

THE EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE FATHERS WHO HAVE REARED ACADEMICALLY  
SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

by

Cheri Gentry Long

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative collective case study explored single fathers' experiences in rearing academically successful children. Academic success was defined as the completion of high school or college, entering college, or attending college. A purposeful maximal sampling of five bounded systems of single fathers and their academically successful children participated in the current study, using snowball sampling. Data collection methods consisted of interviews with single fathers and their children, observations, timelines, letters, and physical artifacts. Within-case and cross-case analysis of data assisted in explaining the experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children in order to assist other single fathers. Five emerging themes developed from the data. Making their children a priority and involvement in school related functions and sports/organizations emerged as a commonality in satisfying the research question—What are the experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children? Single fathers described specific academic strategies and high expectations, which satisfied the research questions—What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success?—and How does the single father's perception of competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children? Finally, support emerged as a theme satisfying the research question—What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?

*Keywords:* single fathers, academic success, self-determination theory, involvement, competence, autonomy, relatedness

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## **Dedication**

“...stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” 1 Corinthians 15:58.

I dedicate this research study to the Lord. It was His from the beginning. In faith, I know His work will not be in vain. I am only His servant.

God has blessed me with my family, who were patient and supportive of me throughout this journey. God has blessed me with friends, who have encouraged me. God has blessed me with my Liberty family, who has guided me with their wisdom and prayers.

God has blessed me with single fathers and their children, who willingly participated in this research. I am thankful for their openness and honesty. Their stories touched my heart.

God blessed me with my own father who was proud of me and supported my efforts through school. His life taught me to be our King's servant. His memory remains in my heart with every step I take in life.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Parent Involvement (PI)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The rapid growth of single father families has demanded that attention be given to how these fathers function as single parents (Ashbourne, Daly, & Brown, 2011; Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009; Mason, 2012). Findings from a research suggested that the transition of the father's role from financial provider to caretaker has positive effects on the family unit (Lamb, 2004). With the conceptualization of the single father, the father's academic involvement has surfaced in correlation studies related to socioeconomic status (Currie, 2005; Marks, 2006; Sarsour, Sheridan, Jutte, Nuru-Jeter, Hinshaw, & Boyce, 2010).

The focus of the current qualitative research was to explore the experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. Chapter One presents a framework for the current research, gives the reader knowledge of the current study and the literature, provides the basis for the problem of the current study and introduces the research questions. The introduction chapter is divided into the following subsections: background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of study, research questions, research plan, and delimitations.

### **Background**

Parent involvement (PI) in their children's academic success has been scrutinized in several current research studies, indicating a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and their children's academic achievement (Avvisati, Besbas, & Guyon, 2010; DePlantey, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Martini & Senechal, 2012). The involvement of parents in the education of their children occurs in many forms. Researchers grouped parent involvement into three categories: school involvement, home and school conferencing, and home involvement (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1990; Hill & Craft,

2003). Involvement activities such as volunteering time to read at school, helping with fundraisers, attending parent/teacher conferences, and helping children with homework are examples of activities within such categories.

In addition to PI research, the roles of the mother and father in the development of their young children's academic success has been studied (Baharudin, Hong, Lim, & Zulkefly, 2010; Lipscomb, 2011; Uddin, 2011). With the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 (PL 107 110), PI in the schools increased across the country, but not without its challenges. Both qualitative and quantitative studies showed parent involvement as having made a difference in the education of children (DePlantey, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2012). While results of many PI studies proved significant correlations to children's academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2012), other researchers explored the challenges and barriers that might affect PI in children's academic achievement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

The family unit began to experience a transition from two-parent families to single parent homes beginning in 1970, with the passing of the no-fault divorce law (Mason, 2012). In the years preceding the 1980s, child custody courts would appoint mothers as sole guardians based on the "tender years" doctrine", believing that mothers would provide what was in the "best interest of the child" (Mason, 2012, p. 453). However, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, child custody courts began to see each case with new eyes and found that joint custody or paternal guardianship was in the "best interest of the child" (Mason, 2012, p. 453). For this reason, some fathers found themselves becoming sole guardians of their children (Mason, 2012). With this responsibility, single fathers needed to be more involved in their children's academics.

Interestingly, 10 years after the inception of the no-fault divorce law, the United States Census Bureau (2012) reported that marriage and divorce rates had declined between the years of 1980-2008. Ironically, single-parent households had risen by 10% in those same years. These statistics indicated the traditional two-family household was transitioning to non-traditional family units (Mason, 2012).

Little research is available expressing how single fathers cope with being sole caregivers after the death of their spouse. The United States Census Bureau, between the years of 1998-2010 stated, “The number of children living with widowed fathers in the United States is estimated to be over 100,000. Cancer has been determined as one of the leading causes of death for mothers between the ages of 35-54” (Heron, 2010, p. 8). The challenges that single fathers face upon the death of their spouses extend beyond how to be involved in the academic lives of their children. These fathers must grieve, while supporting children who need to grieve as well (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2011).

With a rise in the number of single parents (Cunningham & Knoester, 2007), there seemed to be a shift in a focus on two-parent families (Lewis & Lamb, 2003) and the involvement in children’s academic achievement to a focus on single parent involvement (Barajas, 2011; Sarsour et al., 2010). Research also focused on the barriers, challenges, and struggles that many single parents faced as they reared children alone (Coles, 2009; Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010; Lipscomb, 2011). With the onset of marital dissolution and the emergence of non-traditional family units, some fathers found themselves rearing children alone and establishing new relationships with their children (Ashbourne et al., 2011; Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). A new focus in research emerged for single fathers in their



involvement in their children's academic achievement (Abel, 2012; Bronte-Tinkew, Scott, & Lilja, 2010; Lee, Kushner, & Cho, 2007; Lipscomb, 2011).

While some research has described the experiences of low-income single fathers and the challenges they face in being involved with their children's academic achievement (Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002), there remains a gap in the literature concerning the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. Research has investigated specific activities involving parents in their children's academic success (Avvisati et al., 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Schlee, Mullis, & Shriner, 2009); however, a gap in the literature remained explaining what specific activities single fathers use to rear academically successful children. By explaining the positive experiences and specific involvement activities of single fathers rearing academically successful children, other single fathers could benefit.

One theory contributing to understanding these experiences could be the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). According to SDT, an individual is naturally motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, and possesses three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Focusing on the positive experiences of single fathers brings a personal perspective in their descriptions of their motivation in being involved with their children's academics and their perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in rearing academically successful children.

### **Problem Statement**

During the past three decades, researchers (e.g., Baharudin, et al., 2010; Desimore, 1999; Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Lipscomb, 2011; Strom, 1974; Uddin, 2011) conducted studies investigating the history of mother and fathers' roles in the involvement of

their children's lives. Parent involvement has been shown to influence children's academic success (Avvisati et al., 2010; DePlantey et al., 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Martini & Senechal, 2012). The current research study was significant in recognizing how important parents are in the education of their children. However, from the passing of the no-fault divorce emerged the non-traditional family units (Mason, 2012).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as child custody courts began to see each divorce case, they found that joint custody or paternal guardianship was better for the children (Mason, 2012). For this reason, some fathers found themselves becoming sole guardians of their children (Mason, 2012). With this responsibility, involvement in the academic lives of their children became a priority for single fathers.

Another challenge facing single fathers was in the death of their spouse. Little research is available indicating how single fathers cope with being sole caregivers after the death of their spouses. Widowed fathers, who are clearly grieving themselves, must not only be involved with the education of their children, but also provide emotional support to their grieving children need at the time (Yopp & Rosentstein, 2011).

Programs such as the Family Bereavement Program at Arizona State University have provided interventions for children and parents during bereavement (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2011). Some research has investigated how surviving fathers adjust by describing their experiences involving childcare, instilling values, and helping children to grieve (Burgess, 1995). Future research is necessary that focuses on surviving fathers. Yopp and Rosenstein (2011) explained, "It is not known whether widowed fathers cope differently depending on the cause of their wives' deaths" (p. 363).

The focus of this research study was the southern region of the United States, specifically, Upper East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), in 2012 there were 716 single fathers in the southern region of the United States. The current research study provided single fathers the positive experiences of other single fathers who have reared academically successful children. Without research on these positive experiences, the available literature could be limited to studies based solely on ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, or socio-economic status (Acharya & Joshi, 2009; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003; Lee et al., 2007; Marks, 2006).

### **Purpose Statement**

Research has shown a correlation in the involvement of parents and their children's academic success (Martini & Senechal, 2012). While understanding how parent involvement affects children's academic success is important, understanding single parents and their involvement in their children's academic success is equally important. More specifically, understanding the single fathers' involvement in the academic success of children is essential. The purpose of this current qualitative collective case study was to explore how single fathers rear academically successful children. In this study, single fathers and their academically successful children were the bounded system for each case. Single fathers, identified by the United States Census Bureau (2012), are sole caregivers--widowed, separated, never married, or divorced. Academic success is defined as the completion of high school or college, entering college, or attending college (Conley, 2010).

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the current qualitative collective case study was to explore how single fathers rear academically successful children by describing their positive experiences. While

literature has delved into the challenges, barriers, and struggles of single parenting as it relates to the academic achievement of children (Coles, 2009; Lemay et al., 2010; Lipscomb, 2011), there has been limited attention given in explaining the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

The current study has a theoretical contribution by establishing how the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) has motivated single fathers' experiences. According to SDT, an individual is naturally motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, and possesses three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Focusing on the positive experiences of single fathers could benefit other fathers who face the new challenges of single parenthood.

An empirical contribution focused on the single fathers' perspectives and their positive experiences. Furthermore, an empirical contribution focused on the single fathers' motivation in being involved with their children's academics and their perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in rearing academically successful children. The current study is significant because of its exploration into the positive experiences, paternal involvement, and self-determination of single fathers and their academically successful children.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the current study:

RQ1. What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children? A qualitative study is conducted when researchers want to "empower the individuals to share their stories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). The research question is the overall question for this qualitative study in order to share the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children.

RQ2. What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success? The research question is vital to this study because there is little definitive research on what specific activities have the greatest impact on children's academic achievement (Abel, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Lipscomb, 2011).

RQ3. How does the single father's perception of his competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children? This research question is based on the existing literature conducted on single fathers, but focuses specifically on what is needed for this study. Using the Self-Determination Theory, a quantitative study revealed that a father's sense of competence was related to their involvement in their children's academic lives (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007). The feelings or perceptions of competence with respect to an activity or domain is theorized to be important because it facilitates people's goal attainment and also provides them with a sense of need satisfaction from engaging in an activity at which they feel effective (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

RQ4. What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children? One of the constructs to the Self-Determination Theory is the sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Understanding the factors of relatedness is important and how they affect single fathers rearing academically successful children.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout the current study, definitions helped address the criteria for those participating in the research. For the purpose of this study:

*Single fathers* are sole caregivers (widowed, separated, never married, or divorced) who have been single fathers for at least half of the child's life (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

*Academic success* refers to the completion of high school or college, entering college, or attending college (Conley, 2010).

Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posited that individuals have three innate psychological needs related to motivation—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The theory framed the research and each motivational term defined:

*Competence* is a sense of capableness that an individual possesses at interacting with their environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

*Autonomy* is an individual performing an activity with a sense of having a choice, or behavior that is self-regulating (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

*Relatedness* is, "A sense of belongingness and connectedness to persons, groups, or goals" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 64).

### **Assumptions**

The current qualitative research study focused on the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. One assumption of this study is that single fathers are emotionally stable and provided accurate descriptions of their experiences. The different perspectives of the participants were related in the data analysis in order for certain themes to be revealed about their personal experiences. Another assumption is the formation of relationships of familiarity between the participants and me in order to "understand what they are saying" (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). As interviews occurred with the single fathers and the children, there was the assumption they would speak freely and with ease. A comfortable interaction between myself and the participants provided for richer descriptions in the findings. Finally, the research questions answered were dependent on the descriptions provided by the single fathers; therefore, changes to the interview and research questions occurred when necessary, based on the

experiences in the field. Qualitative research design is “the desire to permit events to unfold” and is characteristic of the naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 211). For this reason, fidelity was maintained through the process of follow-up interviews with single fathers if changes were made to the research questions.

### **Delimitations**

A collective case study was appropriate for the purposeful sampling of single fathers and their children as the bounded system; this sampling “involves studying information-rich cases in depth to understand and illuminate important cases rather than generalizing from a sample to a population” (Patton, 2002, p. 563). The delimitations set boundaries for this research. Delimitations are restrictions or boundaries entailed prior to the inception of the study to restrict the scope of a study (Patton, 2002). Single fathers who have reared children for at least half of the child’s life will be participants. As identified by the United States Census Bureau (2012), the status of single fathers can be widowed, separated, never married, or divorced.

The current research study did not include fathers who have joint custody with the mothers because the focus was on the experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children alone. These single fathers have children who are high school or college graduates, entering college, or attending college at the time of the study. By acquiring these participants, the experiences of these single fathers provided richer data. These single fathers were of different ethnicity and some had multiple children.

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of the current qualitative collective case study was to understand and explain the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children. Purposeful sampling of participants from clearly bounded systems (i.e., families) warranted a case study

research design (Stake, 1995). Quantitative research explores information with experimental designs that test hypotheses using a large population (Creswell, 2007). In contrast, qualitative research uses purposeful sampling of participants giving less importance to the generalization of a population and greater importance of a sample to “purposely yield insight from rich information sources” (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

Case study analysis uses a bounded system, and a collective case study is appropriate when two or more cases are being researched for understanding and meaning and not solely for the methods being used (Stake, 1995). The current research study included specific methods and techniques that constituted a case study and answered the “how” and “why” questions for this research (Yin, 1994). The interpretations of the answers to these questions occurred through an inductive lens, not based on hypotheses.

Multiple forms of data collection were used which included interviews, observations, timelines, letters, and physical artifacts. Multiple forms of data collection and the replication of such are used for case study research (Yin, 1994). Common themes are detailed throughout the experiences of each case (within-case analysis), and then an analysis of the data was verified by conducting a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is an attempt to understand experiences through interviews, documentation, and observations; none emerged from a statistical standpoint (Patton, 2002). The current study concluded by interpreting and describing the themes that developed from the experiences of single fathers and their children (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Summary**

The focus of the current qualitative collective case study was to explore the experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The significance of the



study was to explore how single fathers have reared academically successful children by describing their positive experiences. While literature has explored the challenges, barriers, and struggles of single parenting as it related to the academic achievement of children (Coles, 2009; Lemay et al., 2010; Lipscomb, 2011), there has been limited attention given to explaining the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

The theoretical contribution the study established showed the tenets of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) were motivators within single fathers' experiences. According to SDT, an individual is naturally motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, and possesses three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Focusing on the positive experiences of these single fathers will benefit other fathers who will face the new challenges of single parenthood. Furthermore, an empirical contribution focused on the single fathers' motivation to being involved with their children's academics and their perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in rearing academically successful children. The current qualitative research study is significant because it explored the positive experiences, paternal involvement, and self-determination of single fathers and their academically successful children.

Chapter One contained a presentation of the framework for the current research study and gave the reader background knowledge of the problem as well as the statement of the problem. Current literature helped influence the purpose and the significance of the study. The chapter introduced the research questions and definition of terms. In addition, Chapter One contained a discussion on the assumptions, delimitations and possible limitations to this research study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of the current qualitative collective case study was to explore the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The existing literature on parental involvement in the academic success of children is abundant. The problem is the gap in the literature that exists in explaining the positive experiences of single fathers. A review of the literature expands several years of data explaining what factors of parental involvement make children's academic achievement successful. Chapter Two provides an understanding of some of those factors as it relates to single fathers. The organization of this chapter is as follows: (a) the theoretical framework that guided this study, (b) history of the father's role, (c) parental involvement and children's academic achievement, (d) parental factors influencing student achievement, (e) research on fathers' involvement, (f) a title search, and (g) a summary.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the current study was grounded in Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The Self-Determination Theory posited that individuals have three innate psychological needs related to motivation—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When these three needs are satisfied, individuals experience strong levels of self-motivation and well-being. The research on SDT is multi-faceted throughout the realms of education, families, athletics, and organizations as it explains the nature of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The Self-Determination Theory was critical to the current research because it provided the framework for describing the motivating factors that single fathers experienced as they reared academically successful children. Through their experiences, other single fathers can gain wisdom about rearing children alone.

## **Motivation**

Motivation is a psychological process in which people are driven to act in order to meet certain needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Psychological constructs have many factors that usually involve two types—*intrinsic* and *extrinsic* variables. People are motivated by one of these two types of motivation. *Intrinsic* motivation promotes an internal driving force, which causes people to act due to personal commitment or an internal self-regulation. In contrast, some people are motivated by external rewards or from a fear of being reprimanded, chastised, or a disappointment to others. With a consideration to these constructs of motivation, “SDT has been able to identify several different types of motivation, each of which has specifiable consequences for learning, performance, personal experience, and well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 69). The prediction of these consequences is dependent on the motivational forces, which are “*innate* and are assumed essential for everyone, but motivational forces that are acquired will vary in strength as a function of the circumstances in which they were acquired” (Deci & Ryan, 2000b, p. 250).

The current qualitative study was an exploration on how single fathers, who are abandoned, widowed, or divorced (with no contact and/or no support from spouse), would have a strong “*motivational force*” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 250). Furthermore, this study explored how this “*intrinsic motivation would satisfy their basic needs*” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 245) of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn would result in “*positive psychological outcomes*” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 230). These motivational forces may include *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* motivation.

**Intrinsic motivation.** The constructs of *intrinsic* motivation have been studied for the past 40 years. In the field of education, *intrinsic* motivation is a factor leading to higher quality

of learning and higher levels of well-being in students whose parents promote high levels of autonomy in their children (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). A sub-theory to SDT is cognitive evaluation theory (CET), which describes in detail the variations of an individual's intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Cognitive evaluation theory posits that variables such as competence and autonomy must be present if intrinsic motivation is to be sustained over time. Researchers examined this concept by conducting field studies and experimental studies in the education setting and discovered that students who had teachers who promoted competence and autonomy exhibited stronger levels of learning than those who did not (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Benware & Deci, 1984). Intrinsic motivation can be considered the “prototype of autonomous or self-determined behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 17).

**Extrinsic motivation.** Extrinsic motivation often is a result of an external reward for the action that is completed. SDT refers to extrinsic motivation as performing an activity to receive a reward or to avoid a punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation has many variables. According to SDT, “motivation for the behavior can range from amotivation or unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment and these different motivations reflect differing degrees to which the value and regulation of the requested behavior have been internalized and integrated” (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 71). For example, students may complete school assignments because they understand how the assignments will help steer them towards their chosen career, or students may complete school assignments because they fear the consequences of not completing their assignments. Both are examples of extrinsic motivation, but to differing degrees.

Another sub-theory to SDT is organismic integration theory (OIT). Organismic integration theory was introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985) in order to understand the psychological spectrum of motivation beginning with amotivation (lacking the value of an activity) on the far left side of the spectrum, four types of extrinsic motivation in the middle, and finally, intrinsic motivation on the far right. The further to the right of the spectrum that an individual is characterized, the higher levels of autonomy they are believed to possess (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The four types of extrinsic motivation are:

1. *external regulation*, where behavior is a resultant of rewards or consequences;
2. *introjected regulation*, where behavior is a resultant to avoiding guilt;
3. *identification*, where behavior is identified as being important in value; and
4. *integrated regulation*, where behavior exhibits the most autonomy and integrates a value to said behavior. (Ryan & Deci, 2000a)

The organismic view of SDT may explain some of the challenges that single fathers faced when they first began to be involved with their children's academics versus their experiences when their children achieved academic success. The research question, "What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success?" can be answered in part by analyzing the descriptions of the single fathers' experiences in relation to their involvement with their children's academics.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy is described when an individual performs an activity with a sense of having a choice, or behavior that is self-regulating (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Although autonomous behavior may be dependent on outside influences, the self-regulating behavior is of value to the individual. Experimental studies have shown that children could be motivated to perform an

undesirable activity if they were given support and autonomy (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984). Wong (2008) stated, “Parental autonomy support is the extent to which parents value and use techniques that facilitate independent problem solving, choice, and self- determination in their children” (p. 498).

One theory stated that autonomy support is congruent to high levels of parent involvement and parental structure (Grolnick, 2003). Parental structure can be defined as reliable, solid, and dependable. These are also synonyms for an authoritative parenting style. Grolnick and Apostoleris (2002) explained that autonomy supportive parents give children choices, encourage them to be problem solvers, limit pressure and control, and advocate the child’s perspective in relation to situations.

Parenting styles and a child’s sense of autonomy have been investigated and one study found that children “believe themselves to be more autonomous when describing their parents as having an authoritative parenting style” (Hoang, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, autonomy support, in combination with parent involvement (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991), provides children with a “more autonomous style of self-regulation, which in turn predicts better academic performance” (Wong, 2008, p. 500). For the current research, the parenting style of single fathers rearing academically successful children will be important to investigate through interviews of the single fathers and their children as they describe their experiences.

## **Competence**

Competence is a sense of capableness an individual possesses while interacting within the environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competence can be fostered through feedback and encouragement from significant others. For children, a sense of competence can come from parents. One study discovered that “parents who provide children with structure in the academic

domain have children who feel better about school, are more competent in their school-related actions and are more effective and successful in school” (Farkas & Grolnick, 2010, p. 277).

Parents’ sense of competence can stem from their spouse’s opinions. One study showed married fathers’ sense of competence in being involved with their children’s education based on how their partners perceived them (Bouchard et al., 2007). In the current study, single fathers did not have their spouse’s perception of their competence. For that reason, understanding how single fathers perceive their own competence in being single fathers and rearing children will be beneficial. The significance of competence as a “felt sense of confidence” is explained by understanding the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared successfully academic children (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 7).

### **Relatedness**

Relatedness is a sense of feeling connected to others, a sense of feeling supported by significant others, and a sense that significant others trust individuals to make good choices. According to SDT, “people tend to internalize and accept as their own values and practices of those whom they feel, or want to feel, connected, and from contexts in which they experience a sense of belonging” (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 139). In an educational setting, students who believed the teacher liked them displayed higher levels of internalization in educational activities (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

The significance of Deci and Ryan’s (2000) explanation of relatedness complemented the current research study about single fathers. In an effort to answer the research question— What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children? — factors related to the involvement of the single father’s sense of connectedness were determined. Some of the factors affecting a single father’s sense of relatedness might include the family unit itself,

connectedness with the school or the children's teachers, or even a support group they may have been involved with during the children's education. Based on the review of the literature, single fathers and their academically successful children were investigated through the theoretical lens of the Self-Determination Theory and its constructs on motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The Self-Determination Theory has been researched from the standpoint of children based on teachers in the educational setting, parenting styles, and parent involvement (Farkas & Grolnick; 2010; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Hoang, 2007; Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Wong, 2008); however, there is a gap in the literature relating SDT to single fathers.

### **History of the Father's Role**

Reviewing the literature on the history of the father's role in the family is important to understand differences within genders as it relates to parent involvement. Bernard (1981) wrote of gender roles throughout history. From the earliest beginnings in societies of hunters and gatherers, the woman provided the most for the family. Even through the Colonial times, the women were the ones who took care of issues and provided for the family while the husband was absent to do business. By the 1800s, men began to venture into the industrialized world of work and became the providers for the family (Bernard, 1981). The Great Depression and World War II brought on more women entering the world of work. By the time Bernard (1981) identified these familial roles, a shift had begun to emerge.

Some fathers' roles were transitioning from being monetary providers for the family to being a childcare and domestic provider (Orthner et al., 1976). The shift in roles brought a curiosity in how fathers would compare to mothers in these new roles (Goldberg, Tan, & Thorsen, 2009; Risman, 1986). As early as the 1970s, research investigating the roles of fathers



in the family, specifically, involvement with the children, became the norm (Orthner et al., 1976). The shift in the changing roles of fathers caused many men to rethink their position in their children's lives (Fagerskoid, 2008). Fagerskoid (2008) interviewed new fathers regarding their view of perceived fatherhood and actual fatherhood. Many of these fathers felt disconnected in child-care when working outside the home and thus left the child-care to the mother (Fagerskoid, 2008).

Although the shift in roles prompted men to rethink their roles in their children's lives, much of the research indicated focused on married fathers (Fagerskoid, 2008; Goldberg et al., 2009; Orthner et al., 1976; Risman, 1986). The current research study focused on fathers who were not married (divorced). The need for the current study substantiated the gap in the literature for single fathers. Goldberg et al. (2009) analyzed the trends in academic attention to fathers between the years 1930-2006, which indicated a change in fathering roles depicted in media due to the shifts in social changes. The research study examined trends in five psychological journals that indicated a strong jump in academic articles about fathers in the last century (Goldberg, et al., 2009). An ecological view of fathers had emerged through research literature with a focus on specific attributes of fathers and marital trends (Goldberg et al., 2009).

In the early 1960s, few fathers received custody of their children in a divorce case. As divorce became commonplace due to the no-fault divorce legislation, the number of single parents rose. Research turned to single parenting and their involvement in their children's educational lives (Barajas, 2011; Sarsour et al., 2010). Due to the increase in single parenting, attention was given to the single mother and father's involvement in their children's lives.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported America's families and living arrangements. These statistics indicated 15% of single parents were men (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). The U.

S. Census Bureau (2010) also reported 1.8 million men as single fathers. Nine percent of these men were rearing three or more children younger than 18 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). About 46% were divorced, 30% were never married, 19% were separated, and 6% were widowed (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). These statistics represented a variety of American families and their living arrangements, illustrating that more men were in the role of being a single parent. For this reason, researchers must examine how single fathers parent. Some research has focused on how the single father copes with being a single father (Coles, 2001; 2009); however, the gap in the literature, indicated a need to focus on the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

### **Parental Involvement and Children's Academic Achievement**

Parents are vital members in the education of their children. Strong parental involvement is a factor in the successful academic achievement of children from early childhood to young adolescence (Baharudin et al., 2010; Lemay et al., 2010; Martini & Senechal, 2012). Many scholars have studied parental involvement and its effects on children's academic achievement. Scholars such as Epstein (1986) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) paved the way for research on parental involvement. Parental involvement theories concluded that parents have a stake in their child's education, and when they become actively involved, positive outcomes occur. Benefits to both the parent and the child exist (Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams, & Keating, 2009). Epstein's (1986) theory indicated that a child learning at home with a parent had an instrumental effect on the child's achievement in school. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) model posited that modeling, reinforcements, and direct instruction are ways in which parents can be involved with their children's academic achievement. These theories supported

the constructs of the Self-Determination Theory by providing the children with parental autonomy, support, and motivation.

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (PL 107 110) provided more information to parents and held schools more accountable for information (NCLB, 2002). Schools were required to inform parents of their children's performance on state tests. The NCLB mandated schools to provide parents with other educational options for their children if their current school was not meeting NCLB standards. Parents had the power to choose the school in which their children attended, guaranteeing them a strong educational experience. In addition to informing parents of student performance, schools receiving Title I federal funding were mandated to provide a variety of parent involvement opportunities in order to keep their funding (U. S. Department of Education, 1997). In fact, some of the funding received from the federal government is allotted to parent involvement activities every year (U. S. Department of Education, 1997).

With an increase in parent involvement opportunities, NCLB has broadened the meaning of parent involvement. Parent involvement can take form in a variety of activities, including reading to children, helping with homework, volunteering at school, attending parent/teacher conferences, and supporting athletics (U. S. Department of Education, 1997). Ample research has been conducted in an effort to pinpoint what parent involvement activities promote the highest levels of learning for children from early childhood through adolescence (Avvisati et al., 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Schlee et al., 2009).

### **Early Childhood**

Early childhood education is prevalent in America's schools today. The United States government supports early childhood education and parent involvement by implementing and

financially supporting early childhood programs such as Even Start, Head Start, and Early Reading First (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2013). All of these programs encourage and sometimes require parents to become involved with their children's academic lives. These programs assist in the educational curriculum of children, while providing low-income parents with adult education, literacy programs, and child-rearing education (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2013). The U. S. Department of Education's (2013) mission statement asserts that assistance in partnering with parents and schools will be a priority in sharing the responsibilities of their children's education.

### **Adolescence**

In addition to the success that parent involvement has in early childhood, it also provides great results in young adolescence in middle school. Despite the fact that middle school years and young adolescence brings a sense of independence, studies have shown that parental involvement was positively associated with student achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Specifically, involvement activities conducted at school are more strongly linked to academic achievement than activities at home (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Furthermore, high school seniors whose parents were involved with their adolescences' academics have a higher rate of attending a 2-year or 4-year college. The same resulted when parents discussed college and set goals with their seniors (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Adolescence is a difficult time for children. Parent involvement decreases during these years (Beausang, Farrell, & Walsh, 2012), despite its positive association with student achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). When the family structure is challenged through the death of a parent or divorce, adolescents' academics are affected (Beausang, Farrell, & Walsh, 2012). These children need somewhere to turn for help and encouragement. The academically

successful children in this research study shared their experiences about their single fathers through documentation in the form of a letter to other single fathers.

## **College**

College students have shown greater academic performance based on the influence of parenting styles, personal achievement motivation, and self-efficacy (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009). Turner, Chandler, and Heffer (2009) concluded, “Parenting characteristics such as supportiveness and warmth continue to play an important role in influencing a student’s academic performance even after entering college” (p. 343). Findings also included that an authoritative parenting style significantly predicted academic performance (Wong, 2008). In addition, the Self-Determination Theory and the construct of intrinsic motivation were related to academic success among college students (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009).

Research on the positive effects of parental involvement covers a variety of variables, including involvement strategies, making sure children attend school, parenting styles, parental warmth, and parent training (DePlantey et al., 2007; Uddin, 2011; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parental involvement strategies can include reading with children (Senechal & Young, 2008), helping with homework, attending and volunteering at the child’s school, and even attending training classes (Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, & Crook, 2008). In addition to parental involvement strategies, parents should establish high expectations for their children to attend college; research has indicated that through educational discussions, children are more likely to attend college (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Parental warmth and parenting styles have positive relationships with the academic achievement of children (Baharudin et al., 2010; Uddin, 2011; Wong, 2008). Adolescents whose parents practice an authoritarian parenting style exhibited higher academics than those who were

more relaxed in their parenting styles (Baharudin et al., 2010; Wong, 2008). An authoritative parenting style is characteristic of parental warmth. Parental warmth has been proven to enhance academic motivation in children (Uddin, 2011), thereby strengthening the construct of motivation in the Self-Determination Theory.

There is a strong relation between parental involvement and a child's academic achievement (Baharudin et al., 2010; Lemay et al., 2010; Martini & Senechal, 2012). Research has also concluded the activities promoting the highest levels of learning for children (Avvisati et al., 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Schlee et al., 2009). Although the research has shown significant relationships between a child's academic achievement and parent involvement, there are factors that influence this involvement.

### **Parental Factors Influencing Student Achievement**

Specific factors have influenced student achievement including gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status (Abel, 2012; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2011; Coles, 2001). Each of these factors influenced student achievement either solely or in combination with other factors. Specifically, factors such as the father's educational attainment, economic status, and children's gender were challenges needed addressing in research (Castillo et al., 2010). Most of the research conducted on these factors has been using the quantitative research method and targeted the mother's role in the academic success of children, with less attention to the single father. The significance of the current qualitative research bears merit in understanding the impact of these factors as the single fathers described their positive experiences.

## **Gender**

Research on gender differences indicated an interesting conclusion. There seemed to be no significant relationship between academic achievement between single mothers and single fathers, nor a significant relationship between children living with the same gender parent (Lee et al., 2007). Lee et al. (2007) also discovered that parent involvement by single fathers did not affect the academic performance of boys; however, when single fathers were involved with their daughter's school activities there was an increase in their academic performance. Unfortunately, there has been little attention given to the dynamics of the daughter's development as it relates to the father (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008).

The dynamics between a mother's influence on the father and the father's level of involvement based on that influence has been investigated (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008). Interestingly, a father models his involvement after the mother, but the mother does not model her involvement after the father (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008). While this research is forthcoming for married couples rearing children, it is not beneficial to single fathers. Thus, research about where a single father might receive his influence for involvement deserves attention.

## **Ethnicity**

America's schools teach diversity to students on a daily basis, partly due to the diversity of ethnicities of the school students. In 2012, 77.9% of Americans were Caucasian, 13.1% were African American, 1.2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 5.1% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 16.9% Hispanic/Latino, and 2.4% were reported as being two or more races (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). The United States is respected for its diversity and the assimilation of the cultures.

Researchers have understood the need to assist educators in the various ethnic

backgrounds and their cultures as they relate to the education of children (Desimone, 1999; Hill & Craft, 2003; Marks, 2006). Cultural orientation is described when a person is associated with the values, and beliefs of a certain cultural group (Dumka, Gonzales, Bonds, & Milsap, 2009). When educators understand the cultural orientations of the parents they interact with, the likelihood of the children succeeding is increased.

According to research conducted with Latinos and Caucasians, results indicated the Latino cultural orientation did value academic success. In fact, Latinos valued academic success more than did their Caucasian counterparts (Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Both groups, Latinos and Caucasians, reported more involvement with academics at home than at school. Mexican parents have been studied to determine certain parenting practices and the academic success of their children (Dumka et al., 2009). Similar to research involving Caucasian parents (Baharudin, et al., 2010), Mexican adolescents whose parents practiced an authoritarian parenting style exhibited higher academic achievement than those children whose parents were more relaxed in their parenting styles (Dumka et al., 2009).

Parents of different ethnic backgrounds face many barriers. Language is one of the many barriers ethnic parents face when they have children in school (Ryan et al., 2010). Studies conducted with Asian immigrant parents indicated a lower level of parental involvement due to language and safety issues between the school and the families than did Hispanic and Caucasian parents (Turney & Kao, 2009). However, Turney and Kao (2009) discovered that “among immigrant parents, time spent in the United States and English ability were positively associated with involvement, but these associations differed by race” (p. 257).

The research focusing on ethnicities and parent involvement has investigated both sets of parents. The current research study focused on single fathers. Coles (2009) completed several



studies on African American single fathers. Coles' (2009) research is a beginning to understanding the cultural orientations of single fathers of different ethnic backgrounds. With a rise in the Hispanic, Asian, and Indian population in America, it is vital that research broadens to include these cultures.

The research on African American single fathers has been shown to be greatly involved in their children's lives in school (Abel, 2012; Coles, 2001). However, some fathers have admitted not knowing what to do with their daughters during the puberty years (Coles, 2009), realizing their daughters needed an adult woman to communicate with about feminine issues (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002); while other fathers claim, "Just be there for them" (Forste et al., 2009, p. 64). Some middle-class single fathers enlist the use of daycares, while single fathers with low socioeconomic status rely on family and relatives to assist in childcare needs (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002). Whether it is adult females helping communicate with daughters, the use of daycares, or relying on relatives to help with childcare, all provide a social network for these single fathers.

Other social networks have been examined for low-income African American single fathers. Roy and Dyson (2010) investigated a community-based program that supported young African American fathers living in low-income areas. This investigation led to the realization that such social networks, while providing much needed advice and support, often may lack in continuing to assist these fathers to find employment (Roy & Dyson, 2010). The concept of social networks has had a positive influence on fathers and their involvement with their children (Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2010). One of the components to SDT is relatedness. These social networks could provide single fathers with a sense of feeling connected to others, a sense of feeling supported by significant others, and a sense that significant others trust individuals to

make good choices. The current research study explored the experiences of relatedness to single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

### **Educational Attainment**

The educational attainment of parents has been shown to influence greatly the involvement parents have in their children's academic lives (Acharya & Joshi, 2009). When research investigated student achievement motivation of students who had highly educated mothers and fathers, student achievement motivation was significantly higher than those students whose mother or father were less educated (Acharya & Joshi, 2009). Acharya and Joshi (2009) concluded, "Educated parents transfer the value of education to their children, affecting the aspiration level and achievement of the child" (p. 77).

Educational attainment of single fathers has varied from less than high school to college graduates. In a study conducted in 2004, single fathers with a 4-year college education obtained more income than single fathers without a high school diploma. African-American single fathers reported lower levels of income and education than Caucasian single fathers (Zhan & Pandley, 2004). Single fathers with strong work experience proved to be advantageous to the economic status of these families.

When comparing a mother's educational level to that of a father's educational level, one Iranian study found the mother's educational level increased the child's academic success in language/literacy (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). In contrast, the father's educational level did not make a difference in the child's academic success in language/literacy (Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). Acknowledging the research on parents' educational attainment and its significance on children's academic achievement established the construct of competence when applied to the Self-Determination Theory for single fathers in the current research study.

## **Socioeconomic Status**

Parents' socioeconomic status is a factor that influences parent involvement. There is a link between low socioeconomic status and lower levels of cognitive abilities in children (Currie, 2005; Marks, 2006; Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994). Furthermore, children living in single-parent homes with low socioeconomic status are prone to lower levels of achievement than children who are living in two-parent homes with the same economic status (Sarsour et al., 2010).

Low socioeconomic status was the lowest among families with single mothers (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). Single father homes were financially a bit better; however, two-parent homes were stronger (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). In determining the educational advantage of children, research indicated, "The academic achievement of children varied across social background categories, with children from stable middle-class backgrounds having the highest levels of academic achievement and those from stable working-class families having the lowest" (Roska & Potter, 2011, p. 314). The current research study included single fathers of different socioeconomic status. The experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children and fathers with different socioeconomic status will provide useful information to other single fathers.

## **Marital Status**

Another factor greatly influencing parent involvement in the academic success of children is marital status (Coles, 2009; Junttilla, Vauras, & Laakkonen, 2007). Over the past three decades, the number of single parent families has increased. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013b) reported that in 2011, the United States had a divorce rate of 3.6 per 1000 total population. In response to this, the role of single parents in the education of their

children has been researched to understand how single parents can influence their children's academic achievement (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2007; Lewis & Lamb, 2003).

The literature review on parental involvement provided an overview of specific studies emphasizing strategies and other factors that have a significant impact on children's academic achievement. Not evident are strategies and involvement activities that single fathers participate in, which make a difference in the academic achievement of their children. The current research study investigated with interview questions through case study research some of the strategies and involvement activities used by single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

### **Research on Fathers' Involvement**

In 2010, President Obama announced his Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013). The initiative was a call to action for fathers across America to be an active participant in their children's lives (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013). While President Obama grew up without a father, he fully recognized the need for fathers in the lives of their children (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2013). Lamb (1986) developed a three-part model associated with father involvement. The three-part model included engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Lamb, 1986). Engagement refers to the direct interaction of fathers. Accessibility is the father being physically or psychologically available to their child. Responsibility is the father providing care for the child (Lamb, 1986). Engagement, accessibility, and responsibility are analogous to the constructs of SDT: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These constructs are crucial to the current research study when describing the positive experiences of single fathers rearing their academically successful children. These constructs are critical when describing the relationships between fathers and their children.

## **Father/Daughter Relationships**

Researchers have noted an underwhelming amount of research on the relationships between fathers and daughters as compared to mothers and daughters (Nielson, 2001; Pleck & Hofferth, 2008). A recent study investigated the perceived psychological well-being of daughters in young adulthood and found there was a “statistically significant relationship between engagement and accessibility with daughters’ self-esteem and life satisfaction” (Allgood, Beckert, & Peterson, 2012, p. 96). The females in this study had lived with their fathers during their adolescent years and reflected on the time spent with their fathers by rating certain statements on a five-point Likert scale. The study satisfied the researchers’ viewpoint that more studies needed to include the child’s perspective on the father’s involvement within the constructs of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Beckert, Strom, & Strom, 2006).

Another quantitative study with a similar viewpoint indicated the need to research the differences, if any, in the perception of communication between fathers and daughters (Dunleavy, Wanzer, Krezmien, & Ruppel, 2011). When the daughters reported similar communication skills as that of their fathers, the study indicated a strong satisfaction in the father/daughter relationship (Dunleavy et al., 2011). Additionally, a review of relationship satisfaction and family type indicated, “daughters from consensual family types reported higher relationship satisfaction than both pluralistic and laissez-faire types” (Dunleavy et al., 2011, p. 592). These father/daughter relationship satisfaction studies strengthen this qualitative research study. While quantitative research produced results as significant based on numbered data, the current qualitative research study produced results through rich, informative data directly from the fathers’ and daughters’ experiences.

## **Father/Son Relationships**

Research on parental involvement revealed benefits to both the parent and the child (Rogers et al., 2009). Specifically, research on fathers' interactions with their toddler sons revealed that words of encouragement, open-ended questioning, and modeling were important strategies contributing to the father/son interactions (Appl, Brown, & Stone, 2008). Other strategies researched about father involvement have included physical play with sons as being more prevalent than with girls (Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2011).

The current qualitative study explored, through open-ended questions, the strategies that single fathers used to rear academically successful sons and daughters. These descriptions provided useful information about the positive experiences of these single fathers and their children who have been academically successful. An analysis of differences between interactions of fathers and sons versus fathers and daughters provided support to related studies noting similar differences in those relationships (Leavell et al., 2011; Updegraff, Delgado, & Wheeler, 2009).

## **Divorced Fathers**

While a review of the literature on parent involvement and the academic achievement of children examined mostly two-parent married families, parent involvement among fathers must be researched. Following the trends in academic journals, further research led to articles investigating fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. The research investigated divorced fathers (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008), widowed fathers (Gottlieb & Wachala, 2007; Yopp & Rosenstein, 2013) and young single fathers (Levant & Doyle, 1983; Lipscomb, 2011; Risman, 1986). According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2011), mothers made up the majority of custodial parents (82.2%), and only one in six (17.8%) fathers was a custodial parent in 2009.

Divorced, non-custodial fathers reportedly had a limited amount of involvement with their children for many reasons. Some of those reasons included substance abuse, lack of child support, incarceration, or irresponsibility (Walker, Reid, & Logan, 2010).

Federal law changes such as Part D of the Social Security Act of 1975 (PL 93-647) had “four main purposes: to locate absent parents, to establish paternity, to obtain a support order, and then to collect that order” (Sciamanna, 2011, p. 82). Subsequently, in 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant instituted new mandates to enforce payments of child support (Sciamanna, 2011). The Bush Administration enhanced the TANF by allotting \$50 million annually for the promotion of programs on fatherhood (Schiamanna, 2011). In 2012, the Obama Administration proposed to increase that allotment to \$570 million over ten years (Schiamanna, 2011). The Obama Administration believed that when fathers spend time building relationships with their children, they would more likely meet financial obligations (USDHHS, 2011).

Societal views of single fatherhood have evolved over time. These views have progressed in a positive direction. Research has shown children of single fathers perceive a stronger sense of mental well-being, academic achievement, and self-esteem (Sultan & Kanwal, 2013). This may be due to the higher income levels that single fathers obtain as compared to single mothers (Sultan & Kanwal, 2013). Nevertheless, research must expound on the positive aspects of single fathers.

### **Widowed Fathers**

Single father research has been limited for the widowed father. While husbands work to live through the death of their spouse, some husbands must also help their children cope with the loss of their mothers. Many of these widowed fathers could use the assistance of support groups.

Some intervention groups have demonstrated this assistance for widowers affected by the death of a wife due to cancer (Gottlieb & Wachala, 2007).

The three most common cancers among women are breast cancer, lung cancer, and colorectal cancer (CDC, 2013a). At a rate of 123.1 per 100,000 women, breast cancer was the top cancer for all women in the United States (CDC, 2013); however, the CDC stated that in 2013, the leading cause of cancer death among women in the United States is lung cancer, at a rate of 38.6 per 100,000 women. Many of these women could be mothers leaving behind children and husbands. Based on these statistics, the possibility exists that the population of widowed fathers, due to cancer, is overlooked.

Yopp and Rosenstein (2013) investigated a support group for fathers whose partners died from cancer. The participants in the research study indicated a strong sense of commonalities among members of the group and expressed difficulties in coping with being a single parent and the challenges that followed the death of their wives (Yopp & Rosenstein, 2013). Yopp and Rosenstein (2013) discovered some common themes such as, “a lack of preparedness to be single parents, coping with their grief and that of their children, and adjustment to the demands of single parenthood” (p. 172).

Research on widowed fathers has not been a common trend among academic journals and when researched, has often been limited to widowed mothers (Boerner & Silverman, 2001). Although, widowed fathers are a small minority, they do exist. If more research was conducted, these widowed fathers could be assisted in coping with the loss of their wives while rearing children.



## **Young Single Fathers**

Research has also focused on young fathers (Levant & Doyle, 1983; Lipscomb, 2011). Young fathers who do not develop strong relationships with their unborn or newborn children will show a decrease in involvement with those children over time. Therefore, many programs have been developed to help young fathers become involved and stay involved in their children's lives (Levant & Doyle, 1983; Lipscomb, 2011; Raikes, Summers, & Roggman, 2005; Rienks, Wadsworth, Markman, Einhorn, & Etter, 2011).

Young single fathers are at risk of not understanding the importance of being involved with their children because they are children themselves. Lemay et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study on young fathers at or below 25 years of age. These fathers expressed concern for being available for their child, supporting the child financially and emotionally, and teaching their child while assuming responsibility for the child (Lemay et al., 2010). Lemay et al. (2010) recognized that much research has focused on young mothers and should continue; however, "the desire and importance that young fathers and young expectant fathers in this study expressed pertaining to being good fathers for their children supports a move toward care that is parent/child centered" (p. 229). While the current research study focused on the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children, a detailed description of these experiences will render assistance to young single fathers who are beginning the journey of parenthood.

Most importantly, what the literature has not been able to do is relate these experiences in a positive way in order to assist other single fathers rearing school-aged children. The fact that single fathers are becoming more prominent has indicated a need for these single fathers' experiences to be explored as it relates to their children's academic achievement (Barajas, 2011;

Goldberg et al., 2009; Orthner et al., 1976; Risman, 1986). One way to achieve the goal of assisting single fathers is to provide programs that promote fatherhood.

### **Programs for Fathers**

In early 2000, fathers began to take more initiative in the education of their children. Fathers began to realize that taking on a more active role in their children's lives influenced their children's development and their own self-esteem (Ashbourne et al., 2011; Lemay et al., 2010). The newfound acknowledgement that fathers' involvement benefits both the father and the child does not come without challenges. The importance of providing single fathers with the tools to assist them in rearing academically successful children could be the difference between positive experiences and negative experiences.

The installment of the Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative launched a plethora of programs geared to fathers of America. Investments in fatherhood programs and interventions are critical in producing fathers who affect their children's lives in a positive way (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Allen, Bowie, Mbawa, & Matthews, 2007). The U.S. has dedicated themselves to the education, encouragement, and support of all fathers. A non-profit website began called, *Fatherhood.gov*. The website is an official U.S. Government web site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is supported by the White House (2012) to promote "responsible fatherhood" (USDHHS, 2013). On June 19, 2009, President Obama addressed the nation in a personal way about fatherhood when he asserted that an absence of a father is critical to a child's life, and the abandonment of a father's responsibility cannot be replaced by government interventions. He stated, however, the government would "do everything possible to provide good jobs, good schools, and safe streets for our kids" (The White House, 2012). President Obama's efforts have set in motion America's need to acknowledge the

father as an integral part of their children's lives. The current research study complemented these efforts by focusing on the gap in the literature and the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

### **Title Search**

Parental involvement research has been conducted for several years (Baharudin et al., 2010; Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Lemay et al., 2010; Martini & Senechal, 2012); however, studies have not been qualitative research describing the positive experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children. Articles between the years 2006-2013 narrow the scope of single fathers and their involvement in the academic lives of their children. Table 2.1 highlights the outcomes from peer-reviewed library database searches between the years 2006-2013.

Table 2.1

*Title Search*

Keyword or Phrase	EBSCOhost (Academic Search Complete)	ProQuest	ERIC
Single fathers and student academic achievement	2	48	6
Single fathers and academic involvement	2	411	0
Single fathers and school involvement	2	74	7
Single fathers' experiences with school-age children	0	2	0
Divorced fathers with sole custody	1	3	0
Widowed fathers and school-age children	0	0	0
Single fathers and student success	0	87	0
Academic achievement of students of divorce	21	9	90
Minority student achievement and father involvement	0	21	0
Student academic achievement and father involvement	12	33	23

The Title Search (see Table 2.1) indicated that few studies have been conducted on widowed fathers with school-age children, divorced fathers with custody, and single fathers' experiences with school-age children. Narrowing the searches for single fathers who are widowed and divorced justified the current research study and the purposeful sampling of participants. Furthermore, the table indicated an underwhelming number of qualitative case

studies describing the experiences of single fathers, thereby, providing more evidence of a gap in the literature.

### **Summary**

The literature on the history of the father's role in the family has been summarized indicating the transition that many fathers have taken from an inactive role in their child's life to an active role (Barajas, 2011; Goldberg et al., 2009; Orthner et al., 1976; Risman, 1986). This transition is due in part by the programs and initiatives that schools and legislation have prompted to promote the father's involvement. Available literature on this subject has illustrated that parental involvement is crucial to the academic success of children (Baharudin et al., 2010; Lemay et al., 2010; Martini & Senechal, 2012). The research demonstrated involvement from early childhood to college-age. In addition, research has given attention to differing parenting styles and the impact it has on student achievement (Baharudin, et al., 2010; Uddin, 2011).

Father involvement increased as the number of divorced couples with children increased (Barajas, 2011; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2007; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Sarsour et al., 2010). Fathers found themselves to be on their own to rear their children and continued to be involved whether they were living with the child or not. Becoming a single father was not without its challenges. Socioeconomic status, gender of children, marital status, and educational attainment proved to be some of the barriers that single fathers faced. Race of these single fathers did not change these challenges. In fact, much research demonstrated that single fathers of any race face the same challenges.

With all the literature on the single father's involvement in their child's school-based life, there has been little attention given in qualitative research exploring the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. A bigger gap in the literature

involved widowed fathers who have reared academically successful children. More specifically, based on the literature, there is a need to determine the strategies and involvement activities that single fathers participate in which make a difference in the academic achievement of their children.

The theoretical framework for the current research study was grounded in Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The Self-Determination Theory, from the standpoint of children, is based on teachers in the educational setting, parenting styles, and parent involvement (Farkas & Grolnick; 2010; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Hoang, 2007; Joussemetet al., 2008; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Wong, 2008); however, there is a gap in the literature relating SDT to single fathers. The Self-Determination Theory is critical to the current research because it provided the framework for describing the motivating factors that single fathers experienced as they reared academically successful children.

The current research investigation used a qualitative collective case study research method, which Chapter Three describes. Interview questions, observations, and documentation about the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children provided investigation in the current research. The current research study focused on the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The current research study is significant in that it explored these positive experiences, paternal involvement, and self-determination of single fathers who have reared academically successful children with the anticipation of assisting other single fathers who are just beginning parenthood as single fathers.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The current qualitative collective case study explored the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The theoretical lens used for this study was on the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Chapter Three includes the research design, research questions, participants, site, procedures for the study, a personal biography of the researcher, and a description of the data collection and data analysis conducted for this study. Additionally, Chapter 3 explores trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children?

RQ2: What academic activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success?

RQ3: How does the single father's perception of his competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children?

RQ4: What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?

### **Research Method and Design**

A qualitative study explores the positive experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. Qualitative research focuses on “empowering individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). The current research utilized a qualitative collective case study design. Case study analysis uses a bounded

system and collective case studies present themselves when two or more cases are researched for understanding and meaning and not solely for the methods being used (Stake, 1995). Case studies focus on answering “how” questions to the phenomenon studied and collective case studies provide an in-depth theoretical view within the phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Therefore, a collective case study approach with a within-case and cross-case analysis seemed applicable to understand five cases within the bounded system of single fathers and their children. Multiple forms of data collection were used which included interviews, observations, timelines, letters, and physical artifacts. Replication of the procedures for each case provided credibility (Yin, 2003).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling is a research strategy used to determine the participants and the sites used in the study (Creswell, 2007). Maximum variation “determines in advance the criteria that differentiate the sites or participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Identification of single fathers who have reared academically successful children was the goal of the current study. By using maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), five single fathers were of diverse races and ethnicities, as well as socioeconomic status and age. Table 3.1 highlights the participants, ages at the time of separation or divorce, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.



Table 3.1

*Table of Single Fathers*

Fathers	Age at time of Divorce	Age at time of Interview	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Status	Geographic Location
Bill	32	53	Caucasian	Middle Income	Upper East Tennessee
Henry	34	47	African American	Middle Income	Upper East Tennessee
Sam	47	55	Caucasian	Middle Income	Western North Carolina
Walt	34	47	Caucasian	Middle Income	Western North Carolina
Hank	40	53	Caucasian	High Income	Western North Carolina

Based on the literature and suggestions for future research, a minimum of one African American of middle income participated in this study (Barajas, 2011). Single fathers included in the current study reared their children for a minimum of half of the child's life. By acquiring these participants, the fathers' years of experience provided richer data. Gender of the children varied, as did the number of children the single father reared. Intensity sampling is a strategy used to identify "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). Intensity sampling identified the children of single fathers who exhibited academic success, which for the purpose of the current study were those children who are high school or college graduates, entering college, or attending college.

Sampling procedures included snowball or chain sampling as a way to identify participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By describing the purpose of the current study and the sampling criteria to friends and colleagues, identification of single fathers with academically successful children took place. Using phone, email, or letter (see Appendix B) to contact single fathers and their children, participation in the current research study began.

Sample sizes in qualitative research can vary. The number of cases in a case study should be determined based on the in-depth analysis the researcher is trying to achieve (Yin, 2003). Data from the five cases provided a saturation of evidence for an exploration in the positive experiences for the current collective case study. The smaller number of cases allowed for richer analysis of the various perspectives of single fathers and their academically successful children.

### **Geographic Location**

The current collective case study took place in multiple settings within a 100-mile radius of the Upper East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. According to the U. S. Census 2010, these regions are low to middle income with populations of 18,000 to 62,000 people. These populations included low to high socioeconomic areas and diverse ethnic backgrounds. The interview session was important in that it provided the opportunity to document informal observations with the interactions of the single father and the children.

The interview sessions took place at neutral settings. Interviews with the single fathers and interviews with the children took place in neutral settings. The participants were accommodated to make them feel comfortable in the setting in order for them to feel at ease in discussing their experiences. The rationale for this setting selection was to show the different perspectives on the cases studied and to develop a rapport with the participants. Flexibility in the setting was important in order to obtain this rapport (Yin, 2003).

### **Procedures**

Possible participants were contacted by phone call for participation in the study using purposeful maximal sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful maximal sampling helped to ensure that each bounded system followed the sampling criteria set for the current research.

Single fathers were of diverse races and ethnicities, as well as socioeconomic status and age. Single fathers included in the study reared their children for a minimum of half of the child's life. Academic success was defined generally as the completion of high school or college, entering college, or attending college. Each bounded system was given a consent form (see Appendix C), requesting their participation in the current research study.

Current literature influenced the interview and the research questions. Single fathers participated in interviews first. Interview questions (see Appendix D) consisted of a minimum of five open-ended questions. The session was audio-recorded, and transcribed. Member checking included the participants' review of the transcripts (given to them via email or in person). At the conclusion, fathers were given a prompt (see Appendix E) and asked to write a letter to other single fathers suggesting or advising them of how they could be involved in the academic success of their children. Self-addressed stamped envelopes provided the single fathers a way to mail the letter at no cost to them.

With the second set of interviews, children of the single fathers answered interview questions. These interview questions (see Appendix F) were a minimum of five open-ended questions. The session was audio-recorded, and transcribed. Member checking included the participants' review of the transcripts (given to them via email or in person). Upon the completion of this interview, the children were given a prompt (see Appendix G), and asked to write a letter to other single fathers explaining how their father's involvement influenced their academic lives. Self-addressed stamped envelopes provided the children a way to mail the letter at no cost to them.

The final interview session was with the single fathers and their children. This interview session included a minimum of five open-ended questions (see Appendix H). After this initial

interview, fathers and children were asked to create a timeline of the children's academic life while with their single father (see Appendix I). Informal observations documented gestures, discussions, and mannerisms of the family (see Appendix J). Single fathers and their children documented physical artifacts they wanted to share using a disposable camera. The session was audio-recorded, and transcribed. Member checking included the participants' review of the transcripts (given to them via email or in person).

### **Researcher's Role**

Qualitative research allows the researcher to interpret the participants' experiences. For this reason, open-ended interview questions prompted a thorough analysis of the information (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Bracketing out personal experiences and explaining personal biases as they arose was practiced using reflective notes (see Appendix K) throughout the study (Merriam, 1988). As a human instrument, the researcher's role in this study was to seek out and listen to single fathers who have reared academically successful children in order to describe their experiences in a positive way. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "A human instrument is responsive, adaptable, and holistic;" furthermore, "a person, that is, a human-as-instrument is the only instrument which is flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience" (p. 193).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for qualitative case studies can involve multiple sources, which include interviews, documents, archival records, formal or informal observations, physical artifacts, and participant observations (Yin, 2003). Four of these sources were collected and analyzed. For the current research study, using informal observations, interviews, documentation, and physical

artifacts provided the richest data. Table 3.2 depicts how the interview questions related to the research questions for this study.

Table 3.2

*Interview and Research Questions*

Questions	Single Fathers	Children	Single Fathers and Children
RQ1: What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children?	Describe any academic activities you were involved in that you feel benefited your child.  Describe any differences that you may have experienced rearing your son and daughter.	Describe how your father played a role in your academic success.  In what ways was your father involved in your life?	Describe what you feel made the difference in being successful with academics.
RQ2: What academic activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success?	Describe any academic activities you were involved in that you feel benefited your child.  Describe specific academic strategies you used.	Describe specific academic strategies you remember your father using.  Describe any academic activities that your father was involved in that you feel benefited you.	Describe a typical school day at your house?
RQ3: How does the single father's perception of his competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children?	How were you able to manage your time during the school years of your child?		
RQ4: What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?	How were you able to manage your time during the school years of your child?		How would you describe your relationship?

## **Interviews**

The interview questions were open-ended and framed the research questions (Creswell, 2007). The literature review developed the interview and research questions for the current research study. Additionally, the interview questions received peer review prior to the current research study for clarity. With participants' consent, three interview sessions included: (a) single fathers, (b) children, and (c) single fathers and their children. Each interview was audio-recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed by a transcriptionist. Member checking included the participants' review of the transcripts (given to them via email or in person).

**Single fathers.** The first set of interviews was with the single fathers. These interview questions (see Appendix D) were a minimum of five open-ended questions. Single fathers wrote a letter to other single fathers using a prompt (see Appendix E) giving advice to other single fathers. These letters were completed and sent via mail or email after the interview date. Self-addressed stamped envelopes provided the single fathers a way to mail the items at no cost to them. With a disposable camera, the single fathers took pictures of physical artifacts/memorabilia they felt were significant. Each set of interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist; and reflected accuracy and credibility through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Children.** The second set of interviews was with the children. An audio- recording of a minimum of five open-ended questions (see Appendix F) and their answers provided rich data for this research. At the conclusion of this interview, children wrote a letter to other single fathers using a prompt (see Appendix G). The letter was completed, and mailed to me within two weeks of the interview date. Self-addressed stamped envelopes provided the children a way

to mail the letter at no cost to them. Each set of interviews was transcribed by a transcriptionist; and reflected accuracy and credibility through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Single fathers and the children.** The final set of interviews was with each bounded system, the single father and his child(ren). An audio- recording of a minimum of five open-ended questions (see Appendix H) and their answers provided rich data for this research. This group interview session provided a way to have a focus group in order to maintain familiarity, comfortableness, and rapport with all participants. Henderson (2009) explained that a focus group is primarily a qualitative research procedure involving the participants together in order to solicit their opinions or beliefs about the concept investigated for research. With a focus group method, participants should remember memories about their related experiences. In order to answer the research questions for the current study, it was important the best information was available. Informally observing the interactions of the single fathers and their children during this focus group interview accomplished this task. During this interview session, the single fathers and the children used a template (see Appendix I) to record academic milestones during their time together. An observation protocol (see Appendix J) informally observed the interactions between the single fathers and the children. At the end of this interview, the single fathers shared any physical artifacts/memorabilia.

## **Letters**

One form of documentation for case studies is letters (Yin, 2003). In the current research study, single fathers wrote a letter, using a prompt (see Appendix E), to other single fathers relating some advice or suggestions about involvement in the academic success of their children. The children of single fathers wrote letters, using a prompt (see Appendix G); to other single fathers explaining how their father's involvement influenced their academic lives. The letters



were collected and analyzed. The letters provided participants another way to voice their experiences (Creswell, 2007).

### **Timelines**

Another form of document analysis used in the current research study was a timeline provided by the participants. The timeline was a chronological history of the children's academic and developmental milestones. The single fathers and their children used a template for this timeline (see Appendix I).

### **Observations**

Informal observations, using a protocol (see Appendix J), were conducted and field notes taken during the scheduled interview sessions that included the fathers and the children together. During these informal observations, the researcher was a non-participant, while the fathers and their children interacted and completed the timeline together. An observation protocol included both "descriptive and reflective notes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 134) about the interactions between the fathers and their children.

### **Physical Artifacts**

The single father documented physical artifacts with a disposable camera. These artifacts included pictures, awards, certificates, and other memorabilia the fathers and their children wanted to share highlighting the father's involvement with the child's academics (Yin, 2003). Physical artifacts provided rich information for data collection. These items were not required.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for case studies included categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, patterns, word tables, naturalistic generalizations, theoretical propositions, and detailed descriptions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). A detailed description of the single fathers' stories began

the analysis (Yin, 2003). The description developed from the audio-recorded and transcribed interviews in which the single fathers shared their personal history. Writing these interviews in a chronological manner provided organization among the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A transcriptionist transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. The transcriptionist was a professional and signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix L).

A within-case analysis provided information on the individual participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A within-case analysis conducted from the interviews, observations, letters, and timelines provided rich data from each case based on descriptions and emerging themes (Merriam, 1988). Analysis consisted of looking at each piece of data collected and writing down similar statements and phrases (Stake, 1995). These statements were transferred to a worksheet identifying the interview question and the research question it answered (see Appendix M).

Cross-case analysis between the different bounded systems provided rich data. Following within-case analysis, a cross-case analysis originated where interpretations and assertions on all cases provided new interpretations (Stake, 1995). Interpretations and assertions transferred into worksheets to develop themes that may have been similar throughout the data collected (see Appendix N). A cross-case analysis allowed the emergence of commonalities among the bounded systems (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Word tables provided a coding of significant phrases that were common between groups (see Appendix O). The tables listed common themes, specific activities, and other significant similarities between each bounded system (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data analysis on the documentation collected from the current research consisted of the letters written by single fathers and their children to other single fathers. Within-case and cross-case analysis utilizing tables provided common themes, phrases, specific activities, and

significant statements (see Appendices M and N). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested making a matrix of categories and placing the common elements in such categories.

Additionally, within-case analysis conducted from the informal observations of the single fathers and their children working on their timelines provided descriptive data. These observations included descriptive and reflective notes using a template and were analyzed and coded for similarities using cross-case analysis (see Appendix J). Informal observation notes helped to organize the tabulation of the frequency of similar gestures, mannerisms, and interactions between each bounded system (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Direct interpretation of the timelines and documented artifacts described in detail each bounded system. Timelines and artifacts provided rich detailed descriptions of academic milestones for each bounded system. Timelines and artifacts offered commonalities among the bounded systems. Theoretical propositions based on the SDT were analyzed through each of the types of data collected, and triangulation was utilized. Identification on how each research question supplied answers is revealed in the findings of the research and lessons learned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as well as the common themes and significant statements that were found throughout (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Trustworthiness**

The components of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of interviews, observations, and letters guided the trustworthiness of the current research. Triangulation of data strengthened the trustworthiness of the current research and established credibility and reliability. Triangulation provided credibility and reliability to the common themes that emerged from the analysis of all the data collected for the current research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and participants were able to check for accuracy. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the audio-recordings and signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix L). Member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Member checking provided by participants after the analyses were completed gave credibility to the current study. Each participant had the opportunity to "play a major role" in the interpretations that were made (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Thick descriptive data (Merriam, 1988) and participants' quotes communicated the "findings to be transferable between the researcher and those being studied" (Creswell, 2007, p. 204). The detailed and descriptive procedures outlined in this research study will allow other researchers to transfer my research procedures to their studies. An audit trail (see Appendix P) increased dependability and confirmability by providing an outline of the research, data collection, and data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The audit trail was vital to the current research process and chronicled each procedure for data collection, including interviews, observations, documentation, and physical artifacts, as well as each procedure for data analysis, including tables, coding, and worksheets. An external audit conducted by peers determined if the conclusions and findings supported the data collected for the current research after a discussion of the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations maintained anonymity for names and locations by using pseudonyms. The researcher maintained confidentiality and security of data for participants through the securing of files, notes, and recordings in a locked file cabinet at a separate location. Only the researcher could access the cabinet. Computers used were password protected. The

professional transcriptionist used to transcribe the audio-recordings signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix L). The researcher informed the participants of the utilization of a professional transcriptionist. All data will be kept for three years and then documents will be shredded and all other data destroyed.

The well-being of participants was considered throughout the current study as experiences were shared between fathers and children. Relationships between the single fathers and their children focused on the positive aspects of the single fathers' involvement in the academics of the children. Every effort was made during the interviews to focus on what was pertinent to the current research. Research questions for the current study influenced the interviews questions. As interviews were analyzed, if something sensitive emerged that was unexpected, every effort was made to seek advice from IRB and other professionals in the field as to how to proceed.

### **Summary**

The current qualitative collective case study explored the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children. A theoretical lens, using the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), provided empirical observations. By using purposeful sampling, the identification of single fathers who have reared academically successful children was the goal of this study. Single fathers were of diverse races and ethnicities, as well as socioeconomic status and age. Procedures for the study included interviews, letters, timelines, observations, and physical artifacts. A detailed description of the single fathers' stories began the analysis (Yin, 2003). A within-case analysis of the single fathers, the children, and the family interviews provided commonalities and then a cross-case analysis followed from each bounded system. Triangulation provided the credibility and dependability to the common themes that emerged

from the analysis of all the data collected for the current research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher addressed ethical considerations by maintaining anonymity for names and locations by using pseudonyms.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this current qualitative collective case study was to explore how single fathers reared academically successful children. This research study provided new single fathers a description of the experiences of other single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The theoretical contribution of the current qualitative study established how the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) motivated single fathers' experiences. A purposeful sampling of participants came from Upper East Tennessee and Western North Carolina regions of the United States. Chapter 4 provides a description of the data collected and the analyses procedures used to determine the findings as it relates to the current research and interview questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The current research utilized a qualitative collective case study design. A collective case study approach using a within-case and cross-case analysis assisted in understanding five cases within the bounded system of single fathers and their children. Multiple forms of data collected included interviews, observations, timelines, letters, and physical artifacts. The bounded systems identified for this research consisted of five single fathers and their children. Using maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the single fathers consisted of four Caucasians and one African American, whose ages ranged from 32-47 years old at the time they became single fathers, and whose socioeconomic status ranged from middle to high income at the time they became single fathers. While much research has been investigated with low-income single fathers (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; Coles, 2001; Roska & Potter, 2011), it was important to consider single fathers who ranged from middle to high income. According to a gap in the literature, an African American single father of middle income provided for a stronger study.

Table 4.1 depicts the children participants, their gender, their ages at the time of their parents' divorce, and their academic success.



Table 4.1

*Table of Criteria of Child Participants*

Child Participants	Gender of Child	Age of Child at time of divorce	Age of Child at time of Interview	Academic Success
Bill's 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Female	4	25	College graduate
Bill's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Female	2	22	College graduate
Henry's 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Male	10	27	High school graduate, attended college
Henry's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Male	9	26	Attending college
Henry's 3 <sup>rd</sup> Child	Male	8	25	High school graduate, attended college
Henry's 4 <sup>th</sup> Child	Female	4	21	Attending college
Sam's Child	Female	11	21	High school graduate
Walt's 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Female	9	22	Attending college
Walt's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Female	5	19	High school graduate
Hank's 1 <sup>st</sup> Child	Female	8	20	Attending college
Hank's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Child	Male	7	18	High school graduate

The children consisted of both sons and daughters of single fathers of divorce. Based on the review of literature, inclusion of both sons and daughters was needed in this study. Lee et al. (2007) found a difference in academic performance of sons versus daughters when single fathers were involved in school activities. According to the literature review, relationship studies between fathers/sons and fathers/daughters were different (Appl et al., 2008; Dunleavy et al., 2011).

## **Description of Participants**

### **Bill**

Bill is a Caucasian single father of two girls. Bill became a single father when his wife had an affair. “We were not even divorced and she moved a man in with her and she had the girls...the judge turned them (the girls) over to me and then she signed away her parental rights.” Bill was 32 years old at the time and his girls were two and four years old. Bill worked third shift at the time of the divorce. He explained that he would take the girls to his Mom’s house to spend the night when he left for work. Bill would then pick the girls up in the mornings and take them to school. After dropping the girls off at school, Bill would sleep for a few hours in order to be with them at the end of the school day. He emphasized that although a second shift position was available to him, he knew that it would not be the ideal situation for rearing his girls. Bill’s two daughters adore and respect him. They described him as a “selfless man...hard working...very dependable, caring, and always put his girls first.” Both girls graduated high school and college. The oldest daughter is an RN at the hospital and the youngest is a dental assistant. As a single father, Bill opted not to date when the girls were young. Smiling, he recalled how the youngest daughter would check out women in the mall to see if they wore a ring. If they did not have one on, she would say, “Dad, she don’t have a ring on!”

### **Henry**

Henry is an African American single father of four. He explained that before his ex-wife decided to leave, the family was having some “financial stress”. “My ex-wife decided to take out on her own (approximately 160 miles away) even though there was financial responsibility there for me, her, and the children.” The children were four, eight, nine, and ten years old when his ex-wife left. His children described Henry as “just an all-around good guy...a provider, a

model citizen...intelligent...nice and sweet.” Traditions in the home changed after the mom left, but Henry’s children could still recall some of the memories of holidays with their single father. The oldest son recalled, “We did things that normal people do, we put up a tree after Thanksgiving. At Thanksgiving we had dinner and stuff like that.” The daughter (and youngest sibling) remembered getting together to have Christmas and “he (Dad) would cook and we would bake cookies and stuff. On Christmas morning he would make breakfast for us all and then we would open presents and then we would have dinner.” Those memories were reflected in Henry’s words, “You always give them positive things.”

### **Sam**

Sam is a Caucasian father who had two jobs while rearing his daughter. He was a law enforcement officer and owned a printing business. While he was doing police work, his wife would run the printing business. “She met someone who came in to have printing done... they had a spark for each other...we eventually divorced.” Sam was classified as middle income and had one daughter (who was eleven at the time). Sam explained that his ex-wife did not fight him on custody and “opted to take the money...and walk away from us.” Sam’s daughter described the divorce as an “ugly situation”. She went on to say, “I just didn’t understand it at first. I mean why my parents? I didn’t think it would ever happen to me. It broke my heart. My mom actually told my dad she wouldn’t want to fight for me. She didn’t want me.”

His daughter (and namesake) described her dad as “awesome, my hero, my go-to person, my best friend.” Both agree they are supportive of each other. In the individual interviews and in the family interview, they recalled a poignant memory that taught a life lesson about lying.

Sam’s daughter: “I had to write an essay about lying one time. What did I lie about?”

Sam: “I think it was the time that you slipped off on your bicycle.”

Sam's daughter: "That was awful."

Sam: "It was. Do you remember what did you have to do? Do you remember what you had to do from school?"

Sam's daughter: "I had to ride home on the school bus to the police department. That was awful (Sam began to laugh). That's not funny. I was so embarrassed because this was high school."

Sam: "It taught you a lesson though, didn't it? She talked to the bus driver and she said let me off down the street and I'll walk up to the police department. So I knew the bus driver and I said don't you let her get off anywhere but in front of the police department. So she had to come for a week and spend time with me for a week. The time she was in there I said you need to do me one paper. I said you're not going to do in like forty-four point text either."

Sam's daughter: "Oh, no, it had to be like a one inch margin, twelve point font."

Sam: "I said, 'You're not shafting me on this. She typed up a nice little letter. The results of lying. It was really neat.'"

Sam's daughter: "I did it right."

## **Walt**

Walt is a Caucasian single father of two beautiful girls. He described the days prior to his divorce as, "going somewhat pretty well". He was battling clinical depression and did not realize what it actually was as he ministered to a congregation in the town in which they lived. He was very involved with church and dealt with the physical issues he was battling pretty well. He explained that his wife was active in church for a while until "that became old and tiresome" for her. She gave him an ultimatum. She said, "'You're going to have to sorta choose between

me and God.' And I thought, 'Well this is easy, I'm choosing God.' She said, 'Well, I'm leaving.'" The girls were five and nine at that time. The girls have lived with Walt since the divorce. "My whole focus was them and their well-being."

The girls described their dad as "quiet, laid back, very simple, and caring. He's a family person, a historian, and very strong in his Christian faith." The oldest daughter remembers, "After the divorce was final, she (mom) remarried about a year later and he (dad) has stayed single simply because that was best for me and my sister at that time". They remember trips to the beach, "It was funny cause it seemed like every year we would convince dad to get on one ride and after that one ride, he was done. So I guess that's a funny memory, a good one." They also recalled one of those times, "We went to the pavilion, we went to a buffet pizza place, and I (Walt) probably ate ten pieces of pizza. And the very first ride I got on was one of these that just go in a circle. I turned green, literally I turned green."

## **Hank**

Hank is a Caucasian single father of a daughter and a son. He described the time before his divorce,

I was never as happy as I was in the birth of my first child. She (his ex-wife) was an absolute wonderful mother until they got like in kindergarten. And I can't blame it all on her... we both started doing some things we shouldn't have been doing. Going out and partying and stuff and my mom watching the kids when they were real young. But I realized we need to stop this. I stopped, but their mother never could, so that's ultimately what caused us to separate.

Hank was a defense lawyer then and continues to practice law today. His children were seven and eight when he and his wife separated. Although he and his wife shared custody of the children, the children ultimately moved in with him full time due to the mother's life choices.

Hank's daughter described her dad as "very independent, successful, and a good all-around man." She stated that her dad, "played both roles easily." "I always go to him for advice cause he always has the best advice." Hank's son described him as, "A good person, always does the right thing, knows right from wrong, and hard working. He's always provided everything I need no matter what it was."

Father and son recalled, "A little shoving match with a friend at school in sixth grade. He's like one of my best friends now." Hank added, "But you know there were consequences for that. I mean his (the son) big thing growing up was to have his hair longer, so when he got in trouble, guess what? He got a buzz like mine. I think there was three times he ended up getting a buzz, right?"

### **Research and Interview Questions**

The interview questions (see Appendices D, F, and H) attempted to answer four research questions guiding this study. Some interview questions established rapport and put the participants at ease. Specific interview questions supported one or more of the research questions. Open-ended questions provided thick descriptive data (Merriam, 1988) and participants' quotes communicated their personal stories. Writing down similar statements and phrases allowed an analysis of the interview questions to occur. Emerging themes were noted and categorized according to the type of data collected and the participants who provided that data (see Appendices M and N).

## **Findings**

An analysis of data concluded five overall findings about each bounded system. The overall themes were (a) making children their priority, (b) involvement, (c) academic strategies (d) high expectations, and (e) support. From these themes, subthemes emerged throughout the statements and phrases from the data collected for this study.

### **Making Children Their Priority**

Through discussions in answering the first research question— What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children? —all five of the single fathers described how they made their children’s well-being their first priority to the extent of abstaining from dating while they reared their children. In their own words, these single fathers described their choice not to date:

Walt (answering the question, “Did you ever think your personal life was hindered?”):  
“No, no I never thought about stuff like that. I actually went about seven or eight years. I never dated. I never really had an interest in it. My whole focus was them and their well-being.”  
Walt’s oldest daughter recalled her mother remarrying a year after the divorce. “He (dad) stayed single just simply because that was best for me and my sister at that time.”

Henry chose not to date while he was rearing his four children. His daughter explained that she didn’t think her dad missed out on anything, “Cause we were always there for him and we pretty much kept him happy. He didn’t have like a woman in his life, but I know he wanted to, but he just had stuff he had to take care of first before that could happen.”

Bill commented, “I never wanted to hurt them, so I wouldn’t bring no women to the house, bring no girls. So, I didn’t date for years, because they got so attached. If they saw me talking to a woman, she got attached, so I just quit bringing them around until they got up around

16 or 18.” His oldest daughter described him as “a very selfless man, and he taught us to be very family oriented. And if you don’t have family, you don’t have anything.” When asked about her dad’s divorce, she tearfully stated, “I just hate he’s been hurt so bad.” The youngest daughter remembers her dad telling them, “You two are the only thing I need in life. I don’t need anything else.”

The oldest daughter, who recently got married, described the advice her dad gave her about dating, “My dad once told me, ‘You may be able to change his ways, but you will never change his nature.’ I will always remember that advice and when I decided to marry my husband, I made sure he was a good-natured man.” Her advice to single fathers was, “Every little girl will always look up to her daddy. I know that my dad’s approval of my husband meant more to me than anything. Just know that your daughter will want your approval as well. She will want her husband to be as great a man as her daddy is. A daughter needs her dad to a standard against which she will judge all men.”

Hank described going places

where you see spouses together and I’m there by myself. But you know, through the years, and it’s funny, though, because especially my daughter, when she was younger, it seemed like everyone I cared for, she did not like at all. Then I would bring someone around that I really wasn’t too enthusiastic about, they would happen to meet at a ballgame or whatever, of course, she would like her. But now she is of the age where she says, ‘Dad, you’ve got to find someone.’

Hank’s daughter spoke about her father’s social life,

He won’t put a woman in front of his kids. He won’t. That is like the most important thing about him, the greatest thing. Because a lot of men do that. They will find a



woman and they just put that in front of their kids. He won't, he won't let that happen.

Sometimes I just wish he would, like, I don't want him to be lonely.

At the family interview, the children were asked, "What do you hope for your dad?"

Hank's son replied, "To find a wife." His daughter replied, "Yeah, when we get away to college, he wants to get a new house and a wrap-around porch, he's always said that. And to meet somebody good. That's worth his time. I just don't want him to be lonely."

Sam spoke strongly about his choices regarding his personal life. He recalled when his daughter suggested he go out on a date with a female neighbor. He finally decided that he would and they all three went out to on a date.

It was the three of us because my daughter was part of me and she (the neighbor) had to understand that. We went out on a date and a couple of dates after a while it started getting, feelings started going, you know, and I told her at the time, 'Look, you have to understand this. Right now, my life is on hold. I'm not going to do anything, I don't intend on doing anything. I had to raise my daughter. I had to get her graduated before I do anything. Thank God she understood. She said, 'That's fine. What do you need me to do?'

Sam's daughter explained how this made her feel,

It made me. I'm always the type of person that wanted my dad happy. So whatever was going to make him happy, I understood. But it made me feel special that he wanted to make sure I was his main concern first. Get me through school first, get me graduated and then move on with his life. It made me feel special.

## **Involvement**

The first research question for the current study asked— What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children? Interview questions included:

*Single fathers:* Describe any academic activities you were involved in that you feel benefited your child. Describe any differences that you may have experienced rearing your son and daughter.

*Children:* Describe how your father played a role in your academic success.

In what ways was your father involved in your life?

*Family:* Describe what you feel made the difference in being successful with academics.

Single fathers described any academic activities they were involved in that they felt benefited their child. All five single fathers indicated attending school-related activities such as Parent/Teacher Conferences and PTO meetings. The children's interviews mirrored the fathers' descriptions of attending school-related activities and award programs. Single fathers and children described how their fathers were involved in their lives while they played sports or attended organizations, such as Girl Scouts, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or Young Life.

**School related functions.** Fathers' and children's interviews indicated the single fathers' involvement in their children's academics by attending Parent/Teacher conferences and PTO meetings. Hank stated, "I went to parent/teacher conferences, uh, helped with projects, I guess, uh, went to school functions, plays, uh things that I enjoyed." Henry commented that he "attended a lot of parent/teacher conferences (he had four children), and PTA meetings for my children." Sam described his daughter as a "big singer." "She loved to sing. She was very well at it actually. She was active in chorus." Bill simply stated, "Yeah, I did all that (parent/teacher conferences, PTO meetings)." Walt described the time when he talked with his youngest

daughter's kindergarten teacher about holding her back. That was the same time of his divorce. "She struggled a little more in kindergarten and I held her back. They would have sent her on, but I said, no, let's hold her back."

In letters to other single fathers, Hank was specific in his advice. "I would also encourage all single fathers to make contact with the child's teachers on a weekly basis to ensure the child is properly behaving, turning in homework, and paying attention in class." One of Bill's daughters began to struggle in school and he wrote advising single fathers to get involved with the teachers to see "what I could do to help her. Get involved in school activities." Sam summed it all up, "Be willing to take time from your own life to get active in school activities."

Some of the children replicated these statements in their interviews. Bill's youngest daughter stated, "He did PTA and sports; he was always at Parent/Teacher conferences. He went to everything." She wrote in her letter to single fathers how important it was to, "Just be there for them in tough times." Her sister mirrored those thoughts in her letter, "Praise your child for doing well in school. Go to parent/teacher conferences. Go to school plays. Teach your children that school is fun. School will get them far in life. Help them cultivate their future."

When the families were completing their timelines, the observations and a review of the timelines indicated a great involvement in attending school-related functions such as graduations (both high school and college), attending awards programs, and recognition events. The physical artifacts (pictures) displayed scenes at graduations and other events that recognized the children at school functions. The single fathers' involvement in these school-related functions proved to be important to both them and their children, thus benefitting the children's academics.

**Sports and organizations.** All five single fathers indicated that sports and organizations benefited the single fathers and their children with opportunities to spend time with each other.

The single fathers described in detail the sports or organizations in which their children were involved. Ten of the eleven children interviewed, described being involved with sports. When the children described their involvement, they referred to how their fathers were involved in those activities. Hank's daughter recalled, "I played softball in high school and he was always there." Some of these dads coached their children's teams. Hank's son recalled, "He coached me for awhile, then after a certain age, kinda backed off because that's kinda what you're supposed to do. Your dad's not supposed to coach you all the way up. When I was first born, the first thing he bought me was a baseball glove."

Henry described "probably sports" as academic activities he was involved in the most with his children. "Probably football, uh, that's about the only academic thing I can remember. Just participating in regular activities at school."

Sam described his only daughter playing fast pitch softball. "I was actually coach of one of her teams. Her summer teams kept her active in sports. I could work day shift most of the time, so I could spend afternoons with her and take her to ball practice." At the family interview, they began to laugh as they both recalled a memorable time juggling two events. Sam said,

I asked off early one day because she had a concert. I rushed out (across town) and picked her up cause, I had to have her softball gear with me. It was a thirty-minute window there. We couldn't stop and change so she got in the back seat of the Jeep and changed clothes from her chorus gown to her softball gear.

Sam's daughter laughed and added, "And I'm talking about it was sliding shorts and sports bra, and under armor, and my shirt and it was whoosh!" As far as her academics were concerned, Sam's daughter described how supportive her dad was with everything. He was, "always ready to work. He always told me, 'You can do anything you set your mind to.' So, it's

always in my head. It's helped me a lot."

In the timelines the families completed, single fathers and the children described sports milestones, as well as academic milestones. They recalled some of those memories through the pictures they took from their home with a display of a trophy for a winning game or a certificate of excellence with an organization. Although the trophies and the certificates were shared as data, it was evident, through their laughter during the observations, that the best part of it all came from them just being together.

During the family interview, Walt described how both his girls played softball. "One of the girls' teams always won and the other girl's team always lost." The daughter, who played on the losing team, rolled her eyes. He always made it to the games and the girls were appreciative.

Sitting side by side while they thought about milestones in her life, Sam and his daughter recalled, (Sam's daughter) "What about softball? When I became a starter?" (Sam) "Yeah, you always wanted to do that. We worked our butts off for you to be a starter. I was proud of you and relieved." (Sam's daughter) "I was happy and overjoyed."

Henry commented, "There was a lot of stuff going on with church." Henry talked about organizations such as Girl Scouts, 4-H, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Young Life. "They (the organizations) are very important. They actually helped them later in life. It gives you structure and guidance." Henry also commented:

Opportunities in organizations such as Young Life provided my daughter with chances to go to other places and meet children from all over the U.S., you know, and everybody they still keep in touch with one another. For that particular week, everybody connected so that was a good thing.

Individual interviews and family interviews revealed these participants' opinions about how difficult it was at times to participate in sports and organizations because of scheduling issues, travel time, and fitting in homework. No matter how difficult they described it to be, it was evident that being involved in these activities was important to all of them.

Bill: "I loved going to watch them play sports. They both played sports so I was going back and forth. One would have games at the middle school and one would have games at grammar school, right on through high school. A lot of times, they would be at the same time so I would have to go spend half time at this school and then go see other half of the other child at the other school. They played basketball and volleyball. They learned a lot."

At the family interview, the most memorable time in his son's life was "When I was in eighth grade, we were playing in the playoffs... and we won. We won by one run and then all the team and all the parents went out to eat. It was fun." Hank asked, "Is that the game you hit your only homerun?" "Yeah." Hank smiled and replied, "Game winning homerun." Hank's son said, "I still have the ball in my room." Pictures Hank took depicted that ball and the college acceptance letter for his daughter that still hangs from his bedroom mirror.

### **Academic Strategies**

The experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children were associated with the academic strategies these fathers and their children described in their interviews and letters. The single fathers' responses helped to answer the second research question— What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success? In addition, single fathers answered the following original two interview questions— Describe any academic activities you were involved in that

you feel benefited your child. and—Describe specific academic strategies you used. Some single fathers revealed specific academic strategies they used in helping their children with academics such as, providing help when their children needed it, life applications to assist their children, understanding how their child best learned, and being available to listen when they were needed.

**Providing help.** Hank commented

I would certainly try my best, but you know, when they had a math problem, my nephew was very good at math, so we'd get my nephew to help. As they got further on in school, I mean, I couldn't even begin to think about how I would help them with the math. I emphasized paying attention in class and taking notes.

Hank wrote in his letter to other single fathers his advice about providing help to children. "As the child progresses through high school and is ever in need of a tutor for any particular subject, I would certainly encourage the parent to obtain a tutor to help the child with this particular difficulty."

Bill's daughter recalled,

If I needed something for school, he'd find somebody to help us out and do that or take us there for it to be done." Bill talked about going to the store to get poster board or other things for projects at the last minute. Grinning, he said, "It always was the last minute.

Henry's son wrote in his letter to other single fathers about how his dad, "wouldn't get off work sometimes till 5 or 6 o'clock, so he would have us wait for him at the public library. This helped me as a college student. Studying was like second nature. Kudos to my dad."

Bill's two girls described in more detail how their single father helped them with homework: "He would help us (with homework) do it over and over again, like ten times." In one of their letters to other single fathers, she wrote about that experience.

When your child has a test or gets one back that is graded, sit them down and go over it.

The questions they have missed have them write the questions along with the answers five to ten times each to help with memorization. When your child has a test or quiz coming up, ask them if they feel prepared for it, or if there is any way you could help them feel more prepared about it. A nice thing to do that helps is to get a calendar and write down test/quiz dates on it for you and your child to keep up with.

**Life applications.** Single fathers and the children discussed how their fathers would use their jobs or life experiences to help them with homework. The specific strategy used was applying the academic skill to real life. These real life applications helped the children understand their homework.

Sam: “I’m in Crash Reconstruction and math is one of the big things, so I would have examples of crash reconstruction for math samples and she would ask me, ‘Dad how do you know all this stuff?’ I tried to give her some examples in real life related to her homework. In fact, I taught at least two classes at the high school or do a presentation. You would think it would embarrass her, but she was proud actually.”

Walt: “For the most part, I helped them with their homework. They didn’t have too many struggles. I’m one of these people that trust educators because I am an educator. I was always big on accountability. Do your own work and do the best you can. I’ve always tried to instill in both of my kids that whatever it is, if it’s good or bad, own it.”

At the family interview, Walt (a high school history teacher) and the girls described that dad was good at helping them write papers and “anything having to do with social studies classes and history classes, he knew exactly what to do there.”



Walt: “I’m not a hover mom or hover dad. I mean I’m concerned, but at the same time, it’s their grade, it’s their academics, it’s their education. You let them skin their knees, take their lumps, make their mistakes. When my youngest was in Kindergarten, I actually decided to hold her back. Didn’t have to, but did. And just going through what we went through (the divorce). She’s held that against me forever. Cause she’s probably the only nineteen year old senior graduating.” The youngest exclaimed, “That’s not funny, dad.”

One of Henry’s sons described how he remembered his father being academically involved. “He would actually get like, he used to get me a lot of science kits like this solving kit, so I would go find the best solution for that problem, and try to like create it as a detail, like a thinking problem.” Sam’s daughter described how her single father used specific academic strategies, “He was really good at scenarios. Like math, he would give me a scenario, like put it into a mathematical, what is it, equation, not really an equation, but a real life application.”

**Understanding how your child best learns.** A subtheme to having high expectations of your children indicated that three of the five fathers felt that understanding how their child learned was important. Henry (father of four children) stated:

I think all children struggle at one point in time, and there’s probably more struggles when you don’t have another spouse to help out. You try to figure out a strategy to help them. I figured out that (with four children) some children learn better whenever they actually physically do something. Some children learn better by reading and some children have to do it all. Each of my children was different. We had to physically go back over stuff and repeat stuff, a combination of everything.

Hank described the time when his daughter was diagnosed with ADHD. Once medicated for ADHD, Hank commented, “It really made a difference in her performance.” In Hank’s letter to other single fathers, he emphasized the importance of education and suggested a reward/punishment for consequences to academic performance. He said, “I always pushed my kids to do their best.” His children mirrored that when answering the interview question—Describe how your father played a role in your academic success and In what ways was your father involved in your life? Hanks’ children replied, “He always made sure I made good grades. He didn’t want me to fall behind. He cares about important stuff because he wants me to be successful like him.” Hank’s daughter described her dad rewarded her if she made As and Bs “like \$100.00. So, that was definitely like an impact to help me get good grades.” Hank’s son described how his dad helped him with academics:

I loved to play sports and if I wanted to play, my grades had to be good and he always made sure they were A’s and B’s. If they weren’t, there would be consequences. I learned real fast that if I wanted to be, if I wanted to be successful in anything, it all starts in school. He’s made me realize that I have to start now. I have to go through it now, put in the work to pay off later.

Sam’s letter advised other single fathers to, “be opened minded, willing to listen...and understand their thought process.” Bill’s letter suggested, “Find their interest. As a parent you know how hard life can sometimes be, so you want to help your child avoid some of those obstacles.”

**Listening to your child.** Three of the five families indicated how “just listening” was important to being academically successful. Bill’s youngest daughter remembered, “He would be my audience and help with speeches.” Bill stated, “With their homework, I just tried to

explain it to them the best way I could, you know, how I'd do it. They teach it different now days." Henry talked about how he would listen to his children read at night. "It took awhile, but I knew it was important." Henry's daughter duplicated that statement in her letter to single fathers, "He helped me. And sometimes I just needed him to listen." Sam's daughter talked a lot about her dad "being there for her" when it came to academics. During the family interview, Sam recalled some of the times that his daughter had to "listen" to him, "I got asked to teach a class at her school. It was actually one she had to be in. It was fun."

### **High Expectations**

**Intrinsic motivation for fathers.** Deci and Ryan (1985) described motivation as a psychological process in which people are driven to act in order to meet certain needs. Two types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic. Single fathers interviewed for this study indicated some of the factors that were motivating to them and helped them rear academically successful children. In an effort to answer the third research question—How does the single father's perception of his competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children?—the single fathers were asked to describe where they found their motivation. The single fathers spoke of their upbringings.

Walt: "It's not how hard you hit, it's how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. It's not what happens; it's how you respond when it does happen. That describes a lot of who you are, your character, who you'll be. Just basically the values and principles I try to teach to them every day and they've seem to adopt that. My great grandmother had twenty-three kids and we were just raised throughout my family that you solve your own problems. You put on your boots, you go to work, you don't bellyache, whine, complain. You just do what has to be done. You don't make excuses. And my mom and dad were

that way. They let you skin your own knees and that's pretty much how I've raised my girls."

Hank: "I was always brought up with you know, it was worse to disappoint than to be punished. So I think that's where my kids have probably come from is that they tried their best because they didn't want to disappoint me. They know how important it is to me (to do well in school), and really tried to please me. I think that was a big motivating factor for them."

Bill: "I was brought up in a great family that's got morals and everything. Try to bring you up right, church and everything. Don't lie or steal. I try to bring my kids up the way I was brought up and teach them what I was taught. I wouldn't change my life for nothing, the way my parents brought me up. Despite the struggle that you went through personally, you didn't seem to let it affect the kids at all. No, that's one thing I don't do. I never talk bad about her (ex-wife) to them, you know. Sometimes I wanted to, but you can't, you know. They'll figure it out, and they did figure it out."

Henry (answering how he balanced everything): "Oh, the Lord. He always helped me out, you know, there's a lot of times when you don't know, don't see where you can go from a particular point, but there is always an avenue to get you to the point where you are going to be. The balance probably came from just what I got from my parents and what I've learned over the course of time, just being patient."

**Intrinsic motivation for children.** Single fathers described their children's teachers and balancing work by answering the interview question—How did you balance working and helping your children with academics? Findings indicated these single fathers maintained high expectations of themselves, as well as, with their children. Bill commented on the teachers the

girls had during their school years. “They had great teachers. They were strict. I mean they didn’t treat them any different (because a single father was raising them). I knew them and they knew me (the teachers).” Bill explained how he expected the girls to do well in school, “no matter what.” Bill reiterated this in his letter advising other fathers to, “Set goals for them to reach. Give them responsibilities. Teach them morals. Stress to them how important it is to make good grades.”

Sam: (answering the question about his involvement of his daughter’s academics) “I’ve always had high expectations of her. She knew I had high expectations of her, so she had high expectations of herself.” In his letter he wrote, “I always told my daughter I would be her friend but I am first her dad and second her friend. I knew the day would come that we would have to talk about personal things that some dads would have a hard time discussing with daughters. I made up my mind that I wanted us to have an open dad/daughter relationship and we could talk about anything and make decisions. Some things were easier than others but we made it work.”

Hank wrote in his letter about the importance of education and that single fathers should emphasize this at an early age. “It is my belief this will instill in the child, the importance of maintaining good grades, good behavior, and the absolute uncompromising position that going to college is essential in having any chance for a successful and promising future.” His children understood their father’s high expectations. Hank’s children described how they knew they would go to college and had to get good grades in order to play sports. Those high expectations were evident in the comments written about how the fathers felt about their children’s achievements. “I was proud of her.” “I was happy.” “I was proud of her accomplishment.”

The high expectations fathers had for their children stemmed from their own upbringing and motivation. Their motivation spilled over to their children as they set high goals and expectations for them. The single fathers wanted to instill the same values they learned to their children. “I wanted the best for my children. I wanted them to do better in life than myself.”

## **Support**

The sense of feeling supported by significant others, and a sense that significant others trust individuals to make good choices described the construct of relatedness in the Self-Determination Theory (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The research question—What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?—addressed the single fathers by asking how were they able to manage their free time during the children’s school years. Three subthemes emerged from support: (a) the fathers’ support from others, (b) the children’s support from their fathers, and (c) the fathers’ support from their children.

**Fathers’ support from others.** Single fathers described the support they received from significant others in their lives. These single fathers spoke of others in their lives that helped them and their children. These relationships reinforced the SDT construct of relatedness. The support that others offered to these single fathers and their children came in various forms. Others in the single fathers’ lives supported them with time management, childcare, or physical and gender-related issues.

Sam: (describing a female neighbor) “I would go to her a lot of times. I would ask what to do with this or how do I answer that. As far as my workplace, they supported me in giving me time to do that and do things with her. I was blessed more than the average because I got to spend valuable time with my daughter than most men.”

Bill: “They (his daughters) had plenty of friends’ mothers who stepped up and helped them. I had my mother to help me and I have a sister to help me and my niece. They would take them and buy their first training bra and they would help with that stuff.”

Henry: “My mother was there. “My daddy was able to talk to them. I talked to my kids.”

Walt: “Work was gracious to let me off work just about anytime I wanted because they knew I had to get kids here and kids there. I’ve got a big family.”

Hank: “I had a ton of help with my mom. And if it wasn’t for my mom I wouldn’t be able to do it. My nephew helped them with math.”

These fathers’ sense of relatedness came from family members’ support as they described their experiences.

**Children’s support from fathers.** A second subtheme was the support children received from their fathers. Their father’s support came in the form of being physically and emotionally available to them when they needed them. The children indicated their fathers always placed their well-being first in his life. They were descriptive throughout the interviews and letters, indicating that having support from their fathers was important to them and their academic success. This subtheme was evident in the words written by the children in letters to other single fathers and throughout the interviews.

Walt’s second child: “It was important for me that he supported anything and everything I was involved in academically.”

Walt’s first child: “He has always been supportive and encouraging of my passions academically and personally.”

Bill’s first child: “Encourage and support them. Show them you love them.”

Hank's first child: "Let them know how proud you are of them with everything they have accomplished and for their effort in trying."

Sam's child: "I can't stress enough how important it is to be supportive of your child and let them know when you're proud of them and that everything is going to be alright. My dad is my rock and I do believe it's because he was so supportive of me." The children wanted the best for their dads.

Bill's second child: "He won't put a woman in front of his kids. He won't. That is the most important thing about him, the greatest thing. Sometimes I just wish he would. I don't want him to be lonely."

The emotional support that these children felt was encouragement from their fathers. They spoke of how their fathers "cheered them on," "encouraged their studies," and "supported their efforts." Some of the pictures depicted how the fathers supported their children by displaying a trophy, a diploma, or a report card. The ease in which all participating families cooperated and completed the timeline was noted in the reflective notes. Relatedness is the sense of feeling supported by significant others, and having a sense that significant others trust you to make good choices. These findings of support indicate the importance of this construct and the theoretical implications it has on the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

**Fathers' support from children.** The theme of support emerged in the form of relationships such as (a) significant others to the fathers and (b) fathers to their children. The third subtheme, the support that children gave to their fathers came in the form of emotional support. In the words of these fathers, they described how their children supported them. When Bill was asked whom he confided in, he replied, "My children. My family." Henry described how he would lean on his children sometimes when things got hard. "You know sometimes we



get down on things like in life. I try to stand back from that because it will hold me back as well as my children.” Walt described that he and his wife used to argue that he was closer to his girls than he was to her. “I think she was right.” Hank discussed when his daughter was young, she did not really want him with anyone, but now, “She’s of the age where she wants me to find someone.” Sam teared up when answering—Do you feel like you were cheated at all in life?

No. Not really cheated. I don’t feel like I was cheated, I think that some things happening you just have to accept it and go on, you know. I think that if anything, I was blessed more than the average because I got to spend valuable time with my daughter that most men don’t get.

### **Memorable Experiences**

The observations of these families interacting provided additional phrasing and statements of support. In four out of the five families, the oldest child took the pen to begin writing on the timeline. All family members participated in the process. All were relaxed, but seemed to find it difficult to know where to begin.

Hank’s family: “Start with Chorus.” “Maybe start at the beginning.” “So, you want to go backwards?”

Others had significant academic milestones pop out of their mouths immediately.

Walt’s family: “Perfect attendance all four years in high school. You were proud of that.” “I made good grades in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.”

Written in short phrases, timelines included the children’s milestones aging from 10-21 years old. The relationships between the single fathers and their children, through these observations, indicated one of pride and accomplishment. Thoughts and feelings of both the fathers and the children about their academic milestones included:

Sam, Walt, Henry, Hank, and Bill: “Proud of her success, happy, nervous, excited, anxious, glad it was over, overjoyed, and accomplished.”

When answering a follow-up question— Describe some of the most memorable times you had with them. —Bill responded, “I took them to the beach on vacation. Enjoyed that. When they got older, I took them deer hunting and let them kill their first deer, you know, that was exciting. I did lots of things with them.”

Bill’s daughters recalled a memorable time at Christmas. The youngest described, Christmas Eve, he would take us every Christmas Eve, us, my Uncle, and his kids. Every Christmas eve we would go looking for Santa Claus. So we would drive all over town and he would look for Santa Claus and like people who had Santa Claus on top of their roof, he’s say, ‘Oh, you know, there’s Santa Claus, we better get home, he’s getting close to the house.’ He’d make us look for Rudolph. One Christmas, when I was little, we had the Christmas tree downstairs, dad (as Santa) was putting out the gifts for Christmas and I was very noseey. I started walking on the steps, dad heard me, and he growled like Santa and said it was Santa. I took off running and got my sister. The next morning he wrote out a little note and said, ‘Santa Claus will be back later when you are at your Granny’s. And every year he would write on our packages from Santa in a crazy font. He makes up a crazy font and still does that to this day. He thinks it is hilarious.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four described the data collection and data analysis procedures for the current qualitative collective case study. The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in Deci and Ryan’s (1985) Self-Determination Theory.

The constructs of this theory relate to motivation and consist of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Research question one— What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children?—was answered by describing some of the experiences the single fathers and their children remembered. Rich details provided a description of the single fathers and their children's experiences. Single fathers made their children their first priority by choosing not to date or remarry until they reared their children. Single fathers were involved with their children by attending Parent/Teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and coaching or attending their children's sports events. Many fathers recalled running simultaneously from one event to another.

Research question two— What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success?—a triangulation of data collected provided specific activities in which single fathers tended to participate. These specific academic activities included, (a) providing help when needed, (b) applying life skills, (c) understanding how their child best learns, and (d) listening. Single fathers described their stories of how they used these specific academic activities with their children. Sometimes all the single fathers had to do was listen, "He would be my audience."

Research question three— How does the single father's perception of competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children? These single fathers mentioned the high expectations they had for their children and how those expectations were motivated by their own upbringing. Single fathers emphasized the importance of education and worked to instill a motivation to learn within their children. Four out of the five single fathers wanted their children to "do better in life" than themselves.

Research question four—What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?—was answered through the heartfelt words of both single fathers and their children in the interviews, letters, and timelines. These words describe supportive fathers who set aside their personal lives for the well-being of their children. With the support of family, friends, and coworkers, these single fathers described how they were able to rear their children to be academically successful.

Data collected for the current study included interviews of single fathers, their children and family interviews. Families completed timelines during the informal observations. Single fathers and children wrote letters to a single father describing their experiences or giving advice. In addition, single fathers took pictures of memorabilia they felt were significant to them. Triangulation among the different types of data collected from each of the participants provided corroborating themes. Triangulation provided comparisons to the within-case analysis themes and the cross-case analysis themes. Four ideas emerged supporting all participants and the forms of data. The themes that emerged were involvement, academic strategies, high expectations, and support. Within each of these themes, subthemes and specific ideas indicated commonalities among the bounded systems for this study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. This study included a review of the literature expanding several years of data explaining what factors of parental involvement make children's academic achievement successful. The theoretical framework of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) framed this research study. A qualitative collective case study was used to collect and analyze data presented through the stories of the participants' experiences in Chapter Four. Chapter Five contains a summary of the findings, implications, a discussion of the findings, limitations and delimitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and assumptions of the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

Strong parental involvement is a factor in the successful academic achievement of children from early childhood to young adolescence (Baharudin et al., 2010; Lemay et al., 2010; Martini & Senechal, 2012). Other factors that may contribute to the successful academic achievement of children are gender, ethnicity, educational attainment (of parents), socioeconomic status, and marital status (Acharya & Joshi, 2009; Coles, 2009; Currie, 2005; Lee et al., 2007; Marks, 2006). Research on the parental involvement of divorced fathers has indicated a limited amount of involvement for reasons such as substance abuse, lack of child support, incarceration, or irresponsibility (Walker et al., 2010). For this reason, focusing on the experiences of divorced single fathers whose children experienced academic success was important in order to assist other single fathers who are beginning their journey of rearing children alone.

The current research was significant in determining strategies and involvement activities that single fathers participate in which made a difference in the academic achievement of their children. There was significance in applying the constructs of the Self-Determination Theory in order to describe the motivating factors that single fathers experienced as they reared academically successful children. Based on this framework, four research questions guided the current qualitative collective case study.

An analysis of the descriptions of the participants' personal experiences supported the findings relating the interview questions to the research questions. Emerging themes developed from the participants' similar phrasing and significant statements. The emerging themes included making their children a priority, involvement, academic strategies, high expectations, and support and are discussed in relation to the research questions below.

Findings indicated that many single fathers answered the first research question— What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children?— by describing their choice to not date while rearing their children. Single fathers' involvement with their children in school functions and sports-related activities and other organizations was significant. Single fathers' descriptions included how sports and other organizations, such as Girls Scouts, 4-H, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Young Life gave guidance and structure to their children. Responsibility and opportunities to spend time with their children were valuable aspects the families received from sports and organizations. Children described the significance of their fathers taking time to support and encourage them in these activities.

Findings determined specific academic strategies and high expectations to be themes from the triangulated data. These findings satisfied the research questions—What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's

academic success? —and How does the single father's perception of competence and autonomy contribute to the academic success of children? Single fathers and children revealed specific academic strategies that helped the children perform well in school. Academic strategies included, (a) providing help when needed, (b) applying life skills, (c) understanding how their child best learns, and (d) listening. Children revealed how their single fathers emphasized the importance of doing well in school and the single fathers described how they encouraged their children to succeed. The motivation from these fathers stemmed from their own upbringing. The values they learned as children were values they wanted to give their own children.

Participants described both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that contributed to their positive experiences in rearing academically successful children. Intrinsic motivating factors included competency and autonomy in rearing these children alone. Participants' explanations of the circumstances in which they became single fathers exhibited characteristics of autonomy, which led to self-determination in rearing successful children. In addition, participants described their extrinsic motivation in how their parents reared them as children. Many described the value their parents put on being successful and doing what is right in life. The trait of being important in value is based on *identification*, which is a type of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). These traits were evident in the participants' experiences.

The findings answering the research question—What factors of relatedness affect single fathers rearing academically successful children?—illustrated support as being one of the emerging themes developed from the experiences of the single fathers. This support developed from relationships between the families and the significant others in their lives. Support from these different relationships were discussed in subthemes such as (a) the fathers' support from others, (b) the children's support from their fathers, and (c) the fathers' support from their

children. Support included emotional support, time management, childcare, physical and gender-related issues. Support correlates to motivational factors and the construct of relatedness of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Participants described the sense of connectedness they felt as family members, friends, and coworkers supported them during the years they were raising their children. Additionally, the parenting styles of the single fathers indicated one of support for the activities in which the children were involved. The autonomous parenting style supports the theory indicating better academic performance of children whose parents exhibit this “more autonomous style of self-regulation” (Wong, 2008, p. 500).

### **Implications**

The findings in the current research study have several implications for single fathers rearing children alone, educators, and others who know children reared by single fathers. The significance of the current study was to explore the experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children. Methodological, empirical, and practical contributions of the current research study could provide single fathers and educators with empowering information to benefit the children in their lives.

The methodological contribution includes the ease in replicating this current study. Researchers in other areas of the United States could replicate the procedures and data collection methods outlined in chapter three. Broadening this study of single fathers to other parts of the United States would benefit more single fathers and their children. The need to familiarize others to single fathers’ positive experiences is great.

The empirical contribution offered a unique understanding to the single fathers’ self-determination in rearing academically successful children. The single fathers’ perspectives on their experiences supported the constructs of the Self-Determination Theory. Understanding



what motivated the single fathers to help their children succeed was significant to understanding the single fathers' perceptions of their competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

In a more practical way, these single fathers contributed their best advice in letter-form. The children also gave insight to how their single fathers helped them become academically successful. The single fathers and their children bestowed great insight to other single fathers:

Sam: "Be open-minded, willing to listen, and understand their thought process. Be willing to make sacrifices in your own life to make sure she has all the opportunities that would come her way. Willing to spend quality time just getting to 'REALLY' know your daughter. Willing to do (sometimes) embarrassing things for the good of your daughter. Willing to be your daughter's friend; but first being dad. Willing to make some hard decisions and have an explanation for that decision. Just being there for your daughter in the good times and the bad times."

Walt: "My best advice would be to lead and live by example. Most if not all of our children are blueprints of ourselves. I also know that by being an example of what you want your children to be; must be carried out in your own daily life."

Hank: "I would encourage all single fathers to emphasize the importance of education at the earliest of ages. It is my belief that this will instill in the child, the importance of maintaining good grades, good behavior, and the absolute uncompromising position that going to college is essential in having any chance for a successful and promising future. I would further encourage all single fathers to help with homework on a nightly basis."

Bill: "I believe you teach your child good morals, respect, love, and kindness. Get involved in church activities, plays, etc. It is very important that you watch who your child hangs out with. Always show them love (even when they have to be punished).

Always encourage them to succeed. Set goals for them to reach. Tell them you are proud of them.”

Henry: “Always be positive. Give them positive things. The most important thing you can tell your children and give them are goals and aspirations that they can actually reach. Sometimes we, as parents, put things on our children that are really hard for them. Give them room to grow.”

Bill’s first child: “Always be there for your kids to talk to you about anything. They need to know that you are willing to listen and support them. Teach your children to make good decisions. They will make mistakes. Be there for them when they do.”

Walt’s second child: “Interact with your kids. Be involved in their school activities. Most importantly just be there for them in tough times.”

Bill’s second child: “I can’t stress enough how important it is to be supportive of your child and let them know when you are proud of them and that everything is going to be alright. Give plenty of love and encouragement. If they upset you, have a talk about it to see what you all can accomplish by working together.”

Hank’s first child: “I would advise you not to push your child to an extent of causing them stress and worry. You cannot expect your kids to be perfect and try to place them on a higher level than they can actually achieve. It can be very difficult for them. My father being involved in my academic success truly made me successful overall, and I’m so thankful to have him. And even though I really only have one parent, for me, I’m so glad it’s him.”

## **Discussion**

The Self-Determination Theory posits that individuals experience strong levels of self-

motivation and well-being when competence, autonomy, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Through the descriptions of the single fathers' personal experiences, it was determined how these three psychological needs were satisfied. More importantly, it was interesting to hear, through the children's experiences, how these single fathers helped to satisfy these three psychological needs for their children.

The single fathers described how they chose to not date while they were rearing their children. These single fathers "put their lives on hold" in order to provide their children with their full attention and support. The single fathers' self-determination to put the well-being of their children first in their lives was evident in their stories about their personal experiences.

The single fathers discussed how their parents taught them right from wrong, and how to work hard. These single fathers did not choose the circumstances that led to their divorces, but were committed to do what they needed to rear their children, alone. The competence level was strong for these fathers due to their upbringing. Not one single father said, "I didn't think I could do it alone." Their children explained their fathers' strong level of competency, as they described their fathers. The single fathers' intrinsic motivation to "make it work" (Hank's first child) gave their children "room to grow" (Henry's second child). These statements supported Grolnick and Ryan's (1987) research. Grolnick and Ryan (1987) found that intrinsic motivation led to higher quality of learning and higher levels of well-being in students whose parents promote high levels of autonomy in their children.

Understanding how the single fathers described their "academic involvement activities" as "being there" (Henry), "helping when they could" (Sam, Hank, Walt), "providing what their children needed" (Bill, Henry, Hank), and "supporting their children in activities" (Hank, Bill, Sam, Walt, Henry), explained only part of the psychological spectrum of motivation. The single

fathers seemed to be at the *identification* end of the spectrum, which described the behavior as being important in value, and the *integrated regulation* part of the spectrum, where their behavior exhibited the most autonomy and integrated a value to their behavior. Conversely, the children described their academic behavior beginning with *external regulation*, where behavior is a resultant of rewards or consequences, to *introjected regulation*, where their behavior was a resultant to avoiding guilt. For example, the children made comments such as, “I didn’t want to disappoint him” (Walt’s first child), and “I wanted to make my dad proud” (Hank’s first child). All the bounded systems displayed that strong levels of single fathers’ self-determination influenced the children’s self-determination.

With the single fathers’ strong sense of self-determination, a link formed between the constructs of the SDT and the findings of the current research study. Competence, autonomy, and relatedness seemed evident within all forms of data, and through those stories involvement, academic strategies, high expectations, and support and became emerging themes. These single fathers discussed their experiences eagerly as if they were thankful to have a voice. As they described their children’s academic success, their expressions eluded a sense of pride. More importantly, there seemed to be another sense of pride evident in their stories. They seemed to have a sense of pride in themselves for being a supportive person for their children and for holding high expectations for their children to be successful.

Sports and organizations was a subtheme under the theme of involvement. Each one of the single fathers described how their children were involved with a sports team, an organization, or both. The children also described the support they received from their single fathers of their participation in these areas. A review of literature did not include the importance of sports-related activities because the focus for the current research study was academics. However, the

fact that all the children participants played on a sports team made this an emergent theme included with involvement. In hindsight, that all the children were academically successful and played on sports teams made sense. They described the rules their schools had about student athletes maintaining a C average in order to play on any sports team. The children in the current research study were academically successful. Many of them commented they would not have been able to play if they had not kept up their grades. “I learned real fast that if I wanted to be successful in anything, it all starts in school. So even if you’re the best baseball player in the world, you have to be, you can’t go to college if you’re not, if you don’t apply yourself in school” (Hank’s second child).

While participating in sports helped children to maintain good grades, other organizations such as Girls Scouts, Young Life, 4-H, and Boys and Girls Clubs, further helped to provide structure and guidance in their lives. The fact that single fathers made time to take their children to such activities and involved themselves with them gave support and credibility to the current research regarding the effects of parental involvement in the lives of their children. These single fathers making time for their children also supported the research conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009). Parent involvement was positively associated with student achievement during adolescence more so with involvement in school activities than activities at home (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Delimitations set boundaries for the current research study. Participants were single fathers who reared academically successful children for at least half of the child’s life. Academically successful children were defined as completing high school, or college, entering college, or attending college. All five of these single fathers were divorced and had children that

were high school or college graduates, entering college, or attending college at the time of the study. The study was delimited to a specific region of the United States, specifically Upper East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Another delimitation was using the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as the theoretical lens rather than a different theoretical perspective.

Limitations of the current research study included identifying a neutral setting in which to do the interviews. Some interviews conducted in public libraries became crowded and somewhat noisy. For the family interviews, we used a private study room. Another limitation was the scheduling of the family interviews. Finding ways to accommodate the work/school schedules of all participants at the same time and on the same day was difficult; however, all participants were eager to work out a solution for the interviews to take place. Another limitation was this research study was retrospective in nature rather than prospective. Due to the geographic location, there was a limitation in the diversity of participants for this research study. There was a gap in the literature for widowed single fathers. One widowed single father was asked to be in the study; however, he declined respectfully.

### **Application for Educational Leadership**

This study provides a strong application in educational leadership. In the educational setting, findings from this study can be utilized through professional development for school counselors who work with parents and students, for teachers who are directly in contact with students of single fathers, and school staff who, also, take part in the education of students with single fathers.

Furthermore, one of the single fathers in this study accessed a private counseling program for his daughters after his divorce. “You know I took them to counseling when we got divorced and the judge wanted me to take them to counseling, so they would understand. I don’t know if

that helped or not, I guess it did. I took them, though.” Private counselors would benefit from the findings of this study as they assist the children of single fathers.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current research study told the positive experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children using interviews, observations, letters, timelines, and physical artifacts. The necessity to provide more research exploring the experiences of single fathers is justified with the gap in the literature pertaining to specific situations. Future research should include the following recommendations. First, future research needs to explore the experiences of widowed fathers. Yopp and Rosenstein (2013) discovered some common themes such as, “a lack of preparedness to be single parents, coping with their grief and that of children, and adjustment to the demands of single parenthood” (p. 172). The significance of understanding how widowed single fathers rear academically successful children would benefit the small minority of widowed single fathers in our nation.

Next, in 2012, 16.9% Hispanic/Latino students attended schools in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Parent involvement studies of both sets of parents have been investigated (Turney & Kao, 2009). Future research exploring single fathers in this ethnic minority group would serve to assist the growing population of Hispanics/Latinos in the United States.

In addition, future research of single fathers who have never married the mother of their children would benefit society. Custodial single fathers who never married make up 25.7% of the population in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Finally, while the Self Determination Theory focused the constructs of motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how it affected children of two parents, an

investigation on how the SDT affects children of single fathers has not been conducted.

Comparing the children of two parents and the children of single fathers using the SDT would also be helpful.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions for the current research study included the single fathers' emotional stability. All single fathers in the current research study displayed strength in their emotional state and stability. Another assumption that may have affected the current study was whether the single fathers and the children would speak freely and with ease as they told their stories. The single fathers spoke with confidence and sentiment as they described rearing their children. The children spoke with emotion as they described their fathers. The mood and passion that each bounded system supplied provided rich details into their personal lives.

### **Conclusions**

The current research study provided rich data for single fathers and educators. Data came from personal experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children. Their positive experiences, through their personal stories, presented emerging themes. These emerging themes included making their children a priority, involvement, academic strategies, high expectations, and support. Single fathers and their children indicated that involvement was highly important to their children's academic success. Specific academic strategies, suggested from single fathers and their children, helped these children be academically successful. High expectations of their children offered those children motivation to work hard and do well. Support from family members, friends, and co-workers supplied these single fathers the reinforcement they needed to be successful in rearing their children.



The Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) framed the current research study and defined the constructs researched. These single fathers' experiences characterized the factors of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Understanding these constructs in relation to single fathers presented a new perspective on self-determination.

The children's descriptions of life with their single father depicted one of security, support, and love. Memories of loved ones, struggles, funny moments, and special occasions surfaced as the single fathers described their personal stories. Grasping the strength of the relationships between these single fathers and their children brought a sense of joy and blessing.

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## Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 18, 2013

Cheri Long

IRB Approval 1702.101813: The Experiences of Single Fathers Who Have Reared Academically Successful Children: A Collective Case Study

Dear Cheri,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
Professor, IRB Chair  
Counseling

**(434) 592-4054**

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## **Appendix B: Script for Participants' Consent**

Phone Script: "My name is Cheri Long. I am a doctoral student from Liberty University. I am conducting a research study that involves single fathers who have reared academically successful children. I have been informed that you fit the criteria as a single father/child of a single father for my study and I am asking if you would be willing to be a participant."

"I would like to explain what would be expected from you, if you choose to participate. First, I would like to go over the consent form because it includes the information that would be important to you."

At this time, I would read over the requirements and time elements from the consent form.

"If you think you would like to participate in this study, I would like to arrange an initial meeting with you to sign the consent form. If you need time to think about this, I will give you my email and phone number in which you can contact me with your answer or any questions or concerns you may have."

"My phone number is "omitted" and my email is "omitted."

"I appreciate your time in considering being a participant in this research study."

## **Appendix C: Consent Form for Participants**

### **CONSENT FORM**

The Experiences of Single Fathers Who Have Reared Academically Successful Children: A

Collective Case Study

Cheri G. Long

Liberty University

Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study of the experiences of single fathers rearing academically successful children. You were selected as a possible participant because you are or have been a single father that has or have academically successful children or you are the child of a single father. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Cheri G. Long of the Education Department.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of single fathers who have reared academically successful children.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

All meetings will be held at a neutral setting that is convenient for you.

Fathers: The first interview session will be conducted with you. Open-ended questions will be asked. This session will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed notes for accuracy. Also at this interview, you will be

given a prompt and asked to write a letter to other single fathers suggesting or advising them of how they can be involved in the academic success of their children. Self-addressed stamped envelopes will be provided, in order for you to mail the letter back to me. You will also be given a disposable camera to take pictures (if you desire) of physical artifacts in the home that you and your child feel are memorable and would like to share.

Children: Your first interview session will be after your father has been interviewed. Open-ended questions will be asked. This session will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed notes for accuracy. Also at this interview, you will be given a prompt and asked to write a letter to other single fathers describing how your father helped you with academics. Self-addressed stamped envelopes will be provided, in order for you to mail the letter and surveys back to me.

Fathers and Children: You will be asked to participate in another interview session together. Open-ended questions will be asked. This session will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and you will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed notes for accuracy. Using a template, you and your child(ren) will be asked to create a timeline of the children's academic life while with you. Follow-up interviews may occur. An estimated length of time for your participation will be approximately 2 hours for each set of interviews (a total of 4 hours) and approximately 2 hours for follow-up questions, if needed.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study may have risks: Risks are minimal and should be no more than what you would encounter in everyday life. Due to the personal nature of this study, you may be uncomfortable recalling some memories. You may opt not to answer questions that make you

feel uncomfortable. However, if you need to talk to someone, I will provide names of professionals that you may contact.

The benefits to your participation in this study are societal. By exploring your positive experiences of single fatherhood rearing academically successful children, other single fathers can benefit.

**Compensation:**

You will not be receiving payment for your participation in this research.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. A professional will transcribe the audio-recordings and will have signed a confidentiality agreement before transcribing notes. Confidentiality and security of data will be maintained for participants through the securing of files, notes, and recordings in a locked file cabinet at a separate location accessed only by me. Computers used will be password protected. All data will be kept for three years and then documents will be shredded and all other data destroyed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Cheri Long. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (omitted), or e-mail (omitted). You may also contact Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell at (omitted).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I consent to the audio-recording of my interviews and understand that a professional will be transcribing these recordings.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Numbers:** 1702.101813 *(After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)*

**IRB Expiration Date:** October 18, 2014 *(After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)*

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Single Fathers**

Interview Questions for single fathers:

May I have your contact information for follow-up questions?

How would you describe your race?

How would you describe your socioeconomic status?

Interview Questions:

- 1) Describe the circumstances in which you became a single father.
- 2) Describe any academic activities you were involved in that you feel benefited your child.
- 3) Describe specific academic strategies you used.
- 4) Describe any differences that you may have experienced rearing your son and daughter  
(This question will only be addressed if the single father has both a son and a daughter)
- 5) How were you able to manage your time during the school years of your child?

## Appendix E: Letter Prompt for Single Fathers

### A Letter to Single Fathers

#### The Father's Perspective

Please write a letter to a single father describing your best advice or suggestions of your experiences in the involvement of your children's academic success.

When they got into high school they played volleyball and basketball. They had to make good grades to be eligible to play. They joined clubs and vocational classes. All of these things helped them to compete in sports & learning.

So by my experience, I think that what helps is to.

Always show them love (even when they have to be punished)

Always encourage them to succeed

Set goals for them to reach

Give them responsibilities

Always listen to them

Ask them questions about school, personal problems, etc.

Let them know that you're always there for them.

Stress to them how important it is to make good grades

Take time ask them what they would like to do or become in life.

Find their interest.

Congratulate them - Tell them you're proud of them.

Keep a close watch on who they hang with!

Teach them morals.

Get involved in school activities

I'm sure that ~~be myself~~ by me teaching my children these things really helped them to become who they are now and will pass ~~the~~ way that I brought them up to their children.

Good Luck

## **Appendix F: Interview Questions for Children**

Interview Questions for Children:

May I have your contact information for follow-up questions?

How would you describe your race?

Describe your current academic status.

Interview Questions:

- 1) Describe your father.
- 2) Describe any academic activities that your father was involved in that you feel benefited you.
- 3) Describe specific academic strategies you remember your father using.
- 4) Describe how your father played a role in your academic success.
- 5) In what ways was your father involved in your life?



## Appendix G: Letter Prompt for Children

### A Letter to Single Fathers

#### The Children's Perspective

Please write a letter to a single father describing how your father was involved in your academic success.



Being a single father has to be the most difficult job in the world, especially when raising girls. My dad has done a fantastic job with my sister and I, although, sometimes I am not sure how he kept from pulling his hair out. There are a few things I would like to share that may help you. I cannot tell you how my dad made it work so well, but I can tell you things he did to help me.

Always be there for your kids to talk to you about anything. Your children may not always want to tell you their deepest, darkest secrets, but one day they will come to you with problems. They need to know that you are willing to listen and will support them. They are not going to be willing to share with you if they think you are just going to punish them. You may not always like what they have to say and some of it may upset you. Just try to listen. Give them advice. Tell them what you have learned in your life that may relate. Try not to get angry and yell. That will just keep them from coming to you in the future. Be understanding. You were in their shoes once.

Teach your children to make good decisions. As kids, we need to learn to make our own decisions and not have a parents always make them for us. Give your kids the tools to make these decisions. They will make mistakes. Be there for them when they do. Punish as you see fit if they do something wrong, but let them know why it was wrong. Use it as a learning experience. One day they will thank you for it. Trust your children. Try not to be too overbearing. I know this has to be hard as a parent. Trust yourself that you have raised smart children to make good decisions. We need to learn from our own mistakes. Try not to be too hard on them.

## **Appendix H: Interview Questions for Single Fathers and Children**

Interview questions for single fathers and their children:

- 1.) Describe one of the most memorable times in your lives.
- 2.) Describe what you feel made the difference in being successful with academics.
- 3.) Describe a typical school day at your house.
- 4.) How you describe your relationship?

## Appendix I: Timeline Template

### Chronological Timeline of Academic History

Please use the following template to record some of the academic milestones that you have experienced together.

Approximate Date or Age of Child	Academic milestone	Thoughts or Feelings
		Father:  Child:
		Father:  Child:
		Father:  Child:
		Father:  Child:
		Father:  Child:

## Appendix I: Timeline Template

### Chronological Timeline of Academic History

Please use the following template to record some of the academic milestones that you have experienced together.

Approximate Date or Age of Child	Academic milestone	Thoughts or Feelings
21 yr old May 2013	college graduation	Father: proud of her success, happy Child: excited, nervous
May 2012 - 23 yr old Dec. 2013 - 24 yr old	college graduation	Father: proud, happy Child: excited, glad it was over
18 yr old 2007	in Honors Society Valedictorian, valedictorian words who	Father: proud Child: accomplished
2007 17 yr old	officer in Host, French club	Father: proud Child: anxious to try new things for the club
		Father: Child:

### Appendix J: Informal Observation Form

Length of Activity: 50 Minutes	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

(Creswell, 2007)

# Appendix J: Informal Observation Form

Length of Activity: 50 Minutes	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p>C. takes charge - gets pen from purse  D. "I'm gonna flick over this one"  K+C+D - sit side-by-side  D- <del>relax</del> sitting relaxed.  Writes down 2 ages + how they feel.  D- asks - what movie do you say "I did it - I made it"  Legally Blond.</p>	<p>D- Laid back - let's C take charge  Very comfortable w/ each other.</p>
<p>C passes paper off to K.  Doesn't have to just be graduation.  C. touches K. earing -  D- what did you do in HS?  K- HS 4 K- This paper is just  C- writes again  D- you can't put on there you were the biggest first?</p>	<p>→ looks like she's fixing it.  K- <sup>does seem</sup> not confident in her academics</p>
<p>K- Put MBSA + French - Pres.  What were you feeling, Dad?  C- whispers something to K.  D- All of mine will be same answer.</p>	<p>D- pulls something off K jacket.  K is sitting in middle.</p>

(Creswell, 2007)

D- writes his feelings - left handed

**Appendix K: Reflective Notes**

Sam's family	
Henry's family	
Hank's family	
Bill' family	
Walt's family	

## Reflective Notes on Families

Sam's family daughter	loving, humor, finished each other's stories, laughed with each other
Henry's family daughter 1 grandson 4 sons	respectful, loud (due to # of people), daughter - appreciative of dad, 3 sons - laid back, comfortable, 2 sons - not so vocal - Dad - spoke more
Hank's family 1 daughter 1 son	respectful relationship, Dad - encouraged kids to speak freely. Daughter was protective of dad. Humorous stories told
Bill's family 2 daughters	laughed about stories, loving towards one another, girls seemed protective of dad, older daughter "mothered" younger. Dad - prideful
Walt's family 2 daughters	respectful, humorous, 2nd daughter was more withdrawn 1st daughter - more vocal Dad - vocal - confident



## **Appendix L: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist**

You are being asked to transcribe confidential audio recordings of interviews with single fathers for a qualitative research study conducted by Cheri Long of the Education Department of Liberty University.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. You, as a professional will transcribe the audio-recordings and will sign a confidentiality agreement before transcribing notes. Confidentiality and security of data will be maintained for participants through the securing of files, notes, and recordings in a locked file cabinet at a separate location accessed only by me. Computers used will be password protected. All data will be kept for three years and then documents will be shredded and all other data destroyed.

### **Compensation:**

You will be compensated for your time during this research study. This compensation will be decided and agreed by both parties before transcriptions are conducted.

Please sign the confidentiality agreement below.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to transcribe audio-recordings of this research study. I agree to maintain confidentiality with all names, information, dates, and personal identification throughout the research.

Transcript Example  
Page 1

**Can you tell me your race and ethnicity?**

I am a white American.

**Ok. And can you share your socio economic status?**

My what?

**Your socio economic status - Low income, middle income?**

Middle.

**Middle income. Ok thank you.**

**Don, can you describe the circumstances in which you became a single father?**

Just got a divorce. Uh, she had an affair and fell in love with someone else and left me and the girls.

**How old were your girls?**

Two and four.

**Two and four. And you've been with them since they were two and four?**

Yep.

**Can you describe your relationship with your girls as they were growing up?**

Great. Uh, the best father and daughters. That's your life.

**What was one of the hardest things that you had to overcome as a single father?**

Just knowing that they were growing up without a mother and missing out on a mother doing things with them.

**Were there any other people that you put in their lives to compensate for that or?**

Oh yeah, they had plenty of friend's mothers who stepped up and helped them.

**Can you describe how they were in school academically?**

They was good. Straight A's. Oldest one straight A's. The youngest one, she struggled some in grammar school, but she got good in middle school and high school.

**Were you able to attend the PTO meetings and parent conferences and that kind of thing?**

Oh yeah. Did all that. They both played sports so I was going back and forth. Uh, one would have games at middle school and one would have games at grammar school, right on through high school. A lot of times they would be at the same time so I would have to go spend half time at this school and then go see other half of the other child at the other school.

**What sports did they play?**

Transcript Example  
Page 2

They played basketball and volleyball.

**That's neat. And what are they doing now?**

One's a RN at the Med Center and the other is a dental assistant for a dentist office in

**Did you help them with their homework?**

Best I could.

**Do you remember some of the things you used to do with them when they had homework?**

Just try to explain it to them the best way I could, you know how I'd do it.

**Yeah. I'm sure it was different.**

Yeah it is different now. They don't want you to teach them that way no more.

**No that's true, that's true. How were they, since they were girls, when they went through that stage of puberty and that kind of thing, how did you as a single father take care of issues like that?**

I had my mother to help me and I have a sister to help me and my niece and you know they would, take them and buy them their first training bra and they would help me with that stuff.

**That's great. Yeah that's good. What were some of the most memorable times you had with them?**

About everything. I love going to watch them play sports. Uh, I take them to the beach on vacation. Enjoyed that. When they got older I take them deer hunting and let them kill their first deer, you know, and that was exciting. Lots of things with them.

**Did they ever ask about Mom?**

Ummm, no. Not really, they, the youngest one she, she despises her, I mean they haven't seen her because she surrendered her parental rights. And they might have run across her once or twice just out in the store and to be frank with you, the youngest one says, "I wish she was just dead. I hate her guts." But the oldest one, she looks like her mother, she hears it from everybody, you look just like your mom, you know. She don't say nothing, she just blows it off.

**How did you fit your time with work, like what was your work schedule when they were growing up?**

I worked third shift.

**Wow.**

I mean if I worked second, I could have worked second, but I'd never get to see them because they would be in school. So I worked third shift for twenty years just so I could be with them.

**Yeah, yeah.**

And then at night time I would take them to my mothers, you know, before I went to work. And when I got off work in the mornings, I would go by and get them and take them to school.

**As a single father, how did you deal with your wife leaving and that kind of thing? Who would you confide in and talk to?**

### Appendix M: Within-Case Worksheet

R1: What are the experiences of single fathers and their academically successful children?	<b>Fathers:</b> Describe any academic activities you were involved in that you feel benefited your child.  Describe any differences that you may have experienced rearing your son and daughter.	<b>Children:</b> Describe how your father played a role in your academic success.  In what ways was your father involved in your life?	<b>Fathers and Children:</b> Describe what you feel made the difference in being successful with academics.
Interviews			
Letters			
Observations			
Timelines			
Physical Artifacts			

### Appendix N: Cross-Case Worksheet

	Interviews	Letters	Observations	Timelines	Physical Artifacts
Sam Daughter					
Hank Daughter Son					
Henry Daughter Son Son Son Son					
Walt 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter					
Bill 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter					

## Interviews - Dads

2. What academic involvement activities do single fathers participate in that may influence their children's academic success? This research question is vital to this study because there is little definitive research on what specific activities have the greatest impact on children's academic achievement (Abel, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Lipscomb, 2011).

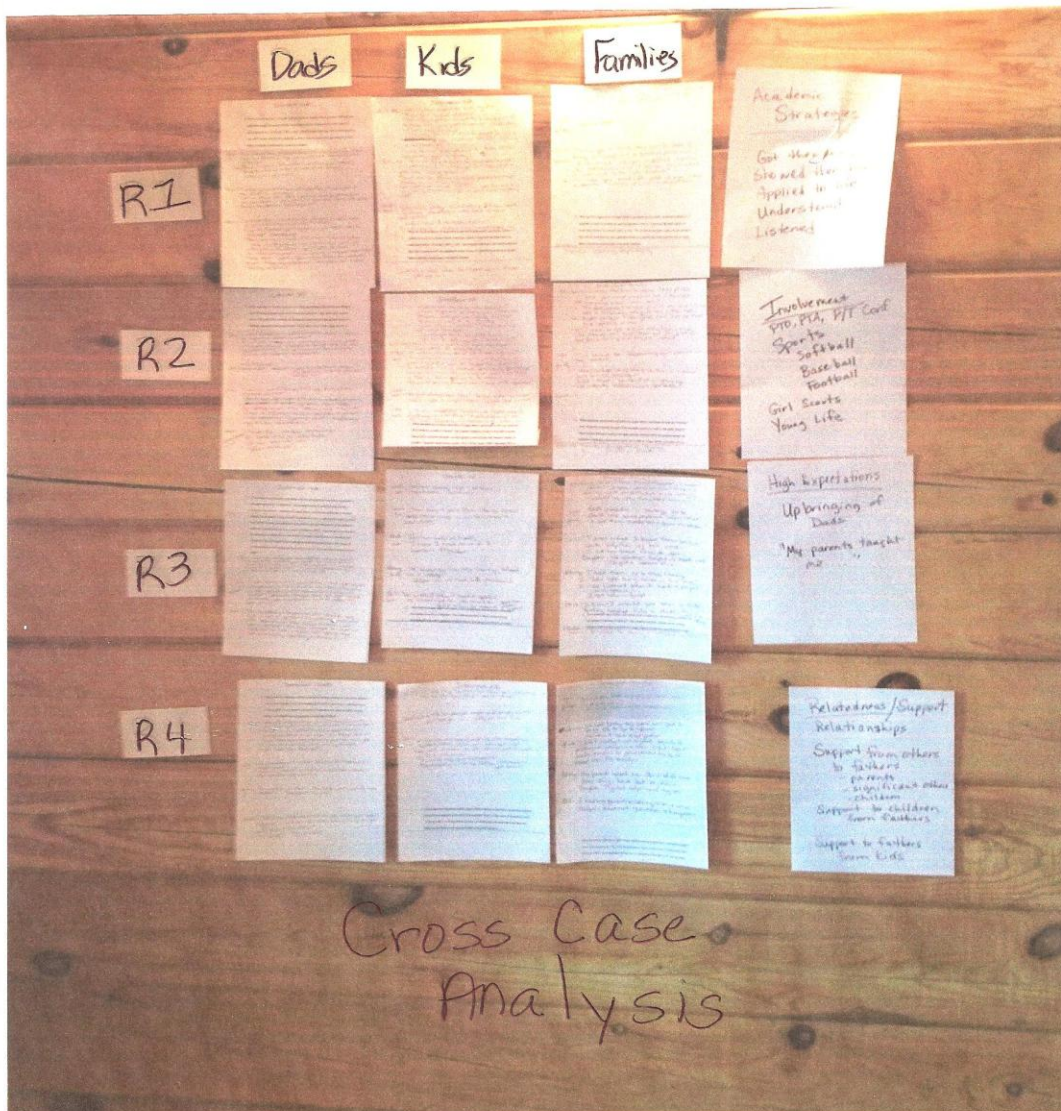
Sam- "involved in school work, spoke with all her teachers, I would go to school to do something with her"  
"I was able to ~~to~~ give her examples on math problems"  
"I taught at least 2 classes at the high school or done a presentation!" "I tried to give her some examples in real life related to her homework."

PT conf, PTA mtgs.

Bill- "did all that" Homework - "Just try to explain it to them the best way I could, you know how I'd do it."

Henry- "I attended a lot of PT conf, PTA mtgs. for my children and stuff like that"  
"Some children learn better whether they actually physically ~~do it~~ ~~do it~~ do something. some learn better by reading about, some children have to do it all"  
"I had to help them read or help them physically to do something" "Repetitive stuff" "So each one of my children was different."

Walt- "I helped them with their homework."  
encourage "Be responsible, be accountable."  
"Do the best you can"  
"Be an example"



### Appendix O: Word Table Worksheet

	Interviews	Letters	Observations	Timelines
Sam Daughter				
Hank Daughter Son				
Henry Daughter Son Son Son Son				
Walt 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter				
Bill 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter				



## Word Table

	Interviews	Letters	Observations	Timelines	Pictures
Sam Daughter	high expectations involved supportive	understand my hero	humor finished each other's sentences	excited proud overjoyed	certificates diploma
Hank Daughter Son	responsible involved supportive encouraging	responsible encourage	graduation oldest writes	proud thankful happy	certificates
Henry Daughter Son Son Son Son	guidance expected positive tough an example goals expectations	listen encourage proud of them expectations	loving graduation	so proud! happy proud proud	certificates
Walt 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter	values principles wanted me to do well helped	example expected	laughed at each other graduation humor	proud surprised	diploma
Bill 1 <sup>st</sup> Daughter 2 <sup>nd</sup> Daughter	proud + joy helped patience	listen encouraging an example supportive	loving caring	Proud anxious happy relieved	certificates

Proud - 9 (3 pieces of data)  
 expectations - 7 (2 pieces of data  
 includes ~~all~~ sets of  
 interviews)

### **Appendix P: Audit Trail**

August 28, 2013	Proposal sent to Committee Members
September 22, 2013	Proposal Presentation
October 1, 2013	Research Consultant Review
October 9, 2013	Safe Assign Results (10%), Uploaded to Sharepoint
October 10, 2013	IRB Application filled out
October 18, 2013	IRB Approval
October 22, 2013	Contact, via email, Henry
October 26, 2013	Interview Henry
October 28, 2013	Contact, via phone, Bill and Walt
November 4, 2013	Interview Bill
November 5, 2013	Contact, via phone, children of Bill
November 6, 2013	Transcripts of Henry's interview sent via email for member checking
November 7, 2013	Interview first child of Bill, Interview second child of Bill
November 9, 2013	Interview Walt
November 11, 2013	Contact, via phone, Sam for his interview, Hank for his interview with him and his children, and the children of Walt to set up interviews with them and the family
November 18, 2013	Transcripts of interviews of Bill and his two children, and Walt sent via email for member checking

November 27, 2013	Interview Sam, Interview Hank, Interview child one of Hank, Interview child two of Hank, Interview Hank and family, Contact, via email, child of Sam
December 5, 2013	Interview Walt's two children and interviewed the family, received camera from Walt and Walt's letter
December 7, 2013	Interview Sam and his family, interviewed Sam's child, received camera from Sam and his letter
December 12, 2013	Transcripts of interviews of Sam and Hank, Hank's two children, and Hank's family interview sent via email for member checking
December 16, 2013	Transcripts of interview with Sam and his family sent, via email, for member checking
December 20, 2013	Transcripts of interviews Walt's two children and Walt's family interview sent via email for member checking
December 22, 2013	Received letters from Hank and his children, received camera from Hank, via mail
December 23, 2013	Received accuracy check from Walt and his children about transcripts, received letters from Walt's children
December 27, 2013	Received accuracy check, via phone, from Hank and Hank's two children about transcripts
December 28, 2013	Received accuracy check, via phone, from Sam and his child about transcripts, Contact Henry's four children to set up interviews

December 30, 2013	Interview Bill and family, received camera from Bill, received letters from both children and Bill, received accuracy check from Bill and his two children for transcripts
January 3, 2014	Interview, via phone, children of Henry (four children),
January 4, 2014	Interview Henry and family, received letter from Henry, received camera from Henry, received accuracy check from Henry for transcript
January 10, 2014	Transcripts of interviews sent, via email, to Henry and his four children and Bill and his children (family interview) for member checking
January 11, 2014	Received letters from Henry's children
January 12, 2014	Received accuracy check, via phone, from Henry's four children and Bill's family about transcripts
January 13-15, 2014	Organized transcripts according to participants, wrote significant phrases answering research questions on worksheets for each participant, compared observation notes, timelines, and pictures
January 17-20, 2014	Compared worksheets to form emerging themes, synthesized data across participants and across bounded systems, summarized findings, and triangulated data across the multiple forms of data