

FREQUENT FATHER MILES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF DIVORCED
FATHERS' PERCEIVED ROLE IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how divorced fathers perceive their role in the education of their middle or high school child. The central focus of this study was: How do divorced fathers describe the roles they play in their child's education? The following questions guided the study: (a) How do divorced fathers describe the role they play in their child's education? (b) What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education? (c) What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout secondary schools? The co-researchers of this study were divorced fathers with joint custody of their middle or high school student. Data was collected through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Interviews were transcribed and emerging themes were used to structure questions for the focus group sessions. Results of the study revealed that the fathers accepted a large responsibility for being knowledgeable about and engaged in their child's education. It was noted that fathers felt their child's mother exercised some form of maternal gatekeeping over knowledge surrounding their children's education. There also was a general lack of knowledge surrounding school policy for communication with parents. Some fathers also mentioned a uninviting and even rude atmosphere from schools toward their attempts at father involvement. In summary, there were many obstacles fathers believed they must overcome in order to remain attentive to their child's needs.

Key words: fathers, divorce, parent involvement, middle school, high school, secondary, maternal gatekeeping

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving husband who has supported and encouraged me every step of the way. Billy you are my best friend, my rock, and my comfort. Thank you for pushing me to persevere.

To my wonderful daughters, Chloe and Gretchen, although mommy has not stopped learning, I think I may have stopped going to school. Thank you for your hugs, your love, and quiet Saturdays so I could write.

To my parents, Charles and Ann Combs, thank you for your unending love over the years. I will forever appreciate all that you have done to help me grow into the person I am today. Your guidance has been priceless.

Finally to my sister, Beth, thank you for you being a lifelong learner with me and letting me share my ideas with you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For decades, it has been assumed by educators and the public at large that socioeconomic status is one of the best predictors of academic achievement (Marzano, 2003), but according to the Michigan Department of Education (2001), family participation was twice as predictive of academic success than was socioeconomic status. Strong family-school-community partnerships are beneficial to student achievement. Teachers must be supported in order to effectively educate children, and in return, families and the community must be supported in order to effectively serve their children (Williams, 2003). Research indicates that school aged children spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school (Michigan Department of Education, 2001). In order to provide as much support as possible while outside of school, parents need to be encouraged to take advantage of every opportunity to be involved in and knowledgeable of their child's educational path.

Background

One of the most important components in educational reform is parental involvement (Mitchell & Hauser-Cram, 2010; Smit et al., 2008). Definitions of parental involvement include the resources and commitment that parents bring to their children's lives (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwick, 2007). Common uses of the term include supporting a child by attending school functions (Guo, 2010), volunteering at school (Coco, Goos, & Kostogriz, 2007), helping with homework (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008), communicating with teachers and the school regularly (Reedy & McGrath, 2010), providing encouragement, and helping students improve schoolwork (Holloway et al., 2008).

Research has shown higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates, along with better attendance, fewer discipline issues, and better motivation and self-esteem is directly related to

increased parental involvement (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010). A number of studies have examined the need for revisions to current parental involvement programs to continue improvement in these areas (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Eberly, Joshi, & Galen, 2010; Flanigan, 2007). Other studies have investigated barriers to creating partnerships that stemmed from the perceptions of teachers and parents (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Smit et al., 2008; Wanat, 2010). After a detailed survey of these studies examining elements of parental involvement strategies, it was clear that a majority of the participants were females, namely the mothers. Studies that do focus on fathers' involvement are often limited to financial support (Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Most research that involves fathers still focuses on the two-parent household (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Several recent studies have reported the lack of data related to the involvement of fathers, but focused on fathers with children in Early Head Start, Head Start, and other preschool and Early Childhood Programs (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; Palm & Fagan, 2008). Little attention is focused on the role that fathers play in their child's education after early adolescence (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Macleod, 2007).

Evolution of Fathers' Roles

Perceptions of fathers' roles have evolved throughout history. Morman and Floyd (2002) argue that the meaning of fatherhood is defined by the changing standards of culture. Past centuries viewed fathers as the protectorate of their family and expected them to ingrain their children with a sense of values from the Bible (Honig, 2008). With the onset of industrialization, the role of fathers moved away from that of a moral compass and toward being the "breadwinner" (Honig, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008, p. 823). During the Great Depression, many fathers were no longer able to provide financially for their families and their role became that of a gender-based role model (Honig, 2008; Lamb, 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). During the 1970s, fathers emerged as nurturers taking an active role in their child's development (Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Child-bearing in non-marital situations likewise led to a large number of unmarried men that co-parent, but do not live with their child (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010).

According to Mitchell and Hauser-Cram (2008), "fathers who are involved in their adolescents' lives have teens who are better adjusted and more satisfied in their relationships as adults" (p. 488). Many fathers are involved in their children's lives; however, past research has not attempted to gain their perspectives and give them a voice. This study was delimited to include only men no longer married to their child's mother. Phenomenological studies delve into the shared experiences of those involved in the phenomenon. By including only divorced fathers, I attempted to elicit a common voice that is often unheard. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand divorced fathers' perceived roles in the education of their middle or high school child.

Situation to Self

I began my research with the axiological assumption that parents were not involved in their child's education because educators are not doing their part to make parents believe they are welcome and valued in the process of educating their child. I wanted to find ways to involve parents and create the desperately needed partnerships to help children be successful in their educational journey. Throughout my research, I began to understand that the partnerships were there, but there was not equal representation. I sought to take a participatory stance and allow divorced fathers to share their perceptions of their involvement in their child's education. By removing mothers entirely from the study, I hoped ascertain a clearer picture of the role that fathers take in their child's education. This aspect of the study sought to place sole focus on fathers' perspectives as they relate to their experiences with their child's education.

It was my experience and observation that divorced fathers, for the most part, are not in attendance at school meetings and parent teacher conferences. The assumption made was that divorced fathers make an active choice to not be involved in their children's education. This opinion was formed over the course of many years of teaching. This constitutes a bias that should be acknowledged. I made every effort to not let this bias effect the outcome of the research.

Problem Statement

Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it" (New King James Version). In the book *Kingdom Education*, raising children is likened to a homework assignment from God (Schultz, 2003). God's intention for fathers is that fathers should maintain continued involvement in the education of their children. Additionally, current research correlates school success with parental involvement (Freeman,

Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010, Mitchell & Hauser-Cram, 2010; Smit et al., 2008). However, with unemployment, divorce, and child-bearing outside of marriage on the rise over the past several decades, the American family's structure has undergone significant changes (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; DeBell, 2007; Laughlin, Farrie, & Fagan, 2009; Goodsell & Meldrum; 2010; Honig, 2008; Saracho & Spodek; 2008).

Most parents taper off their involvement as their child progresses in school because they see their children as “independent and resistant to parental involvement” (Galloway, 2006, p. 258). Smit et al. (2008) viewed the fact parental involvement is “more extensive in primary education than in secondary education” (p. 69) as an international problem. Throughout the research, fathers are not the primary parent who attends school activities regardless of their current marital status (Coco et al., 2007; Macleod, 2007; Palm & Fagan, 2008). Fathers' voices, especially those of high school students, have been rarely heard (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Macleod, 2007). Including only men who are divorced provided a unique perspective because there was little, if any influence from the child's mother. A qualitative phenomenological approach to research provided divorced fathers with the opportunity to share their perceptions and provide the rationale for their current level of involvement in their child's education and captured the essence of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived roles of divorced fathers in the education of their middle and high school students. The role of a father was generally defined as the father's perceived responsibilities and actions related to his child's education. Father involvement was defined as any communication or contact between the father and the child or child's school regarding the child's progress or overall school experience and

attendance at school functions or conferences (i.e., sporting events, parent-teacher conferences, open house, IEP meetings, community events).

Research Questions

The focus of inquiry was to describe the roles divorced fathers play in their middle or high school child's education. The following questions guided this study:

Research Question One

How do divorced fathers describe the roles they play in their child's education? Research related to a father's influence in a child's life predominately consists of discussions of the absence of the fathers and of the negative effects of fathers' absences rather than focusing on the positive contributions that fathers make through their involvement in the child's education (Honig, 2008; Mikelson, 2008, Saracho & Spodek, 2008). This question focused on the perceptions of fathers' responsibilities and actions they take in their child's education.

Research Question Two

What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education? Parental involvement research has identified several barriers that affect parent involvement (Coco et al., 2007; Eberly et al., 2007; Flanigan, 2007; McCoach et al., 2010). Awareness of perceived barriers helped guide the interview questions and signaled themes that emerged from the responses. While most published research involves mothers, this question helped determine if the fathers recognized these same factors as obstacles to their involvement.

Research Question Three

What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school? Palm and Fagan (2008) argued that fathers need additional support from teachers in the parental involvement arena dominated by mothers. Other studies

revealed that fathers recalled their own difficulties in school, were afraid that their children would do poorly and reflect badly on them as parents, and that some schools requested their attendance only when there was a problem with the child (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Freeman et al., 2008; Macleod, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). This question attempted to verify the findings of studies from the father's perspectives to provide support for future studies in parental involvement programs.

Significance of the Study

The earlier parental involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; Honig, 2008; Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Smit et al., 2008). The research, however, is limited to elementary school and does not address sustaining involvement throughout the entire educational journey from the perspectives of divorced fathers (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; Palm & Fagan, 2008). This study provided the opportunity for fathers of middle and high school students to voice the involvement they have in their child's education. Studies that do focus on father involvement are usually from the perspective of the mothers or focus solely on a father's financial contributions to his children (DeBell, 2007; Freeman et al., 2008; Holloway et al., 2008; Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). The intent of this current research was to provide a window into the experiences of divorced fathers' perceptions of their role in their middle or high school student's education.

This study will provide teachers and schools with valuable information about how fathers are currently involved in their child's education. It examined the factors that influence

their level of involvement, and what elements should be included in parental involvement programs to make them more inviting to and beneficial for fathers in particular.

From a theoretical perspective, this study applied Bruner's (1990) *Acts of Meaning* to describe the phenomenon from the perspective of divorced fathers with children in high school. The approach allowed fathers to explain their actions and rationale related to their current involvement. By focusing not only of the internal and external behaviors exhibited, but allowing fathers to share the reasoning behind the behaviors, the study contributes to the understanding of the central beliefs of divorced fathers, the level of meaning they assign to the area of education, and parental involvement at school.

Delimitations

The participants of this study were limited to men who have children in grades six through 12. I chose to limit the study in this manner because there was very little research related to involvement of fathers with students in middle and high school. The men could no longer be married to the child's mother. This delimitation helped to ensure that the fathers were not notified daily about the child's school activities by the child's mother. The fathers had joint custody of their child to ensure that they had the opportunity, both legally and voluntarily, to be involved in their child's education. By placing the restriction of divorced fathers with visitation rights or joint custody, I hoped to eliminate the possibility of fathers relying on their spouse to relay any information about their child through direct contact. Widowed and never married fathers who still remain active in their child's life were excluded to understand the phenomenon specifically from the perspective of divorced fathers. Researchers have found that divorced fathers with joint custody were the most committed to the lives of their children (Cooksey and Fondell, 1996; Halme et al., 2009; Huang, Han, & Garfinkel, 2003; King, 1994; McKenry et al.,

1996). Walker et al. (2010) found that those with a court mandated financial responsibility and joint custody of their child were the most involved in their child's life.

Research Plan

Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand problems in a certain context. The research was viewed through a constructivist paradigm. Participants are referred to as co-researchers to signify their active role in the collection and analysis of the research data (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2005) described qualitative research as an alternative to traditional quantitative research that places importance on the views of co-researchers. Recent parental involvement research has quantified the involvement of the participants. I chose the qualitative design to gather data related to the perceived experiences of divorced fathers. Phenomenological studies seek to have participants share their experiences related to a phenomenon. I chose this research design to allow divorced fathers with visitation rights or joint custody of middle and high school students to share the experiences they have had when dealing with their child's education. Moustakas (1994) believed that each experience studied should be considered fresh and apart from other experiences for the researcher to better understand the "structural essences" (p. 35) of the phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenological design requires the researcher to follow a rational path and see the phenomenon for what it truly is with a "pure ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Limited experience with middle and high school students and their parents coupled with the inability to speak from the perspective of a father with a child at this grade level allowed for a more objective or "fresh perspective toward the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). These factors support a transcendental stance.

Data was collected through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (1994) analysis of phenomenological data

was used for all survey data. Interview data followed a modification by Moustakas' of van Kaam's (1966) method. Survey and interview data analysis was used in the formation of questions for focus group discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most important components in educational reform is parental involvement (Dunlap, 1999). Academic achievement, as well as student confidence and determination, have been linked to higher levels of parental involvement (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010). Many studies have investigated revisions to current initiatives, barriers to current programs, and ways to provide existing resources to more parents (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Eberly, Joshi, & Galen, 2010; Flanigan, 2007, Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Smit et al., 2008; Wanat, 2010).

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework behind this study and the search parameters used for inclusion of articles in the study. It defines different aspects and viewpoints related to parent involvement and synthesizes previous literature relating to the benefits of, factors affecting, and barriers to father involvement in education. The themes that emerged in each of these areas are addressed. The chapter concludes with noted gaps in literature related specifically to divorced father involvement in their child's education and with the recognition that there is a need for more empirical data on the father's perceived roles, responsibilities and actions related to his child's education.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Bruner's (1990) *Acts of Meaning* to analyze the literature and data collected for this study. Bruner (1990) sought to interpret the *hows* and *whys* of how individuals act in their everyday lives and the restrictions placed upon actions. This theory is often referred to as "folk psychology" or "common sense" (Bruner, 1990, p. 35). It examines what makes people tick and how the mind works, the actions taken by individuals, and how one commits to these actions. Bruner (1990) argued that when things go as we expect, we feel no need to

explain them. However, if there are conflicting theories between what is and what we feel should be, we feel the need to explain the rationale behind our actions. The world is not under our control, but instead how we respond to our reality. This approach allowed the culture of divorced fathers to explain their actions or responses related to their involvement in their middle or high school child's education.

Macleod (2007) applied this theory to understanding what types of involvement activities are more appealing to fathers. The theory does not focus simply on the causes of the internal and external behaviors exhibited, but the reasoning behind the behaviors and what meaning the co-researchers have ascribed to their experiences (Bruner, 1990). The basic premise at the center of this theory is that people have beliefs and desires. Each person has their own set of beliefs, they want certain things, and they assign more meaning to or feel that some things matter more than others. This theory aided in the consideration of data collection during the revision of interview questions as common themes arose and data analysis as responses were clustered into themes and overlapping statements were eliminated.

Review of the Literature

Two methods were used to initially identify and then select articles and studies for inclusion in this literature review. First, studies were identified through computer searches of Educational Research Information Center (ERIC) and ProQuest using various combinations of the terms parent involvement, parent support, parent-school partnerships, fathers, father involvement, fathers' roles, divorced fathers, middle school, high school, secondary education, parent training, and father training. The primary searches were limited to articles published within the past five years. The reference lists of the articles identified through the computer

searches were reviewed for articles that discussed parent involvement and specifically father involvement that resulted in a few studies for inclusion outside of the five-year publication span.

A second round of computer searches were conducted using combinations of terms developed from common themes found through an in-depth review of the initial articles and the original search terms. These terms included benefits of parental involvement, academic achievement, family structure, children with disabilities, culture, Early Head Start, early childhood, co-parenting, non-resident fathers, mother influence, maternal gatekeeping, and mothers in the workforce.

Definitions of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can assume many forms. Walker et al. (2010) named both structured and unstructured forms of parental involvement. Structured involvement focuses mainly on the financial support that fathers provide to their children. Unstructured involvement includes concrete actions such as discipline, cooking, putting a child to bed, reading to the child, attending school and sporting events, talking with the child, and playing games or sports. Most of these forms, however, occur within the home and focus very little on involvement in schools.

Early in her work, Epstein (1987) named the following four types of school parental involvement: (a) basic obligations, (b) home and school communication, (c) parent involvement at school, and (d) parent involvement in at home learning activities. Later, she expanded her research to include six levels of opportunities for parent involvement in school-related areas to include: (a) child-rearing skills assistance, (b) school-parent communication, (c) parent volunteer opportunities, (d) home-based learning, (e) school decision-making involvement, and (f) school-community collaboration (Epstein, 2008). Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) named communication with schools, volunteering, participation in school decision-making, and support

for learning at home as ways parents partner with schools. For the purposes of collecting information on father involvement for the literature review, all forms of involvement were considered. However, Epstein's (2008) and Patall et al.'s (2008) forms of involvement were considered and used as guides in formulation of guiding questions during the data collection and analysis phases.

Focus on Parental Involvement

A detailed survey of parental involvement studies examining elements of parental involvement strategies made it clear that every effort is being made to initiate new partnerships and perpetuate current partnerships. However, when examining the participant makeup of these studies, a majority of the participants are females, namely the mothers, and fathers are often view as the 'invisible' parent (Spodek & Saracho, 2008, p. 665). In studies that do include fathers, focus is placed on early childhood programs and gives little attention to paternal involvement into later adolescence.

After reviewing many studies, it is clear that schools have worked very hard to establish partnerships with parents. However, the majority of data collected focuses on the perspectives of mothers, and fathers' perspectives were limited, if present at all. Fathers that did participate in the studies were mainly those of children in early childhood programs.

Another common theme in parental involvement is that, even when examining the paternal role, reports are from the mother (Walker, Reid, & Logan, 2010). Previous studies have ignored the viewpoints of fathers with students in middle and high school and more specifically divorced fathers at the middle and high school level. This fact supports the need to gain the perspectives of the fathers of middle and high school students related to their involvement in their child's education.

Benefits of Father Involvement

Schultz (2003) named the home as being “the greatest influence on shaping the next generation” in the past, present, and future (p. 59). Dodd and Konzal (2002) argued that parental involvement is a better predictor of student success than family income and educational levels which are more commonly used. Reilly (2008) supported this view by citing the most noted benefit of involvement is its enhancement of student performance.

Academic achievement. Promoting achievement in children is the central goal of educational policy and linked to an increase in the push for parental involvement because it is viewed as an effective strategy for raising academic achievement and creating life-long learners (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2005; Flouri, 2005; Freeman et al., 2008; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005b; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Smit et al., 2008). Recent educational research noted improved academic motivation, examination results, school attendance, behavior, and lower dropout rates as benefits to education when fathers are involved (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Fan & Chen, 2001; Flippin & Crais, 2011; Ghazi et al., 2010; Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Palm & Fagan, 2008).

Several studies found that although parental involvement is important in early developmental stages for children, their involvement becomes even more important as students progress into middle and high school (Elish-Piper, 2008; Lee & Green, 2008; Lenka & Kant, 2012; O’Bryan, Braddock, & Dawkins, 2009; Skaliotis, 2010). Parental involvement later in educational careers has been tied to higher grades, college aspirations, post-secondary school attendance, and ultimately attainment of higher educational degrees (Elish-Piper, 2008; Lenka & Kant, 2012; O’Bryan et al., 2009).

In a study conducted by Ghazi et al. (2010), researchers interviewed both parents and students in a rural government primary school in Pakistan. The researchers found a direct relationship between children's academic motivation and frequent discussions about the importance of education, praise on better school performance, ensuring their basic daily needs of food, safety, and health, and protecting children from the social evils and current family financial troubles. By allowing students to share experiences about school parents are helping their child establish a sense of ownership over their education and creating more motivation for their success (Reilly, 2008). Researchers said that by discussing school with parents, the students tend to earn higher overall grades (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). Although Ghazi et al. (2010) conducted the study outside of the United States; parallels can be made to American children who need these same physical and emotional needs satisfied.

Emotional and social growth. Research suggested the emotional relationships children develop with their fathers early in life foster empathy, social skills, and positive peer relationships both inside and outside of the school setting (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Flouri, 2005; Goodsell & Meldrum, 2009; Grossman et al., 2002; Honig, 2008; Mitchell & Hauser-Cram, 2010). Pleck (2007) explained that children's attachment to their father gives them a firm base to explore the world and establish future relationships with peers and adults. Lundahl et al. (2008) stated that providing more parent training, especially to fathers, would be beneficial given the link between father behavior toward their children and their child's social and emotional development.

Similarly, Palm and Fagan (2008) suggested this training should take place in the context of Early Head Start initiatives in order to impact children as early as possible.

Although data does show that father involvement has a positive effect on student outcomes, especially in early childhood, it should be noted that there are many other contributors that determine child outcomes. In fact, Phares, Fields, and Kamboukos (2008) reported that in their study of interactions between families of adolescents that there was no significant correlation between the involvement of mothers or fathers and their child's behavioral or emotional functioning. Skaliotis (2010) found that while a child's behavior at school did not deter paternal involvement; given their current level of involvement fathers were not likely to increase their involvement if the child's behavior did decline.

Factors Influencing Father Involvement

Age of father. Fathers' involvement in their children's development and lives varies across generations (Robbers, 2008). Honig (2008) suggested the later a man enters paternity, the more likely he will be reflective about the role he plays in his child's education. The age of a father may pose some risks to the child such as genetic mutations and higher occurrences of autism and schizophrenia (Saey, 2008). This fact may have both positive and negative impacts on father involvement by increasing his involvement with his child because of the nature of the child's disability, or decreasing his involvement due to stress imposed by the disability (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2005; Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Flippin & Crais, 2011). It has been found that children of younger fathers are more likely to suffer from physical abuse that could in turn influence their educational success (Flanigan, 2007; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008). Honig (2008) specifically cited "shaken baby syndrome" as one physical risk suffered more often by infants with younger parents versus mature parents (p. 667).

Robbers (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of fathers with children ages zero to three years enrolled in a fatherhood program. Fathers in the sample ranged from age 16 to 30, with the average age of the fathers being 20 years. An involvement instrument was used to determine how often the fathers participated in a range of activities with their children. At the onset of the study it was found that younger fathers reported spending more time with their children than the older fathers in the study and the older the child become, the less assistance the father provided (Robbers, 2008). These findings seem to refute the claims that later paternity leads to more positive outcomes and that older fathers are more reflective about the time they spend with their children (Honig, 2008).

In a study conducted by Deslauriers et al. (2012), 22 young fathers in Canada aged 17 to 21 at the time of their first child's birth were interviewed to better understand these young fathers' perspectives of social organizations such as child protective services, legal systems, and social organizations that are designed for families (Deslauriers et al., 2012). The results ranged from fathers who felt fully supported by family and social institutions to those who felt they were actually criticized by these individuals and organizations. Many of the fathers felt they were discriminated against because of their appearance (hair, tattoos, earrings) and their level of income. One father responded: 'You can have absolutely no job, be on assistance, and still be the best parent in the world.' (Deslauriers et al., 2012, p. 75). Young fathers in the study cited the ability of mothers in the same situation to receive support and assistance more easily than they could. Although this study is valuable in helping social organizations evaluate the current state of their programs, all the fathers in the study had children no older than 12 years old and their involvement past this age was not considered.

Father interests. Recent research has suggested that the easiest way to improve father involvement is to focus on their interests and cater to their needs in order to gain their participation (Rygus 2009, Wanat, 2010). It can be said with almost certainty that most men prefer actions to words (Deslauriers et al., 2012). One way to satisfy this preference is through sporting events or activities. Young fathers who are in need of help can use this venue to receive assistance without feeling weak (Kiselica, 2008). Varsity high school sports have been named as one of the strongest indicator for increased involvement in secondary schools (O'Bryan et al., 2009). This predictor, however, only seems to hold true for males, as females were not involved in the study and supports conclusions that fathers are more involved and provide more care to their sons than daughters (Flouri, 2006; Phares et al., 2008).

Fathering beliefs. According to Sriram and Nevalkar (2012) across the globe fatherhood can be defined in the following ways: the biological father, the provider, the partner, the care giver, and the enlightened. As a biological father, paternity is accepted and responsibility is taken for the child's well-being. The provider attempts to make sure economic support is available to the child. As a partner, men work equally with women and enjoy the nurturing tasks in tandem. This partnership is sometimes referred to as the 'new father' (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012, p. 207). As a care giver, fathers may not assume an equal share with their partner, but they feel free to be expressive and loving toward their child. Finally, as an enlightened father, men reach an understanding of the benefits of their involvement with their child. Although there are many views or stages in fatherhood, many fathers still feel that their primary responsibility is to be a good provider (Deslauriers et al., 2012; Tichenor et al., 2011).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) conducted research that linked parent self-efficacy beliefs to their parental involvement practices. Building upon this research, Freeman et al.,

(2008) examined fathers' self-efficacy and ability to press past obstacles to their involvement as a mediator to their behaviors. The researchers found that when a father's self-efficacy is taken into account the barriers to involvement that fathers may face cannot be considered as predictors of their involvement. In other words, a high self-efficacy leads fathers to higher levels of involvement in their child's education regardless of barriers. It should be noted, however, that the study was conducted within an Early Head Start program and the barriers faced at this level may not be comparable to those encountered in later grades.

Guzzo (2011) and Yarwood (2011) conducted separate research in the area of fathering identities of first time fathers and found that most men model their role as a father and their thoughts on fatherhood after their own parents. In the cases where a father was not present for a majority of the now fathers, they modeled their beliefs after 'other working dads' or based on the shared meaning of fatherhood where one participant vaguely stated 'everyone knows what a dad does' (Yarwood, 2011, p. 162). These statements suggest that fathering attitudes and identities are based on common social expectations. Guzzo (2011) found that although most fathers felt it was very important for them to be involved, provide financial support, and act as an authority figure, the traditional perspective of fathering still exists in a minority of fathers who felt that going to work and providing financially for their children was of more importance than spending actual time with their children and that father involvement was much more important for sons than for daughters. Although no direct link was made between this traditional attitude and highly involved fathers, the researcher did note that those participants had high levels of paternal involvement in the form of a co-resident father as a child did hold fatherhood in higher regard than those who had an absent father. These beliefs are echoed around the world. In a study of fathers in India, results found that they were most influenced by their own parents or a close

relative, while some drew inspiration from spiritual leaders, mythology, and the media (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012)

In a study of low-income secondary school boys in South Africa, Spjeldnaes et al. (2011) found a major difference between the studies conducted among first time fathers in the United States. Although these individuals had not become fathers yet, they viewed their role as a good father as being a means for earning respect in their society. Of all the boys who participated in the study, none of the individuals lived with their father on a permanent basis. In fact, most fathers were completely absent from their son's life. In interviews, boys cited their goal for fatherhood to be the exact opposite of their father, wanting to provide guidance for 'life in general' because this was the most important responsibility of a father to his son (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011, p. 14).

Men may finally allow the following assumptions to influence their involvement: (a) men invest less in order to avoid mis-investment, (b) support of children is more economic and social than physiological, (c) time invested in children will be more socially than hormonally-driven, (d) the more time and resources invested in a child, the more certain men need to be of the child's paternity, (e) the fewer number of children, the more motivation to invest resources toward their success (Lamb, 2000). These behaviors would be most prevalent in cohabitating, step, never-married, and non-resident fathers because of potential paternity ambiguity (Lamb, 2000; Castillo & Finzi-Crossman, 2010).

Maternal influence and gatekeeping. Research on father involvement often examined the link between father-child interactions based on the attitudes of mothers toward the father's role (Gorvine, 2009; Holmes & Huston, 2010; McBride et al., 2005a; Mikelson, 2008; Phares et al., 2008; Pleck & Hofferth, 2008; Stolz et al., 2010). In studies of parent involvement with

school work, mothers and fathers both report that there is more maternal responsibility than paternal responsibility, and mother reported being content with their responsibilities (Phares et al., 2008). It has been suggested that father-child interactions and paternal involvement are influenced by the quality of mother-child interactions and marital relationships (Holmes & Huston, 2008). Pleck and Hofferth (2008) contribute these findings to the possibility that fathers model their involvement behaviors after those of the mothers. McBride et al. (2005a) agreed that father involvement is influenced by maternal perceptions of father investment. Tichenor et al. (2011) suggested viewing fatherhood in relation to motherhood because the couple aspect seems to impact the view of fatherhood.

In many fathering studies, mothers are the primary reporter for levels of paternal involvement (Grovine, 2009; Hohmann-Marriott, 2011; McBride et al., 2005a; Mikelson, 2008). Mikelson (2008) noted this fact could contribute to discrepancies in reported paternal involvement versus actual involvement. Another factor that may influence father involvement is known as “maternal gatekeeping” and is defined as: (a) the setting of rigid standards in reluctance to release family responsibility, (b) the urge to confirm maternal identity, and (c) the separation of family role images (McBride et al., 2005a). In a sense, gatekeeping follows the more traditional perspective of motherhood, placing women in the role of homemaker and childcare provider, while the father assumes his role in the area of financial support and security. Perhaps without realizing it, mothers are directly or indirectly removing opportunities for fathers to be more involved in their child’s education by placing these constraints on them (Palm & Fagan, 2008).

Fathers’ residency. Research has shown that a major indicator of father involvement is the father’s accessibility to his child, or better stated his residence status (Nelson, 2004). In

married and cohabitating instances, the frequency of contact between fathers is not usually in question, however, for divorced or non-resident fathers this aspect should be taken into consideration. It is important, however, to understand it is not necessarily how often a child sees his or her father, but more importantly the quality of the interactions when they occur (Flouri, 2006). These two concepts can be referred to as *presence* and *level* (Sano, Smith, & Lanigan, 2011).

Larger numbers of divorces and cohabitations without marriage results in many biological fathers not living with their child following the end of a relationship (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010; Laughlin et al., 2009). Fathers not living within the home are less likely to have day-to-day contact with their child and therefore play a less active role in their child's education (Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). When asked about conditions that might affect their child's non-resident biological father from seeing their child on a daily basis, mothers cited the fathers did not receive good parenting skills from their own fathers, work schedules, great travel distances, feelings of inadequacy related to parenting, conflict between the mother and father, and conflict between the biological father and other extended family members (Andrews et al., 2004).

Palm and Fagan (2008) pulled from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) research related to microsystems that may influence a father's involvement. One such factor is non-resident fathers may not have immediate access to their children because of the proximity of their residence to their child's residence. This fact is especially true to non-marital non-resident fathers who do not have the same legal rights as most married or divorced fathers thereby decreasing their interactions with their children (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2009). Cabrera and Peters (2000) noted that fathers may simply be denied visits with their children because of non-payment of

child support which may be somewhat beyond their fathers' control. However, in a study by Dush, Kotila, and Schoppe-Sullivan (2011) on co-parenting, both men and women described their co-parenting relationship to have an equal share of responsibility and to be very similar to their marriage or relationship prior to the dissolution regardless of custody arrangements. Non-resident father have been found to decrease their involvement the older a child becomes, but do not express the same gender biases between sons and daughters as most married fathers do (Sano et al., 2011).

Although father absences can be detrimental to children, it is sometimes unavoidable (Andrews et al., 2004; Lamb, 2000). Other father residency issues may be beyond the control of both mother and father. Issues such as current incarceration and drug addictions that keep father and child apart may be more beneficial to the child than contact (Mikelson, 2008; Sano et al., 2011). Sano et al. (2011) found that past incarceration resulted in lower involvement by fathers in the future.

Educational attainment. Some research suggested parents with a higher level of education corresponded to a higher level of involvement at school, discussion of school in the home environment, and higher educational expectations for children than those with a lower educational attainment (Freeman et al., 2008; Secord, 2009). In a survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control (2009), education of the father was a key factor in a father's positive involvement with his child. It has been found that young fathers are more likely to drop at of school in order to seek employment thereby having a lower educational attainment and lower economic status for supporting their family (Deslauriers et al., 2012). Higher levels of educational attainment, however, cannot fully predict the types of parental involvement or the quality of the involvement. In a study on parental involvement's link to educational attainment

by Secord (2009), higher education (at least a four year degree) was tied to more assistance with homework and parent self-efficacy, but those with lower educational attainment levels (less than a college degree) volunteered more time within the schools. This study was conducted in private school settings and made that assumption that parents who enrolled their children in private school desired and expected more involvement opportunities. Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson (2004) found college-educated married men have begun to spend more time with their children in an attempt to offset the demands place on mothers who work outside of the home. This link is not true for other studies where higher levels of education did not project higher father involvement (Rienks et al., 2011).

Education of both secondary school boys and girls in Turkey was positively impacted by fathers who had completed some of their own secondary education (Smits & Hoşgör, 2006). The researchers found that mothers in Turkey, who had completed only their primary education, had a positive influence on the education of girls. Mitchell and Hauser-Cram (2010), however, found there to be no significant correlation between the parents' education and the amount of time spent involved in school activities. The researchers noted that the participants were primarily from middle-income families and that socioeconomic status should be considered a factor in future research.

Socio-economic status. Freeman et al., (2008) stated that income and social status do not indicate why parents become involved and should be considered as a barrier to involvement especially for those with low status. Some recent studies suggested socio-economic status (SES) as a strong predictor for educational involvement (McCoach et al., 2008; Mitchell & Hauser Cram, 2010). In addition, most parental involvement studies that focus on the role of father limit the involvement to the financial responsibilities fathers have in their child's life and are taken

from the perspective of the mother regarding child support payments (Honig, 2008; Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Therefore, the more a father contributed financially, the more involved in his child's life he was said to be. In fact, fathers with fewer resources may struggle with transportation, child support, and costs associated with visitation which may reflect poorly on their involvement (Sano et al, 2011).

In a study of high and low SES schools' student achievement, McCoach et al. (2010) found a critical predicting factor of low-SES schools to be the amount of communication and collaboration between parents and school staff. Similarly, Pleck (2010) found that although family income directly affects the amount of material social capital such as food, clothing, shelter, and even education a child receives, a conclusive link between SES and involvement cannot be established. Although both studies' researchers agreed there is a possible link between SES and parental involvement, they concluded that SES could not be listed as a causal factor.

While many researchers are not ready to name a definitive link between SES and parental involvement, it cannot be denied that economic hardship can place a strain on parent-child relationships, especially in families where the father is considered the provider (Rienks et al., 2011). Some have made links to young fathers and low SES because it is more socially acceptable than for middle-aged fathers (Nelson, 2004). When examining differences in SES and race, white men were found to have a higher level of parental involvement when compared to Black males of the same low SES, specifically when examining payment of child support (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Huang et al., 2003; Sano et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2010).

Children with disabilities. Carpenter and Towers (2008) conducted a study of fathers of children with disabilities. Over one-third of the fathers participating in the study reported their child's disability made their commitment to involvement and support of their child even

stronger. Some fathers reported their own difficulties in school, such as dyslexia, as a hindrance to helping with their child's disability (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Hart, 2011). Ingber and Most (2012) attempted to examine the difference in father involvement of children with hearing loss and those with normal hearing, but found there was no statistical significance in their findings. Both groups of fathers had a higher level of self-reported involvement suggesting that there is equal involvement regardless of disability.

In a meta-analysis of literature on studies of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Flippin and Crais (2011) found that these parents reported higher levels of stress that often lead to a break down in family cohesion which may support a higher divorce rate in families with a child with ASD. Studies conducted by Baker-Ericzén, Brookman-Frazee, and Stahmer (2005) and Tehee, Honan, and Hevey (2008) found that mothers of children with ASD reported a higher level of perceived stress related to their child's disability than those of their typically developing peers. The mothers reported significantly higher levels of involvement in their child's education than did the fathers of children with ASD. Mitchell and Hauser-Cram (2010) found in their longitudinal study of parents of children with developmental disabilities that both mothers and fathers who reported having a lower level of stress with their child at age three had a more positive relationship with their child and felt more involved in their child's education at age 15 than those who reported a higher level of stress at the same point in their child's development. There was no further data collected with regard to these children past the age of 15 or throughout high school. Stress is often offset by the level of satisfaction that mothers have with the child's father (MacDonald & Hastings, 2008).

Fathers often acknowledged frustration because they could not communicate with their child who was diagnosed with ASD (Carpenter & Towers, 2008). Fathers said that mothers were

better at coping with the diagnosis of a disability, but felt the need to eventually accept the facts and move on (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Hart, 2011). This perspective is echoed in Mitchell and Hauser-Cram's (2010) findings that fathers reported more positive relationships with children with Down syndrome, while there was no correlation in this area for mother-teen relationships of children with disabilities.

Hart (2011) noticed that when initial assessments of students were conducted for admission into a special education program, the educational psychologists were working primarily with the mothers. The researcher first noticed that when receiving permission to give psychological advice that 98% of discussions were held with the mother while 13% involved the discussions with the father. Twenty fathers who did have knowledge of their child's special education assessment were contacted for interviews to understand the fathers' perceptions of their involvement in the assessment process. Of these 20 fathers, only eight consented to participate in the study. Notably, all the fathers who were identified as having knowledge of their child's referral and testing for special education were living with their child and the child's mother either in a marriage or cohabitating arrangement (Hart, 2011). Of the eight fathers, five said they were notified by the child's mother about the assessments and two noted being informed jointly, and one did not remember. Although the sample is not large, the findings of the study do support the trend that married and cohabitating fathers tend to rely on information regarding their child's education from their spouse.

When working with fathers of students with disabilities, many researchers have found it beneficial to provide training in specific areas of children's disabilities, but also to provide general coping strategies (MacDonald & Hastings, 2008). Many fathers of students with disabilities feel it is important to seek out resources to help them cope, but would like for

information to be readily provided to them through practitioners (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Hart, 2011; MacDonald & Hastings, 2008). Tehee et al. (2008) found statistically significant difference between levels of available support and information related to their child's disability. Parents of children ages three to six years and 11-14 years reported receiving more information and education than parents with children ages 15-18 years. Again, parental involvement seems to diminish the older the child becomes.

Barriers to Father Involvement

Time. Adam (2003) suggested time perception is characterized by the following three aspects: (a) time frames, temporality, tempo, and timing; (b) past, present, and future time; and (c) rhythm. This study suggested that more fragmented and unpredictable task are, the more difficult and time consuming it is to synchronize them into one's current schedule. This would account for the challenge, especially on short notice, that parents would face in making time during the day to schedule parent-teacher interactions. Even with strict time schedules, parents are willing to forfeit their leisure time in order to increase time spent with their children (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). Saracho and Spodek (2008) considered the amount of time fathers spend at meal times, play, reading, and physical child care and the frequency of this time spent to be a major indicator in the quality of paternal involvement.

Although time is usually related to activities of a 24-hour day, Flouri (2006) examined the amount of time elapsed after the separation of mothers and father. The study examined non-resident fathers' relationships with their secondary school child. The researcher concluded that although the time elapsed since the separation of mother and father did not predict the father's level of involvement, the frequency of father contact was negatively impacted. These findings

suggested that the longer a mother and father have been separated, the more frequently a father would be involved in the child's life.

In the Western culture, time is synonymous with money (Coco et al., 2007). When dealing with middle and working class families this belief must be considered. Although those in the middle class may work long hours, they are not as tightly bound by their work schedule and are allowed more leisure time, while those who perform shift work have much more unpredictable schedules and often cannot coordinate their schedules with the other demands of their family life such as their children's school activities (Warren, 2003).

Often teachers organize parental involvement opportunities around their work schedule and many parents cannot afford to spend time on these activities because they would lose income (Coco et al., 2007; Palm & Fagan, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008; Wanat, 2010). Coco et al. (2007) begs the question of fairness related when requiring or expecting parents to organize their schedule "according to the same priorities and principles as teachers conduct their work" (p. 78). Creighton (1999) suggested a decrease in the work day, or more family friendly work procedures to overcome this issue.

In a study conducted by Sayer et al. (2004), the researchers examined trends in mother and father childcare from the 1960's to the late 1990's. Although the 1960's were found to be a more "family oriented" time, the amount of time that both mothers and fathers reported spending with their child into the 1990's steadily increased (Sayer et al., 2004, p. 1). Their report found that married fathers are spending more time in routine activities with their child than in the past, but mothers are still the primary care giver. Although these findings support father involvement, there is no evidence to support time spent in these areas with fathers who are not inside the home.

Varying family structures. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), 5.6 million children in the United States live in a stepfamily, with about 10% of all two parent households being that of a biological mother and stepfather. Throughout the literature, studies typically focus on the perspectives of fathers in the typical family structure and give little attention to emerging structures (Halme et al., 2009). Today, however, men are interacting with children not only as fathers, but also as stepfathers, grandfathers, foster fathers, or simply as a partner to a woman with children from a previous marriage (Honig, 2008). Leidy et al. (2011) found that children with stepfathers are less likely to interact with their stepfather and were less well-adjusted. Non-marital childbearing has led to many men who are involved with their child, but in a co-parenting role (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010, Hohmann-Marriot, 2011). Although many couples remain in a cohabitating situation after the birth of their child, it is more likely that these relationships will dissolve later on than those couples who are married (Laughlin et al., 2009). These researchers found that even though marriage relationships were not as likely to dissolve, there was no significant predictor for a higher level of involvement among formally married fathers than those in cohabitating relationships. Lower paternal involvement has been found to be associated with high marital conflict and stepfather status (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008). Likewise, non-marital fathers' relationships with their former spouse were found to have a positive correlation to their involvement with their children (Castillo & Fenzi-Crossman, 2010).

King (1999) found that generally speaking divorced and separated fathers generally visit their children more often than never married fathers. Walker et al. (2009) found that divorced and non-resident fathers who had a poor relationship with their child's mother typically had contact with their child about once per month, while those who reported a good relationship with the mother were involved in contact with their child at least once per week.

Men are sharing more of the financial fulfillment responsibilities with women and are not considered to be the sole provider for the family (Saracho & Spodek, 2008). The percentage of women in the workforce increases from 58.5% of two-parent households where both parents are employed and 6.9% of two parent households where only the mother is employed outside the home to 65.9% of single- mother households with the mother employed outside the home (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2011). With over half of children growing up in households without their father and their mother employed outside the home, attention should be directed to the role that non-resident, namely divorced, fathers play in their child's wellbeing (King & Sobolewski, 2006).

Parent employment. Time constraints faced by families are often related to parent employment. Research in parental involvement identified some specific factors related to fathers' employment that may hinder involvement. In families where the mother worked, made more money than the father, or where both work schedules were not consistent, the involvement of fathers increased (Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Lamb (2008) found in families where the mother is not employed the father spent around 25% of the total time the mother did with their child. However, when considering homes where both parents are employed, the percentage of involvement by fathers increased significantly, but this fact was contributed to the fact that mothers were able to do less thereby forcing fathers to be more involved. Fry and Cohn (2010) noted the higher likelihood of two high earning individuals to marry each other and opt to live off of one salary rather than two when children are young.

According to the United States Census (2010) families with stay-at-home mothers has decreased from 6% in 1994 to 2% in 2010. There was an increase in stay-at-home father across these same years from 0.2% to 0.7% respectively. It should be noticed that these statistics

reference only two-parent households with children less than 15 years of age. When specifically focusing on stay-at-home fathers, Latshaw (2011) found that most fathers had intentions of returning to the work force within five years when their children would be in school all day or most of the day.

Although there has been a significant shift in the amount of women employed outside the home, many workplaces view their male workers as being free from responsibility of related to childcare and educational commitments (Percheski, 2008). This change in roles is consistent with a late twentieth century shift from industrial to postindustrial production. Men's wages decreased significantly, fewer families were able to rely solely on paternal support, and employment rates of women rose sharply as a result (Creighton, 1999; Oppenheimer, 1994; Percheski, 2008). Saracho and Spodek (2008) found families with fathers of higher incomes spent less time involved with their child and families of low-income fathers had more frequent and positive involvement. This fact is supported by Lewis' (2011) research which found that fathers who are out of work or work part-time are more likely to be involved in all aspects of their child's life while those who work full-time limit their involvement to one or two specific areas. The researcher found that fathers employed on night shift jobs were more likely to be involved with their child.

Employment in families of students with disabilities reported opposite findings, those with a higher income showed more involvement, and those with a lower income showed less involvement because of a fear of losing income (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Tehee, Honan, & Hevey, 2008).

Cultural differences. The role that fathers play in their child's lives differs across cultural groups (Robbers, 2008). Often teachers make assumptions about the differences in

cultures based on what they think they know (Eberly et al., 2007). One assumption is that parents from other cultures are aware of traditional school involvement activities such as open house (Ramirez, 2003). It is important when examining measures of father involvement to understand expectation of men in different cultures more fully. In a study conducted by Eberly et al. (2007), the researchers found teachers thought they were not fully prepared to reach parents from cultures different from their own or to interact in a culturally sensitive manner.

While there is a plethora of research related to African-American fathers, many of the studies compare them to their white counterparts (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Huang et al., 2003; O'Bryan et al., 2009; Sano et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2010). In an examination of African-American high school student achievement as it relates to their family involvement, discussions at home about school and educational decision was noted as the only predictor of increased achievement in these students (Hayes, 2012). Although this study did not rule out parent involvement by parent-teacher contact, it was not shown to have statistical significance. Hayes (2011) found that within urban locations, generalizations cannot be made about African-American parents. When examining two groups of urban African-American parent groups, over 80 % of both groups were found to have high educational aspirations for their children and hoped they would continue to earn college and graduate degrees. Fathers in this culture stated that they were constantly seeking out ways to help their child and simply wanted teachers to reach out to them with resources and invitations to be directly involved (Abel, 2012).

Parents in the Latino culture felt that teachers did not understand the differences in Latino cultures and were viewed as uncaring because they could not often attend events and meetings (Lopez, 2007; McWayne et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003). Parents often complained that teachers even verbalized "Mexico was the same as Guatemala or El Salvador as far as culture, language,

and customs” (Ramirez, 2003, p. 103). Lopez (2007) conducted a study of Mexican-origin fathers’ involvement in their child’s education. She found that those fathers who spoke only Spanish had a very difficult time engaging in school activities due to a language barrier and were not likely to continue involvement past their initial attempt to communicate with their child’s teacher. When dealing with immigrant families, the language barrier seems to be compounded even more (McWayne et al., 2008). A deeper look in to the Mexican-American and Latino culture reveals that these fathers although perhaps not visible in schools, do understand the importance of academic achievement and the home construct of their involvement is much stronger than it may seem (Altschul, 2011; Lopez, 2007; D’Angelo, Palacios, & Chase-Lansdale, 2012).

Guo (2010) found parents in the Asian community were less likely to attend parent conferences because the parent believed the teacher only contacted them because their child had acted inappropriately. The Hmong culture is growing rapidly in the United States. Although education in this culture was not as important in their countries of origin, the importance of education is understood within this culture in the United States (Lee & Green, 2008). However, it seems that as the children of this culture progress in their educational careers, they are forced to seek help outside of the home because parents lack the skills to support their higher learning. Holloway et al. (2008) found mothers in Japan less confident in their parenting abilities than other industrialized countries and therefore spend more time engaging in their child’s education to gain better understanding.

Comfort and suspicion. Most elementary school activities are often geared toward and attended by families (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Men feel more comfortable being involved as a family rather than as an individual. Therefore, if the mother is not able to attend a school activity

or conference, the father will also be less likely to attend. This may be attributed to the fact that men may appear weak if they are the ones to ask for help (Deslauriers, 2012). Men are often times simply looking for direct invitations to be involved in their child's education increasing the feeling that they are needed (Abel, 2012; Honig, 2008; Macleod, 2008).

In a study conducted by Macleod (2007) on the absence of fathers in family learning groups within elementary schools, the participants of the study reported their lack of involvement in many activities because they thought they would be "regarded with suspicion if they spent too much time hanging out in a place where there were young children" (p. 778). In a visit to a Chinese elementary school, Honig (2008) found the school staff to be completely populated by women. When asked about this phenomenon, the response was 'Why would a man want to be a kindergarten teacher?' (p. 681). Palm and Fagan (2008) likewise found that, especially in the elementary environment in which the teachers are typically female, fathers believed their presence was viewed as "unusual and not expected on a regular basis" (p. 752).

Younger fathers expressed they are viewed as being immature, unable to handle the responsibilities of fatherhood, and not taken seriously (Deslauriers et al., 2012). Robbers (2008) noted that most policies support this view and promote abstinence initiatives rather than attempting to educate young fathers on how to be a successful parent. These policies often spill over into the educational setting creating social biases against young fathers.

Impacts of Divorce

Today, nearly half of all marriages end in divorce (Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011). Although divorce itself is a solitary event, it should be viewed as a multi-stage process that radically alters the structure of a family (Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006). Divorce impacts children, adults and the family's finances.

Children. Over 30 years of research has been devoted to understanding the effects of divorce on the children involved (Strohschein, 2012; Voussoura et al., 2012). Links have been made to depression, lower educational attainment, early assumption of at-risks behaviors, and increased suicide attempts (Albertini & Dronkers, 2009; Cui et al., 2011; Huurre et al., 2006; Ivanova, Mills, & Veenstra, 2011; Moon, 2011; Portnoy, 2007; Schramm & Calix, 2011). When compared to their intact, never divorced family counterparts, children of divorced parents exhibit more behavior problems and poorer psychological adjustment (Moon, 2011). However, when attempting to make a definitive connection between a child's psychological well-being and the experience of a parental divorce, it should be noted that the child's psychological well-being before the divorce should be considered to make an accurate determination (Huurre et al., 2006; Strohschein, 2012).

In order to combat some of the possible impacts on children after divorce, 48 states throughout the United States mandate divorcing spouses with children to attend a parent education program (Schramm & Calix, 2011). One such program, Focus on Kids, centered in the Mid-west was reported to be most helpful for mitigating in young parents, women, those with lower education, and lower income.

Cui et al., (2011) found that divorce can have both negative and positive effects on children. In cases where high levels of interparental conflict were observed, the children were found to be in favor of the divorce and had an overall positive attitude toward divorce as a viable solution to a difficult relationship. Children were also reported to be much happier after the dissolution of such relationships. In a similar study of the effects of divorce on children's romantic relationships it was found that children of divorced parents moved into dating relationships faster, felt that relationships were bound to end at their initiation, and transitioned

to the next dating relationship faster than their intact family counterparts (Ivanova et al., 2011). The impacts of divorce are not limited to childhood; they influence future relationships and may carry over long into adulthood (Huurre et al., 2006; Voursour et al., 2012).

Adults. Although adults are the initiators of divorces it does not mean they do not experience difficulties after the dissolution of a relationship. Researchers found that both men and women who experienced divorce as a child reported less relationship satisfaction and happiness (Cui et al., 2011). Many have also cited the loss of defining relationships (wife/husband, parent) as a major factor in divorce-related stress. Divorce literature identifies the loss of friends, physical and psychological distress, and increased health problems as additional stressors that adults deal with after a relationship ends (Kulik & Heine-Cohen, 2011).

Bauserman (2012) examined literature related to parental satisfaction with custody arrangement following a divorce. He found that parents with joint custody adjusted more quickly and reported higher post-divorce satisfaction than those of maternal custody. Mothers and fathers report less conflict with their ex-spouse in joint custody arrangements, and fathers spent twice as much time monthly with their children than do non-custody fathers (Dush et al., 2011). Parents with sole-custody reported higher level of psychosocial satisfaction despite the added burdens of support. This is most likely related to the feeling of control over the child or having won in the competition for custody over the other parent (Bauserman, 2012).

Portnoy (2006a) examined a report in divorced families and found that 40% of most divorcees fall into the category labeled the “good enoughs” (p. 74). Although these individuals felt turmoil during the occurrence of the divorce, but seemed to be dealing with no lasting effects positive or negative. Thirty percent of individuals fell into a category of post-divorce satisfaction remaining single and sustaining without a committed relationship. The remaining

30%, mainly men, fell into reckless behaviors such as alcohol and drug addictions or engaging in only casual sexual relationships (Portnoy, 2006a). These findings are supported by Kalmijn's (2007) research which found that marriage acts as a protector for men who often received very little support from their children after a divorce when compared to their mothers.

Finances. Divorce often sets many life changes into motion. Perhaps the most noted change affecting the family after a marriage's dissolution is the economic situation of the family (Kulik & Heine-Cohen, 2011). Historically, divorce has been synonymous with poverty (Ducanto, 2010). Often times women who remained at home with their children in lieu of a career, after a divorce were forced into minimum wage jobs in an attempt to regain some financial stability after the end of their marriage. For those families where both parents were employed, income is split across two households and individuals may be forced to move to a new residence in a lesser community (Portnoy, 2006a). This fact is supported by Bratberg and Tjotta's (2002) research which found that typically both parties suffer a 50% income drop and more than a 50% risk of moving down in the income distribution. When looking specifically at custody divisions, women without custody fair much worse, while men with custody remain economically very close to intact families (Bratberg & Tjotta, 2002).

Summary

Past research focused on the correlation between parent-teacher partnerships and school achievement (Patall et al., 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2007). The need for open and trusting communication was deemed a critical component to student success (Eberly et al., 2007). A review of the literature suggested there are many factors that influence the quality of these partnerships as well as obstacles that may keep involvement from occurring at all (Coco et al., 2007; Eberly et al., 2007; Eberly et al., 2010; Flanigan, 2007; Guo, 2010; Holloway et al., 2008;

McCoach et al., 2010; Wanat, 2010). Holloway et al. (2008) indicated the mother is the parent most visibly active in her child's education. It may even be said that there is a gender disproportion in parental involvement (Hart, 2011). Father involvement has been the focus of several studies but they are conducted heavily in Early Head Start initiatives and Early Childhood Programs (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; McWayne et al., 2008; Palm & Fagan, 2008). One area that still lacks attention is the continued engagement of fathers in children's education once the student reaches middle and high school. Saracho and Spodek (2008) suggested the need to study fathers and their involvement directly rather than relying on others' perspectives of their involvement. By taking a candid approach to this initiative, fathers will be able to share their attitudes toward their current involvement and ways that social organizations, specifically schools can aid in perpetuating fathers' involvement throughout their child's middle and high school career.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Parental involvement in the educational realm has received attention for several decades. However, until recently, studies related to the involvement of fathers were limited to financial and material support of children (DeBell, 2007; Freeman et al., 2008; Holloway et al., 2008; Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Attention turned recently to other contributions fathers make to their child's education, but focus on Early Childhood Programs (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; McWayne et al., 2008; Palm & Fagan, 2008). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how divorced fathers perceive their role in their middle or high school student's education.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: How do divorced fathers describe their role in their child's education?

Research Question 2: What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education?

Research Question 3: What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school?

Research Design

Maxwell (2005) argued one goal of qualitative research was not only to have interest in the observable behaviors related to a phenomenon but also seeking to understand how the co-researchers make sense of the event and how their beliefs influence their actions. The qualitative design was chosen for two reasons. First, most parental involvement studies attempted to quantify the levels of parental involvement rather than attempting to understand the

experiences of the parents in the study. Secondly, qualitative research explores a specific problem within a specific context. Gathering data related to the experiences of divorced fathers of students in middle and high school satisfies this qualitative goal. A qualitative approach allowed for rich descriptions from those who have experienced the phenomenon.

A phenomenological approach to the study empowered the co-researchers to share their life experiences to help others gain a better understanding of how the co-researchers have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This research design was chosen to allow divorced fathers of high school students to share any experience they have with their child's education. Moustakas (1994) argued that transcendental phenomenology takes a "rational path" (p. 41) where the researcher is able to see the phenomenon for what it is and describe it in its own terms. To objectively describe the phenomenon, I first needed to be aware of my current biases and perceived knowledge of the phenomenon. By engaging in the Epoche process, I was able to systematically set aside my prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). By identifying and remaining aware of my presuppositions throughout the study I was able to view the phenomenon in a new consciousness. As a result, the experiences of the co-researchers are described rather than an attempt being made to explain or interpret the findings (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2007) suggested the use of this design for individuals with limited experience in the area of research to provide a more objective perspective toward the phenomenon.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how fathers perceived their roles in their child's education. Roles were defined as the actions and responsibilities fathers believe they should have in their child's education. Father involvement was defined as any communication or contact between the father and the child or child's school regarding the

child's progress or overall school experience and attendance at school functions or conferences (i.e., sporting events, parent-teacher conferences, open house, IEP meetings, community events).

Researcher's Role

My journey as an educator began in August 2004 in an alternative learning program. Each day, I interacted with children who verbally expressed their displeasure with their school and home environments. They took their frustrations out on others in an inappropriate manner. I desired to reach these children and understand where their anger originated. I thought the best way to understand the child was to gain a glimpse into their lives by meeting with their parents. Many times I found myself waiting in vain for parents to attend scheduled conferences, and if the parents did attend, it was almost always the mother. I cannot recall meeting any of my students' fathers. Many of the students' shared that their fathers were not physically present in their lives, either by choice or because of incarceration. After moving to a rural elementary school, I expected to have more frequent and higher attendance at parent conferences. My assumption was correct, but I was still meeting mainly with mothers. Some fathers would attend in the cases of two parent households, but divorced fathers only attended when they were the sole caregivers for the student. I began my research with the desire to create partnerships with parents and began to look for strategies to use in the creation of a successful parental involvement program to create lasting partnerships with parents. However, the deeper I delved into the literature, I realized that the partnerships were there, but the participation was skewed. I began to form an opinion of why mothers were the more visible parent and assumed that the fathers were making a conscious decision not to be a part of their child's education if they were not a part of the household. My suspicions became that their lack of attendance at conferences and other school functions was just another way of abandoning their responsibilities as a father. Perhaps they saw

their monetary contributions to be enough to be considered a good father. However, after much research, I began to see that my views were extremely obscured by my own experiences and that divorced fathers should be afforded the chance to share their own experiences rather than being obscured by the opinions of others.

All parents have responsibilities related to raising their children, and a focus on education is also important (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010). I took an observatory stance to provide a fresh perspective rather than relying on my current knowledge, which could have been obscured by past experiences. My aim was to give divorced fathers of middle and high school students a voice. I wanted to determine not only what they perceive as their role in their child's education, but also what fathers perceive as steps educators can take to help fathers increase their involvement.

Setting

This study was conducted in a Midwestern Georgia county, Suburban County (pseudonym) (Table 1) and extended to include one father living out of state with a student in an adjacent Georgia county. The study was extended to include this father living out of state because of the initial difficulty getting participants as well as a slow response rate between initial contacts. Suburban County contains three high schools and six middle schools. Ideally one to two co-researchers would be chosen that have children in each of the three high schools in Suburban County in order to have an equal number of participants from each school as a representation of all areas in Suburban County. An attempt was made for the sample population to reflect the population of Suburban County. This setting was chosen for its proximity to the researcher. I had no prior nor do I have a current relationship with any co-researchers. The demographic make-up of Suburban County is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Suburban County Demographics

	Suburban County
Total Population	127,317
White	76%
Black	17%
American Indian	0.3%
Asian	2%
Latino	7%
Multiracial	2%
Median Household Income	\$59,848

Co-researchers

The participants of the study are referred to as co-researchers because of the active role they played in helping conduct the research (Moustakas, 1994). The constructivist paradigm used to view the research based on the ongoing involvement between all researchers also supported the use of this term. Co-researchers in this study were divorced fathers who have joint custody of their middle or high school child. Fathers could be remarried, or in a present relationship, but not be living with the mother of their middle or high school child and could not be the primary custodial parent of the child. A purposeful selection of co-researchers for this study was utilized. Guba and Lincoln (1989) referred to purposeful sampling that ensures a range of members who adequately represent the entire population as “maximum variation” (p.

178) sampling. The research coordinator for Suburban school district was contacted to request approval for distribution of a recruitment letter for potential co-researchers in the study (Appendix A, Appendix B). Permission was granted by Suburban District (Appendix C). The administrators of the high schools in Suburban district were contacted to determine the best method for distribution of a recruitment letter (Appendix B). Two of the three high school responded and 95 letters were distributed at the schools' Open House activities at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. There were no responses after the initial contact with possible co-researchers. I spoke at a Divorce Care meeting and was able to distribute ten letters to possible participants, but there was no additional contact from these individuals. Flyers were placed at local community organizations (e. g. recreation department, public library)(Appendix D) and a letter was sent to pastors of five churches in the community to request their help in identifying potential co-researchers that met the criteria for participating in the study in Suburban district (Appendix E). Of these five pastors, only one responded with the allowance to post a flyer on his campus (Appendix D). These methods also yielded no participants; therefore, Facebook was utilized by creating an event invitation to identify individuals who may meet the original criteria for participation in the study (Appendix F).

I received three responses to the Facebook invitation, but fathers did not meet the original criteria because their children were currently in middle school. Because of the difficulty faced when trying to gather participants, it was decided to open the study to participants with students in either middle or high school. All documents (i.e., recruitment letters, community flyers, Facebook events/invitations) were amended to reflect the change in study criteria to include divorced fathers with either middle or high school students and were then redistributed.

After initial identification, potential co-researchers were contacted by phone to determine if they would be willing to participate in the study (Appendix G). A “snowball or chain” approach to sampling was employed in the hopes of identifying additional co-researchers (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). Co-researchers were asked to refer other individuals who fit the sampling criteria and may have information rich cases for the study. No co-researcher was able to provide additional contacts for possible participation. Nine to 12 co-researchers were sought for the study. Sampling continued until thematic saturation occurred and I ended up with a total of nine divorced fathers (Table 2) who met the participation criteria (Creswell, 2007).

Table 2

Summary of Co-researcher Characteristics

Co-Researcher	Educational Attainment	Child’s Level in School	Child’s Gender	Ethnicity
Matthew	High School Graduate	Middle	Female	White
Perry	College Graduate	Middle	Female	Black
Brandon	Graduate Degree	Middle	Male	White
Austin	Some High School	High	Female	White
Stephen	High School Graduate	Middle	Female	White
Hayden	Vocational/Technical	Middle	Female	White
Daniel	Some College Credit	Middle	Male	White
Riley	Some College Credit	High	Female	White
Thomas	Some College Credit	High	Male/Female	White

Data Collection Procedures

Permission was obtained (Appendix H) from Vanderbilt University to use and adapt the *Parental Role Construction for Involvement* instrument for the purpose of the study (Vanderbilt University, 2005a). This instrument was developed during a study on parental involvement as part of the Family-School Partnership Lab initiative at Vanderbilt University's Peabody School of Education. The research that went into the development of the scale was grounded in the theoretical suggestions of a social learning theory. The study found the three following role construction orientations to be linked to student success: (a) parent-focused roles, (b) school-focused roles, and (c) partnership-focused roles. Based on these orientations, the Parental Role Construction for Involvement (Categorical) scale was developed to conduct future research on larger groups of parents related to these roles. The researchers in this study developed a 10-item measure to assess the extent to which parents believe they should be actively involved in their child's education. A six-point Likert scale was used ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Higher scores signify a more active parental role belief and lower scores signify a more passive parental role belief. Data was gathered over a three-year research project of 358 public school parents with students in grades 4-6. The alpha reliabilities for the role constructs and beliefs were established during year one and two of the study (Table 3, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

Table 3

Construct Alpha Reliabilities

Scale-Year 1	alpha
Parental role construction for involvement: parent-focused	.62

Parental role construction for involvement: school-focused	.63
Parental role construction for involvement: partnership-focused	.72
Scale-Year 2	alpha
Parental role construction for involvement: parent-focused role beliefs	.61
Parental role construction for involvement: school-focused role beliefs	.65
Parental role construction for involvement: partnership-focused role beliefs	.60

Interview questions were constructed through examination of common themes found throughout and grounded in the empirical literature. These themes included parent-child interactions and parent-school interactions (Epstein, 1987; Epstein, 2008; Patall et al., 2008). Two experts in the field of parental involvement reviewed the interview questions. These individuals each have over thirty years of experience in education and have served as principals at both the middle and high school level. Each has worked to initiate and promote parental involvement programs at the school level and now at the district level. The questions were reviewed for validity and sensitivity to the co-researchers. After a successful proposal defense, an application was submitted for permission to conduct research on human subjects to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix I). Upon approval from the IRB (Appendix J), a pilot interview was conducted with an individual outside of the sample population. This interview was conducted for the purpose of determining the clarity of questions, appropriate wording, and possible insensitive language (Appendix K). This individual

was chosen for his similarity to the sample population. He was a divorced father with children in high school, but he did have a current relationship with the researcher in order to provide immediate availability for clarification. There were not changes made to the guiding interview questions, and the process for selection of co-researchers and gaining informed consent (Appendix L) began.

Surveys/Questionnaires

After receiving informed consent from a co-researcher, he then received access via the Internet to the *Parental Involvement Survey* (Appendix M). This instrument was adapted from the *Parental Role Construction for Involvement* which was developed by the Family-School Partnership Lab at Vanderbilt University. The survey was based on three role construction orientations (parent-focused, school-focused, partnership-focused) derived from interviews with parents of elementary school students. The findings were developed into an objective survey to measure these constructs in larger samples of parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The scales for each construct received the following alpha reliabilities: (a) Parent-focused role construction = .62; (b) School-focused role construction = .63; (c) Partnership-focused role construction = .72 (Vanderbilt, 2005a). All measures were evaluated for face and content validity to check for how well the assessments of the constructs by the scale matched the construct definitions supplied by a panel of five individuals considered to be experts in the field of the constructs (Vanderbilt University, 2005b). The information gathered from this instrument was used as an additional resource to the interview guide to structure the interview questions. Research question one (How do divorced fathers describe the roles they play in their child's education?) will be addressed by the *Parent-focused Roles* section, Research question two (What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education?) will be addressed

by the *School-focused Roles* section, and Research question three (What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school?) will be addressed by the *Partnership-focused Roles* section. A four-point scale was utilized because the survey was not likely to foster the need for in-depth responses. Mangione (1995) suggested eliminating middle responses in scales to force respondents to choose a thoughtful, final decision. Therefore, the middle response from the Vanderbilt scale was eliminated. The data taken from this instrument served as preliminary findings to create a more in-depth and tailored interview guide for each individual participant. The instrument also included five demographic questions which aided in the establishment trends during the data analysis phase related to the gender of the child, educational goals (i.e., gifted education, regular education, special education), educational attainment, ethnicity, and employment status of the father. These questions not only aided in the sampling process for maximum variance, but additionally helped to establish other barriers fathers face related to Research question two (What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education?).

Once a co-researcher completed and submitted the questionnaire, they were asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves and all personal identifiers were removed. The co-researchers will be identified by their pseudonym throughout the remainder of data collection and analysis. A code book was used to link the pseudonym to the actual name of the co-researcher. This code book was kept in a locked file cabinet separate from all other research data.

Interviews and Document Collection

Approximately one week after receiving the survey data, a time was scheduled to conduct a 45-minute to one-hour face-to-face, telephone, or video conference audio recorded interview

with the co-researcher. Interviews took place with the co-researcher remaining in their home environment in order to aid in their availability as well as provide a level of comfort and security for them. Interviews were informal and consisted of a semi-structured format to permit open-ended responses, but were topically guided (Moustakas, 1994). An interview guide (Table 4; Appendix K) was used; however, questions were modified, removed, or added based on analysis from the survey responses of the co-researchers. As per IRB, the tapes were transcribed and immediately erased following the interviews. Transcripts were coded using the co-researchers pseudonym and kept in a locked file cabinet separate from the codebook. Co-researchers received a copy of their interview transcripts for review within a week of their interview. Co-researchers were encouraged to make any additions or clarifications they felt were necessary. The interview data was used to answer Research questions one, two, and three. The interview questions not only helped to establish the role fathers perceive they have in their child's education but also the barriers that hindered involvement. Further, the questions ascertained what fathers want schools to do to help them remain involved throughout the child's middle and high school career.

Table 4

Standardized Interview Guiding Questions

Questions

Father-child interaction

1. How would you describe a typical interaction or encounter with your child?
2. How would you describe your availability to your child?
3. How often do you discuss school with your child?
4. What responsibilities do you have as a father?

Father-school interaction

5. Describe your involvement in your child's school.
6. How many school functions do you attend?
7. How have you been supported by the school to help your child?
8. What are the challenges you face in supporting your child's educational pursuits?
9. Is there anything else that you think we as educators could do to help divorced fathers?

The questions on father-child interaction were developed to gather information about the father and child outside of the school environment. Questions one, two, and three were developed to gather information about the factors identified in the literature that are considered barriers to parental involvement. Research suggested that father involvement with their child is inhibited by time, employment, and current family structure (Coco et al., 2007; Freeman et al., 2008; Honig, 2008; Palm & Fagan, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Research of fathers' involvement with their children is limited to their financial responsibilities (Honig, 2008; Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Question four was developed to target whether fathers perceive their responsibility as more than financial.

The questions on father-school interaction were developed to verify information found in the literature as to why fathers are viewed as the non-active parent in schools (Saracho & Spodek, 2008). Questions five through eight will gain insight into fathers' perceptions of what schools could do to help them take a more active role in their high school child's education.

During initial interviews fathers were asked if they could provide samples of communication (e.g., e-mails, letters, memos) between themselves and their child's teachers or school (Creswell, 2007). These documents would be used to provide a richer description of the father's involvement. Although three of the fathers mentioned having contact with their child's teacher through email or phone calls, they were unable to provide such documentation. Documents regarding district and school policy on the release of information to non-primary custodial parents were collected to better understand the possible lack of communication documents and identify a possible barrier. It was noted that any hard copies of communication were sent to only the primary custodial parent in order to eliminate unnecessary expense, however there was no policy limiting the communication with non-custodial parents unless there is documentation within the child's permanent record prohibiting contact.

Focus Group

After completion of all surveys and interviews, fathers were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss common themes that emerged from their responses to survey and interview questions (Appendix N). Co-researchers were asked to sign a confidentiality statement to help insure the privacy of all participating co-researchers (Appendix O). This group took place via the WebCT platform in order to promote maximum participation by co-researchers and followed a semi-structured format (Appendix P). The topics addressed during the focus group session were based on the common themes developed during the synthesis of interview and

survey responses. The themes were provided at the focus group to avoid possible discussion of the themes prior to the groups meeting.

The purpose of the focus group was to provide co-researchers the opportunity to examine the themes, make suggestions for revisions, and verify data collected as recommended by Moustakas (1994). The session was video recorded and transcribed later so that no pertinent information was missed. After transcription of the focus group sessions, the video was erased.

Data Analysis Procedures

Survey data (Appendix Q) was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (1994) method for analyzing phenomenological data. With a limited understanding of the phenomenon, this approach was most effective. While the surveys did gather quantitative data, the responses to the survey questions were evaluated on an individual basis for each co-researcher. Each statement from the survey was considered in relationship to the current understanding of the phenomenon. All responses were pulled from the survey. Overlapping responses were eliminated unless there were discrepancies between the co-researcher's responses to each question. Responses to statements were then examined based on the three themes guiding the survey (i.e., parent-focused roles, school-focused roles, partnership-focused roles). These themes were used to edit, reformat, and develop new interview questions. This procedure was used for each survey prior to the interview. Other quantitative data related to the child's gender and the father's educational attainment and employment status were used to develop trends and themes related to the phenomenon as well as descriptors of each co-researcher.

The analysis of interviews was conducted following Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) method for analyzing phenomenological data. On the printed copy of each

interview, I highlighted all statements that seemed related the co-researcher's experience with his child and their education. The statements were then considered for their necessity in understanding the experience and abstracted and labeled. Overlapping and repetitive statements were also eliminated at this phase in the analysis. The remaining descriptions were identified as the "invariant constituents" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The related statements were then clustered into themes and labeled (for an example see Appendix R). I validated the themes by evaluating them with regards to the individual co-researcher's experience. A textural and structural description was constructed for each co-researcher (Appendix S). The textural description of each co-researcher's experience focused on the thoughts, feelings, and struggles of the phenomenon. The structural descriptions sought to bring awareness of the real meanings or essences of each co-researcher's experience (Copen, 1992, p. 65). After all textural and structural descriptions were constructed for each co-researcher, a composite textural and structural description was written for the group as a whole. The composite textural and structural descriptions were written with correlation to each of the guiding research questions to aid in the integration of the essence of the phenomenon and the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Triangulation among the data collection methods was used to support or refute the themes established from analysis of the data. The survey responses were used to guide the development and analysis of the interview questions and suggested themes for coding interview responses. The interview and survey data were used to develop areas of discussion for the focus groups.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, the aim of trustworthiness is to support the findings of the study as being “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 90). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested establishing credibility through triangulation of data. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups provided multiple sources from which to develop themes. Peer debriefing was used to help eliminate any personal biases that may emerge through the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). The peer reviewer was presented with interview transcripts and conducted an analytical session paralleling the analysis methods of the researcher. Co-researchers received a copy of their interview transcripts as a member check. Follow-up interviews and focus groups likewise served as member checks. Moustakas (1994) suggested allowing co-researchers to examine the themes that have developed to make suggestions for revisions and verify the data collected on the phenomenon. Maxwell (2005) also suggested this method for identifying and controlling personal bias of the researcher.

Transferability was achieved by the sampling procedures. Co-researchers represented diverse socio-economic groups and ethnicities to ensure the study could apply to a variety of contexts. Field notes, memos, and journaling were used to keep records of my thoughts throughout the research process. Rich descriptions of purposeful sampling procedures and data collection and analysis procedures were used and reviewed by an expert in the field of qualitative research to ensure appropriateness in relation to the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Recorded interviews and the focus group session was transcribed verbatim. This ensured collection of elaborate data rather than simple note-taking that may not gather significant themes (Maxwell, 2005).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using an external auditor to aid in creating dependability within the study. Information-rich descriptions of the site, co-researchers, survey questions, interview questions, and data analysis procedures provide dependability of the study. This allows for accurate replication of the study to verify the findings. Some quasi-statistics were necessary to support the themes identified by the study related to demographic factors (e.g., child's gender, employment status, level of education).

Confirmability was established through use of an external auditor who specializes in parent-teacher partnership programs within a local school district. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested avoiding the auditor entering too early into the study to avoid the auditor taking on the role of a "formative evaluator" (p. 326). This individual was chosen for her over 40 years of experience and knowledge in the field. She is recognized for the development of a parental involvement policy and is known for building strong family involvement. Member checks were performed through a review of transcripts from interviews by each co-researcher for any changes or misconceptions. Peer audits were incorporated as a beneficial measure to ensure that the research is unique.

Ethical Issues

When reporting the data, I attempted to remain sensitive to the co-researchers and allowed them to choose pseudonyms for themselves and I used pseudonyms for their children's schools in order to provide anonymity. Survey response data and other hard copies of data were stored in a locked filed cabinet and electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be retained for three years from the date of the study and then destroyed.

The nature of the study had the potential to make me privy to sensitive information such as child neglect or abuse. The co-researchers were made aware of my obligation, as a mandatory

reporter for the state of Georgia, to report any possible occurrence of such behaviors to the appropriate authorities. They were fully informed of this fact through a letter of informed consent (Appendix L).

Honesty is a desired character trait for educators and Christians. This study was entered with the assumptions that fathers are not involved in their child's education because they are not visible in schools. The hope, however, was to increase understanding of fathers' perspectives and avoid any personal biases about their involvement to arrive at a potential solution for involving them more in their child's education. The desired outcomes of this study were achieved through the analysis of the data. Findings will be reported accurately as they support or refute all research claims in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The following questions guided the study: (a) How do divorced fathers describe the role they play in their child's education? (b) What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education? (c) What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout secondary schools?

This chapter discusses the interview process, the characteristics of the co-researchers, data analysis procedures, results, and the process of member checking. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study results.

Pilot Interview

The pilot interview was conducted after school one afternoon in September 2013 at the school where I am employed. The divorced father had a child in a high school outside of the district in which the study was conducted. The pilot interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. It was determined that all of the language of each interview questions was appropriate and easily understood. The pilot interviewee needed no clarification of questions and felt that none of the questions were offensive or intrusive. The remaining interviews were conducted using the original guide (Appendix K) and clarifications to questions were made on an individual basis for each co-researcher.

Interviews

Each interview was conducted at times and locations that were convenient for the co-researchers. Eight of the nine co-researchers opted to conduct their interviews via the telephone. Of these individuals, three were conducted while the co-researcher was at their place of business and six were in their homes. One co-researcher preferred the use of Face Time for his interview while he was at home. A standardized interview guide was used for each interview, but

questions were directed specifically toward responses from the *Parental Involvement Survey* (Appendix M). After each interview, prior to transcription theoretical memos were used to record impressions from the interviews (for an example see Appendix T). Although the goal was to conduct interviews within one week of survey completion, I was unable to get several individuals to commit to an interview within that time frame. A summary of survey completion dates, interview dates, and the interview medium can be viewed in Appendix U and Table 5. All participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality.

Table 5

Summary of Interview Data.

Co-researcher	Survey Completed	Date of Interview	Interview Medium
Matthew	11/1/13	2/12/14	Phone
Perry	11/11/13	11/21/13	Phone
Brandon	1/7/14	1/14/14	Phone
Austin	1/8/14	1/18/14	FaceTime
Stephen	1/10/14	1/20/14	Phone
Hayden	1/14/14	1/20/14	Phone
Daniel	1/15/14	1/21/14	Phone
Riley	2/4/14	2/7/14	Phone
Thomas	2/7/14	2/12/14	Phone

Co-Researcher Characteristics

Overall Sample

Although the original sample population was intended to include only divorced fathers with children in high school, after several months of failing to locate fathers who met the high

school student criteria, it was determine that opening up the criteria to include divorced fathers with children in middle school might allow for more participants. By allowing divorced fathers with students in middle school to participate, the final sample population consisted of nine divorced fathers with joint-custody of their middle or high school student. Eight of the co-researchers were white and one was black. None of the co-researchers had children with disabilities and all fathers were employed full-time.

Individual Characteristics

Survey and interview data was used to create a textural and structural description for each co-researcher. The textural description outlines what is experienced and the structural description interprets how, in what context and setting, it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). The following narratives use verbatim examples and emerging themes to portray how the co-researchers have existed within the phenomenon.

Matthew. Matthew is in a unique situation and has experience in this phenomenon from both sides. Although the data collected focuses on his daughter, he has a son that lives with him. From the aspect of being the non-custodial parent, Matthew has experienced the effects of maternal-gatekeeping and has to make informal efforts at ball games and other extra-curricular activities to catch up on his daughter's educational experience. He does help with things such as homework when she is visiting him, but admits on a regular basis he has little control in decisions that are made. While it seems that Matthew's ex-wife has control over most of the aspects of his educational involvement with their daughter, he does say that he still holds the role of disciplinarian when she is not meeting their expectations.

From his experience, Matthew sees notification of the primary custodian as a "rule or regulation" from the schools. Because his daughter "lives with my ex-wife, she is the point

person.” He has never attended a parent conference and is not sure if that is because there have not been any because his daughter is a good student or if he is just not made aware of them. Again, it seems that he must rely on his ex-wife to relay information.

Matthew attributes much of his lack of knowledge to the fact that his divorce was difficult and what his ex-wife relays to others including teachers “is constricting”. Because he has seen this phenomenon from the side of the custodial parent also, he feels that there should be “consideration for the other parent.” Some sort of “system” where both parents could be informed.

Although Matthew has had informal contact with teachers about his daughter, the only formal contact he has had is during the Open House and Orientation events that schools hold at the beginning of every year. As far as providing educational support for his daughter, he attributes his flexibility to the fact that he is self-employed and can drop things with short notice to attend to needs she may have during the school day.

Perry. Perry has a unique experience. He is responsible for taking his son to and from school every day and teaches at the same school his son attends, so he has more direct involvement than many. He does realize that he still must take an active role and provide guidance most especially for his son because he looks up to him. He is always at parent conferences, but so is his ex-wife. It has been his experience that “they (schools) look at the mother as being the leader when it comes to education.” He also understands that the involvement he has is based heavily on the fact of how much effort he puts into being involved. If his son were not with him, he knows he would have to be more “adamant” on teachers contacting him. Even as a teacher, though “Perry” feels that he could have benefited from a class to help him understand how to work with his child now that he is not in the household.

Perry is a teacher and has experienced this phenomenon differently. He understands the importance of involvement from both the father's perspective and the teacher's perspective. From the perspective of an educator and divorced father, Perry understands it is "the natural reaction for the school system to contact the mother first."

Brandon. The experience for Brandon trying to remain involved in his son's education can be characterized by a sense of loneliness and helplessness. Although Brandon did live near his son for several years after the divorce, he is now in a completely different state. Not only is he isolated physically, he feels an emotional isolation too. Although when he is with his son, they act "as if I've never gone anywhere" he finds it difficult to get in contact with his son and cannot always relate to his "video-game" lifestyle.

Brandon also has faced many incidents of maternal gate-keeping. He feels he is being punished by his ex-wife because she purposefully keeps information from him. She also exerts her control and made it know she was unhappy when Brandon was contacted first about an incident before she was. This incident was also reported after the fact and was in the form of an email that stated how the issue had been handled rather than a more personal phone call. With regards to contact from teachers, the contact has been only once and "absolutely not" on a positive note.

Although Brandon is no longer in the household with his son, he feels he still has full responsibility for him and checks in on him regular basis. Education is a common topic of discussion with his son, but he is uncertain about how to make himself an active part of his child's education within the school environment.

Brandon can only remember one time that he was contacted by his son's teachers before the mother and it was related to a behavioral issue. He felt that perhaps the teachers thought "he

could get through” to his son better. Other than this one incident Brandon has never been contacted by his son’s teachers good or bad and would “really appreciate” receiving the same information that his ex-wife does when she does. Although Brandon feels that all teachers see a parent as a parent, the overall consensus seems to be that because “she’s in the house with him, she matters and I don’t.”

Austin. Austin has spent much of his daughter’s educational career isolated and shut out. Although he feels responsible for guiding her and providing her with advice, his ex-wife through maternal gatekeeping has “pretty much shut me out.” When he was involved he spent most of his time disagreeing with her decisions for their daughter. He attributes this to the fact that it is “hard for divorced fathers and mothers to agree on anything, much less make a decision together.” Although Austin said that teachers contacted him, it was because his ex-wife refused to deal with the issue at hand. He said referring to phone calls “I always felt there was an awkwardness there.” With regard to his involvement in her future education, he wants her to get a high school diploma, but after that he “allows her to make her own decisions.” Because of his less than active role, he chooses to support her freedom of choice and puts less concern on her completing her schoolwork. Because Austin quit school at the age of 16, he feels very strongly about finishing school with a high school diploma. He feels his lack of education has affected his employment opportunities. This seems to be the driving factor behind his drive to remain knowledgeable of, but not actively involved in helping her with assignments or insisting she remain engaged in school.

Austin has been a divorced father for over 16 years. Although he has remarried, he has no other children with his current wife. Because of this fact, he has had no experience in the education system in a marriage relationship. Therefore, Austin has never been as visible as the

mother in education. Because his ex-wife did have the schools contact him as a way of her avoiding responsibility, he did have some contact, but remembers being asked “what exactly was my involvement with my child.” This has placed Austin on the defensive from the beginning and he has had little if any positive interactions with school. He has contacted the school in response to reports from his daughter that something had happened, and admitted “that things didn’t go so smoothly.” Much of Austin’s opinions come from a lack of communication and what he feels is disdain for him from the school system and his ex-wife. He recognizes a need for a protocol within the schools to notify both parents in divorced situations of what has happened. He feels a combination of both perspectives would be the most effective way to reach his child and best provide for her educational needs.

Stephen. Stephen admits the circumstances surrounding his divorce have strongly influenced his level of involvement. He tries to stay involved with his daughter, but the time he spends with her is very short and infrequent because of his ex-wife. He receives very little information about even extra-curricular events and receives no information about academic issues. Stephen has become “frustrated” with his situation and relies on his current wife to keep him informed about things that are going on through the Parent Portal system. He has never been invited to a parent conference and had one informal conference with a teacher that he ran into one day. This happened after his current wife informed him of low grades that she had seen when checking the online grading system. All interaction that Stephen has had has always been because of his initiative.

Stephen’s ex-wife is a teacher and he feels “awkward”. It is almost as if she has the upper hand and he agrees he hasn’t done as much as he could have. He admits he has not made a huge effort to be involved saying “I guess I could take it upon myself to ask,” but he has also

never been invited to formal meetings either. He understands the need for both parents to be involved and wishes that teachers would keep him informed instead of relying on the ex-wife, Parent Portal, or his daughter to notify him of issues.

Hayden. Most of Hayden's experiences with his daughter's education since his divorce have been minimal. He has attended no parent conferences, but he attributes that to the fact that she is a good student. It seems that parent conferences are needed only if something is going wrong. He has not, however, been contacted about any positive elements either.

Hayden has met his daughter's teachers during the Open House that the school held at the beginning of the year, but feels that getting used to middle school has been a difficult transition for him and that the "school system does the best they can."

The time since Hayden's divorce has not been very long and he is informed about his daughter's progress, but he relies on his ex-wife to do so. He does not receive direct contact from her teachers. Although he says his work schedule does limit his in school activities without sufficient notice, he is available to his daughter on a daily basis and welcomes contact from her teachers.

Daniel. Daniel feels his experience transitioning into a divorced father in education has been very smooth. He has signed up for the school-wide messages and attends many of his son's events. He also volunteers and feels very much in the loop. One of the issues he had with education related specifically to his son. He suggests that the adjustment to such an event should be taken into consideration and teachers should be more sensitive to what is happening in their students' lives. He stays in regular contact with his son and discusses education frequently.

Daniel does attend parent conferences and has been alone if his ex-wife could not make it, but he says most times both of them are in attendance. Although his descriptions do not

suggest a large amount of maternal gate-keeping, it does seem that his ex-wife tries to remain very aware of all interactions.

Daniel attributes the amount of involvement he has with his son's education to the fact that he volunteers often and is more visible in the school. Because his son is getting older, Daniel also feels that he should spend more time with him in order to teach him "how to be a man" they really need "to learn those things from their dad."

Riley. Riley considers the time spent with his children as typical. He feels that he is very open with his children and they are very open with him. In fact he recommends everyone be open with their families because "if you don't, you end up harming the children in the future." Riley admits he is not as involved as he would like to be stating, "I'm not the class dad." Most of the experience that Riley has had with education has come through the form of open forums such as Open House or getting information on grades through the Parent Portal system. Although he has attended parent conferences, he is not usually happy with their results. He believed his attendance was not valued and because his ex-wife was also attending the conference, he was not included in the conversation. He values the Parent Portal system more. When asked about why this is his usual method of involvement he cites work as taking up a majority of his time although he does make provisions to attend their school functions such as band or chorus performances. He considers education to be important, but feels that educating his children in real-life applications is more pertinent. He does not expect his children to go to college and supports them in either a desire to get a job or continue their education. Riley owns his own business and gained on the job experience that led to his choice of careers.

Riley's children have all been good students and their problems are minimal (i.e., cell phones, talking in class). All of his parent conference experiences have been those surrounding

traditional progress updates. He sees no reasons to be called in and told his child is doing fine. “It’s a waste of time” and the teachers are not enthusiastic either, “you can hear it in their voices.” Riley does admittedly remove himself from contact letting his current wife filter through any contact the teachers may have with him. She forwards any information she feels is pertinent on to him. Riley does not appear to be extremely involved, at least not directly, in his children’s education, but he does understand the importance of being involved in other aspects of their life, he just places more emphasis on other areas.

Thomas. Although Thomas views his duties and responsibilities of a father to be much the same as they were when he was still living in the home with his daughter (i.e., provider, protector), he does not place the same sense of urgency on her education. He has had very little contact with the school because he feels the school should only contact him “when something is going on.” He also attributes his lack of involvement to the monotony of things like Open Houses, which he has “gone to about 800,000 of.”

Thomas admitted in the past he placed very little emphasis on his daughter’s education. She is overall a good student and as a “self-employed bachelor” he did not spend time focusing on her education. After a recent marriage, Thomas feels that having “a woman to help” has been a “blessing” by creating a “structured family.” He relies more on her support to be involved in his daughter’s education.

As far as being a divorced father, he also seems to feel a lack of support on the part of the school, stating, “I don’t think they know or care if you’re divorced or not.” He does, however, place a large responsibility on himself to be the one who is aware of what is going on at school, but he chooses to support his daughter in her goals and deals with problems on a needed basis.

Analysis

Survey Analysis

The Parent Involvement Survey data (Appendix Q) was based on the relationship between the current understanding of father involvement and the three themes that guided the survey (i.e., parent-focused roles, school-focused roles, partnership-focused roles). With regards to the parent-focused role questions, 89% of co-researchers agreed that although they were not in the household, they still felt they had a large responsibility in guiding their child's education. There was some variance in responses related to the school-focused roles. All of the statements related to the fathers' beliefs of the responsibility that schools, specifically teachers, have in educating students. Therefore, responses that agree with the statement would place more responsibility on teachers and those responses that disagree would place equal if not more responsibility on the parent, in this case, the co-researcher fathers. Fathers still took more responsibility for being proactive in their child's education and relying less on the teachers with at least 67% or more of co-researchers disagreeing with the statements linked to school-focused roles. Two school-focused role statements, however, showed all co-researchers to be in agreement. Fathers place more responsibility in the hands of educators when classroom instruction and communication of problems were involved (see Appendix M, Section B part f and g). Finally, when examining the partnership-focused roles, it seems that most of the co-researcher fathers, 78%, still found it helpful to be actively involved in their child's education by communicating with their child's teachers about assignments and problems, whether academic or behavioral. Although this survey was used to gather overall perceptions of fathers, responses were used to tailor interviews to each individual based on their respective answers.

Interview Transcription

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher no more than two days after the interview was conducted. A sample transcript can be found in Appendix V.

After interviews were transcribed, I listened again to the interview while reading the transcript in order to check for any errors. Then the interviews were reviewed for voice inflections that may have been missed during the first transcription in order to call particular phrases in which the co-researcher showed strong emotion to my attention. After completing the accuracy check, a hard copy of each transcript was printed for analysis.

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how divorced fathers perceive their role in the education of their middle or high school child. The central focus of this study was: How do divorced fathers describe the roles they play in their child's education? This section is organized around the themes as they related to each of the guiding research questions. A synthesis of the composite textural and structural descriptions of the experiences as well as survey data related to the phenomenon was used to describe the essence of non-custodial divorced fathers' experiences.

Research Question One: How do Divorced Fathers Describe the Roles They Play in Their Child's Education?

The survey data showed that 89% of co-researchers agreed that they should have a large responsibility in their child's education, but analysis of the interview data showed the general role of father blurred into their role in education. When asked about interactions with their children, all co-researchers referred to typical behavior that would be expected in a two-parent household. Perry and Matthew both referred to their responsibilities as "typical." Perry expressed, "Even though I'm out of the household, I still do the same things a father would do in

the household.” The following three themes emerged surrounding divorced fathers’ perceived roles: connections, responsibilities, and expectations.

Connections. Although the co-researchers when prompted did express that they checked in on a regular basis with their child about school, it was not their first response.

Brandon explained when asked if he talked with his son about school:

It’s one of the first few questions that I end up asking, like, “How are things going at school?”

Which is as long as everything is pretty much going the way it’s supposed to be, he says,

“School’s going great!” And that is pretty much the extent of how it’s going. Are there any classes you’re having trouble with? Most of the time he’s a good student so I don’t hear a whole lot about school. Now he has a band class and he had a concert not too long ago and we talked a little bit more about that. He and I share music. He’s a trumpet player and so am I so we talked a little bit more about that. But as far as any other classes, not a whole lot.

As Brandon references, the co-researchers acknowledge their effort to make connections or bond with their child and address common interests. In general, they spoke of shopping with their daughters and hunting, fishing, and athletic events with their sons. Stephen admitted:

I just try to spend time with her, ask her what’s going on with her friends and school, and just try to catch up with her. To be honest my time with her is short and she doesn’t

come a whole lot so I just try to catch up with life and see what’s going on a little bit.

As was the case with most of the fathers, talk of education is brief and very generic as Hayden demonstrated with the following comment: “When I talk to her I ask her to tell me something she likes about school or what she has learned.” Most co-researchers only see their children on an every other weekend basis if that often and try to maximize the time they have with them.

Responsibilities. The co-researchers seemed to be more confident when asked what their responsibilities were to their children. With certainty they all said they were fully compelled to make an effort to be knowledgeable about their child's education. Hayden best summed up the feelings of the group:

I'm completely responsible for everything is how I feel. I don't take anything lightly whether it's good or bad. I feel that no matter what she does, I need to be there and understand what she's doing so that I can address it good or bad.

The co-researchers agreed unanimously that their ultimate responsibility was to be aware of what is going on in their children's life. Stephen, however, admitted, "My responsibility is just like a normal father that would be living in the house. That is my responsibility. But do I uphold that as far as most fathers? Probably not because of the whole situation." Along with awareness came the roles of leader, counselor, and educator. Each co-researcher had a slightly different perspective on how to assume those roles.

Daniel and Matthew described specific opportunities outside of formal education that sons can gain from the guardianship of their fathers. Daniel expresses the need and desire for his son to live with him by asserting:

I think the big thing is to teach him how to be a man. To be a godly man. How to treat people and especially his girlfriends and stuff. I guess that's the main thing....but boys his age are really better off living with their dad. They are at that age that they need to learn those kinds of things from their dads.

Matthew, who has a high school son who does live with him, spoke of how his son has benefited from living with him in the following account:

I bought my son a car when he turned 16. I told him I would only carry liability insurance on the car and if he wrecked it we would have to go from there. Long story short, he totaled the vehicle. He was fine and that's the main thing. I gave him the choices to walk, ride the bus, or take him. Or I offered to buy him a vehicle that needed work, but he had to do the work. He did all the work and I just supervised and he rebuilt the whole car. He has better appreciation for that car. Now he just loves working on cars. We also play paintball and he used YouTube to learn how to work on guns. And I don't know that he would have learned how to do those things if he was not living with me. But it's hard to say. But it gives him more to look forward to and the pride to know that he could do that. And with his mother I'm not sure if that would have happened or had that experience.

Matthew admitted that his daughter whom we spoke about could learn things from being with him more often, but she probably gains more from her mother's guidance.

Expectations and support. The Parent Involvement Survey (Appendix M) collected data on the co-researchers' current education and their desired education for their children. There appeared to be no correlation between these two elements, but co-researchers were asked to elaborate on their expectations for their child's educational future. Perry expressed his "no excuse" policy for his children to attend college:

I'll say one thing. Talking about all my children, all three have been instilled with the necessity and there are no excuses about going to college. They are expected to go to the next level. It is nothing...I demand it. Ever since they were young. They know they have no options than to go to college. And it is something that they want to do. I hear

them talk and say, “When I get to college this..., when I get to college this...” They know that in order to be successful they need to get as much education as they possibly can. I think this is what they want to do. It is not something they are pushed into, it’s something they want to do.

Although Perry is the only co-researcher who expressed that college was a requirement for his children, all co-researchers shared the same view on the importance of finishing school with a high school diploma. Austin shared his adamancy about his daughter finishing high school:

I always tell her whatever goals she has as far as school is fine and I will support her and ultimately she needs to finish school. That is the most important thing. As far as college, again those are choices I allow my children to make, but the number one thing is to finish high school at all costs. A GED is not what I mean...It needs to be a high school diploma....I was a high school dropout. The day I turned 16 I dropped out because they were either going to expel me or I had to drop out, so I dropped out. One of the reasons I am very adamant that my daughters at least continue and finish their education is because I am stuck in one position of auto paint and bodywork and I don’t know how to do anything else. I have nothing to fall back on. I have always told the girls that they need to finish school.

Hayden, who has received a degree from a Technical school echoed Austin’s perspective:

I would love for her to go to college, but I will never press them to go to college. My main goal is for them to learn responsibility, get an education and then by the time college or whatever comes up I will support them in their decision. I am not pushy about college or you’ve got to do this or that. The only thing I am pushy about is you’ve got to go to school. My job is to go to work, your job is to go to school. Your job is to get and

education, get the best grades you can get and then if you have trouble with anything, we'll address it. So I don't know that. My daughter has said that she wants to go to college and be a teacher. I support that if that is what she decides, but I don't make it the end all to end all because things change...interests change.

The other co-researchers shared much of Austin's and Hayden's opinions saying things like, "Whatever they want to do we support them 100%. If they don't want to go to college then you must get a job," "I leave it up to her at this point," and "She has an idea of what she wants to do and I'm okay with that...As long as she's happy with what she wants to do I'm okay with that."

It is apparent that although the co-researchers believed that establishing a baseline objective for their children's education was a very important role for them, they equated their role to being equally supportive throughout the journey.

Research Question Two: What are the Factors that Influence a Divorced Father's Role in His Child's Education?

Employment. Analysis of the interview data showed five co-researchers felt their employment had a negative influence on their role in education while three believed it aided their involvement. One co-researcher did not initially mention the impact his employment had on his involvement. He was later consulted about the impact of his employment and he replied, "Lucky for me, my schedule is fairly flexible. I have had to make some adjustments, but I would not consider it an interference."

Some co-researchers admitted that their work schedules did often interfere with or limit their involvement. Riley, who is a small business owner, said, "My present wife handles a lot of that stuff. I am bombarded taking care of my home and my business, my employees, so she relieves me of a lot of things." Thomas, who is also self-employed, confessed, "A self-employed

man that's a bachelor, that has a 12, 13, 14 year old is not going to spend as much time with school, supper, 'Is your homework done?' all that kind of stuff." Brandon's work has taken him out of the state, which obviously limits his direct involvement and Hayden believes that his "work schedule" is a hindrance to involvement. Austin mentioned traveling for his job as a handicap to his role.

On the other hand, Matthew felt his self-employment helped him be more readily available for his daughter. When asked about the impact owning a business had on his involvement he said, "It actually helps me be more available. I am very flexible as far as what I can and can't do. I can drop if I have 30 minutes' notice, I'm pretty much available." Although Stephen works for a company, he mentions sometimes taking his lunch break to "pop in over on her even though she's in middle school and she doesn't like it I'll try to go see her." Perry, who is an educator, has the luxury of teaching at the same middle school that his son attends:

My middle child is here with me, so I am very involved with him and I see what is happening first hand. I am very hands on with him. . I see my son every morning when I pick him up for school. I go to his plays, his activities. If there are parent conferences, both of us are there.

Although there were mixed feelings about the nature of the impact, it is clear that employment is a factor in a father's role in education. Lewis (2011) discovered fathers who are out of work or work part-time are more likely to be involved in all aspects of their child's life while those who work full-time limit their involvement to one or two specific areas.

Family structure. The theme of family structure seemed to have an influence on involvement also. The co-researchers fell into two categories, those who are remarried and those who have remained single.

It seemed that those co-researchers who had remarried relied heavily on their current spouses to keep them tuned in to their child's education. Stephen, Thomas, Austin, Matthew, and Riley have all remarried and some even shared the role their wives play in keeping them involved. Stephen shared the following perspective: "My current wife probably does more than I do because I've kind of gotten aggravated with stuff. She keeps up with grades on Parent Portal and lets me in on stuff." Riley also spoke of the role his wife has:

There are certain things that my daughters share with my present wife and they will keep it from me, but if it needs my attention, my wife will tell me. It's the same thing with my sons. They have the same connection with my wife and they will talk to her and keep things hidden from me and I'm on a need to know basis.... But a lot of times, she gets it sent to her and then she sends it to me if things are going on.

Thomas praised his wife for the help and structure she provides:

It has been a huge help and blessing to be remarried and live in a structured family.

There is a 5 year old son now. It's a more family-oriented structure than it has been in the past three or four years.

Although the currently single co-researchers did not mention the desire to have a helpmate, it seems likely that a female may have an impact on a father's role. This development leads to the next emerging theme.

Maternal gatekeeping. McBride et al. (2005a) refer to maternal gatekeeping as setting rigid standards that confirm maternal identity and separates family role images. In effect mothers are unwittingly assuming the stereotypical role of childcare provider and leaving fathers the role of financial support and disciplinarian and removing opportunities for more involvement in their child's education through these constraints (Palm & Fagan, 2008). It could simply be

that the mothers are allowing more bonding time between father and child by removing these responsibilities.

Although research suggested that the limitations set by maternal gatekeeping could be unintentional, co-researchers felt this was just another way of their ex-wives showing influence over the situation. When specifically asked about attendance at parent conferences, Stephen stated:

I've been to a few. Do I go to every one? I do not. A lot of those reasons...It's probably more my fault than it is her fault, but the relationship that her mom and I have had in the past. She doesn't tell me a lot of things nor does she invite me to a whole lot of things..... Some divorces may be the same some may not. But I think some parents may get along a little better...which we get along fine, but I think they tell me about what they want me to be involved in. If it's stuff where she's not doing too good in school, I think they don't want me to know or be there because they don't want my opinion on it. They think my opinion may be the truth and they don't want to hear it. I'm not dogging my ex-wife out because she is a great mother, but we have had our differences and I think some of the reasons that things go on with my children could be helped if they would let me be involved more in things that go on, but she doesn't.

Similarly, Brandon viewed his ex-wife's withholding of information as a form of punishment saying, "It's been a pretty helpless feeling. Realizing that anytime she gets sick of me, I don't know anything."

The arrangement of primary custody also seems to support the stance of maternal gatekeeping. According to Austin, "I was on the road a lot so my ex-wife shut me out and now

we have a lot of animosity between us.” Although Matthew admitted that he and his ex-wife do communicate about their children and make decisions together regarding their children, he is still uncertain that she informs him of everything regarding their daughter. When asked about attendance at parent conferences he replied, “I don’t think we have conferences unless my ex-wife goes and doesn’t let me know. That is a possibility.” Whether deliberate or not, it is clear that the involvement of divorced fathers in their child’s education is affected by the control that mothers have as primary custodians.

Child maturity and independence. It seemed that the co-researchers with children in high school viewed their role as more of a facilitator. Thomas, for example, said, “She’s 15, she’s a freshman. She knows how to pay attention in class and learn. Her help is not the same if she were in grade school and younger. I don’t micromanage everything she has to do every day.” Austin felt similarly indicating:

I believe when a parent does their job in raising a child properly, once that child gets to a point in their teens around 15 to 16 years old, they should be allowed to make many of their own choices as long as their decisions make sense and don’t lead to them getting in trouble or causing them problems in school. My point of view has always been as long as they are doing what they should do, what they are supposed to do, and as long as they are doing well in school, at this point in their lives, they are the age I trust them completely. I don’t see why they can’t make their own decisions and choices. They have never shown themselves to be irresponsible, uncontrollable, delinquent or any of those things. This feeling was also echoed again by both Thomas who exaggerated he had attended “800,000” Open House events and Riley who declared he had “been doing this for so long now, almost 17

years and it's the same thing over and over again. They discuss this, they discuss that, and I would rather just get an email.”

However, co-researchers with children in middle school showed more concern for being aware of their children's grades, homework assignments, and parent conferences. When asked about involvement in their child's education, they each mentioned attending their child's school's Open House event as well as relying on the Infinite Campus Parent Portal for access to grades, discipline reports, and attendance records.

Lack of knowledge. Another theme that ties directly into the previous theme is lack of understanding and knowledge related to school policies. Although most of the co-researchers expressed that they were familiar with procedures such as Open House events, sporting events, school performances, and Parent Portal access, many expressed they did not know how to get involved in other avenues. Brandon, who lives in a different state than his son disclosed: “I have completely no clue as to what is going on. But I have no way of really bullying my way into that. I really wouldn't even know where to begin.” Other co-researchers also expressed this same frustration. Matthew even believed there were guidelines that kept him from being informed. He explained, “When you have custody of a child, you tend to be the point person. I understand the reason why, there has to be rules and regulations.” In fact, in Suburban district, there is no protocol in place for who should or should not be contacted unless prohibited by a custodial agreement. The need for such a formality leads to the results surrounding research question three.

Research Question Three: What can Schools do to Facilitate Involvement of Divorced Fathers in Their Child's Education throughout High School?

Consideration. "Consideration" was a word used time and time again by the co-researchers to express how schools could help and support divorced fathers. In an extreme case, Austin was outraged at the interactions he did have with teachers and administrators:

I always think there was an awkwardness there. A lot of times, the teacher or principal would ask me exactly what my involvement was with my children. They would also tell me they didn't think it was appropriate that I was the one they were having to call when she told them to call me. They always said they thought it was inappropriate and they made...They didn't hide behind a façade and try to make it seem like it was business as usual. They even made it clear a couple of times that they didn't even like talking to me.

He later went on to say:

I just think that schools should consider both parents as being responsible for their child. Even though one parent might have custody. I think the schools should still interact with both parents. Because even if you are the non-custodial parent, you are going to see them on the weekends and you're still going to talk to them about those things. You're still going to go to plays and to events. So yes I think schools could do a better job not just accepting the parent that has custody, but the non-custodial parent. I think it would probably benefit both parents and the child.

Although other co-researchers did not reference discourteous conversations, they gave examples of how they felt they had been treated unfairly in the past. Brandon believed he was viewed as being insignificant:

If they have one person's email or up to this point like with him the one he has most contact with, that's the person you reach out to. Even though my contact may be indirect for the most part of the year, he and I have a great relationship and he doesn't have a problem talking about things. If I know what to ask for. So it's not a male/female thing. They see it all pretty much the same, but because she's in the house with him, she matters and I don't is my guess.

In a like manner, Matthew shared his experience as being both a custodial and non-custodial parents:

Well, with my situation, my ex has my daughter and I have custody of my son and he lives with me. It could be the same with my ex....It seems like the schools could take the other parent into consideration to some degree. Keep them informed. Although I am informed, I'm sure I'm not informed of everything and that bothers me.

Being both a divorced father and educator, Perry, accepts that higher consideration is given to mothers. He explained, "I think the natural reaction for the school system is to contact the mother first. They look at the mother as being the leader when it comes to education." Riley sensed this partiality during a conference he attended with his ex-wife sharing, "I would probably say they gave more attention to her because they always assume the woman is the one more involved with the children." The custodial bias found in these reports leads to the next theme.

Protocols. Because all of the co-researchers of the study had joint custody of their children, there is not a legal element prohibiting schools for contacting these fathers. The co-researchers suggested some systems or protocols for keeping them informed about their child's progress. We currently live in a technological age and the ability to send information to more

than one individual or even a group is available with just a few clicks of a computers mouse or press of a phones buttons. Matthew summed up the groups feelings in the thought, “So if they could somehow come up with some sort of system where both parents could be informed that would be a good thing.” Austin adamantly voiced:

Pick up the phone! Don’t call just one parent! Call them both and say this is what we told the mother. We would like for you to hear our point of view and maybe we can get two different opinions. Both the mother’s and the father’s perspective on how to help the child.

Hayden explained, “The main thing is to make sure they (divorced fathers) stay in the loop somehow. If that means they (teachers) send two emails or make two phone calls whatever need be. Just to keep them in the loop.” Although Brandon did say he tried to keep an open line of communication with his son regarding education he faced some difficulties that could be minimized with a contact policy:

He’s not at an age where he is real cognizant of letting me know, as much as I beg him to let me know what is happening and when it’s happening. He’s completely out there so I can’t rely on him for that information....So if one parent is contacted, I would really appreciate us both being contacted instead of assuming that my ex-wife or my son is letting me know anything.

Ideally, fathers just want to be afforded the same chance that their child’s mother is to be involved. Perhaps Stephen said it best:

All she has to do is just call me and say, “Here’s what’s going on and we have a conference. Do you want to sit in on it?” At least give me the opportunity to say “No, I don’t want to.” I just want that opportunity.

Effectiveness of meetings. A minor theme that emerged thorough interview with the co-researchers was that of the effectiveness of parent conferences and Open House events. When asked about the types of contacts the fathers had with their child's teachers, they usually referenced Open House events. It seemed this was the approach they took to let the teachers know that they were interested in their child's education.

However, two fathers in particular stated they did not attend the Open House events or even some parent conferences because they did not feel the teachers were being genuine or appreciated their attendance at the meetings. Riley stated:

I have been to a couple when my older children were younger and I have been to some of the Open Houses to talk with teachers. But I have been doing this for so long now, almost 17 years and it's the same thing over and over again. They discuss this, they discuss that, and I would rather just get an email. That is just my business aspect of it. Say, "Hey your child's doing this, and this. They're doing great in this." We keep up with the Parent Portal also. I would rather scan over their grades than talking to teachers. I feel it's a waste of time. And the teachers aren't really caring to be there either. You can tell in their tones.

When asked specifically about his attendance at Open House events, Thomas said:

I think they were having their Open House this week, something like the one they did at the beginning of school, which we didn't go to. And then they have something this week or next week, but I don't know if I will go or no...I have gone to about 800,000 of them. I know what they're about. You're a freshman in school. It's not like you are in third grade.

While none of the other fathers stated they felt the conferences and Open Houses were ineffective, they also were not able to provide specific examples of what had happened at the Open House events or what was discussed during the conferences.

Member Checking

The final step in the analysis the study's findings was to conduct member checks in the form of co-researchers' review of their interview transcripts and a focus group. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of member checks as being a "reasonable and valid way to establish the meaningfulness of the findings and interpretations (p. 315). Each co-researcher was given a copy of their transcript for verification and they concluded that their responses were accurately transcribed and captured the essence of their experiences.

In order to determine if the findings discussed above were an accurate representation of the experiences of participants in the phenomenon, a focus group session was scheduled at a local community center to discuss the themes with any co-researchers who wished to participate. However, none of the co-researchers attended. I then scheduled a focus group session via WebEx in the hopes that more fathers would be willing and able to attend. Only one father attended, and I was able to discuss the themes with him. He made one suggestion of changing the label of the theme "duties" to "responsibilities" instead. I scheduled a second WebEx session, but none of the co-researchers joined the session. I then provided the themes to each of the co-researchers via email welcoming their feedback or suggested changes (Appendix W). After one week, I contacted each of the co-researchers to determine if there were any changes that needed to be made. None of the fathers returned my phone calls. Two fathers did, however, reply to by email with no needed changes. The remaining six fathers were again contacted by phone and four more fathers verified the findings of the study and felt their experiences were

captured effectively. Of the nine fathers, a total of seven personally responded verifying the findings of the study and two offered no changes to the study's findings by providing no response.

Summary of Results

There has been a plethora of information dedicated to how important father involvement is and summaries of how fathers can get involved (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010). However, little attention was given to how fathers are actually involved in their middle or high school child's education (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; Macleod, 2007).

The aim of this study was to give divorced fathers of middle and high school students a voice. The goal was not only what divorced fathers perceived as their role in their child's education, but also what they perceived as steps educators can take to help them increase their involvement. The co-researchers of this study were nine divorced non-custodial fathers who believed they still played an important part in their child's life and specifically their education. They were all very open about their experiences, honest about their shortcomings, and hopeful for a chance to become more influential in their child's education.

In their survey responses, all of the fathers accepted a large responsibility for being knowledgeable about and engaged in their child's education. However, through one-on-one interviews, it became apparent they that though they felt a strong obligation toward their child, there were many obstacles have had to overcome so that they can remain attentive to their child's needs. Maternal gatekeeping and a general lack of knowledge of school policies were obstacles mentioned frequently by the co-researchers. There also seemed to be reluctance from some schools to have fathers involved, even to the point of being rude and uninviting.

By sharing their experiences, these co-researchers have allowed a glimpse into the familiar, yet misunderstood culture of non-custodial divorced fathers. This study has allowed divorced fathers to speak and be heard. They no longer have to be the ‘invisible’ parent (Spodek & Saracho, 2008, p. 665).

Chapter Four restated the problem and discussed how the interviews were analyzed, providing specific examples of interview transcripts, coding of statements and theme development, and the textural and structural descriptions that were used to understand the phenomenon. This chapter also described the group of co-researchers as a whole with relation to the Parent Involvement Survey data. The findings according to the research questions were presented with their corresponding emerging themes. Chapter five will present a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for this study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceived roles of divorced fathers of middle and high school students in the education of their child. Father involvement was defined as any communication or contact between the father and the child or child's school regarding the child's progress or overall school experience and attendance at school functions or conferences (i.e., sporting events, parent-teacher conferences, open house, IEP meetings, community events). Research repeatedly has shown mothers to be the active parent in education and even the primary reporter on father involvement (DeBell, 2007; Freeman et al., 2008; Holloway et al., 2008; Mikelson, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2008). This study sought to give divorced fathers a voice and to better understand their perspectives and feelings related to the phenomenon. It also helps to inform educator about how to help divorced fathers remain involved and informed.

Design

Nine divorced fathers with joint custody of their middle or high school child were selected to participate in this study through purposeful sampling. Data was gathered through quantitative (i.e., survey) and qualitative methods (i.e., interviews, focus groups) and were analyzed according to Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (1994) and van Kaam (1966) method for phenomenological data. The quantitative data gleaned from the survey responses was used to develop trends and themes that were common to the father's educational level and employment status.

The analysis of interviews was conducted following Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) method for analyzing phenomenological data. Statements were abstracted for their necessity in understanding the phenomenon and labeled for development of common

themes. These themes were then used to develop textural and structural descriptions for each co-researcher. Then a composite textural and structural description was constructed for the group as a whole and examined in relationship to each of the three research questions to aid in the integration of the essence of the phenomenon and the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Theoretical memos were kept throughout the process detailing my thoughts and ideas concerning the data. As each interview was analyzed, I employed a constant comparative method by comparing codes and categories from previous interviews. Quantitative data collected was used in correlation with theoretical memos and descriptive data to understand themes in greater depth.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Researchers in education have studied the integral part that parents play in their child's education and found that achievement as well as student persistence is associated with greater levels of parental involvement (Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2008; McCoach et al., 2010). The results of this study were able to extend current research on father involvement and examine ways to improve upon current best practices in parent-school communication, especially when divorce and joint custody are a factor.

Research Question One: How do Divorced Fathers Describe the Roles They Play in Their Child's Education?

Past research on paternal involvement has overwhelmingly been limited to gaining the perspective of fathers with children in early childhood programs (Spodek & Saracho, 2008). Research that did explore father involvement throughout a child's life were usually gained from the perspective of the mother and focused on the financial support that fathers provided (Walker,

Reid, & Logan, 2010). However, the goal of this study was to gain fathers' perspectives directly and understand what roles they assumed in their children's education. In a study by Guzzo (2011) fathers reported they felt their involvement was important, but they still focused on the traditional roles of provider and disciplinarian as their main responsibility. These fathers also reported that their involvement was more critical to their sons than daughters. This study's findings differed in that fathers did not mention their financial responsibility to their children at all. With the exception of one father, there was also no mention of a child's gender affecting the fathers' level of involvement or types of involvement. In short, the co-researchers in this study felt that their responsibilities to their child should not change simply because they are no longer living in the same household with their child.

Research Question Two: What are the Factors that Influence a Divorced Father's Role in His Child's Education?

Throughout the literature, several themes emerged surrounding influences and barriers that attribute to the level of father involvement. One such indicator in the literature is the age of the father. Honig (2008) suggested later paternity leads to a more reflective and involved father. However, a longitudinal study conducted with fathers aged 16-30 years showed that the younger fathers participated more with their children in activities and the older both the child and father became, direct involvement decreased (Robbers, 2008). While the exact age of the co-researchers was not determined, they did mention that their involvement in school activities had decreased as their child progressed through school, mainly due to the repetitive nature of many parental involvement initiatives such as Open House and parent-teacher conferences.

Parent employment also has an impact on parent involvement. While the number of stay at home mothers has decreased over the last two decades and stay at home fathers have increased

(U.S. Census, 2010). Percheski (2008) found that employers still view their male workers as being free from childcare and educational responsibilities. While none of the fathers in this study found that their employment has decreased their ability to be involved, it should be noted that two fathers felt their employment was a hindrance that needed to be overcome and four of the fathers were self-employed eliminating the need to check with someone in authority before attending to their child's educational needs.

There has been some discussion in the literature about a correlation between the educational attainment level of parents and their level of parental involvement (Freeman et al., 2008; Secord, 2009). While some studies showed a higher level of involvement in assistance with homework in those with higher education experience and more volunteer time within schools for parents holding less than a college degree (Secord, 2009), other studies of fathers with higher educational attainment did not necessarily mean higher father involvement (Rienks et al., 2011). Within this study, educational attainment was not a predicting factor in father involvement. The level of education of the co-researchers ranged from a high school diploma to graduate degree, yet all father described similar experiences with involvement in their child's education.

Two additional themes that were present in both the research and study data were maternal gatekeeping and father residency. Time and time again, research on father involvement has investigated the link between father-child interactions from the vantage point of the mothers (Gorvine, 2009; Holmes & Huston, 2010; McBride et al., 2005a; Mikelson, 2008; Phares et al., 2008; Pleck & Hofferth, 2008; Stolz et al., 2010). Throughout these studies mothers and fathers both agreed that in school, maternal responsibilities are more prominent. Perry, a co-researcher in this study, who is an educator, admitted that schools "look at the mothers as being the leader

when it comes to education.” This seems to perpetuate the idea that the maternal role is more prominent in education. Many of the other fathers, however, attribute their lack of involvement to a lack of information because their former spouse often times withholds information from them and as Stephen said, “they (his ex-wife and daughter) only tell me about what they want me to be involved in.” Other co-researchers also mentioned their ex-wives demonstrating what the literature refers to as maternal gatekeeping and Matthew stressed that while he felt informed about his child, he knows he is “not informed of everything.”

Father residency or the arrangement of primary custody seemed to be linked to the maternal gatekeeping. Matthew who is the primary custodian of his son does receive direct notification from the school about his son’s progress while he says he has never been invited to a conference about his daughter who does not live with him. Austin and Brandon, who do not live in the school district where their children attend school, feel they are at a disadvantage also with regard to their involvement. Effectively stated, Brandon said, she (his ex-wife) is in the house with him, she matters and I don’t.” While seven of the nine fathers shared their relationship with their former spouse was amicable, they did admit that their perspectives are not always parallel. This study’s findings support Walker et al. (2009) who found fathers reporting poor relationships with their child’s mother typically had often only monthly contact with their child, whereas those with a more positive relationship had almost weekly contact.

Much of this study’s findings support the literature with regard to the elements impacting the level of father involvement. It also seems that these elements are amplified by the fact that the fathers are divorced and living apart from their child.

Research Question Three: What Can Schools do to Facilitate Involvement of Divorced Fathers in Their Child's Education throughout High School?

Particularly within the elementary arena, parent involvement activities are geared more toward families or just the mother (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Men have typically attributed their lack of attendance at school function to either feeling more comfortable when attending as a family in order not to appear weak if they are in need of help, or because they are viewed suspiciously, especially in the elementary environment, if they are alone (Deslauriers, 2012; Macleod, 2007; Palm & Fagan, 2008). When the co-researchers of the study were asked about these perceptions, their responses echoed many of the studies' findings that they simply just wanted a personal invitation to be involved increasing the feeling that they are needed in their child's education (Abel, 2012; Honig, 2008; Macleod, 2008). Stephen echoed this feeling by saying, "At least give me the opportunity to say, 'No, I don't want to.' I just want that opportunity."

Implications

There are several implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, it is important to understand that although father involvement is extremely important in the education of a child from an early age, their involvement is just as important, if not more throughout their child's adolescence as they begin to make decisions about their future educational and career plans. This study provided the opportunity for fathers of middle and high school students to voice the involvement they have in their child's education.

Secondly, it is clear that divorced fathers desire to be a part of their child's life including their education. The fathers in this study have become the 'invisible' parent, but not necessarily by choice. They perceive their ex-wives and children's schools are not making any effort to

keep them involved. It is imperative that faculty and staff at schools work to keep both parents equally informed about student progress in order to aid in eliminating the maternal gatekeeper role with regard to education. Teachers should also consider the importance of notifying both parents about educational issues, both good and bad, rather than simply notifying the primary custodian because of their visibility.

Also, many fathers in this study reported feeling ostracized by teachers because they are not the primary custodian and therefore, the most visible parent. Teachers should remove the possible bias they may have against divorced fathers and any assumptions about the absence of them at school events. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2012) it is the duty of the teacher to communicate “effectively with students, parents or guardians, district and school personnel, and other stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning” regardless of the custodial situation (p. 2). Also, Georgia House Bill 1187: (Smith et al., 2000) states: “Annual teacher evaluations shall at a minimum take into consideration the following: Communication and interpersonal skills as they relate to interaction with students, parents, other teachers, administrators, and other school personnel” (pp. 69-70).

While all of the co-researchers of the study expressed their desire to be actively involved, they did not take what would seem to be obvious steps such as contacting the administrator or counselor of the school to express their desire. However, several fathers expressed they felt unwanted or that teachers and other staff were rude to them, which may have led to their lack of initiative. Teachers should be reminded parent involvement and contact trainings to remain as objective as possible in these situations. Also school webpages usually list a calendar of events to inform parents and the community about upcoming opportunities for involvement. The fathers did not seem to be aware of this or other open and public resources that are available to

them. All parents should be made aware of the multiple forms of open correspondence available to them throughout the school year.

Furthermore, many parent conferences and Open House events are not providing parents with adequate knowledge of what is happening with the students. A one on one conference should include some details about how the child is doing academically and socially in class. While Open House events in elementary grades may give parents the opportunity to compare their child's work with that of their peers because it is displayed in the hallways, middle and high school parents have very little basis to judge their child's progress without a one on one conference. This factor should be considered when structuring both parent-teacher conferences and Open House events.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, this study allowed fathers to explain their actions and rationale related to their current involvement. This process could serve as a reflective process for the divorced father participants as well as the culture of divorced fathers to examine their current level of involvement and act as a catalyst to begin the road to taking a more active role, even if it is against the desires of the other parent. Ultimately, the child is the focus of their intentions.

Limitations

Nine divorced men (8 white, 1 black) with joint custody of their middle or high school child were selected to participate in this study through purposeful sampling. Recruitment of researchers was difficult and many individuals whom I first contacted were not willing to complete the entire length of the study. The sample yielded limited variation in ethnicity. Although common themes emerged, a larger setting area may have generated a greater number of participants with more ethnic diversity to understand the phenomenon across cultures.

Participants were selected for convenience to the researcher therefore; findings cannot be generalized to the divorced father culture across the country. Moreover, interviews took place across gender lines (female interviewing divorced males) and that may have influenced how co-researchers responded. Although the co-researchers did look forward to possible involvement opportunities, most of their responses were based on reflections of past experiences and feelings associated with the divorce.

This study was delimited to include only divorced fathers with children in middle and high school. The divorced fathers could no longer be living with their child's mother and could not be the primary custodian of the child discussed in the collected data.

Recommendation for Future Research

Ethnic Diversity

The process of gathering participants for this study yielded little ethnic diversity. Table 6 shows the percentage of divorces by ethnicity. This data only supports the lack of participants from the Asian community and suggests a need to gather information specifically by ethnicity. Taking a more purposeful sampling approach and reaching out to specific communities (i.e., Latino, Hispanic, Asian), a more generalized conclusion could be made about this phenomenon.

Table 6

Percentage of Divorce by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage of Divorces
White,Non-Hispanic	21 %
Black Non-Hispanic	29%
Asian	4%
Hispanic	28%

(National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2011)

Teacher Perspectives

Repeatedly co-researchers said that their child's teacher had made little or no effort to reach out to them. A quantitative or mixed methods study on how teachers approach the situation of contacting parents in a divorced, joint-custodial situation would allow a better understanding and also to validate fathers' perspectives.

School District Policy

Although I am aware of the policy for parent notification in Suburban district, I am not aware if all school districts hold the same policy. By conducting a study inquiring how dissemination of information is handled in divorced family situations, a better generalization could be made regarding any potential gaps in notification of the non-custodial parent.

Non-Custodial Mother Involvement

Through attempts to find participants for this study, I was connected with fathers who did not qualify for the study because they were the primary custodian of their child. It would be interesting to investigate divorced mothers who are on the other side of this phenomenon to see if they have similar experiences related to the phenomenon.

Open House Effectiveness

Through the voices of the co-researchers and visible lack of attendance at Open House events, it could be that attention should be turned to the effectiveness of these events. Are there certain elements that schools should include in their meetings, parent involvement activities, and parent trainings that would attract and benefit parents more than what is currently being done?

Conclusion

This study examined the role that divorced fathers believed they have or should have in their middle or high school child's education. Findings from this study showed that although divorced fathers may not be the visible parent, they are not 'invisible' as once suggested (Spodek & Saracho, 2008, p. 665). The fathers identified as co-researchers in this study had high expectations for their children, but were often forced to take a minimal role because of themes such as maternal gatekeeping and lack of knowledge regarding school policy. Although there is currently no policy preventing non-custodial parents with joint custody from being included in parent contact, there has also been no line of communication developed with the fathers of this study.

Training for both divorced parents on what their rights are as well as explicit opportunities for them to be involved could promote more visibility and involvement from these parents. There also is a need for teacher sensitivity and responsiveness training for dealing with the non-custodial parent.

Additionally, this study generated ideas for steps that schools and teachers should take to help divorced fathers remain informed about their child's progress. There are additional areas of research to pursue related to this study, particularly in the area of additional qualitative research related to divorced father involvement from their perspectives of both the current co-researchers of this study as well as those gathered in future research. Furthermore, there is much more research to conduct in the area of secondary parental involvement from both parent and school perspectives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Request for Information Related to Potential Co-researchers

Rebecca Bowman



July 30, 2012

Dear Research Coordinator,

My name is Rebecca Bowman. I am conducting a study for a doctoral dissertation project at Liberty University entitled Frequent Father Miles: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Fathers' Perceived Role in Their High School Child's Education. The purpose of the study is to understand the perceived behaviors and responsibilities that divorced fathers assume in their high school child's education. I am writing to request your help in identifying potential participants for the study. I would like to send a letter home with all high school students explaining my study in order to identify potential co-researchers. No research data will be collected from the students or the school district. This letter will only be used to inform parents about my study and request their participation if they, or someone they know meets the requirements for participation.

In order to be included in the study, fathers must have a child in grades nine through 12. They must be no longer married to or living with the child's mother. It is important that the father has joint custody of the child, and is not the primary custodian.

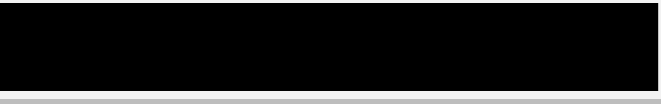
Thank you for your help in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at, rbowman3@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowman
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix B: Letter of Recruitment for Potential Co-Researchers

Rebecca Bowman



Dear Parent,

My name is Rebecca Bowman. I am a student pursuing a doctoral degree at Liberty University. As partial completion for this degree, I must conduct an original study. I have always been interested in the area of getting and keeping parents involved in their child's education. After much research, I realized that most studies have been conducted from the point of view of mothers and give little attention to fathers, especially those of high school students.

I am writing this letter asking for your help in my study. I am seeking to speak with divorced fathers about their role in their child's education. This study is completely voluntary and those participating may withdraw at any time. Your participation will take very little of your time and poses minimal risks to you. In order to be a potential participant in this study the following must be true:

- (1) The participant has a child in grades six through 12.
- (2) The participant is no longer married to the child's mother.
- (3) The participant has joint custody or visitation rights for the child.
- (4) The participant's child lives a majority of the year with their mother.

If you, or someone you know satisfies the above requirements and would like more information about this study or to participate in this study please contact me at rbowman@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowman

Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Research—Suburban District

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, August 20, 2012 10:39 AM

To: Bowman, Rebecca

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: Research proposal

Rebecca,

Your proposal to interview divorced fathers on their perception of their role in the education of their high school child will be approved with 2 stipulations.

1) You will have to provide the letter to be given to all student's parents asking for their participation in a sealed fashion to be distributed in that we cannot give you information on who is divorced or not. Outside the letter (whether in an envelope or stapled) you must mark "To parents of High School Student – Research Project." You must provide the numbers of copies needed so that the school only needs to distribute them.

2) In addition, your letter must be revised to say to contact you directly or mail that portion of the letter to you so that the school is not inconvenienced and has to collect the responses. Currently it states to return that information to your child's school.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

Frequent Father Miles

Examining Divorced Fathers' Roles in Their Child's Education

- *Do you have a child in grades six through 12?*
- *Are you no longer married to your child's mother?*
- *Do you have joint custody or visitation with your child?*

You may be eligible to participate in a study about divorced fathers' role in their child's education. This study is completely voluntary and those participating may withdraw at any time. Your participation will take very little of your time and poses minimal risks to you.

If you, or someone you know satisfies the above requirements and would like more information about this study or to participate in this study please contact:

Rebecca Bowman
Primary Researcher



**Appendix E: Letter to Pastors Requesting Information Related to Potential Co-
Researchers**

Rebecca Bowman



Dear Pastor,

My name is Rebecca Bowman. I am conducting a study for a doctoral dissertation project at Liberty University entitled Frequent Father Miles: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Fathers' Perceived Role in Their High School Child's Education. The purpose of the study is to understand the perceived behaviors and responsibilities that divorced fathers assume in their high school child's education. I am writing to request your help in identifying potential participants for the study.


In order to be included in the study, fathers must have a child in grades six through 12. They must be no longer married to, or living with the child's mother. It is important that the father has joint custody of the child, but is not the primary custodian.

Thank you for your help in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at rbowman3@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowman
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix F: Facebook Event for Co-Researcher Recruitment



Frequent Father Miles Public · By Rebecca Bowman Events Edit More

Friday, July 26, 2013 What time?

I am seeking help with my research study. I would to speak with divorced fathers about their role in their child's education. This study is completely voluntary and those participating may withdraw at any time. Your participation will take very little of your time and poses minimal risks.. In order to be a potential participant in this study the following must be true:

- (1) The participant has a child in grades six through 12.
- (2) The participant is no longer married to the child's mother.
- (3) The participant has joint custody or visitation rights for the child.
- (4) The participant's child lives a majority of the year with their mother.

The total time of your participation in the study will take approximately two months from start to finish, and will require a 10 minute survey, a one-hour face-to-face interview, and a 45 minute focus group session. Both the interview and focus group sessions will be recorded.

If you, or someone you know satisfies the above requirements and would like more information about this study or to participate in this study please contact me at (770) 546-8283 or rbowman@liberty.edu.

Appendix G: Co-Researcher Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Rebecca Bowman. I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in the Department of Education. I am currently conducting research that will be used in my dissertation.

I am studying the responsibilities and behaviors that divorced fathers perceive they assume in their high school child's education. I am very interested in your thoughts on this matter.

The information that you share with me will be used to further current literature on divorced fathers and their high school children as well as aid schools in helping fathers remain involved in their child's education at all levels.

The total time of your participation in the study will take approximately two months from start to finish, and will require a survey, one-hour face-to-face, telephone, or video conference audio recorded interview, and a focus group session.

There is a small risk for a breach of confidentiality, but I will make every effort to keep all your experiences confidential. I will not link your name to anything you say in the text of my dissertation. The topics in the interviews and focus groups may upset some divorced fathers.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question or discontinue your involvement completely at any time during the study without affecting you or your child's affiliation with their school or Liberty University.

If you choose to withdraw early from the study, any data collected up to that point will be destroyed immediately. It should be understood, however, that I am a mandatory reporter for the state of Georgia and will be required to report any information related to child neglect or abuse that may arise during the study.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask them now or you may contact my supervisor Dr. Barbara White.

If you think you would be interested in participating in this study, I will send you more detailed letter to fully outline the study and gain your informed consent for participation.

Appendix H: Permission to Adapt Instrument

Dear Rebecca,

My many apologies for my delay in responding to your note below.

I'm very happy to give you permission to use any of our measures as may be helpful in your study. We ask simply (as you've reflected below) that you cite the source of the measures in any report of your research. You may cite the website and any of the published material available on the site that has focused on the construct and measure (parental role construction for involvement) that you're using.

Many thanks for your interest, and all best to you in your research study!

Kathy Hoover-Dempsey

Appendix I: IRB Approval Request Letter

Liberty University Institutional Review Board
Campus North Suite 1582
1971 University Blvd.
Lynchburg, VA 24502

To Whom it May Concern:

Enclosed please find the protocol and consent form for the study, "Frequent Father Miles: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Fathers' Perceived Roles in their Child's Education." The university Application to Use Human Subjects for Research is also enclosed.

The study is proposed to be conducted on nine to 12 divorced fathers in one Midwestern Georgia county. The purpose of the study is to understand the perceived behaviors and responsibilities that divorced fathers assume in their middle and high school child's education. Data will be collected through a survey, semi- face-to-face, telephone, or video conference audio recorded interview, and focus groups. Additional data related to communication (e.g., notes, emails, letters) between the father and teachers may be collected. Each potential co-researcher will be notified of the potential risks associated with the study through informed consent. This study will offer valuable information to schools and school districts related to keeping parents involved throughout a child's entire educational journey.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at rbowman3@liberty.edu. I look forward to your comments and approval.
Sincerely,

Rebecca C. Bowman
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Appendix J: IRB Approval Letter



The Graduate School at Liberty University

May 29, 2013

Rebecca Combs Bowman

IRB Approval 1602.052913: Frequent Father Miles: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Fathers' Perceived Roles in Their High School Children's Educations

Dear Rebecca,

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



Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix K: Standardized Interview Guiding Questions

Questions

Father-child interaction

1. How would you describe a typical interaction or encounter with your child?
2. How would you describe your availability to your child?
3. How often do you discuss school with your child?
4. What responsibilities do you have as a father?

Father-school interaction

5. Describe your involvement in your child's school.
6. How many school functions do you attend?
7. How have you been supported by the school to help your child?
8. What are the challenges you face in supporting your child's educational pursuits?
9. Is there anything else that you think we as educators could do to help divorced fathers?

Appendix L: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

Frequent Father Miles: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Fathers' Perceived Role in Their High School Child's Education
A Doctoral Dissertation Project
Rebecca Bowman
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are being invited to participate in a research study of divorced fathers' involvement in their high school child's education. You were identified as a possible participant by yourself, an acquaintance or current participant in the study as a divorced father with a child in grades six through 12. Before you consent to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand what your commitment will involve. Please read the following information carefully. If any information is unclear, please contact the researcher for clarification.

This study is being conducted by: Rebecca Bowman, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at Liberty University

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand how divorced fathers perceive their role in the education of their middle or high school child. The study will focus on your experiences as a divorced father of a high school student and your role in your child's education. The following questions guiding the research are: (a) How do divorced fathers describe the role they play in their child's education? (b) What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education? (c) What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school?

Study Procedures

If you agree to be a participant or co-researcher in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Survey: You will be asked to complete a brief survey related to your involvement in your child's educational experience. The survey can be completed via the internet or through mailed hard copy provided by me. The survey will include five demographic questions to aid in the sampling of co-researchers.

Interview: Approximately one week after the completion of the survey, you will be asked to participate in a 45 minute to 1 hour face-to-face, telephone, or video conference audio recorded interview. There is a possibility that you will be contacted by telephone to clarify any questions I may have about your interview responses. Any follow-up questioning will be conducted within a week of the initial interview.

Document Collection: The nature of the research may require the collection of documents such as emails, notes, or letters that served as communication between you and your child's teacher. These documents would be collected during the interviews. Would you be willing to supply these documents if necessary? ___Yes ___No.

Focus Group: You may be asked to participate in a focus group. This data collection tool will allow all willing co-researchers to gather in an interactive environment to freely discuss the findings of the study and to allow the other divorced father in the study to further comment on the study and make suggestions for revisions to the current findings. The focus group will be video recorded. All focus group participants will be asked to sign an additional statement of confidentiality and no co-researchers will be identified by name during this session. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group? ___Yes ___No.

Risks and Benefits of the Study:

Risks: There are certain minimal risks that come with this study, but are similar to those you would encounter disclosing personal information in a work-related environment to others. The topics in the interviews and focus groups may upset some co-researchers. You may decline to answer any question or discontinue your involvement completely at any time during the study. If a participant withdraws early from the study, any data collected up to that point will be destroyed immediately. It should be understood, however, that the primary researcher is a mandatory reporter for the state of Georgia and will be required to report any information related to child neglect or abuse that may arise during the study.

Benefits: Although there will be no direct benefit to the co-researchers participating in this study, it is my hope that the information collected through this study will be used to provide teachers and schools with valuable information about how fathers are currently involved in their child's education, the factors that influence their level of involvement, and what elements should be included in parental involvement programs that may be more inviting to and beneficial for fathers in particular.

Compensation:

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study. Light snacks or a meal may be provided during face-to-face interviews and focus group meetings.

Confidentiality:

The findings of the study will be published as a doctoral dissertation, will be available to the public to read, and may be used in future research related to divorced fathers and parent involvement. In any report published, no information included will make it possible to identify you as a co-researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for all co-researchers, as well as the school and district in which their child is enrolled.

Each participant will be identified in research records by their pseudonym that will be stored in a code book. This code book will be used to link the co-researcher's audio and video recordings and transcripts to the actual name of the co-researcher. This code book will be stored in a separate secured file. Any electronic data, including survey data and audio and video recording transcriptions, will be stored on an external hard-drive which will be password protected. Audio and video recordings will be erased immediately after transcription from the recording device. The researcher will be the only individual with access to these records.

Upon completion of data analysis, all data collected will be archived and then destroyed after three years. The original data will not be used for further research. All hard copies of data will be first shredded and then burned. Electronic data will be erased from the external hard drive.

Because focus groups may be used as a form of data collection, the researcher cannot ensure that the focus group members will maintain the privacy and confidentiality of what is discussed in the session. However, each participant will be asked to sign a statement of confidentiality.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

Contacts and Questions:

The primary researcher of this study is Rebecca Bowman. If you have any questions about this letter or the study please ask them now. If you have any questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the primary researcher at rbowman3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@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 have my interview with the researcher audio recorded.

☐ I consent to have my participation in possible focus groups video recorded.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix M: Survey Instrument
PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

Removed Due to Copyright

Appendix N: Focus Group Invitation

Dear Co-Researcher,

Would you be willing to meet for one hour with your fellow co-researchers in the Frequent Father Miles study to discuss the current findings of the study? This time will be used to discuss the common themes that emerged from the study and allow you the chance to review the findings for accuracy and make any suggestions for revisions to the data collected. Although this session will be video-recorded, the data will be transcribed immediately and erased from the recording device. The group will be conducted via the WebEx video conferencing software. All that is required of you is high-speed internet access.

Although I will make every effort to keep your participation in the study and focus group confidential, I cannot ensure that the focus group members will maintain the privacy and confidentiality of what is discussed in the session. However, each participant will be asked to sign a statement of confidentiality.

If you are willing to participate in this focus group, please check the appropriate statement below and return to the researcher in the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowman
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

_____ I would like to participate in the focus group.

_____ I do not wish to participate in the focus group.

Enclosure: Return Envelope

Appendix O: Confidentiality Statement

This form is intended to ensure confidentiality of the information obtained during the course of the study Frequent Father Miles. All co-researchers involved in the focus groups sessions will be asked to read and sign their names expressing they intend to abide by this agreement.

I certify that I will not communicate in any manner or divulge information discussed during the focus group sessions. I acknowledge that I will not talk to anyone, including other co-researchers, outside of the current focus group session about the content of these sessions.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix P: Focus Group Agenda

I. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to our session. Thank you for taking time to join us in discussing the findings of the Frequent Father Miles study. You have been invited to participate in the Frequent Father Miles focus group session because of your involvement in the Frequent Father Miles study.

We will first go over the ground rules for the discussion. Then I will briefly discuss the analysis of the survey and interview data. We will then discuss the ideas and thoughts that have emerged from the study. Finally we will progress into other questions that may arise out of our discussion.

II. Ground Rules

Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers when discussing the themes. There are only differing points of view. Understand that both positive and negative comments are useful additions to the discussion and that sometimes the negative comments are the most helpful.

These sessions will be video recorded so that all comments receive full attention.

Your real names will not be used during the session or in the report, but instead you will be identified by the pseudonyms you selected for yourself at the beginning of the study. This will help to ensure confidentiality. Each of you has been asked to sign and adhere to a confidentiality statement.

Only one person should speak at a time so that all comments can be heard. You do not have to agree with others, but please listen respectfully as they share their

views. Please turn all cell phones off if possible. If you need to respond to a message or call, please do so as quietly as possible and return to the discussion as soon as you can. Food and drinks are available for you, but please avoid excessive movement around the room during the discussion.

My role as the moderator will be to facilitate the discussion. I ask that you please talk to each other and share your thoughts on the themes of the study as well as other co-researchers' opinions.

III. Explanation of Data Analysis Process

IV. Discussion of Themes and Further Questioning

- How do divorced fathers describe their role in their child's education?
 - Connections
 - Responsibilities
 - Expectations/Support
- What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education?
 - Employment
 - Family Structure
 - Maternal Gatekeeping
 - Lack of Knowledge
- What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school?
 - Consideration
 - Protocols

V. Closing Statements

Thank you for attending tonight's focus group for the Frequent Father Miles study. Your input is greatly appreciated. These results from this session will be added to the current data collected and published in a final report. You may obtain a final copy of this report by contacting me at rbowman3@liberty.edu.

Appendix Q: Summary of Survey Data

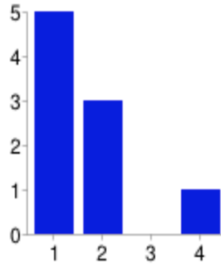
*1=Strongly Agree

2= Agree

3 =Disagree

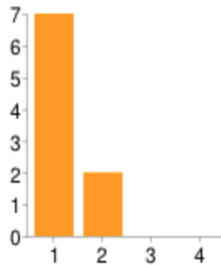
4=Strongly Disagree

It is my responsibility to make sure my child understands his or her assignments.



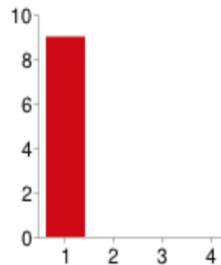
1	5	56%
2	3	33%
3	0	0%
4	1	11%

It is my responsibility to make it my business to know what my child is doing at school.



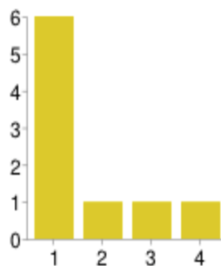
1	7	78%
2	2	22%
3	0	0%
4	0	0%

It is my responsibility to keep an eye on my child's progress at school.



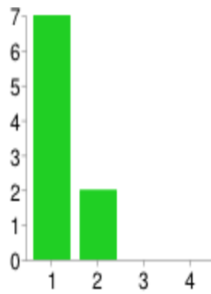
1	9	100%
2	0	0%
3	0	0%
4	0	0%

It is my responsibility to make sure my child's homework is done.



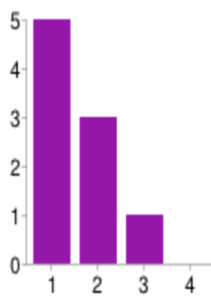
1	6	67%
2	1	11%
3	1	11%
4	1	11%

It is my responsibility to talk to my child about what he or she is learning.



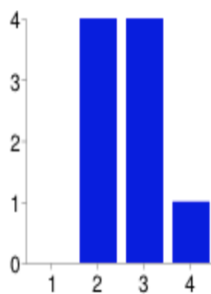
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2	2	22%
3	0	0%
4	0	0%

It is my responsibility to take my child to the library, community activities, or similar events.



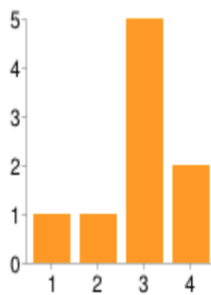
1	5	56%
2	3	33%
3	1	11%
4	0	0%

I believe my child is doing all right when I don't hear anything from the school.



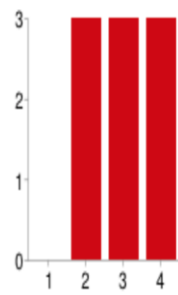
1	0	0%
2	4	44%
3	4	44%
4	1	11%

I believe the teacher has to notify me of a problem before I will be able to do something about it.



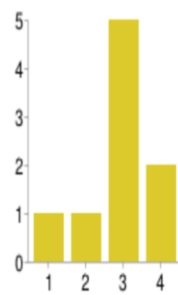
1	1	11%
2	1	11%
3	5	56%
4	2	22%

I believe my child's learning is up to the teacher.



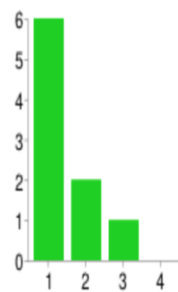
1	0	0%
2	3	33%
3	3	33%
4	3	33%

I believe most of the information about my child's progress should come from the report card.



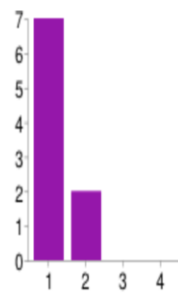
1	1	11%
2	1	11%
3	5	56%
4	2	22%

I believe the teachers should make sure that their students understand their assignments before giving them homework.



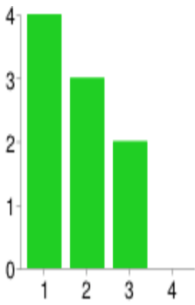
1	6	67%
2	2	22%
3	1	11%
4	0	0%

I believe the school should notify me if my child is having a problem.



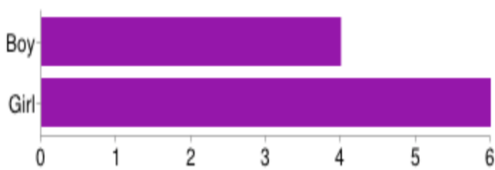
1	7	78%
2	2	22%
3	0	0%
4	0	0%

I find it helpful to get advice from the teachers.



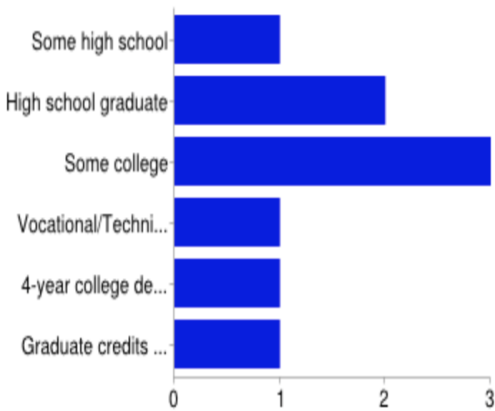
1	4	44%
2	3	33%
3	2	22%
4	0	0%

Is your high school student a



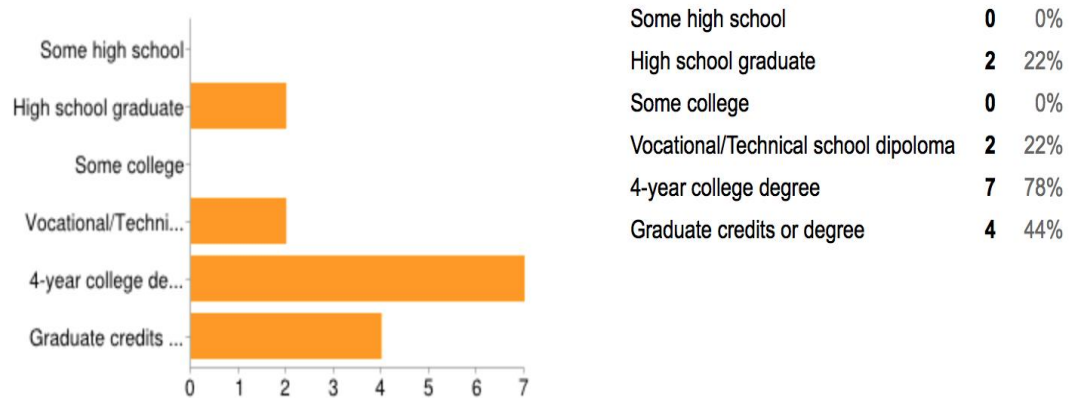
Boy	4	44%
Girl	6	67%

How much formal education have you completed?

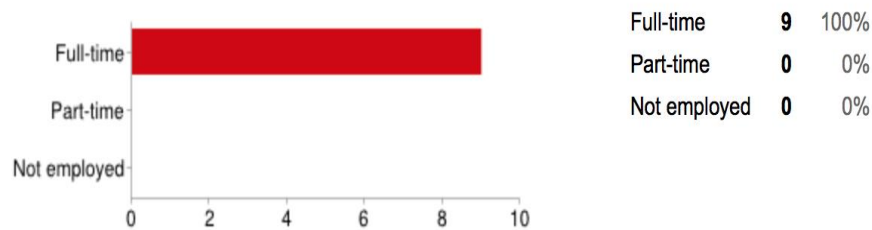


Some high school	1	11%
High school graduate	2	22%
Some college	3	33%
Vocational/Technical school diploma	1	11%
4-year college degree	1	11%
Graduate credits or degree	1	11%

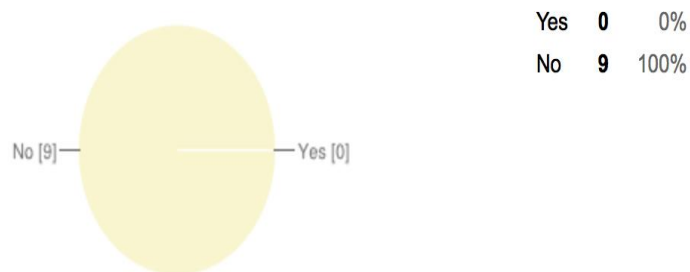
How much formal education would you like for your child to complete?



Are you employed



Does your child have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?



Appendix R: Sample of Clustered Codes and Themes

“Perry” Statements, Codes, and Themes

Themes	Codes	Quotes from Interview
Typical Interactions	Bonding	“We talk about anything that ranges from athletics or religion.”
	Daily contact	“I see him every morning before school and every day after school.”
Duties/Responsibilities	Guidance/Nurture	“To lead and guide them in the right direction, to nurture them.” “I try to show them leadership, guidance, direct them in the right way.”
	Family values	“To instill in them family values, love.”
	Educate	“Education, above all.”
Assumed Roles	Father/son interaction	“When you are divorce, especially if you have a son, they are looking to us.” “You see what we have going on in the school

		systems. You can tell whose dad is actively involved and whose is not.”
	Financial support	“Honestly, we think if we’re paying child support that’s all we need to do. No more, no less. That’s not true.”
	Mother=education	“I think the natural reaction for the school system is to contact the mother first.” “They (schools) look at the mother as being the leader when it comes to education.”
Diligence/Persistence	2-parent conference	“If there are parent conferences, both of us are there.
	Initiative	“It would depend on how adamant I would be in terms of them contacting me.”

Expectations	College	<p>“Talking about all my children, all three have been instilled with the necessity and there are no excuses about going to college.”</p> <p>“They know they have no options, than to go to college.”</p>
Provisions	Informational sessions	<p>“To be honest, it would be nice to have a class for divorced fathers on how you help your children in education.”</p>

Appendix S: Sample Textural and Structural Description

“Matthew”

Textural Description—What was experienced?

Matthew is in a unique situation and has experience this phenomenon from both sides. Although the data collected focuses on his daughter, he has a son that lives with him. From the aspect of being the non-custodial parent, Matthew has experienced the effects of maternal gatekeeping and has to make informal efforts at ball games and other extra-curricular activities to catch up on his daughter’s educational experience. He does help with things such as homework when she is visiting him, but admits on a regular basis he has little control in decisions that are made. While it seems that “Matthew’s” ex-wife has control over most of the aspects of his educational involvement with their daughter, he does say that he still holds the role of disciplinarian when she is not meeting their expectations.

From his experience, Matthew sees notification of the primary custodian as a “rule or regulation” from the schools. Because his daughter “lives with my ex-wife, she is the point person.” He has never attended a parent conference and is not sure if that is because there have not been any because his daughter is a good student or if he is just not made aware of them. Again, it seems that he must rely on his ex-wife to relay information.

Structural Description—How, in what context and setting was it experienced?

Matthew attributes much of his lack of knowledge to the fact that his divorce was difficult and what his ex-wife relays to others including teachers “is constricting”. Because he has seen this phenomenon from the side of the custodial parent also, he feels that there should be “consideration for the other parent.” Some sort of “system” where both parents could be informed.

As far as providing educational support for his daughter, he attributes his flexibility to the fact that he is self-employed and can drop things with short notice to attend to needs she may have during the school day.

Although Matthew has had informal contact with teachers about his daughter, the only formal contact he has had is during the Open House and Orientation events that schools hold at the beginning of every year.

Appendix T: Sample Theoretical Memo

1/20/14

Today I conducted my fourth interview with “Stephen”. This is the first interview where I felt like the interviewee was completely honest with me. He did not try to build himself up and stated over and over again that he did not do as much as he should with his child. He didn’t place the blame on anyone but himself, although the same themes of isolation and resentment did seem to be peeking through. He described a lack of communication between himself and his ex-wife as being a huge factor in the disconnect between his daughter and her education.

This is also the first father I have spoken to that is remarried. He admitted that he often lets his current wife deal with many of the issues and check on his daughter’s grades using the Parent Portal program. He mentioned an aggravation with the entire situation. He feels he often doesn’t get provided with an opportunity to be involved, so he doesn’t seek the opportunities on his own. Is it just easier for him that way? He also mentioned his ex-wife being a teacher which seems to be an added factor with fathers taking a step back if mom is already in the role of teacher and caregiver.

“Stephen” seemed very appreciative of the opportunity to participate and wanted to help in more ways if he could to get his perspective as well as the perspectives of other to be heard.

With each interview it is becoming more and more apparent that fathers just want to be reached out to and provided with an opportunity to be involved, but they aren’t really ready to make the step to get involved either.

Appendix U: Summary of Interview Data

Co-Researcher	Date Survey Completed	Date Of Interview	Interview Medium
Matthew	11/1/13	2/12/14	Phone
Perry	11/11/13	11/21/13	Phone
Brandon	1/7/14	1/14/14	Phone
Austin	1/8/14	1/18/14	Face Time
Stephen	1/10/14	1/20/14	Phone
Hayden	1/14/14	1/20/14	Phone
Daniel	1/15/14	1/21/14	Phone
Riley	2/4/14	2/7/14	Phone
Thomas	2/7/14	2/12/14	Phone

Appendix V: Sample Transcript

“Brandon” Interview Transcript

Conducted 01/14/14

Transcribed 01/15/14

B: The first few questions are about your interactions with your child. Now, your child is a son?

BR: It's a son.

B: So how would you describe your interactions with him? When you are together, what do you do?

BR: It is somewhat difficult to get in touch with him because he may or may not have a cell phone. He doesn't check his text messages. He doesn't email all that much. My daughter is in college right now. She just started. And he is in 7th grade, so if I had a PS3 or something like that I could connect and I could play games all the time, but as far as the phone it is almost impossible to get a hold of him.

B: You mentioned you might be visiting him soon. What are your interactions like when you are face-to-face?

BR: Oh, we have a great time. It's like I've never gone anywhere. He lets me know everything that has happened. His soccer, his school, in his life. Things he's seen at the movies, stuff like that. So it's as if I've never gone anywhere.

B: What about your availability to him. How available do you think you are?

BR: 100%. I've told him he can call me any time. And have even begged him “please give me a call anytime” and even if its 3:00 in the morning, as an ex-pastor I have those times when those phone calls come up. He hasn't had a need for that at all so I have not had to respond in that particular way. But he knows he has access to me any time he wants.

B: When you are, if you do happen to get in contact with him on the phone, or when you are face-to-face, how much of that time would you say that you spend talking about school?

BR: It's one of the first few questions that I end up asking, like, "How are things going at school?" Which is as long as everything is pretty much going the way it's supposed to be, he says, "School's going great!" And that pretty much the extent of how it's going. Are there any classes you're having trouble with? Most of the time he's a good student so I don't hear a whole lot about school. Now he has a band class and he had a concert not too long ago and we talked a little bit more about that. He and I share music. He's a trumpet player and so am I so we talked a little bit more about that. But as far as any other classes, not a whole lot.

B: So you usually are the one initiating those conversations, or is he sometimes the one who BRings those things up?

BR: Oh, no, I'm definitely initiating how school's going.

B: As far as your responsibilities of a father since you aren't in the household anymore, what do you feel your responsibilities are?

BR: Obviously I still need to make sure everything is going well and I still ask him how things are going. Now I've been in contact with some of his teachers not because I've initiated it, but because they have initiated it back to me. So as far as, my responsibility it's still there even though I'm not in the house. As far as actually being a part of what's going on, I have very little control of what's going on.

B: Moving into father school interactions. You said that the teachers have contacted you.

BR: Yes.

B: Why do you think they did that? Did they happen to mention why they contacted you?

BR: Oh yeah, they had a big problem with him on the one hand because he supposedly sat down at a table and these two girls made him move. In the process of him moving, one of the girls said he mouthed the word “bitch” to her. And so they wanted to let me know that my son had done that. Which I heard that from two separate teachers, and then my ex-wife also mentioned something. By the time I finally got to talk to my son, all I had to do was mention, “Did you do this?” and he said, “Absolutely not, I did not do that.” Which it was completely out of character for him to do. But it was a very natural thing. That is the first and only time I have heard from his teachers.

B: So it was a behavior issue.

BR: Yes, that was all.

B: They have never contacted you as far as academics?

BR: No, nothing. And it was a supposed academic thing that they took as being legitimate rather than listening to anything he had to say.

B: Because you are not in the same state anymore, have you been able to attend any of his school functions.

BR: Yeah, I have gone on some field trips. He has gone on a couple of weekend or several day field trips that have required chaperones and I have been able to chaperone those and also some of his other extracurricular activities I have been able to attend. But, that was more as a result of his mother than anything else.

B: I hate that you said the only reason they had contacted you was for a behavior problem.

BR: Right

B: Do you...

BR: Supposed behavior problem.

B: Do you feel like you are still supported, as far as the interaction. How do you feel like the teachers handled that? That was the first time that they had contacted you anyway?

BR: EVER

B: Have they contacted you since then?

BR: Absolutely not. I never hear anything good from them. I never hear anything...in fact when I heard about that situation, my ex-wife was upset that I had been contacted about that before she had. And for whatever reason they thought that I could handle the situation with my son better. I don't know, but they didn't have her email or what. I didn't get a direct phone call, I got an incident report from two different teachers about what they had seen and how they had handled it. Even at the house, because my wife is also a teacher, the two teachers had to be right more than my son. And which you know I had to talk to him before I made any decision because that was completely out of character for him. So, yeah it was very difficult. I never hear about the good stuff. I never get emails. And I'm sure my wife gets emails and gets notified about all kinds of stuff that is happening. I have completely no clue as to what is going on. But I have no way of really bullying my way into that. I really wouldn't even know where to begin.

B: That's why I really wanted to do this study. As a teacher myself I feel like with those in your situation, I am going to call mom first. So I wanted to get your perspective and other fathers' perspectives about what we could do.

BR: I acknowledge that a lot of moms are the go to people who are going to be more actively involved. But that is not always the case. And I feel completely isolated and empty when it comes to what I can do to help my son. Selfishly on my side, I am open to that at some point hopefully in his high school years that he will be willing to come down here and live with me. Then it could be just he and I down here. Of course, I would be the bad guy and all that stuff.

She would...you know I think I would go overboard letting her know what all is happening, but it's not happening this way and any anger, this is just the way you get punished.

B: How long have you been away from him? Were you ever in Georgia with him?

BR: Oh, yeah.

B: After the separation.

BR: Yeah I left four years ago. I am beginning my fifth year right now, but prior to that I was very much involved. My ex-wife was at the daycare that taught pre-K there so he was involved in those programs and through the first three or four years of his education. I have attended quite a few things. It's been a pretty helpless feeling. Realizing that anytime she gets sick off of me, I don't know anything. And he's not at an age where he is real cognizant of letting me know, as much as I beg him to let me know what is happening and when it's happening. He's completely out there so I can't rely on him for that information. Unless I stalk him, which is a little weird. I don't know any of that stuff.

B: You are saying that even though when you were in the same state you were pretty much isolated.

BR: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Always have been.

B: Other than the things you have already mentioned can you think of anything that has gotten in the way of supporting him as far as education goes? Teachers...What could teachers do? Would you like for teachers to reach out to you more? Especially the fact that they contacted you when there was a supposed behavior issues as opposed to academics?

BR: That was the thing that upsets me. My ex-wife had mentioned, "Why did they contact you first?" How many things have they contact her on that I had no clue? Why is this the first time I am hearing from anybody. So I assume that she has been contacted about other things. So if one

parent is contacted, I would really appreciate us both being contacted instead of assuming that my ex-wife or my son is letting me know anything. I had a very frank discussion with my son about that. I asked my son, "Did you do this? Because I will support you either way, but I need to know what I'm dealing with." And he said, "No, I didn't do it," and that good enough for me. I know him that was not like him, for them to make those assumptions. It was interesting because my ex-wife naturally assumed because she's a teacher that the teacher's always right. So sometimes that's the case, but when you're taking hearsay from a girl, you can never do that. I would love, if you're going to contact one, even more with email, it's easy to contact both. But I have not been contacted on one single thing with regard to my son. Unless it had something to do with the field trip I signed up for. Except for that I have not heard anything. Interestingly enough, the two teachers that I heard from about the behavior incident were two teachers that were on the field trip. They just spent two weeks with this kid and you're going to assume this is the kind of kid he is. They never even thought twice about it when they wrote their emails. This was the incident, this is what was reported, and it was over. There's a whole lot more going on in his life and at school than just that and I don't hear any of it.

B: One other thing that has come to mind. Have you had any interactions with male teachers?

BR: As far as I know, there are no male teachers.

B: I wondered if they might feel more... Maybe the female teachers don't feel comfortable reaching out. I didn't know if you thought you had been treated differently by the male teachers.

BR: I don't think so. I think that for the most part as far as most teachers that I have had interactions with, you are just a parent. Is not a male/female thing. You're just a parent. And yet if they have one person's email or up to this point like with him the one he has most contact with, that's the person you reach out to. Even though my contact may be indirect for the most

part of the year, he and I have a great relationship and he doesn't have a problem talking about things. If I know what to ask for. So it's not a male/female thing. They see it all pretty much the same, but because she's in the house with him, she matters and I don't is my guess.

B: Thank you for your help and you have a great evening.

Appendix W: Sample Request for Verification of Study Findings and Themes

Dear Co-Researcher,

I would like to thank you for your participation in the Frequent Father Miles study. The information you shared will contribute to a better understanding of your role in your child's educational pursuits.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you, as an individual participant, will be kept confidential. All the data has been collected and analyzed for this project. Results will be disseminated through the publication of my doctoral dissertation and possibly a journal article.

A summary of the findings and common themes is below. I welcome your comments, questions, or concerns. Please feel free to contact me at rbowman3@liberty.edu to express your feelings regarding these results.

- How do divorced fathers describe their role in their child's education?
 - Connections
 - Duties
 - Expectations/Support

- What are the factors that influence a divorced father's role in his child's education?
 - Employment

- Family Structure
 - Maternal Gatekeeping
 - Lack of Knowledge
- What can schools do to facilitate involvement of divorced fathers in their child's education throughout high school?
 - Consideration
 - Protocols

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowman

Primary Investigator