Appellee-Cross-Appellant, and Concerning Earl George WINTER, Appellant-Cross-Appellee. No. 2-57244. Supreme Court of Iowa. Nov. 13, 1974 (Iowa 223 North Western Reporter, 2d Series, 1974, p. 165-170).

It was stated that no hard and fast rule governs which parent should have custody and the decision of custody is not meant to be a punishment or a reward. The issue is ultimately determined by findings which sets apart the parents in their individual capacity to effectively administer to the long-range best interests of the children.

The general principles applicable to the custody issue in this case of WINTER vs. WINTER hold true today in the State of Iowa. These principles must be applied in

light of a number of factors in each case. These factors include:

1. The characteristics of each child, including age, maturity, mental, and physical health.
2. The emotional, social, moral, material, and educational needs of the child.
3. The characteristics of each parent, including age, character, stability, mental, and physical health.
4. The capacity and interest of each parent to provide for the emotional, social, moral, material, and educational needs of the child.
5. The interpersonal relationship between the child and each parent.
6. The interpersonal relationship between the child and its siblings.
7. The effect on the child of continuing or disrupting an existing custodial status.
8. The nature of each proposed environment, including its stability and wholesomeness.
9. The preference of the child, if the child is of sufficient age and maturity (14 years of age).
10. The report and recommendation of the attorney for the child or other independent investigator.
11. Available alternatives.
12. Any other relevant matter the evidence in a particular case may disclose (Iowa 223 North Western Reporter, 2d Series, 1974, p. 166-167).

Custody of four boys, ages 12, 10, 9, and 7, was involved in this case. The parents were married in 1961. Marital problems started as early as 1967. These problems seemed to be initiated by the presence of a hired-farm-hand who was hired by the father's mother because the

father lost part of a thumb in a farm accident. The hired-man moved into the parties' home. The father testified that he observed intimacies between this man and his wife and asked that he move out. The spouse denied such, insisting that the relationship was platonic until 1972, when the parties separated. Trial court found that the accusation coming from the father was true.

The father started a dissolution action and during its pendency he stayed in the home and retained physical custody of the two middle children. The mother retained physical custody of the other two children. Then the father dismissed the action, however, and refused to return the two boys after a weekend visitation. The spouse then started dissolution action and retained physical custody of the two boys with the father retaining that of the middle boys. The father resisted visitation for his spouse, was reluctant to pay child support, and served five days in jail for contempt in refusing visitation.

At the time of the trial, the mother was seven months pregnant with a child by the hired-man. Although they were planning to marry, this information alone did not award full custody to the mother. Each child was questioned by the court in private and expressed the desire to stay where he was.

The trial court placed legal custody of the children with the Department of Social Services with

physical custody divided among the parents. In other words, this is a case of split or divided custody arrangement with each parent physically responsible for two of the children, subject to supervision. It was ordered that the parties were to have visitation on alternate Saturdays so the children could be together every Saturday. Each parent would also have all four children for two weeks each summer. At the end of two years, the physical custody arrangement was to become legal custody unless a different award was made upon application to the court of the Department of Social Services.

The father challenged these custody provisions. Applying the relevant principles (2, 3, 4, and 5), the court believed the custody provisions to be appropriate. Both parents expressed interest in the children and possessed parenting capabilities. With unfortunate exceptions, they had each provided adequately for the children in their physical custody.

The issue of divided custody is troublesome. The boys would have preferred to be together and the court felt the same way. However, in this case, the children had already been long separated, become adjusted to their situations, and received adequate care. The court felt that it would be unduly disruptive to upset the satisfactory relationships which had been established. In these circumstances, the disadvantage from risk of injury to the security and emotional health of two of the children is

greater than any advantage to be gained by placing them all in the custody of one parent. Divided custody appeared to be the least detrimental available alternative (Iowa 223 North Western Reporter, 2d Series, 1974, p. 165-170).

Chapter 3

INTERVIEWS WITH SINGLE-PARENT MALES

It has been estimated that four out of ten children born in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s will spend some time in a single-parent family, of which 90 percent are female-headed families. Such households can be "fragile to the point of pathos" but they still are families. And so are those headed by fathers who have custody of one or more children (Howard, 1978).

Because of the lack of information written specifically concerned with the single-parent male, the logical alternative for gathering first-hand information about this family would seem to be through a personal interview.

Procedure

A survey or questionnaire was not sent to any of the fathers interviewed because a clinical, bureaucratic approach to questions that required "gut" answers seemed inappropriate. Rather, a personal interview within the fathers' homes was conducted. (Several of the fathers were known by the author and the identity of the other fathers was brought to the awareness of the author by friends.) The average length of time given toward each interview was approximately two hours for each of the ten (10) single-

parent males. Following is the basic outline of questioning used during each interview.

What is your age?

What is your occupation?

What is the age and sex of your child/children?

Is your marital status widowed, divorced, separated, single, or never-married?

How would you describe your personal/emotional adjustment toward being a single-parent?

How can you describe your child/children's adjustment toward you as a single-parent?

Under what circumstances was the decision made that you would maintain custody of your child/children?

What is the relationship between your child/children with the natural mother?

What difficulties have you encountered as a single-parent?

Do you feel that your peers, family of origin, and society as a whole accept your life-style?

Would you describe your life-style as forced or chosen?

Describe your support system.

To what extent do you feel involvement and support from your child/children's extended families?

Do you enjoy your single-parenthood?

Would you recommend your style of life to other males?

What is the present adjustment and functioning of your child/children?

What special difficulties do you feel your child/children have experienced at home and within the community?

Has your child/children sought a surrogate mother figure?

Have you felt pressure from others to marry?

Do you consider remarrying an alternative?

Please summarize your attitude toward your experience of single-parenting?

Summary of Interviews

Subject A

Early in our conversation, Subject A expressed (verbally and non-verbally) a great need to talk about his experience and present situation as a single-parent father. He stated that he is a "three year veteran at this business," yet his concerns have not and will not "erase themselves even after all of this time."

This thirty-four year old parent has retained full-custody of his three children for the past three years. Two of the children are males, ages 8 and 12, and the female child is 9 years old. The mother of these children "ran away from home," so to speak, and was not seen or heard from for the next 13 months. At the time when she reappeared in her family's life, she demanded that the children live with her in another state. The marriage ended in divorce and the court awarded full-custody to the father. The father owns a small business located in his home.

Feelings of alienation and loneliness were expressed by this father. The Catholic Church ostracized him after

his divorce. Couples with whom he and his spouse once socialized, no longer include him in their activities. Supportive persons in this father's life include his family of origin, another single-parent father, and the organization, Parents Without Partners.

At first, the children were unable to understand or accept that their mother vanished. They moved through feelings of abandonment and loss, anger, resentment, and guilt. The father also owns those feelings, but feels that he and his children worked together, painfully at times, to form what he calls a "secure, close-knit family."

The middle child (daughter) experienced a greater sense of abandonment than did her brothers and has sought her paternal grandmother as a surrogate mother. The children have had no contact with their mother since the day of the custodial court hearing.

This man has engaged himself in an intimate relationship, but has no plans to remarry. He stated that at times he feels very awkward in a dating situation and has had some difficulty trusting females. He feels he has "grown into" his role as a single-parent and through adjustments and personal growth has come to enjoy his present life-style.

It has been this father's experience that most people see him as foolish and rebellious for wanting to raise his children alone. He has "no intention of conforming to what other people think I should do."

Subject B

The pain and suffering that is apparent in Subject B is overwhelming. This 40 year old man is aware that his marriage, which ended in divorce one year ago, has of yet not been resolved.

This person is a pastor and feels as though he has failed and is incapable of being a partner in a healthy and intimate relationship with a woman. The pain he feels seems to be piercing, and for him, at this time, relief is unattainable.

He awakened one morning with the other side of the bed vacant and was abruptly faced with a letter written and signed by his spouse. She explained that she was going to live with another man outside of the United States.

He first thought of suicide but that thought left his mind as he visualized his three children, all males, ages 14, 12, and 10 years of age. The middle son was adopted when he was a four year old.

He remembers the first and perhaps most difficult hurdle to pass was that of telling his children about their mother leaving the family. He recalls feeling rejected, first by his spouse, and then by his children.

During the next two months, besides dealing with his own feelings of anger, loss, and inadequacy, he gave much of his energy to his children and was not certain that he would be able to continue with the position of Assistant Pastor in his church. A portion of the congregation and the church

council frowned upon the separation between him and his spouse. (The issue was resolved and he was not ostracized.)

A considerable amount of confusion and feelings of anxiety followed this sudden change into the single-parent role. He sought personal counseling and gradually a family counseling situation was introduced as the children became more willing to become involved in the sessions with their father.

The children have had a most difficult time adjusting to the change in their family. Initially, they blamed their father for the dissolved marriage. During the time between the separation and the finalized divorce, the children blamed themselves for their parents' terminated relationship. They felt guilt for not doing this or not doing that or not doing what they were told and thus making their parents angry.

The father was awarded full-custody of his children, and he does not rule out remarrying. He stated that his children seemed to move toward an older neighbor woman who has taken an interest in them for several years and he feels she has been their surrogate mother.

Because the children have experienced great amounts of disruption in their lives and have been reluctant (almost withdrawn) to verbalize the feelings that have accompanied this trauma, the father has searched for contacts in their community with other children who have been faced with the same kind of abandoning experience.

The father himself has spent alot of time with friends and other persons who can personally identify with his situation.

The children have emphatically stated that they do not want any sort of relationship with their mother and in fact, have not seen her since she left home. She has written them letters on numerous occasions and has not had a response to this date.

Subject C

Currently, this man is a never-married father and at 20 years of age, he retains sole-custody of his 10 month old son.

He had spent much of his time with a friend for almost a year and a half until she moved to another city. There was mutual agreement to discontinue the relationship permanently. Approximately nine months later, he was contacted by a social service agency and was told that his name was given as the "alleged" father of the child that his ex-friend was due to deliver. The mother planned to place the child for adoption. (Both the mother of a child and the "alleged" father must give written consent before an adoption is legalized.)

He stated that his first reaction was outrage at the thought of his friend even considering adoption as an alternative without discussing the matter with him before involving a social service agency. He did not give consent

for the child to be adopted and instead decided to raise the infant.

His mother, a widow, has been the primary supportive figure for this man and child. She has cared for the infant while her son is busy with the farm operation.

He stated that he sometimes wonders whether or not he has made the best choice but he does not receive negative comments from other people because he is pretty much of a "loner" and there are not alot of people that he would listen to anyway. He is clearly a single-parent father by choice and plans to take full responsibility for his son. He feels he might marry some day, but now his priority is the well-being of his child and making the farm operation succeed.

This interview was difficult in that the father was reluctant to talk about his feelings and he did not hesitate to remind me that he values his privacy. He had second thoughts about sharing his experience once the interview was underway.

Subject D

Three years ago this man became sole-custodian of his children when his spouse died of a terminal illness. He is 38 years old; his son is 10 years old and his daughter is a 14 year old. He said, "Hell has just begun for me as a single-parent."

Among the first personal, as well as nuclear family adjustments, he recalls a grieving period when he and his

children wondered, "Why us?" He feels that, for him at least, the grieving time did not last long because of certain responsibilities he was suddenly faced with as a parent with no partner. For example; menu planning, grocery shopping, cleaning and maintaining the home with some sort of orderly fashion, budgeting finances, buying clothes for himself and his children, and his full-time employment as an engineer. He felt "ashamed" and "guilty" for not being aware of all of the household tasks his spouse had performed with little or no recognition.

As he was soon cognizant of what it might take to be in two roles - mother and father - he took on the challenge. The hours in the day were consumed with work, his children's need for attention and reassurance, and the household responsibilities.

Subject D began to feel like a social reject. He was too busy to spend time with his peers (mostly males) and yet found that he was no longer invited to have fun even if he had chosen to set aside that certain time. He felt "over-worked" and "resentful" of his situation as a single-parent father.

He sees himself as an adequate parent with the help of personal therapy. He feels that encouragement and support in his role as a single-parent has helped him to become more comfortable with himself and in the presence of women. He said that he attempted to prove his masculinity and at another time he tried to prove himself

as feminine. Neither worked. Now he says that he has learned that he is both.

He feels that it is common knowledge within his community that he is satisfied with his present life-style, however, the possibility of another "partner" has not been ruled out. Throughout the conversation, this father did not talk about his children without appearing to feel extremely uncomfortable.

Subject E

Shortly after the interview began, a little girl, four years old, ran from another room and asked, "Are you my Mommy?" At the age of 2½ years, the child was physically abused by her mother, and after quite an ordeal, the court ordered full-custody to her father. Regardless of the rationale for the bond which seems to exist between a parent and child, the child still remembered and faithfully acted out the reality that somewhere there is another sort of person who cares for her.

The father, 38 years old, does not feel that he is accepted by others in his community. Most people seem to feel that he should not have divorced, but rather, should have given his wife another chance in the marriage. The responsibility he seems to feel toward his child out-weighs his commitment toward his job. He is an elementary school teacher and stated that he would give up his job and home in order to secure the welfare of his child.

Subject E had not known of the abuse which occurred during the long hours he was away from home coaching the sports at the junior high level. A neighbor contacted the *proper authorities and the abuse was substantiated.*

This man said he has felt acceptance and support from his younger sister. His parents live out-of-state and, besides the distance in miles, they seem to have withdrawn from him and his situation emotionally. He has received help for the care of his child from a retired neighbor couple.

Sadness, feelings of making mistakes, and the difficulty of readjusting his life-style, have been his primary concerns. He continues to wonder whether or not he will be capable of being an adequate father in the future. The thought of guiding his female youngster through adolescence is a tremendous fear.

At this time, he does not feel that trust, security, and warmth can be gained from women. His bitterness is a problem he hopes to resolve; however, he has not wanted or sought assistance from "outsiders."

Subject F

This divorced, 39 year old father has had custody of his two sons, 15 and 17, for almost one year. The adolescents were given the freedom to choose the parent with which they wished to live at the time of the divorce. Their choice was to stay together and under their father's roof.

During this interview, Subject F seemed to take a subservient role relative to his sons' active involvement toward the interview. It was as though the father and son(s) roles had become reversed. Very little direct information was gained from this single-parent father. He seemed rather unhappy. Clearly, the young men have established control in the familial situation. The two sons have taken the responsibility for the household chores as well as the demands of a 360 acre farm.

The father stated that his adjustment of being single again has been the most difficult. He is ambivalent at the thought of remarrying. The father feels his sons have had no real difficulty adjusting to the single-parent home and they agreed. The support system seems to be neighbors and most of the same friends he had while married.

Subject G

This single-parent is the father of an 8 year old female. He does not maintain sole-custody of his child, but rather a shared custodial arrangement has been established between he and his spouse. This father does have the daily care of his daughter for the most part.

This man clearly stated that he had no intention of revealing much information about himself during the interview. He said that he has successfully worked through the trauma of divorce and that he is satisfied with his single-parenthood even though there are times when he might

rather not be tied to home quite so much. He would like to have more free time to spend with his peers. He seems not to feel inadequate in intimate involvements with women and does plan to remarry some day. He is 33 years old.

With regard to a support system, he feels that most of his friends and his family are "open-minded" about his single-parenthood and they are willing to help him whenever it seems necessary.

Subject G recalled times when he was awakened by his daughter who was having nightmares. It seems that until about a year ago, he was not sure that his daughter really understood why her mother moved away from home. Now she looks forward to spending the weekend with her mother on a bimonthly basis.

Before the divorce, this man and his spouse shared much of the household chores. He also stated that during the first two years of marriage he was unemployed and cared for his infant daughter on a full-time basis.

Subject G seemed rather irritated with the interview and was unwilling to share on a "feeling" level.

Subject H

Subject H was highly receptive toward the interview. His 12 year old daughter has lived with him as a single-parent for four years. Her mother left the family to live with another man who would not accept the daughter in his family. (He had four children of his own.)

This 32 year old man is a part-time student and holds down two part-time jobs. He stated that he tries to be away from home and the responsibilities there as often as possible. He is extremely unhappy with his role as a single-parent. He does not appreciate or accept the behaviors his daughter displays as she is approaching adolescence.

Because of his frustration and unhappiness as a single-parent, this man uses alcohol and drugs as an escape. He wants to be free of the responsibility for his daughter's well-being, yet, is not comfortable at this point with making the first move toward arranging an alternative living situation for her.

Subject H sees his only support system as his family of origin. The 12 year old often spends days at a time with her grandparents.

The daughter has experienced a great deal of rejection from her mother and often verbalizes feelings of the possibility of being rejected by her father. She has acquired difficulties within the school setting, both academically and with teachers and peers.

The father has become involved with women, but has not seen the relationships as meaningful. He admitted that he is angry with women and that most of his involvements have been established to "use" women sexually. This man did not seem particularly angry with me during the interview.

This man plans to engage in professional counseling as soon as he feels he can afford the fee. His primary reason for seeking help is around his problem of alcohol and substance abuse.

Subject I

This interview did not occur. The father refused to be a part of the interview because the interviewer reminded him of his former spouse.

Subject J

This man declined an interview. The reason that he changed his mind is unknown.

Chapter 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

People do things for many different reasons. Their past experiences, their basic needs, the society around them - all play a part in motivation. Expectations are involved one way or another in all behavior. Expectation involves such important aspects of personality as faith and hope - ingredients essential to human life. Along with expectation goes a certain amount of disappointment.

During the past century, most persons who married carried along with that legal contract, the expectation that the union was to be a lifelong commitment. We are finding that this does not hold true today. A rise in the divorce rate during the last decade has occurred among couples of all ages, and specifically, among the age group of persons with children who are not of majority age.

It has been substantiated that when a divorce has occurred, traditionally, children under 18 years of age almost automatically would be ordered by the court to be in the custody of their mother. Presently, in 85 to 90 percent of all divorces that involve children, custody is awarded to the mother. The availability of literature concerning this single-parent mother is sparse and the

literature regarding the other 10 to 15 percent of children whose custody is awarded to the father presents an even greater void.

The single-parent father is understudied. In this society, he is simply usually not recognized. At this time, he is for the most part, seen as incapable of raising progeny as compared to the mother. The single-parent father is oftentimes misunderstood and not recognized as a valuable alternative to changing family life-styles.

The relationship between parent and child may be the most important relationship in our country and in the world. The expectations that people have about parenthood are as varied as are most things about human beings. Eight different opinions and sets of expectations of parenthood were gathered from ten single-parent fathers who were contacted for personal interviews.

The age range of the single-parent fathers who were interviewed is 20 to 40 years of age. The situations that have led to their single-parenthood includes divorce, never-married, and widowed. Their occupations include teacher, farmer, engineer, student, appliance repairman, pastor, and a small business owner.

The common concern which was found to exist among the single-parent fathers was their view of their parental role, whether it was forced or chosen. In all cases, each father has taken his dual role of mother and father seriously. That is not to say that each father has felt

appreciation for or satisfaction from that role. Another common characteristic apparent among these persons was found to be their feelings of isolation and loneliness. Each father has found their unique way of dealing with these feelings.

All of the single-parent fathers talked of a support system which varied but included the family of origin, friends, other single-parent fathers, and professional counselors. Only one of the fathers has been active in the organization Parent Without Partners.

Because masculine and feminine roles are so rigidly defined in our society, the majority of the fathers who were interviewed have experienced difficulties with household duties and responsibilities. Some have adjusted well to this aspect of family life, while others do not plan to accept or take the responsibility for these so-called "female" duties.

Three of the fathers expressed concerns about their female children who are approaching adolescence. They feel unsure as to their capabilities to handle the problems and situations which may arise during this stage of their daughter's development.

It was interesting to note that the majority of the single-parent fathers were reserved or defensive when asked to address "feeling" kinds of issues. In almost all instances, such issues were avoided, the importance of them

minimized, or the father very directly stated that those kinds of questions were inappropriate and "none of your business."

There was no noticeable pattern among the fathers concerning the issue of marriage. Some of the fathers revealed plans to remarry and others feel that marriage is out of the question for them. It was interesting to note, however, that in some particular way, each father expressed feelings of being uncomfortable with women. Words such as "anger," "rejection," "inadequacy," "impotency," and "fear" were used in explaining their relationship or lack of relationships with women.

The single-parent father is becoming more common. He is affected by our society and at the same time has an effect on society. Hopefully, those of us who are helping professionals, such as educators, counselors, and persons in health occupations will gain clearer insight into the difficulties and concerns of the single-parent father and his children. Thompson (1981) stated, "In the past, men almost never won custody of children in court. Today a few do. But the actual raising of a brood of children (or child) is still frightening to a man alone" (p. 8).

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