Exploring the social psychological processes of lone fatherhood after separation or divorce.

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Anna Hovris

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work submitted in this dissertation is fully the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Name: Anna Hovris

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Background: A significant change in family structure in the United Kingdom (UK) has been the increase in lone parent families. It is strongly predicted that the population of lone father-headed families will continue to grow in the UK. Of all dependent children living in lone parent families in Britain, 8% currently live in a lone father household. However, research on lone fathers remains scarce. Indeed, there is limited research that recognises the wide diversity of fatherhood, including the specific needs different fathers might have. Research findings suggest that lone fathers often face difficulties that are linked to structural and personal factors. They also emphasise how gender stereotypes further influence their experiences. Nonetheless, research has shown that lone fathers are able to plan a healthy developmental and functional environment for themselves and their children. This challenges the notion that men are emotionally detached and the exclusive importance of mothers as salient carers for children, a concept that is deeply embedded within psychoanalytic theory.

Rationale and aims: There is very little known about the psychological well-being of lone fathers in the UK. Yet, studies have found higher rates of distress in lone fathers as a result of separation or divorce when compared with married fathers, widowers and the general population. Studies have suggested that lone father families as a result of separation or divorce are not a homogeneous group. For instance, those fathers who insisted on or fought for the custody of their children must be distinguished from those who, differently, had no adjustment period in taking over the care of children. Indeed, it has been argued that a parent's initial attitude and feelings about his child might be influenced by whether or not he wanted sole responsibility. Earlier research findings have suggested that lone fathers feel unhappy and depressed at the point of separation and are of vulnerable mind and susceptible to forms of depressive mental illnesses, enough to impede their ability to acknowledge that they need help, to know where to ask for it, and then, to ask for help . Although there is a very small body of research exploring lone fatherhood after separation or divorce in the UK, this is not necessarily a disadvantage as it may place the field of counselling psychology in a more qualified and unique position to explore the experiences of lone fathers from a fresh perspective. The current study, therefore, focuses specifically at men raising children alone after divorce or separation in a UK context. The study aims to elicit a better understanding of this specific group of fathers. This study aims to explore how men understand their experience of becoming lone fathers after separation or divorce, the challenges that they might face and how they might work through them. The current study also intends to address how they understand the relationship with their children.

Method: This current enquiry is a qualitative study and uses a constructivist grounded theory method to generate data examining social psychological processes involved.

Results: The results highlight that the transition to lone fatherhood occurs from a variety of positions and in different ways that seem to influence the emotional, practical and social experiences of participants. Nonetheless, the men in this study demonstrate a propensity to self-realise and self- transform.

Discussion: The participants of this study understand their experiences as a lone father in terms of; first, the complexities that they faced; second, how they managed their lone fatherhood experience; and last, through re-inscribing fatherhood, whilst simultaneously reflecting on gender and masculinities, all of which were influenced by the situational context that preceded lone fatherhood, as well as the relationship with their children. Findings are discussed in relation to these influential contexts, with an exploration of what they mean in light of existing theory and research. The men in this study not only appear to be changing traditional social and cultural norms for fathers but, they further challenge the prevalence of the heterosexual matrix that characterises the oedipal triad. The implications for theory and practice are outlined, emphasising how counselling psychologists could make a difference.

Chapter 1

Reflexive Statement

I initially set out to explore unemployment, mental health and quality of life in lone mothers. At that time, my choice of topic was influenced by my day-to-day work with lone mothers. As I was going through existing literature though, I noticed that there was a wealth of information on lone mothers and the absent fathers. I quickly discovered that lone fathers were an overlooked population. This led me to begin a process of reflection about how my own experiences have informed my perceptions of gender relationships and the impact this has had on my understandings of fatherhood.

In our household, a two-parent family, I am the one who is doing the bulk of the caring and domestic work, while also working on a part-time basis and studying for the professional doctorate in counselling psychology. I also see my husband's role as primarily the 'provider' and as a result, I do not expect him to do any of the domestic chores or child care work. This is a culturally informed and socialised choice that I made and one that is deeply ingrained within my Greek cultural roots. Nonetheless, I believe that we know the world through our own interpretation of it and the meaning we give to what is occurring within it. I also believe that we know the world through interacting with and learning from others.

From my husband's perspective, as both a man and a father, he assumes many roles in the household. He is able to care for our young daughter, to be nurturing and emotionally sensitive, as well as to carry out domestic chores. Although the evidence that appears to suggest that a provider identity may be a barrier to men's involvement in parenting does apply to our household, it does not imply a position that is congruent with hegemonic masculinity. This insight had a big impact on the subsequent direction of this study.

Western society has structured gender roles that have led to the assumption that men have more of a choice than do women as to whether to take on a full-time parenting role once a child is born. Additionally, two-parent families have more of a choice to negotiate around child care, employment and personal development. With this assumption in mind, I came to think about men who are lone fathers, i.e. men who have sole custody of their children and who assume a full-time parenting role.

Beginning the literature review, I had preconceived ideas about lone fatherhood that stemmed from my own family experiences and struggles. I felt that if we, as a two-parent family and with a child under the age of 6, are faced with day-to-day challenges of time pressure and emotional investment, how does a lone father manage on his own? Therefore, my initial theoretical hypothesis was that the lone father will struggle to adjust and to manage both the 'provider' and the 'carer' role. I found myself experiencing sadness but also admiration for lone fathers, and as a result identified a strong desire to support them.

Not long after these initial thoughts and emotional reactions, I realised that I did not know much about what lone fatherhood really involved, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK). Through my work in the Welfare to Work sector and the many debates around lone parenthood in the policy arena, I perceived lone parents as struggling to find employment because of the lack of affordable child care and social support, as living on low income, and as having a poorer health than the general population. Due to my own cultural belief that mothers are more natural at caring for their children and undertaking domestic duties, I assumed that lone fathers must struggle more in attempting to balance work, social, domestic and parental roles than lone mothers. This is what I wrote down as my main reasoning for wanting to study this topic. My initial and somewhat naïve assumptions were influencing the direction of the literature review by virtue of only focusing on papers that portrayed lone parents as a disadvantaged group.

I realised that I had to bracket my assumptions and initial feelings by reverting back to basics. Through talking with peers and my supervisor the message was clear. I had to tackle this from an outsider's perspective and accept that I had very limited knowledge of the topic. I started by using a simple search string: fatherhood. The whole process of reading both professional and popular media accounts of (lone) fatherhood was quite an eye opening experience. My hetero-normative assumptions of the family set-up were challenged and upon reflection, I recall feeling disappointed in myself, especially as a trainee counselling psychologist and therapist, for having those assumptions in the first place. I was keen to share all the new knowledge I gained on different non-traditional family set-ups with family and friends, perhaps in an attempt to sooth my own insecurities about the topic I chose to explore.

This being said, I also found myself struggling with scanning the overwhelming literature on fatherhood. This evoked feelings of frustration and anxiety that were further exacerbated by the thought of word constraint. I had to take a step back and think objectively about how the

literature can guide me rather than sink in the plethora of information I was faced with. I spent months 'brainstorming' and making connections. This much needed funnelling approach enabled me to shape the research process and to realise that lone fatherhood has not been given the attention it deserves. As a key philosophical feature of counselling psychology is to consider the needs of underrepresented groups, I feel I have been given a rare opportunity to carry out research in an area that has not only opened my own mind but that has allowed me to decipher neglected research elements that could make a new contribution to the domain of lone fatherhood.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Embedded at the heart of psychoanalytic theory is a tension between the symbolic presence and qualitative absence of fathers in family life, which is centrally placed in Freud's foundational concept of the Oedipus complex (Freeman, 2008). Whilst the mother-child bond is characterised as 'the lynchpin of child development' (Freeman, 2008: 116), the father is dubbed the 'forgotten parent' of psychoanalytic thought (Ross, 1979: 317).

Since the mid-1970s, there has been an active effort to challenge the limitations of the patriarchal model of the authoritarian father. Scholars have long noted that fatherhood is a socially constructed notion that arises within the gender, economic, cultural, and political structures that underlie families (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). The pursuing of more positive conceptualisations of paternal involvement within psychoanalytic practice has highlighted the father's role to be more varied and actively engaged (Lamb, 1976; Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002). More sceptical research describe the new fatherhood ideal as reflecting men and fathers in crisis and emphasise the dominance of the father's breadwinner role in the UK (e.g. Lewis, 2000; O' Connell, 2005). In contrast, critical social constructionist and psychoanalytic theorists have welcomed changes in fathering practices, namely in having the potential to challenge hegemonic forms of masculinity[1] (e.g. Frosh, 1997; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). There has also been a slow but growing recognition within the psychoanalytic arena that the 'hidden' complexity of the paternal role is balanced with the diversity of contexts in which both men and women parent (Featherstone, 2009).

Indeed, the heterosexual model that defines the oedipal triad can be challenged by alternative 'non-traditional' family forms, including lesbian and gay parenting, lone fathers and lone mothers (Tasker, 2005; Freeman, 2008). Historically, there has been very limited psychoanalytic work on lone parent families, with the exception of parental loss by bereavement (Freeman, 2008). However, the recognition that children are raised in many different contexts other than the traditional nuclear family has led to an increased interest in lone parenthood research. The large majority of the literature focuses on lone mothers and the impact of parental separation and paternal absence on child development (e.g.,

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[1] Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) characterise hegemonic masculinity; 'not as a 'the male role' but a variety of masculinities to which others—among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men—are subordinated' (p. 586).

Thompson & Amato, 1999; Smart, 2000). Further, most fatherhood research that looks at men's commitment to childcare does so in the context of two-parent families (e.g. Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

A significant change in family structure in the UK has been the increase in lone parent families (ONS, 2013) and a forecast that the population of lone father-headed families will continue to grow in the UK (Featherstone, 2001). It has been reported that there are now 100,000 mothers living apart from their children in the UK — with a disturbing 12 per cent increase every year (Cable, 2006). The last couple of decades have seen a rise in feminist psychology suggesting that mothers might also feel ambivalence towards their children, and that it should not be assumed that all mothers will be warm and nurturing. Yet, research on lone fathers remains scarce despite a rising ideology of gender equality that has shaped family structure and fatherhood (Lewis & Lamb, 2007; Walters, 2011). A possible explanation might be that the study of lone fathers as a homogenous group (e.g. Amato, 2000) has restricted the lone fatherhood literature.

In fact, there is very limited research that recognises the wide diversity of fatherhood, including the specific needs different fathers may have (Sherriff, 2007) and, very little is known about what works in engaging men who are fathers (Reeves, 2007). Consequently, the current study focuses specifically at men raising children alone post-divorce or separation in a UK context. This study aims to elicit a better understanding of this specific group of fathers and it sets out to explore social psychological processes involved.

2.1 Defining of terms

Fatherhood and fathering are both used to describe the biological fact of being a father. Fathering may express both the biological fact of fatherhood and the work of actively caring for children (Fox, 2002). This is the meaning adopted in this study because the more encompassing definition of fatherhood as oppose to the purely biological one fits more with the pluralistic and wholesome nature of Counselling Psychology. The terms 'single father', 'lone fatherhood', 'solo parenting', 'men raising children alone', and 'men who are primary carers', are used throughout existing literature because 'lone fatherhood' is a contested definition. As a result of definitional and conceptual inconsistencies, this study defines lone fathers as 'men who [are] single fathers, that is, who [have] the caring responsibilities for at least one child of 16 years or younger, and who [are] resident in households where no adult women- kinfolk or non-kinfolk- [are] resident' (Barker, 1994: 34).

2.2 Outline of research study

Chapter 3 sets out to explore existing literature that has looked at lone fathers and the social psychological implications for men who become primary carers and have responsibility for both providing and caregiving. The relevance of this study to Counselling Psychology, research aims and questions are emphasised. Chapter 4 introduces method and methodology used. For this purpose, ontological and epistemological information, data collection techniques, choice of contexts and participants, as well as data analysis are discussed, including ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presents the results of the study where the key categories and sub-categories identified are introduced and defined. Data from participants are used to support analytical points made. Chapter 6 presents the theoretical and practical implications of the study. The findings in relation to existing literature and how they might contribute to theoretical developments, limitations as well as future research to build upon this study, are discussed.

Chapter 3

Critical Literature Review

Becoming a father and fatherhood present a "major adult transitional period" (Zayas, 1987:8). They have both been described as a "phenomenon around which there currently exist many and often competing discourses" (Lupton & Barclay, 1997:9), as well as "dissonant voices" (Gillis 2000:235). While general issues linked to fatherhood and motherhood are discussed, this chapter focuses on the exploration of some unique issues associated with being a lone father, such as the psychological transition into parenting, stress and coping, and provides a comparative picture of lone parent families as well as, provides the similarities and differences of lone fatherhood with other family constellations. This chapter also discusses the salience of gender and masculinity within men's lives and, particularly, male parenting. It further highlights the importance of investigating men raising children alone in the context of post-divorce and separation parenting, paving the way into the research questions for the current study.

3.1 Relevant theoretical frameworks

Biographical writings (e.g. George, 2009; Melville-James, 2009), theory (e.g. Lupton and Barclay, 1997) and research (e.g. Draper, 2002; Fletcher et al. 2006) suggest that fathers are faced with many issues in the realm of gender, around their social role, identity and understanding of masculinity. To understand these issues, this section seeks to provide an overview of relevant theoretical frameworks that are deemed particularly relevant to lone fathers who actually do both providing and caregiving (Day & Lamb, 2004).

3.1.1 The social role theory

The social role theory provides a language that describes the multiple and often conflicting roles that an individual plays throughout his or her lifetime (Connell & Masserschmidt, 2005). It also suggests that although there are multiple and alternative masculinities, a masculinity that is socially valued and dominant is called 'hegemonic masculinity'[2] (Connell, 1987). Connell and Masserschmidt (2005) assert that the social roles of men have undoubtedly been influenced by this concept, and by a society whose norms impose upon men specific obligations and gendered expectations, qualities and roles; in turn, to adhere to

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[2] In gender studies, hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies men's dominant social roles over women and other gender identities, which are perceived as feminine in a given society (Connell, 2005).

these gendered expectations, men should reject feminine qualities and positions in society. Although challenges to and changes in hegemonic masculinity are common (Connell & Masserschmidt, 2005), these are often without due regard not only for individual differences among men, but also for marginalised or smaller populations of men that are challenging these ideals such as lone fathers (e.g. Coles, 2002), stay-at-home fathers (e.g. Rochlen et al., 2008) and homeless fathers (e.g. Schindler & Coley, 2007). Thus, for this study, the impact of gender role norms and expectations on men who do both providing and caregiving is addressed.

3.1.2 Role discontinuity and gender role theory

Lupton and Barclay (1997) state that balancing employment and family involvement is a struggle for many fathers. Gender role theory is based on the idea that individuals have an array of roles throughout their lives (Turner, 1996). Turner asserts that these roles may be ascribed, or alternatively may be achieved, and come together to create a role set. Role discontinuity, then, occurs when an individual struggles to make the transition from one life stage (and role set) to another. Biddle & Thomas (1966) explain maladaptive functioning as either intra- and inter-role conflicts or, as a lack of transparency about the expectations of the behaviours associated with playing a role (i.e. gender role strain). Gender role theory also includes the idea of role overload; this occurs when one person assumes more roles, which are not interdependent, than they can cope with (Biddle & Thomas, 1996). The view presented here is in harmony with the work of La Rossa (1988) who states that "the culture of fatherhood, or society's beliefs and values concerning the role of the male parent is changing as women enter the workplace and have increasing obligations outside the home" (p.451).

To that end, the view above can further extend to lone fatherhood. Evidence suggests that men raising children alone encounter difficulties in relation to already established role expectations for male workers and the tasks associated with this identity, which often means that the need for a lone father to actively participate in parenting tasks has been dismissed (e.g. Schindler & Coley, 2007). Furthermore, according to Schindler and Coley (2007), lone fatherhood provides an illustration of a mismatch between gender expectations and father roles. Therefore, studying lone fathers who are doing both providing and caregiving provides an opportunity to examine how these men have been impacted by their new role and transition.

3.1.3 Gender role discrepancy and the influence of symbolic interactionism

The gender role discrepancy paradigm (Pleck, 1981, 1995) is another important framework. This paradigm suggests that men are socialised to behave in ways congruent with traditional masculinity, which includes the avoidance of behaviours and attitudes perceived to be feminine (Schindler & Coley, 2007). It also indicates that men face significant strain to fully meet the requirements of the traditional male role. According to Martin & Mahoney (2005), the pressure of failing to meet gender ideals and expectations can result in a range of negative outcomes (Martin & Mahoney, 2005). For example, men who fail to live up to masculinity norms can be susceptible to negative psychological consequences (Pleck, 1981, 1995; Silverstein et al., 2002; Schindler & Coley, 2007), such as social isolation and difficulties forming supportive and connected relationships (Mahalik et al., 2005).

Potential areas of gender role discrepancy include, for instance, financial expectations placed on low income fathers that often conflict with the limited financial resources of these men, which creates substantial stress as they struggle to adjust to the demands placed on them. In addition, qualitative studies have proposed that lone fathers experience difficulties playing the role of both provider and nurturer (Emmers-Sommers et al., 2003; Greif, 1995). Similarly, Hamer and Marchioro (2002) suggest that fathers transitioning into full-time parenting after gaining custody of their children feel trapped in their new roles. There is, also, general agreement in this area of research of an increased presence of men in roles that challenge long-standing gender role norms and expectations such a lone fathers, gay fathers and stay-at-home fathers, who often struggle to comprehend poorly defined fathering roles and competing images of ideal fathering (Palkovitz, 2002; Haddock et al., 2006; Schindler & Coley, 2007; Rochlen et al., 2008). What is more, there is evidence that shows that lone fathers are more stressed than mothers over their identities as fathers. For example, the 1981 study of Smith and Smith (discussed later in this chapter), argues how lone father respondents felt that they had to prove themselves capable of caring for children alone, without a mother. In the 1990s, Richards and Schmlege's (1993) reported that lone fathers were treated as oddities by outsiders. It appears, therefore, that lone fathers' stress is exacerbated by their parental and gender identity. Burke (1991) explains that the more an individual receives feedback from others that threatens a valued identity, the more stress he or she will feel. This, in turn, reduces their sense of esteem and efficacy.

Nonetheless, it has been argued that gender role discrepancy should be viewed as a process and not an outcome (Pleck, 1995). This viewpoint accords with symbolic interactionism, which has also shaped the fatherhood literature by introducing the more subjective elements

of identity development and meaning-making. Of particular interest to this inquiry is the idea that "humans are the only species that interpret or define each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions" (Blumer, 1969:180). In other words, the meaning that a father associates with an interaction may become symbolic and influence the construction of the father's view of self and his view of the generalised other. For instance, evidence suggests that when faced with gender discrepancy, men manage to adjust their behaviours or views concerning gender roles (e.g. O'Neil, Good and Holmes, 1995; Rochlen et al., 2008). This subsequently helps them to disengage from traditional ideals and ideas of hegemonic masculinity, or even often to alter their reference group, which is also known as gender role transition. This, in turn, leads to a range of positive psychological benefits (e.g. Rochlen et al., 2008), such as increased feelings of success and satisfaction, as well as, increased coping effectiveness (e.g. Easterbrooks et al., 2011). Thus, this study brings forth an opportunity to examine how providing and caregiving may affect lone fathers' beliefs of parenting and masculinity, as well as, a chance to consider how they might transform over time as this transformation might present a potential opportunity for intervention.

3.2 Psychological transition into parenting[3], stress and coping

To further understand family-based course transitions, this section explores relevant theories of transition to parenthood and adjustment to stressful life events. According to Coles (2009), a large body of literature focuses on stress and coping related to normative life events (those that are ubiquitous, expectable, and relatively short-term). Coles further explains that, although parenting is normative in the sense that it is an expected and quite often a desired stage in most people's developmental life cycle, the transition to the parental role may nevertheless occur at a culturally non-normative time, involve other non-normative, sometimes traumatic events, or be adopted by individuals not normally associated with the parental role. The strength of such an explanation is that the psychological transition to parenting is more accurately understood as a process that involves continuous emotional and practical adjustments.

Building on from the idea that the transition from adult to parent is a process that requires both practical and emotional adjustments, Shapiro (1987) asserts that family role transitions are crucial phases of the life cycle in which both men and women are challenged to develop not only novel responses to the self, but also to others. Grossman (1984) described a model

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[3] Parenting and parental responsibilities often refer to involvement with, and management of the daily care of children, such as discipline, nurturing, teaching, and the transference of values and belief systems (Doucet, 2004; Castillo, 2010). Home management (such as household chores and responsibilities) is also incorporated in the concept of parenting (Coles 2002, 2009; Castillo, 2010).

of adaptation to parenthood that consists of autonomy and affiliation, deriving primarily from a combination of object relations, self-psychological and developmental perspectives, and this model explains that both men and women require autonomy (i.e. related to a view of oneself as separate or distinct from others) and affiliation (i.e. related to a view of oneself as connected in an important way to others) for a healthy adaptation to parenting. Since parenthood involves negotiating commitments to self and to others, the dialectic between affiliation and autonomy becomes highlighted around the transition to parenthood. This focus on transition and how lone fathers cope with their new lone parenting status is addressed later in this chapter.

Another angle on the transition to parenthood as a process suggests that how families adapt to change depends on several factors and, according to Lindbald-Goldberg (1989), include the state of organisation or disorganisation of the family when the major change occurs, available personal resources, a positive family concept as well as the interpretation of the change itself. As parenting has generally been found to be stressful for both mothers and fathers in two-parent households (e.g. Miller & Sollie, 1980; Belsky, Spanier & Rovina, 1983; Ventura, 1987), the cognitive model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is relevant here. This is because, and in the relative absence of models of coping distinct to lone parents, research on stress and parenting asserts that daily parental stressors are even more compounded when linked to lone parenting (e.g. Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2009; Respler-Herman et al., 2012; Coltart & Henwood, 2012). For instance, financial strain, posits Shellenbarger (2002), is one of the strongest predictors of depression in lone parents. He additionally argues that the strain of poverty combined with role overload and loneliness increase vulnerability to new life stressors. Because of this, poor lone parents are susceptible to feelings of hopelessness and despair, which is detrimental to themselves and their children.

The cognitive model of stress and coping has be used as the basis for research into parental stress and coping with a significant importance being allocated to the individual's appraisal of the stressor in affecting his/her adaptation to a stressful situation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Hassall et al., 2005). To put it another way, stress is not viewed as inherent in any event itself, but rather as a function of the cognitive response of the individual or family to the event (Patterson, 2002; Gameiro & Finnigan, 2017). Not only is the meaning the person attaches to a stressful situation notable to determining the severity of the stress (Coles, 2009), it is also strongly linked to psychological resilience (McCubbin, McCubbin, & Thompson, 1986; Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995; Patterson, 2002; Gameiro &

Finnigan, 2017); that is to say, when a person uses "mental processes and behaviours in promoting personal assets and protecting self from the potential negative effects of stressors" (Robertson et al., 2015:533).

Coupled with the idea above that parenting tends to be stressful for both mothers and fathers, Coles (2009) paints parenting itself as a coping conundrum, even under the most normative of circumstances. Coping theory has actually defined coping as on-going cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage external and/or internal demands that are perceived as taxing a person's resources (Lazarus, 1993). The literature identifies the simplest and most common coping categories to be problem-focused and cognitive-focused strategies (e.g. Lazarus, 1993; Coles, 2009). Problem-focused strategies involve actions taken to modify a threatening situation, whereas cognitive-focused strategies are attempts to moderate or eliminate unpleasant emotions or, to reframe the situation in a positive light (e.g. Lazarus, 1993; Coles, 2009). Cognitive strategies can also involve avoidant strategies, such as having a fantasy, wishful thinking, denial, withdrawal, substance abuse, suppressing one's emotions and stress reduction through relaxation, joking, or positive reappraisal (Mattlin, Wethington & Kessler, 1990; Ross & Aday, 2006).

In addition to problem-focused and cognitive-focused strategies, the use of large informal networks of social support are also identified as primary coping strategies (e.g. Matthews, 2004; Ross & Aday, 2006; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier & Otis, 2007). Although many of these studies have largely relied on female respondents, the findings have frequently been generalized across gender and show that support networks not only influence parents' feelings of depression, success and satisfaction, but they also enhance parents' ability to cope with their situations (Christian, Al-Mateen, Webb, & Donnatelli, 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Taylor, Hardson, & Chatters, 1996; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2009; Castillo, 2010; Easterbrooks et al., 2011).

Many of the studies mentioned in this section are grounded in quantitative research. Quantitative coping measures have been criticised for frequently failing to investigate the social contexts of stress or the whole person, who has particular intentions, beliefs, plans and social connections (Coles, 2009). What is frequently missing from research, as Lazarus has noted, and what is needed most, "is a description of what the person is thinking in an effort to cope" (p. 236). Therefore, the current qualitative study aims to offer insight into how men raising children alone address any difficulties and challenges that they might face. This is deemed important as evidence suggests that lone parents have higher levels of stress and

experience life changes with more severity and greater frequency, as well as, they are more likely to experience chronically distressing conditions when compared to two-parent households (Olson & Banyard, 1993; Marsiglio et al., 2005). Evidence further suggests that, while mothering is certainly influenced by contextual factors as well, fathers are particularly vulnerable to contextual influences (e.g. unemployment, financial crisis; social support; institutional practices, cultural expectations) that often shape their parenting (Doherty et al., 1998; Fox, 2002; Marsiglio et al., 2005; Schindler & Coley, 2007; Williams, 2015).

3.3 Lone father families

It is generally accepted that lone fathers are dealing with the common stressors faced by all lone parents. However, lone fathers also have to actively challenge the assumptions about the abilities of men to be primary caregivers (Coles, 2009). Lone fathers' parenting frequently involves a cluster of stressors, both in the transition to parenthood and in the parenting activity itself (McCubbin et al. 1980, Smith & Smith, 1981; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). In fact, and according to Coles (2009), lone custodial fathers barely exist in the cultural mind. Instead, they are frequently assumed to be non-resident fathers, or if they co-reside with the child, it is assumed they must be co-residing in a married or co-habiting state, with the mother as well. Thus, it might be posited that their stressful parenting environment is exacerbated by this very view that their parenting is in a sense non-normative as culturally and socially men are not expected to be full-time lone parents. This section focuses on highlighting issues that are presumed to be universal among all lone father-headed families, regardless of how they came into creation, and on explaining how lone fathers might be similar or different to other families, specifically married fathers and single mothers, as this has been the main focus of the studies that have attended to this minority group.

3.3.1 Common experiences of lone fathers

As it is becoming apparent that this population is increasing, research on lone fathers has been blossoming (Williams, 2015). There are various themes identified in this field of study and different groups of lone fathers are depicted. For instance, Coles (2009) distinguishes between lone fathers by circumstance, which includes those fathers who are divorced or separated, and those who are widowed, and, on the other hand, lone fathers by choice, which includes those lone fathers who come to parenthood via foster care, surrogacy or adoption. There was a fair amount of qualitative and quantitative data obtained on lone fathers in the 1980s and 1990s when it was becoming evident that this population was increasing (e.g. Smith & Smith, 1981; Barker, 1995; Greif, 1995; Adams, 1996). This early research was, albeit to a small degree, expanded and began focusing on smaller and more cohesive groups

such as African American men who chose custody (Coles, 2002, 2009), African American men in poverty (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Roy, 1999), stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2004), homeless fathers (Schindler and Coley, 2006) and widowed or divorced men (Fox, 2002; Williams, 2015; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016; McClatchey, 2018).

One theme that emerges in research on lone fathers is the theme of 'struggles and adjustments'. For example, a struggle with adjustment to full-time parenting is presented, which includes the acceptance of new roles as well as difficulty and confusion with respect to the many facets of childrearing or parenthood (e.g. Coles 2002, 2009; Hamer & Marchioro 2002; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016; McClatchey, 2018). Adjusting to full time lone parenting for fathers has been shown to be a very difficult transition and this struggle appears to be similar across differing circumstances that led to lone parenthood, whether by personal decision or choice, by circumstance, or by the need to remove the children from the care of the other parent for the children's safety or well-being (e.g. Coles 2002, 2009; Fox, 2002; Hamer & Marchioro 2002; Matthews, 2004; McClatchey, 2018). An important theme in the literature also concerns the transition to lone fatherhood. Issues that are presented include, for instance, a need to increase patience, learn new forms of communication, balance the added responsibility and set personal mental decisions on childrearing, such as discipline and schedule (e.g. Coles 2002, 2009; Hamer and Marchiorio 2002). In this focus on transition, and particularly relevant for this study, is the issue of how fathers cope with their new lone parenting status. One of the strategies fathers engage with is setting novel priorities, like finding a new job (including taking a demotion), committing to their new role of lone parenting and having their domestic role as one of the highest priorities, namely by putting their children's needs before their own (e.g. O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001; Fox, 2002; Williams, 2015; McClatchey, 2018).

Next to the aforementioned, and combining qualitative narratives with demographic data, Coles (2009) found that single African American custodial fathers rely on a repertoire of social and psychological coping mechanisms, such as depending on support networks, when they could, but also relying on cognitive strategies, such as keeping themselves distracted, pushing themselves to do what they have to do despite the stress, and reappraising the situation as a learning experience. Although lone fathers use similar coping strategies, they do so, Coles (2009) emphasises, for different reasons. They might, for instance, believe that they lack control over certain aspects of their lives and the above strategies might allow them to feel a sense of control over their situation. Participants in Coles study (2009) did not use problem-solving strategies in order to avoid the stigma of gender stereotypes and to create a

counter-image of independence and competence, suggesting that the stress was appraised as inevitable. Williams (2015), whose qualitative study focused on widowed and separated/divorced lone fathers, explains how experiences of isolation, exclusion and the weight of responsibility, all evoked difficult emotions for her participants. They managed these through outward emotional suppression where not coping and needing help often appeared to create confusion and doubt in their help-seeking experience, namely because of unhelpful gender stereotypes. This might reflect attempts to moderate or eliminate unpleasant emotions or to reframe their situation in a positive light.

In the process of transition, not only adjustment, but also accepting the new role is highlighted in the literature. For example, quantitative findings comparing parenting behaviours in single-mother and single-father households suggest that lone fathers have more negative feelings towards single parenting, especially with younger children, because of the time invested in the care involved with younger ages (e.g. Dufur et al., 2010). Earlier studies already suggested that the age and gender of the child both contribute to the level of distress that lone fathers might feel (e.g. Greif, 1985; Frosh, 1997). In contrast, Fox (2002) stated in her qualitative study that the age and gender of the child did not present a significant challenge for lone fathers. Due perhaps to the historical difference in the way that men and women are socialised, qualitative and quantitative research suggests that fathers, different to mothers, are less engaged and participatory in child rearing (Doucet 2004; Riina and Feinberg 2012) and struggle to manage daily childrearing aspects appropriately when looking at guidance, discipline, rules and boundaries (Kielty, 2006). Research further suggests that parenting practices in lone father households are different from those in both dual parent households and single mother households. For instance, Dufur and colleagues (2010) found that lone fathers tend to be less affectionate and stricter on daily routines such as bedtime routine, but also tend to be less abrasive in their discipline techniques. They also found that different activities and games were played in lone father households (e.g. things such as singing and imaginary play occurred less, but activities such as puzzles and sports were more frequent).

3.3.2 Lone fathers and masculinity

Previous qualitative depth interviews on fathers and masculinity have shown that there is a binary tension for men to find a balance between fulfilling the gendered idea of the breadwinner role and being a more active and participatory father (Hatter et al., 2002; Williams, 2009). There is also a general struggle over their gender identities as fathers, and when in a lone-parent situation, lone fathers struggle with a constant need to reaffirm their

masculinity and the feeling that they no longer fit the traditional masculine male role (Coles, 2009). There is, additionally, a motivation to prove themselves capable of traditional mothering roles in caring for their children (Adams, 1996; Fox, 2002). Williams (2009) and Coles (2009) argue that some men address these personal struggles with gender roles (mothering and fathering) by changing how they perceive and perform these roles, while others prefer to dismiss or ignore them altogether. Doucet (2004) suggests that those who attempt to change their gender role perception do so by replacing or altering the maternal-nurturing ideas of daily life with more risk taking, fun and physical or outdoor activities and with less indoor activities such as art, crafts; in other words, they make this 'maternal-nurturing' role more masculine.

The conflict between nurturer and provider appears in several articles on lone fathers. Therein, this conflict emerges as a constant struggle and, as a form of stress that single mothers do not tend to have (Coles, 2002, 2009; Fox, 2002; Doucet, 2004; Williams, 2009). While men often struggle with multiple masculinities, qualitative findings have suggested that lone fathers seem especially concerned with the dual roles of providing and nurturing (Rochlen et al., 2008; Schindler & Coley, 2007). Literature on men and masculinities often argues that fathers experiencing low wages or unemployment may have difficulty sustaining positive masculine identities due to the association of masculinity with providing (e.g. Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). Fathers who are unemployed or are part of a dual-earner household have reported similar feelings regarding an inability to fulfil the role of provider (Roy, 2004). Even fathers, who choose to stay at home with their children, hence challenge hegemonic masculinity by choice, face social scrutiny and a desire to find alternative ways to express their masculinity (Doucet, 2004). Williams (2015) found that the nature of their responsibility as fathers is strongly influenced by gender stereotypes. For example, she found that lone fathers often negotiated traditional gender roles in the context of struggling financially to provide or, feeling the pressure to adopt both mother and father roles. Williams reports that traditional gender roles also impact on lone fathers' experiences of understanding their children's distress. Her participants experienced their children's distress as caused by parental action, particularly the father's lack of discipline or protection and/or the mother's rejection or abandonment. Williams (2015) argues that these experiences of guilt, blame and judgement perpetuate lone fathers' struggles to understand their children's distress. This aligns with earlier non-UK studies arguing that fathers need to work through their own feelings in order to adequately differentiate between their own fears and the reality of their children's emotional reactions. This is an important observation as there is a consensus that children's distress presents specific problems for lone fathers, namely in their

ability to manage children's emotions such as, rejection, unworthiness and abandonment (e.g. Bartz & Witcher, 1978; Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978b; Pichitino, 1983; Bernier & Miljokovitch, 2009).

Findings have also suggested that fathers transitioning into a new parental role appear to be renegotiating their role in the family and seek out new definitions of fathering (Esbensen, 2014). For example, fathers who gain full-time custody of their children and, as touched on, they have to learn to be both providers and nurturers, develop a reinvigorated commitment to their fathering and, as such, masculine identity. This includes a substantially enhanced appreciation for the nurturing and daily caretaking activities involved in parenting (Fox, 2002; Esbensen, 2014; McClatchey, 2018). As they increase their parental duties, however, fathers also appear to gain both greater satisfaction and greater daily stressors from the myriad of demands of caring for young children (Fox, 2002; Esbensen, 2014; McClatchey, 2018). Matthews's (2004) qualitative study examined the lived experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers. He found that participants developed several of the characteristics identified by Lindbald-Goldberg (1989), such as, more available personal resources, which enhanced their coping effectiveness, better family organization, which balanced household responsibilities and decreased task overload, a positive family concept, which valued loyalty and child-centeredness, as well as an ability to highlight positive events and place less emphasis on negative aspects of stressful events.

3.3.3 How are lone fathers similar or different to other families?

This section expands upon how lone fathers might be similar or different to other families, specifically married fathers and single mothers since this has been the main focus of both quantitative and qualitative studies that have attended to this quantitatively small group.

3.3.3.1 Financial status, age, ethnicity and social class

There is a consensus in the literature that lone fathers are more likely to have a higher income than single mothers (Meyer & Garasky, 1993; Eggebeen, Snyder & Manning, 1996; Hill & Hilton, 1999; Brown, 2000; Zhan & Pandey, 2004; Cooper et al., 2008). However, single fathers' income has been shown to be significantly lower than co-habiting and married fathers (Eggebeen et al., 1996; Brown, 2000). Data from a U.S. national dataset revealed that single fathers work less hours than married fathers, with one in nine being unemployed, suggesting that many single fathers are parenting full-time (Brown, 2000). Also true in the U.K, single fathers are far less likely than other fathers to be working full time (Adams, 1996; O'Brien, 2004; ONS, 2017). A survey of British single fathers reported difficulty in

balancing work and childcare with perceived detrimental effects to career as the main reason for leaving employment (Gingerbread, 2001; ONS, 2013). Given their lower rates of income, unsurprisingly many single fathers rely heavily on government support, which is in sharp contrast to married families (Brown, 2000; ONS, 2013). However, it is suggested that lone fathers might not always receive the support they need or are entitled to (O'Brien, 2004; Maplethorpe, 2010). This might be because child support policies are still founded upon the gendered assumption that women will assume sole custody of their children, disadvantaging lone fathers (Meyer & Garasky, 1993; O'Brien, 2004). Moreover, Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that the context of marital status was particularly influential for single fathers compared with mothers, where, after controlling for a range of demographics, previously married single fathers had higher income than never-married fathers, a finding not replicated amongst single mothers. Additionally, quantitative findings of past research on single fathers (e.g. Furstenberg, 1995) found that employment and income play a major part in the decision to take on full-parenting. However, in Coles (2003) qualitative interviews of single fathers, most participants felt that, if necessary, they would have taken custody, even if they had been unemployed.

Data collected in the 1980's and 1990s (e.g. Grief, 1985, 1995) tended to represent single fathers as White, middle class, older, divorced men, and parenting less and older children when compared with single mothers and two-parent families. However, within-group differences show that the demographic of this group has diversified in recent years (Garasky & Meyer, 1996; Eggebeen et al., 1996; Amato, 2000; Brown, 2000; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010), becoming increasingly younger, ethnically diverse, less affluent and parenting younger children. These changes have been attributed to methodological limitations such as datasets that are based on unrepresentative samples and inappropriate comparison groups (Meyer & Garasky, 1993), or recruitment strategies that rely on samples from conventional parenting networks, that likely exclude, low income men and men of minority ethnicities (Hamer & Marchioro, 2002).

3.3.3.2 Social Support

Quantitative findings have reported that single fathers are more likely than single mothers to have other adults living with them such as, extended family, displaying somewhat a positive picture (Brown, 2000; Zhan & Pandey, 2004). Other research has shown that single custodial fathers experience the same levels of parental support as single custodial mothers (e.g. Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010; McClatchey, 2018). Social support has been linked with less parenting stress amongst single fathers, namely because it allows them to balance work and

childcare (St. George & Fletcher, 2012). This finding is also supported in research on two parent families and single-mother families (St. George & Fletcher, 2012). Nonetheless, this positive picture contrast clinical papers that address social isolation as a specific issue many lone fathers face. A national Australian study showed that lone fathers are more likely than married fathers to perceive a lack of social support as being the absence of someone to help out in a crisis, or to confide in (Patulny, 2012). Hughes and Scoloveno (1984) argue that lone fathers often feel under pressure from family and friends to re-marry. According to Meyer & Garasky (1993), however, this reflects more a pragmatic response to a tendency of the legal system to award custody to married fathers as opposed to a response to isolation in itself.

Smith and Smith (1981) conducted eleven semi-structured interviews of stay-at-home fathers to explore feelings of isolation and alienation. They suggest that men's internalisation of traditional gender roles and their social interactions were perceived as negative influences. For instance, the men in Smith and Smith's study found their interactions with other women, especially stay-at-home mothers, isolating. They described how the lack of interaction with peers or men in similar roles to them also evoked feelings of social isolation. The lone fathers in Adams' (1996) qualitative study reported feelings of isolation from the parenting community that mainly consisted of mothers, and subsequently led them to be isolated from potential advice and support. This is in harmony with findings from Hipgrave (1978) and O'Brien (1987). They all argue that lone fathers often experience a shift in their priorities, namely from the world of work and male activities such as sports; consequently, impelling isolation and difficulties building or maintaining relationships. More recently, it is asserted that the potential loss of workplace relations due to childcare responsibilities might be another factor affecting lone fathers' social contacts and, as such, support (Gingerbread, 2000; Patulny, 2012), particularly when one considers the dominant discourse around the father as 'provider'. Although single mothers undoubtedly face similar challenges, the dominance of the 'father as provider' discourse may make a lack of time spent in the workplace a particularly challenging transition.

Isolation might be heightened where peer groups consist mostly of single mothers, from whom some men have been exposed to negative attitudes by virtue of their role as primary caregiver (Griffiths, 1999; Yopp & Rosenstein, 2012). This was also a major finding in a survey of British lone fathers by the single-parent charity Gingerbread, where 61% of the participants felt that society had a negative attitude towards them (2001). Negative attitudes may make it harder for lone fathers to socialise (Walters, 2011), which is likely to contribute to their isolation. Although research is limited, there is qualitative evidence that these men

face a range of judgements and negative consequences (Martin & Mahoney, 2005). Quantitative findings have actually shown that people respond negatively to both men and women who do not conform to traditional gender roles, although women are seen more positively relative to societal standards (e.g. Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

In line with Adams (1996), O' Brien (1987) states that the scarcity of lone fathers might attract support from female friends and family but that this support may be experienced by men as another indication of the 'unusual' nature of their role. They argue that this might promote strain in social interaction and potential difficulties linked to gender identity, which in turn might affect their confidence to meet the emotional needs of their own children. Williams (2015) found that gender stereotypes greatly influence the experiences of lone fathers. As such, all participants in her qualitative study expressed feeling different from other parents with a strong sense of isolation and loneliness. Like the studies mentioned above, Williams (2015) states that feelings of loneliness and isolation are understood in the context of experiencing exclusion and difference and in the context of reported practical limitations to socialising.

Empirical studies using large U.S. samples from predominantly student populations have focused on attitudes towards different family forms (Troilo & Coleman, 2008; DeJean, McGeorge & Carlson, 2012). In DeJean et al's study, lone fathers were generally viewed more positively than single mothers, understood to be related to the presumption that single fathers are to be admired for stepping up to a role not 'natural' for men and where something must have gone wrong for mother not to have assumed care. Nonetheless, when asked who they would choose to look after their child, participants reported a preference for single mothers, likely linked to discourses of the mother as the 'expert' parent. Moreover, negative attitudes lie in the context of involvement with services. For example, Wetchler (2005) describes feeling under suspicion, a feeling that resonates with research in the social care context that has highlighted discourses about fathers as a 'threat' and as 'unimportant' (Scourfield, 2003); thus, possibly contributing to the tendency for professionals to view single fathers as less deserving of support than single mothers (Kullberg, 2005). Adams (1996) found that health and education resources do not generally show prejudice towards men as lone parents. Appearing to mirror the broader societal assumptions that women should be the salient carers for children, however, his findings indicate that, in contrast, social care services do show prejudice.

3.3.3.3 Help-seeking

A large body of empirical research has shown that men are reluctant to seek help from health care professionals (e.g. Millar, 2003; Singleton & Lewis, 2003). Therein, the reasons men identify for not seeking professional help appear to fall into three interconnected areas: the male socialisation process, the influence of stigma and the knowledge of help-seeking processes. Reviewing existing literature on gender role socialisation and seeking help, Addis and Mahalik (2003) highlight that variability amongst men seems to be addressed by taking into account individual differences in the degree to which men contribute to different masculinity ideologies and struggle with gender-role conflict. Robertson and Fitzgerald (1992) found that high scores on masculinity measures were significant predictors of negative attitudes towards help-seeking. It has also been suggested that men's responses to psychological and emotional difficulties might indeed be related to the dominant cultural characteristics of masculinity and gender-role expectations (Garde, 2003; Hilton, 2009). Therefore, a focus on male gender roles might be appropriate for psychological interventions, either tailored to more traditional masculine ways of relating (Brooks, 1998), or aimed at helping individual men become less constrained by gender role expectations (Hilton, 2009).

While this explains why some men seek help whilst others do not, the cultural and gender role socialisation explanation of men's help-seeking, despite its strengths, does not appear to account for why some men will seek help for some problems but not for others. For instance, men who have internalised masculinity norms about self-reliance and emotional stoicism may be resistant to seek help for mental health difficulties, but not for physical health problems. Studies have proposed that 'normative male alexithymia' or men's difficulties putting emotions into words might prevent them from admitting their need for help, rendering traditional psychotherapy of talking about feelings unappealing to men (e.g. Levant, 1998; Gillon, 2007). Similarly, Wisch et al. (1995) found that men expressed more negative attitudes toward seeking help after viewing a counselling session focused on feelings than a session focused on cognitions. Other studies found that men who have more traditionally masculine attitudes preferred a counselling brochure emphasising self-help, technical competence and an achievement orientation over the expression of personal feelings (e.g. Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992). Although the topic of transition to fatherhood and the psychological impact this might have on men have been explored, it has been predominantly approached from a perspective on being a father in a two-parent household (Millar, 2003; White, 2009). Little empirical attention has been placed on lone fathers who

are raising children alone (i.e. without mediating maternal presence), and who are faced with the responsibility of both caring and providing (Fox, 2002).

Research about accessibility and availability of psychological services that is focused on lone mothers or lone fathers is very limited (Parker et al. 2008). Approaches to family therapy generally assume a two-parent subsystem (Walters et al., 2001) and it is argued that because lone parent families themselves are different, they do not fit family therapy-based definitions (Lewis, 1986; Featherstone, 2009). Following the use of key words such as 'lone-parent family' and 'family therapy', a literature search generated a dearth of articles (albeit not very recent). On a general consensus, the predominant reason given to explain lone-parent families engaging with psychological services is behavioural problems with the children (e.g. Zuc, 1980; Lewis & O'Brien, 1987). Greif (1987) carried out a longitudinal examination of 28 single custodial fathers in the U.S and explored, based on self-report data, how they fare in their role. He found that long-lasting concerns of lone fathers included accepting the long-term possibility of care, facing the reality that parental issues will not ease over time, fostering the ex-spouse's involvement with the children and their fears about losing custody.

Related to social support, a dearth of studies has focussed on help-seeking amongst lone fathers. Cohen & Savaya (2000) employed questionnaires to compare the self-report of Israeli single mothers and fathers regarding the help they sought and wanted. Compared with single mothers matched for education, for number and age of children, single fathers reported wanting and receiving less help. From a critical stance, it is important to highlight that a lack of control for income was likely to have influenced this finding, especially given evidence that shows that single fathers' had a higher income compared to single mothers. Moreover, this result might have also been influenced by a lack of critical reflection on the underlying assumption of what the authors refer to as "a traditional male reluctance to ask for assistance" (p. 1444), and a lack of alternative sources of help. Quite importantly, it has been shown that the reluctance amongst lone fathers compared to lone mothers to seek help further extends to help-seeking for the children (Leining & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Wolff, Pak, Meeske, Worden & Katz, 2010). Regrettably, the reasons why this pattern of help-seeking might be identified are not discussed in these studies. Interestingly, a multicultural qualitative study outlines fathers' accounts who reported that they were depending much more on practical (e.g. help with childcare) rather than emotional support (Wolf et al., 2010).

Previous research has found that men are more prone to have a strong desire for autonomy, yet, at the same time, many lone fathers depend on their families as their main support (e.g., Coles, 2002, 2009). However, studies tend to ignore, Williams (2015) actually rightly states, the unique social experience of being a lone father. For example, lone fathers might be reluctant to ask for help for themselves or even their children, raising concerns for helping professions. What is even more concerning is that there is nothing tangible in the literature that demonstrates that the profession invests time and energy in therapeutically engaging lone father. This is, particularly relevant considering the recommendations nearly three decades ago for family therapists to support lone fathers in adjusting to their new roles and to help them deal effectively with the multidimensional difficulties they might present, especially because many of these families have experienced bereavement, divorce or separation (e.g. Zuk, 1980; Grief, 1987). While the literature review suggests that lone fathers are often aware of negative attitudes towards them (Gingerbread, 2001), little is known about how these affect their experience. The current research study intends to address this.

3.4 Lone Fathers: A high risk group for psychiatric morbidity?

Given the potential financial, emotional, and social consequences amongst lone fathers, it is not surprising that studies have found higher rates of distress compared with married fathers and the general population (e.g. Cooper et al., 2007; Wade et al., 2011; Collings et al., 2014).

The study of Cooper et al. (2007), from the Department of Mental Health Sciences in London, is the first to explore rates of depression and anxiety between lone and married mothers and fathers, including 73 lone fathers. In the paper, they present data from the 2000 British National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey to show that financial strain and a lack of social support contribute to the excess of non-psychotic affective disorder (also known as Common Mental Disorders- CMD) in lone parents. They found that lone mothers are twice more likely to have a CMD than other women. Lone fathers are nearly four times more likely to have a CMD than other men. Lone fathers experience less socio-economic strain than lone mothers; however, a lack of a supportive social network is a significant predictor of morbidity in lone fathers, as well as in all other men in the survey. The significance of the relationship between gender, parental status and distress decreased for lone mothers when financial strain and a lack of social support were included. However, this did not apply to lone fathers. This suggests a difference in the character of lone fathers' distress compared with mothers. The authors provide various suggestions regarding lone fathers' distress. For instance, lone fathers lack social contacts adapted to their own needs, such as access

relations with other parents. Difficulties balancing childcare and work may cause difficulties for lone fathers. Last, they suggest that gender roles and expectations may contribute to poor self-esteem which, in turn, depression. This is in line with findings from a U.S. study that reported higher scores for depression, although this specifically concerns mothers and fathers who reported low levels of satisfaction in their role as a lone parent (Hill & Hilton, 1999). Cooper et al. (2007) further found that there are higher rates of CMD in lone fathers who are separated rather than widowed.

A Canadian Community Health Survey examines the unique and combined effects of gender and family structure on the mental health of fathers and mothers (Wade et al. 2011). Consistent with other findings, they found that lone mothers have higher rates of psychiatric disorder compared with married mothers. Comparing the effect that lone-parent status has on fathers was slightly trickier since there is little research in the area. As such, they were only able to compare their findings to those from Cooper et al. (2007). Contrasting Cooper and colleagues' study, they found that social support was a protective factor for lone fathers compared with lone mothers. This difference in findings may be due to a larger sample size of lone fathers. However, a lot of information was left out such as data on the events or circumstances leading to lone parenthood or the time of entry into that role. As such and as their data was cross-sectional, it is very difficult to determine whether or not events or circumstances leading to lone parenthood may have been responsible for the onset of psychiatric disorder.

Finally, a critical stance of how gender might relate to levels of distress men as lone parents might face is not acknowledged in the above studies. Thus, one might argue that lone mothers and fathers are likely to be more similar than different. For example, it might be the case that these issues are related to social and cultural constructions of the nature of motherhood and fatherhood, which might in turn perpetuate unhelpful gender stereotypes (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Fox, 2002) and consequently negatively impacting upon their lived experiences. There does appear to be a consensus in the existing literature that lone fatherhood is associated with diminished mental health (e.g. Cooper et al. 2007). However, Williams (2015) fittingly explains that it might leave the reader with the assumption that the majority of lone fathers are disordered, as opposed to distress experienced being a reaction to their new life situation. Thus, more qualitative research might help toward identifying the needs of lone fathers and the support that they might perceive as helpful as a lack of appropriate support might also have concerning repercussions on the child or children involved (Jones et al. 2012).

3.5 Lone fathers in the context of post- separation or divorce

A limited number of qualitative and quantitative studies have suggested that lone father families, as a result of separation or divorce, are not a homogeneous group. They also suggested that those lone fathers who insisted on or fought for the custody of their children must be distinguished from those who had no adjustment period in taking over the care of children because of, for instance, the mothers' wishes, neglect, abandonment (O'Brien, 1980; Guttman, 1989; Fox, 2002). The only British study that specifically looked at lone fathers' initial feelings and experiences at separation was conducted in the late 1970s by O'Brien (1980). Regardless of whether the lone father actively chose for lone parenting or had the situation thrust upon him, O'Brien initially assumed that one would expect the father to experience a great deal of pressure in his role. In her qualitative study with 51 separated or divorced lone fathers, O'Brien proposed a three-way categorisation of the path to lone fatherhood after separation. The 'hostile seekers' refer to the families in which child custody claims were activated by a desire for revenge on their wives, usually on grounds of adultery, and, on the other hand, a positive desire to care for their children. The 'passive acceptors', second, had wives who simply left without the children. Last, the 'conciliatory negotiators' concerns families in which custody and care arrangements were negotiated between the couple at the time of separation. O'Brien's findings revealed a greater psychological burden in the men whose wives 'left the home alone without the children'. O'Brien's (1980) study further showed that the majority of fathers reported feeling very unhappy and depressed during the separation period. The reported mean time to get over the initial feelings was 1-3 years. Interestingly, research by Burgess et al (2012) suggests that at the point of separation, men in particular, were of vulnerable mind and susceptible to forms of depressive mental illnesses, enough to impede their ability to acknowledge that they need help, to know where to ask for it, and then, to ask for help .

O'Brien (1980) and Fox (2002) have researched fathers in post-separation situation. To ease their transition from married to separated state, some of the men in O'Brien's study (1980) either devised survival strategies themselves or sought support from outside sources. Both reactions appeared to be influenced by social constraints, such as money, time, presence of nearby family and the availability of support, as well as the person's willingness to accept help and motivation to create survival strategies (e.g., changing life style and prioritising the relationship with the children). The 'conciliatory negotiators' and the 'hostile seekers' created survival strategies more readily than the 'passive acceptors'. Interestingly, the former were materially more advantaged than the latter with less housing and financial issues. Here,

the clinical implications of a potential link between social constraints and what this means for those who did not actively seek child custody were unfortunately not discussed.

Similarly, Fox (2002) conducted a qualitative study to demonstrate that men post-separation or divorce can 'mother'. In this research, it appeared that the experience of doing care transforms fathering. She identified events around the breakdown of the parental relationship to follow one of four patterns. In the first, the woman left without the children. This was both the least ambiguous and the most common situation. The second most common scenario, accounting for around a third of respondents, concerned the man moving out alone, but subsequently became the children's main carer. When non-resident fathers became primary carers, it was always precipitated by a life event or crisis in the parent (i.e. the mother) who formerly had taken up the primary care role. In more than half of these cases, fathers became primary carers as a direct result of Social Service intervention. The least common situation in this sample was a parent (i.e. the father) leaving with the child or children. Fox (2002), like O'Brien (1980), also found that the transition is typically more abrupt when the mother leaves, with little time to reflect for most fathers on the implications of this significant change in the structure of their everyday lives. The withdrawal of a maternal presence means that these fathers are not only left with their own feelings and emotions, but that they are also left with the unmediated emotional and material needs and demands of their children. Consequently, men in this position reported feeling constrained to change their lives in radical ways.

The clinical implications can be very important here, namely in relation to the father-child relationship. Therefore, more research exploring lone fathers who did not actively seek child custody could be useful as a parent's initial attitude and feelings about his child might, according to Greif (1987), be influenced by whether he wanted sole responsibility. Thus, integrating research into practice may lead to the development of therapeutic interventions that are specific to this situational context as human functioning cannot be understood without consideration of the context in which it occurs. As Amato (2000) emphasises, adjustment, severity and duration of negative outcomes varies from person to person and highly depends on the presence of moderating or protective factors.

3.6 Conclusions and Research Aims

Findings from the studies above highlight that lone fathers often face difficulties that are linked to structural, attitudinal and personal factors. They also emphasise how their experience might be influenced by gender stereotypes, leading to feelings of loneliness and

isolation in the context of experiencing exclusion and difference and in the context of reported practical limitations to socialising. Gender stereotypes appear to influence how men understand the nature of their responsibility as fathers and how they conceptualise their children's distress. There are mixed findings about whether or not the circumstances that leads to lone fatherhood impact upon men's experiences as lone fathers. Despite the potential usefulness of involving (lone) fathers in psychological services, the field of psychology has not kept pace with the growth in the number of lone father families (Lewis, 1986; Walters, 2011). The lack of emphasis on gender and the growing interest on 'evidence-based practice' might explain why health and caring professions in the UK tend to hold on to gender-centric views about parenting, and understand parenting in terms of mothers and mothering; consequently they struggle to know what works in engaging men who are fathers (Page et al., 2009; Williams, 2015). While there is a growing UK literature on fathers and policy relating to father engagement, there is very limited research that recognises the specific needs different fathers may have (Sherriff, 2007).

Many times, the socialisation processes teaches individuals that the mother should be and is the nurturing parent and the father should be and is the breadwinner and disciplinarian. Therefore, it only stands to reason that society will be reluctant to accept and adjust to a phenomenon such as lone fatherhood, wherein the father takes on all roles. Indeed, of all the changes in family life during the 20th century, perhaps the most impactful in its implications, Amato (2000) claims, is the increase in the rate of divorce or separation. As referred to earlier, the two-parent family setting tends to be seen as the foundational institution of society; the setting in which adults achieve a sense of meaning, stability and security and also in which children develop into competent and successful citizens. This is particularly important as there is rich UK literature that emphasises the potential negative impact of divorce or separation on both parents and children (e.g. Mooney et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2010). Parental self-report studies of child behaviour have also indicated mixed findings around circumstances leading to lone parenthood and the impact on children's distress (e.g. Risman & Park, 1988; De Maris & Grief, 1992; Amato, 2000). The limited qualitative and quantitative studies have suggested that lone father families as a result of separation or divorce are not a homogeneous group. For instance, those fathers who insisted on or fought for the custody of their children must be distinguished from those who, differently, had no adjustment period in taking over the care of children (O'Brien, 1980; Guttman, 1989; Fox, 2002). Additionally, Cooper et al. (2007) found that there are higher rates of CMD in lone fathers who are separated or divorced rather than widowed, and research by Jones et al. (2012) suggested that at the point of separation, men in particular are of vulnerable mind.

The current study is an inductive piece of research where the data speaks for itself and new insights emerge from the data with the intention of developing a theoretical model of an experience or process grounded in individual perspectives. The current study intends to elicit a better understanding of men relating to and raising children alone in the context of post-separation/divorce. Exploring social psychological processes involved, this study aims to make sense of how men understand their experience of becoming lone fathers, the challenges that they might face and how they might work through them.

In light of all of the above, the present study aims to explore the following research questions:

1.   How do men raising children alone and in the context of post-separation or divorce understand their experience of becoming lone fathers?

2.   How do men raising children alone and in the context of post-separation or divorce address any difficulties or challenges they may experience?

3.   How do men raising children alone and in the context of post-separation or divorce understand the relationship with their children?

3.7 Relevance to Counselling Psychology

Although there is a small body of research exploring lone fatherhood in the UK, this is not necessarily a disadvantage as it may place the field of counselling psychology in a qualified and unique position to explore the experiences of men raising children alone in the context of post-separation or divorce from a fresh perspective. As a key feature of counselling psychology is to take into account the needs of under-represented groups (Werth, 1993), the profession is well placed to achieve this task. The pluralistic nature of counselling psychology allows for the implementation of a critical stance to gender relations and understanding lone fathers as a heterogeneous group. Through this pluralistic approach, the field becomes adaptable to the inevitable changes of a pluralistic world (Athanasiadou, 2012). This is particularly important as it accounts for diversity and complexity in individual experiences. Through research, counselling psychologists can contribute towards understanding and addressing social psychological processes involved in lone fatherhood post-separation or divorce and, as such play an active part in the development of therapeutic theory and practice.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Method

Quantitative approaches to research tend to understand the world in a cause and effect way or tend to focus on pre-defined variables (Willig, 2008), often without personal investment on the part of the researcher (McLeod, 2001). Indeed, they are often criticized due to their disregard for the subjective states of individuals (e.g., Cohen et al., 2000). An alternative is provided with qualitative approaches available, often characterised by their flexibility to explore the complexity and depth of the human experience (McLeod, 2001; Willig, 2001). Qualitative approaches also echo the underpinnings within the field of counselling psychology (Morrow, 2007), such as working with meaning, subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, beliefs, values and context. This current enquiry is, therefore, a qualitative study and constructivist grounded theory (GT) is the method of choice.

4.1 Design

4.1.1 Rationale for selecting a qualitative approach

The population of lone father-headed families is under-represented across many platforms and it is predicted to continue to grow in the UK (Featherstone, 2001). Qualitative research can aim to 'give voice' to those whose accounts tend to be marginalised or discounted (Willis, 2013; Anfara & Mertz, 2006). It can also be designed to capture the subjective 'feel' of a particular experience among a group of people (Willig, 2013), as opposed to quantitative research that aims to quantify the phenomenon of interest (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). For instance, Williams (2015) argues that although there is evidence in the literature of the influence of structural level factors on lone fathers, existing findings from quantitative studies tend to account for them in individualistic terms and a critical take on gender differences is often lacking. This might lead to an assumption of blame and responsibility, particularly where links have been made between lone father families and poor child outcome. In contrast, a qualitative approach to research has the potential to bring the focus to other possible sources of distress such as gender-based stigma and its implications with regards to lone fathers' access to support.

Given that there is very little research and theory surrounding lone fatherhood in the context of post-divorce and separation parenting, a qualitative approach seems appropriate, especially when, as Creswell (2009) notes, little is understood of a phenomenon, and as Rizq

and Target (2008) highlight, when the field of interest is characterised by very little theory and research that is often attributed to the complexity of the phenomenon of interest. My task is to develop a kind of interpretive framework of meaning that explains how men raising children alone in the context of post-divorce and separation parenting understand the experience of becoming a lone father, what they might do to address any difficulties or challenges they may experience and how they understand the relationship with their children. A qualitative approach is ideal for looking at the 'how' and 'what' of the questions being researched (Morrow, 2007) and it is also effective in eliciting insights into the social psychological processes involved (Charmaz, 2006).

4.1.2 Philosophical position

It is essential to acknowledge that both ontology and epistemology are predominantly based on how the researcher conceives the world as this in turn comes with certain methodological consequences (Hay, 2002). I believe that knowledge is constructed by humans through proactive and purposive interaction with the world, as well as through experiences and reflection (McNamee, 2004; Gordon, 2009). In this respect, I support constructivism (i.e. a research paradigm that denies the existence of an objective reality). Charmaz (2006) also states that constructivism places more emphasis on the meaning- making of the individual mind in relation to experiences in the environment.

As a mother and a woman, I hold my own assumptions, identity and socio-cultural reality. However, I also support the idea that reality is reproduced by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of it. In this sense, reality is a social construction and the world is the product of human participation and negotiation; therefore, it is a changing world. According to Charmaz (2006), social constructivism is a theory according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is created through interaction with others. As I am interested in personal meaning-making, process and constructing categories and theory through my interaction with the data, I position myself as a social constructivist. This is consistent with the idea that meaning is not discovered but socially constructed between researcher and researched (Charmaz, 2006), and is more in harmony with counselling psychology values (BPS, 2005a). As social constructivist approach subscribes to symbolic interactionism (see section 3.1.3) and it also highlights the more subjective elements of meaning- making and identity development of participants into the current study.

4.1.3 Rationale for the choice of method

Both Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Discourse Analysis (DA) can be suitable in understanding participants' experiences from a social constructivist perspective. Nevertheless, the descriptive quality of IPA does not fully fit with the aims of this study that intends to go beyond description or interpretation. Similarly, DA can answer the question around how men as lone fathers and in the context of post-divorce and separation construct their social reality through an understanding of the way in which they use language to talk about the lone fatherhood phenomenon. But, its functional nature might also mean that a researcher would be able to investigate the talk about that experience but not necessarily the experience itself (Burr, 2002). These characteristics do not seem to fit well with the aims of this study that seeks to offer a construction of a framework which elicits new insights into learning how participants make sense of their experiences and which places more significance on meaning, action and processes. My aim is to engage with an exploratory study in order to reach a conceptual focus with the intention of developing a model of process rather than, such as in IPA, acquire rich details concerning the general experiences of participants; hence, making my study better suited to grounded theory (GT) than any other qualitative methods.

The intention of GT is to produce contextualised theories that are truly grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006). As there is no clear and established theory that explains how lone fathers after separation or divorce understand, adjust to and carry out their role, GT differs from other approaches to research in that it aims to explain the phenomenon being studied from the perspective and in the context of those who experience it. Additionally, the concept of process, i.e., viewed as an action, interaction, or emotion taken in response to situations or problems (Charmaz, 2006), is a unique feature of GT and represents an important element in the current study.

GT emerged over fifty years ago and it has now become a very popular method of analysis. However, GT has undergone several revisions since the original design of the method. It feels important to highlight that there are currently three main versions of GT: the classical Glaserian version (1978), Strauss and Corbin's (1997) more structured approach, and Charmaz's (1990, 2006) constructivist version. There have also been on-going arguments over the distinction between discovery and construction of meaning. Glaser and Strauss (1967) present a method which results in the discovery of emerging social facts. The role of the researcher in this discovery is either ignored or trivialised. This stance assumes that the researcher will discover something that is already there and thus, deals with analysis as an

objective process of truth-seeking, or views reality as existing independent of us or our perception of it. I strongly feel that the idea that theory is discovered or captured by the researcher somewhat downplays the creative role of the researcher in the research process. In contrast, constructivist GT posits that categories and theory do not emerge from the data, but are rather constructed by the researcher through an interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2006), a version that is also more aligned with symbolic interactionism.

Consequently, I feel theoretically more comfortable with the kind of knowledge constructivist GT is aiming to produce, its assumptions and the way it positions the researcher. It further allows me to live out my own beliefs through the process of co-construction of experience and meaning. In my roles as a mother, employee, wife and counselling psychology trainee, I definitely need structure but I also need enough creativity and flexibility to manage better in both private and public spheres. Thus, unlike Strauss and Corbin's more structured approach that could encourage analytic rigidity, constructivist GT feels more familiar as it is structured enough whilst it also allows for enough flexibility to let the research phenomenon speak for itself, freedom to access the unanticipated and the facilitation of open and creative coding without the imposition of a forced framework on the data (Charmaz, 2006; Willig, 2008). Given many different passionate viewpoints on what represents appropriate approaches to GT methodology (Glaser, 2002), making a decision to take a position of constructivist GT felt scary initially. However, I owned my decision to employ a constructivist GT approach through Birks & Mills (2011:52) advice that, "your methodological position dictates if you consider yourself an objective instrument of data collection from participants, or a subjective active participant in data generation with participants".

Additionally, other factors also contributed to my choice of method. For instance, processes of data collection and analysis are merged in an iterative and dynamic relationship (Willig, 2008), a strength that suits the exploratory nature of this project. This flexibility is important because dynamic interaction with participants can be central to identifying and explaining psychological and social processes (Charmaz, 2014). Codes and categories, as Charmaz (1995) maintains, are not implicitly part of the data but rather, they are constructed through interpretations of the data. Charmaz (2000) emphasises that researchers should set out to immerse themselves in the data through the use of coding language that is active in its purpose, and that 'helps to keep that life in the foreground' (p. 526).

Another unique feature of constructivist GT is the ability to explore an area where little is known (Birks & Mills, 2011). As lone fatherhood in the context of divorce and separation is

a social phenomenon that has not been adequately investigated and as it is a psychological transition rather than a 'point-in-time' occurrence, using constructivist GT to explore participants' experiences represents a solid fit (Willig, 2008). That is, participants' meanings of the lone fatherhood phenomenon are not only shaped through social interactions but are contextual and change over time. The purpose is to generate new knowledge in the form of theory, which is directly grounded in the data, even though the intent is not to construct theory generalizable across all contexts. Thus, subjectivity is welcomed and multiple realities are accepted in the construction of knowledge during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Finally, it is important to be aware of my own pre-conceptions and assumptions. A constructivist GT approach deals with this challenge since it emphasises reflexivity, a more silent concept in the other versions of GT. Glaser (2001) actually rejects reflexivity as an appropriate strategy to add in a GT research design, asserting that it will lead to 'reflexivity paralysis' with regards to analysis. My aim is to gather and interpret data without imposing my own views and, thus, a reflexive approach is essential. It not only allows me to question my personal motivations, but it also enables me to remain transparent throughout the whole research process. Reflexivity is essential in this type of study as it allows me to work towards diffusing potential power imbalances in my relationship with the participants and it increases my awareness of a possible risk of either perpetuating gender stereotypes, or even of, completely eliminating them by adopting a more idealistic approach (e.g. defending my participants excessively).

4.1.4 'Full' versus 'abbreviated' version of GT

In the full version of GT, Charmaz (1990) explains, the researcher uses open initial coding, establishes tentative links between categories and then returns to the field to collect further data. In doing so, the researcher can use different methods of data collection. In contrast, she argues that the 'abbreviated' version still uses similar principles as the 'full' version but these can only be implemented within the texts that are being analysed. So, new participants are recruited as the categories emerge, not iterating in terms of collecting new data, but rather iterating in finding different incidents to support the emerging categories (Willig, 2001). Thankfully, constructivist GT contributes to the provision of rich data (i.e. line by line initial coding) and is such that no data is overlooked or missed (Charmaz, 2006); hence, compensating for the breadth that is lost due to a focus on the original data set (Willig, 2008).

Charmaz (1990) further posits that unlike the 'full' version of GT, the 'abbreviated' version operates from the 'inside out' (i.e. a subjectivist perspective with the focus on the world in its appearing for the participant), a perspective that fits constructivist GT. This perspective also corresponds to the nature of this study and to its research questions as it is concerned with uncovering verbalised and un-verbalised social psychological processes, as well as with looking at individual beliefs and assumptions that create certain emotions and behavioural choices. As my intention is to map individuals' categories of experience and create a model that explains patterns of behaviour, my choice of using the 'abbreviated' version can be justified. Finally, Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) advise researchers to use the 'abbreviated' version in the presence of time and resource constraints and, in small scale GT studies. Therefore, this study's small sample size combined with the practical and time limitations of this doctoral research project also contribute to the choice of choosing the 'abbreviated' version.

4.2 Participants and sampling procedure

4.2.1 Sample size and selection criteria

Sampling is an important component of a qualitative research design (Mason, 2002). Thus, I am aware that given anticipated barriers to recruiting lone fathers, e.g., small population and difficulties with engaging fathers (Walters, 2011), putting restrictions on definition is thought to be potentially limiting. Nonetheless, the current study's intention is to seek a sample size that is sufficient enough for participants to have a voice within the study and for an intensive analysis to be conducted. My hope is that understanding a small group might offer relevance in a wider context and might also allow participants within the sample to be given a defined identity rather than being subsumed into an anonymous part of a larger whole (Robinson, 2014).

4.2.1.1 Sample size

The sample group consists of six participants. The size of a sample used for a qualitative project is influenced by both theoretical and practical factors (Mason, 2002). Researchers conducting small-scale qualitative studies are normally given a guideline of 3 to 16 participants for a single study, with the lower end of that spectrum advised for undergraduate and post-graduate projects and the upper end for larger scale funded projects (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is also important to highlight that when using a constructivist grounded theory approach, monitoring and being responsive to the practical realities of research is fundamental (Mason, 2002), namely because collecting in depth data can lead to challenges that are never entirely predictable at the outset of a project. Therefore, 6 participants did not

necessarily represent my initial target size but rather, I aimed toward being flexible about sample size as the project progressed (please see recruitment section). I was further aware that certain categories of individuals might have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and, therefore, their presence in the sample needed to be ensured (Mason, 2002).

Finally, it might be argued that the small sample size fits the exploratory nature of this study as the intention is to identify categories of meaning and experience in order to achieve an explanatory model of best fit that captures the full depth of the data on which it is based. Recognising that this study has not reached a point of theoretical saturation, it aims at offering a theoretical rendering with an interpretive portrayal of lone fatherhood in the context of post- separation and divorce, not an exact picture of it. Thus, given this study's research questions and the topic's sensitive and personal nature, I argue that six participants can provide sufficient exploration of both similarities and differences within the sample, further helped by the iterative and dynamic nature of data collection and analysis. Hence, allowing for enough depth and richness in each category to be achieved.

4.2.1.2 Selection criteria

Men who are lone fathers and who have caring responsibilities for at least one child of 16 years of age or younger and with no other adult in the household were included, based on criteria derived by Barker (1994). Lone fathers who are widowers were excluded because evidence suggests that the dynamics of bereavement are different to those of post-divorce and separation lone fatherhood (e.g., Fox, 2002; Barker, 1994). Men who care for their children on a part-time basis were also excluded. Concepts of 'shared care' may create some ambiguity around responsibility for children versus practical, day to day care, which is not necessarily the same (Fox, 2002). Recognising that narrow criteria were selected for this sample, the current study aims to give men raising children alone in the context of post-separation or divorce a 'voice' and to achieve theoretical significance through the provision of a comprehensive account of both the inner and outer dimensions of their lone fatherhood experience. Other exclusion criteria are self-reported mental health disorders that affect cognition and/ or emotional stability because this can affect child caring responsibilities. Participants were required to live in the United Kingdom as well as to understand and speak fluent English.

It is important to highlight that one of the features of GT approaches is to achieve heterogeneity of the sample (Mason, 2002). Acknowledging that narrow criteria could

compromise heterogeneity, I suggest that that the process of theoretical sampling that is unique to GT approaches and that involves either (a) locating cases from new groups of participants or from new locations (Strauss, 1987), or (b) restructuring an already gathered sample into a new set of categories that have emerged from analysis (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross & Rusk, 2007), undoubtedly contributes towards developing heterogeneity into the sample, which is also reflected in the complexity, fluidity and diversity of the participants' experiences.

4.2.2 Recruitment strategy

Participants who met the criteria for this study were recruited through a variety of sources in order to broaden the sample and geographical spread. A recruitment leaflet (Appendix 1) was used to advertise the study through the following paths:

One Space Forum for lone fathers that is also accessible to the general public.
Schools, children centres, play groups and libraries.
Informal contacts such as work colleagues, friends and neighbours.
Organisations that highlight and support single parents in every aspect of parenthood such as Only Dads, Gingerbread, Dads' House, Single Parent Action Network, Family Matters, Working with Men.
On-line discussion forums, such as Dad Info (a website offering advice and support for dads)
Lone father pages on Facebook accessible to the public (e.g. Life of Dads)
SPS (Single Parent Support) page on Facebook.

The response from One Space Forum for lone fathers was positively surprising. Three potential participants came forward. Two out of the three agreed to participate and one withdrew for personal reasons. At this stage of the recruitment phase, I carried a feeling of optimism as I had anticipated that recruiting lone fathers might be a challenging task. I recognised that there may be a problem to locate men willing to be interviewed on a subject matter that is rather quite sensitive and personal, which was also reinforced by the idea in the literature that men are emotionally unavailable (e.g., Bartlett, 1999; Fox, 2002) and also concurs with research showing a higher tendency towards self-disclosure in females than males (e.g. Dindia & Allen, 1992). Not long after recruiting the two first participants, the One Space Forum closed.

No responses were generated through advertising this study at schools, family centres, local play groups and libraries (use of notice boards). It is not until much later in the research process that I started to wonder whether this lack of responses might have been because of a reported feeling amongst lone fathers that the services available to parents and children are not intended for males. For instance, existing studies suggest that this might be particularly

true of men's use of family centres, which are often thought by men to be father-unfriendly and often referred to as 'institutional' barriers that might avoid fathers perhaps without even realising (e.g. Adams, 1996; Fox, 2002).

Similarly, there was no success when contacting organisations that support single parents. I first secured permission from an individual who has access to channels of communication used within the organisation, as I hoped to be able to locate potential participants who might otherwise be difficult to reach. However, lone parent organisations were generally unwilling to help or perceived their lone parents to be 'research fatigued' and suggested considering vouchers as an incentive for participation. However, I declined, namely for ethical reasons. Yancey, Ortega & Kumanyika (2006) suggest that although the benefits of incentives are that they increase the likelihood of participation by adding additional motivation, the disadvantage is that they provide a motivation for fabricating information in the interview in order to access the incentive. A further ethical issue pertaining to incentives is that they may motivate participation in an interview on a topic that may elicit distress. With this in mind (albeit aware that this may not be a strong enough incentive to all participants), I opted for alternatives to financial incentives such as offering a report of the study's findings, making the potential benefits of the research clear and ensuring participants knew that they can opt out the research process at any point in time (see sections 4.2.3 and 4.5).

I tried hard not to be discouraged and carried on searching for participants on on-line sources as they appeared to be the most successful method of recruitment. Two more participants were recruited through the SPS page on Facebook. Privately messaging potential participants via Facebook generated some responses. Although two African- British men who adhered to the inclusion criteria were willing to share their story, they were not prepared to be interviewed or audio-recorded (potentially too time-consuming and a general wariness that I might be in some sense 'checking up' on them, reflecting a general mistrust of anything official such as a recorded interview). Thus, one could argue that the problem of mistrust and weariness consists of several obstacles: those set by the men themselves, those set by dominant cultural characteristics of masculinity and socialised gender roles and expectations, or an alternative perspective could be institutional or service-set barriers that might ignore or avoid fathers without even knowing.

As the recruitment of participants was an on-going process throughout the data collection and analysis phase, I was asking participants who agreed to take part whether or not they knew any other lone father who met the criteria for this study. I had hoped that this approach

would 'snowball', which might have been useful especially when the population being studied might hesitate to respond to advertisements due to the sensitive and potentially stereotypical/stigmatising nature of the topic (Heckathorn, 2002) . However, all participants said that they did not know of any other men in their situation. As discussed earlier, this might reflect the feeling of isolation that is often reported amongst lone fathers. Two more participants were recruited through my own informal networks, which helped with issues of trust and accountability. No other participants volunteered for the study. Thus, no participants were turned away. Due to time constraints of the study, recruitment ceased after the sixth participant had agreed to take part.

On hindsight, it is important to highlight that the narrow criteria selected for my sample rendered recruitment more difficult as other men who were also lone fathers but widowed as opposed to divorced or separated came forward and showed willingness to participate in and engage with the research process. However, I had to turn them down as they did not meet my selection criteria. Upon reflection, I am also aware that, although on-line recruitment enabled a wider outreach, the sample runs the risk of being skewed as individuals were required to respond to a flier and then contact me to participate. Thereby, those who came forward might have been proactive and confident enough to make contact and subsequently volunteer in the study. It is therefore possible that they might not have been as psychologically vulnerable as those who perhaps did not make contact. Nonetheless, as voluntary participation is central to ethical good practice and also taking into account issues faced by lone fathers, such as isolation and gender stereotypes (as discussed in chapter 3), all I could do is be aware of the possibility for bias and consider its possible impact on findings and generalizability (discussed in section 6.5).

4.2.3 Initial materials and participant demographics

Participants who agreed to take part in this study were emailed an information sheet (Appendix 2) and a consent form (Appendix 3). I organised times and dates to carry out the individual interviews. I needed to take into account fathers being able to commit to a potentially time-consuming study. Interviews conducted at the participant's home presented an option (if no other suitable location in which to conduct an interview could be found). However, the information sheet included the following statement:

 'In the event that the interview will be conducted at the participant's home I will need to provide my supervisor with your name, the day, time and location of the interview.'

As Skype interviews are thought to provide geographical convenience and a neutral location for participants (e.g. Hanna, 2012), they were an option as well.

Each participant was asked to complete a brief demographic survey (Appendix 4). The use of demographic data is intending to help the researcher to locate the sample, to answer the research questions more succinctly and to provide more detail about the experience of the participants. Table 1 illustrates participant demographic information.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

	Age	Employment Status	Ethnic Background	Number of years being a lone father	Number of children	Gender of children	Age of children
P1	48	Full-time employed	White British	7	2	Child: M Child: M	Child: 10 Child: 16
P2	47	Part-time employed	White British	9	2	Child: F Child: M	Child: 9 Child: 11
P3	38	Full-time employed	White British	2	1	Child: M	Child: 8
P4	46	Self-employed	White British	3	2 (twins)	Child: F Child: M	Child: 16 Child: 16
P5	45	Self-employed Part-time	White British	16	1	Child: F	Child: 16
P6	45	Full-time employed	White British	3	2	Child: F Child: F	Child: 8 Child: 11

I acknowledge that the sample appears very homogenous on the basis of this information. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the heterogeneous character in the current study is strongly reflected in the complexity, fluidity and diversity of the participants' experiences. Participants also came from a wide geographical area, including Wales, Southern Coast of England, Central and North East England.

4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the source of data collection. An initial interview schedule (Appendix 5) was used to encourage conversation around the research topic whilst also maintaining focus without restricting conversation (Braun & Clark, 2006). The interview schedule included probes to enable participants to expand on their accounts. With the research questions in mind, the interview schedule roughly consisted of enquiries around circumstances that led to lone parenthood, the transition to lone fatherhood, the

processes involved including emotional experiences, possible challenges or difficulties faced, coping resources and relationship with children.

The first three interviews (P1, P2 and P3) were transcribed and coded before the start of the latter half of the interview process. The aim was to begin developing concepts and patterns in order to amend the interview schedule for the latter half of the interviews (P4, P5 and P6). Thus, the interview schedule became more focused on the intention of checking, deepening and refining the data collection and analysis (Appendix 6).

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Towards the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions and add anything else they thought was relevant. Participants were all provided with a debrief information sheet at the end of each interview (Appendix 7). They were informed that feedback on the final project can be offered, which they said helped them feel more included in the study.

4.4 Data Analysis

In the analysis of data, the abbreviated version of constructivist GT was employed as discussed by Charmaz (2006) and Willig (2001), and a specific procedure was followed that consisted of initial coding, focused coding and memo writing.

4.4.1 Initial Coding

Initial coding means 'categorising segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data' (Charmaz, 2006:43). The line by line coding was done by ascribing words in the form of either gerunds or *in vivo* codes that reflected actions and processes (Charmaz, 2006). Although challenging at times, this coding strategy restrained my natural impulse to make conceptual leaps and tendency to want to formulate. Recognising this, I would ask myself questions such as 'what does the participant suggest', 'what does the data pronounce and from whose point of view'. It is also noteworthy to say that the initial coding phase generated a vast number of codes, which evoked overwhelming feelings. Some of the initial codes that emerged included, 'prioritising children's needs', 'feeling injustice' and 'pocketing own emotions'. To deal with the overcrowding of codes, the researcher frequently revised and changed codes in a way that maintained fitness with the data. An example of the initial coding is demonstrated in Appendix 8.

4.4.2 Focused Coding

According to Charmaz (2006), the purpose of focused coding is to synthesise larger segments of data. She states that 'focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data' (p. 57). For example, 'feeling excluded by virtue of gender' and 'feeling isolated from potential support and advice' were selected in this study as significant codes to capture, synthesize, and understand the meaning in the participants' accounts. Categories then began emerging from the focused coding. Using constant comparative analysis throughout the coding process enabled me to cross-reference between the coding process and the raw data, compare new initial codes with the previous and adjust the focused codes accordingly. It also facilitated the moving back and forth- using a personal colour system- between the focused codes to ascertain whether they belonged to one category or required separating into others (Williams, 2015). I also needed to refocus on differences within a category in order to be able to identify possible emerging sub-categories. An example of the development of the focused coding is shown in Appendices 9- 12.

4.4.3 Memo Writing

Memos enabled me to engage with a process of free writing (Charmaz, 2006) and express my thoughts outside the parameters of initial and focused coding. They further facilitated the identification of gaps in the existing data. For example, P1 & P3 spoke about seeking psychological support from their respective GPs at the initial stages of their transition to lone fatherhood. They both expressed feeling let down by their help-seeking experience. Consequently, memo writing was proved to be a significant tool in identifying a gap in the existing data and in alerting me to ask more focused questions about help-seeking to later participants. In line with this example, theoretical sampling was useful in developing, deepening and refining categories. A memo example is illustrated in Appendix 13.

4.4.4 What is theoretical sampling?

Theoretical sampling means 'seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory' (Charmaz, 2006: 96). It is central to GT design and it is informed by coding, comparison and memo-writing. The process of analysis was very multi-faceted as it raised questions, it suggested relationships and it highlighted gaps in the existing data set. Charmaz (2006) explains that more focused questions may be a rigorous strategy to deepen and refine categories. Participants 3, for instance, raised the issue that support services treat men as single fathers differently to the way they treat women as single mothers. The matter of gendered treatment by support services was brought up in the interviews with later

participants, which enabled them to express their thoughts and feelings about this. In turn, this led to further development of the preliminary analytical category of 'systemic injustice', which was identified earlier in the analysis.

4.4.5. From category saturation to category depth

As Charmaz (2006) reports, 'saturation' occurs when interviews cease to bring anything new to the categories identified by the researcher. In a GT study, theoretical saturation is usually sought but as this is not a principle I chose to endorse, I focused instead on achieving enough depth in each category to form an explanatory model of 'best fit'. A core category was selected at the centre of the lone fatherhood phenomenon and with which all other categories have some relationship with.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Full Research Ethical Approval by the London Metropolitan University was obtained (Appendix 14). The issues of data protection, anonymity and confidentiality were outlined both in the information and consent forms. Because the interview data touched on sensitive or even painful topics such as the mother leaving without the children, it was important to be aware of my responsibility to potentially vulnerable participants; thus, adhering to the importance of humanistic values that are demonstrated in the Professional Practice Guidelines for Counselling Psychology (BPS, 2005) was a pre-requisite. Further, the British Psychological Society (BPS) outlines the need to protect the anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of research participants. Participants were informed that confidentiality may be breached if I had serious concerns about their own safety, the safety of others and the health and welfare of children or vulnerable adults (see consent form). An important issue around confidentiality and consent is related to the children in the household. It was therefore important to think about what I would do if I found out that a child was being abused or neglected. Although the BPS states that psychologists are not expected to personally investigate potential risks to children, they are expected to ensure that such information is passed onto relevant authorities. Hence, I deemed it necessary to include a statement in the consent agreement that confidentiality will be breached if I had concerns for the safety and welfare of their children.

The emotional stability of participants was ascertained in the information sheet. The possibility that a participant might become distressed during the course of the interview was an issue that needed consideration in advance. In this case, I anticipated closely following the London Metropolitan University distress protocol that outlines the steps to take to deal

with the varying levels of distress that the participants may experience (Appendix 15). A contact sheet outlining sources for additional support was made available (Appendix 16). However, none of the participants in this study reported feeling distressed by the interview process.

4.6 Ensuring Quality

Yardley's (2000) guidelines about what constitutes good qualitative research were referred to throughout the research process. Yardley's evaluative criteria include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour (e.g. methodological competence, thorough data collection and breadth of analysis), transparency and coherence (e.g. fit between theory and method, reflexivity), as well as impact and importance.

Guided by Yardley's above criteria, I worked towards ensuring quality from the very start of the research process. For example, I engaged with extensive reading including attending workshops to develop my knowledge, skills and understanding of GT research. I also spent time acknowledging my personal philosophy, establishing methodological congruence and maintaining honesty about the limitations of my research. The use of a reflexive diary (see Appendix 17) enabled me to maintain awareness and manage my own presence in the research process. It also provided me with the opportunity to examine how my own understandings and experiences of the world might affect the research process. Additionally, I tried to provide sufficient information about myself as the researcher (e.g. acknowledging own biases, assumptions, values and beliefs), the research context itself, processes involved, participants and the researcher-participant relationship. Here, I intended to offer the reader an opportunity to decide how the findings may be transferred. Further, I was very careful not to imply that the findings can be generalised to other populations or settings.

In line with the social constructivist perspective, I ensured additional quality of the data through the use of consistent supervision and peer review to "capture and respect multiple perspectives" (Patton, 2002:546) that I sought to explore and incorporate; thus, checking that the analysis was effectively grounded in the data. As I played a fundamental role in the creation of codes, I was mindful of the possibility of missing relevant information in favour of my own biases. Therefore, this is where supervision and peer researchers were also useful in bringing things into awareness and offering another view. As my aim, however, was to construct an amalgamation of the participants' experiences, individual participant checks were not deemed necessary.

In this current study, trustworthiness was assured by following Chiovitti's and Piran's (2003) criteria in grounded theory research. These criteria involve ensuring credibility, auditability and fittingness. I remained close to these criteria by clarifying why and how participants were selected as well as by allowing participants to guide the process of inquiry through, for instance, the use of open-ended questions, using participants own words and checking theoretical constructions created against participants own words. For this, I committed myself to regularly cross-reference between the coding process and the raw data and, as mentioned above, I continuously made use of my reflexive diary. Moreover, the process through which the findings are derived was made explicit by taking note of influences on data collection and analysis, emerging categories and memos. Finally, I ensured that fittingness was achieved through being clear about the level of theory generated and through discussing how existing literature relates to each category or sub-category.

4.7 More reflexivity

As a trainee counselling psychologist, I have been taught not to assume only one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing and knowing. Indeed, this lesson had an important impact on my role as a researcher. Additionally, the use of a reflexive diary enabled me to describe my own thoughts and develop an awareness of my own position in the research process, which allowed me to remain as open-minded and unbiased as possible. As very little was known about my research area, it somewhat helped me towards starting the process from a blank canvas system whereby I could explore and develop. As important, I tried to avoid being influenced by existing literature in order to maintain authenticity and originality. Nonetheless, what I did keep firmly in mind is something Grief (1995) mentioned around the risk of maintaining the 'expectation of a straw man' by approaching participants with the assumption that they will be struggling. I was also aware of the importance of being careful of how I approached the interview process. I had to take into account what the word 'interview' might evoke in some participants (Willig, 2001). I, therefore, found myself using the words 'discussion' and 'conversation' as a way to reduce any possible anxieties and aimed to remain open to any questions they may have around the interview process and concerns about confidentiality. For instance, the interview schedule was forwarded to P6 as he disclosed that the interview process created some anxiety in him.

Further, I often reflected on how being a woman and a mother raising my daughter in a two-parent household may influence the participants' reactions and perhaps what they believe they should say. Consequently, personal reflexivity encouraged me to think about the interviewer and interviewee relationship. Mathieson (1999) suggests a 'narrator-listener' role

may be more helpful in strengthening rapport as opposed to an 'interviewer-participant' role that may increase barriers and hinder participant reactions to the interview process. I tried to nurture the relationship through being informal in the way I greeted the participants and placed emphasis on the fact that the participants were the experts whereas my role was to listen to and understand their experiences. Prior to the interview process, I had developed a research relationship with the participants through email exchanges with regards to arranging a suitable time to conduct the interview. Throughout these informal exchanges, I maintained honesty and transparency about being a married female with a daughter and about my intentions of studying lone fathers after divorce or separation. The participants seemed to like my openness and generally felt appreciative that they were being given a voice. Indeed, some of the participants shared feeling happy to give the benefit of their experience to anyone who is interested in this subject and also disclosed that more research is needed. In parallel with this, factors such as my training in Counselling Psychology, work as a CBT therapist, familiarising myself with the research process and with the creative elements of constructivist GT, all helped toward minimising my impact as a female interviewer on how the participants presented their accounts, but also on how I reacted to and interacted with them. These factors also helped me maintain awareness of the possibility that my own analysis might perpetuate gender stereotypes, especially in a study exploring men as lone fathers.

Given my context as a female, I was initially concerned about the pragmatic issue of gender. I worried that participants might hold back from discussing experiences of differences; thus, running the risk of social desirability bias. Thankfully, participants appeared to want to share their stories precisely because they are seldom asked about their opinions and their experience. In fact, they did not require much prompting and articulated their experiences with a lot of transparency as well as comfortably shared sensitive and emotive elements with me. Despite my initial worries, I did not feel that my gender was a significant issue and disclosing that I was a mental health professional contributed towards building a research relationship in which participants believed me to be trustworthy and accountable. For example, participants readily expressed feelings of anger, injustice, disappointment, loneliness and isolation, all of which were linked to their context as a man and a (lone) father. Their accounts, therefore, suggest that they wanted to be heard, understood, included and supported in ways helpful to them and their context. Moreover, their strong desire to defend all lone fathers and to challenge stereotypical attitudes and assumptions around gender roles and expectations further contributed to their ability to be open and transparent about their lone fatherhood experience. To them, it was not about disrespecting and de-

valuing the roles of women or mothers. Rather, it was about highlighting the need to move with the reality of changing family forms and granting recognition to the caring role of fathers that is independent of mothers and independent of the provider or breadwinning role. From my perspective, as a woman and a mother, I did not experience any negative feelings towards them. Instead, I experienced feeling richer in both knowledge and mind set. I saw this endeavour as an opportunity whilst also feeling a strong sense of responsibility to do their accounts justice (see more reflexivity in Chapter 6).

Chapter 5

Results

This chapter presents a constructivist grounded theory developed from the analysis of interviews. The aim of this research study was to explore how men raising children alone after divorce or separation and in a UK context understand their experience of becoming lone fathers. The intention was to generate new knowledge of this process in the form of theory, which is directly grounded in the data. The presentation of the findings are organised around the key categories (and sub-categories) identified.

5.1 Explanatory model

The core category constructed at the centre of the lone fatherhood phenomenon after separation or divorce is 'self-realising and transforming', namely in the context of both psychological growth and transformation of self. It is through the relationship with their children that the process of self-realising and transforming was constructed. The path towards becoming a lone parent varied amongst the participants. They described how this path involved 'making sense of the situational context' and 'experiencing push factors and constraint', which explain why and how they became lone fathers. Regardless of the style that the lone fatherhood situation occurred, they all experienced the process of adjusting to a new life course in their context as a lone father. The process identified here was that of 'transitioning into a new family set up' that combined a set of three actions: 'facing the weight of role and responsibilities'; 'sensing stirring of own emotions' and 'making sense of children's emotions', all of which explain the practical and emotional implications of becoming a lone father. Gender stereotypes also had implications on participants' experiences and these were understood in the context of 'being in the minority as a man and a father' that inadvertently left them 'feeling isolated and excluded', 'feeling injustice' and, with a strong sense of 'wishing not to be pigeonholed'. 'Being in the minority as a man and a father' meant that the participants were left 'dealing with the complexity of gender roles and stereotyping' in two manners; 'processing own gender role attitudes and behaviours' and 'being subject to ambivalent stereotypical attitudes', all of which appeared to influence the way lone fathers understood and organised their experience.

Participants adopted different ways to manage their new life course. They all appeared to 'drive their experience forward' by 'enduring and committing' and 'integrating self and life

management abilities'. In order to successfully drive their experience forward, participants had to manage their own emotions. Participants provided accounts of 'managing own emotions' in two ways: 'being steered by internalised gender norms and alternate forms of support' and 'experiencing and understanding help-seeking'.

Participants emphasised an understanding of lone fatherhood as operating outside of social and culture bound norms. Nonetheless, 'seeing self as the expert' helped them drive their experience forward. Consequently, some participants protected this expertise through 'defending lone fathers'. Others used this expertise to express much needed changes in two manners: 'pushing for better awareness and inclusion' and, 'pushing for the right type of support at the right time'.

The relationship participants had with their children appeared to envelope their entire lived experience. In understanding relationship with children, the notion of 'protecting in different contexts' was salient. Their own parental style appeared to be influenced by their own up-bringing, which left participants 'wanting more, and better for children'. Finally, becoming a (lone) father led them to 're-define their sense of self and identity'.
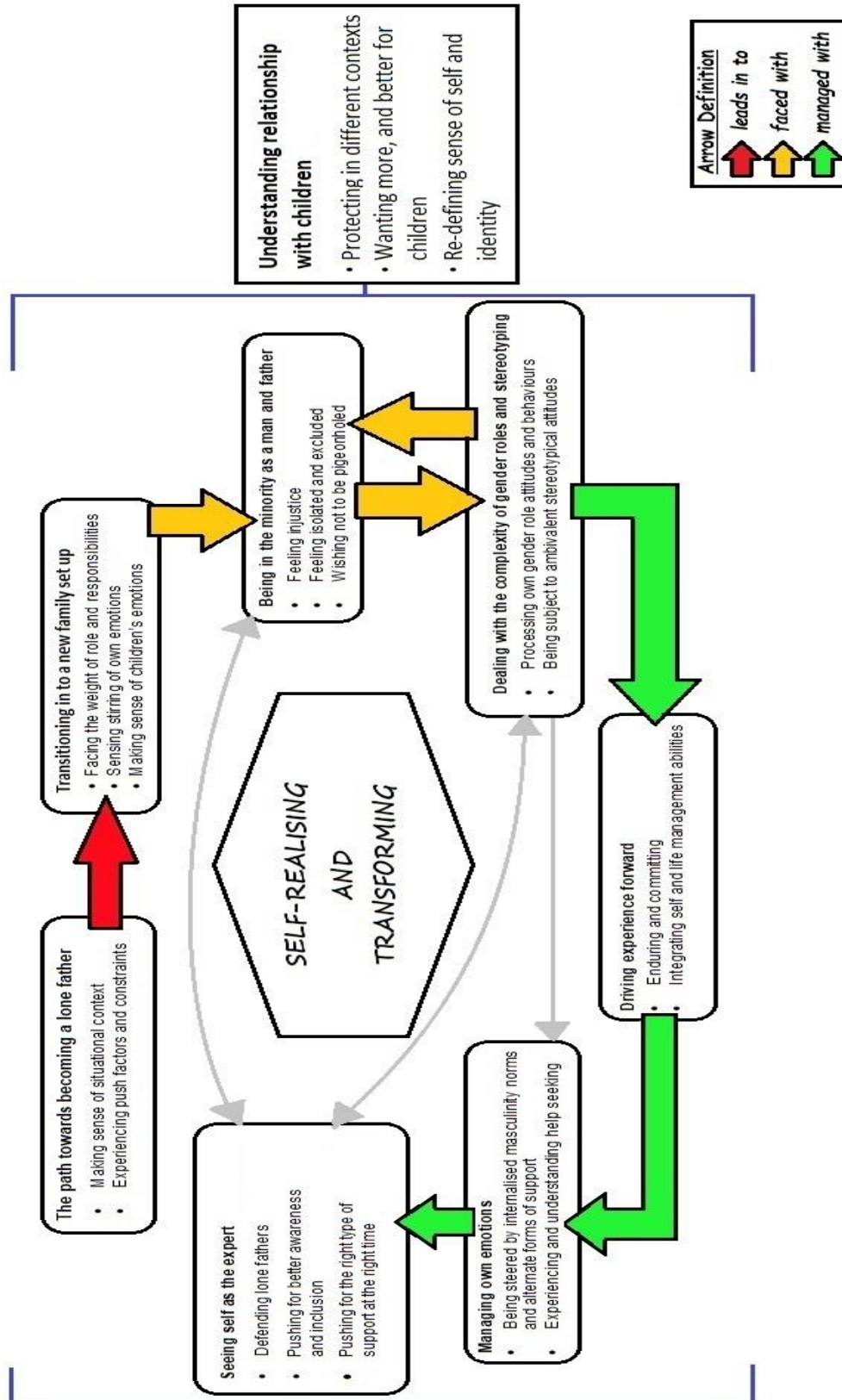
The explanatory model is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Processes of lone fatherhood after divorce or separation

5.2 The path towards becoming a lone father

The path towards becoming a lone father varied amongst the participants and followed one of three patterns. The first pattern was the woman moved out of the house leaving the children with the father (P3 & P6). In the second pattern, it was the man who moved out alone without the children; he was initially a non-resident father, but later became the children's primary carer (P1 & P4). The third pattern was the man leaving the family unit with the child or children and leaving the woman behind (P2 & P5).[4] The first category 'the path towards becoming a lone father' involved participants making sense of their situational context that preceded lone fatherhood and explaining how and why they became lone fathers.

5.2.1 Making sense of the situational context that preceded lone fatherhood

Participants provided accounts of how they made sense of their pre-transition experience. In the first pattern, where the woman moved out of the house leaving the children with the father, P3 recounted how she had been absent even before leaving the family unit. He described how the mother emphasised self and own needs and desires over those of the child. For example, he said; *'She hangs with friends with no responsibilities, with no children, and she should realise that her son should come first'.* P6 recalled incessant arguments in the marital relationship.

The men who were non-resident fathers before transition to lone fatherhood viewed their living arrangement as a normal consequence of parental relationship breakdowns and one that fits with social and cultural expectations. Both P1 and P4 maintained regular contact with their children. Although P4 described his situational context as *'not terrible to be a man who sees his kids on weekends'* and attributed this to getting *'the best of both worlds'*, P1 described it as a *'strain in a new relationship'* and a *'strain financially'*, namely in relation to having to pay child maintenance to his ex-partner. These differing accounts suggest that the manner non-resident fathers perceive their situational context post-divorce or separation might be subject to individual variation.

The third pattern appeared to be the most ambiguous. As mentioned earlier, it involved the man leaving the family unit with the child or children, and leaving the woman behind (P2 &

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[4] Pattern 1: the woman moved out of the house leaving the children with the father.
  Pattern 2: the man moved out alone, without the children; he was initially a non-resident father, but later became the children's primary carer.
  Pattern 3: the man left the family unit with the child or children, leaving the woman behind.

P5). Both participants made sense of their situational context that preceded lone fatherhood in very similar ways. They both disclosed being abused by their partner (often fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse) and they recalled feeling overwhelmed with all they had to face.

For instance, P2 said:

'But basically I did everything anyways and I had to deal with [ex-partner] and her drugs, her violence and her unpredictability. She always used to attack me when she lost her temper. She'd do that once every couple of weeks'.

Similarly, P5 reported:

'I was being put under a lot of pressure to be, errm, to be around more, to be there more, errm, and I found it really stressful coping with [the ex-partner] and the, you know, the pressures of work' and viewed his situation as his *'sense of normality'.*

In fact, P5 elaborated:

'I kind of had to accept her being violent to me. It became, you know, my sense of normality was, was kind of whopped because I was, I was kind of impervious to the, to the threats and to the violence. It just became part of my normal day-to-day life'.

Here, both accounts suggest that these men were moving through the day on automatic, sticking to a plan, perhaps to manage the emotional weight of their difficult situation. There is also a feeling that they perhaps did not feel entitled to leave.

5.2.2 Experiencing push factors and constraint

The path towards becoming a lone father was also characterised by the participants experiencing push factors and constraints that not only impacted on the style the lone fatherhood situation occurred but also on the degree of mutuality in the processes involved.

In pattern 1, the mother leaving meant that the men had no time to reflect on the implications of what this means for them and their children, both practically and emotionally. For instance, P3 described how there was nothing else that he could do other than *'get by in any way',* suggesting a perceived constraint, namely in that his wife's course of action left him feeling that he had no choice to negotiate the transition to primary carer. P6 perceived constraint was reflected in his silence, indicating a struggle or inability to exert a choice on the style his lone fatherhood situation occurred and, the degree of mutuality involved in the transition to primary carer. It is clear from this pattern that the men did not actively seek to become lone parents. This pattern corresponds in nature with the notion that mothers

relinquish their caregiving role. Even though both fathers explained fostering a relationship between the non-resident mother and the child, the mother just *'didn't want to be a mum'* (P3), suggesting a different understanding of maternal caregiving and attachment.

In pattern 2, push factors seemed to strongly influence the path towards becoming a lone father. In one case (P4), intervention was organised by the father and in the other case (P1), it was organised by the mother, by virtue of reported mental health difficulties that the women experienced.

Although P4 did not expect to become the primary caregiver of his children, protecting them underpinned his decision to actively seek full-time custody of his children.

P4 described:

'I went over and [the children] had a very terrible time. They really hated it and, errm, [they] didn't enjoy it at all, and my ex-wife I believe had some mental health issues, which got worse whilst she was in France and it was very traumatising for the kids… and so, already I think I decided. Inevitably, the next place was to get legal advice and the legal advice was I had to start some legal proceedings for this. If I didn't, [the mother] could and may end up fighting this in France so I escalated it pre-emptively because I couldn't, I had to secure the future of the kids in the UK, and that's what I did'.

In contrast, P1 recalled how he patiently waited for the opportunity to become the primary caregiver of his children and described it as:

'I was just waiting, I was playing a waiting game and I was waiting for my opportunity for the kids to come and live with me'.

Feeling the more able parent and financial relief from having to pay child maintenance during the time of separation, both influenced how he negotiated the transition process.

P1 explained:

'Mum wasn't coping with [the children], she became ill' and *'I thought they had the best lives here, I could do more for them here and I didn't have to pay maintenance, I could support them physically, I could support them mentally and I could offer them discipline, which she couldn't'.*

It is discernible from this pattern that mothers might sometimes feel unable to protect and to nurture their children. Here, both men committed to protect what they perceived the needs of the children to be.

In pattern 3, the prevailing push factor seemed to be an inherent fear of the mother's violent behaviour turning towards the child or children. Only when the mother's violence was threatened toward the child or children, the participants seemed to feel entitled to escape.

P5 recalled:

'But the moment, the violence was threatened towards what was you know a young baby you know, [the mother] began with insinuations when I was at work, [that] she would do things to [the daughter] and she would threaten her. I knew I had to take action'.

Similarly, P2 described:

'One time, [the mother] threatened, tried to, well she threatened to kill our daughter and so [the mother] ran out of the house with my daughter and I phoned the police. The police came and arrested her and then that was it'.

Both accounts indicate that P2 and P5 instantly gained a sense of control of context in relation to their ex-partner's violent outbursts, implying prioritising the well-being of their child or children over their own safety, reflected in the following description:

'You got a baby and you put yourself second. It was protection, it was protection, errm, protecting my baby, errm, it wasn't about protecting me" (P5).

Their accounts further suggest that a perceived lack of resources (e.g. having nowhere else to go) might also explain why these men felt unable to leave the abusive relationship.

For example, P5 described:

'I didn't have anywhere else to go, errm, and once my mother had bought the house for us, I planned, I planned an escape and I just took my daughter, errm, one morning I said I was going for a walk and that was it. I never went back'.

Whereas P5 moved in a house purchased with the help of his mother, P2 lacked suitable accommodation for himself and his children. For P2, housing appeared to be of key importance as following his call to the police, social services got involved. The instability of the situational context had consequences for his capacity to protect the children. Here, push factors also included a strong fear of losing the children and a sense of urgency to protect them from their mother.

P2 noted:

'So, [to keep the children], I went to live with my sister and then with my sister's help, I was put in a house for a little bit. She (the ex-partner) wasn't supposed to know where we live but she found out where we lived. So I then moved again and then I moved again and that's where we are now'.

Noteworthy, all of the above accounts appear to reflect the complexity and diversity of the participants' experiences even before the transition to lone fatherhood.

5.3 Transitioning into a new family set-up

Regardless of how the men in this study became lone fathers, they all transitioned into a new family set up in which the weight of role and responsibilities, sensing stirrings of own emotions and making sense of children's emotions influenced their experience.

5.3.1 Facing the weight of role and responsibilities

In the context of becoming a lone father, a number of participants reported feeling the weight of role and responsibilities to provide and to care for their child or children. Herein, the participants discussed various challenges they faced in terms of change, finances, parenting, and work-home balance.

For instance, P1 said:

'Everything changed. I had to find new schools. I had four days to find [the children] schools. I had to find child care for them… sort their school uniforms. It was a massive change (errm) over the next year and a half. I had to give up all my own businesses. I couldn't, I couldn't'.

In response to these challenges, most fathers chose to adjust their hours of working by going part-time, by becoming self-employed or by leaving work all together. Consequently, this work-related adjustment presented some lone fathers with financial constraints.

For instance, P5 explained:

'You know you had to leave work at a drop of a hat, you know to collect… I feel the challenging time was, was financially coming up with schemes and plans just to try and make a few extra quid, you know to get by, to be able to cause it's, it was really errm, you know, a struggle'.

Finding a work-life balance was not restricted to employment though. Participants described feeling the weight of role and responsibilities to care for more than one person and to juggle multiple tasks and roles, which is reflected in the following accounts:

P4 reported:

'Oh life is much harder when you are the full-time carer. Well, I am much more exhausted because I have just many more things to do. I am not just taking care of one person'.

Similarly, P1 said:

'There were far too many things, you know, being mother, father, guide you know, support worker' and *'there is very little left by the end of the day'.*

5.3.2 Sensing stirring of own emotions

The transition process also involved the participants reflecting on their own emotive experiences. Herein, emotions are at play in different ways; some emphasised mostly negative emotions (P3 and P6), others mostly positive emotions (P2, P4 and P5), and the others described how they experienced negative emotions later in the transition (P1).

In terms of their own emotions, the mother leaving without children had a significant impact on P3 and P6. P3 made sense of his own emotions in his context as a lone father as *'feelings, upset feelings'* that appeared to be stronger in the mornings.

P3 described:

'It took me time to get up, I had to set my alarm clock an hour or so before, so I'd lie in bed. I just didn't want to get out of bed'.

These upset feelings proceeded thoughts around dashed family ideals and expectations. P3 said; *'My son deserves a mum and she doesn't want to be a mum. And I deserve the wife I wanted'*, indicating that his feelings might be understood in terms of continued attachment to the 'ideal' image of the traditional nuclear family and highlighted by not taking his lone parent status *'well'.*

P6 referred to feelings of anger, depression, loneliness and *'lots of worrying'.* These emotions appeared to be grounded in the reduced possibility of meeting a potential partner and in assumptions that women will think he is a *'lost cause'* in his context as a lone father.

P6 described feeling trapped and experiencing the initial stages of the transition (when the children were young) as a struggle; *'It's just not being able to get away from it, especially at the start'*. However, later in the transition when the children were older, he felt *'more in control'*.

In terms of their own emotions, P2 and P5 felt a strong sense of relief after they had left the family home with their children. The feeling of relief appeared to supersede any other difficult emotional experiences that they possibly might have experienced had their trajectory been similar to the other fathers, as this example indicates:

P5 remembers the negative emotions that were left behind:

'So, you know, maybe I look back to you know with coloured glasses. But errm once things really settled down with my, with my ex and she was out of the picture for a couple of years, things were things were quite, quite calm and you keep things on track because there were no spanners getting thrown in the work.'

P4 became the primary carer when his twins were adolescents. Although experiencing both challenging and positive feelings, feelings of thankfulness and appreciation for the opportunity to amend past mistakes also supersede any other emotions such as *'feeling much more exhausted'* and experiencing a *'certain amount of stress.'*

He reflects:

'It was difficult but it was also great because I felt like I had not, you know, necessarily always been in terms of, errm,errm, prioritising family and errm, and I had made mistakes and so on. So, on another level, I felt this was a wonderful errm chance to be with my kids',

Last, there were fathers who experienced negative emotions later in the transition process. For instance, P1 who became the primary carer of his children when they were, 4 and 9 years of age, experienced *'a whole barrel full of emotions all coming out at various times'* in his new context of becoming a lone father and dealing with his young boys. Although he appeared in control of his emotions during the first year and a half of the transition as his main focus was to ensure his children were settled, he described how his emotional experience changed further down the line and reflects on the changing presence of emotions:

'I got the boys sorted out, I'd done the court case, I'd been through all the appeals and everything like that and I felt that I was at the ragged edge, you know, I was no longer 100% in control of my emotions and feelings at all times. Rage, rage, shouting'

5.3.3 Making sense of children's emotions

Attention is now drawn to the process of making sense of children's emotions. Children's emotions were often conceptualised as a reaction to circumstances and in the context of the mother's absence. This is illustrated by P1 when he talks about his youngest son:

'Child 2 especially was very, very fragile. He didn't cope with the situation very well at all… His mum had been his rock all of his life and all of a sudden she wasn't there, and I would imagine he felt… because he was so young he didn't really express… I would imagine he felt that she cast him aside. You know abandoned him', indicating feelings of confusion, abandonment and rejection.

Some participants made sense of their children's emotions in light of the age of the child at the time of transition. For instance, P1 described how his oldest son found the transition difficult but that *'he wasn't anywhere near as bad'* as the youngest child because he was *'a bit older'*.

P4 provided an account of his adolescent twins where he highlights that any negative emotions they experienced are grounded in *'normal day-to-day school stuff'* and not *'particularly to do with their mum'*.

Differently, P5 also described a lack of negative emotions after the transition, but this was because his daughter was a young baby at the time of transition and, as he assessed, *'didn't know any different'*, a view shared by P2 about his own children. However, for both P2 and P5, this picture was more complex. P5's daughter develops later in life *'problems with rejection'* that *'affects her mental health'* and P2 anticipated that his children might later in life *'develop some psychological problem because they never saw their mum'*.

5.4 Being in the minority as a man and a father

Participants experienced and understood being in the minority as a man and a father through feelings of, first injustice, and second, isolation and exclusion as well as a strong wish not to be pigeonholed, which were all experienced in the context of gendered rules and norms.

5.4.1 Feeling of injustice

The feeling of injustice was identified at the way in which fathers post-divorce or separation, *'are seen as secondary, second class parents'* (P1), as opposed to mothers who are seen as having a legacy of experience and expertise. Similar views were brought up by other participants. For instance, P5 stated:

'The rights of fathers and the rights of children, which go hand in hand are, you know, are often stamped upon… it's biology, the main thing is biology, that you know, caregivers, the main caregivers are, you know, are, are mothers and, and they have proven how to do that'.

Moreover, the feeling of injustice was evident in accounts by participants who addressed the need to bridge the parenting gender gap post-separation or divorce. For instance, P4 refers to cases *'where things go wrong'* and *'where mum is not capable of doing stuff'*, then *'dads should get a look in'*. For instance, P4 addresses the problems that arise from understanding (only) women as parents or capable of parenting and fathers as (only) providers, as illustrated in this example:

'So, yeah single dads, yeah, they are a rare breed because you know 9 times out of 10, mum's quite capable errm but you know, I think the expectations, the expectation that are on dads to be, to be the provider, you know, and, and to provide safety and to provide errm an income and, you know, to keep, to keep the family going that side of the expectation prevents them, prevents them from being, from taking on the full time care of, of children and the expectations of the women is that they will do the job'.

P1 described lone fathers *'almost like unsung heroes'* and appeared bemused about Britain being *'stuck in this old society'* and described a gendered approach to parenting post-separation as *'medieval'*, suggesting that a focus on mothering and an avoidance of father is still present today amongst government agencies and society as a whole.

This feeling of injustice was further identified in the differential treatment of mothers and fathers post- separation. This differential treatment was conceptualised in the context of fathers largely being viewed as providers of money and in the context of resources for financial assistance. For example, P3 described how his ex-wife *'gets everything'* and he gets *'nothing'*, which is *'not fair'* because should it have been himself who left the family home *'[the ex-wife] would still get everything'* and he would still have to *'pay for everything'*. This felt unfair to him, as in his situation, his wife left him but yet, *'she didn't have to pay a penny to [the son]'*. In this respect, P5 raised the issue of how fathers post-divorce or separation can be *'marginalised very easily'* and P2 addressed the negative stereotypical attitudes that might arise. For instance, he explained:

'Whereas the man isn't so much, he's expected to go and get a job and provide for the mum to be able to look after the child. So I think a lot of women don't like that, I think they probably resent that in some way, I don't know. That's what happens so men are let off'.

5.4.2 Feeling isolated and excluded

Being in the minority as a man and a father evoked feelings of isolation and exclusion in the participants. Participants attributed the feelings to a lack of understanding by both men and

women of what it means to be a man looking after children on a full-time basis. For instance, P2 said that he *'never met anybody'* (i.e. men, women, lone mothers and fathers) who genuinely understands *'what it is like to be a 24/7 parent'*. As a consequence, participants felt that they had to minimise the true nature of their experience in an attempt to present their situation and themselves in a positive light. Nevertheless, there was an apparent underlying need to talk to someone who genuinely understands what it is like for them and who validates their experience.

P4 reflects:

'I think I do get frustrated that no one, that everybody took my version so readily and maybe I would have liked if somebody had said, yeah but how are you really feeling underneath the jokes and everything'.

Thus far, these accounts suggest a lack of recognition in other men and from other mothers and feelings of isolation as they do not know other lone fathers. The latter quote also seems to refer to the need for a sparring partner, a critical eye – and actually seems to refer to the challenging of gender norms regarding hegemonic masculinity and interest in emotional well-being and experience.

The scarcity of having someone to 'talk to' left participants feeling isolated from potential support and advice. For example, P5 explained how he knows very few lone fathers who are looking after babies and very small children and how the ones that he has encountered are managing without support. P5 was able to identify with them since at the initial stages of the transition process, he recalled being on his own, which caused him to feel *'very, very isolated'* and *'a little out of his depth'*. This indicates a need to identify and actively engage with lone fathers, in particular those caring for babies and small children. Feelings of isolation and loneliness appeared to be experienced by the absence of peers to share the experience.

Many men felt excluded and isolated in social settings. P2 reflects on the gender aspects of exclusion and isolation, for instance:

'On the One Space website, is that amongst women, it's like, it's like a little club you know, a club of single parents and they are women. I am never completely accepted into that group because I am a bloke'.

Gender aspects of exclusion and isolation were also present in informal school rules. For example, P5 mentioned father's day and his daughter's school deciding not to make fathers' day cards in order not *'to upset some single mums'*.

Participants also experienced feelings of exclusion and isolation in building facilities geared to parents and children as female-dominated.

P5 recalls:

'I can think of an incidence in, when I was kicked out of the changing rooms and, the baby changing rooms in Boots because mums might be breast-feeding, and I was like well where am I supposed to change her'.

5.4.3 Wishing not to be pigeonholed

Feeling excluded and isolated left participants with a strong sense of 'wishing not to be pigeonholed'. Participants described how being a man as a lone father goes beyond just gender and biology. Not unrelated, they often highlighted their wish not to be pigeonholed.

For example, P5 said:

'As long you know, as long as there is a main carer whose attached to that age and sees to the baby's needs effectively providing all the, you know emotional as well as the physical support then I don't think it matters who the main carer is, whether it's mum or dad. I think they are both absolutely interchangeable'.

In fact, participants shared the viewpoint that men who choose not to parent is not because they are men, but because they are *'a certain type of man and with certain types of issues'* (P4), suggesting that whether a man or a woman can parent is subject to individual variation.

Finally, participants' wish not to be pigeonholed was identified in relation to their lack of desire for sympathy or differential treatment because of gender-role assumptions and expectations, as highlighted here by P3:

'We just do what we do because we have to do it and the key is to connect with the children', emphasising the concept that parenthood goes beyond gender.

5.5 Dealing with the complexity of gender roles and stereotyping

The participants had to deal with the complexity of gender roles and stereotyping in two ways, each represented as a sub-category in the explanatory model. First, the fathers were

faced with the process of understanding their own gender role attitudes and behaviours. The second sub-category encompasses the idea of gender stereotypes and involves participants being subject to ambivalent stereotypical attitudes.

5.5.1 Understanding their own gender role attitudes and behaviours

First, it became clear that the process of becoming a lone father included the challenge to make sense of how one experienced, expressed and acted in terms of gender roles and as such, masculinity in the light of parenting. Whilst participants generally felt that being the lone parent of children did not go against what they considered to be masculine or manly, their experience of masculinity was not fixed and unchanging. Instead, it appeared to take different forms in light of their situational context.

The participants in pattern 2 felt that taking up the lone parent role diverged from what might be considered the 'norm', which is manifested in the changes in their gender identities and expression due to the transition of becoming a lone father. For instance, P1 referred to his experience of masculinity in the period before he became a lone father as *'being his own man'*. While after he became a lone father, he was confronted with that '*something I wasn't used to having to deal with'.* In other words, it suggests that there is a relation between the experience of masculinity in a more general or identity sense and the practical experience of lone parenting.

The participants in pattern 1 appeared to struggle with the negotiation of their lone parent identity, which was expressed through the rejection of desire to become a *'single dad'*. This suggests that becoming a lone father is grounded in and related to dominant discourses of masculinity and gendered socialisation processes. This relationship was further highlighted in their struggle to comprehend their ex-wives' actions and indeed to understand *'how any mum can just leave their children, any children'* (P3).

The participants in pattern 3 felt that becoming lone parents of young babies somewhat went against what might be considered the 'norm' in relation to dominant discourses of masculinity, which is demonstrated in their increased identification with women and mothers than *'other men who were dads'* (P5). This suggests that their own masculine identities at that time fitted more with the idea of the representation of caring for young children as a mother's role by virtue of becoming a lone father.

For example, P5 looks back:

'I had to become more like, although I was a lone father, I had to become more like a mother in terms of those roles. Yeah, so you know, I don't think you know my role was particularly masculine', indicating a new experience of masculinity in relation to lone fathering.

What brings these accounts together is the shift in the participants' experience of their gender roles throughout the transition, to a point where they felt more secure in terms of gender identification and changed their ideas and behaviour around masculinity and fatherhood.

Further, this new experience of masculinity in relation to lone fathering suggests a more inclusive or bridging experience of gendered parenting. This was highlighted by P1 in terms of the role of caring; *'there was'*, he discusses this change, *'definitely shifts towards more things caring around, around children'*. Through experiencing self-realisation and transformation, participants would also be *'quite happy to challenge'* (P6) the assumptions about what it means to be a father and about caring for children as exclusively a mother's role.

5.5.2 Gender stereotypes and attitudes

The nature of lone fatherhood itself was often greeted with ambivalent reactions by others, which often highlighted the unusual nature of their role. First, there is a reaction of amazement about being a man as the primary carer.

About this, P5 reflects:

'If I am completely honest as well, as a man, you get a lot of credit for doing things that as a woman would be just considered as a natural. As a man you just get a lot of credit for looking after your kids, from women particularly'.

Second, another reaction is emphasised in terms of assumptions around gender roles, particularly that women should be the salient carers for children. Some participants felt that it is more acceptable to be a lone mother, whereas *'men who are single full time parents are viewed with suspicion'* (P3).

P2 elaborates:

'I get the [women] who think 'oh he must be doing something wrong, how could he possibly know that's a woman's job'.

P5 remembers reactions of suspicion from family and friends:

'My role was pretty much belittled. I think there was a refusal to accept that, that I was capable of doing the job. This erroneous belief was held by everybody and [family and friends] assumed that somebody else was doing the work'.

In line with this, P4 discussed how *'there's always this assumption that the men cannot do it or that they're violent or they're feckless'* suggesting that stereotypical attitudes reflect assumptions of the model of men as powerful, oppressive and incapable.

Furthermore, the participants were subject to negative attitudes towards them by support services. Although there was a general consensus amongst the participants that educational resources such as schools did not show prejudice, they experienced negative attitudes in health and family social work services.

For example, P5 shares:

'I was under a lot of scrutiny and I would also had some social services involvement because errm because my ex wouldn't go. It was me taking our daughter to baby clinic and she wouldn't go. So, social services got involved because they were like you know 'why are you doing this', 'why, why isn't mum here' and 'what's a matter with her', and it came to a point when it was all put on mw as if I was doing something wrong'.

This account suggests that professionals might fail to acknowledge family complexities and resort instead to gendered stereotypes with a focus on mothers and an avoidance of fathers. Demonstrating awareness of the gendered nature of support services, participants responded in different ways.

Some 'engineered' their situation to protect themselves and their children.

P1 explains the actions he took:

'I have a residency order for both of them. I have parent responsibility for both of them. I am a governor at both their schools. I am in constant contact with the school and the school is in constant contact with me. It's sad, but I had to that'.

Other participants refrained from engaging with support services all-together.

P5 reflects:

'There was always a protective side of me, the one that would ensure that I really don't want to engage with any, any other support services because I thought I was going to get judged, I thought I was going to be in a lot more scrutiny than you know, a mother would be'.

5.6 Driving experience forward

Becoming a lone parent also involved different processes that helped the participants to manage their new life course. This is represented in the process of 'driving experience forward'. This was expressed through enduring and committing as the first way, and integrating self and life management abilities as the second way, participants managed their new family set up.

5.6.1 Enduring and Committing

When talking about their experience, participants often referred to a persisting approach described as *'coping on a day-to-day basis'* (P5); *'trying the best I could'* (P3)*, 'it was a tunnel of focus'* (P1); and *'getting on with it'* (P2); All these accounts suggest that the participants permeate their ethos of ownership with a strong sense of purpose to *'get to that finish point'* (P1) and to *'look at the bigger picture'* (P5); thus, reflecting their commitment to their new life and parental responsibilities. This involved a commitment without apparent emotional influence to make things work, which was described by P5 as:

'I don't look at things through an emotional lens… Errm thoughts and ideas and, solutions… I don't think about emotions.., I got on with it'.

Driving their experience forward also represented a commitment to their parental responsibilities above anything else. For instance, P2 stated:

'You know just to go out with friends, [parents] having their own freedom or whatever you know. It's not on, you know. You take care of their needs first and then you have your life back, don't you?'

Participants shared the mind-set that their children's needs take priority over theirs and that their own needs only included basic needs, which P5 described as having '*a roof over my head' and 'eating'.* This suggests that the participants generally drove their experience forward through having a focus on their life course, stripping away non-essentials to prioritise their children and looking their situation in the face with the intention of *'doing what a parent does'* (P2).

5.6.2 Integrating self and life management abilities

Participants also seemed to drive their experience forward through the integration of self and life management abilities.

For instance, P5 said:

'I decided once I got my head around the whole situation, I kind of saw it was a project, you know, that's how I rationalised it'.

Maintaining a sense of control appeared to be important in the way that they managed themselves and their new life. For all participants, maintaining a sense of control involved staying organised while having a routine or a daily structure. This was illustrated in the following examples:

P6 said:

'You have to be a lot more organised. Yeah, being more independent, that's in terms of structure and strategy and things like that really'.

Similarly, P4 explained:

'You know, plan anything you want to do around making sure the kids are okay, you have to be up every morning to make sure they are up and so on'

Fostering mental resilience and self-reliance also appeared to be essential ingredients. First, fostering mental resilience refers to developing a mental toughness that helped some participants drive their experience forward and persevere against any *'curveballs that life throws'* (P5). To achieve mental resilience, P1 used the tactic of *'accepting what you can't change'* and then emphasised *'maybe if you are not strong enough, you can't make it and that is it'*, a view shared by P2. Second, self-reliance refers to the ability and the effort to provide the necessities of life for the family unit in order to stay sane. The importance of self-reliance is illustrated in the following account by P3:

'At least I work and I provide for my son and look after him. I am not sponging off the government. I just try to get on with it and, you know, you have to. You have to, [as] nobody is going to help you. You've got to do it yourself otherwise you go to a nut house'.

5.7 Managing own emotions

In addition to integrating self and life and management abilities to manage their experience, participants also had to manage their own emotions in two ways; being steered by internalised masculinity norms and alternate forms of support, and professional help-seeking.

5.7.1 Being steered by internalised masculinity norms and alternate forms of support

The participants seem to manage their own emotions by focusing outward rather than inward. This can be conceptualised as being steered by internalised masculinity norms in the sense that their responses to emotional difficulties might indeed be related to the dominant cultural characteristics of masculinity and gender-role expectations.

First, side-lining their own emotions appeared to be a coping strategy amongst some participants so that all their energy could be focused on the children and their needs.

For instance, P1 described:

'My emotions were almost… they almost had to go to my back pocket and stay there. And then… and when I needed them I used them for the boys'.

Second, business and distraction also helped some participants keep their emotions at a distance, *'I don't think I consciously thought of it really'*, P2 reflects, *'I just got on with what I had to do'*.

Third, a practical and logical approach that highlights *'thoughts and ideas, and solutions'* as opposed to looking at *'things through and emotional lens'* (P5) was employed to manage emotions. Emotional support resources also included *'good friends'* (P4), *'family'* (P5), *'getting out and meeting people'* (P1).

Internalised masculinity norms were apparent in participants' accounts. Some participants felt that turning inward into their emotional world might expose their vulnerabilities and this was not a risk that they were prepared to take. In this context, the fear of vulnerability prevents them from expressing emotions in public.

For instance, P3 explained:

'You have to stay strong to be honest… Yeah I just put them away and when I am on my own or whatever, I get a little bit upset sometimes but I try to carry on'.

Internalised masculinity norms might be a reaction to gender role socialisation and expectations, a view that is echoed by P6 who said that seeking help as a man *'just feels wrong'* and P5 talked about *'going somewhere for help'* being seen *'as a weakness'*.

It is unsurprising that talking about feelings then, is also experienced as unappealing or unhelpful. Returning to P5's account, he reflects:

'I am not sure that, you know, men talking more is, is the answer to it. In fact, I think that's not the answer. I think that's what, you know, what might work for, it might be more effective for you know, for women'.

The above account suggests a possible need for psychological interventions to be more gender-specific, which will be addressed later.

5.7.2 Experiencing and understanding help-seeking

As a consequence of their own internalised masculinity norms, participants experienced and understood professional help-seeking in differing ways. The participants who did experience professional help-seeking were those whose wife left without the children and without otherwise fulfilling a parenting role. This suggests that the circumstances that led them to become lone parents might have influenced their experience in a different way than the other participants. The relationship break-up had not provided these fathers with the time to process feelings, which seems to be related to the way the separation and maternal withdrawing happened. For example, after a moment of silence, P6 reflects about *'feeling something'*, yet unable to identify what he is feeling, he tells that he managed *'pretty well'* in terms of the children, but *'not so well'* in terms of himself. Despite his earlier account that, help seeking as a man *'just feel wrong'*, P6 still sought counselling for himself in order to escape his current reality and to have the opportunity to process his own feelings and emotions.

He explains:

'Support from (name of counselling service) was helpful, to just get away from it and *(...), to change, to make things better was the motivation',* suggesting a deep desire to reconcile his own personal needs with his expectations.

P3 sought counselling to deal with dashed ideals and expectations related to *'deserving the wife he wanted'*. However, when he did seek help, he was turned away because of the multi-dimensionality of his difficulties. *'I went to like CBT'*, P3 described, *'[the therapist] said it*

wouldn't work for me. I had too many problems, to come back when I've sorted my problems'.

Related to this, P1 discussed how his needs for support changed over the transition period into lone fatherhood. Just over a year into his lone fatherhood experience, P1 explained how he went to his GP but *'they weren't very helpful'* and *'they couldn't give me support instantly'*. P1 needed practical and immediate solutions and he did not have *'the time to sit and wait'*, so because he was not given something tangible to work with, P1 describes, *'I stood up, brushed myself down and best put forward and off I went really'*. However, three years later, P1 returned to his GP and this time accepted the treatment plan that had been offered during his first help-seeking experience. This is because he had *'now moved from somebody who is their guide to now somebody who is controlling their emotion. It was not worth it. I had to stop that'*.

In addition to his support needs changing over time and a process of self-realisation, P1's accounts reflect men who have traditionally masculine attitudes to help seeking. For instance, P1 mentioned that he only visits health care professionals if he *'can't see past it'*. This reflection is also emphasised in the meaning he gives the anti-depressant medication:

'Have we fixed the damage? Have we repaired the little bit of the damage of my mental state', an understanding of his mental health as needing to be fixed just like a car or a physical ailment such as a bad back.

Thus, possibly indicating internalised gender norms around masculinity, self-reliance and, emotional and mental resilience, also indicated in P4's description who said he might consider professional help that was *'more about symptoms'* rather than discuss feelings.

5.8 Seeing self as the expert

Seeing oneself as the expert helped participants withstand the complexity of gender roles and stereotypes that they faced. Consequently, some participants protected this expertise through defending lone fathers. Others used this expertise to express much needed changes that involved a need for better awareness and inclusion of lone fathers and a need for the right type of support at the right time.

5.8.1 Defending lone fathers

Some participants felt that through their own experience they are challenging gendered rules and norms. Indeed, they are suggesting that their own experience proves their competence and their ability in the context of being a man who is also the primary caregiver of his

children. P5 shares, *'I am a living breathing example that dads are as capable as mothers'*, and P2 describes how society views lone fathers as '*pioneers*' in what they do. Related to the idea of lone fathers as 'pioneers' in what they do, participants frequently defended men as *'perfectly capable of being the primary carer of the child'* (P2) and as having the *'propensity to learn and to care'* and to have *'passion for their kids'* (P5). Participants share the view point that, '*sometimes mums make mistakes, sometimes dads make mistakes'*, indicating that being a good parent can be subject to individual variation and that gender should be irrelevant. Participants' accounts suggest that lone fathers might be able to provide a more inclusive understanding of lone fathers that breaks away from traditional, prescriptive gender roles, which is why it is important not to *'write them off'* (P3) or *'patronise them'* (P5), accounts that led to the construction of the next sub-category that emphasises a need to bridge the parenting gap.

5.8.2 Pushing for better awareness and inclusion

In this sub-category, participants identified a strong need to bridge the parenting gender gap.

For example, P5 said:

'Dads are valuable and dads are able to do stuff. And buildings, and services, and professionals, you know, practitioners need to be accepting dads as they are mums'.

Some participants pushed for better awareness and inclusion in the court systems, post-separation or divorce. For example, P1 suggests that both the mother and the father *'should be able to put their case forward'* as opposed to the court system immediately assuming that the best place for the child is with the mother, and that the decision process should be grounded on assessing who *'the better parent'* might be, in the context of being able to meet the child's emotional, developmental and practical needs. In contrast, P2 emphasises the idea of doing *"what's best for the [children]'* and he reflects that *'if what's best for them is living with the other parent, then embrace that'* as it is very *'important that [children] have that relationship'* with both parents. These accounts further demonstrate the need to bridge the gender gap post- separation and set out to focus instead on individual circumstances and the needs of children.

5.8.3 Pushing for the right type of support at the right time

Participants identified a strong need for the right type of support at the right time. In alignment with the literature that suggests that the men whose wives leave without the child experience greater psychological burden in the first couple of years of the transition than

other patterns, P3 discusses how he needed *'better access to counselling services'* in '*the first months, in the first year'*. P3 describes the risk of getting '*depressed and the situation getting worse'* if they are left alone. *'We get neglected or whatever'*, he reflects about his own experience as well as of the children:

'It can be the other way around; the child can get depressed and not seen by anyone you know so you just don't know. So I don't know maybe for people to be more aware of it'.

This suggests the lack of support at the right time might have concerning repercussions not only for the man as a lone parent but also for the children involved.

The above was expanded by P3 who said, *'a lot of single dads they struggle and they don't know what to do or what steps to take'* and believed that it was the job of professionals *'to try and find out and give direction'*, suggesting that knowledge of help-seeking processes might be valuable to lone fathers.

To address the issues of social isolation and male suicide, P5 uses his own expertise to identify a way forward. He suggests that counselling services should focus more on building *'resilience in dads'* and providing them with *'some practical pursuits and some friendships'*. Similarly, P6 identified through his own experience that the psycho-educational courses that are available in the National Health System (NHS) are *'too generic'* and described them as *'unhelpful'* in the context of his own needs. This points to the need of available NHS courses to be more gender-specific and father-specific. As mentioned earlier, P1 discussed how his needs for support changed over the transition period into lone fatherhood.

5.9 Understanding relationship with children

As illustrated in the above model, the relationship participants had with their children appeared to envelope their entire lived experience. In understanding relationship with children, the notion of 'protecting in different contexts' was quite pre-eminent. Their own parental style appeared to be influenced by their own up-bringing, which left participants 'wanting more, and better for the children'. Finally, becoming a parent and becoming a lone father motivated them to 're-define their sense of self and identity'.

5.9.1 Protecting in different contexts

In the relationship with children, the fathers described how they prioritised their children to protect them. '*It was protection'*, P5 describes, *'I would say that my own thoughts, my own needs, my own feelings, my own ambitions, everything was just side lined. The focus was on*

my daughter'. The *'getting on with it on my own'* (P3) came back in various accounts. For instance, P1 addressed how his boys needed his *'help'* and his *'support'* and P3 described how *'[he] put [his] son first'*. Therefore, as P1 and P3 reflect, they separated themselves out. The emotions that they felt in the context of the mother's absence were side-lined; participants employed different ways to protect their children by limiting their psychological damage. One way participants tried to do this was by keeping the memory of the mother present in the children's lives. '*They know who she is'* P2 said, *'there are a few items in the house that have been given to us from her'*.

Similarly, P5 always presented the mother in a positive light:

'It was the case of just explaining that, you know, your mum does loves us but she does love you, but you know she's, she's not well at the moment'.

This resonates with what P4 described:

'I would try to, errm, defend their mum every time they said something very critical. Well I would say, 'you know she loves you very much'.

There were different ways that participants tried to stay attuned to their children's needs. For instance, P5 and P6 sought external support by accessing counselling service in response to his children's feelings of *'being let down [by their mother]'* (P6) and challenges his daughter experienced with *'the issues over how she has been brought up by a dad instead of a mother'* (P5).

Other participants were able to encourage themselves open communication and free expression of self.

For example, P2 described:

'*I don't find it a challenge because I don't try to impose any sort of [stereotypes]. I don't care, particularly with my son, if he wants to be girly then that's entirely up to him. I don't have any particular issues',* a view that was supported by P4 when dealing with his trans-gender adolescent son.

In the same breath, P5 referred to being open and honest with his daughter:

'We've been, errm always been close, we've always been able to, she's always been able to ask [me] questions and get straight answers'.

Some participants referred to protecting their children by ensuring they are a consistent and stable attachment figures in their children's lives. For some participants this meant *'over-compensating in some ways'* to *'their own detriment'*, as P5 illustrates:

'You know stifling my own ambitions and my own, you know, my own shots in, in happiness, or you know, start another relationship. I was reluctant to do that you know, and start new jobs and new projects', a viewpoint echoed in P2's understanding of his relationship with his children.

Participants further protected the needs of their children by recognising the importance of a female influence on their children. Indeed, they all fostered a relationship with other females regardless of the gender of the child. For example, P2 described how *'[he] encourages [his] children's relationship with [his] sister because she is a good female role model'* and P3 embraced the support from other mothers at his son's school. Recognising difficulties that his daughter experienced with her sense of self and identity, P5 ensured he welcomed *'support from a female, well, female carer'*.

Although these accounts suggest that the participants were protecting their children in various ways, they all shared a common goal to prioritise their needs and well-being, and through their own values and life lessons such as *'respect for others'* (P3), *'independence'* (P6) and a strong *'moral compass'* (P5), the fathers set out to prepare the children for a healthy adult life, with the end-result being the ability to confidently say *'it's job, it's job done'* (P5).

5.9.2 Wanting more, and better for children

In line with 'protecting' to prepare their children for a healthy adult life, the second sub-category identified in the data was 'wanting more, and better for children', which was made sense of by participants in terms of their own up-bringing as (young) men and as lone fathers. For instance, P3 explained *'wanting better for his [child] than [he] had [himself]'* and P6 recalled how *'[he] didn't like it when [he] was brought up'* and how he *'didn't get the opportunity to do much as a kid'*. Consequently, this led him to do *'things differently now'*.

Similarly, P1 tried to learn from *'the mistakes his parents made'*, *'when they forced [him] to do things they wanted [him] to do'*. He reflects how *'[he] made bad decisions because of it'* and tried to do it differently from his own up-bringing. The learning from their parents' mistakes was also identified in relation to a softer approach with their own children. Although unsure how (much) it affected his parenting, P2 talks about how he is *'a bit lax'*

with being a parent; in contrast to his own mother, he says *'I am not strict with them'*. Some participants 'wished more, and better for their children', when comparing the fate that their children might have waited should they have stayed with their mother.

For example, P5 described about his daughter:

'She's got a rock solid base and trust and understanding that she's got with me because I think she certainly would not have that if she, if it d' been the other way around'.

5.9.3 Re-defining a sense of self and identity

Re-defining a sense of self and identity is conceptualised here as the way the participants think about and view their traits, beliefs, and purpose within the world. Accounts suggest that many aspects of the participants' selves including the ways they understand and define themselves changed in light of becoming a parent and a lone father. For some, this process started as soon as they became a parent, and, for others, it started as soon as they became lone fathers.

For example, P5 explains how becoming a parent changed *'[his] whole perspective'* and *'outlook on life'*:

'The way that I changed as a person was that I was less focused on myself and now I am more focused on other people. Errm, you know my nature is, you know, more caring, errm, than individualistic'.

Similarly, P3 explains:

'I was a man of leisure, I travelled the world, I travelled the world, I'd go football, I did what I want, you know, I did all sorts of stuff, I didn't have nothing but as soon as I had a child that's when, it's time for me to grow up you know, do the right thing.'

Both accounts reflect an opportunity participants embraced to transform as well as to transcend their own ego by virtue of becoming a parent. Participants re-discovered a new sense of self and identity, in that before they became parents, they were more *'self-centred'* (P5) with only themselves to focus on, whereas now they are more altruistic and committed to the welfare of their children as well as caring.

For the men in pattern 2, the process of re-defining a sense of self and identity started when they assumed the lone father role. For instance, P1 explains how he *'developed new skills, personal skills'* and *'the softer side'* that *'[he] didn't really have to use before'* because *'[he]*

only had the boys at weekends' and *'[he] never had to be a full-time [dad]'*, which indicates a development of sense of self and identity in terms of caring responsibility and practice.

Chapter 6

Discussion

As discussed in Chapter 5, the participants of this study understood their experiences as a lone father in terms of; first, the complexities that they faced; second, how they managed their lone fatherhood experience; and last, through re-inscribing fatherhood, whilst simultaneously reflecting on gender and masculinities, all of which were influenced by the situational context that preceded lone fatherhood,[5] as well as the relationship with their children. I will be discussing the findings in relation to these influential contexts, with an exploration of what they mean in light of existing theory and research. Herein, I will tend to implications of the findings, their limitations, and I will also present suggestions for future research.

6.1 Complexities lone fathers face

In line with Fox's findings (2002), the path to becoming a lone father varied amongst the participants as they all made the transition from a variety of positions and in different ways (see section 5.2); creating new and diverse practical, emotional, social and gender-specific complexities.

6.1.1 Practical complexities

After becoming a lone father, participants reported feeling the weight of role and responsibility to be the sole provider of the family, which was often manifested in their struggle to manage work, child care as well as associated- and sometimes unfamiliar- household tasks. Most participants experienced changes and losses in their employment situation, resulting in financial pressures. Other research on lone fathers in the UK (Hipgrave, 1982; Adams, 1996; Gingerbread, 2001; O'Brien, 2004) finds that lone fathers are far less likely than other fathers to be working full-time because of the pressure they feel to balance work, childcare and household tasks. The data also shows that the participants who were victims of domestic violence (P2 & P5) faced more ambiguous circumstances; in addition to the transition pattern that the other fathers experienced, they also had to provide safe housing for their children because of the 'threatening' mother (see section 5.2.2). Nonetheless, what was evident in this study, a finding also supported in other research on

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[5] Pattern 1: the woman moved out of the house leaving the children with the father.
  Pattern 2: the man moved out alone without the children; he was initially a non-resident father, but later became the children's primary carer
  Pattern 3: the man left the family unit with the child or children, leaving the woman behind

single fathers (e.g. Coles, 2003), is that participants would have taken full-time parenting anyways, despite their prevailing personal circumstances (e.g. employment status or, housing situation), as protecting their children underpinned their decision to become lone fathers. Balancing daily life and schedules together with feeling the weight of role and responsibility to be the sole provider of the family was therefore a challenge for all of these fathers, but it was one that crossed all boundaries of situational and social contexts.

Unlike Fox's study (2002), none of the participants referred to child care and homemaking tasks as women's work. This finding also applies to the men who were non-resident fathers and who did very little domestic tasks (and childcare) before they became lone fathers. The men who lived in a two-parent household before transition to lone fatherhood already actively engaged with them. Actually, their struggle related more to entering and adjusting to a new family set-up and the effects of actual sole parental responsibility on the change in taking on all childcare and domestic roles and involvement, as opposed to viewing these roles as a predominantly female domain (Hipgrave, 1982; Adams, 1996). It can be argued that these findings support the idea of role overload. As mentioned in chapter 3, this occurs when one person assumes more roles, which are not interdependent, than they can cope with (Biddle & Thomas, 1996). In contrast to the 'deficit paradigm', which presents the view that fathers are essentially inadequate parents and unable to perform to the same level of proficiency as mothers (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997), participants' accounts yielded useful information in support of both the gender role discrepancy framework and symbolic interactionism. Indeed, participants' accounts support Pleck's (1995) perspective that gender role discrepancy should be viewed as a process rather than as an outcome. For instance, the men in the current study learned to adopt a strong child-centred approach that helped them adjust to their new family set-up and consistent with previous research on lone fathers (e.g. O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001; Fox, 2002; Williams, 2015; McClatchey, 2018), engaged with setting novel priorities, such as adjusting their hours of working by going part-time, by becoming self-employed or by leaving work all together. All participants managed to adjust their behaviours in order to commit to their new role of lone parenting. In O'Neill and Mendelsohn's study (2001), committing was described as the fathers' having their domestic role as one of the highest priorities. This perspective also applies to the fathers in the current study, particularly as they unequivocally put their children's needs before their own, even when being faced with role overload, or feeling the weight of role and responsibility to be the sole provider and caregiver of the family.

6.1.2 Emotional complexities

Participants in the first pattern expressed feelings of anger and upset, related to social and cultural constructions of 'good' mothering such as the idea of nurturance as an 'instinctive' attribute of mothers (Lupton & Barclay, 1997), and their own mental representations of caregiving such as the goal of caregiving is to protect and to prioritise the child. Their narrative around the actions of the mother corresponds in nature with the notion that mothers abdicate their caregiving role (Solomon & George, 1996a), For instance, P3 described how the mother 'just didn't want to be a mum' and emphasised self and own needs and desires over those of the child. He struggles to 'understand how any mum can just leave their children, any children'. There is an assumption here that all mothers should be able to be caring and nurturing; thus, indirectly framing maternal desire and ability to provide protection as 'natural' processes in women. Gender specific behaviours in parenting, such as caring and nurturing, are therefore understood as psychological, unconscious processes (Graham, 1983). Upset feelings are also associated with their attachment to the 'ideal' image of the traditional heterosexual family, and society's traditional values about masculinity and heterosexual relationships (see section 5.3.2). Indeed, feelings of depression and anxiety, such a not wanting to get up in the mornings and incessant worrying about the impact their lone parent status might have on future intimate relationships, were salient in both participants. These findings echo with O'Brien's (1980) findings that showed a greater psychological burden in the men whose wives 'left the home alone without the children' and with those of Cooper et al. (2007) and Hill & Hilton (1999) who found a higher rate of depression in lone fathers who reported low levels of satisfaction in their role as a lone parent. These findings also support a general agreement in this area of research of an increased presence of men in roles that challenge long-standing gender role norms and expectations and who often struggle to comprehend poorly defined fathering roles and competing images of ideal fathering (Palkovitz, 2002; Haddock et al., 2006; Schindler & Coley, 2007; Rochlen et al., 2008). Thus, these fathers emotional complexities, and as Smith & Smith (1981) argue, might be exacerbated by their gender identity in the context of the traditional heterosexual family, a struggle not salient in the other men, who became lone fathers through different paths.

Indeed, the other men, who became lone fathers through different paths, describe more positive emotions such as a sense of relief, thankfulness and gratitude, which supersede any other emotional difficulties such as feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed. Additionally, whereas the participants in the first pattern show no understanding of the mother's actions, the others are somewhat able to rationalise the mother's behaviours and

attribute them to external influences such as mental health difficulties and negative childhood experiences. It could be hypothesised that the lone fathers, from the second and third patterns, exhibit a healthier state of mind (Bernier & Miljokovitch, 2009), than those from the first pattern. What is evident in this study and which is supported in previous research on lone fatherhood (e.g. O' Brien, 1980, Fox, 2002) is that men make the transformations they do, engage with their day-to-day and also struggle with that, but those whose wives left them and their children find it harder to reflect on their situation at a more macro level, hindering their ability to break away from what is considered the 'norm' in relation to traditional family contexts and in turn, creating more complex emotional challenges when compared to the other lone fathers. Conversely, discourses around what constitutes a 'good' and 'bad' parent possibly provide lone fathers who experienced more positive emotions with a moral framework about their own position as primary carers and one that transcends any other emotional difficulties (Fox, 2002). For example, some participants referred to 'being able to do more' for the children (P1) and 'a wonderful chance' to be with them and 'amend past mistakes' (P4). Unlike O'Brien (1980) who argues that the 'conciliatory negotiators' and the 'hostile seekers' created survival strategies more readily than the 'passive acceptors' (see section 3.5), all participants in the current study sustained motivation to create survival strategies such as, changing life style and prioritising their relationship with the children. Notions of the influence of the pre-transition experience and path to lone fatherhood on initial attitude and feelings about the child, expressed by fathers in Greif's (1987) study, do not correspond with lone fathers in this study. For all participants, and notwithstanding the path towards becoming a lone father, meeting the children's emotional and practical needs transcended their own needs, feelings and practical limitations. For example, all participants sought emotional support for their children. This finding contrasts with what Cohen and Savaya (2000) refer to as a "traditional male reluctance to ask for assistance" (p. 1444) that extended to help-seeking for the children.

In relation to the children, the age of the child at the time of transition appears to influence how some participants made sense of their children's emotions. The lone fathers, whose children were aged four to nine, explained how their boys and girls felt anger, sadness, confusion and rejection, consistent with findings from non-UK studies in which young children describe similar emotions (e.g. Bartz & Witcher, 1978; Bernier & Miljokovitch, 2009). However, P4 who is raising teenagers attributed emotional difficulties in his fourteen year old twins to problems related to adolescence, rather than the 'absent' mother as such. Similarly, participants, whose children were under the age of three at the time of transition, describe how their children did not know any different. Nonetheless, P5's daughter, who was

a baby at the time of transition, developed difficulties dealing with rejection later in life. Similarly, P2 mentions that although his children, who were also young babies at the time of transition, did not present any difficulties as yet, he anticipates potential emotional difficulties later in life. It seems, therefore, that most participants attribute their child's emotional difficulties to a reaction to circumstances (i.e. the absent mother)[6], and although their children's emotional reactions was a real concern, it did not present a significant source of functional distress for the lone fathers, as earlier studies have suggested (e.g. Pichitino, 1983; Bernier & Miljokovitch, 2009).

6.1.3 Social and gender-specific complexities

Participants often spoke about the tendency of the more 'official' external influences, such as government agencies, to be biased towards supporting and favouring the needs of the mother; for instance in the context of resources for financial assistance, and by viewing fathers as 'second class' parents (P1) and providers of money, as opposed to mothers who are seen as having a legacy of experience and expertise In line with the 'deficit paradigm' that describes the idea that men are incapable or less capable of quality fatherhood (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997), the participants understood this bias in the context of cultural and societal norms around parental responsibility of child care post-separation in which mothers would gain (main or full) custody (Ceglowski, Shears & Furman, 2010). They further framed this bias in biological terms and, therein, as the gendered nature of parenthood. Some participants also felt this affected their position with regards to parental responsibility in the legal system; because, they felt, women are seen as 'natural mothers' and, hence, 'expert' carers', the notion of male parenting as an adjunct to women's caring was perpetuated (Silva, 1996; Burgess, 1997; Anderson et al., 2002). Participants talked about the their disbelief in why notions of maternal care, whether essentialist or other, are still maintained in the legal system as opposed to moving with the reality of changing family forms, consequently granting very little recognition to the caring role of fathers that is independent of mothers and independent of the provider or breadwinning role.

In light of the above, the feeling of injustice identified in the analysis of the data makes sense considering the lone fathers in this study did both providing and caring. Unfortunately, government bodies and agencies still maintain and emphasise supporting fathers as providers rather than care (Featherstone, 2009; Lewis & Lamb, 2007). Although there is now a more

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[6] George and Solomon (1999:15) emphasise possible negative consequences for the children of mothers' who abdicate their protective role and how a child might be more vulnerable to forming a disorganised attachment pattern, which evidence has linked to greater pathological risk, when compared to other attachment patterns such as avoidant and ambivalent (see also Fagot & Kavanagh, 1990; Lyons-Ruth, 1996).

equal gender distribution of responsibilities for the financial provision to a family, this transformation has not been accompanied by new patterns in the gender distribution of household- and care work, although, fortunately, this has been changing- albeit not very rapidly (Bianchi et al., 2000). There has also been a slow but growing recognition within the psychoanalytic arena that the 'hidden' complexity of the paternal role is balanced with the diversity of contexts in which both men and women parent (Featherstone, 2009). Indeed, and in support of the gender role strain model, the fathers in this study were acutely aware of traditional stereotypes and generalisations concerning men and masculinity. What is evident from this study is that by doing both caring and providing, and as La Rossa (1988) addressed, lone fathers challenge dichotomous gender perspectives and instead introduce signs of change in both the culture and conduct of fatherhood (see section 6.3).

It further became clear that the participants experienced feelings of exclusion and isolation and often actually were excluded and isolated. Being a lone father outside of social and culture norms of masculinity and fatherhood contributed to this. As earlier studies confirmed (Hipgrave 1978; Smith & Smith, 1981; O'Brien 1987; Adams, 1996; Williams, 2015), participants also felt isolated and excluded from community groups and they did not have peers to share their experiences with. These feelings of isolation and exclusion were also grounded in institutional organisations around gendered norms, such as in schools, building facilities and on-line parent groups, which seem to be to mothers and were female-dominated.

The role, experiences and the identity of lone fathers are far from straightforward. Perhaps because men are continued to be viewed as less capable of caring due to a process of socialisation, it is the theoretical model that best applies (Greif, 1995). This emphasises the idea that professional practices, argue Lewis and Lamb (2007), often fail to acknowledge family complexities and resort, instead, to gendered stereotypes focussing on mothers and avoiding fathers. These accounts suggest that stereotypical attitudes and assumptions might make some lone fathers feel that they need to prove themselves and their ability to raise their children. Actually, some participants in this study felt compelled to refrain from disclosing any difficulties or vulnerabilities to government authorities, such as social services, out of fear of losing the children. Their feelings reflect Wetchler's (2005) description of feeling under suspicion, a feeling that resonates with research in the social care context that has highlighted discourses about fathers as a 'threat' and as 'unimportant' (Scourfield, 2003).

Lone fatherhood itself was often received with ambivalent reactions by others, especially from women, and these could be as diverse as from amazement and to suspicion (see section 5.5.2). Research has suggested that lone fathers receive more community support than lone mothers because they are to be admired for stepping up to a role intended for women (e.g. Barker, 1994; Breiding-Buss, 2000; Anderson, 2005; DeJean et al., 2012). In terms of suspicion, some women would react to the lone father with a degree of resistance that was manifested by a sense of suspicion, often assuming that the lone fathers must have help or someone else is doing the job. It could be that any transformation of men into an able and emotionally sensitive father might feel threatening for some women because they want to maintain control of a domain they feel expert in (Craig & Mullan, 2011), which did not resonate with the participants in this study as they often recognised the importance of a female influence on their child and lone fatherhood experience, and expressed further their wish not to be pigeonholed or treated with sympathy.

Men did present, however, an ambiguous attitude towards masculinity and fatherhood; whilst they generally felt that being the primary carer of their children did not contradict masculinity roles, during the initial stages of becoming a lone father, some participants, whose children were babies at the time of transition, recognised themselves in normative gender roles. According to Doucet (1995), this might be because caring for children where it involves physical tasks, such as changing diapers traditionally represents a mother's role of caregiving. Nonetheless, this did not prevent participants from taking this kind of responsibility for their children; which, contradicts evidence from older research (e.g. Barker, 1994; Warin et al. 1999; Fox, 2002) suggesting that, the belief that breadwinning is a father's role, is powerful enough to create an internal conflict for many men; in turn, inhibiting some men from becoming primary carers for their children.

The element of change in terms of experiencing and 'doing' gender was noticeable among the participants; all participants experienced a shift over time in their gender roles and sense and manifestation of masculinity, so that they felt secure in the sense context of 'gender identification' (Lamb, 1979). Indeed, they felt happy to challenge assumptions about what it means to be a parent and about caring for children as exclusively a mother's role. Upon reflection, their participation in this research might also present an effort to challenge gender stereotypes and like their narrative often reflected, to stand as representatives of all lone fathers (see section 5.8.1). In line with previous research on lone father-headed families and unrelated to both how they came into creation and to their occupational or financial status (e.g. Fox, 2002; Esbensen, 2014; McClatchey, 2018), the men in this study transitioned into

a new parental role and appear over time, to renegotiate their role in the family and seek out new definitions of fathering. For example, they had to learn to be both providers and nurturers, develop a reinvigorated commitment to their fathering and, as such, masculine identity. Previous research also found that a form of stress and struggle for fathers lies within the gendered parental roles (Smith & Smith, 1981; Coles 2002 & 2009; Doucet 2004; Williams 2009). Although this study found similar findings around raising younger children, the desire participants had to commit to and protect their children also meant that the gendered roles of childrearing were not a barrier to their success with full time parenting. Therefore, the implications for theory and practice might be very exciting as identifying and engaging with more lone fathers could challenge existing models of fathers as either deficient and problematic, or committed and involved with their children, conveying instead the message that 'this is my family and it works' (Finch, 2007:70).

6.2 Managing complexities

The dynamic and evolving nature of the process of self-realisation and transformation enabled participants to drive their experience forward and to plan a functional environment for themselves and their children; a finding that mirrors other lone father research (e.g. Adams, 1996; Fox, 2002; McClatchey, 2018). Research on (lone) fathering has often shown the presence of a binary tension to do both providing and nurturing (Coles, 2002, 2009; Hatter et al., 2002; Williams, 2007), and although the participants in this study struggled to juggle multiple tasks and roles, they were willing and able to adapt to them. I will now be discussing the processes involved in managing the complexities that they faced.

6.2.1 Managing everyday family life

Like the widowed men who gave voice to their lived experience in McClatchey's study (2018), the men in the current study referred to a persisting approach of enduring and committing that involved putting their children's needs before their own and holding a positive belief around being fully present in their children's lives. This persisting approach also included the use of ingredients such as thought, action, organisation, resilience and self-reliance. Family research, however, has shown that in non-traditional family forms, family management is more complex than in traditional family forms (Smart, 2000; Nelson, 2006; Oláh et al., 2014). For example, participants did gender as they did housework and childcare, an act that is 'performative' in the sense that that they re-constructed their identity (see section 6.3), whilst also 'doing family' by embedding their everyday lives in daily practices, routines, activities and rituals (Daly, 2003). Finch's (2007) concept of 'display' provides a way of understanding the challenges faced by lone fathers who attempt to 'do' gender and

family differently. As indicated in section 6.1.3, men who care for children on a full-time basis experience social and gender-specific challenges, suggesting that their display of care work, as well as alternative family form and non-hegemonic masculinities, are 'belittled' (P5), and as a result feel treated with suspicion. Finch (2007) explains that displays of family involve 'the conveying of meaning through social interaction and the acknowledgment of this by relevant others' (p.77) and an on-going 'process of seeking legitimacy, which necessarily entails displaying chosen family relationships to relevant others and having them accepted' (p.71). This was evident in some participants' accounts who expressed a lack of validation from others and genuine understanding of their lone fatherhood experience, as well as in participants seeing themselves as experts in what they do and protecting this expertise through defending all lone fathers. Interestingly, in an attempt to display themselves as capable and their family set-up as one that works, some participants employed what Doucet (2008) calls, 'heroic narratives', such as lone fathers are a 'rare breed' (P4) and 'almost like unsung heroes' (P1). Thus, as Barnet & Hyde (2001) address, it might be reasonable to theorise that the effects of sole parental responsibility contribute to the process of self-realisation and transformation, precisely because the additional responsibilities and roles assumed by the men in this study helped increase aspects of the self and self-complexity; in turn, buffering them against the negative impact of complexities faced, as well as providing them with more opportunities to drive their experience forward by getting perspective on both the positives and the negatives of their experiences.

In line with previous research (e.g. Fox, 2002; Esbensen, 2014; McClatchey, 2018), the transformative effect of parenting included an enhanced appreciation for the nurturing and daily caretaking activities involved in parenting, as well as a greater satisfaction of caring for children in spite of the greater daily stressors from the myriad of demands of being both provider and caregiver. Like Matthews's (2004) who examined the lived experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers, participants in this study also developed several of the characteristics identified by Lindbald-Goldberg (1989) such as, acquiring personal resources (e.g. self-reliance and resilience), which enhanced their coping effectiveness, increased family organization (e.g. maintaining a daily routine), which balanced household responsibilities and decreased task overload, a positive family concept, which valued commitment and child-centeredness, as well as an ability to highlight positive events and place less emphasis on negative aspects of their experience. From a social constructivist perspective, gender, here, appears to be something that is actively done in specific contexts rather than a property of individuals (Courtenay, 2000). As important, and as the literature suggests (e.g. Coles, 2009; Esbensen, 2014), the process of self-realisation and

transformation may reflect their belief that they lack control over certain global aspects such as social complexities, yet, it allows them to maintain a sense of control over their own behaviours and environment.

6.2.2 Managing their own emotions

In terms of emotional management, and in accordance with the cognitive model of stress and coping (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), the men in this study developed different strategies and discourses; although emotions were acknowledged, participants seemed to actively keep their emotions at a distance, such as through avoidance, business and distraction, but would also, for instance, manage their emotions through a logical and practical approach. These findings mirror Coles' (2009) and Williams' (2015) findings, which showed that lone fathers managed emotions through dismissal or suppression, often also relying on cognitive strategies such as keeping themselves distracted, pushing themselves to do what they have to do despite the stress and, like the men in this study, reappraising their situation as a learning experience.

Management of emotions, then, seems to be manifested through non-engagement with emotions, for which, there are different explanations. Most participants felt that turning inward to their internal world might expose their vulnerabilities and they were not prepared to take this risk, often combined with insufficient time to process their emotions that led them to just 'get on with it' (P1). This approach, however, came with some negative consequences. For instance, P1 spent the first year and a half of the transition ensuring that the children are settled and organised. However, he later experienced feelings of anger and rage. Some participants referred to the notion of 'resilience' and being the 'right type of man'. In P5's case, for instance, putting emotions into words felt counterproductive; it was also seen as an approach more suited to women. These findings are reflective of previous literature that suggests that men's responses to psychological and emotional difficulties are related to the dominant cultural characteristics of masculinity and gender-role expectations (e.g. Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992; Gillon, 2007). Indeed, hegemonic masculinities are evident in the participants' accounts of managing emotions (see section 5.7), consistent with the theory of gender differences in emotion expression, which Brody (2009) argues, is a result of a combination of biological and socialisation processes that allow for the influence of context; for instance, in P3's case, self-reliance was essential as 'otherwise you go to a nut house'. These findings are further reflective of the notion that not only is the meaning the person attaches to a stressful situation critical to determining the severity of the stress (Coles, 2009), but it is also strongly linked to psychological resilience (McCubbin, McCubbin, &

Thompson, 1986; Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995; Patterson, 2002; Gameiro & Finnigan, 2017). Here, participants used mental processes and behaviours that protected not only them (e.g. creating an image of independence and competence through integrating self and life management abilities), but also their children, namely shielding them from the potential negative effects of the mother's absence, all with the intention of improving their children's life trajectories.

Within the clinical literature, there is very little knowledge of the consequences of motherless families, as is the case in this study, on child development. Yet, this is very relevant as the psychological impact of the mother's absence on the children appeared to be a prevailing worry for many participants. To diffuse this, they set out to be a consistent and secure attachment figure in their children's lives and do so through transcending their own ego, needs and aspirations. They sought to limit anticipated or actual psychological difficulties in their children in very similar ways such as keeping the mother present (including fostering a relationship with her), and seeking (non-psychological) support (both formal, and informal), and with some over-compensating or adopting a very relaxed approach with their children. Regardless of the gender of the child, all participants encouraged open and honest communication. Learning to express themselves in different contexts was therefore encouraged in both their girls and their boys; actually, they highlight the importance of socialising their children, for example, to be happy, respectful of others and independent, with the end goal being to help them become healthy adults (see section 5.9). Unlike previous findings that have suggested that fathers' styles of parenting are less affectionate and stricter than those in both dual parent households and single mother households (e.g. Dufur et al., 2010), the fathers in this study emphasised warmth, emotional expression and support, as well as, teaching life lessons such as 'respect for others' (P3), 'independence' (P6) and a strong 'moral compass' (P5).

In this sense, lone fathers not only transgress their own internalised hegemonic masculinities, but also transcend them. This mirrors an important theme in the literature concerning the transition to lone fatherhood that involves a need to increase patience, learn new forms of communication and set personal mental decisions on childrearing (e.g. Coles 2002, 2009; Hamer & Marchiorio 2002), as well as concerning the consensus that it is the quality of parenting that is of primary importance and not the gender or sexuality of the caregiver (e.g. Lamb, 1987; Fox, 2002; Tasker, 2005). It further highlights the importance of the dialectic between affiliation and autonomy (Grossman, 1984) that emphasises negotiating commitments to self and to others.

6.2.3 Experiencing and understanding help-seeking

Help-seeking as a method to manage their emotional well-being was experienced by three participants. Interestingly, two of the participants were those in the first pattern, who reported struggling with depression. Greif (1987) discussed that this was because of accepting the long-term possibility of care, fostering the ex-spouse's involvement with the children and fears about losing custody. As mentioned earlier, the participants in this pattern struggled with losing a traditional family ideal. For them, professional help-seeking was a way to promote change in their motivations and self-concepts (Heubeck et al., 1986); in contrast to earlier findings (e.g. Greif, 1987; Guttman, 1989), the fathers' own emotions did not appear to interfere with their parenting roles and feelings toward their children. For instance, P6 explains how he coped well with the children but he did not manage as well with himself because of 'not being able to escape from his situation', which reflects findings from earlier studies that report greater emotional distress in this group of fathers (O'Brien, 1980; Fox, 2002), in light of having very little time to deal with their own feelings and emotions. Only P1, who was a non-resident father before lone fatherhood, reported how his feelings of anger and rage impacted on his relationship with his children for a short while, a behaviour he described as 'unreasonable'. Nonetheless, he sought psychological support because he was able to differentiate between his own emotions and the reality of his children's emotional needs.

This raises question about the role that counselling can have for lone fathers. As Addis & Mahalik (2003) suggest, what individual men perceive as central to the self could be a function of both dominant masculinity norms and the way masculinity is constructed in specific help-seeking contexts. For example, P1, who seemed to conform to the norm of emotional stoicism and self-reliance at the initial stages of the transition, might have felt that seeking help for emotional difficulties was a threat to his sense of self; when he was unable to resolve the problem on his own, however, he accepted help and described his choice as one of taking control of his emotions for his children's sake, and 'fixing the problem'. In doing so, he simultaneously supports the norm of emotional control while seeking help and constructing masculinity as a competition with one's emotional self. It might also suggest that P1 actually needed quicker access to emotional and practical support at the initial stages of the transition process. This was echoed by other participants who described long-waiting lists and basically being left to their 'own devices' (P3) by health care professionals in the first 7- 9 months post-transition. In fact, P3 explicitly said that he was rejected for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) because of the complexity of his difficulties. This reflects what

some family therapists suggested over three decades ago about psychological therapists needing to have specific training to deal effectively in therapy with the multi-dimensional difficulties lone fathers present (e.g., Zuk, 1980).

Whether or not the men in this study experienced professional help-seeking, they made some crucial recommendations about changes needed in the context of seeing self as the expert. This is particularly enlightening as studies of gender as a correlate of help-seeking are based primarily on female only populations and inferences are then drawn about men and help-seeking (Stanley & Wise, 1993). This resonates with the narratives of, for instance, P3 & P5, where they discuss a better awareness and understanding of lone father families and related mental health risks. The accounts from most men in this study reveal a strong need to develop more father-specific support interventions, for the purpose of tackling the issue of social isolation amongst men. Indeed, Breiding-Buss (2000) reported that many lone fathers in primary caregiver positions experience a sense of isolation and the feeling prevails that the services available to parents and children are not intended for males. Actually, by seeing themselves as experts, participants often highlighted the need for more favourable father-oriented inclusion initiatives and facilities across different professional and structural settings.

Participants also touched upon help-seeking barriers such as negative experiences or perceptions of services and practical barriers such as access and time. For P3, it was more the knowledge of help-seeking processes that influenced his experience. Other participants spoke about the wrong type of support such the need for psychological support to be geared toward building mental resilience and tackling the issue of social isolation in the lone father population, as opposed to traditional psychotherapy that is geared towards expressing feelings. In line with Wolf's et al. (2010) qualitative study, some participants explained that *"a lot of single dads they struggle and they don't know what to do or what steps to take"* (P3), thus, suggesting that practical (e.g. help with childcare/guidance/advice) might be better than emotional support, especially at the initial stages of the transition.

6.3 Re-inscribing fatherhood (while simultaneously reflecting on gender and masculinities)

Participants' accounts echo the voices of several studies that found that men who have sole custody of their children can be as nurturing and caring as mothers (e.g. Risman, 1986; Greif, 1992; Coltrane, 1996). Indeed, the notion of protecting in both the context of prioritising the children's needs and in the context of mother's absence was quite salient (see section 5.9). As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study suggest that it is the quality of

parenting that is of primary importance and not the gender of the caregiver; in other words, men can be good quality parents and the relationship that participants had with their children appeared to envelope their entire lived experience. Indeed, the process of self-realisation and transformation for most participants started as soon as they became a parent (and still partnered), whereas for the non-resident fathers, it started when they became a lone father.

The process of self-realisation and transformation is evident in how all participants reconstructed the meanings of work, home and social life as soon as they became a parent and a lone father. The participants who became parents when they were partnered used narratives, such as 'being a man of leisure' (P3), before transition to fatherhood. However, as soon as they were partnered and became parents, they referred to doing the right thing by prioritising and providing for their family unit. P1 and P4, who were non-resident fathers, experienced a 'massive change' (P1) in relation to dealing with new roles, such as domestic and caregiving , as well as relinquishing successful businesses or careers as soon as they became lone fathers. Nonetheless, most men maintained close links to paid work, even when they left employment to care for their children, such as 'coming up with schemes and plans just to try and make a few extra quid' (P5), retaining a connection to traditionally masculine sources of identity, and supporting research that argues that fathers' 'moral' responsibilities as carers and earners might be framed and experienced differently to mothers. Many participants also reported experiencing changes in their social lives, such as leaning more 'towards more things caring around children' (P1). These findings demonstrate complex intersections between home, work, community, and masculinity (Doucet, 2004).

Also, the men in this study do not reproduce or challenge hegemonic masculinity, as illustrated in, for example, the ways they manage their emotions, as well as in their determination to defend themselves as men and as fathers and to view themselves as 'capable' as mothers (see section 5.8.1); thus, not distinguishing themselves as mothers, as such. As Doucet (2004) mentions, they create instead new forms of masculinity. They demonstrate through their relationship with the children that it is possible to integrate feminine qualities into male identity without actually compromising masculinity. For instance, P5 described how his nature changed to one that is 'more caring' and 'less individualistic', and P1 described the development of a 'softer side', processes of personal and social re-adjustment and echoing feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives that are more aligned with woman's social positioning (Gilligan, 1993; Friedman, 2000). Some participants refer to being mother and father in their caring responsibility and practice, re-visioning masculine care to include some aspects of femininities. Most fathers also

mentioned how being a lone parent is hard, and from this place, they are experiencing the significance of caring work. Staying attuned to their children's practical and emotional needs represents lone fathers' sensitivity to their needs for protection that is fundamental to attachment (George & Solomon, 1996), countering the position of mothers as natural carers of children- that is, as caring and protecting on the basis of this biological instinct. This adds a unique dimension to their self-transformation and self-realisation, resonating with participants' understanding their relationship with the children as transcending everything else and as something a parent does (regardless of the gender of the primary caregiver). The participants in this study, therefore, provide 'evidence that masculinities do change and they are created in specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed' (Connell, 2000: 13-14).

Participants' accounts about their situational context before transition to lone fatherhood also provide evidence that in any given social setting and at any one time, men can re-inscribe fatherhood and associated masculinities in different ways (Frosh, 1997; Frosh et al., 2005). Where mothers used to be always considered 'naturally' caring and nurturing, there has been a change in the social and cultural expectations of mothers and the role that mothers actually are taking up after a separation is diversifying with that change. For instance, representing the second pattern, men who were a non-resident father, now also become the primary carer at a later stage. In this path towards lone fatherhood, it becomes clear that mothers sometimes actually feel unable to protect and to nurture their children. Ruddick (1990) suggests that maternal work is based on the perception of the needs of the child instead of her own role or practise; herein, 'mothering' as a practise is work that goes beyond biology and gender, involving an active commitment to protect and to nurture. In that light, 'mothering' work can be carried out by both men and women. This is consistent with the idea that some fathers are 'caring for' as an actual activity rather than a 'projected capacity' (Smart, 1991: 494). Since the fathers in this study are committed to these goals and actively protect, nurture and care for their children, arguably they are 'mothering'; thus, lone fatherhood appears to convey a complex set of meanings that breaks away from traditional, prescriptive roles.

The men in the third pattern who become lone fathers and keep the children were victims of domestic violence. There were the unexpected pressures before transition to lone fatherhood that made them feel overwhelmed, such as balancing work and family life, being fully involved in childcare and the domestic setting, but they also experience their partners' frequent physical abuse. P2 and P5 provide evidence that the experience of masculinity is far

from uniform and, as Connell (2000) states 'masculinities are not fixed' and are not 'homogenous, simple states of being', but are 'often in tension, within and without' and that 'such tensions are important sources of change' (p. 13). For example, P5 described how the abuse he endured became his 'sense of normality' and how instead he carried on providing for his family. Both P2 and P5 only felt entitled to escape when the mothers' threatened to turn their violent behaviour toward the children. Their perceived availability of resources (e.g. having nowhere else to go) further affected these men's decision to leave. Clearly, there is much to be learnt about how masculinity and fathering is negotiated in these circumstances but, what is evident is that their stories do not reflect subordinate or hegemonic masculinities as such, but rather they emphasise processes of 'internal complexity and contradiction' (Connell, 2000: 13), and a 'complex intertwining of acculturation and personal biography' (Lupton & Barclay, 1997:151).

6.4 The importance and implications of the findings

This study reveals that the transition to lone fatherhood after separation or divorce occurs from a variety of positions and in different ways. This supports the notion the lone fathers after divorce or separation are not a homogeneous group. For instance, the style in which participants' lone fatherhood situation arose created new and diverse practical and emotional complexities in their transition to primary carer. This indicates that the expansion of lone fatherhood literature in the UK that explores lone fathers after separation or divorce is required as there appears to be complex and diverse realities of lone male parenting and, as Amatto (2000) suggests, perhaps the most impactful change in current family life and in the context of its implications is the increase in the rate of divorce or separation.

Consistent with existing research on lone fatherhood (e.g. Schindler and Coley, 2006; Coles, 2002, 2009; Connelly, 2004; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Roy, 1999; Greif, 1995; Smith & Smith, 1981), the narratives and identities of the participants in this qualitative study stand to contribute to the literature on gender and masculinity in society and the ways in which these can be questioned, changed and re-inscribed for future generations. Although balancing daily life and schedules together with feeling the weight of role and responsibility to be the sole provider of the family was a challenge for all of these fathers, they unequivocally put their children's needs before their own. Consequently, most participants experienced changes and losses in their employment situation, resulting in financial pressures, as well as faced practical and social limitations. Participants' accounts suggest that for lone fatherhood to succeed, and for men to cope with the weight of role and responsibility to be the sole provider and caregiver of the family, it is important that policies address the gendered nature

of parenthood while also provide the 'right' support at the 'right' time for the transitions men raising children alone are facing.

Indeed, being a lone father outside of social and culture norms of masculinity and fatherhood contributed to feelings of injustice, exclusion and isolation. The fathers in this study were acutely aware of traditional stereotypes and generalisations concerning men and masculinity. For instance, participants talked about their disbelief in why notions of maternal care, whether essentialist or other, are still maintained in the legal and social care system (namely around residence, contact/child maintenance after relationship breakdowns and in child care settings) as opposed to moving with the reality of changing family forms. These feelings of isolation and exclusion were also grounded in institutional organisations around gendered norms such as in schools, building facilities and on-line parent groups. This type of research can, therefore, help promote social acceptance of these fathers, as well as dismantle systematic gendered roles of parenting as a barrier to their success with full-time parenting. The fathers in this study, although struggled to juggle multiple tasks and roles, were willing and able to adapt to them. Actually, by seeing themselves as experts, participants often highlighted the need for more favourable father-oriented inclusion initiatives and facilities across different professional and structural settings.

Participants often spoke about the tendency of the more 'official' external influences, such as government agencies, to be biased towards supporting and favouring the needs of the mother. Thus, counselling psychologists could be involved in the provision of information and training for other professionals across different settings in how to best listen, understand and discuss the challenges that this population of fathers face in order to provide the right type of support. Though producing more research and the dissemination of findings, counselling psychologists could provide knowledge and expertise 'freely to all who need and can use them' (Miller, 1969:1074). Similarly, and in line with participants' accounts of not knowing any other lone fathers, feeling isolated and excluded from community groups, as well as not having peers to share their experiences with, more public research and media coverage might increase the visibility and normalisation of other lone father families in the UK.

As the style in which the lone fatherhood situation occurred varied amongst the participants, research that places more emphasis on the different patterns of separation could contribute towards a better understanding of lone fathers emotional experiences. This study has explored and found useful and unique information on the group of lone fathers from the first

pattern and how they might benefit from initial emotional support to work through their own feelings of loss and struggle to break away from what is considered the 'norm' in relation to traditional family contexts. Within the clinical literature, there is very little knowledge of the consequences of motherless families, as is the case in this study, on child development. Yet, this is very relevant as the psychological impact of the mother's absence on the children was a real worry for the participants. There is an assumption that all mothers should be able to be caring and nurturing; thus, indirectly framing maternal desire and ability to provide protection as 'natural' processes in women. Integrating research into practice may lead to the development of interventions that account for sensitivity to the child's needs for protection that is fundamental to attachment, rather than working on to the assumption that mothers do instinctively know how to mother. Therefore, further unpacking a father's influence on child attachment development, which may be more observable in fathers who have a central caregiving role, could have important clinical implications.

This study has provided insight into gender and help-seeking, as well as what constitutes not only 'the right type of support", but also "support at the right time", for this population of fathers. This resonates with the narratives of, for instance, P3 & P5, where they discuss a better awareness and understanding of lone father families and related mental health risks. This research suggests a lack of gender-inclusive support and indicates a need for psychological support to be geared towards building mental and emotional resilience and address the issue of social isolation in the lone father population. Since the protective, social and role model function of the social network function was addressed by some participants, and is also reflected in the broader literature on men's help-seeking (e.g. Tucker, 1995), a model or intervention that facilitates constructive and supportive social connections might contribute to more gendered and father-specific forms of intervention. Thus, there is scope for further work which examines subjective experiences of lone fathers and help-seeking as more qualitative research might provide more insight and information about how to best support lone fathers at service level and about the meaning lone fathers attribute to the term 'support' (and how they might consider it helpful).

Finally, this research emphasises the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of existing and potential family forms and therefore highlights that a gender-blind approach might be better. In social theory, psychoanalytical ideas refer to a 'crisis in masculinity' in terms of a conflict in gender roles (e.g. Minsky, 1995; Lacan, 2004). Whitehead (2002) suggests that the crisis in masculinity is an illusion limited to academic journals and Heartfield (2002) describes it as an exaggeration of the differences between men and women. The pluralistic nature of

counselling psychology might be able to add lone fathers' voices to these differing perspectives, slowly exerting influence both theoretically, socially and politically. Therefore, implications for policy can be addressing areas that are real issues in fathers' lives and introducing signs of change in the conduct and culture of fathering while also working towards de-gendering parenting.

6.5 Strengths, limitations and improvements

Findings arose from how I interacted with and interpreted comparisons and emerging analyses. The choice of categories and sub-categories reflects a constructivist process and it is important to recognise that other researchers might have selected a different methodology to work with the same data. As I did not set out to construct theory generalizable across all contexts, I feel that I achieved my task of developing an explanatory model of best fit that captures the full depth of the data on which it is based. In fact, this explanatory model can be seen as providing constructs that represent, what Elder-Vass (2012) might call, 'tendencies' in the lone fatherhood phenomenon that might also be more broadly shared.

Nevertheless, this study recognises that exploring topics of a sensitive nature comes with its disadvantages, and it is important to address the limitations. First, all participants in the research were white British. This inevitably means that the sample does not represent culturally diverse experiences and views. Similarly, all participants were biological fathers of the children. Although the intention was to recruit from a broader range of male care patterns, as well as cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, locating lone fathers for this study proved to be quite difficult. Consequently, participants came from the target population that was available at the time and who were willing to take part (i.e. opportunity sampling). Nonetheless, the very process of choosing to take part as research participants might mean that they have some knowledge to offer, a perspective supported by the findings that showing a position of expertise enabled the participants to elicit a better understanding of the lone fatherhood phenomenon post-separation or divorce. However, the difficulty locating participants who are willing to take part might also reflect other lone fatherhood issues, such as a reluctance of men to talk about the research topic (and with a female researcher) because it might expose vulnerabilities, and out of fear that they might be scrutinised or judged.

In future research, the method of recruitment, the style of advertisement and the focus (as well as language) of the research questions might be worth re-evaluating as this study would have undoubtedly benefited from a wider demographic. The use of different methods could

enable the implications of these findings to be examined in different contexts and from different perspectives. Researchers might want to consider using focus groups, case studies and triangulation of data (Cohen and Manion, 2000) in order to compare and possibly strengthen the current findings that one might describe as tentative-based given the small sample size and the use of the abbreviated version of GT. An alternative might be the use of mixed methods to collect data on the same topic at different times and at different places, which can also involve different data sources, samples and theoretical approaches. As Coles (2009) highlights, research of the current lone father's overall experience is lacking, in particular in relation to the inclusion of a more generic population, more variation of exploring the effects of class status, race, sexual orientation (e.g. gay fathers) and family structure (e.g. adoptive and biological fathers). Therefore, further refinement is needed within the lone father literature itself, which could be quite useful for scholars, policy makers and practitioners. For example, quantitative methods could enable a large enough number of respondents to make generalisations and to control for factors that qualitative research could not capture, whereas qualitative methods could focus in depth on the experience as well as expand to specific sub-groups. This could enable more comprehensive data to be obtained, more lone fathers to be located and to engage, as well as more insight to be generated and different dimensions of the lone fatherhood phenomenon to be captured.

6.6 Suggestions for future research

It becomes clear in this study that the fathers successfully succeed in their parenting role and practice; however, as P3 points out, 'a lot of [lone fathers] struggle and they don't know what to do or what steps to take'. In this study various issues came up, then, that requested further research. For instance, when thinking of professional (clinical and other) practice, research that specifically examines the subjective experiences of lone fathers in relation to their help-seeking, as well as an exploration of the role that gender (stereotypes) play in the way that practitioners view lone fathers, could enable a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that the men and support services experience.

The lone fathers in this study 'did fathering' in different styles. Though this research did shine some light thereon, it might be helpful to further explore the different patterns of separation and paths to becoming a lone father to increase the understanding of, first, lone fathers' emotional and practical experiences through different stages of the transition process and, second, of their 'fathering' (and 'mothering') style and, last, the impact this has on their children. More longitudinal data would address this better.

This study suggests that lone fathers might be changing traditional practices of and social and cultural norms around fatherhood and, as such, masculinity and more research into changing gender role attitudes and behaviours of lone fathers would be welcomed. Therefore, it would also be interesting to explore other forms of (lone) fatherhood that challenge ideas around 'traditional fathering', such as of (lone) gay fathers, to add more unique perspectives in de-gendering parenting, reconceptualising family and re-working masculine gender roles (Schacher et al., 2005).

Finally, the men in this study demonstrate a propensity to self-realise and self- transform. Thus, research that looks at what constitutes the process of self-realisation and self-transformation, particularly in the light of the idea and norms of (hegemonic/crisis in) masculinity, could be very useful as it might lead to new ways in which, first, fatherhood can move forward in an attempt to generate a theoretical model that surpasses existing models of fathers and fathering (lone or other) and, second, how masculinity can be reconceptualised in the light of the transformation in becoming and 'doing' lone fatherhood.

6.7 Conclusion

Participants' accounts demonstrate protection and a wholehearted investment in their children. For instance, the men in the current study make the transformations they do, engage with their day-to-day and also struggle with that, learn to adopt a strong child-centred approach in order to commit to their new role of lone parenting. Most importantly, this study not only challenges the prevalence of the heterosexual matrix that characterises the oedipal triad but it also points to alternative ways to view and do caregiving and attachment- and therefore interventions- that reflect current changing family patterns and practices.

6.8 Reflexivity

When I started the research process, I made a mental note not to go in maintaining the 'expectation of a straw man' (Greif, 1995). This was especially important as I had initial preconceived ideas about lone fathers struggling. However, bracketing out my own assumptions felt nearly impossible at the start of the interview process. I still vividly recall feeling frustrated and anxious when P2 was describing how everything was 'perfect' and how he was experiencing 'no difficulties at all'. Upon reflection, I think that my feelings of frustration stemmed from P2 not telling me what I thought then I wanted to hear, i.e. that he was struggling. P2 struggling meant that my study would possibly have more clinical relevance for both theory and practice. In fact, I kept a memo that his denial of difficulties might be a coping mechanism and consequently he might be under-reporting his difficulties

because I was a female researcher and a mother. Feeling out of my depth, I took some time away to make sense of my own assumptions. This action helped me maintain awareness of the possibility that my own study might either perpetuate gender stereotypes; or, in light of my initial assumptions of lone fathers struggling, I would want to fight against gender stereotypes. Since, I strived to 'qualify findings with statements of positioning and reflexivity' (Williams, 2015:22). This approach allowed me to unpack my own influences both in the context of the interview and during the analysis of the data (also see appendix 17); enabling me to embrace the possibility that the men could be both successful and also be a 'product' of their environment and socialisation as men, and in a context where hegemonic masculinity, although changing, hasn't disappeared yet. Thus, from a constructivist perspective and in the context of co-construction of meaning, my influence, as Pidgeon & Henwood (1998) address, must be acknowledged not only by myself but also by the reader as an inevitable part of the outcome.

This small-scale qualitative study has been a true learning experience that has resulted in viewing mothering and fathering roles and practices form a different (and less naïve) angle. I believe that gender should not really matter to the care of children and indeed the men in this study prove that they can and do take on care work. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge structural and socio-economic contexts as there is still resistance in the gendered divisions of domestic and childcare responsibilities, and as a result both men and women face differing pressures.

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Appendix 1

Recruitment Leaflet

Title: Exploring the social psychological processes of lone fatherhood- A Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach.

Researcher: Anna Hovris

 I am conducting a research study that aims to hear directly how lone fathers make sense of their experience and what becoming a lone father means to them. Little is known about how men understand their experience of becoming a lone father, how their experience has shaped their relationship with their children and the resources they use to address any potential difficulties they may or may not have.

In light of the limited available research literature on lone fatherhood, it is hoped that this study will raise key considerations in better understanding what it means to be a lone father and to create new understandings of lone fathers' relationship with their children.

Your involvement would require taking part in a one- hour interview conducted at a time and place that is convenient to you. Skype is also an option. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times throughout the study.

Participants will be required to speak English, be over 18 years of age, have full-time custody of a child or children, and be separated or divorced.

There is no obligation to take part in the study but if you are interested in participating, or have any questions about the study, please email or call me on the contact details listed below.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Anna Hovris

Tel:
E mail:

This research study has been approved by the London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Review Panel.

Appendix 2

London Metropolitan University Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

<u>Information Sheet</u>

Thank you for agreeing to receive some information about my research. My name is Anna Hovris and I am a trainee counselling psychologist at the London Metropolitan University. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which I am conducting under the supervision of Dr Athanasiadou-Lewis (Lecturer in Counselling Psychology). The aims of the study are to hear directly from lone fathers in order to offer insight into how they make sense of their experience and what it means to them. The results of the research will be written up as a dissertation and submitted as part of my examinations towards a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology.

This information sheet will help you decide whether or not you would like to participate in the study and what your participation will involve. If there is anything in this information sheet that is unclear or if you would like more information, please feel free to contact me using the contact details at the end of this form.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are a lone father and you have full-time custody of a child or children. I would like to hear from you if you feel comfortable discussing your experience. However, if you believe that talking about your experience of lone fatherhood will be too distressing or if you have recently been diagnosed with a mental health disorder that may affect your ability to talk about your experience as a lone father, then thank you for your interest in taking part in this research project but at this point in time it is considered that you would not be suitable to participate in this current project. If you are unsure about whether you are suitable or not I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this study. It is also a requirement that you speak and understand fluent English.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time before or during the interview process. All the data provided up to the point of withdrawal will also be withdrawn from the study.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part you will be invited to attend an individual interview. You

will also be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. It is anticipated that the interview will last between 1 and 2 hours. Arrangements will be made for interviews to take place at a time and place convenient to you. Some options include Skype, the local library or children's centres where I can arrange for a private room to be made available. Alternatively, I can interview you at your home address. However, in the event that the interview will be conducted at your home I will need to provide my supervisor with your name, the day, time and exact location of the interview. This is done in order to protect both research participant and the trainee researcher. Conducting the interview through Skype is also an option should this be of preference to you.

The individual interview will be audio-recorded so that the researcher can transcribe the information in order to analyse it. All data received in the interview will be anonymised when written up in the final report or potential research publication. Any specifying details that I disclose will be altered in the verbatim transcripts and research report in order to ensure anonymity.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

I hope that you will embrace the opportunity to talk about your experiences and, in light of the limited available literature on lone fatherhood, it is hoped that the information provided will raise key considerations in better understanding what it means to be a lone father and to create new understandings of lone fathers relationship with their children.

Additional information about taking part

If at any point during the interview you feel that you would like to withdraw from the study you will be free to do so. In the event that your participation will raise some concerns or difficulties that you would like additional support with, you will be provided with a list of support services that may be able to offer you help and advice. You will also be able to address any issues or concerns with myself or my supervisor on the contact details at the end of this form. You will also need to have childcare arrangements in place for the time of the interview as the interview process will require your full attention and focus. Similarly, if you have any more questions about the study or any issues that you would like to raise you can contact me on the details below.

Will my taking part in this study be confidential?

Direct quotes will be used in the write up of this research. Although direct quotes will be used, these will be anonymised and all identifying information will also be removed. The data will be stored securely and the researcher alone will have access to the data. When the data is transcribed all names will be changed so that you will not be identifiable from the transcripts. Following transcription, the audio-recordings will be destroyed. However, if you were to disclose a risk to yourself or another person, this information would need to be communicated to my supervisor and local authorities. I will always tell you first if I need to break confidentiality.

What will happen to the results of this study?

The results of the research will be written up as a dissertation and submitted as part of my Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Transcribed interview data will be anonymised. If you like a summary of the final report please circle the relevant part on the consent form.

What if I have a problem with the study?
Please contact the researcher or my supervisor (contact details below).

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and given favorable opinion by the London Metropolitan Research Ethics Committee.

What do I do if I want to take part in the study?

If you would like to take part in this study please contact me (Anna Hovris) to discuss the consent form and meeting up at a time and location convenient to you. This will also be an opportunity to ask any questions you feel may not have adequately been covered in this information sheet.

Contact Details:

Anna Hovris (Researcher)
Tel:
E mail:

Supervisor's name:
Address:
School of Psychology
Room T6-20, Tower Building
166-200 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB
Tel: 020 7133 2140
E mail:

Appendix 3

London Metropolitan University Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Consent form

Research Title: Exploring the social psychological processes of lone fatherhood: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach.

Researcher: Anna Hovris

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have them answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that participation may raise some concerns, difficulties or may touch upon sensitive or painful topics. I understand that appropriate measures will be put in place in the event that I feel distressed and that I am free to withdraw from the interview process at any time. A list of support services that may be able to offer help and advice will also be provided to me.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study up to four weeks post interview. I understand that as the analysis will begin shortly following the interview it will not be possible to withdraw from the project beyond four weeks post interview.

4. I understand that the interviews are confidential unless I disclose information suggesting that I or someone else may be at risk or harm. Direct quotes from the interview will be used in the write up of the research (or in a potential publication of this study) but these will be anonymised.

5. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded, and the tapes will be kept securely. The London Metropolitan University Research policy states that data generated in the course of the research must be kept securely in paper, electronic or other form, as appropriate. After the completion of a research project the University expects such data to be securely held for an appropriate period of time, usually ten years.

6.   I understand that any specifying details that I disclose will be altered in the verbatim transcripts and research report in order to ensure anonymity.

7.   I agree to recording, transcription, storage of the transcribed material and to a possible publication of findings.

8.   I have been offered a copy of the consent form for my perusal.

9.   I agree to take part in the above study.

I wish to be sent a summary of the research findings on completion of the study. Please circle

YES   NO

If you have indicated "yes" to the above question please provide details of where you would like the summary sent (i.e. email or address). Contact details:

Participant Name   Date   Signature

Researcher Name   Date   Signature

Appendix 4

London Metropolitan University Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Brief Demographic Information Sheet

These questions are just to provide me (**Anna Hovris**) with some background information about you. This will only be used to give an overall picture of the participant sample.

Age:

Employment status: Full Time Employed   ▭

                            Part Time Employed   ▭

                            Self- Employed   ▭

                            Unemployed   ▭

                            Other   ▭

Ethnic Background: ……………………………………….

Number of years being a lone father: ………………………….

Number of children: ………………………………

Gender of child: Child 1:

                          Child 2:

                          Child 3:

Age of child: Child 1:

                          Child 2:

                          Child 3:

Thank you very much

Appendix 5

London Metropolitan University Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

<u>Initial Interview Schedule</u>

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Before we proceed do you have any questions?

Begin recording

As you know I am interested in finding out about how men make sense of their experience of becoming a lone father and what it means to them. I would like to start by asking if you could just tell me a bit about how you first became interested in taking part in this research study…

Thank you… That's given me a really good understanding of your reasons for agreeing to participate. What I would like to do now is to find out more about yourself and the circumstances that led to lone parenthood?

Can you tell me in your own words what was it like for you to be a lone father?

Can you describe any feelings or emotions that you experienced?

Can you tell me about whether or not there have been any particular challenges or difficulties that you experienced? (*If any, how did you manage? Is there anything that you found helpful or unhelpful? Resources?*)

Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with your children?

(**<u>Prompts for questions above:</u>** *Would it be possible to tell me more about… how you felt/managed when… How you think that process works… why you think this … what was so important or useful about that experience for you… What did this mean to you…One of the things you've mentioned is how… Do you have any thoughts on why… how this happened…?*)

We're just coming towards the end of the interview. Before we finish I just wanted to ask you whether there is anything else you would like to add / say that you think is relevant…
(prompt- how things might change in the future/ how services might improve)
What is has been like for you to speak to me today and be involved in this research?

Thank you

Appendix 6

Interview Schedule Revised

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Before we proceed do you have any questions? Participants will be reminded to conceal all identifying details of any person whom they speak about.

Begin recording

As you know I am interested in finding out about how men make sense of their experience of becoming a lone father and what it means to them. I would like to start by asking, if you could just tell me a bit about how you first became interested in taking part in this research study…

Thank you… That's given me a really good understanding of your reasons for agreeing to participate. What I would like to do now is to find out more about yourself and the circumstances that led to lone parenthood?

Can you tell me in your own words what was it like for you to be a lone father? (What was going on in your mind?)

What was it like for you before transition to lone fatherhood compared to after transition to lone fatherhood? Previous participants have spoken about the transition being a massive change and some described it as a sense of relief. What are your thoughts?

Can you describe any feelings or emotions that you experienced? (Did those feelings change or evolve over time? For example, what feelings or emotions did you experience before becoming a lone father and after becoming a lone father? Previous participants spoke about managing their own feelings, how did you do that?)

Did your emotional/ psychological well-being change over time? (Before separation, at initial stages of transition and at later stages of transition)?

Can you tell me about whether or not there have been any particular challenges or difficulties that you experienced? (*If any, how did you manage? Is there anything that you found helpful or unhelpful? Resources?*) (Did you seek any type of help or support? Do you think there are any barriers to seeking help? Previous participants spoke about support services such as GPs being inaccessible to men compared to women and professionals not understanding the needs of men as single fathers (a particular participant described being left to his own devices even when he sought support); other participants spoke about being the right type of person to cope with lone fatherhood. What are your thoughts about this? What is you experience of help-seeking?)

Previous participants mentioned not knowing what help they need and needing direction from professionals? What are your thoughts about this? Did your own needs change over time? Or did the type of support you may have needed change over time?

Previous participants mentioned feeling that the system including support services treat them

differently to the way they treat women as single mothers? What are your thoughts about this? What are your thoughts about preconceptions still being present of the mother having exclusive rights to parenthood? Do you agree?

What are your thoughts about the idea of identity as being integral to men's behaviour today regarding fatherhood and what this means? (Does being the primary carer of your child or children goes against what is considered to be masculine or manly?) (Did your own up-bringing influence your father role?)

Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with your children? (Hopes & expectations?)

What was it like for the child or children?

Previous participants spoke about engaging with damage limitation, in relation to the absent mother and its potential impact on the child or children? Do you agree with this? If so, how did you do this?

What are your feelings towards the mother?

We're just coming towards the end of the interview. Before we finish I just wanted to ask you whether there is anything else you would like to add / say that you think is relevant… (e.g., how things might change in the future/ what might improve? What advice might you give to other single fathers?)
P4 suggested asking "If you could go back in time to your old self, what advice would you give yourself?"
Previous participants described lone fathers as a "rare breed"? Do you agree?

What is has been like for you to speak to me today and be involved in this research?

Prompts:
Would it be possible to tell me more about… how you felt/managed when… How you think that process works… why you think this … what was so important or useful about that experience for you… What did this mean to you…One of the things you've mentioned is how… Do you have any thoughts on why… how this happened…?)

Thank you

Appendix 7

London Metropolitan University Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

<u>Debriefing Form</u>

Lone Fatherhood Research Study

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in my research study. Your willingness to participate is very much appreciated. If you are interested in the findings of this study or similarly if you have any more questions about the study or any issues that you would like to raise you can contact me or my supervisor on the details below.

If your participation has raised any concerns or difficulties that you would like to discuss further I have included a list of support services on the contact sheet that may be able to offer you help and advice. Thank you again for taking part in my research study.

Researcher's name: Anna Hovris
Tel:
E mail:

Supervisor's name: Catherine Athanasiadou-Lewis
Address: Faculty of Life Sciences and Computing
School of Psychology
Room T6-20, Tower Building
166-200 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB
Tel: 020 7133 2140
E mail:

Thank you very much.

Appendix 8: Example of Initial Coding

Transcript 3

	Raw Data	Initial Coding
1	R: Basically first of all thank you for agreeing to participate and I wanted to ask before we start whether you had any questions?	
2	P: No I am happy for you to carry on	
3	R: Okay. Errm I just want you to tell me a bit about how you first became interested in taking part in this research study? What motivated you to take part in it?	
4	P: My mum saw it on the internet and she showed it to me and she said 'would you like to take part' and I said yeah if you get in touch with me then I will respond	Hearing of study indirectly
5	R: Oh okay fantastic. Do you feel that research is needed?	
6	P: Yeah it is	Expressing need for research
7	R: Why do you think it's needed?	
8	P: Because a lot of single dads they struggle and they don't know what to do or what steps to take	Expressing viewpoint; single dads struggling; single dads not knowing what to do
9	R: Right okay, okay. Errm, can you just tell me a bit more about yourself and the circumstances that led to you becoming a lone dad?	
10	P: Yeah, yeah. Errm I went to Thailand a fair few years ago	
11	R: Okay	
12	P: And I met my wife on holiday and I asked her if she would like to get married and we had a son. I brought my son and my wife to England and then, and then my wife she got her driving test, she got a job and as soon as she got a British passport she decided that she didn't want to be a mum or a wife and went on her way, and she had minimal contact with her son, she didn't do anything or she'd provide no money or anything like that for him so we just had to get by in any way, there was nothing else	Meeting wife on holiday Having son Settling in England; wife reorganising priorities; wife rejecting mother role; mother prioritising own needs; getting by in any way; *"there was nothing else"*
13	R: Oh okay. How long were you, how long were you married?	
14	P: Five years	
15	R: And when did she decide that she wanted to leave?	
16	P: When he was 6	Wife leaving when son was 6
17	R: Oh okay when he was six years old.	
18	P: Yeah	
19	R: Okay. Is she, is she, has she gone back to Thailand?	
20	P: No. I offered to pay her to go back but I don't know she wanted to stay here errm to do her own thing. She hangs around… Hello?	Expecting wife to go back to Thailand. Wife still hanging around
21	R: I am here P3	
22	P: She hangs with friends with no responsibilities and no you know with no responsibilities, with no children, and she should realise that her son should come first	Describing wife's irresponsible behaviours; expecting wife's priority to be son; *"her son should come first"*
23	R: Right okay	
24	P: Instead of doing it all myself. But I am not bothered about myself, it's just my son.	*"Instead of doing it all myself"* Not worrying about self; worrying about son; *"it's just my son"*
25	R: How has it been for your son?	
26	P: Well very, very hard at first, now he's okay. He actually wants his mum to come and she says 'no' like activities over the weekend for judo, he got a medal for judo, he got a full belt for judo, he got two football medals and he asked her twice to	Son struggling at first with absent mother Son wanting mom around

	attend and she said no so there are things there that she missed out on and you know you just get to the point where I'll never ask her to do… he asks her all the time to come to school or judo or swimming and she says no and he is just getting sick of asking her now. There's no problem in his mum attending all his activities but she decides not to	P3 encouraging relationship with son Mom rejecting relationship
27	R: Okay. How does that make you feel?	
28	P: It makes me feel a bit upset really and a bit angry because she is selfish you know. It's not (child')s fault, it's not my son's fault.	Feeling upset; feeling angry; believing mother is selfish. *"It's not my son's fault"*
29	R: Hmm hmm	
30	P: She's the one hanging around with her low life friends and she thinks she's 16 again and you know, you know and she's missing on her son growing up.	Disapproving of mother's lifestyle; expressing mother missing out; *"missing on her son growing up"*
31	R: Of course. How do you explain it to (child)?	
32	P: He asks straight away, he keeps asking his mum and she says 'no' so that's it he just takes it as a 'no'.	Mother continuously rejecting son; son accepting rejection
33	R: Okay, okay. Do you know in the last two years that you have been a single dad can you tell me in your own words what was it like for you to be a single dad?	
34	P: Yeah very hard, tough. You don't know where to turn, you're looking for people to help; you don't know who is going to help	Finding experience tough. Feeling lost; feeling helpless; seeking for support; not knowing who can help
35	R: Hmm hmm	
36	P: You know you struggle for work, you struggle for money. You don't know what the kids want sometimes, sometimes they want different things, they want anything … They've had a lot of help from other mums at school along the way. If it weren't for them I would struggle a lot more.	Struggling for work; struggling financially. Feeling uncertain/confused; not knowing what kids want Receiving support from other mums. Anticipating struggling more without their input
37	R: Okay. So talking to the mums at the school helped you?	
38	P: Yeah they helped me out a lot and looked after me and child.	Recognising help from other mothers
39	R: Errm what feelings have you experienced over the last two years?	
40	P: Feelings, upset feelings you know. He deserves a mum and she doesn't want to be a mum. And I deserve the wife I wanted. I don't want to be a single dad or a single parent.	Expressing upset feelings. Believing son deserves a mother; recognising mother's rejection of son. Believing he deserves *"the wife he wanted";* having sense of shattered expectations Not wanting to be a single parent; not fitting with own expectations/values
41	R: Hmm hmm	
42	P: You know she let down her husband and her son so I am upset about it	Feeling let down; Feeling upset
43	R: Of course. How do you cope	
44	(Interrupted by a phone call)	
45	R: How did you cope with those feelings? Like who did you have to talk to?	
46	P: I went to like CBT. You know CBT?	Seeking support to cope; showing willingness

47	R: Yes.	
48	P: Yeah he said it wouldn't work for me. I had too many problems, to come back when I've sorted my problems. No one was going to help me or give me help anyway. So I just got on with it, I put things at the back of my mind and got on with it on my own. I put my son first.	Being told CBT not suitable. Attributing decision to too many problems Predicting lack of support; accepting defeat Feeling forced to get on with things; managing emotions through putting things at the back of mind. Managing through prioritising son
49	(Phone ringing)	
50	R: Okay so you basically just got on with things	
51	P: Yeah	
52	R: The emotions you just packed them away?	
53	P: Yeah I just put them away and when I am on my own or whatever I get a little bit upset sometimes but I try to carry on	Managing emotions through putting them away; privately allowing self to get upset; trying to carry on
54	R: You know you said you had CBT and they said your problems were too complicated	
55	P: Yeah	
56	R: How do you mean too complicated?	
57	P: With me being depressed and with me looking after my son alone, my wife leaving me	Describing complexity of situation; being depressed; being a single father; wife leaving
58	R: Hmm hmm	
59	P: With me you know with his mum not being around and stuff like that. They said it was too much you know my wife claiming divorce and wanting load of money you know money that we haven't got and she already took money of what we already had	Interpreting why not suitable for therapy. Describing complexity of situation
60	R: Hmm hmm	
61	P: They said it was too much for me to handle so they couldn't help me because I wasn't getting any further and they weren't helping me. They said it's not until I've sorted some problems out errm you know they couldn't help me any further so	Implying therapy would be too overwhelming No further action
62	R: Did they not refer you somewhere else? Did they not sign post you?	
63	P: No, no. They said you have to try and do it yourself, try to sort things out because the CBT is not for me at the moment. They can't help me there.	Being left to own devices Being left without support
64	R: What would you have found helpful? You know you mentioned earlier that you suffered with depression and you were very upset. What do you think you would have found helpful at the time?	
65	P: If she came back and be a mum and not go out every night you know. You know she could have been around or helped even if she doesn't want to live with us but fair enough at least get out and be a mum to him, help me out with looking after him and maintaining my son	Imagining what would have been helpful; wishful thinking Wife coming back; wife being a mother; wife helping more with child care. Implying difficulty coping as single parent.
66	R: Of course	
67	P: You know it's our job as parents to look after them not just the one parent	Disclosing child-rearing values; believing both mother and father should care for child Conflict between belief and reality
68	R: Hmm hmm. In terms of the health care professionals how could they have been	

	more useful?	
69	P: I don't know because it's their job, they should know… You don't know what you need or what help you need, it's their job to try and find out and give direction	Expecting health professionals to know what help he needed; Not knowing what help he needs; relying on health care professionals *"to find out and give direction"*
70	R: Of course	
71	P: You know?	
72	R: Yeah of course. And you also mentioned that you just got on with things errm how did you do that like when you woke up in the morning?	
73	P: It took me time to get up, I had to set my alarm clock an hour or so before I wanted to get up so I'd lie in bed. I just didn't want to get out of bed	Difficulty getting up in the morning; feeling forced to wake up earlier. Not wanting to get out of bed; difficulty being motivated
74	R: Hmm	
75	P: When you get out of bed, you just have to get on with things, do things, do whatever you have to do because if you sit down you have the chance to think of things, you get upset and you start crying, and the children are there it affects them you know. So you know I just got up, got the house clean, took him to school, try to put things to the back… I just try to keep myself active	Concentrating on today; *"you just have to get on with things";* keeping busy; doing things; anticipating emotional risks of stopping; protecting son from seeing him upset. Managing through focusing on day's tasks; locking thoughts and feelings away; keeping active

Appendix 9

Example of focused coding

Participant	Raw Data	Initial Coding	Focused coding
	Q. What got you interested in taking part in this study?		
1	"Errm (…) Single dads are errm not so much the unsung heroes but we are just(…) If you are a single mum as a single parent and the government bends over backwards to help you. If you are a single dad they are not interested… They are not interested in any of it at all"	Experiencing single dads almost like unsung heroes; 'being just'; implying doing great but receiving little recognition. Expressing differential treatment	Feeling overlooked Feeling injustice in relation to differential treatment of single mothers and fathers
2	"To just talk."	Sharing experience *"To just talk"*	Feeling the need to talk about experience
3	"Because a lot of single dads they struggle and they don't know what to do or what steps to take"	Believing that struggling is a prevalent feeling amongst a lot of single dads; "they don't know *what to do or what steps to take";* implying need for advice and guidance	Viewing lone fatherhood as operating outside cultural and social norms Feeling isolated from potential advice and support
4	"…no one really ever asks me about my experience and whether I am interested in talking about it"	Sharing experience with others as a rarity. Implying need to talk about it	Feeling the need to talk about experience
5	"I know there are very few lone fathers errm certainly who have looked after babies and very small children errm alone without significant support errm you know from, from females, from female care givers. So I am quite errm in that demographic"	Believing that lone fathers looking after babies and toddlers as a rare phenomenon Belonging in this demographic; implying small demographic	Viewing lone fatherhood as operating outside of cultural and social norms
	"…So I know more research needs to be done on this and I am happy to give the benefit of my experience to people who are interested in this subject."	Expressing need for more research. Building awareness by sharing own experience	Sharing own experience to build awareness
6	"[Silence]. Well I don't know	Silence reflecting not knowing; Taking part in	Feeling isolated in experience

Appendix 10	
Condensation process using colour system	Focussed codes
Feeling overlooked Feeling injustice in relation to differential treatment of single mothers and fathers Feeling the need to talk about experience Viewing lone fatherhood as operating outside cultural and social norms Feeling isolated from potential advice and support Sharing own experience to build awareness Feeling isolated in experience Making sense of circumstances that led to lone fatherhood Mother becoming unwell Withstanding mother's request to have sons back Feeling the more able parent Feeling financial relief fatherhood Experiencing ex-partner's drug abuse and violence Fearing ex-partner's violent behaviour towards daughter Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to protect Mother leaving without the child Not understanding wife's actions Feeling the weight of role and responsibility Worrying about son Embracing support from other mothers Feeling upset by mother's actions Dealing with shattered ideals and expectations Struggling with new life situation Struggling with juggling work and home life Feeling the weight of role and responsibility in context as a lone parent Feeling thankful of opportunity given to prioritise family Taking a transforming opportunity to prioritise family Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to look after more than one person Committing to newly created family Planning Having a structured routine Experiencing more positives than negatives Prioritising child Protecting Taking a transforming opportunity to learn and to act Struggling with finding balance between work and family life Leaving work Feeling financial strain Enduring Family support to deal with emotions Feeling ex-partner being out of the picture as superseding any other difficulties	1. Feeling overlooked Feeling isolated and excluded by virtue of gender and lone parent status Feeling injustice in relation to differential treatment of single mothers and fathers Feeling the need to talk about experience Feeling that fathers are marginalised Viewing lone fatherhood as operating outside Feeling isolated from potential advice and support Feeling isolated in experience Feeling alone in experience Family set up as operating outside of cultural and social norms Feeling the need for validation Feeling the need for genuine empathy and understanding Struggling to talk about experience Feeling excluded by virtue of being a man and a father Feeling overlooked due to gender-centred expectations and biology Feeling isolated from peers 2. Planning Having a structured routine Enduring Being more organised Taking control of situation Focusing on end-goal to prepare daughter for a healthy adulthood Functioning without emotional steer Fostering resilience Maintaining a sense of control Being self-reliant Having a clear focus Having a focus to get through day Implementing changes to adopt to new life Stripping away non-essentials 3. Feeling upset by mother's actions Not understanding ex-wife's actions Making sense of children's distress Making sense of children's distress with attribution to age Understanding child's distress Understanding mother's actions Making sense of child's emotions Worrying about son Making sense of children's emotions in the context of mother's absence Rationalising mother's actions

Feeling practised at caring for children	Managing children's emotions as well as own
Struggling with being a man as a lone parent	Anticipating potential psychological difficulties when children are older
Being more organised	Feeling scared of power of social services
Custody changing because the mother developed mental health problems	Fearing losing children
Children feeling distressed	Making sense of own emotions
Protecting and taking action	Attributing child's coping to age
Dealing with unplanned pregnancy	
Making sense of self as homogeneous male before parenthood	4.
Feeling trapped in relationship	Making sense of circumstances that led to lone fatherhood
Self-transforming	Struggling before transition
Putting family first	Experiencing ex-partner's drug abuse and violence
Ex-partner feeling unable to cope with new baby	Mother becoming unwell
Meeting child's needs from start of parenthood	Mother leaving without the child
Dealing with ex partner's alcohol abuse and angry outbursts	Fearing ex-partner's violent behaviour towards daughter
Experiencing a loss of freedom	Fearing ex-partner's violent behaviour towards daughter
Struggling with being the primary caregiver of teenagers	Wanting children and feeling the more able parent
Separating his masculine identity from his father role before transition to lone fatherhood	Leaving with daughter for good
Feeling overwhelmed with juggling work and family	Ex-partner abandoning mother role and leaving without children
Reducing working hours	Dealing with unplanned pregnancy
Struggling before transition	Protecting and taking action
Feeling alone in experience	Feeling trapped in relationship
Taking time to adjust	Custody changing because the mother developed mental health problems
Committing	Children feeling distressed
Adjusting to his reality	Dealing with ex partner's alcohol abuse and angry outbursts
Fearing ex-partner's violent behaviour towards daughter	Being just a provider of money before
Feeling the weight of responsibility to protect and to act	Ex-partner feeling unable to cope with new baby
Leaving with daughter for good	Feeling financial and relational strain before transition
Ex-partner abandoning mother role and leaving without children	Feeling a sense of relief when alone with the children
Feeling financial and relational strain before transition	Feeling the weight of responsibility to protect and to act
Feeling a sense of relief when alone with the children	
Functioning without emotional steer	5.
Feeling external pressures in his context as lone father	Feeling the weight of role and responsibility
Taking control of situation	Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to protect
Focusing on end-goal to prepare daughter for a healthy adulthood	Feeling the weight of role and responsibility in context as a lone parent
Using a logical and practical approach to emotions	Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to look after more than one person
Committing	Experiencing more positives than negatives
Experiencing fluctuation in emotions from anger to relief	Feeling external pressures in his context as lone father
Experiencing massive change in first year and a half of transition	Experiencing massive change (in first year and a half of transition)
Experiencing loss	Experiencing loss
Making sense of children's distress	Feeling weight of role and responsibility to provide
Making sense of children's distress with attribution to age	Feeling angry/struggling
Struggling with new caring identity	Experiencing depression
School as helpful	

Making sense of child's emotions

Experiencing no difficulties

Being aware of others assumptions and gender role stereotypes

Being a parent as superseding any difficulties

Using a relaxed approach with children

Living and working as a unit

Family set up as operating outside of cultural and social norms

Feeling lost and helpless

Having no knowledge of who can help

Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to provide

Making sense of children's emotions in the context of mother's absence

Keeping mother present

Counselling not fitting with personal coping style

Enduring

Transcending own ego

Experiencing life transformation

Transforming

Feeling angry/struggling

Fostering resilience

Experiencing depression

Struggling to talk about experience

Managing caregiver role well

Struggling with self

Worrying

Feeling the need to be in a relationship

Getting motivation through his children

Feeling unable to escape at initial stages

Feeling more in control as children got older

Ignoring own emotions

Becoming more caring of others

Transforming/re-discovering self

Becoming more family-oriented

Just coping/ enduring through right support network

Feeling better different as children got older

Maintaining a sense of control

Receiving some family support

Being self-reliant

Fostering relationship with female influence

Dealing with dashed ideal family set up

Struggling with lone parent status

Expecting health professionals to be able to help

Experiencing help-seeking

Being self-reliant to stay sane

Maintaining close support network as helpful

Feeling the need for validation

Time as a barrier to expanding support network

Imagining family support as helpful

Imagining fostering relationship with other parents as helpful

Experiencing help-seeking for struggling with depression related feelings

Feeling the need for instant support

Fostering a social life

Seeking help for son

Experiencing the wrong type of support

Struggling with self but not with caregiver role

Worrying

Feeling pressure of time

Dealing with dashed ideal family set up

Struggling with lone parent status

Feeling the biggest storm in the first 6-9 months

Feeling the calm after the initial storm

Feeling unable to escape at initial stages

Feeling more in control and better as children got older

Feeling the need to be in a relationship

New life not fitting in with previous life and friendships

6.

Family support to deal with emotions

Using a logical and practical approach to emotions

Ignoring own emotions

Getting motivation through children

Maintaining close support network

Fostering a social life

On-line support as helpful

Side-lining own emotions

Compartmentalising own emotions

Prioritising child to manage emotions

Suppressing own emotions

Expressing emotions privately

Using business and distraction to cope

Focusing inward as a risk

Talking with others

Doing the right thing as superseding any difficult emotions

Feeling able to provide as superseding any emotions

Using cognition to find solutions

Fostering mental resilience and close support network

Going on-line as emotional outlet

Feeling the weight and responsibility only allows for thought and action (not emotions)

Needing resilience and positive attitude to manage experience

Pushing for on-line social connections to maintain sense of control

7.

Struggling with new life situation

Struggling with juggling work and home life

Struggling with new caring identity

Struggling with being a man as a lone parent

Struggling with being the primary caregiver of teenagers

Struggling with finding balance between work and family life

Leaving work

Feeling financial strain

Dealing with shattered ideals and expectations

Feeling overwhelmed with juggling work and family

Reducing working hours

Feeling scared of power of social services
Fearing losing children
Understanding children's distress
Staying fully involved in children's lives
Feeling the need for genuine empathy and understanding
Experiencing help-seeking to escape reality
On-line support as helpful to foster friendships
Experiencing wrong type of support through NHS
Imagining seeking help to treat symptoms
Time as a barrier to seek help
Experiencing help-seeking to escape reality
Imagining seeking help to treat symptoms
Anticipating potential psychological difficulties when children are older
Keeping mother present
Staying emotionally attuned to children's needs
Rationalising mother's actions
Fostering relationship with mother but also worrying about negative influence on children
Being open and honest with children about absent mother
Reassuring children of mother's love
Being aware of importance of female influence in daughter's life
Not understanding mother's actions
Over-compensating to his own detriment
Experiencing instant change
Feeling a nine month storm before the calm
Managing children's emotions as well as own
Using cognition to find solutions
Prioritising children's emotions
Side-lining own emotions
Having a clear focus
Functioning without emotional steer to get to finish point
Compartmentalising own emotions
Fostering emotional resilience
Feeling the biggest storm in the first 6 months
Feeling the calm after the initial storm
Implementing changes to adopt to new life
Experiencing massive change
Feeling complete satisfaction when with children
Committing to being a parent
Seeking professional help
Being let down by health care professionals
Coping with own emotions by prioritising son
Suppressing own emotions
Expressing emotions privately
Struggling in the mornings more
Using business and distraction to cope
Focusing inward is a risk
Having a focus to get through day
Doing the right thing as superseding difficult emotions
Understanding ex-partner
Talking with others as helpful
Having a close connection of friends as helpful
Feeling pressure of time
Feeling able to provide as superseding any

Experiencing loss of freedom
Experiencing no difficulties
Feeling lost and helpless
Worrying about much needed new relationship by virtue of women's perceptions of lone parent status
Having no knowledge of who can help
Experiencing fluctuation in emotions from anger to relief
Experiencing change in different ways
Juggling different roles and pressures of time

8.
Making sense of self as homogeneous male before parenthood
Separating his masculine identity from his father role before transition to lone fatherhood
Being aware of others assumptions and gender role expectations
Experiencing no internal conflict with own masculinity
Not conforming with societal expectations even before parenthood
Identifying with being a single parent
Identifying with statement being a primary carer as going against what is considered masculine only at the initial stages
Not identifying with idea of hegemonic masculinity
Developing more female friendships
Identifying with being primary carer as going against what is considered to be manly when daughter was a baby
Experiencing shift in gender roles over time
Being both mother and father

9.
Withstanding mother's request to have sons back
Feeling the more able parent
Feeling financial relief
Feeling ex-partner being out of the picture as superseding any other difficulties
Feeling practised at caring for children
Meeting child's needs from start of parenthood
Feeling thankful of opportunity given to prioritise family

10.
School as helpful
Embracing support from other mothers
Family support as helpful
Time as a barrier to expanding support network
Imagining family support as helpful
Imagining fostering relationship with other parents as helpful
Having a close connection of friends as helpful

11.
Taking a transforming opportunity to prioritise family

difficult emotions
Not viewing gender as a barrier to seeking help
Feeling support is available
Accessibility as barrier to seeking support
Feeling support should be catered to individual needs
Finding accessible support on line
Stereotypical gender attitudes as barrier to seeking help
Fearing being judged/scrutinised if expressed vulnerabilities
Seeking emotional support through social connections
Feeling excluded by virtue of being a man and a father (daughter)
Defending fathers' rights
Identifying need to better awareness and inclusion
Pushing against social isolation as essential
Mental attitude of some men as a barrier to help-seeking (process of socialisation)
Mental attitude of all men should be to do everything to prioritise children's needs at all times
Stripping away non-essentials
Going on-line as emotional outlet as the day was about his child
Seeking therapy for daughter not self
Fostering mental resilience and close support network
Fostering support on the basis of individual needs
NHS as providing minuscule support
Feeling talking about feelings as wrong support for men
Feeling therapy should be about encouraging resilience
Feeling therapy should be geared towards more practical support
Feeling professional support should tackle social isolation amongst men
Recognising high suicide risk amongst men
Feeling talking therapy is wrong type of support for men (not for women)
Seeking help to foster change within self
Feeling asking for help as a man is wrong
Knowing the person as more important than being a man as primary caregiver
Feeling different treatment of men and women from GPs
Seeking help from GP only if can't past it (Internalised hegemonic masculinity)
Gender differences in help-seeking
Seeking help only when lost control of own emotions
Making sense of own emotions
Self-realising
Wanting to regain a sense of normality
Fixing mental problem
Understanding counselling experience
Counselling enabled him to talk
Needing different type of support at initial stages

Taking a transforming opportunity to learn and to act
Committing to newly created family
Becoming more caring of others
Committing
Prioritising child
Protecting
Self-transforming
Putting family first
Committing
Adjusting to new reality
Taking time to adjust
Being a parent as superseding any difficulties
Using a relaxed approach with children
Living and working as a unit
Transcending own ego
Transforming
Re-discovering self
Becoming more family-oriented
Becoming more caring
Enduring and Committing to being a parent
Self-realising
Transforming and self-realising since becoming a parent
Developing and learning
Not understanding mother's actions or parents who don't prioritise children
Prioritising and committing
Transforming and doing the right thing since becoming a parent

12.
Fostering relationship with children
Prioritising children's emotions
Over-compensating
Seeking professional help for child
Keeping mother present
Fostering relationship with mother
Fostering relationship with female influences
Being open and honest with children
Reassuring children of mother's love
Being aware of importance of female influence
Staying fully involved in children's lives
Staying emotionally attuned to children's needs
Feeling complete satisfaction when with children
Seeking therapy for daughter not self
Mental attitude of all men should be to do everything to prioritise children's needs at all times
Understanding relationship with mother
Believing one secure attachment is enough regardless of primary caregiver's gender
Being a parent is all that matters regardless of gender
Protecting child by enduring temporary emotional/behavioural storms
Anticipating child's fate if had relinquished role and responsibility
Worrying and protecting
Encouraging freedom of self-expression

Finding on-line support time-consuming
Feeling weight of role and responsibility too much to make time for additional commitments
New life not fitting in with previous life and friendships
Receiving polarised views from others
Feeling isolated from peers
Differentiating between weekend fathers and full time fathers in context of relationship with children
Receiving ambiguous responses from other women
Discounting others opinions
Enduring and committing to being a parent
Others perceiving primary caregiver role as unnatural
Being given credit for doing woman's work
Challenging stereotypical debates
Defending (lone) fathers
Feeling need for fusion of parenting gender gap
Being a parent is not about gender
Dealing with negative gendered-based assumptions
Using own experience to challenge stereotypical attitudes
Wishing for gender rules to move with time
Attributing stereotypical attitudes to process of socialisation
Juggling different roles and pressure of time
Developing and learning
Experiencing change in different ways
Transforming and self-realising since becoming a parent
Transforming and doing the right thing since becoming a parent
Not understanding mother's actions or parents who don't prioritise children
Prioritising and committing
Experiencing no internal conflict with own masculinity
Being just a provider of money before
Not conforming with societal expectations even before parenthood
Identifying with being a single parent
Identifying with statement being a primary carer as going against what is considered masculine only at the initial stages
Not identifying with idea of hegemonic masculinity
Developing more female friendships
Having to engage with being both mother and father
Identifying with being primary carer as going against what is considered to be manly when daughter was a baby
Experiencing shift in gender roles over time
Becoming both mother and father
Experiencing negative stereotypical attitudes
Feeling happy to challenge them
Wanting the children and feeling the more able

Experiencing no current emotional difficulties with children but anticipating them later
Having basic life expectations for children
Having a liberal approach with children
Doing everything with child
Maintaining open and honest relationship with children and accepting the good with the not so good
Experiencing a strong bond with daughter
Protecting and committing
Preparing children for a healthy adult life
Doing things together
Understanding own up-bringing
Feeling intimacy satisfaction through children regardless of others viewpoints
Having different expectations for own children
Fashioning a parental style different to own up-bringing
Learning parental style through own experience
Feeling own up-bringing influenced relationship with children
Transforming through children
Transferring own values to child
Feeling own up-bringing influenced own parental style
Fostering resilience and self-reliance in daughter
Feeling own up-bringing influenced parental style
Wishing more and better for child

13.
Experiencing wrong type of support through NHS
Imagining seeking help to treat symptoms
Time as a barrier to seek help
Experiencing help-seeking to escape reality
Imagining seeking help to treat symptoms
Experiencing help-seeking to escape reality
Experiencing the wrong type of support
Experiencing help-seeking for struggling with depression related feelings
Feeling the need for instant support
Expecting health professionals to be able to help
Experiencing help-seeking
Counselling not fitting with personal coping style
Seeking professional help
Being let down by health care professionals
Not viewing gender as a barrier to seeking help
Feeling support is available
Accessibility as barrier to seeking support
Feeling support should be catered to individual needs
Finding accessible support on line
Stereotypical gender attitudes as barrier to seeking help
Fearing being judged/scrutinised if expressed vulnerabilities
Seeking emotional support through social connections
Pushing against social isolation as essential

parent
Fostering relationship with mother
Attributing child's coping with absent mother to age
Believing one secure attachment is enough regardless of primary caregiver's gender
Being a parent is all that matters regardless of gender
Understanding relationship with children
Protecting child by enduring temporary emotional/behavioural storms
Anticipating child's fate if had relinquished role and responsibility
Worrying and protecting
Encouraging freedom of self-expression
Experiencing no current emotional difficulties with children but anticipating them later
Having basic life expectations for children
Having a liberal approach with children
Doing everything with child
Maintaining open and honest relationship with children and accepting the good with the not so good
Experiencing a strong bond with daughter
Protecting and committing
Preparing children for a healthy adult life
Doing things together
Understanding own up-bringing
Having different expectations for own children
Fashioning a parental style different to own up-bringing
Learning parental style through own experience
Feeling own up-bringing influenced relationship with children
Transforming through children
Transferring own values to child
Feeling own up-bringing influenced own parental style
Fostering resilience and self-reliance in daughter
Feeling own up-bringing influenced parental style
Wishing more and better for child
Defending lone fathers as ahead of the systemic game
Disapproving of court systems' societal assumptions that women should be the salient carers for children
Feeling need to fuse parental gender gap
Feeling the need for system to move on from assumption that caring for children as exclusively a mother's role.
Wishing for gender-neutral approach from courts post-separation or divorce
Striving for equality and more balance
Feeling the need for system/society to move on from assumption that caring for children as exclusively a mother's role
Feeling assumptions exacerbate gender role stereotypes and negative attitudes
Fathers' caring as having a significant degree of voluntarism.

Fostering support on the basis of individual needs
Mental attitude of some men as a barrier to help-seeking (process of socialisation)
NHS as providing minuscule support
Feeling talking about feelings as wrong support for men
Feeling the need for better access to support services
Feeling the need for support at the right time
Feeling therapy should be about encouraging resilience
Feeling therapy should be geared towards more practical support
Feeling professional support should tackle social isolation amongst men
Recognising high suicide risk amongst men
Feeling talking therapy is wrong type of support for men (not for women)
Seeking help to foster change within self
Feeling asking for help as a man is wrong
Knowing the person as more important than being a man as primary caregiver
Feeling different treatment of men and women from GPs
Seeking help from GP only if can't past it (Internalised hegemonic masculinity)
Gender differences in help-seeking
Wanting to regain a sense of normality
Fixing mental problem
Understanding counselling experience
Counselling enabled him to talk
Needing different type of support at initial stages
Finding on-line support time-consuming
Feeling weight of role and responsibility too much to make time for additional commitments
Seeking help only when lost control of own emotions
Mental attitude of some men as barrier to seeking help
Feeling the need for more practical support at the initial stages
Feeling the need for support services to adopt a gender-specific approach
Feeling the need for better awareness of lone fathers' needs and associated MH risks

14.
Others perceiving primary caregiver role as unnatural
Being given credit for doing woman's work
Challenging stereotypical debates
Differentiating between weekend fathers and full time fathers in context of relationship with children
Receiving ambiguous responses from other women
Discounting others opinions
Receiving polarised views from others
Dealing with negative gendered-based

Feeling isolated and excluded by virtue of gender and lone parent status	assumptions
Enduring and hoping	Using own experience to challenge stereotypical attitudes
Feeling that fathers are marginalised	Wishing for gender rules to move with time
Feeling overlooked due to gender-centred expectations and biology	Attributing stereotypical attitudes to process of socialisation
Encouraging a gender-neutral approach post-divorce or separation	Feeling need for fusion of parenting gender gap
Gender-centric expectations as hindering fathers' taking on full-time role	Being a parent is not about gender
	Experiencing negative stereotypical attitudes but happy to challenge them
Defending self and fathers as capable through own lived experience	Disapproving of court systems' societal assumptions that women should be the salient carers for children
Attributing men not being capable of parenting to individual factors	Feeling need to fuse parental gender gap
Being a parent is not about gender but about fostering a health relationship with children	Feeling the need for system to move on from assumption that caring for children as exclusively a mother's role.
Mental attitude of some men as barrier to seeking help	Wishing for gender-neutral approach from courts post-separation or divorce
Feeling the weight and responsibility only allows for thought and action (not emotions)	Striving for equality and more balance
Needing resilience to make it through experience	Feeling the need for system/society to move on from assumption that caring for children as exclusively a mother's role
Feeling the need to identify and to engage with struggling out of sight and out of mind lone fathers	Feeling assumptions exacerbate gender role stereotypes and negative attitudes
Feeling the need for more practical support at the initial stages	Fathers' caring as having a significant degree of voluntarism.
Feeling the need for support services to adopt a gender-specific approach	Encouraging a gender-neutral approach post-divorce or separation
Feeling the need for better awareness of lone fathers' needs and associated MH risks	Gender-centric expectations as hindering fathers' taking on full-time role
Wishing for new father-oriented inclusion initiatives	Attributing men not being capable of parenting to individual factors
Wishing for better awareness lone fathers across different settings	Being a parent is not about gender but about fostering a health relationship with children
Being a good parent as subject to individual variation	Feeling the need to identify and to engage with struggling out of sight and out of mind lone fathers
Wishing for lone fathers to stop being tainted by gender stereotypes	Wishing for new father-oriented inclusion initiatives
Feeling the need for better access to support services	Wishing for better awareness lone fathers across different settings
Feeling the need for support at the right time	Wishing against the odds
Wishing against the odds	Being a good parent as subject to individual variation
Fostering mental resilience and a positive attitude as essential to manage experience	Wishing for lone fathers to stop being tainted by gender stereotypes
Encouraging more support for lone fathers by virtue of own lived experience	
Pushing for on-line social connections to maintain sense of control	15.
	Sharing own experience to build awareness
Feeling intimacy satisfaction through children regardless of others viewpoints	Defending fathers' rights
Worrying about much needed new relationship by virtue of women's perceptions of lone parent status	Identifying need to better awareness and inclusion
	Defending lone fathers
	Defending lone fathers as ahead of the game
	Enduring and hoping
	Defending self and fathers as capable through own lived experience
	Encouraging more support for lone fathers by virtue of own lived experience

Appendix 11	Continuation of coding process
Example of process of condensing into categories and sub-categories	**Focussed Codes**
1Feeling injustice	Feeling injustice in relation to differential treatment of single mothers and fathers
2Feeling isolated and excluded	Feeling isolated and excluded by virtue of gender and lone parent status Feeling the need to talk about experience Feeling isolated from potential advice and support Having no knowledge of who can help Feeling isolated in experience Feeling alone in experience Feeling the need for validation Feeling the need for genuine empathy and understanding Struggling to talk about experience Feeling excluded by virtue of being a man and a father Feeling isolated from peers Feeling overlooked Feeling that fathers are marginalised Family set up as operating outside of cultural and social norms
2Managing self and life **1Enduring and Committing**	Planning Having a structured routine Being more organised Taking control of situation Focusing on end-goal to prepare daughter for a healthy adulthood Functioning without emotional steer Fostering resilience Maintaining a sense of control Being self-reliant Having a clear focus Having a focus to get through day Stripping away non-essentials Fostering mental resilience Feeling the weight and responsibility only allows for thought and action (not emotions) Needing resilience and positive attitude to manage experience Enduring Implementing changes to adopt to new life Committing to newly created family Committing Taking a transforming opportunity to prioritise family Taking a transforming opportunity to learn and to act Committing to newly created family Putting family first Enduring and Committing to being a parent Enduring and hoping
2Making sense of own emotions	Making sense of own emotions Feeling a sense of relief when alone with the children Feeling angry/struggling Worrying Feeling pressure of time Feeling unable to escape at initial stages Feeling more in control and better as children got older Feeling the need to be in a relationship Experiencing depression

	Experiencing more positives than negatives Doing the right thing as superseding any difficult emotions Feeling able to provide as superseding any emotions Experiencing no difficulties Worrying about much needed new relationship by virtue of women's perceptions of lone parent status Experiencing fluctuation in emotions from anger to relief Feeling lost and helpless Feeling financial relief Feeling ex-partner being out of the picture as superseding any other difficulties Feeling thankful of opportunity given to prioritise family Being a parent as superseding any difficulties
==2Understanding (or not) mother's actions==	Feeling upset by mother's actions Not understanding ex-wife's actions Rationalising mother's actions Understanding mother's actions Dealing with dashed ideal family set up Understanding relationship with mother
==3Making sense of children's emotions==	Making sense of children's distress Making sense of children's distress with attribution to age Understanding child's distress Making sense of child's emotions Worrying about son Making sense of children's emotions in the context of mother's absence Experiencing no current emotional difficulties with children but anticipating them later Anticipating potential psychological difficulties when children are older
1Making sense of situational context before pre-transition	Making sense of circumstances that led to lone fatherhood Struggling before transition Experiencing ex-partner's drug abuse and violence Mother becoming unwell Dealing with unplanned pregnancy Feeling trapped in relationship Custody changing because the mother developed mental health problems Dealing with ex partner's alcohol abuse and angry outbursts Being just a provider of money before Ex-partner feeling unable to cope with new baby Feeling financial and relational strain before transition
2Experiencing push factors and constraints	Fearing ex-partner's violent behaviour towards daughter Wanting children and feeling the more able parent Leaving with daughter for good Ex-partner abandoning mother role and leaving without children

	Protecting and taking action Children feeling distressed Feeling the weight of responsibility to protect and to act Withstanding mother's request to have sons back Feeling the more able parent
1Facing the weight of role and responsibility	Feeling the weight of role and responsibility Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to protect Feeling the weight of role and responsibility in context as a lone parent Feeling the weight of role and responsibility to look after more than one person Feeling weight of role and responsibility to provide Juggling different roles and pressures of time Feeling external pressures in his context as lone father Feeling weight of role and responsibility too much to make time for additional commitments
1Experiencing the weight of change and loss	Experiencing massive change (in first year and a half of transition) Experiencing loss Feeling the biggest storm (before the calm) in the first 6-9 months Leaving work Reducing working hours Experiencing loss of freedom Experiencing change in different ways

Appendix 12

Categories	Sub-categories
0. Transforming and self-realising	
1. Path towards becoming a lone father	1. Making sense of situational context 2. Experiencing push factors and constraints
3. Transitioning into a new family set up	1. Facing the weight and role of responsibilities 2. Sensing stirring of own emotions 3. Making sense of children's emotions
4. Being in the minority as a man and a father	1 Feeling injustice 2. Feeling isolated and excluded 3. Wishing not to be pigeonholed
2 Dealing with the complexity of gender roles and stereotyping	1. Processing own gender role attitudes and behaviours 2. Being subject to ambivalent stereotypical attitudes
3 Driving the experience forward	1. Enduring and committing 2. Integrating life and self-management abilities
4 Managing own emotions	1. Being steered by internalised gender norms and alternate Forms of support 2. Experiencing and understanding help-seeking
5 Seeing self as the expert	1. Defending lone fathers 2. Pushing for better awareness and inclusion 3 Pushing for the right type of support at the right time
6 Understanding relationship with children	1. Protecting in different contexts 2. Wanting more, and better for children 3 Re-defining sense of self and identity

Appendix 13

London Metropolitan University Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

<u>Case-based memo 9/04/2014</u>

P1 talks a lot about his frustration with an unjust custody system whereby he strongly believes that single mothers are favoured and considered to be the obvious caregiver of their children. On many occasions, P1 expresses his strong disapproval of how the system runs currently. Although he recognises some changes in more recent times, he also mentions falling into financial debt in the process. In fact, he believes that unless one has the financial means to fight for full custody of the children, it is otherwise futile. He labels single fathers as the "unsung hero". P1 also makes it very clear that paying maintenance is very expensive and stressful ("Always being held at ransom"). One of his motivations to fight for custody was his contempt of having to pay maintenance to a mother who he believes isn't up for the parental role. He stated that he was playing a "waiting game". (Sense of frustration; unjust treatment- single mothers versus single fathers; sense of mothers being favoured)

Battling systemic injustice- court beliefs, legal aid, CSA
Financial strain of fighting system
Mental strain of fighting system
Expression of disbelief; "incredulous"
Expression of own personal beliefs
Expression of how system should change
Minimal conviction
Choice to have children
At mercy of the system; helpless
Fighting system

On many occasions he describes the transition into lone parenthood as a "massive change" at all levels. His children became his priority. He sacrificed his work and social life to ensure the children's needs were met. P1 seems to function on autopilot mode to cope with the whole experience. He coped through maintaining structure and having a plan. In the first two years, he functioned on a day to day basis. His main aim was to get through the day. His emotional well-being did not appear to matter at that stage of the transition. As he says, his emotions went in his back pocket. Dealing with his emotions was almost a waste of time. He sought practical and immediate solutions. He was not prepared to talk or listen to anyone who wouldn't give him something tangible to work with. This was evident in his first contact with the GP in relation to his own mental and emotional well-being and CAMS in relation to the difficulties experienced by his youngest son. It was also evident in his choice not to become a member of Gingerbread. Unless others offered him what he needed he described them as useless. If he felt criticised he became very defensive. P1 appeared to have a good relationship with the children's school but it becomes clear in the transcript that this is because the school conforms to his ways and seems to praise and embrace what he does.

Further down the line, P1 realises that he needs to deal with his emotions as he begins to lose his temper and shout at the children. He saw his GP and he received medication and face to face therapy. P1 seems to be gentler in his views of the help he received. Perhaps at this stage he was ready for therapy; he was ready to talk.

He describes his experience as a "massive change" in his lifestyle, his priorities, his development of new skills strengths, interpersonally and professionally.

Risk taking
Making Choices/sacrificing/life scoping
Transition as a process- ever-changing
Trajectory characterised by stages; milestone changes
Emotional experiences: Doubt, negative and positive; unsettled; overwhelmed; depressed; powerless; fear; struggling; rage; anger; isolation. Emotional Battling/Emotional Deadening
Self-preservation
Intra-personal psychological processes
Inter-personal psychological processes
Gender and emotion
Readiness to seek support
Making choices in helping self; seeking help in his own terms
Pragmatic approach
Issue of time
Ego
Conformist approach
Criticising his 'attackers"; defence of attack before being attacked
Memo: Becomes rigid in his relations with self; children; support network and ex
Strategies changing over time
Reflecting/understanding self
Relationship with children

Memo 30/04/2016 [linked to theoretical sampling

Time in transition pre- and post- separation may be important in determining when a lone father engages with therapy. P1 only accepted and engaged with therapy some years after gaining full custody of children. It may be important to consider the long-term impact of emotional avoidance? But also it may indicate that there may be stages of types of support needed by single fathers. For instance, support at initial stages of transition may be different to support needed later in transition. It sounds like when his children were settled he was suddenly left with his own emotions and did not know what to do with them. Consequently, he "lost control", "flew off the handle", "shouted". P3 did seek support from his GP but was sent away as he was told that his problems were too complex at that point in time for therapy to work. P2 did not seek support. To ask more questions about understanding and experiencing help-seeking in later participants.

Exploring the social psychological processes of lone fatherhood after separation or divorce.

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London Metropolitan University,
School of Psychology,
Research Ethics Review Panel

I can confirm that the following project has received ethical approval to proceed:

Title: **Exploring the psychological processes of lone fatherhood: A Grounded Theory Approach.**
Student: **Anna Hovris**
Supervisor: **Dr. Marta Sant**

Ethical clearance to proceed has been granted providing that the study follows the ethical guidelines used by the School of Psychology and British Psychological Society, and incorporates any relevant changes required by the Research Ethics Review Panel. All participating organisations should provide formal consent allowing the student to collect data from their staff.

The researcher is also responsible for conducting the research in an ethically acceptable way, and should inform the ethics panel if there are any substantive changes to the project that could affect its ethical dimensions, and re-submit the proposal if it is deemed necessary.

Signed:

Date: 13/02/2014

Dr Chris Chandler
(Chair - School of Psychology Research Ethics Review Panel)
chandler@staff.londonmet.ac.uk

Appendix 15

London Metropolitan University Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Distress Protocol

This protocol has been devised to deal with the possibility that some participants may be-come distressed and/or agitated during their involvement in this research. There follows below a three step protocol detailing signs of distress that the researchers will look out for, as well as action to take at each stage. It is not expected that extreme distress will occur, or that the relevant action will become necessary. However it is included in the protocol, in case of emergencies where professionals cannot be reached in time.

Mild distress:

Signs to look out for:

1)   Tearfulness

2)   Voice becomes choked with emotion/ difficulty speaking

3)   Participant becomes distracted/ restless

Action to take:

1)   Ask participant if they are happy to continue

2)   Offer them time to pause and compose themselves

3)   Remind them they can stop at any time they wish if they become too distressed

Severe distress:

Signs to look out for:

1)   Uncontrolled crying/ wailing, inability to talk coherently

2)   Panic attack- e.g. hyperventilation, shaking, fear of impending heart attack

3)   Intrusive thoughts of the traumatic event- e.g. flashbacks

Action to take:

1)   The researcher will intervene to terminate the interview/experiment.

2)   The debrief will begin immediately

3)   Relaxation techniques will be suggested to regulate breathing/ reduce agitation

4)   The researcher will recognize participants' distress, and reassure that their experiences are normal reactions to abnormal events and that most people recover.

5)   If any unresolved issues arise during the interview, accept and validate their distress, but suggest that they discuss with mental health professionals and remind participants that this is not designed as a therapeutic interaction

6)   Details of counselling/therapeutic services available will be offered to participants

Extreme distress:

Signs to look out for:

1)   Severe agitation and possible verbal or physical aggression

2)   In very extreme cases- possible psychotic breakdown where the participant relives the traumatic incident and begins to lose touch with reality

Action to take:

1)   Maintain safety of participant and researcher

2)   If the researcher has concerns for the participant's or others' safety, he will inform them that he has a duty to inform any existing contacts they have with mental health services, such as a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) or their GP.

3)   If the researcher believes that either the participant or someone else is in immediate danger, then he will suggest that they present themselves to the local A&E Department and ask for the on-call psychiatric liaison team.

4)   If the participant is unwilling to seek immediate help and becomes violent, then the Police will be called and asked to use their powers under the Mental Health Act to detain someone and take them to a place of safety pending psychiatric assessment. (This last option would only be used in an extreme emergency)

(Chris Cocking, London Metropolitan University Nov 2008)

Appendix 16

London Metropolitan University Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Contact information for further support

Samaritans: (24 hour confidential national help line)

Website: www.samaritans.org

Help Line: 0845 790 9090

NHS Direct: National Health Service 24 hour helpline

Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

MIND: For advice relating to mental health

Website: www.mind.org.uk/help

National Line: 0300 123 3393

Relate: For stress with relationships

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Gingerbread: Single Parent Helpline

Website: www.gingerbread.org.uk

Free line: 0808 802 0925

Your GP can also provide support and offer advice.

Thank you very much

Appendix 17

Extracts of Reflexive Diary

Influence of literature review

It is necessary to address some crucial issues of reflexivity. In terms of the methodology of constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) argues that 'the intended purpose of delaying the literature review is to avoid importing preconceived ideas and imposing them on your work' (p. 165). As a Year 1 mandatory component of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology, I had to present a critical literature review before data collection; in other words, I was not able to follow the sequence as proposed by Charmaz. I now wonder how helpful or unhelpful bracketing out existing literature actually is. Burr (2003) highlights that it is impossible to bracket out experience; social constructivist and symbolic interactionist perspectives maintain that the world is seen through socially constructed ideas, symbols and language. This implies that data is not neutral, but is constructed within a social context which encompasses the existing literature. Despite an active attempt to delay re-visiting the literature review during data collection, I am not convinced the data would have reflected a more accurate representation of the participants' experience if I would have delayed the literature review. Additionally, participants' accounts were socially constructed through their interaction with the researcher. The early literature review therefore served more to refine constructed categories and sub-categories of meaning and action as opposed to influence the direction of the findings.

The interview process

I am aware of the importance of being careful of how I approached the interview process. For example, I often reflected on how being a woman and a mother raising my daughter in a two-parent household may influence the participants' reactions and perhaps what they believe they should say. Consequently, personal reflexivity encouraged me to think about the interviewer and interviewee relationship. Mathieson (1999) suggests a 'narrator-listener' role may be more helpful in strengthening rapport as opposed to an 'interviewer-participant' role that may increase barriers and hinder participant reactions to the interview process. I tried to nurture the relationship through being informal in the way I greeted the participants and placing emphasis on the fact that the participants were the experts and that my role was to listen and to understand their experiences. Emphasising this helped reduce the risk of social desirability bias, especially given my context as a female. The participants seemed to like my openness and generally felt appreciative that they were being given a voice. Indeed, participant 5 shared feeling happy to give the benefit of his experience to anyone who is interested in this subject and also disclosed that more research is needed.