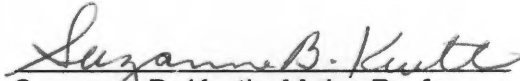
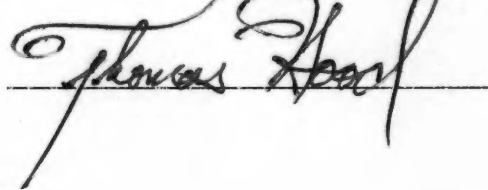


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Brandee Rutherford Mathews entitled "Narrating Single Motherhood: What Does It Mean to Be a Single Mother?" I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.


Suzanne B. Kurth, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

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**Narrating Single Motherhood:
What Does It Mean to Be a Single Mother?**

**A Thesis
Presented for the Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Brandee Rutherford Mathews
December 2005**

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Abstract

Status transitions such as divorce challenge those who undergo them to revise or reformulate identities linked to statuses no longer held. This study focuses on the identity work of recently divorced mothers of dependent children. Participants were solicited from those attending a "singles' group" designed for adults with children sponsored by a large evangelical church located in the southeast. The women's identity work occurred within a religious context that emphasized the desirability and sanctity of marriage. The researcher both participated in the group and conducted phone interviews with eleven of the mothers in the group. Identity ambiguity and identity limbo were sensitizing concepts used by the researcher. Data collection and analysis were parallel rather than sequential activities. The analysis yielded four themes; juggling of demands, shortage of resources, pride in good mothering, and ambivalence about the single mother identity. The women resisted the label and identity of single mother until they encountered some positive consequences associated with the designation. Overall, embracement of the single mother identity remained situationally specific.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I divorced my husband and lost many “friends” in the process. I also lost my self. Roles and role definitions that I had negotiated and held onto through good, mediocre, and terrible times were gone and new and more negative roles seemingly had to be assumed. I no longer knew who I was and did not know how to move through society. With my southern Christian upbringing, a divorced woman is a failure because divorce shows a lack of commitment, faith, and hardiness. I was not invited to parties with my married friends and their husbands. I was a threat. I no longer fit the demographics to remain in my study class at church. Singles’ events were meat markets with depressed divorced singles desperately trying to be part of a pair. I was the only mother at Boy Scout meetings. My son was angry and the dads ignored me. I could not take my daughter to the Father-Daughter dance. I started noticing and paying attention to the fact that meetings, clubs, and social events were not planned with a single parent in mind. I was angry and I did not understand why I was treated negatively. I did not understand why I felt down about being a divorced person, when I knew divorce was the right thing to do. Disoriented, I had no clear concept of myself, or how I should move about my home, my family, and the larger society.

One day an associate referred to me as a single mother. At first, I did not feel any connection with that categorization. Gradually, I began to look at my struggles and my challenges and 'single mother' began to sound more like a cultural heroine rather than a lost and alien woman. I experienced an identity turning point. Over time, I negotiated a more positive concept of my self (Markus, 1977). I was reframing my concept of self, as I left one status and adopted a new and unfamiliar one.

Having learned to trust my abilities and capabilities, I have embraced my role as a single mother of two thriving children. I am aware of my status as a single mother, as I negotiate roles with others. I have all the responsibilities for my household, but lack a clear definition of my roles. I wondered if other divorced mothers had similar experiences. When and how do women come to see themselves as single mothers? What does it mean to be a single mother?

The identity challenges that women with dependent children experience after divorcing are important as large numbers of women face them. There is little research on how women's identities/selves change after divorce. This project is a first step in filling that gap.

Chapter II

Research Implications and Questions

Social Importance

The proportion of children living with two parents in the United States has declined in part due to high divorce rates. In 1990, 73% of children under 18 lived with two parents, compared to 85% in 1970 (United States Bureau of the Census, 1991). Approximately 25% of children live with one parent (United States Bureau of the Census, 2002). The majority of the children in single parent families come from divorced families and nearly 87% of these children live with their mothers (United States Bureau of the Census, 2002).

Many of the children in single parent households live at or near the poverty level (United States Bureau of the Census, 2002). In fact, the heading "single mother" used in a database search produces a plethora of articles on mothers and children living in poverty. But, my interest was in the meaning being a single mother has for women who may have experienced a symbolic loss of self that may be of equal or greater consequence to them than the financial losses associated with divorce. When I searched under the heading of single parents instead of single mothers, I found articles more appropriate for my research, as the single parent literature is primarily focused on divorced mothers (not fathers). This limited body of research on single parents was primarily in the

area of child and family studies. The numbers of women with children experiencing divorce and life as a single mother calls for research to fill the void.

Sociological Importance

I am interested in the selves of divorced single mothers and how their identity of “single mother” develops. Attempts to review the literature and clarify the term “single mother” yielded limited results. All that I found were references to deficiencies. Research articles focused on low socio-economic standing, poor psychological functioning, and low success rates for children in single mother households were common (e.g., Molino, 2000; DeNavas and Welniak, 1992; Amato and Keith, 1991). The sociological literature needs to address the identity transformations of divorced mothers.

Guiding Questions

My first question is whether women define themselves as single mothers. If they do, what contributes to the acceptance of this identity? What does the designation single mother mean to them? The overall question is, how do single divorced mothers narrate their single/non-marital status?

Organization of Thesis

After a brief introduction to the researcher's standpoint, this qualitative study begins in **Chapter II** with establishment of the increasing numbers of divorced women with children in our society and a few basic questions about the identities of single mothers. These single mothers are not the subjects of much research, particularly in the sociological literature.

Chapter III outlines the social psychological theory that provides a foundational understanding of identity, particularly challenges and transformations of identities during adulthood. This chapter continues with a discussion of the empirical research concerning women's life transitions.

In **Chapter IV**, criteria for inclusion in the sample are presented. The participants are recently divorced women with children who are members of a single parent church group. Participant observation and interviews are the methods selected for data collection. A grounded theory approach is employed for data analysis.

The findings obtained from participation in the single parent group and interviews are presented in **Chapter V**. Thematic issues included how

participants juggled demands, viewed their resources, defined being a good mother, and perceived their status/identity as single mothers.

The final chapter **Discussion/Conclusions** relates the findings to current literature. It concludes with suggestions for future research.

Chapter III

Studying Women's Lives

This research draws on social psychological theory, particularly symbolic interactionism. It also is based in literature on adult identity transformations.

Theoretical Literature

Conceptions of role, self, and identity important to this analysis are rooted in the works of George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and William James. Cooley and Mead view the self as socially constructed. Cooley (1902) emphasizes how our perceptions of how others see us influence our self concepts with his looking glass self. Mead (1934) emphasizes the reflexive nature of social selves, that is, how one can be the object of her or his own thoughts. Our multiple perceptions of ourselves are products of our relationships with others. Our perceptions of others' conceptions of us shape what Mead terms selves or "me"s and contemporary theorists call identities or role identities. James' (1892) argues that our conceptions of our selves (mes) are hierarchically arranged, that is, some are more important than others.

Cooley's theorizing is reflected in the work of Cast, Stets, and Burke (1999) particularly the idea that selves are shaped by the views and expectations of the others. Not everyone influences our self-conceptions. Individuals try to associate with others that see them in the same way they see themselves

through selective interaction. In sum, theorists and researchers see self-conceptions as constructions based on social feedback.

A way to view or express these identities is indirectly by “role-taking,” placing oneself in the attitude of the other (Mead, 1934). People’s views of themselves are constantly adjusted through social interaction. The many roles a person enacts during social interaction and others’ responses to those role performances provide the basis for the role identities (McCall and Simmons, 1966).

Identity theory, as developed by symbolic interactionists, holds that an individual’s identities are created and supported through interactions with others, especially close personal relationship partners. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), role identities are the self-meanings that are attached to particular positions and their associated roles. One’s identity as a mother and others’ reactions to one’s performance as a mother may become more prominent and salient after divorce. Without the marital partnership, she becomes a particular type of mother, a single mother. However, she and others may perceive her parenting as more central to her children, thus placing more emphasis on the mother identity, as opposed to her status as a single woman.

Berger and Kellner (1964) view marriage as a joint construction of a shared reality. Dating, engagement, and marriage are steps in a process that

leads two autonomous individuals to come together and construct their world as a couple (Vaughn, 1986). A coupled identity develops through shared experiences, language, and interactions. Presumably, in addition, parents and children develop a family identity. Destruction of the shared marital and familial identities leaves the divorced mother to construct a new single identity, as she adjusts to her altered roles. Throughout adulthood, people encounter situations and relationships that place new demands, stimulating adjustments that deliver new rewards and negative sanctions (Brim and Wheeler, 1966). Divorce and life as a single parent involve such transitions.

Empirical Literature

In American society, despite various social changes that have affected the timing of events and distribution of time, women are expected to marry and to have children. Research addresses the socially fostered transition to motherhood, including the identity formation and restructuring of self that occurs with that change (Smith, 1991, 1994, 1999). Such research addresses the preparation (anticipatory socialization) for the new role and the transformative impact of motherhood on women's life plans and on women's selves. The transition to parenthood is often treated as a universal occurrence and a pivotal developmental event (Duvall, 1977; Hill 1978). Parenthood requires extensive investment, and functions as a major agent of change in adulthood. Much of the parenthood literature focuses on women. Research on the transition to

motherhood addresses the timing of motherhood, as a developmental challenge, and as a normal stage of family development (Goldberg and Michaels, 1988).

Pregnancy and the changes associated with it are conceptualized as normal life events. A theoretically useful way to analyze the role changes associated with pregnancy is in terms of the "possible selves" that can emerge (Smith, 1991).

In contrast, most studies of divorced women and single mothers seem to stress or focus on the maladaptive or pathological (Smith, 1999; Amato and Booth, 1991; Kitson and Morgan, 1990; Keith and Schafer, 1982). Some recognize the importance of understanding the identity transformations and role negotiations of women that no longer choose or are no longer able to continue on the traditionally approved path for women (Vannoy, 2000).

Introduced by Blau (1973) and Allen and van de Vlierts (1984), the concept/process of role exit, experienced by: ex-nuns, ex-convicts, former police officers, teachers, doctors, retirees, divorcees, and mothers who have surrendered custody of their children, is depicted by Mary Rose Fuchs Ebaugh (1998). She defines role exit as "the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (Ebaugh, 1988:1). Exes report feeling disengaged and disoriented as they negotiate new roles and identities in the wake of their former roles. Ebaugh argues that an individual undergoing a role exit incorporates her or his past identity into a current identity drawing on

interactionist role-taking and role-making processes (Anderson and Bondi, 1998).

This argument suggests becoming a single mother involves leaving one role, marriage partner, and redefining the parental role.

Becoming a divorced single mother requires that a divorce occur. Of the many who have researched the impact of divorce, Vaughn's analysis (1986) of the process that occurs as the constructed identity of a married partner is deconstructed into a singularity is particularly useful. Identity change does not occur at the same point in the process for each individual. Uncoupling involves redefinition of self, the other, and the relationships being left. Uncoupling involves negotiating who one is without the marriage partner and without the socially recognized status of married woman (Vaughn, 1986). Being a marriage partner is no longer a current identity, yet it is unclear who one has become.

This research addresses the identity challenges experienced by women whose families of procreation are broken up by divorce. At one time, the stigma of divorce made the negative identity of a divorced woman prominent for such women. As divorce became more prevalent, the negative stereotype of the "gay" divorcee has become a somewhat humorous cliché. Now divorced women experience more options, but often feel somewhat adrift in establishing new identities. In fact, the majority of divorces involving children are filed by women, and women are the parents most likely to receive custody of the child(ren)

(Baskerville, 2004). If they have children, one way divorced women may be defined and/or define themselves is as a single mother.

Becoming a single mother generates a renegotiation of relationships, which may or may not function well. Divorce creates role ambiguity, as there are no clear expectations of how a divorced mother should act, or how she should cope with being the primary parent and often the chief breadwinner. There is little or no anticipatory socialization that occurs in our society for life as a single mother (Kaslow and Schwartz, 1987). It is the combination of role ambiguity and a lack of anticipatory socialization that leaves single mothers to engage in role creation.

Chapter IV

Research Methodology

This qualitative study looks at the themes that arose during group discussions and individual interviews with a sample of divorced mothers who participated in a church single parent group. Content analysis was used to gather the identity related stories that the women presented.

Sample

Initially, for the purpose of this research, I sought a meeting of the national organization, Parents Without Partners®, but to no avail. There are no PWP meetings in Knoxville, or in the state of Tennessee. I began looking for other single parenting groups in the area and found that most of them are facilitated by local churches. That being the case, I chose to focus my research on a Single Parent Group that was just being formed at my own church, Fellowship Evangelical Free Church (FEFC). FEFC is a very large church with a membership of over 4,000.

Fellowship Church is a fundamentalist church belonging to the Evangelical Free Church of America. According to the church, marriage involves a life-long commitment. Weddings should be conducted by ordained pastors and include life-long vows. Marriage is an earthly reflection of the relationship that Jesus has

with his bride, the church. While it is acknowledged that some individuals are meant to be single, being married is the ideal. The church encourages reconciliation at every point. No Fellowship pastor ever recommends divorce. FEFC states that divorce and remarriage are only permissible under certain circumstances. A divorced person may remarry when the divorce occurred prior to becoming a Christian, if one's spouse was guilty of adultery or sexual immorality and unwilling to change, or the unbelieving spouse permanently deserted the believing spouse.

Fellowship Church has an adult ministries section and holds many classes for different demographic groupings that the church leadership believes might be beneficial to their adult membership. Most single adults have three options for classes or groups. There is the Young Adult Ministry (YAMs), which serves singles from 18 to 35. The average age for this group is 26 and the focus in this group is on dating, marriage, roommates, and careers. The second option for singles is the Seasoned Adult Ministry (SAMs), for those who are 35 and older. The average age for this group is 45. This group includes mostly divorced individuals with grown children and several never married women. Most of them are financially secure, and as a group, they go on boating trips, have movie nights, and do such things as take trips to China and Australia.

Based on an interview, I learned the single parent group at FEFC began three years ago in the mind of an administrative assistant, Amy, at the church.

She was 36 and a single mother of two daughters. For three years, she reported bouncing between the two singles groups, not knowing where she fit because of her age and her circumstances. She perceived that one group was for the people that were young and had a "haven't been there and want to do it all" attitude. The issues in this younger singles group (YAMs) did not pertain to her at all. Most of the members were still looking forward to their first marriage and blooming careers. And, the older singles group (SAMs) had a "been there done that and not interested in doing it again" attitude. For the most part the members of this group have grown children and are well into their careers. No group was for singles that were formerly married and raising children alone.

Amy gathered information about single parents and looked into the church registry to note the numbers of individuals that had voluntarily identified themselves as single or divorced parents. When she found over 100 individuals, she approached a member of the pastoral staff and recommended that a group be created for the single parents of the church and surrounding community. It was suggested that she locate a willing married couple that had been single parents to lead the group. She found none available, but was allowed to email an interest questionnaire to all the individuals that had declared they were single or divorced in the directory. The response was good and an initial meeting was set for January 2005.

The kick-off meeting was set up as a movie night and everyone was invited to bring a snack to share. At that event, 42 single parents showed up with numerous children, whose ages ranged from 2 months to 19 years old. The diversity that would mark the group was readily apparent. There was difficulty finding a movie that would appeal to most of the children and not bore others. At this time, the facilitators of the group, Amy and Roberta, realized that they would need to address a diverse group's needs in the Sunday morning meetings and in the fellowship activities outside the regular meeting.

The newly formed third group, Single Parent Families group (SPF) began to meet at 11:00 on Sundays during the second church service. They began with a parenting study and divided the members into three groups for discussion. The current facilitators of the group(s) are two single mothers and two single fathers. The meetings include an opening and a discussion of a parenting topic like discipline, self-esteem, or character development. Since inception, most of the focus of the group sessions has been on parenting, lifestyle changes that accompany single parenthood, and provision of emotional support to group members. Three subgroups were created to facilitate discussion and address diversity. The parents of preschool children, the parents of teenagers (ages 8-12), and the parents of teenage children presumably would be better able to talk about age specific problems they were experiencing, if separated. If a parent had children of various ages then they were orally given the freedom to float from group to group, as they needed. The attendance on Sundays ranges from 16-42

parents. The majority of the attendees are female and most individuals (male and female) have their children with them more than 50% time.

Past outside activities included hikes, camping trips, bowling, an Easter egg hunt, a fund raising dinner, and a night at the drive-in theater. The event times and weekends are alternated so that activities will not continually fall on a weekend that some parents do not have their children. All parents are encouraged and invited to participate, even when they find themselves on a weekend without custody.

The group continues to meet, grow and draw support from the pastoral staff at FEFC. As more is learned about single parents and their diversity, changes are made in the topics and in the presentation on Sundays. At the request of the group attendees, the focus of the group has begun to change from ways to adapt and better parent children to a tighter focus on being a single parent and becoming a stronger person who happens to be a single parent. The members have expressed a desire for more time to be spent discussing their personal experiences as single parents.

The eleven women interviewed were recruited from this group. They were women that ranged in age from 25 to 44 years old. Each woman was the primary care giver and custodial parent. The number of children in the women's households ranged from one to four. The youngest child was two years of age

and the eldest eighteen. The amount of contact the children of each participant had with the non-custodial parent varied widely. In some cases there had been no contact since the divorce and in others, the children spent alternate weekends with the other parent. All of the women had fulltime work commitments outside the home and reported income that placed them above the poverty line.

(Detailed information about household income was not collected.) All of the participants shared in the local knowledge structures found in the southeastern United States, an area dominated by the southern Bible belt culture. I expected to encounter similar thoughts and experiences about church activities, given that the respondents were recruited from a relatively conservative church.

To collect information on identity shifts, I sought participants that had the experience of having their first divorce finalized within the last four years. I sought women first divorced in the past four years for two reasons. First, they would still be engaged in the process of identity transformation and the significance of the first experience of a life changing event, in this case divorce, would be distinctive. In the case of second divorces, the women would not be taking on an entirely new and unfamiliar role and the impact of the role loss is less dramatic (Goldberg & Michaels, 1988). Second, research shows that nearly half of all divorced women in all race and ethnic groups remarry within three to four years (United States Bureau of the Census, 2002).

So that they would be further similarly situated, women who were not the primary custodians for their own biological children were not included. Potentially important status differences were eliminated by excluding teen mothers, poverty level mothers, widows, or single mothers by choice. Limiting status differences facilitated focus on the identity shifts associated with becoming a parent without a partner after having been in a traditional family arrangement.

The presence of children under the custodial care of the divorced participant is necessary because the identity of a mother requires it for most individuals in society. Research also shows that roles that require the greatest investment to acquire and maintain, like motherhood and marriage, become deeply merged within a person and have a great impact on the self (Turner, 1978). To be included in this research the women had to have at least one child, less than 18 years of age, who was in residence for equal to or more than 50% of the time.

Qualitative Methods

This project requires a flexible method that facilitates uncovering the meanings of the experience of the identity single mother. Qualitative methods are well suited to research "that attempts to uncover the nature of a person's experience with a phenomenon" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.19). Thus, this study employs qualitative research strategies to further understanding of

participants' subjective experiences of resolving identity challenges. This study furthers the understanding of the participants' subjective experiences of establishing themselves as a particular type of mother, a single mother and their perceptions of others' reactions.

I obtained permission from the leadership at FEFC (Appendix A-1) and exemption from review from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board. I participated in the single mother/parent group where I kept track of what the women said, how they responded to each other, and also my own emotions, reactions, and experiences of self (Harding, 1998).

My own experience of being a single mother contributed to my understanding of the shared knowledge structure of formerly married women with children. Emphasizing an empathetic "understanding" led me to take an open-ended approach to the research (Weber, 1949).

I explained my interests in studying single mothers to the group and spoke briefly about my plan to interview individuals as a method for gathering information. I asked for volunteers willing to be interviewed, and I recorded names, phone numbers, email addresses and the most convenient times for interviews. I obtained background information about potential participants: their ages, their children, and the timing of their divorces to determine their eligibility for the study. Eighteen group attendees fit the requirements necessary to

participate and of those 14 volunteered. Summer vacations and other commitments led to only eleven interviews being conducted. Each volunteer signed a consent form (Appendix A-3). After varying amounts of logistical communication and scheduling, the interviews were scheduled.

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (Appendix A-2) and relied on them for collection of data. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Both the collection and analysis of the data were based on research practices consistent with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As such, this research places an emphasis on the phenomenon of study and sees “both the data and the analysis as created from the shared experiences of the researcher and participants” and the relationship between the research and the participant (Charmaz, 2002, p. 678). The grounded theory approach gives the researcher flexibility to learn about and better understand the subject or interest at hand.

The interviews involved participants relating experiences, self-definitions, and specific situations in response to general questions. Each interview covered the same basic areas of inquiry, but I asked clarifying or expanding questions, if previous interviews suggested the need for them. The eleven interviews lasted an average of one hour. The interviews were not taped. I typed each woman’s responses as they were given. While guarding against any tendencies to force the data into preconceived categories, I remained alert for any interesting leads

that arose during the interview process (Glaser, 1965; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

The interviews were conducted over the telephone for several reasons. First, the participants were single mothers and their time was often filled with parenting and work activities. Second, money was often mentioned as a concern for many of the participants. Therefore, conducting the interviews via the telephone allowed the single mothers to stay in their homes with their children, not have to negotiate mutually convenient times, and not to pay for childcare. Research shows that some of the advantages to conducting interviews over the telephone are reduced interview effects, greater cost efficiency, and faster results (Frey, 1989; Groves, 1989; Shuy, 2002).

While analysis and data collection were done simultaneously, I knew that I was doing so through the lens of my interests and my perspective. I acknowledge that my history, my beliefs, and my culture constantly directed the course of my research and acted as a filter for my findings. Having been raised in the same region, time, and culture as most of the women in the study, I was familiar with the local knowledge structures. From my observations and the interviews, sensitizing concepts emerged concerning the participants' identities, such as identity ambivalence and identity limbo (Blumer, 1969). It was these concepts that I drew upon to understand the data. Data analysis involved identification of general themes and ideas (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), through

the on-going process of interviewing the participants. Emerging themes influenced follow-up questions in subsequent interviews, which in turn influenced the refinement of the emerging themes (Warren, 2002).

The data analysis involved the identification of the types of experiences and role relationships that might lead to embracing or distancing oneself from an alternative identity, such as single mother. The data collected revealed the overlapping and interconnectedness of the various roles and responsibilities of the women; and, how their experiences shaped their identities as single mothers. By the eleventh interview, I was not getting any new information, only similar themes found in previous interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Some of the women interviewed had well developed stories of how being a single mother affects their interaction with others, and with community members and organizations, while others did not. The findings section focuses more on the stories of those who did. There is no reason to think that others' experiences are different, they simply did not speak as much or as articulately. In discussing whether they were doing a good job as a single mother, the difficulties of being a single mother, or the positive or negative connotation of the term single mother, several themes emerged. The four themes are ambivalence about the single mother identity, the difficulties in juggling demands, shortages of resources, and the definition of what it means to be a good mother.

Chapter V

Identity Themes

Marital separation and divorce are sources of personal disruption and often grief. They also provide an opportunity for positive change and personal development. This research focuses on the themes that emerged from interviews and group discussions with single parents.

Single Mother Identity

Before divorcing, the women reported they had not thought much about single motherhood, but if they had, it typically was perceived as a choice made by some individuals (e.g., a single woman adopting or having a child). After divorce, they did not embrace the designation. Various circumstances made them aware that they were both single and mothers (e.g., school conferences and church activities). The emotions they reported on those occasions often were ones of loss for a lifestyle they no longer had. Calling themselves single mothers in some cases was seen as negative, a declaration of what they were not. When they could see some benefits in accepting the designation (e.g., finding a group of similar others or being provided services, such as car repair) the term was more acceptable. As many women desired to marry again, they did

not embrace the single part of the designation. Single motherhood was more acceptable than being single.

I think of myself as a single mother and sometimes that can really piss me off. I do not want to be in this situation. The other situation, being married, really sucked. But I am able to admit that there are days so bad and so lonely that I almost wish I had never divorced my husband. I said almost, I am not so crazy that I would go back to that (my marriage).
(Judy)

Whether the mothers had initiated the divorce, they had not planned to be single mothers. For most of them, the identity was negative and unwanted did not want to be identified as a single mother. They appeared to perceive that accepting the identity of single mother would signify satisfaction with their being single. This negative perception was supported when church functions, children's schools, and other activities when they experienced a sense of being different.

I look around and I see couples lined up to talk about their kids, and there I stand, alone. I have to talk to teachers alone and I have to hear about what they (my children) have done or not done. It makes me feel tired.
(Taylor)

Functioning as a single made them more aware that they were no longer part of a couple, as many things in their lives continued to be oriented with the traditional family in mind. Awareness of being off the traditional pathway idealized by their church and endorsed generally in the community was one thing making them resist single as a central component of their self.

Being out with single mothers makes me more aware that I too am a single mother. When I am at a function with lots of families, I am more aware that mine is broken. I see minivans and mothers going in to volunteer at school and I am mad that my life is not what I planned and it is not what I want. (Jacquie)

Some of the mothers reported that they had come to see themselves as single mothers through seeking assistance and/or association. One of the mothers needed to have her car repaired and the church provided free automotive repairs for single mothers. At the car repair, she met other single parents and learned about a church group for single parents. One of the mothers stated that it was not until a close friend pointed out that she was a single mother, that she considered herself a single mother. This same friend pointed out the SPF group in the church bulletin and suggested that she attend. Seeing others as single mothers facilitates a woman's view of herself as a single mother.

I used to think single mothers were women that wanted to have kids and not be married--until I got divorced. My husband fell out of sight and the church started doing car repairs for single moms...so I had my car fixed because I fit the bill. (Becoming a single parent) is like when you get a red Toyota and you suddenly start noticing all the people that are also driving red Toyotas. Then there was the group for single moms and dads. (Kaitlyn)

For some of the women the activation of the single mother identity was situational. They were single mothers "depending on the place and the people". Some claimed that while they generally rejected being a single mother as a negative identity, they invoked the identity to deal with role expectations that they could not fill.

At work when they used to start looking for someone to cover second shift, I would tell them that I am a single mother and I have to be home with my kids. I make sure they know my situation and that my kids come first. Now, they don't even look my way and I don't have to worry. (Esther)

One of the situations when being a single mother was positive was during group meetings. Most of the mothers said that having others in the group with

whom to share their experiences has been helpful. After interacting with other single parents, some of the mothers noted that they began referring to themselves as single mothers. As they talked about themselves as single mothers, they noticed that others around them began to as well. They were somehow fortified by the knowledge that they were not the only one in what they perceived was *identity limbo*.

When I was invited to join this group (SPF), everyone talked about themselves as single parents. I began to talk about myself as a single parent. Before that, I had never really thought about it. I was not sure that I wanted to join this group because I do not want to belong to this group. I do not want to stay a single mom forever and I am not thrilled about being single. But the group has turned out okay so far. (Taylor)

Initially denying or rejecting the single mother identity, the women perceived that with time and social support, they were becoming more comfortable with it. Hearing the stories of other single mothers made it easier to see the positives.

I like being the one in charge of my home. I do not always like being a single mother. Sometimes you just get really down but it is getting easier as time goes on. (Linda)

Juggling Demands

Single mothers perceive that they have tenuous control over their lives. The responsibilities of a single mother are present and unrelenting and none of these women planned to be single mothers. Not having a co-parent in the home means that for every available minute the children are their responsibility and other things that need their attention and time--work, household tasks, and community expectations--may potentially conflict with their parenting ideals. Most mothers reported that the responsibilities in their lives had expanded (e.g., employment, outside the home, supervision of the household, management of the emotional and social challenges of redefining their family and themselves). Unable to meet all the expectations, some expressed concern that others might perceive that they were not "pulling their weight."

If I am asked to do something for the kids' school, or volunteer for some trash clean up or volunteer thing at work I tell them that I am a single mother and I can barely find time to go to the bathroom in between work and chauffeuring my kids around. (Judy)

Without a spouse to share the division of labor, these mothers must carry out all the necessary tasks alone or with limited help from older children, friends, and relatives. One woman stated that she simply lacks the personnel to fill all

the expected needs for her family each day. The participants recognized that being a good mother might conflict with the expectations of an employee. Negative perceptions of bosses and co-workers are a concern for the single mothers as they juggle trying to meet the demands of work and the needs of their children. When a child is ill or has an emergency, making the choice to be at work or with the child generates stress.

Sometimes I think people get mad at me when I have to leave (work) early for an emergency with one of the kids. I think they think that I am using the fact that I am alone to get out of things. (Linda)

The single mothers reported placing great value on putting their children and their children's needs first. The combination of the view of children as highly important and the feeling that parenting is primary made maintaining the traditional boundary between work and home difficult (Nippert-Eng, 1996). In their view, being a good parent means keeping the parent-child relationship at the forefront, even when the child is not present and other things need full attention. When two or more roles made simultaneous demands, like trying to focus on work when a child was running a fever, successfully juggling them was the issue.

(My primary role is) taking care of Alex. Well, I have many roles.

Balancing them all is the biggest issue. (Diane)

Some women specifically noted parenting alone created stress. They mentioned feeling a pressure to assume all responsibilities, to meet all expectations of fathers and mothers.

Sometimes, I am overwhelmed by the feeling that I have to be both mother and father for my children and it makes me feel guilty when I fail.
(Kayla)

What they appeared to be doing was expanding the expectations associated with being a mother to include some of those traditionally assigned fathers, at the same time they were assigning mothering at least as high a priority as they had given it before divorce.

Resources

Resources are the means and assets that are essential to parenting. These resources include time, financial support, and social support. When asked about the difficulties of single parenting most women responded like Kaitlyn, "not enough time and not enough money." The lack of resources both financial and social is stressful for the single mothers. They reported feeling tired, exhausted,

and/or needy in their stories about asking for help. Often their views of their current situations were dependent on their ability to access resources and support. Social support let the women feel more able to handle financial stresses and having more financial resources made it easier for the women to feel more able to deal with the daily stresses of being single mothers. The emotional stresses associated with troubled marriages were happily gone, but even poor marriage partners offered resources that occasionally had to be sought from others.

My home is a quiet place now. There is no fighting but so much to be done everyday. I feel like I have no one to turn to help me. I feel so guilty when I have to ask someone for help. It makes me feel needy.

(Kayla)

Time

Time is taken for granted and permeates "all values, decisions, and actions" (Daly, 1996:201). Time is factored into all aspects of daily life. From allotting time for household tasks to ensuring that an adult is home with the children in the evening, to managing work, school, social and personal schedules, time management is central for single mothers. Work schedules impact decisions and choices for the single mother and in turn family schedules

and needs influence the single mother's work. Even when potential conflicts between work time and home time are successfully negotiated, stress remains.

Time passes so quickly. I guess juggling my career and being both a mother and a father for Alex. Sometimes I feel like I have to keep all the plates in the air and it gets stressful. (Diane)

Everyday basic childcare, household work, personal self-care and leisure time must be coordinated. When asked about the difficulties of being a single mother, the women often cited a lack of time. They described their experiences using words like not enough, scarce, hectic, and scary. Most of the responses involving time fit revolved around four categories: paid work, parenting, self-care, and free time.

Paid work time is the time that is spent working for a wage. Paid work also includes the commute to and from work or work taken home. Parenting time involves all activities that maintain the children and a home for them. Work such as childcare, food preparation, house cleaning, doing laundry, household management, gardening, shopping, house maintenance and repairs, and car care were addressed. Self-care is personal time. It is the time spent sleeping, eating, washing, dressing, and grooming. Free time or leisure time is the scarce time that remains after meeting the obligations for paid work, parenting and self-

care. With the exception of one woman's mention of attending Jazzercise, that exercise was otherwise not mentioned suggested that leisure time was scarce.

The mothers saw parenting as the primary temporal responsibility. The participants placed priority on the responsibility of parenting. They attempted to allocate their time so as not to affect what they saw as their primary responsibility to their children. In most situations where they perceived a conflict between their own needs and their children's, the time allocation was shifted in favor of the children. One mother laughed as she told the story of different mornings with her children. She said that some days, "good days," she likes to "fix breakfast a la Donna Reed," complete with bacon, eggs, muffins, and real plates as opposed to plastic and paper. On other days, when she is running late, she is screaming at the children to get up, and ends up throwing bananas and juice boxes into the back seat while threatening them not to get dirty.

Mornings are a free for all. I want to get to work on time and looking halfway decent. I also want my kids to have a healthy breakfast and look good. I don't want any of us to leave the house in a whirlwind. Usually, they (the children) are fine and I am rushing. (Esther)

A myriad of unpredictable things can occur through the course of a normal day (e.g., children get sick, irritable, and have last minute assignments). The women reported assigning priority to their responsibilities as a mother when they

made decisions concerning the allocation of time. The majority of the single mothers placed a high priority on providing their children with what they thought were important opportunities like guitar lessons, piano lessons, soccer games, and church activities. They continually emphasized that they did not want their status as a single mother to limit their children's experiences. The mothers of older children particularly experienced the time demands associated with involvement in extra curricular activities. These activities typically placed more demands on the time of the mother because transportation was usually needed and parental attendance frequently desired.

I do not have enough time. I run all over town like a chicken with my head cut off trying to get everyone where they need to be. It helps that Clarissa drives, but trying to find the time to teach Amy to drive, and trying to be there for Ben. (Linda)

The women found it difficult to compartmentalize their time. They talked about thinking and/or worrying about their kids when they were at work, when the kids were at their fathers' houses, and when they were alone. Their children were never far from their thoughts. Most women reported that conversations with co-workers usually involved what activities their children were involved in and how they were doing.

I can barely find time to go to the bathroom in between work and chauffeuring my kids around. Sometimes and I mean the rare sometimes that I make it out with some of the girls from work and we are at a bar. I sit there and think; I am a single mother. I have so much to do. And, I am all that my kids have and I am out having a drink. I feel guilty. But, sometimes it would be nice to see an R-rated movie, one that I do not have to worry about whether or not it is appropriate for my kids...sometimes it would be nice to just be me. (Judy)

The single mothers reported they grabbed little bits of time to focus on what they considered most important in their lives: their children. Most single mothers talked about “making time” for their kids and feeling guilty because they were not able to focus fully on their children due to a lack of time and/or energy. Some mothers perceived that they had more time for their children prior to the divorce. They attributed this to being able to share the household chores and childcare responsibilities with their spouses. In one of the group’s meetings, one mother stated that one advantage of being married was her ex-husband did all the cooking. She humorously related that she spent her free time looking for recipes that would allow her to do something new with ground beef.

Time is scarce. I mean, I am a professional and I am ten minutes late to everything. I just feel behind on everything, and the guilt I feel for being so

tired at night, which is when I have time with her (my daughter), And it is hard to swallow that now (that I am divorced) I am not raising my daughter the way that I always thought I would be raising her. I wanted to be able to stay home or work part-time before she went to kindergarten. (Tina)

Most respondents expressed a desire for more time, specifically more time with their children. Some of them reported short time periods could be capitalized on to focus on what they considered most important, parenting.

We eat at McDonalds and I do not have to worry about pleasing some husband. We have picnics on the floor for dinner, if we want to, me and Michaela. (Tina)

Financial Resources

In our consumption-oriented society, single mothers may experience a lack of ability to provide their children what other children have or even the equivalent of what they had before the divorce occurred.

I never have time for me anymore and that is all right because I do not have money anyway. Seriously, it is tough to want to give your kids

things that their friends seem to have like Abercrombie clothes, fancy vacations, and they get picked up from soccer practice in fancy cars. Before, they never lacked for anything. (Judy)

Most mothers reported experiencing strain trying to provide economically for their children. While a few of the women in the group received some type of consistent financial support from their exes, the majority of the women reported sporadic or non-existent support. While previous research has emphasized the loss of income following divorce, it was not always an income shortage that the women spoke of but of the knowledge that they now carried the bulk of the financial burden for their families. Judy's response was typical.

I felt more secure when I was married. Being a single mother means it is all on me--college funds, first cars, weddings, having to pay for all the proms and school pictures.

All of the women in this study were currently employed, whereas some of them did not have to be employed when they were married. They discussed their need to be employed to protect themselves and their families from perceived short-term deprivations, like needing cleats, or Abercrombie clothes for their children, and to meet long-term economic needs, like college tuition and retirement. Whatever the quality of their marriages, most women reported feeling

more secure financially and less stressed when married because the burden had been shared.

It is hard now to make a living and support two teenagers that want a car like everyone else. But, I tell them that everyone else has two working parents. When I was married, I was a stay at home mom. I had part time jobs that helped us to take the vacations that lasted a little longer or to a more distant place. And, the kids never lacked for anything. (Bobbye)

Social Support

Most of the mothers in the group discussions and in interviews expressed a sense of being marginalized and feelings of isolation. Some women perceived that being single jeopardized their social activities and relationships with others. They spoke of feeling left out of certain groups or being ignored by the married women in church groups. One single mother reported that her own sister thought she might be out to take her husband causing a rift in their relationship that had remained. Often single mothers reported it was difficult to find settings in which being single and accompanied by children was non-problematic. The single mothers stated that they appreciated group activities that had been planned outside normal meeting times because they were always kid-friendly.

The mothers talked about how important support was for them. Two types of support seemed to be desired: they wanted support for what they did as parents and support for who they were as single parents. Over half of the women had extended family in the area and often turned to their families for support in rearing their children.

I get lots of help from my family. I have a huge family and we are close. My sisters help with my kids and I always know that I can call on them if I need anything. That is nice to know because so many other single women are not so lucky. It is good to have family that that I can talk to that knows my situation and my kids. (Esther)

The women also sought emotional support; particularly empathetic understanding that could be obtained from other women in similar shoes. From the flyers at church, to postings on the web, and prodding from friends and family, the members came to attend the SPF group. After a friend pointed out that she was a single mom, Glenda said, "I thought about it, (joining the SPF group), and the idea of someone that had walked a mile in moccasins like mine sounded nice." With the SPF group they perceived that they had both individuals for whom their own experiences would have meaning and that would accept them. For some of the mothers, sharing their experiences with other group

members was helpful because they received emotional support, guidance and information about how to cope better with their current situations.

Sometimes I hate this situation. I feel tired and messed up. After I come to class (SPF) and I hear, other people and I feel better. It is when I am alone and get tired that I really start getting mad and hating my life. (Beatrice)

One of the difficulties some of the women experience is lack of time to form and/or maintain friendships. Logistical constraints limit going out with friends or forming friendships with other singles.

I do not get to go out with my friends. I don't have many anyway, but the idea is a nice one! (Kaitlyn)

They also found ways to adapt with the use of electronic communication. Many of the women in the group reported using the internet to email family members and friends because they could take a break, if needed, when writing an email, and then come back and finish it later. They used the internet to instant message other group members as well as to send photos. They visited websites for mothers and read discussion boards. A couple of the women had ventured into the world of online dating via a Christian match service. The group anticipated hearing one relay her latest dating adventure, whether sweet or disastrous, each Sunday morning.

Parents of young children often form friendships with the parents of their children's friends because of the time demands of parenting. For single mothers this can be problematic if their children's friends are from two parent families. A mother of boys in the group said that she looks forward to baseball season because she gets to spend a couple of evenings a week talking with other mothers with boys on the team. Their boys played baseball and went to one another's birthday parties. Yet, she never did anything with the other parents aside from talking at games.

As SPF has continued to grow the group members are more open and direct about what they would like to discuss during meetings and the outside activities they would like the group to pursue. The communication between the members and the leaders becomes more open each month with the members taking more control of the direction of the group. As the members develop relationships with other members and develop a sense of being a group, they are more eager to approach others to talk about what is good about the group and what is not.

Rachel, one of the lead facilitators of the SPF group expressed the difficulty involved in finding topics for discussion that would be inclusive of the diversity of the group membership. Rachel was open in admitting mistakes in

curricula or in the choice of guest speakers. One recent guest speaker caused several members to question participating in the group.

We had this guest speaker in our group at church on Father's Day and he was awful. He rambled on and on...all this stuff about how important fathers are. He told us he had been happily married for 23 years and had 4 kids and so he knew parenting was tough. He talked about all the time he put in as a parent and then he had the audacity to tell us that his wife was a housewife. He was grateful to be able to provide enough for her not to work! I could feel my hackles rise. I knew who was doing all the work in that house. He kept on and on and then at the end, he started saying how divorce was wrong and awful and it was this horrible tearing of a relationship. Then, to make it worse, he started talking about single parents and how hard, and how difficult it must be, and then he started crying. I was furious....and I did not like it that he obviously pitied us for being single parents. I felt sorry for his wife. I was not sure I was going back to the group until later. Everyone talked and we all decided that he is an ignorant man and can never know what it is like to be a parent alone.

(Judy)

The women expressed a desire for support for what they were doing and for how they saw themselves. They found it from some family, friends, and group members. However, receiving desired support, they also encountered

apprehension that they were after others' spouses, pity for their single state, and efforts to pair them up and make them "normal."

Good Mothers

All parents recognize that how their children behave is seen as a reflection on their parenting. Single mothers may be particularly sensitive to being evaluated in terms of their children's behavior and their successes and failures, as they have primary responsibility and they assign highest priority to the mother role.

I think I am a good mom. My kids are challenging, twins and a teenager, and I feel like I am doing a good job being their Mom. They are neat and clean, they do not get into any trouble, and my daughter is very responsible for her age. (Beatrice)

Like Beatrice, many of the mothers equated being a good mother to the successes and behavior of their children. Most of the women defined success in the context of their relationships with their children and their ability to care for their children. Yet, they were unsure of what yardstick or measure to use to determine what a good single mother is or what she does when the role is ill

defined. In their discussions, they talked significantly more about themselves as mothers than they did of themselves as single women.

I think I am doing a good job (as a single mother). I take my kids to church and piano and soccer. I just don't know. I just keep on keeping on, hope, and pray that it will all pan out in the end. (Judy)

None of the women interviewed expressed concern that being a single mother negatively affected their ability to care for their children. Most women stated that they were still doing the same things for their children that they had done while married; only now they did it alone.

(Being a single mother) was not at all different for me. I did all the housework, and took care of the kids when I was married. (Caitlyn)

The women's comments suggest emphasizing the socially valued mother identity and role allows them to distance themselves from their ex-husbands and the negative aspects of their married lives.

I think of myself as a mother. I have been a mother over half of my life. I have been someone's Mom longer than I was married. I am a single mom, now. I played the good little wife to an ogre for longer than I should have. But, I am not single. (Glenda)

Because so many of the women interviewed, placed most emphasis on their identity as a mother, they expressed feeling somewhat lost when their children were not present.

I feel alone on holidays, especially on the ones that the kids are at their Dad's house. In addition, I sit here alone. My kids are gone and I do not honestly know who I am or what I am supposed to do. I turn the TV on the kids' shows just to fill the air. (Glenda)

They had redefined parenting. Although all of the women work outside the home and feel the stress of time, many of the women reported that post divorce they were able to spend more time interacting with their children on a deeper level. Like Diane's living room picnics, many of the women mentioned a number of things that they were not able to do with their children during their marriages.

Some nights we just have appetizers for dinner and eat everything with chopsticks. We turn on the iPod, and dance around the living room and take turns choosing songs. When I was married, the living room was off limits when my husband came home because he wanted it quiet. Now we laugh and we are loud. (Esther)

What became apparent through discussions was that when focused on the question of mothering the women relied upon specific behaviors of their children (e.g. good manners and grades) or they relied on other's responses to evaluate their performance. Yet, when they told stories about life with their children, they had developed, albeit nascently, other criteria for good parenting. They emphasized communication, cooperation, and having fun.

Chapter VI

Discussion and Conclusions

Well, the first year after the divorce was a huge shock to my system, doing it (parenting) all on my own was even more of a shock. So, I tried to be mom and dad and then alternated that with going out and trying to find a new dad for the kids--big mistake. Luckily, I escaped what would have been mistake number two and I am learning that I am a single mom. The group (SPF) helps a lot. Anyway, I am a single mom and that is good and enough. (Kayla)

I explored the identity transformations of recently divorced mothers. What they were, they no longer are. They are in the process of becoming someone different. Focus was on the perceptions divorced mothers have. Specific focus was on how divorced women who were members of a church that emphasized marriage and family identified themselves and perceived others identified them.

All the women in this study were single mothers, but their conceptions of what it meant to be a single mother varied. Some had accepted being a single mother as a positive identity and others were more ambivalent. The divorce process initiates changes for everyone in a family. Not one had anticipated their first divorce, when they married. The single mother struggles with feelings of

sadness, guilt, and struggles with the practical issues of financial responsibility, adapting to new living arrangements, and the issues of custody and child support.

The women in this study described managing their lives and resources as a type of juggling that involved constant prioritizing. This finding is in accord with Adam's (1995:122) research that found women's work usually involved coordinating multiple activities--the "sequencing and prioritizing of certain times." It is often difficult for a woman to untangle time for the self, from the multiple and overlapping demands in her life. Other research found single mothers reported more daily hassles related to family and work related tasks than their two parent counterparts (Compas and Williams, 1990).

The women in this study reported feeling more financial stress since they divorced. This finding is consistent with the previous research that indicated women lose almost half of their income, have a lower standard of living, have less wealth, and experience greater economic hardship after divorce (Amato, 2000; Smock, 1993). Nationally, 60% of single mothers are engaged in daily routine employment, more than double the proportion for all mothers (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005). Whether they were part time employees or stay at home mothers while married, the mothers in this study are all employed now that they are single mothers with custody.

The first years in the post divorce process are a time to examine changes in women's identities, as they adjust to changed circumstances and relationships. The interplay between the person and societal pressures (e.g., church and community) contributes to the development of a new identity (Zurcher, 1977). A new self or identity may be revealed through successfully carrying out a social role, presenting a perfect "performance," and developing a future oriented perspective (Turner, 1976).

Ebaugh's (1988) work provided a useful starting point for examining the processes of exiting marital and co-parental roles and the possible shaping of a new identity as a single mother. However, linear models of change, such as hers, do not describe everyone's experiences. Not all of the single mothers' stories conformed to her four-stage model of role exit and the creation of an ex-role identity (Anderson and Bondi, 1998).

Most people aspire to have relatively conventional commitments in the areas of work and family. Yet, institutional fragmentation and the expanded number of lifestyle alternatives may generate tension between the social and reflective dimensions of self (Zurcher, 1977). Today, there are fewer social stigmas associated with being a divorced woman. As social definitions become less negative and rigid, divorced individuals may focus more on this reflective dimension. They must develop answers to the questions: Who am I? What is it that I should be doing?

How women in this study talked about themselves and their lives as single divorced mothers provided useful information about self and identity changes. Talk is crucial to the construction of a new role identity and its acceptance by others. The women that had adopted a positive identity of single mother had done so through interactions with others, such as children, ex-spouses, and the SPF group. The perceptions of others affected the women's preference for the single mother identity in lieu of a single identity. This self/identity was created, maintained and altered in and through communication (Wiley, 2003). The Thomas dictum (1928) states that when a situation is processed and mentally defined as real, then those same individuals have a tendency to act in accordance with the definition and real consequences follow. The single mothers in this research did not spontaneously develop the identity or self-concept as a single mother immediately following the finalization of their divorces. Many were reluctant ever to do so as they hoped their single status was temporary. Instead, most women emphasized the more socially approved identity of mother.

Turner (1978) proposes that those roles that involve the greatest investment, as motherhood does for women, may become merged with the self of the individual. This study suggests that during the stressful times following the dissolution of a marriage, traditionally religious women may center their self-conceptions around a role that they know and have invested themselves in. Motherhood is a known role that is both socially approved and a link to other

mothers (Baker, 1989). Conceiving of themselves as single mothers occurred when it was situationally advantageous, e.g., on the occasions when advantages were associated with the designation.

Limited acceptance of the identity of single mother occurred through positive interactions with others who used the designation and the SPF group. The group provided a network of similarly situated women beginning to develop a shared positive conception of single mothers. Having a group for others like themselves made the women feel welcome. Often feeling invisible or marginalized, the women were welcomed, in a generally couple centered organization, and provided with a way to locate themselves within a larger community. This finding is supported by research shows that people obtain psychological and social benefits from exchanging feelings and experiences (Molina, 2000; Kurtz, 1997; Vera, 1993; Carping, Bell and Strecker, 1992).

A Proposal for Future Research

This study was based on a small sample of women affiliated with a church group for single parents. As the focus was on subjective experiences, a weakness of this research is that no data on external changes in the respondents' lives were collected. Studying women in non-religious groups and different areas of the country would provide useful comparative data as the religious and community values of the women in this study may have contributed

to their reluctance to see themselves as single mothers. And longitudinal research that would involve repeated interviews of women once divorced would provide the opportunity to identify how the passage of time and the establishment of new routines and relationships shape women's perceptions of single motherhood.

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Appendix

A-1. FEFC Permission Letter

May 25, 2005

Institutional Review Board
The Office of Research
University of Tennessee
1534 White Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529

To Whom It May Concern:

Fellowship Church has begun to focus our attention on the new majority, which actually is not very new, but we believe the church is now ready to align its ministry efforts with more than 35% of our culture. The non-nuclear family consists of families with children who do not have both of their birth parents in the home.

As the pastor overseeing our Single Parent Families Class, it is my desire to encourage and equip single parents with parenting principles and a faith-based game plan to raise their children to maturity. I want all Singles (with and without children) to know they have a place to belong at Fellowship Church, and are a vital part of our church family.

Brandee Mathews has been a regular attendee and small group co-facilitator for our Single Parent Families Class. I am very supportive of Brandee conducting research on single mothers, and believe her research could enhance our ministry to single moms.

I appreciate the opportunity to support Brandee in her academic efforts. Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at 470-9800.

Sincerely,

Roberta Truza
Community Care Ministries

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A-2. Interview Questions

1. What do you think when you hear the term- single mother?
2. Do you think of yourself as a single mother?
3. If yes, when did you begin to call/identify yourself as a single mother?
4. How is being a single mother different than simply being a mother?
5. How do you know that you are doing a good job as a single mother?
6. What do you see as your primary role?
7. What are the difficulties in being a single mother?
8. Do or did you identify yourself as a divorced woman or divorced mother?
9. Do you think of such designations as positive or negative?
10. Do you dislike being a single mother?
11. Which do you prefer to be called, single mother or divorced woman?
12. Do you introduce yourself as a single mother?
13. Do people refer to you as a single mother?
14. If yes, then who, and in what circumstances?
15. When do you feel your status as a single mother most often? When does being a single mother come to the foreground?
16. If time is seen as one of the difficulties in single parenting, do you feel that you balanced your time better when you were married?
17. Do you feel that your children are an obstacle to meeting men?

A-3. Informed Consent

This research project, "Narrating Single Motherhood: What it means to be a Single Mother", is an exploratory effort toward a better understanding of the term single mother. You are being asked to participate because of personal characteristics which include: (a) being in the 25-50 age categories; (b) being previously married only once; (c) having been divorced within the past four (4) years; (d) having primary custody of one or more of your own biological children, and (e) not currently married or engaged.

If you agree to participate you will be interviewed by phone, for an hour or longer, at a previously arranged time. There is a possibility that a second, much briefer, interview may be necessary for clarification of one or more of your answers. Your name and the names of your family members will be kept confidential. All information you provide will be stored in the personal computers of the principal investigators, accessible only by means of passwords, and in locked filing cabinets. After it is processed, selected quotations and compiled responses will be used in a master's thesis at the University of Tennessee and the data will be destroyed.

There may be some benefit in that you will have the opportunity to share some of your experiences with empathetic others. Participation is entirely voluntary and may be terminated at your discretion. There is minimal risk associated in being involved with this project. Roberta Truza is available should you feel the need to discuss any issues that arise.

Brandee Mathews, Primary Investigator

Suzanne Kurth, Associate Professor

I have read the above description of the research and am willing to be a participant.

Participant's Signature

Witness

Date

Vita

Brandee Rutherford Mathews is a native of Knoxville, TN, born on January 27, 1969. She attended the Farragut Schools in Farragut, TN and graduated in 1987. She served in the United States Army in Washington, DC for 2 years. After being honorably discharged she returned home and resumed her undergraduate studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. Brandee earned a B.A. in Philosophy in December of 2002.

Brandee completed a M.A. in Sociology from the University of Tennessee.