

**SINGLE MOTHERS' VOICES IN THE 1990s: AN  
EXPLORATION OF ECONOMICS, CHOICES,  
AND RELATIONSHIPS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Female-headed households form an important group in North America. Unfortunately, many single mothers and their children are living at or below the poverty line, which means financial strain plays a prominent role in their lives. Being a single mother means making difficult choices on a daily basis because they are the sole breadwinners and child rearers in their families, and poverty only intensifies the constraints under which these choices are made. Single mothers' relationships with their children and their children's fathers are a significant part of their lives whether these relationships are positive or negative.**

**Ten single mothers were interviewed with open-ended questions concerning three areas: economics, choices, and relationships. These ten women were all living with their children and without a partner at the time of the interview. Some of the women came from diverse social locations. For example, one woman was First Nations, one was a lesbian, one was bi-sexual, one had a special needs daughter, and two women had mixed race children.**

**Single mothers generally enjoyed being the heads of their households, but financial and time constraints made being the sole breadwinner and child rearer very difficult. The participants were asked about the choices they made when they became pregnant and when they became single mothers. Some women became pregnant intentionally while others became pregnant unintentionally as a result of failed birth control. All participants chose to become single mothers because of problems in the relationship with the child's father. For some participants this choice was further constrained by an abusive partner or their own sexual orientation. Many of the participants and their children experienced discrimination based on their belonging to a lone-mother household. Inadequate child support payments as well as sporadic involvement by**

**the children's fathers contributed to the stress experienced by these single mothers. Additional constraints were experienced by the participants who were excluded from the dominant culture. These constraints further reduced these mothers' choices. The participants requested more beneficial social programs such as higher daycare subsidies, reliable child support payments, and consistent involvement of the children's fathers.**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Single parenthood (meaning lone parents with children under the age of 18 living at home) is on the rise in North America. In Canada, single parents have increased by 34% since 1981, totaling close to one million in 1991 (Statistics Canada 1992: 7). Similarly in the United States, single parenthood has increased from 3.8 million in 1970, to 10.5 million in 1992 (Gringlas & Weinraub 1995: 29). What is most intriguing about these statistics is that women overwhelmingly make up the majority of single parents. According to Statistics Canada, in 1991, single mothers represented 82% of all lone parents in Canada (Statistics Canada 1992: 7). From a different angle, single mothers headed 16% of *all* households with children in 1991 (Statistics Canada 1995: 18). The percentages are comparable and even greater in the United States where women were 86% of all lone parents and single mothers headed 31% of all households with children in 1994 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994: 1).

With numbers such as these, it is clear that single mothers form a large and important group of parents whose numbers may continue to increase in the future (Oppenheimer 1994). Therefore, it is beneficial to learn as much about female-headed families as possible for their own benefit as well as for society's benefit in general. That is, information about the lives of single mothers can be used as a tool to pressure Canadian and United States governments to adopt social policies that are beneficial to single mothers (Dooley, Finnie, Naylor, & Phipps 1995).

For this masters thesis research, I chose to focus on three aspects of single motherhood: economics/standard of living, choices around single motherhood, and single mothers' relationships with their children and their children's fathers. I chose these three topics because



they were important in single mothers' lives, and because the information may be useful in advocating for social change by and for single mothers. Economics, the most general topic, provided the material framework within which the single mothers experienced the choices they made, and still make. Furthermore, single mothers' economic situation provided a framework in which to understand their relationships with their children and children's fathers. Single mothers' choices were examined in order to explore the balance between agency and constraints single mothers experienced on a daily basis. These perceptions of choices and constraints served as a foreground to single mothers' relationships. Most specifically, I explored the agency and fathers constraints in single mothers' everyday relationships with their children and their children's.

I chose these three topics over other possible topics for various reasons. Economics was chosen because single mothers are poor. The more that is learned about their economic struggles, the easier it will be to provide programs to alleviate this. Economic strain is also the underlying theme to many of single mothers' other struggles such as lack of time and child care.

I explored the choices single mothers made because of my own personal experience being raised by a single mother. I remember people assuming that my mother had made one simple choice to leave my father, and therefore brought her financial struggles on herself. This could not have been further from the truth. Growing up with this type of attitude toward my mother propelled me to examine the circumstances in which single mothers became single mothers.

I chose single mothers' relationships with their children and ex-partners as my final topic because it was under researched. There are many fathers who are not providing child support or participating in their children's live, yet this information is not as well documented as it should

be. Being the child of a female-headed family, I was also curious if single mothers' children were thriving as well as I did in this type of family. Since the reassert surrounding single mothers' children is somewhat negative, I wanted to examine the inconsistencies between my experience and much of what is written about children raised by single mothers.

## ***ECONOMICS***

I examined single mothers' standard of living and their economic situation because statistical information revealed that many single mothers are unemployed and living in poverty with their children. In Canada, only 48% of single mothers were employed whereas 65% of married mothers (or mothers living with partners) were employed in 1993 (Statistics Canada 1994: 46). There is an even larger gap between single and married mothers with children under the age of 5. In 1993, 40% of single mothers with children under the age of 3 and 23% with children aged 3-5 were unemployed, compared with less than 10% for married mothers with children in each age group (Statistics Canada 1994: 47). As a result, in 1994, 71% of children from female-headed families lived at or below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), contrasted with only 16% of children from two-parent families (Statistics Canada 1997: 8).

Gary Bowen and his colleagues (1995) have found similarly disheartening statistics for the United States. In 1991, 45% of children in single-mother families were living in poverty compared with only 8% of children in two-parent families (Bowen, Desimone & McKay 1995: 116). Reasons for single mothers' lack of employment and poverty include lack of 'good' jobs and an abundance of part-time, low-paying service jobs with low benefits (Bowen et al., 1995; Lynn & Todoroff 1998). It appears as if North American society has reached an impasse with its

single mothers and their children. Single mothers are forced to collect welfare or attempt to survive on part-time pay. Many single mothers do work, yet the low pay they receive makes it difficult for them to stay above poverty levels. To make ends meet, a large number of single mothers must take on additional jobs that usually pay privately, or rely heavily on their own personal networks of family, friends, and communities (Edin & Lein 1996; Schein 1995). Not only is the job market unfavorable for single mothers, other factors contribute to single mothers' poverty (Schaffner-Goldberg & Kremen 1990; Mencher & Okongwu 1993). Single mothers in poverty often have less education. Many are high school dropouts and have poor school performances. Low levels of education and/or work experience put single mothers at high risk for needing public assistance. Once on assistance, they tend to use it repeatedly (Orthner & Neenan 1996; Schein 1995). Welfare programs should place a stronger focus on education, job training, time management, and parenting skills to further assist single mothers in their financial struggles (Fitchen 1995).

Being the sole breadwinner and child rearer also creates time pressures for single mothers (Anderson 1990; OECD 1993). They have less time to devote to their children and themselves because they have no partner with whom to share responsibilities (Hochschild 1997; Terry 1993). Thus a lack of time adds to the strain of a lack of money for most single mothers.

For most single mothers the worst part about being poor is not providing adequately for their children. For them, "the pain of poverty is what [their] children cannot have" (Schein 1995: 58). Poverty, lack of child support, and lack of government-funded programs are some reasons that single mothers have less money to spend on their families (DeLapp 1989; Harris 1993; McLanahan & Booth 1989). Many single mothers feel that poverty should not be a consequence of single motherhood (Buchanan 1995). For this thesis research, I explored my participants'

economic situation, discovered how they made ends meet, and opened up the dialogue on this issue with them. I wanted to hear their ideas about what could be done to improve their circumstances so they did not think they were powerless in this situation. My intention was to reveal social trends involving single mothers in order to expand the dialogue on solutions. Although single mothers have very little time on their hands, they still need to be included in the dialogue (Bowen et al., 1995).

## ***CHOICES***

For my research, I analyzed how single mothers perceived having and not having choices around becoming and being single mothers. I wanted to avoid the idea that single mothers are victims with no agency. Therefore, my goal was to explore both the perceptions of constraints single mothers have dealt with and the agency single mothers have exercised. I conceptualized choice not as a single event, but rather as a series of choices that began with becoming a mother, and then a single mother, which continues on.

The common view in North American society is that women choose to become single mothers (VanEvery 1995). This is understandable considering the increase in single motherhood has been greatest among never-married, educated, middle to upper class women between the ages 25-44 (Statistics Canada 1995: 18; Gringlas & Weinraub 1995: 30). In fact, for all women in Canada aged 20-24, the births per 1,000 women dropped from 97 in 1981, to 83 in 1991. At the same time, for all women aged 30-34 the birth rate increased from 68 for every 1,000 births in 1981, to 88 in 1991, surpassing the 20-24 year old women (Statistics Canada 1995: 20). These statistics may partly explain society's willingness to accept the idea of women's 'choice' to become single mothers which can lead to society's apathetic feelings for single mothers'

needs. However, these statistics present only a partial picture— one that does not reflect the financial situation of most single mothers. Choice is a complex process that cannot be inferred from statistics.

Women have not always had the choice to become single parents. In the early to mid-twentieth century unwed pregnant women had the options of marriage, illegal abortion, or being placed in a home and forced to give their children up for adoption (Petrie 1998). Now that women have the choice of becoming single parents, there are various reasons that women become lone parents. The most common reason is divorce, but single motherhood is also increasingly a result of sexually active women rejecting marriage (Lichter, Kephart, McLaughlin & Landry 1992; McLanahan 1994; Siegel 1995). Single mothers “are considered to be voluntarily stigmatized in that they define themselves as having made the choice to become mothers, even if the choice occurred after rather than prior to” becoming pregnant (Siegel 1995: 1,954). Many single mothers have not chosen to become pregnant, rather they have chosen to have the child after they became pregnant (Davies & Rains 1995). Some women chose to get pregnant with their partners, yet their partners leave them after the baby is born. Lesbian mothers may have chosen to have a baby on their own but might rather raise their child with a partner than without one (Mulley 1997).

Should women be told that they are single mothers by ‘choice’ when the choices are so limited? As noted by Sue Wendell, “[m]uch of what women appear to do freely is chosen in very limiting circumstances, where there are few choices left to us” (Wendell 1990: 17) For example, some single mothers could not bear the thought of having an abortion or giving their children up for adoption but also were not ready for the responsibly and financial burden of having a child (Leslie 1994). Whereas other single mothers could not bear the treatment of an

unloving husband any longer and needed to break away from him, but they too were not ready for single motherhood (Krygsveld 1996). In both situations, the women felt their choice was an obvious one but one that they were not ready for, and therefore was a choice made in very limiting circumstances with primarily negative alternatives.

Single mothers tend to be thought of as having made one simple choice to become single mother and therefore deserve to be in their financial situation (Miller 1992; Taylor 1994). What is missed in this thought process is that choice itself is usually a process, and that single mothers' choices are often very limited (Dowd 1997; Miller 1992; Sands & Nuccio 1989). Single mothers often experience discrimination and stigmatization because of this thought process, which in turn limits their choices even further.

## ***RELATIONSHIPS***

My research interests in single mothers' ex-partners was in their role in the children's and mothers' lives. Davies and Rains (1995) discussed how male partners' indifference to birth control methods and their active refusal to use condoms contributed to their partner's pregnancy. Yet, many male partners became upset or irate when their partners decided to have the baby instead of aborting it. In an angry attempt to punish their partners, many men have refused any contact with their children or the mothers (Davies and Rains 1995). This study is not an isolated incident. Many other single mothers have experienced this kind of behavior from their male partners when their pregnancy became known (Leslie 1994). There are various reasons fathers have little contact with their children, including the unwanted feminine role of childrearing and their fear that "shared parenting" could mean having to spend too much time with their children

(Baker & Dryden 1993: 230). On the other hand, many single mothers have made no legal efforts to involve their children's father in their lives (McRae 1993).

This research sparked my interest to find out more about single mothers' relationships with their ex-partners before and after the pregnancy. I was interested in what kind of help or support, if any, single mothers wanted and received from the fathers of their children. In general, single mothers received little and/or sporadic child support from their children's fathers (McLanahan & Booth 1989; Seltzer & Brandreth 1994). Having to remind and sometimes beg their children's fathers for child support payments often caused even more unwanted stress in single mothers' lives (Taylor 1994). The absence of a male income forced single mothers to seek out various sources of income such as family, friends, and community networks (Edin & Lein 1996). A system needs to be developed that will insure that fathers pay their monthly child support, since it is necessary for many single mothers to make ends meet (Edin & Lein 1996; Fitchen 1995; Hudson & Galaway).

My research interest in single mothers' children was finding out what concerns, if any, they had about children raised in a lone female-headed family. I was curious because, according to Statistics Canada, many children raised in lone-mother families are prone to repeat a grade, have problems at school, and suffer emotional disorders compared with children raised in two-parent families. For example in 1994, 11% of 6-11 year olds from female-headed families had repeated a grade and 6% had current problems at school, contrasted with only 5% and 3%, respectively, of children from dual-parent families (Statistics Canada 1997: 8). It is logical to assume that these children were suffering from poverty rather than being raised by a single mother (Polakow 1993). The lack of child support from fathers increases the poverty factor in their children's behavioral or emotional problems. However, this may not be the only

explanation. When the incomes of lone-female parent families were equal to two-parent family incomes, single mothers' children still showed higher percentages of behavioral problems (Statistics Canada 1997: 8). The lack of a father's role may also contribute to the problems that some single mothers' children have. Without the fathers' participation in their children's lives, mothers are forced to shoulder responsibilities alone, which means they have less time to spend with their children. This may be why single mothers' children receive less help with their schoolwork and less guidance with peer pressure (Lash, Loughridge & Fassler 1992; McLanahan & Booth 1989). I wanted to question my research participants about concerns they had for their children, what sorts of problems their children might have, and what they felt were the solutions for these concerns and problems.

## ***DIVERSITY***

Single mothers are not a homogenous group of people. Recognizing their different social locations and how it affects their lives becomes essential when they are the focus of research (Olson & Ceballo 1996). After reviewing the economic statistics concerning single mothers, it is apparent that many single mothers are poor. Thus, many single mothers, including most of my participants, tend to be classified as working and/or lower class. For this research, information concerning the women's employment, income, and subjective class identity was gathered. However, each woman's class and class in general is not discussed in depth in this thesis because many women did not want to be defined by their class. Many women tend to disidentify with class because of the negative connotations that come with being lower or working class and refuse to be measured by it (Skeggs 1997).



The fact that single mothers are poor is even more true of single mothers of color. Most single mothers of color have experienced some type of racial discrimination based on both their race and their status as lone mothers (Taylor 1993; Wyche & Crosby 1996). African-American single mothers' financial strain is also increased by the "absence of a male income", but African-American single mothers, and single mothers of color in general, must also deal with the burden of racism and sexism (Randolph 1995: 138). For example, black single-mother households occupy the highest percentage (48.1) of female-headed households living below the poverty line in the United States. In contrast, 26.8% of white single mothers are living below the poverty line. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that black women holding 18.6% of all "managerial/professional level" jobs while white women holding 27.2% of these well paying jobs (Hemmons 1995: 110).

Financial strain combined with sexual orientation and sexism is a "double whammy" for lesbian single mothers. Since sexual orientation is not as visible as race, the obstacles lesbian single mothers face tend to be different from those face by single mothers of color (Chow, Wilkinson & Baca Zinn 1996; Lewin 1993). Lesbians, single and partnered, who decide to have a child experience discriminatory behavior from the onset of motherhood. Sarah Bruckner, describing her experience adopting a child, said "I needed letters and affidavits certifying my moral character, my financial assets, and my ability to love a child" (Bruckner 1994: 36). Lesbians who realized their sexual orientation after being married and having children can experience discrimination from their ex-partners. Diane McPherson remembered, "One of the things I celebrated, on his eighteenth birthday, was the end of my fear that he could be taken away from me by his father" (McPherson 1994: 226). It is clear that lesbian single mothers and

single mothers of color experience additional disadvantages as single mothers because of their diversity.

There is great diversity among single mothers, as great as among women generally. However, the experience of being a single mother and the experience of poverty, which is shared among many single mothers, creates important similarities among single mothers (McKay 1993; McNeill, Rienzi & Kposowa 1998). Single mothers on a limited budget must face the pain of not being able to provide everything they want for their children, whether it is new sneakers or music lessons. On the other hand, single mothers have the satisfaction of not having to compromise their independence or decision-making power in an unsatisfactory partnership (Lee 1994). Having common experiences, both difficult and enjoyable, is what connects single mothers to each other, and putting their children's needs before their own is what connects mothers in general (Daly & Reddy 1991; Pies 1990; Reddy, Roth & Sheldon 1994).

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHODS**

### ***FEMINIST METHODOLOGY***

An important theoretical distinction is the difference between methods and methodology (Harding 1987; Stanley & Wise 1990). Methods are research tools for gathering data, e.g., interviewing, historical analysis, and participant observation (Harding 1987; Kirby & McKenna 1989; Reinharz 1992). Methodology is more complex. Harding explains that, "methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (Harding 1987: 3). In other words, methodology is how a researcher utilizes the methods s/he employs in her/his research. Methodology explains how a researcher constructed her/his research as a body of knowledge and why they chose to do so. Feminist research is defined by the methodological choices made throughout the research. It is not as important what methods the researcher uses as how s/he uses them (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1991; Duran 1991; Harding 1987). First, feminist researchers should begin from women's experiences answering questions women want answered, yet keeping in mind that there is no universal "woman's experience"-- that race, class, age, and sexual preference all play a key part in an individual woman's experience. Second, feminist researchers must remember that their research should be for women to benefit them in some way and contribute to social change for women. Third, the feminist researcher should locate herself within the research as an integral part of its creation (Harding 1987: 7).

To carry out the first aspect of feminist research, I began my research with women's experiences, choosing interviewing as my primary method. This particular research tool allowed me to rely heavily on quotations from the interviews letting the women describe their own experiences in their own voices. Since women's experiences are not uniform, I made attempts to

create a diverse sample. Although the diversity in this study is not as great as I had hoped, the ten women interviewed varied some by sexual orientation, race, and class. I have included these aspects of diversity throughout my analysis.

Meeting the second criterion of feminist research, contributing to social change and benefiting the participants, was a more difficult task, and was the hardest aspect of feminist research to carry out. Doing this research has not led me to take any action on behalf of single mothers yet, but it may in the future. Producing beneficial research and social changes for single mothers is going to be my life's work. This thesis was merely the starting point in my journey ahead. I think the main way I began contributing to social change for single mothers was in the questions I asked the mothers-- especially when I asked them what types of changes could be made to improve their lives and what issues were prominent to them that had been ignored. I feel the participants in this study may have benefited from my decision to mail them a copy of their transcript and mail them a copy of the research analysis I typed up specifically for their interest. My hope was this might inspire the participants to take action benefiting their own lives.

The final aspect of feminist methodology is locating oneself within the research as an integral part of its creation (Harding 1987; Reinharz 1992). I carried this aspect out by locating myself with the participants during the interviews. I used my own experiences with single motherhood to connect with their experiences of single motherhood. Although I am not a mother, I chose to research single mothers because I was raised by a single mother and know how difficult it can be from a child's perspective. I focused on single mothers' former partners and their children partly because I was curious about how my life experiences compares with others. However, this research was not about me, which is why I interviewed single mothers

rather than their children, and included research topics related to economic issues and perceptions of choice. The strengths of my location lay in my ability to sympathize with single mothers, my empathy with their experiences, and my desire to make their situations better.

On the other hand, there are several limitations to my location. My mother does not exactly fit into my definition of single motherhood in that she has had partners at various times in her life. She was not always a “single” mother living only with her children. Also, there are limits to my ability to identify with single mothers of different races, classes and sexual preferences since my mother and I are both white middle-class heterosexuals. We have not always been middle class (we were most certainly poor during my childhood) but we are middle class now and this is how I identify myself. Although I was not always able to identify with my participants, I was concerned that I not treat them as ‘other’ and place myself in a position of authority over them (Collins 1991; Harding 1991; Spelman 1988). I agree with bell hooks, “[w]hen we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination” (hooks 1989: 43). By placing myself in the research I was more aware of the distinction between, “yes I understand her perspective” and “I need to see this from her perspective.” By recognizing my strengths and limitations, I was more able to work with my participants toward the goal of producing feminist research of which my participants and I can be proud (Duran 1991; Lorde 1979).

## ***PARTICIPANTS***

To find a diverse group of single mothers, I posted my advertisement (Appendix A) in a variety of places, obtaining consent from each institution and newspaper where I placed my

advertisement. To locate First Nations single mothers, I posted an advertisement in the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, and at a predominately First Nations elementary school in North Vancouver. To locate lesbian single mothers, I posted an advertisement in the Gay Lesbian Transgendered Bisexual Community Center in Vancouver. I also posted my advertisement in the Britannia Community Services Center, the Women's Center at Simon Fraser University, the Women's Studies Department at Simon Fraser University, and in Kinesis, a local feminist newsletter. No one responded to my advertisements posted at the First Nations House of Learning, the Gay Lesbian Transgendered Bisexual Community Center, or the Britannia Community Services Center. Four participants responded to ads posted in the Women's Center, the Women's Studies Department, and in Kinesis.

Since my advertising attempts resulted in only four participants, I also used more direct methods of recruitment. I visited an introductory women's studies class where I distributed copies of my advertisement. This effort led to one interviewee. I also contacted one student from a previous class in which I had served as a teaching assistant and asked if she would like to participate in the research. She wholeheartedly agreed. Lastly, a women's studies graduate student referred me to the director of a single mothers' network in the downtown eastside who provided me with a list of four single mothers to contact by telephone. All four of these single mothers responded positively, and three of them participated in this study. The fourth agreed to participate, but was not home when I arrived at her house for the interview. This graduate student also posted my advertisement at the Path Center, a counseling center in Vancouver, where one interviewee contacted me after seeing my flyer.

I also used 'snowballing' to obtain more participants but to no avail. Although I asked each participant if they knew any other single mothers who might be interested in participating in

my project, not one of them knew any other single mothers living in the area. In fact, many of them were unhappy that they were isolated from other single mothers, and were eager to hear what the others in my research sample had to say.

The term 'single mother' can include a wide variety of women with children depending upon the definition of single motherhood that is used (Baker & Dryden 1993). For example, a single mother can be any woman with a child who is not married by law. For my thesis, I decided to keep my definition of single mothers fairly narrow since I was not interested in exploring the entire single mother spectrum, but rather the challenges single mothers faced when raising children alone. Therefore, my definition of a single mother was a woman who lived with her child/children only and not with a partner. As I contacted participants, I expanded my definition somewhat and welcomed interviewees who had roommates (not the child's father or a current partner) since this has been found to be a common living arrangement among single mothers (Folk 1996). However, my main criterion was that participants lived in a household with their children and without a partner.

My secondary criterion was to choose participants who varied in race, class, and sexual orientation. However, it was not possible to obtain my ideal sample within a reasonable amount of time given the demands of completing this thesis. Therefore, I interviewed the first ten women who volunteered over a four month period (January-April 1999). In the final sample, my participants consisted of one First Nations single mother, one lesbian and one bi-sexual single mother, one mother with a special-needs daughter, two white mothers with mixed-race children, and five mothers who were attending Simon Fraser University. Most of the participants identified as, and based on their income were classified as, lower/working class but did not

necessarily come from a working class background according to their reports. Demographic information about the participants is shown in Appendix B.

## ***INTERVIEW***

Before I discuss the particular method I have used, I will discuss the type of research that I have used in order to lay the groundwork for my methodological choices. For this thesis, I chose to produce qualitative research, which meant that I limited myself to employing certain research methods. Qualitative research employs research methods such as interviewing, participant observation, and content analysis, whereas quantitative research utilizes surveys and statistics (Kirby & McKenna 1989). Since the second wave of feminism in the 1970s there has been a movement towards qualitative research methods by feminists researchers because they “permit women to express their experience fully and in their own terms” (Epstein Jayaratne & Stewart 1991: 89). There is a sense among some feminist researchers that quantitative research has hidden women’s voices and experiences, and therefore should not be used in social science research. Since quantitative and qualitative methods each have their pros and cons, utilizing both research methods (triangulation) may be the key to producing a more balanced study (Epstein Jayaratne & Stewart 1991). I was not able to produce triangulated research because of my sample size.

To produce inductive, qualitative research I chose the method of interviewing as my primary research method (Kirby & McKenna 1989). I chose interviewing because it “offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz 1992: 19). Women, especially marginalized women, have been spoken for by men and white women often in research and other forms of knowledge



construction. In order to partially avoid this problem I chose to rely heavily on direct quotes from the single mothers in my study (Haig-Brown 1996). Additionally, interviewing allowed for a dialogue between the women and myself. During each interview I asked the women if there were any particular topics they wanted addressed that we had not in order that this research might directly benefit them in the best possible way. I also took each opportunity I received to either relate their experiences to mine, or at least verbalize understanding of what they were describing.

I conducted ten semi-structured, open-ended interviews of about two hours with each of the ten single mothers. The interview questionnaire consisted of forty-two questions in five sections: demographics, general questions, economic issues, perceptions of choice, and relationships with fathers and children (Appendix C). The demographic questions focused on each participant's background and included questions about their parents, education, income, marital history, and places lived. I chose to retrieve this type of information because I thought it was important in further understanding my participants' point of view and experiences. The general questions focused on the single mothers' feelings about mothering and being single. I was curious if single mothers were single mothers because they had not found a suitable partner or because they actually wanted to stay single. The questions concerning economic issues focused how the participants made ends meet with their limited incomes. These questions allowed me to get a general idea of the degree in which my participants struggled financially. The questions on perceptions of choice focused on the path each mother traveled to become a single mother. I wanted to get each woman's individual and unique story in order to show just how many choices single mothers have made. The questions asked about the interviewees' children and children's fathers focused on the types of relationships formed between mother and

father, child and father, and mother and child. I asked these questions so I could examine the role relationships played in single mothers' lives. As I mentioned above, I also asked each woman if there were any additional topics or issues they wanted to discuss in order not to miss any key issues relevant to these particular women. Also, at points in each interview I sought to relate my own experiences to theirs, in order to make connections between the participant and the researcher. It is crucial to note that this type of connection occurred no more than once or twice throughout the course of each interview because I wanted the focus to stay on the interviewees' experiences, and I wanted the connections to be natural not forced.

## ***PROCEDURES***

I conducted six of the interviews in the graduate office in the Women's Studies Department, two interviews at participants' homes, one interview at my home, and one in a restaurant near a participant's house. The interviewees chose the location of the interview in order to insure their sense of privacy and comfort. For the students who wanted to meet at Simon Fraser University, I suggested we meet in the graduate office for privacy, but I met them in the Women's Studies Lounge so we could talk for a few minutes and get comfortable with each other before moving to the graduate office. The interviews were all arranged by telephone and for a time convenient for both the participant and myself. Since I do not own a car, I was uncomfortable with the idea of traveling on public transportation alone at night. Therefore, I tried to schedule all interviews during the day. One interview was scheduled in the evening because it was the only time the participant could meet with me. I mailed each interviewee a copy of the interview schedule (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) by mail before the interview took place, allowing her a chance to be prepared for and feel comfortable with the

interview. I also phoned the off campus participants the day before the interview to remind them of our scheduled interview. The interviews were completed in a single session with the exception of one interviewee who was pressed for time and required two sessions to finish the entire questionnaire. The interview schedule was meant as a guide rather than a fixed series of questions, but at the end of each interview I did check that each question had been addressed.

I used a tape recorder with a small accompanying microphone so that the participants and I could discuss freely during the interview. The microphone picked up the voices clearly and facilitated accurate transcription of the interviews. Before beginning the interviews, I collected the consent form I mailed to them and provided them with another one to keep for their records. I took the time before the interview to explain their rights as participants in order to give them a sense of agency and to ensure they understood the consent form completely. I made it clear that the participant had the choice not to answer specific questions or to end the interview at any point. To ensure confidentiality, the participant's chose a code name, and I explained the interview tapes would be destroyed after the interview was transcribed, unless the participant wanted the interview tape, in which case I would return it to her. None of the participants requested their interview tape; however, each participant received a copy of her transcript and an invitation to add, delete, or change any information (Kirby & McKenna: 1989; Reinharz: 1992). Three participants responded to their transcripts with some comments and these comments were included in the analysis where relevant. I also sent each participant a copy of my research analysis and invited her to comment in general as well as indicate in particular if there was specific information about her or questions from her transcript that she did not want included in the thesis. Two participants replied with comments. The transcripts were placed securely in computer files and on unmarked disks that I solely had and still have access to.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS**

In the following section, all ten participants whose quotes were used are referred to by a code name they chose. In some cases the participants chose to use their real names (first and last). This is why I have chosen to use first names only. All the children and ex-partners are referred to by code names chosen by the interviewees as well.

As I stated, there were ten single mothers who were interviewed for this study and whose voices follow this introduction. One woman was First Nations and the other nine women were white. Two of these white women had mixed-race children, as did the First Nations woman. One had a daughter with special needs. One woman was a lesbian and one woman was bisexual. All participants considered themselves lower or working class except for one white, heterosexual woman who considered herself middle class. Five of the women I interviewed were currently attending Simon Fraser University at the time of the interview, three others were receiving a post-secondary education at other accredited institutions, and one woman had recently attended Simon Fraser University. A summary of the participants' demographic information can be found in Appendix B.

### ***ECONOMICS***

The single mothers I interviewed all had the same problem-- not enough money. All the various struggles and setbacks these single mothers experienced were related to financial strain. This is partly due to the fact that all ten single mothers I interviewed were poor at the time of the interview. This means many of the women were often in debt and all were struggling to secure the basic necessities for their families. Only two participants made between \$30,000 and

\$39,000 per year. One of these women circled the \$30,000 mark instead of the entire income range. Four participants made between \$20,000 and \$29,000 per year. Again one of these women circled just the \$20,000 mark. Three participants ranged between \$10,000 and \$19,000 as their yearly income, and one participant fell under the \$10,000 range. Two participants related how they managed their financial struggles.

And making ends meet I rob Peter to pay Paul. Actually if I write down how much I make and my expenses I'd probably go in the hole about \$250 a month. And I just manage to jump from this bowl into that bowl before the money runs out. And I always manage. I pay my bills. Actually I have three Visas, they're all maxed. Well there's a little room on each, but they all have been paid up to date, I've never missed a payment, I've never been late. I mean if I do a credit bureau I've got beautiful credit rating. But I'm like up to here, you know, I really, I really, really am. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

But I'm always in debt a little bit, not that much. Like over the years I usually owe Visa fifteen hundred, two thousand. I'm always paying interest. Just barely making it, never having anything in the bank. My only resource in an emergency is credit cards, which isn't very good. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Two participants envisioned financial security in the following way.

I would like to be able to not live hand to mouth and not have to worry about getting that loan in on time or else I'm not going to make these bill payments. And have my credit cards paid off in full. That would be nice. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

Um, you know what I would really like to be able to afford for myself that I can't, is piece of mind. I would just like to be where I feel like okay, I've got this extra thousand bucks in the bank in case there's a problem. And, ah, you know I owe on my visa. Pay off the visa bill and just have that little bit just in case something went wrong. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

These are just a few from the many examples the participants had about their economic struggles. In this section I will be focusing on the three main economic problems the single mothers I interviewed revealed to me: jobs, childcare, and time. First, my participants made it clear that they needed better paying full-time jobs with full benefits in order to make ends meet. Since education, job training, and experience are often needed to obtain one of these secure jobs,

many of the single mothers I talked with were earning a post-secondary degree so they could get better paying jobs. The problem was that these women were having a hard time financing their university education and were going into debt in order to obtain a degree. I also included in this section the participants' experiences with social assistance and their dependence on it because they were lone mothers. Second, the women I interviewed had a hard time making ends meet because a majority of their paycheck was going for childcare expenses. This was when their perceptions of needed social change seriously entered the discussion. My interviewees were asking for forced financial support from their children's fathers, better paying childcare subsidies, and even free socialized childcare to help ease their financial burden. The later, free socialized daycare, was requested with a laugh on the participants' part because, I thought, they knew the social program they needed most would be the hardest to achieve. Third, time constraint is a burden for many women because they work a double shift when they get home from their jobs. For single mothers lack of time is an even bigger dilemma because they do not have a partner to rely on to help with household and childcare duties. The single mothers I talked to wanted more time and money to invest in their children and themselves.

### ***JOBS***

In 1993, 48% of single mothers with children under the age of sixteen were employed. Of the 48% employed single mothers, 21% worked part time, while 19.8% of all single mothers were unemployed (Statistics Canada 1994: 47). The single mothers I interviewed all had children under the age of sixteen. Similar to the figures from Statistics Canada, 60% of the single mothers I interviewed were currently working, while the other 40% were unemployed but looking for some form of employment. Of the employed participants, only two had full-time

jobs, whereas the other four had part-time jobs. Of the participants looking for work, two were on student loans, one was funded by her First Nations band for her education, and one was receiving employment insurance. The two main reasons for these single mothers' lack of full time employment were the lack of full time jobs and that eight out of ten interviewees were seeking a post-secondary degree at the time of the interview.

My participants have had many difficulties finding well paying, full-time jobs because, as I stated in the introduction, there are not enough 'good' jobs available in the labour market. All my interviewees had negative work experiences whether it was being relegated to the lowest rungs of the job ladder, being forced to accept exploitive work, or being discriminated against in being hired for a job. There was only one interviewee, Lynn, who had what can be considered a good job, earning between \$30,000 and \$39,000 as an operations officer for a bank. Yet, as she described in her interview, she still came up short about two hundred and fifty dollars each month. Three participants, who were not as fortunate in the job market, described their difficulties finding and obtaining satisfactory employment.

And out of the people at work, I'm most responsible, but I'm just a cashier. I mean, it's really ridiculous. And I can't work anymore than I do. I work full-time. And I really don't want charity. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

There's a lot of stuff that isn't talked about, like when I started for Canada Post. It was as an Ad Mail Helper, and we didn't get paid for sorting. You would get maybe a dozen flyers all packaged together and you'd have to sort them in bundles at home and they didn't pay for that. And it was really heavy too. Like they gave you a bag but if you got ten or eleven flyers for each house, like they slide around so you have to carry them here [on one side of your back]. And I've still got a back and shoulder problem from it. (Jenneffer, March 18, 1999)

And then I, I mean I applied for jobs and people said I was over qualified and it was really weird. I mean, I'm over qualified, yet I still don't get to eat. Um, so I ended up going on social assistance. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

Ending up on social assistance was exactly what did happen for these single mothers when they could not find a job that paid enough to support them and their children. All of the women I interviewed had been on social assistance as single mothers except for Jenneffer, who had been on social assistance prior to having children. None of the interviewees had positive things to say about social assistance and half of them had some very negative comments about their treatment on social assistance and the welfare system in general. Some of the participants experienced negative treatment from welfare workers or experienced negative results from welfare policies, and thus viewed the welfare system in a negative light. Other participants felt stigmatized because they were utilizing the welfare system for a period of time in their lives.

Welfare was the *worst* experience of my life. If I was a vigilante, I would shoot them all. Which I'm not. There's other ways to achieve change. But it was horrid. I was not even human. I was not human at all in their eyes. I had one worker who was just a mega bitch. I went in there and I was very six months pregnant, very obviously pregnant, and she said, "You have to go look for a job." I'm like *no one's* going to hire me, there's no way. She's like, "Women here are working until their due date," and I said, "well that's because they *have* a job. I don't." And the most training I could get would be working at Subway. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

And social assistance they're using like a profit society instead of a non-profit society where they hold the funds, where they have, um, where they have to, um, show that they've given the least amount of money out a month. It's being abused. It's not a system that can be abused. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

Oh god, with that welfare reform they kicked us all off, all single parents off of welfare. Which meant that we didn't get our prescriptions paid for anymore, we didn't get our dental paid for anymore, and medical. And I mean we can apply for Healthy Kids, my son could get dental, but *we* couldn't get it. And the [student] loan isn't enough to cover those things, so all of a sudden you have an added expense. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Well right, I have been on assistance. I was for the first two years of his life. Um, I know that I shouldn't feel bad about having used it because it's my right. But I will say that society has a way of making you feel like crap. You know, and the sad thing is those people who are making you feel like that could one day end up in the system too. But right now, though, I go through my band. And even with that, I still have to keep it quiet. Like I get funded to go to school. Because a lot of people don't understand the



history of the Native people. You know, there's a lot of history there. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

I was on welfare when I was drinking [before she had children]. And I believe it gives them way more control over you. I believe they almost take over like the man's role. And there's a lot of guys that are social workers now and they seem to be fixated on control. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Fifty percent of the women I interviewed were earning their bachelor's degree at Simon Fraser University and 30% were earning some other type of post-secondary degree. This means that finishing their education came first over working or even looking for a job. They were pursuing an education in order to find better jobs than they had in the past and to secure a future for their children and themselves. Even though these women were and still are dedicated to earning their post-secondary education, getting their education was expensive and contributed to their poor economic status. Here, three interviewees stated how difficult it was to get an education as a single mother.

Um, I'm not gonna work [while] in school because I have enough on my plate [with school] as it is. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

You know I don't want to work so much when I'm going to school, otherwise my school work suffers. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

But I think because of the fact that I did get more of an education, that's opening so much up for me. I want to do first aid, and I'm doing a personal computer course, and stuff like that. I mean really, I don't have time for all of it, and I'm managing to do it all for something in the end I suppose to happen. (Lynn, March 28, 1999).

### ***CHILDCARE***

Another barrier to single mother's economic well being is the expense of good and decent childcare. Seventy percent of the women I interviewed requested that the government provide adequate subsidized or free childcare. The other thirty percent had older children who no longer needed childcare services. My participants made it a point to tell me that higher subsidies or

even free childcare was a must if they were going to make ends meet and have time to raise their children. The single mothers I talked to could not afford childcare and many verbalized their need for some help in this situation.

I think something that would be really good, at least in this province, ah, free daycare. *Good* free daycare. I think that is absolutely necessary. The children are our future. They need to be treated as such. That would be a good investment. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

Like up here I found it quite expensive. It's almost \$400.00 for part-time, three days a week. It's \$390.00 for three days a week. So I found that quite expensive, and daycare covers \$200.00. Um, she said maximum was \$220.00. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Before and after school care is subsidized. Um, they don't pay all the childcare. They could definitely do that. That would help a lot. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Well I guess, I did have to give up university when I had my first girl because of the cost of daycare and stuff. The daycare here is so expensive, I couldn't believe it. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Government, I would say they could come up with better daycare programs. But, um, so I definitely think social programs would be a big help, daycare for sure. Subsidies should be higher. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

These mothers had a difficult time affording daycare and some had to get it in different ways, such as taking their children to a friend, family member or neighbor. For example, one interviewee paid her mother to take her kids when she could not rely on a babysitter or formal childcare. Another interviewee described how she avoided paying the huge daycare fees.

And when I was working, I ran [my kids] over to a neighbor that they would just go over there and I would pay her a little bit of money each day. But for them to just go into after school care would be \$500.00 a month. Which is outrageous for someone who, say, I mean I was only earning \$1,200 a month, and I mean that's just, I really don't understand how people do it. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

The problem was not only providing affordable childcare, but, also, as many participants emphasized to me, providing decent childcare that single mothers could feel good about.

So, [there were] problems with getting decent daycare, especially when they were younger, because [the subsidies] pay so low. And some people don't want to take it. So like my younger girl got hurt one time. They were playing outside and a boy pushed her down for whatever reason. They tried to say that she was probably tying up her shoe or something. Her whole clothes were ruined with blood. So I was talking to the daycare woman about it and her answer was, "Who knows what actually happened"? And I said, "That's because you're never watching them." Like she's either doing her housework, the kids are always outside, and even when they're inside they're kept in the basement, you know, and she's up stairs doing her housework. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Adding to the expense of childcare for single mothers was the lack of involvement and financial support from their children's father(s). Only one of the women I interviewed was receiving what she considered adequate payments for daycare from her child's father at the time of the interview. Adequate to her, and probably to many of the single mothers in this study, was \$800.00 a month for two children. The \$800.00 had to cover daycare expenses as well as all other expenses the children have. The other six women who required daycare for their children either received very little money, sporadic payments, or nothing at all for daycare expenses. Two of these six women discussed what it was like for them to deal with ex-partners who pay partially or not at all for daycare expenses.

And then the last father, he pays half the daycare for the little one, he's pretty good whenever I need money. He doesn't have a lot of money. Daycare, he pays for half the daycare and he takes them three days a week so I just count my blessings you know. But that's been a fight, too, or not a fight but a struggle. You have to *tell* them their responsibilities, and if you don't say anything for a couple of weeks, you find that he doesn't call or he'll say, "Oh I can't come this day" you know, but if I stay on him he will take them the three days. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Oh Christ. Yeah, he *insists* on seeing them and sometimes it has come in handy when I'm working in the summer, so I don't have to pay daycare. He did pay for a while, but he's of the mind that he doesn't have to pay and so he won't. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

One of the drawbacks to spending so much on daycare, that really bothered the single mothers I interviewed, was less money to spend on extracurricular activities and programs for

their children. Seventy percent of my participants wanted to be able to afford programs and activities such as sports for their children.

I'd like to be able to put the kids in anything they want without having the cost factor really coming up. When the kids wanted to do an activity it was like, well, okay, now who's going to get to do what now. It wasn't like okay, well, you want to do swimming and you want to do dancing okay, of course, no problem. You know there's always those kinds of things. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

Um, I can't afford, um, you know, sports equipment and stuff like that. A lot of the subsidies, not the sports equipment but the courses that the soccer needs, you know, they don't subsidize. And all three girls are involved in soccer, and they really *like* soccer, and they're really *good* at soccer. So it's ridiculous. You know the school's kind of helping out and not charging any extra fees, but I still have to pay for the equipment. But she should be getting lessons somewhere else and really taking advantage of her youth, you know, but that I can't do. And you want to support that, you know, whether it be arts, or sports, or anything, you know. I want to support it. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

I guess the sports and after school activities and stuff like that. That's the only thing that I am concerned about, that they'll miss that. I mean that can be a chunk of a kid's life whether it's football or piano lessons, you know what I mean? It's something that makes them a certain way. Playing piano opens up your mind and, ah, makes you appreciate music and stuff like that. It gives you something more. Yeah, and sports does that, everything like that. That's just what I worry, that they won't get that. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

Well, my one girl is in art lessons, but it's like an eight week course through the parks and recreation. And the other kid does go to Surrey Academy of Music because she really wanted it, and my parents were entertainers. It's sixty eight bucks a month, but I can't afford it, but. But I would *add* to that. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

I think the other thing that I would like to be able to afford is-- my daughter is special needs-- there's treatments that would benefit her that aren't covered. I mean, the medication has stabilized her for the most part, but I think really when I can afford it, I would be paying for the treatments. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

### ***TIME***

Another problem the single mothers faced was time. The single mothers simply did not have the time to be the sole bread winner and child rearer in their family. Obviously, the single mothers had no partner to share the childcare and domestic work loads with, nor did they have a

partner to contribute to the family's finances. If a single mom devoted too much time to her job she saw her children less, or if she devoted too much time with her children, she had to work less. The participants had to find that balance between the two; however, listening to my interviewees, this was not always possible with only twenty four hours in a day and only so many dollars in their bank accounts. Many of the single mothers I interviewed were in agreement about being happier without a partner. Still, many of them also experienced times when they really missed an extra hand with childcare and domestic duties.

Not enough time. I wish I could be two people with four arms, two bodies. I just try to do as much as I can, but there's times though when I have to say to my son, "I'm only one person. You have to do something around here." Cook dinner, you know, he can wash the dishes. He's old enough to do the dishes, not that I want to make my kid my slave, but jeez some help would be nice. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Um, just the shared time, it would be nice for someone else to take him off my hands once in a while, to just give me a break. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

Well, like yesterday, I was just dog-tired and I still had to cook supper. So I think that it would be nice to have someone to take over some of the work load once in a while and financially. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

You know, you're the *only* one there as well, so when you're tired or drained or whatever, there's no one else to rely on. There's no one else to, say, at ten o'clock at night, um, oh my god, I forgot milk and I *have* to go to the store tonight because we have to have milk in the morning for cereal and coffee or whatever. Um, so it would be nice to have someone to rely on in that respect. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

It was not so much that these women want a permanent partner or any type of helper, but rather more time to be able to relax a bit when they got home from a full day of having been at work or school. When these women got home it was up to them to take care of all the domestic duties which meant no time to unwind. Some mothers felt that if they had better paying jobs they could work less hours, giving them more time to spend at home caring for their children.

Single mothers also had much to say about time constraints in relation to their children's needs. When a single mother was strained for time, it sometimes had adverse affects on their

kids, and many of the single moms I talked to were worried about this. Some of the mothers I talked to were upset that they could not be there for their children as much as they felt they should, and others were concerned about the example they were setting for their children by being rushed all the time.

And I wish I had more time to dedicate to him. You know, because you're cleaning up, or sometimes you lose track of the fact that you're not spending the time. You know, you're so busy with housework, oh gotta do the laundry, or you know. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

It's really time consuming playing, you know, your baseball, your soccer, and doing all those kinds of things. And since you're only one person. As far as disadvantages go, that time thing too. Yeah, time constriction. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

And I think, disadvantages, too, with the kids is not being able to, I spread myself so thin. And so the disadvantages, ah, would be just, ah, not being able to do everything I need to do. That means I gotta drag my kids to the grocery store if I need a bottle of Tylenol or something or you know like that. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

No, I did write down that my only concern I have is the modeling of too fast a pace of life. Because I think as a single mother you're just doing it ALL. When my daughter gets old I don't want her doing all the things that I do. Because it is too much. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Poverty was such a pervasive issue among the participants that there was little room for their diversity to show through. Economically I did not find any consistent differences concerning race or sexual orientation. Donna, who is a lesbian, had the second highest income (\$30,000) among my sample of women and had a well paying job at Simon Fraser University, until recently. She was first in line for another job at SFU. McFly, who is First Nations, was funded by her band for her education and did not need to work, although she was contemplating a part-time job. She kept quiet about her sources of financial support because many people got upset with her or made her feel guilty for the "free ride" they felt she was getting. She felt this prejudice was a result of people not understanding and not wanting to understand the history of First Nations people. Erika and Kelly, white women who have children by black fathers, both

fell into the lower income ranges of \$10,000 and \$19,000, and \$20,000 and \$29,000 respectively. Erika and Kelly, like most of the women in this study, have had difficulty pinning down well paying, full-time jobs. Rachel, a white woman from a working class family, was the only participant who fell into the lowest income bracket of under \$10,000, yet she was stable financially because of savings she had accrued. She was able to maintain pets, owned a “beater of a car”, and cared for a special needs daughter who had Borderline Personality Disorder.

So, um, I've really had times where I sit there and go, “I don't know what to do.” I'm not going to make the rent. I'm not going to be able to pay my bills.” But I've managed to stay in the house that I'm at, the duplex that I'm at since '91. So it tells me that I've pulled through even though I've had the times that were so difficult. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

## ***CHOICES***

For this section I analyzed how the single mothers I interviewed perceived having and not having choices around becoming and being single mothers. I wanted to avoid both the idea that single mothers are victims with no agency and the idea that single mothers are individuals with unlimited free choice. My goal here was to find a balance in single mothers' lives between constraints they have dealt with and the agency that they experience. I asked my interviewees how they became single mothers and asked their perception of how they did and did not have choices in this process. I conceptualized choice not as a single event, but rather as a series of events and decisions that single mothers had gone through to become single mothers and continue to go through to remain single mothers. For example, many of the single mothers I talked with had made choices within existing constraints to make the most of their economic situation.

And I mean I say that only in a sense that, ah, you don't, if you're poor, you don't have to look like you're poor. And it's and I don't think it's, I think that's why there's so

much stereotypical stuff about that is that, and again it comes when people look at me and you know they don't think I'm a single mom and that, ah, I make squat! And it's not that I'm trying to hide it, it's that I'm proud of who I am and I don't have to live in a scum hole or dress like an idiot. I mean I've seen people with big, big bucks walk into the bank with, who haven't even shampooed their hair or even *brushed* it. And they still got yesterdays pasta sauce on their face. I mean, so it's all a matter of how you want to feel and look. And I think if you live in a shack, you're going to feel like you live in a shack, so, ah, that's what really bugs me. (Lynn, March, 28, 1999)

One of the choices that I had to make this semester, I was renting a house in Langley, and they put the rent up to \$1,100 a month. And I was working three nights a week and I didn't want to work any more than that because I had four classes, so it was enough anyway. But when I had the opportunity of taking housing up here, you know, I came and I looked at it and it's *less* that five hundred square feet. It's a one bedroom apartment and it's 475 square feet. So what has ended up happening is my oldest boy stays at my mum's during the week-- he didn't want to switch high schools. So he stays there and I see him on Wednesdays. I go up there and then I have to come up on Fridays and drop him back off Monday morning. So it's not ideal, it's not, um, not a situation I would have chosen had we'd been able to get into the two bedroom. I wouldn't have had to make that choice. And then there's the two little ones because they miss him. [But it's what you have had to do?] In order to be able to not work to have to work as much, to not have to worry about money as much. So it's a short-term sacrifice, you know. For two years is sort of what we have targeted that we would do this. And then I may still pursue the two bedroom and that would make it work out. So that's sort of the situation. Mind you, there's something different from paying 1,100 dollars to five hundred dollars, you know that's a six hundred dollar difference. (Regina, January, 19, 1999)

I have to go to welfare to pay my rent. I keep my house though. Like, I don't, um, let it get messy. But I'll keep it a certain level. I have nice stuff. I don't have a lot of, I don't know, I just keep my house. It may just be a basement suite, but [with] my furniture and the stuff that I own alone I can make it look like home, like home. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

The three areas that I focused on in relation to choice were pregnancy, single motherhood, and discrimination. First, the single mothers I interviewed had much to say about how their children came into this world and the choices and constraints they experienced when they were pregnant. The participants' stories about and experiences with their pregnancies illustrated both the choices they made and the limitations they experienced. Second, I explored more in depth the choices available to these participants at the time of their break up from their partners, which eventually led to their present state of single motherhood. While the single



mothers had very strong opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of single motherhood, in fact, many of them preferred it. Although single mothers have made the choice to be single, they still had to make a series of choices daily concerning their situation and face a number of limitations. Third, most of the women I talked with had experienced some form of discrimination based on the fact that they were single mothers. I included their experiences with discrimination here as a factor that limited their choices.

### ***PREGNANCY***

Do single mothers really choose to be single mothers? There is no conclusive answer to this question, but I would like to offer some understandings and explanations of single mothers' perceptions of their choices in this complex process. Pregnancy seemed the best place to start. Ninety percent of the women I interviewed were unmarried at the time of their first pregnancy. The participants in this study were divided almost evenly into two groups: unintentional and intentional pregnancies. These two categories were the basis for explaining my interviewees' road to single motherhood, and hopefully shed some light on the choices many single mothers make. Sixty percent of the women I talked with said their pregnancies were unintentional. In most of these cases, the women chose to use some method of contraception to avoid becoming pregnant, but then chose to keep their child when the birth control failed. Two of the participants, using two different forms of birth control, discussed how their birth control failed.

We were living together for about a year and a half and that was a condom, that was a condom breaking. I remember that one. And the other one was, I was breast feeding, and I remember we had sex *three* times in between my one daughter being born and me becoming pregnant with the next one, and it was one of those times! (Donna, March 4, 1999)

Um, I was on the pill, and I was with the father at the time, and I was taking penicillin and my doctor never told me, in fact I learned about it on Oprah, that

combining birth control pills with antibiotics can negate the pill. And I got pregnant and that's pretty much the extent of it. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

In some other cases, the participants were not intending to get pregnant but ended up pregnant due to various circumstances in their lives at the time. Two single mothers, who were not using birth control at the time of their pregnancy, described the unique circumstances that lead to their pregnancy. In both examples, the women did not see themselves as having choices to make. Rather they saw becoming pregnant as something that just happened to them or as a stupid mistake they had made.

No, no. I mean now it's a good thing, but back then it was a different thing. It was not very good at all. Um, ah, well basically it's quite the story. I'm sure they all are. Um, I was with his dad for three years. We split up for two. He went to Australia and blah, blah, and I did my thing. And I, um, had one boyfriend in between that time. I wasn't really serious, we just kinda went out and did social things. Um, and then, um, I got sick and, um, I sort of phoned his dad back up because I felt like I needed somebody to-- I can't even explain where my head space was. I was just like running on this, I wasn't working that summer because I was sick, and so I had a lot of time to think. And so we kind of ended on a bad note, so I phoned him back. And we sort of started talking again, and we started doing social things together and things happened! And I mean Lord knows they don't happen the three years you're together, but you know a couple times later. And that's how it came about. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

Well, I was living with the guy, and the reason, I don't even know why, but I was on the birth control pills since I was like 13 or some ridiculous age and for some reason I went off for about a month and a half. I was living with the guy and I mean I don't even know why, I can't even give you an explanation why. Um, at the time, where I got them was an hour away and I wasn't driving at the time and I was working a lot and I couldn't get to this place when it was open or whatever, some stupid excuse. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Most of the women I talked with considered other options such as abortion, adoption, or co-habiting, but these did not turn out to be the best solutions for them. Four women gave very different reasons for choosing not to have an abortion.

Um, I had an abortion when I was twenty. Actually got pregnant the first week I lost my virginity. Talk about luck, huh? Because I'm not, I'm fairly celibate. I mean the only time I've been intimate is you know with his dad. I've only had three partners in my life and I'm thirty, so that's not very many. And compared to my friends and people I

know. Um, but, um, ah, I made a promise to myself that I would never do that again because it really screwed my head up. So that's why I chose that. But for some reason to be honest with you, I wasn't scared. I can't describe it. I didn't sit there and go "oh my god." I just thought one day at a time, one day at a time. And so it's just how it happened. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

Well, the pregnancy wasn't intentional. And then, um, the father really wasn't able to handle the responsibility. Because as far as I was concerned at that time I didn't feel comfortable with the idea of abortion. I wasn't comfortable with the concept of carrying a child and then giving it up [adoption]. Because I know how that's affected children. Um, so it was kind of like, um, I came to the conclusion that at that time it was a spirit that wanted to come to me and doing anything else with the spirit wasn't something I was comfortable with. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

Um, I was with a fellow when I was eighteen and got pregnant when I was eighteen. Um, and then the father was around for a bit but not very long and I ended the relationship. Um, at the time, this was in Alberta, and this was in 1982, yeah '82, and at that time the abortion laws had been struck down and it was difficult it was going to be very difficult. I probably could have, um, I probably could have if I had really, really pushed it, but I also was with someone who was very abusive and was saying things like, "If you kill my child I will never speak to you again." (Donna, March 4, 1999)

I was misdiagnosed at first. So I was quite far along and I think that may have had an effect on my decision. It was more of a danger to me to have an abortion at this point even though they were willing to do it. The doctors were willing to do it because they had made this error. I would of had to fly to Vancouver, have a specialist do it with my family doctor, I was 24 weeks. So I think at that point I had already been through enough with the misdiagnosis. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

These are only a few examples of how the women became single mothers. All the constraints that came with these mothers becoming pregnant, such as failed birth control and a misdiagnosed pregnancy, were taken in stride and choices were made within these constraints.

Four of the ten single mothers I interviewed said their pregnancies were intentional, meaning none of these women were using birth control when they became pregnant. Lynn was the only who was married and discussed having children with her partner before she got pregnant. Kelly, Jenneffer, and, to a lesser extent, Pretzel all were ready for and wanted children, therefore they did not use birth control while engaging in intercourse with their partners.

Each kid was, okay, let's make a baby, and we did. So yeah, and I quite willfully chose to have babies and it was, ah, it was great. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

Ah, my pregnancy was intentional. But I wanted to share my life with a child. I thought I had a lot to offer. And you know he happened to wander along in my life. I think I got pregnant about the first time we had sex. When I first conceived I think I thought we would always be together. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

The first one I even, like people can't say I tricked the guy or anything because I had a miscarriage first and he took me to the hospital. Like people try to lay that one on me. And we already went through that and he never mentioned birth control so. He didn't say nothing about you know using birth control after that so, anyway. Yeah it was intentional. I think really they still have that attitude today that it don't matter to them that much because they don't have to be responsible anyway. They kind of maybe like the idea of having a kid especially when they're older. They like having a successor. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Um, with Joel I was using birth control. I was on birth control for like eight years and I knew it was time for me to get off. And within the first two weeks I was pregnant! Yeah. Well, um, they both knew it could happen, you know, obviously, I mean, if you have intercourse without a condom. Yeah, they don't take responsibility. Yeah, and it still is to this day. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

Of the women who had unplanned pregnancies, one was First Nations, one was a lesbian, one was a bisexual with a mixed race son, and one had an income of under \$10,000. These unplanned pregnancies may have been due to a lack of resources available to these women. In other words, it might be easier to obtain reliable birth control if you are middle class, heterosexual, white, and in a same race relationship. One can see here the interaction of resources and choice. One of the major constraints limiting choices is a lack of resources. In the previous section, all of the single mothers were aware that lack of economic resources limited the daily choices they made everyday. They were less aware that insufficient resources may have limited their choices around pregnancy, perhaps because this lack is coded in systemic ways and thus less visible.

Regardless of whether the participants' pregnancies were intentional or unintentional, they all were in relationships at the time of their children's conception. Most of the women had

hopes that their relationships would work out and that their children would have responsible fathers. For my participants, the process of becoming a single mother was one of leaving or losing a relationship for whatever reason. In the following section I explore how the choices and limitations became more complex for the single mothers in this study after they give birth to their children.

### ***SINGLE MOTHERHOOD***

Single mothers are often viewed as having made the choice to become single mothers, and seven of the ten women I interviewed felt that it was their choice (VanEvery 1995). However, the choices these single mothers had were often very limited. The seven single mothers, who said they had the choice to become a single mother, followed their affirmations with some hesitation and eagerly explained the limited options available to them. The other three women were very clear that the choice to become a single mother was not really a choice but a necessity given the problems that arose in their relationships. I would like to explore the differences between these two groups of women by looking at their transitions into single motherhood, examining their options, limitations, and feelings about single motherhood.

The seven single mothers who said it was their choice to become a single mother said so because there were other options open to them. There were other choices to make, but these were not necessarily favorable choices. This is why these women were hesitant in saying it was their choice to become a single mother and why they were eager to explain their situation to me.

And then, ah, I told him and he freaked. And he just basically didn't want anything to do with it until about three months into the pregnancy. And then he started asking me questions, and he told me he had a girlfriend who he's still with actually. So basically I've been doing this all along by myself. I don't even know what it's like to have support during pregnancy, just family support, friends, yeah. (McFly, April 7, 1999)

He has issues, he has lots of issues. He tried to kill himself actually, uh, in December before my son was born. My son was born in May. So he tried to kill himself because his fifteen year old girlfriend broke up with him, and then he went out with a thirty-three year old. So he definitely has some issues, some co-dependency issues. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

In my experience of being a single parent, it was *my* choice. I could have stayed with one of them and I chose not to. And I think it's really just a nicer atmosphere in our house and it's because of the type I am as opposed to when Tan Man and I were together. Because he was really quite authoritarian. You know, all this "do this and do that," whereas I'm like, "Let's go do this, let's all do this." And I find that they're much more settled. It's a quieter home. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

That's funny the way it's worded too, "Do you *feel* you had a *choice* to become a single mother?" Well, I *chose* to become a single mother because he was such an asshole. You know, I'm not going to stick around. He's not going to be the *father* of my child as a direct influence and there's no way I was going to be with him. So yes, I *made* that choice. My son has a father, he just happens to be a loser. And I'm sure I could of settled for the next guy that came along but no thanks. And with every day that goes by my standards go up so. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Like I said, I'd saved quite a bit when I was doing word processing. I used to do free lance and that. And then I got the money from the estate and I figured I'm doing good, you know. Like I was only nine years sober. And everyone was telling me how good I was doing and I *was* compared to how I used to be. But I got like over confident and I didn't realize the *costs* of having a kid. And I figured I was really doing good and I figured, yeah, it was my choice, and that's another reason why I didn't put his name on the birth certificate. I felt like I could do it myself. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Well, see in my opinion even though a choice is not something that you choose, it's still a choice. It's still an *option*. Just because you wouldn't choose it, that's your own prerogative. So, where does it leave you? As far as I was concerned I had several choices, but this was my best option. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

What went unsaid by many of these seven women was that there was not much choice between staying with or leaving an irresponsible man who treated them badly. Many of their options were limited for these women when their partners either responded negatively to the pregnancy or turned out to be incompatible.

Thirty percent of the participants did not feel that they had any sort of choice in becoming single mothers. They were very clear in stating that there were no other options open to them.

These three single mothers may have had their partner's willingness to be a part of their life, but my participants were not willing to be a part of their partner's life, and for good reasons.

My husband was, ah, he was just a hitter. And he was a hitter before I married him and even while I was going out with him. But around when we got married things had changed so much and he seemed so much nicer and all this other crap. I mean that's exactly what it was, put on those rose colored glasses and happily ever after! I didn't have the choice no. I was really quite pissed off because, ah, like I say, calling 911, and, ah, then I actually gave my ex-husband a year to get his life together. So I gave him a year and after a year he didn't get his life together and didn't go to counseling and actually chose to blame me. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

But he was an abusive partner, and I don't want you to think that I'm excusing his behavior at all because I'm not, but I think the situations for why he was abusive, I think a lot of it had to do with societal pressure. I was being frustrated and angry about the ways society treated him, um, I mean it was just insane. I would never have believed it if I hadn't lived it because I thought that was what happened in the 60's in Alabama. But it still happens today. Unfortunately, his way of dealing with it was to take it out on me. In that aspect I don't really feel like I had a choice to stay. I mean I agonized over it for a long time, but I also decided that I didn't want my daughter growing up and thinking that that's how she should be treated. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

But I was living a lie. It wasn't who I was. I felt like I was being claustrophobic. And the walls were coming down on me and it was just an awful, awful, awful time. Like the last year and a half of the marriage was just really, really awful. And *not* because he was doing anything because he was very loving and supportive and I was just dying inside to get out and to be who I really was which is a gay person. So I mean it was not, um-- it was just really awful. So that was definitely a disadvantage! I didn't feel very good. I felt very depressed. A choice to me means that you have, there's some kind of options. You know you can either do this or that, and if I had stayed in the marriage, I *would* have. I was getting clinically depressed and I would have been on medication. It just would have been so *awful* to live with. I don't know if I would have killed myself, but I would have been *awful* to live with. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

Two of the women felt forced to become single mothers because they had abusive partners. One woman felt forced to become a single mother because she was a lesbian in a heterosexual marriage. All three said they had no other choice except the one they chose, yet all of them later said that if pressed then they guess it was some sort of choice they made but that it certainly did not feel like a choice. It felt like the *only* way out of an impossible situation. These three women experienced a different degree of choice than the previous seven women. Instead

of having the choice of involvement with an inadequate partner, like the aforementioned seven women, these three women had the choice of living with a physical abuser or with an unacceptable identity. Every woman in this study made choices. However, some women had more pressing and life threatening situations, hence a different degree of choice.

There are numerous factors that make single motherhood a difficult life to lead. The stigmatization single mothers experience may be a result of their poverty, and of the bias toward two-parent heterosexual family as normal. However, six of the single mothers I talked with said they definitely preferred single motherhood to having a partner. Even the four of the women who did say they would like to have a partner to share their life with could count the many advantages that single motherhood offered. Three women voiced a common advantage of single motherhood, a view shared by nine of the ten women.

Um, having to, the advantages of single motherhood, having, being able to make the decisions I need to make, having the freedom of choice. We can leave without having the beds made, or we can not come home for three days, which happens. Um, or you know if we want to blow all our money on nothing, on shopping. Um, another advantage is, you know the kids, um, being able to sleep with me if they want. They still sleep with me all three of them. They don't take turns but they have their own cycles of when they need attention and comfort and security. Um, basically I don't have to, um, I'm just living my life the way, having the freedom to live our life the way we want. And I let them make a lot of decisions that other people may not see as, um, appropriate so. And being able to live our life the way we want. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

Um, I think that the biggest advantage for me is that I don't have to confront with anyone. I raise my children the way I want them to be raised. And there's no discussion about bedtimes, or allowances, or what they can eat, or if they're not eating something and someone's getting *mad* about the fact that they're not eating something, or what kind of *peanut butter* we're going to have, or where we're going to go on vacation, or what kind of clothes I think are appropriate, or make-up or *anything*. There is no discussion and I love that. I think that is the best. And I don't even *want* to be in a relationship with someone that, that I have to do that again with. I did that when I was married and that was-- I want it done my way. For me that is *totally* the best part. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

Um, not having to fight with anybody about how the parenting happens. And just kind of, you can make your own values and, um, say this is how I want my child to be



brought up. These are the values that I want to pass on. That kind of stuff. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

What these three single mothers, as well as the other six, enjoyed most about being single mothers was the increased freedom, decreased constraints, and abundance of choices that came along with it. When it came to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of single motherhood, almost everyone reported that being the head of the household was the biggest advantage because they could make all the necessary decisions themselves. On the flip side, the most common disadvantage was the lack of a partner to share domestic duties with. This was the consensus regardless of how many children a participant had. McFly was the only participant who said lacking a partner to share in the household chores was not a disadvantage to her. Kelly, Erika, and McFly all made a point of saying that a big advantage for them was the closeness they shared with their only child. None of them were willing to sacrifice the closeness they valued in order to have a partner in their lives. Being an ethnic minority or having to deal with the racism that faces a mixed-race child may have contributed to the particular closeness between mother and child that these women experienced.

### ***DISCRIMINATION***

Eight of the ten women I interviewed said they had experienced or still experience some form of discrimination as single mothers. Everyone had different experiences as far as the type of discrimination experienced, but all the participants were in agreement that the discrimination they experienced was due to their status as single mothers. For example, three of the single mothers experienced discrimination from their employers or co-workers, three women experienced discrimination from social services, two participants experienced rental

discrimination, and two of the women had experienced some discrimination from their children's school.

Well, co-workers, ah, tend to, you know, if I've got to run off, I've got a sick kid I've got to pick up from school or whatever, they'll think, "Ugh she gets off more time that we do." I think there should be, your job should include sometime of emergency time allotment per day. And somehow as an employee with kids you should have to compensate that, okay. Whatever time I'm gone, it should be that I do have to make it up if that's the case so that it's even. Because I feel just guiltier than stink and I'd rather have an agreement that I make up the time instead of somebody saying, "No that's okay, that's okay" and then get pissed off later. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

I still think social services is terrible. I think I mentioned that one time they were threatening me with apprehension and *finally*, I had just sold my house so I didn't want to put out the money, but finally I had to go out and get a lawyer. And she just made *one* phone call to him and he phoned me and he said, "I never said anything about apprehension." And I wished I had got it on tape, you know. And that was the only difference. I had a lawyer. He backed off just like that! It just shows you. They've never relented with the control of our lives. That's my opinion. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Yeah, in a lot of ways, yeah, you're discriminated against. The biggest one is in renting. No. And we've actually played with that a little bit. A few times that I've rented and if I, you know, I've got three kids, "Oh, I don't think this would be suitable for you" or "someone's looked at it and I'll let you know." And yet I'll phone that same place back with Tan Man and say [to Tan Man], "Oh you have to come with me, I need a man here." And, "*Oh yes*" they'll rent to us right away. And that's the biggest place I've noticed it. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

When you talk about that, I think about this last year. For my daughter's school concert he [daughter's father] came up because we actually can tolerate each other, so we, you know, we sat together and watched her do her concert. Afterwards, I did notice some difference in the way, I thought that the teachers were more friendlier to me. And I was saying to a friend of mine, "They were probably saying, 'Oh she did it with a black guy but at least she's not gay'." You know? So it's just so sick. But his presence definitely does make a difference. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

Only two women, Donna and McFly, did not feel they had experienced any discrimination due to their status as single mothers. Donna who is a lesbian said that any discrimination she felt was a result of her sexual orientation. McFly who is First Nations said she received more respect for being a single mother than for any other type of behavior. She

informed me that many married mothers reminded her constantly how lucky she was to be single and how they wished they had the freedom she possessed.

All the women I interviewed reported some form of discrimination based on their status as single mothers except for Donna and McFly. These two women discussed people's discriminatory behavior toward them as homophobic and racist respectively. These two women might not have picked up on negative behavior concerning their single motherhood status because homophobic and racist behavior was usually more blatant and harder to shield one's self against. As far as some form of discrimination goes, no single mother completely escaped it.

### ***RELATIONSHIPS***

There were fifteen fathers and eighteen children associated with the mothers in this study. From what the participants described about these fifteen fathers, seven (47%) were happy with about the pregnancies, six (40%) were indifferent to or could not deal with the pregnancy, and two (13%) specifically requested an abortion. It might be expected that the men who were excited to become fathers have also taken an emotional and financial interest in their children's lives. However, of the seven men who, in the mother's perception, were pleased with their partner's pregnancy, only one paid adequate child care every month, while four fathers paid very little but saw their children, and two of these men had absolutely no contact whatsoever. Only one father in this study paid his court ordered child support and took an active interest in his children. He has even taken responsibility for a son who is not biologically his, as Donna explains.

No, I have three children and the first one [her son] was when I was by my self and we don't have any contact with his father. But my husband, my ex, totally took on all responsibility for all three children. And actually my son, he's almost sixteen, he actually lives with his Dad in Calgary now. So I have two kids [girls] that live with me

and one child that lives with him. So then my child support went down because he had one child there. So we worked it out where he pays less. And so my oldest boy is living with him. Yeah, the other, the biological father of my son, had not, hasn't seen him since he was a year, so in fifteen years or so. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

As is clear from this quote, Donna also has had experience with a father who has had no involvement in his child's life at all. Her son's father has never accepted his responsibility and most likely never will. Some of the fathers associated with the women in this study took no responsibility for their children, but the majority of fathers, according to the participants, made an effort to see their children regularly while they simultaneously avoided financial responsibility for their children. In other words, most of the participants' ex-partners failed to make consistent or any child support payments but wanted contact with their children.

When the single mothers discussed their children, the main focus was their concerns about their children and single motherhood. This was partly due to the nature of the interview schedule, but it was also partly due to the participants' desire to voice their worries about their families. There were a variety of concerns as well as a variety of possible sources for these concerns. For example, 30% of the participants were concerned about their sons not having a consistent male role model, and 20% were concerned about their daughters' future romantic relationships.

Ah, just the fact that he doesn't have a consistent male role model. There's his grandparents, his grandfathers, my brother, and there could be his father in the near future. And there's the two guys, my roommates, they're gay actually, they're a couple. So it's, my son's lived with me and now he's living with two gay guys that are a couple and that I think could be causing some problems. Just because of the difference. So those guys have always been part of my life, I've known them for ten, eleven years and they've good friends of mine. But you know I'll be moving out soon so the everyday contact is not going to be there. They still want to be a part of my son's life, but the twenty-four/seven [24 hours a day/7 days a week] kinda role model, I think that's the one thing my son's going to miss out on. (Camille, February 5, 1999).

The one thing that I don't know is that I wonder if kids raised by a single parent if they understand relationships. I really don't understand relationships with an intimate

partner so that would be the one concern that I would have. Again I think that Elisha is fairly strong-minded, so I think whoever hooks up with her is probably going to be the less dominant. Yeah, you know people have asked me, because I do counseling, about relationships and I just say, "I don't know." Don't ask me that, that's definitely not my area. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

Although the participants had a wide range of concerns for their children being raised in a lone mother family, 90% of them agreed that their main concern for their children was lack of money. Other concerns, such as lack of time and lack of activities for their children, were discussed under economics because these concerns were related to lack of income. Many single mothers felt that with more income many of their concerns would disappear, even the concerns that were not necessarily directly related to financial matters, such as lack of a male role model.

In this section, I first discuss the fifteen fathers associated with the single mothers in this study. I consider the fathers' role in their children's lives and the types of child support, if any, that the fathers provide for their children. Next, I discuss the participants' children. So much was discussed about these eighteen children that it is impossible to include every detail or even attempt to organize all that was said into categories. In this thesis I have chosen to examine the discrimination the children experience and the mothers' perceptions of the children's problems that have arisen from living in a lone-mother family. Past research has placed the blame on single motherhood for any of their children's problems rather than considering other factors such as poverty and absentee fatherhood. These were topics the participants talked about at length.

### ***CHILD SUPPORT***

I inquired about the amount of monetary support each woman received from her ex-partner. Each woman had already figured out what a sufficient amount of monthly child support would be either by court order, or by mutual agreement between their ex-partners and

themselves. Each single mother required a different amount of money depending on the number of children and other circumstances, but each could say whether they received all the money, part of it, or no money at all. Only one father paid adequate child support each month, while eight fathers paid their child support either sporadically or paid very little each month, and six fathers have never paid any child support. All of the participants reported the same personal and household income for two reasons. The mothers who received a specified amount of support on a somewhat regular basis included this as part of their personal income. The mothers who received nominal or irregular payments did not feel the need to include this as their personal income. Obviously, the majority of the single mothers I interviewed received little or no money from their children's fathers which made life for these women that much more of a constant struggle. These three participants each discussed the varying degrees of child support they received.

Um, actually it's depending on my income. But, for the longest time we kinda thought, oh four or five hundred dollars a month was adequate. And then we found out that the new Canada, there's federal guidelines on child support, which came out a year ago, and all of a sudden we realized that one of us was being shafted and that was me! And so my child support went from \$450.00 to \$1,080 a month and that was really great. Yeah. And now it went down again and now it's going up a bit so it's a round, like I think since I'm not working, it's around \$850.00 a month. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

Very minimal. He, um, this is actually a huge issue for me. I've really bitten it and I really bit it. And I just figure well, I believe in karma, so I just don't want to, you know, get my hands too dirty. Um, he, ah, pays us, ah, \$140.00 for the month. Wupdity do da! (McFly, April 7, 1999)

I get, um, sometimes I get money from him. Like I said it's supposed to be \$550 a month and I don't, I might, and I don't get it on any given day. So it's kinda like, I call it Keg money because you know how you go to the Keg every once in a blue moon and it's a great dinner? Well I call it Keg money because I get it every once in a blue moon and it's great! So I don't go to the Keg with it but I call it Keg money. And, ah, so when I get my Keg money, whenever I get it, I might get, I think I've gotten the most in that last, well, I got a \$150 and thought wow! Well, \$150 in Keg money, you know, I better get those kids the boots, or whatever they need, or drop it on my Visa, or something. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

Not at all. Um, that's been like a nightmare. We went to court and he just kind of sat and lied through his teeth to the judge. It's like you goof. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

All of the women I talked with received different amounts of money except of course the women who received nothing. For example, a single mother in this study received anywhere from \$25.00 a month to \$850.00 a month. There were also the sporadic payments such as one participant who received \$100.00 occasionally from one of her daughter's father.

The problems the mothers faced fighting for monthly child support payments from the fathers as well as the government were significant. Camille briefly described the hassle she went through with court enforced payment, Donna talked about the stress adequate monthly payments from her ex-partner caused her, and Regina illustrated what she would like to do when her ex-partner did not pay his child support.

Well, a lot of times the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing because he's being enforced to pay this, but the BC government thinks he's voluntarily paying it. And I got \$300.00 in November and I got \$300.00 last week [for February]. And he said he started getting deducted in October. So, October and then there's three more months somewhere in the mail. No one knows what's going on. They won't let me talk to Ontario. So I'm gonna go to the premier if that's what it takes. It's ridiculous, because I was getting \$300.00 every month from him on time, 15th of every month, he gave me post dated checks. Now, I never know when I'm going to get money. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

Um, and he's always paid me but I continually feel like it's a struggle. Like even though he's really good about it and I think, you know, I have nothing to complain about, I just I never know when the money's going to be there. And like it's always around the first of the month, but sometimes it's not right on the first of the month. And then I have to think well I have to have all my rent covered and all my bills covered and then not really count on his money coming in at a certain time. Or he has really good intentions about doing things but then he takes a while to do them. Like for this month he was supposed to give me the seven hundred. And I kept phoning him the week before and wasn't able to get him to talk to him. And finally I talked to him on the weekend and I said to him, "You know my UI hasn't kicked in yet and I'm going to need a bit more money and how are you about that"? And he says, "Oh yeah, yeah, I'll go to the bank on Tuesday and put some extra money into your account." Well yesterday [Wednesday] I went and there's no extra money there. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

I guess I can be a little bit radical. But I remember the last one, he wasn't going to pay one month. And I was like, "Okay, fine, you're not going to pay and that's fine, but the kids and I are coming to your rugby game with big plaque cards and we are going to carry these signs up and down the side lines that *you* are a delinquent dad." He was horrified. Then the other time I was like, what would used to happen was if he didn't like something I did or said he wouldn't pay. Then I was like, "Fine, *don't* punish *me*. I'm making up signs and I'm tacking them all around your house. I'm going to put your address, basement suite, your name, how much money you make, and that you are *refusing* to pay for you children. You just shouldn't have to go threaten stuff like that or have to *think* of things like that. It's like \$200.00, we're going on a march now, me and the children. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Regular child support payments were not the only kind of monetary support that these women received from their children's fathers. Some fathers paid for daycare costs, some bought clothing, some paid for vacations or travel, and some helped out in other ways by doing odd jobs for their ex-partners. Three participants discussed how their children's fathers provide monetary support in other ways than child support payments.

He buys her clothes and he gives her money when he comes up to see her. It would be nicer if he could give the money to me so I could buy food, but he gives it to her and she buys whatever which, I guess, is okay too. But as far as like, see he's always been able to give her like all the fun stuff, which has been, ah, which has been tough on me sometimes. We already talked about his minimal support. As far as monthly maintenance, he didn't give anything for the first seven years. Um, and but he's always, always bought her clothes and shoes, well not *all* of them but the majority of clothes and shoes. Which helps. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

The second one, he sent some money here and there, like \$50.00. He's probably sent less than \$500.00 total in six years. He tries. But he did pay like the last time they went to visit him. I told him he had to pay half of the plane fare and he did eventually, yeah, he did eventually. And then for number three, he pays for half of the day care. And, um, any clothes or incidentals he'll pay half. He also, he doesn't work. He's a full time student. His financial situation is a little bit different. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Although I got my ex to build one [a carport]-- he's a carpenter-- I took it off what he's supposed to be paying for child support, which he doesn't pay, so I did get that. A lot of women don't even have that opportunity. He built us a tool shed, like when my older girl moved in we had to put the boxes and that in the tool shed. Like he built the carport and the tool shed, I hate to say it, but it is a help. It's really disgusting. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)



Although these other types of financial help should be in addition to regular, adequate monthly payments from fathers, they were frequently used in place of child support payments. I think most of the participants would agree with Kelly that she could spend the money more wisely than her daughter or her ex-partner could if the money were given directly to her.

It was very difficult for single mothers to make it on their own. It became an even larger challenge when ex-partners failed to pay child support. Many fathers simply refused to pay child support, according to the single mothers in this study. As Jenneffer stated, "He did pay for a while but he's of the mind that he doesn't have to pay and so he won't." Unfortunately, he was right.

### ***FATHER'S ROLE***

What goes hand in hand with the father's child support is the father's role, meaning the time each father in this study spent alone with his children. The role fathers play in their children's lives can mean a great deal to single mothers, as it gave them time to work, rest, or spend time with friends. Although they often did not pay child support, the fifteen fathers connected with the participants in this study were a little better about taking an active role in their children's lives. Of these fifteen dads, nine made some effort to spend time with their kids, while six dads made no such effort. Of these six fathers, five also had no contact with their child's mother and did not pay child support. The nine fathers who did see their children consisted of one who paid sufficient child support, seven who paid a little or sporadic support, and one who paid nothing. There were various ways these nine fathers spent time with their children and there were various amounts of time spent as well. Some fathers had a desire to see

their children and some had to be asked or reminded to see them. Although the ex-partners' role can be another burden for single mothers, it was appreciated when the fathers did play their part.

How often fathers saw their children varied. In this study, the majority of fathers made time to see their children, but the time spent was rather scant. According to my participants the time their ex-partners spent with their children ranged from seeing them two or three nights a week to seeing them only on the weekends. Then there were the fathers who only saw their children once a month or once a year.

He now sees the kids three times a week. He pays half the day care but it hasn't always been so rosy. It's been a real struggle. But because his sort of motivation is to be on my good side, it's helpful in keeping him doing all the things he should be doing. So that gives that glimmer of hope there. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Oh, this is, ah, kinda of a joke because I get every second weekend free *if I'm* lucky. So that's probably the most advantage that I can see because then I get that, um, not every single mom would get that. But I was saying to this counselor, you know he doesn't even listen about the grief that I have to go through. Being interrupted in my job, he doesn't have to deal with them being sick, finding daycare, he doesn't have to deal with a goddam thing and I'm sick of it! All he does is give me attitude, no money. He used to actually, um, it would be his weekend and he'd call me Friday night, "Ah, I got a job and I can't pick the kids up tomorrow." He'd leave a message rather than talk to me. So I'd have to get a baby-sitter, and that baby-sitter would cost me thirty-five dollars that day. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

Yes, they think he's just like the sun and the moon and ugh. He lives in Calgary. Um, he works, and for work he sometimes comes out to Vancouver, so he's actually seen them this year quite a bit. You know he was out at least two times in the fall and then out at least for like Christmas and then he was out again in February and then I think he's coming out next week. So he's sees them quite a bit. At least more so than he did before because he was working, he was based in Calgary, and he wasn't traveling a lot, so that's really good. And they phone him and, um. Sometimes they talk to him a lot, and sometimes they don't talk to him too much. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

So, um, I mean, since we've moved back here, I mean when we were living in the interior he probably called once a month and she saw him four times in seven years. Um, since we've lived back here he calls her on a weekly basis. He calls at least once or twice a week and he tries to come up and see her once a week. I wish he would take her to his house more. He was supposed to take her for the weekend but he said he was too busy. He had to work. And I said, "Gosh, I've worked your whole life, you know, and I still have time for you." (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

The women wanted their ex-partners involved with their children, however, some single mothers found this situation to be a catch 22. On the one hand most single mothers wanted their ex-partners to spend time with their children, but on the other hand this time was usually spent doing fun things the children enjoy. Not only did the fathers get the fun time with their children, but they also spent money the participants could not afford to spend on their children. Further, the participants would have preferred to have this money as child support. Three single mothers were upset that their ex-partners got to spend the fun time with their children while they did the draining child rearing work.

Actually he's more like Disney dad because he picked the kids up and would think nothing of dropping like \$200.00 in a day or a weekend. Um, taking them out to dinner, movies, and, ah, buying them \$30.00 runners! You know, buying them anything they want, taking them like to all kinds of theme parks, and drop money, it just makes me sick. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

He does take the kids, in fact he's really stubborn about insisting on seeing them. You know they still seem to have the right. So sometimes it helps a bit if there's stuff I want to go to or if I'm working. I always work weekends. So he is good with the kids, he takes them to the beach, the park. He has more leisure time with them than I do I feel like. It pisses me off. And the younger girl always wants to go there. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

But as far as like, see, he's always been able to give her like all the fun stuff, which has been, ah, which has been tough on me sometimes. Like I remember one time we stopped by because we were on our way down the Oregon coast or something like that. So she went to see him and he bought her some new clothes and stuff and so she came back telling me how great her dad is you know, and I just said, "*Who* looks after you *everyday* of your life"! And I've taken her on some fairly big trips and stuff like that too, and she goes down and sees her dad for an afternoon and gets a couple of outfits and thinks he's a *king*! (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

The other single mothers whose ex-partners were not in any way a part of their children's lives had some very different complaints. For example, some of the single mothers were concerned about lack of a father figure for their sons, some were concerned about the rejection their children felt, and some were concerned about how it enabled their ex-partners to be

irresponsible. Here three single mothers describe why their child's father did not pursue a relationship or spend time with them.

Nope, it's non-existent. When she was, um, well when she was about a year and a half I tried to go back out with him. And when it didn't work in terms of a relationship between him and I, he said, "Tell her that, tell her to get your new boyfriend to father her." It's like yeah right. I've seen him once since then and it was years later and I just I asked him, "So Cathy would really like to see you." And he just said, "Well tell her, her dad's doing some of his own stuff right now." Okay. And I mean he grew up in a dysfunctional home and everything like that, so he felt like he needed to take care of some of that. And I just kind of go, "Okay!" (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

And he has no relationship with my son. I mean he [her son] might remember him as Stephan. And we used to be really close, but I don't think we even know each other anymore. If I was living in Toronto right now it would be different because I'd be seeing him on a regular basis. But I'm glad I'm out here, and he has the opportunity to come out here, I think even his parents would be willing to support him, but he won't. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

Not the oldest one. No, he refuses. He refuses to have a relationship because he's mental. He has mental problems. I shouldn't say it that way but he does. Has a mental illness. He's been off on half time. I don't know because I haven't seen him in a while. My suspicion is that it's made up because then he gets disability. He works for the government, ministry of social services, child protection! But because of the kind of person he always was, it would make sense to me, he's *always* on stress leave. Whether it's legitimate or not, my suspicion is that he isn't. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

When fathers did not send child support and/or did not involve themselves in their children's lives, the lives of their children and of the single mothers of these children were seriously affected. This lack of support on the fathers' behalf was one of the causes of many of the concerns my participants had. Concerns such as lack of time, money, and lack of a male role model were partly related to their ex-partner's lack of involvement.

### ***CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS***

The single mothers I interviewed did encounter some school-related and emotional problems with their children. Concerning problems children encountered at school, 60% of the

women I interviewed affirmed their children had some type of problem, whereas 40% said their children had no problems. Most of the children's problems at school, which the mothers reported, were a below average performance and/or difficulty fitting in. Concerning emotional problems, 70% of the single mothers said their children did not suffer from any degree of emotional distress, while 30% of the participants said their children exhibited some signs of emotional distress.

The school related problems the single mothers said their children had encountered were lack of motivation or social isolation. Of the six participants who had children who experienced difficulty at school, all gave specific reasons as to why this was so, including lack of a male role model, lack of money, racism, and special needs.

My son had, um, some problems the last year and half. And I don't know, you know, if it was because I was a single parent, but I think it would have helped if his father was around you know, like here in the province. Um, you know he was, ah, not really getting into trouble but like missing school. And, you know, just being really *lazy* around the house and kind of disruptive like destroying my stuff, like furniture and like little knives and little things and not talking back but just not being really, you know, whatever. And he failed, um, English and French last year, and we had *lots* of discussions about, you know, you can't do that and this and that. (Donna, March 4, 1999)

The older girl won't do anything. All the teachers say more effort needed. One teacher said more effort in class, and she blames everybody. I say, "Who are you going to blame for this one"? She says, "Oh I was reading in class." You'd think she'd read her text, right? But no she's reading some *Goosebumps* book or something. So you know. So she's a bit better since they've been sending me letters and I had to go and see a counselor and all that shit. So she's keeping up a bit more but. Most of it's lack of effort. I still think that some of the diagnosis is probably right, they diagnosed her finally ADHD, she has that, she's so easily distracted and hyper and all that. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Well, she doesn't really think that she has friends. Um, and I think that she is scared to try to make friends and again that stems from her history at school. It would be really nice if I could find a single mom that had a kid the same age as her. (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

The three children who experienced emotional problems also had very specific reasons for these problems. Mothers who reported that their children had emotional problems explained these problems with reference to various family dynamics.

Um, but being impoverished is emotional. You know it is. It weighs on the heart, it weighs on the mind. The oldest is carrying a burden. She carries a burden. I see myself reflected in my three girls. And I see all three of them carrying different things of me. (Pretzel, April 21, 1999)

Only in the sense that, yes, I think they used to, um, with my, like I said with emotional problems in the sense that my one son went through counseling about children witnessing abuse. I mean, I think if you become a single mom because of that, then I really think you should get your kids into counseling because of that. I mean I think you need to talk to your kid about divorce too. So as far as emotional, I think, I mean I've spoken to them on goingly about what's going, so they're not in the dark and they don't misunderstand. (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

I would say that she, well, she suffers a lot from emotional difficulty, but that's, it's kind of a multidimensional bag. It's, I mean, yes, she suffers the loss of her father and she's talked about him many times. So, I mean does a child of a single parent suffer any emotional damage? Oh, wow, ah, there's the financial issues, there's, I mean, a single parent usually has emotional baggage that they need to work through, um, the loss of the other parent. It's a pretty multiplex bag. So. (Rachel, April 15, 1999)

The gap between rich and poor, attachment to parent, and difficulty with discipline are other child-related problems that were described by the single mothers I talked with.

And my son sees the toys they bring and that's where it gets really bad. And I *can't* compete with that so that's a problem I'm experiencing. That he's going to understand the gap between rich and poor way sooner than I ever did. And it's gonna get blamed on me. It's just really hard, I mean parents should be allowed to spend money on their children, but it makes it hard for the rest of us who can't afford those things. (Camille, February 5, 1999)

And when we first started being friends, I mean Elisha's funny too because I am like her sole person she somewhat, she wants to control that. She's insecure I guess in a sense of losing me. So she tries to keep others out. So when this friend of mine, you know, we tried to hook up our two kids because we're friends so our kids should be friends, they hated each other and they fought all the time. I think both the kids were threatened by the moms' relationship and so if they could always stir up crap, then how could the moms have a good relationship? (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

And there is the thing with the discipline, especially since my older girl's moved in. I think it's, she won't do anything and I think it's easier if there's two people to enforce it. It's *really* difficult especially when you're too busy to try and get them to do anything. Well it ends up with a bunch of yelling and arguing. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

These women, as well as some of the other participants, did not see their children's behavioral and emotional problems stemming from their status as single mothers per se. Rather they saw poverty and/or the absence of a responsible partner as the main factors responsible for their children's behaviors.

### ***DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHILDREN***

Since most of the single mothers I interviewed experienced some form of discrimination because of their status as single mothers, it would follow that most of the children in this study have experienced discrimination as well. Sixty percent of the interviewees said their children experienced some form of discrimination, usually at school or daycare, because they belonged to female-headed households. Two of these women, Kelly and Erika, had mixed-race children, so they felt the discrimination imposed on their children was a product of both single motherhood and racism. Many times when single mothers' children experienced discrimination because of their status, single mothers shared it too. It is unfortunate that single mothers and their children encounter prejudice and discrimination because they belong to a female-headed household. In this case, some of the children's discrimination was based on single mothers' poor economic situation, some based on the lack of a father, and some based on racial discrimination. In Rachel's case, the discrimination her special-needs daughter experienced was also derived from being in special education as well as being poor. The other 40% of the participants who said their children experienced no discrimination based on their inclusion in a lone-mother household

also implied their children encountered no discrimination based on factors other than belonging to a single-parent household.

Most of the prejudice the children in this study experienced was at school by teachers and classmates; however, neighborhood kids and parents were also sometimes a problem as well.

The discrimination usually erupted in reprimanding, exclusion, and teasing.

One of the things that happened was she had her tonsils out so she had a bottle of water with her at school. And I guess when the teacher first saw Elisha, Elisha walked into the classroom and this kid said to her, "Why do you have that bottle of water"? And Elisha turned around to him and said, "Because I had my tonsils out, *stupid*." So the teacher said to me that Elisha was again not being very tolerant of this other kid and she didn't like the way she was talking to him and blah, blah, blah, blah. So when I talked to Elisha, I said, "What's going on, why are you calling this kid stupid? You know that wasn't very nice." And she said, "Well Mom, he was doing it just to bug me because two seconds earlier out in the hall he said to me, 'How come you have that bottle of water'?" And I said, "Because my tonsils, I got my tonsils out and my throat's dry and so I drink the water." Then I walked into the classroom and he said to me again, "Why do you have that bottle of water"? And I said, "*Because* I got my tonsils out, stupid." (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

Okay, hold on a second. My son had a disagreement with a kid a year younger than him, over his car, like my son's little motorcycle, one of those plastic motor trike things. And, um, my son was like, "Get off, it's mine, it's mine." And the grandmother of this child was walking by and said something, I didn't hear, I found out later that the woman called my kid a bastard. Well, I don't stand for that. I don't. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

My older kid, she complains that kids even at the daycare-- they don't go much anymore-- but they make fun of them because of the clothes they wear. But the kids at school and the daycare make fun of my kids telling them that they're on welfare and we're not. They just use as a put down. (Jenneffer, February 18, 1999)

Since Kelly and Erika's daughter and son, respectively, have black fathers, they have further experienced discriminatory behavior, mostly in the form of exclusion. Both single mothers gave examples of regular occurrences of prejudice in their child's life.

My daughter started school with some kids from kindergarten. And there were some kids that had been all over the place with us. Like they had come to our house, we had sleepovers, we've gone to, like there's hot springs two hours away from us. We'd gone there, and all over. My kid's never ever once been in their house. What's that



about? People ask me what I think about this and I say they are racist but they are just trying to be polite so they'll let their kid come with us but "there's no way that kids coming in our house." This is the other thing that's interesting, they always said that she was intolerant. So it's okay for kids to call her brownie. I mean they didn't say that it was okay, but they said that she was intolerant of others. I had a teacher tell me that Elisha was the most destructive kid in her class and that she'd stir up the whole class, but she had Elisha sitting in the middle of the classroom. And I thought powerful little thing isn't she if she can get the whole class going? Well why do you have her sitting in the middle? If she's this good, then why don't you have her over to one side so she's not the center of attention? (Kelly, February 25, 1999)

Well, the funny part is the kid next door and the kid up stairs play together. I mean it was so obvious. It was so blatantly obvious last summer, they set up a tent, you know, in the back yard, and the two boys slept in the tent, and they didn't invite my kid over! Um, I couldn't believe it! I mean it was up for about ten days, and they never once asked him. I sat there going, I didn't get it. I filled in the blanks though. It was, I see it as the fact that I'm a single mother, and I see it as the fact that I've got black people coming in and out of my house in the white neighborhood. The other thing is, my son is allowed to go over, the odd, odd time this is, and he's allowed to go in their house. Every time my, their boy comes around the corner and they can't see him for a second, they're all calling his name or whatever. And he's not even allowed in my *house* to play. But my son's allowed to go over his house. (Erika, April 12, 1999)

Although these examples differed in the site of exclusion, the mothers clearly saw and labeled the exclusion their children experienced as racist. Kelly's daughter was not invited to go over her friend's house, but those friends were allowed by their parents to visit Kelly's home. Whereas, Erika's son was invited over to his friend's, but his friend was not allowed by his parents to visit Erika's house. Although these two examples are opposite in details, it is the exclusion that the mothers focused on in both cases.

McFly, a First Nations woman, also had a mixed-race son but with a white father. McFly reported that her son had not experienced any form of discrimination, which she felt might have been because her son was only three and not in school yet. However, we did not discuss this issue in-depth our interview.

In terms of diversity, Donna and Erika, lesbian and bi-sexual mothers respectively, did not feel their children were discriminated because of their sexual orientations. This might be because sexual orientation was not as obvious as race among the participants in this particular study. In other words, sexual orientation was less obvious in this study because Donna and Erika did not have partners at the time of our interview. If they had been living with female partners, then orientation might have been a much bigger issue in their lives and thus in our interview.

Not all of the children in this study met with discriminatory behavior from school, neighbors, or peers. As Regina explained, one way to avoid discrimination was to pass as a two-parent family. However, this strategy required an involved father who was also on good terms with the mother.

I can't really see any ways that my children suffer for being in a single parent family. I don't see it. You know, not in school. And part of that may be that they just don't even know. I mean how would school know? You know, other than maybe if there was absolutely no involvement on the part of the father, or the father that's around. Then maybe they would have a different idea, but because he's a very present, you know, picking them up from school and dropping them off, that sort of thing, I'm sure they don't even really know. And we do make a conscious effort to go to parent meetings together and attend anything like that together. And maybe that's part of it in my mind, is that then the kids won't suffer from that stigma. And, really, a person doesn't *know* a relationship, they usually assume. There's that big assumption that people that are apart are not friendly to each other, so when you do appear and come together and you're laughing and stuff, they just don't really know what to make of it. (Regina, January 19, 1999)

The other reason single mothers' gave for a lack of discrimination against their children was the presence of other single mothers in their children's school, daycare, and neighborhood.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION**

Economically, the ten single mothers in this study were poor as most single mothers are. With respect to choices and relationships, there were as many differences as there were similarities among the participants in this study and with single mothers in general, because every single mother's situations is unique. However, the lesbian and First Nations mothers, as well as those with bi-racial children, faced some issues in common with other single mothers who share similar sites of oppression. I want to compare/contrast the one lesbian mother's experiences with lesbian single mothers (many of who have partners) in general, and compare/contrast the one First Nation mother's experiences with First Nation single mothers in general. Next, I want to compare/contrast the situations of the two single mothers in this study who had partially black children and compare/contrast them with other white mothers (single and married) who had children of color. Finally I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this thesis.

### ***ECONOMICS***

For the ten single mothers in this study, the three main economic concerns that came up during the interview were jobs/social assistance, childcare/programs for children, and time. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the job market is not favorable to single mothers since it consists of mostly part-time, low-wage jobs. To make ends meet, single mothers rely heavily on side jobs (some that pay "under the table") and their own personal networks (Edin & Lein 1996; Schein 1995). Among the women I interviewed, Erika sewed clothes for friends as a side job and Kelly had her parents to fall back on when money was tight. Other factors such as low

levels of education and work experience also contribute to single mothers' poverty (Schaffner-Goldberg & Kremen 1990; Mencher & Okongwu 1993). This is why eight out of the ten interviewees were pursuing a post-secondary education, although none had poor school performance or were high school dropouts. Because of their low levels of education and/or work experience single mothers were at high risk of needing public assistance and tended to use it repeatedly (Orthner & Neenan 1996; Schein 1995). Because single mothers make the same salary working at their jobs as they did collecting welfare it seemed easier for them to collect welfare. However most of them did not, including some of the ones I talked with, because of the stigma that came with collecting welfare and because it bolstered their self-esteem to work. (Edin & Lein 1996; Harris 1993). As Lynn said to me, "I tell people if I didn't go to work, I could be on welfare all day. And it would be easier, it is. I'd just have to go to my mailbox to get my check. But you know, along with that would be, well, I'd just rather kill myself" (Lynn, March 28, 1999)

I agree with the human capital development theory that single mothers with more education and job training will fare better in the labor market. Education is an investment on one's own human capital and a student will invest in herself if she foresees a return on her investment (Johnes 1993). However, more education and job training are useless if single mothers do not have the time to invest in their human capital (Schultz 1993). As I mentioned, eight out of the ten women in this study were earning a post-secondary degree. Compared to most single mothers, who tended to have low education levels, the women who participated in this study were unusual in the degree to which they were pursuing post-secondary education. This anomaly had likely occurred since six out of the ten participants were located through Simon Fraser University where all six had taken courses at one time or another. Although these

women did not fit with the general statistics on single mothers' education, they still experienced poverty. These results illustrate the pervasiveness of poverty among single mothers. Hopefully the education these women are working so hard to obtain will lead to better jobs. However, the poverty they experience while obtaining their post-secondary education underlines the difficulties single mothers have in obtaining the education they need to escape poverty. Welfare programs should focus on education, job training, and parenting skills, while giving single mothers adequate assistance so they can make ends meet (Fitchen 1995).

Affording decent childcare and extracurricular activities was another concern for single mothers in this study. It greatly bothered the interviewees that they could not afford all of the things they wanted for their children. According to the economic-deprivation argument, "single mothers have less time and less money to invest in their children, which affects both children's personal characteristics as well as how they view the parental household" (McLanahan & Booth 1989: 566). Single motherhood's effect on children will be discussed in the relationships section, but single mothers in my study and in general do have less money to spend on their children because of their poverty, lack of child support, and lack of government funded programs for children (Harris 1993; McLanahan & Booth 1989). As many of my participants noted, what is needed for single mothers is subsidized childcare, more government services aimed towards children's activities, and reinforced child support from fathers.

The final economic theme that came up for my participants was the lack of time they had to spend with their children and with themselves. Most research does not focus on the time pressure single mothers feel, probably because it is assumed that single parents naturally have less time on their hands than dual parents. The research that does exist, including this thesis, tells us that single mothers have very little "free" time because there is no second partner to fill

in the gaps. Single mothers must do it all. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (1993), the essence of the predicament for single mothers is exactly how to balance their roles as the sole breadwinners and child rearers of their families. In other words, single mothers have less time than dual parents because they are the sole economic source and domestic caretaker for their families (McLanahan & Booth 1989). However, there is research that indicates mothers (single and married) in general have less time than their male counterparts because women are expected to work a “double shift.” That is, although working married mothers have a partner with whom they can share the domestic duties, they still end up doing the bulk of the work themselves (Hochschild 1997). The single mothers I interviewed had even less time than single mothers did in general because most of them were working on a post-secondary degree in addition to working and raising children. Highlighting the importance of time as an economic resource to the participants was an important contribution of this study.

## ***CHOICES***

A pregnant woman’s choices have changed significantly since the early and mid-twentieth century when unmarried pregnant women had the option of marriage, hiding away from society in a “home” and giving their infants up for adoption, or an unsafe abortion. These women were made to feel guilty and ashamed while their partners were usually never even connected with the pregnancy, let alone held accountable for their responsibility as parents (Petrie 1998). At least now unmarried women have the choice to keep and raise their child, although society has found other ways to make women suffer for this choice, as the participants in my study revealed (Sands & Nuccio 1989).

Nine out of the ten women I interviewed were unmarried at the time of their first pregnancy, which coincides with the general population of single mothers (Lichter et. al. 1992; Sands & Nuccio 1989). Six of the ten women I talked with said their pregnancies were unintentional. In most of these cases and with many other unintentional pregnancies, the women chose to use some method of contraception to avoid becoming pregnant but then chose to keep their child once they became pregnant due to failure of their birth control. “It might be more accurate to say that in choosing to go ahead with a pregnancy, these women became single mothers by default” (Davies & Rains 1995: 550). Although women now have the choice of keeping their child or safer abortions, they still do not necessarily choose to become pregnant. Single mothers' choices become even more difficult and strained once they decide to raise their child as a lone mother (Dowd 1997).

The stigmatization single mothers experience may be due on the one hand to society's view of the dual heterosexual parenthood as easier, “normal” and more well rounded, and on the other hand to their poverty (Siegel 1995). There is also a tendency to view single mothers as having made the choice to become single mothers, a perception that the majority of women I interviewed agreed with (Miller 1992). However, as I have discussed, the choices single mothers have are very often limited, and “most single mothers do not choose to support their children on their own: in the vast majority of cases that decision is taken out of their hands by their [partners'] departure through desertion, divorce, or death.” (Taylor 1994: 4). In my study, most of the participants had experienced a partner's desertion. Desertion for them meant their partner's refusal to take responsibility for his child or children.

The participants who admitted to having made a choice to become single mothers qualified these choices with much hesitation and explanation of the options available to them.

Although they felt they had options, they also felt the options open to them were mostly negative. This is why these women were hesitant in saying it was their choice to become a single mother and why they were eager to explain their situation to me. When the alternatives became not just negative, but either physically or emotionally dangerous, then the women felt they had not had a choice at all.

Discrimination against single mothers is prevalent in North American society as the participants in this study illustrated with their experiences (Dowd 1997; Miller 1992). The reason discrimination against single mothers is relevant to this particular study is that discrimination limits choices single mothers have. This holds true for single mothers in general, and the single mothers I interviewed were able to make this connection themselves. According to Sprague (1991) many single mothers experience discriminatory behavior that limits their choices. For example, most single mothers pay a large portion of their income for rental housing yet they constantly encounter discriminatory behavior from their landlords. In this study, Regina's difficulty finding decent housing unless she brought her ex-partner with her is a good example of this discriminatory behavior. This is not an isolated incident, nor is renting the only form of discrimination that limits single mothers' choices. The workplace, children's schools, and government offices are other sources of discrimination for single mothers (Sands & Nuccio 1989; Sprague 1991). Many single mothers experience multiple sources of discrimination against them, as I will discuss later.

## ***RELATIONSHIPS***

Most single mothers are the sole breadwinners and child rearers in their family, which leaves little time for anything else. This is why the role of the father is important and needs to be



understood (Fitchen 1995). Single mothers need and want their children's fathers to be a part of their lives and take on some responsibility concerning their children. Both financial support and parental responsibility are important roles for fathers. Many of the fathers in this study did not fill one or the other, and sometimes neither role was filled. According to Davies and Rains (1995), many of the women they talked with had chosen to keep their children even though they had not chosen to become pregnant. They then offered their partners the chance to be fathers and help raise their child. All of the women but one were disappointed that their partners wanted nothing to do with their child. Similarly in this study, Jenneffer was the only mother who did not want any involvement on the fathers' part; she wanted financial support not parental support. The rest of the participants wanted both equally but had a difficult time getting either out of their ex-partners, although financial support seemed the most difficult for single mothers to receive.

In general, single mothers do not receive a decent amount of child support from ex-partners who are their children's non-residential fathers (McLanahan & Booth 1989). In this study, one woman received adequate monetary support, six women received little or sporadic payments, and three women received no money. This forces single mothers to look for other sources of income supplements in their own family, friends, boyfriends, local charities, non-welfare agencies, and/or community networks (Edin & Lein 1996). Most of the single mothers who participated in this study looked to others besides their children's fathers to help them out from time to time. For example, Kelly's parents loaned her extra cash when she needed it. Erika charged ten dollars an hour to sew clothes for friends on the side. Another difficulty single mothers encounter with child support is reminding their ex-partners for the money. Single mothers' ex-partners often agree to and do pay child support, but when single mothers do receive some financial support it is often inconsistent or unreliable. Single mothers hate having to beg

from their children's fathers and would like them to just give them enough money automatically each month (Taylor 1994). In this study, even Donna who received adequate child support each month, still could not count on the money being in her account at the same time each month. This led to many e-mails and phone calls asking where the money was. Extending financial support across a wider population (fathers, labor market, government, family) for single mothers would minimize single mothers dependence on men and/or the government (McLanahan & Booth 1989). Child support is still greatly needed by the majority of single mothers, therefore fathers need to be forced to pay adequate child support based on their income (Edin & Lein 1996; Fitchen 1995; Hudson & Galaway 1993). It is important to point out that even when fathers are ordered by the courts to pay child support, problems for single mothers do not go away-- as illustrated by several women in this study.

The lack of a fatherly role and child support can increase the chance that children raised by lone mothers will exhibit behavioral problems at school and at home. The reasons for this are that many children in single mother families receive less help with school work and receive less guidance with decisions surrounding peer pressure because single mothers are forced to shoulder the responsibility of raising their family on their own (Lash et. al. 1992; McLanahan & Booth 1989). However, poor families resemble each other whether there are one or two parents, so these problems often come up because poverty, too, equals lack of time (Fitchen 1995). Children with behavioral problems are also mostly male and/or pre-school aged children, which can affect a "mother's sense of competence and personal well being" (Orthner & Neenan 1996: 671). In contrast, it was the pre-teen and teenage boys and girls in my study who experienced problems at school and at home. This inconsistency was not due to there being more older children than younger children. There were only seven pre-teen and teenage children included in this study

compared with eleven young children. One possible explanation for this difference is that many of the children who encountered problems were either the oldest child or an only child. Both Donna and Gina had difficulty with their teenage sons (who were both the oldest of three kids), but Jenneffer and Kelly also had trouble with their pre-teen daughters (who were the oldest of two kids and an only child respectively). Each situation was unique and was dealt with accordingly. For example, Donna's son went to live with his ex-step-father because she and his father felt he needed male bonding. From what I gathered from our interviews, all of the women had a high sense of competence and well being because they knew any problems their children might experience had other causes than just being a member of a lone-mother household. These common causes are poverty, lack of a father, and people's negative treatment towards their children (Lash et. al. 1992). Many of my participants held the view that "troubled parents" equal "troubled children" and "happy parents" equal "happy children" regardless of how many parents there are (McLanahan & Booth 1989: 573).

Another factor contributing to single mothers' children's problems was the discrimination they experienced. Again, this tends to be blamed on the fact that these children come from single mother families, but the reality might again be that these children also come from poor families (Fitchen 1995). Most of the discrimination the children of the participants in this study encountered was rooted in their economic status. For example, Pretzel's daughters were discriminated against because most of their clothes were second hand. However, Pretzel also noticed teachers discriminating against them because her daughters were 'free sprints', which she felt was directly related to her daughters' belonging to a single mother household. If fathers would step up to their responsibility as fathers, then some of the discrimination their children experience might be lessened (Fitchen 1995). Regina was able to bypass this type of

discrimination against her children because her ex-partner accepted his role as a parent at school functions and meetings. She felt that since it appeared she and her ex-partner were together that “the kids [didn’t] suffer from that stigma.” (Regina, January 19, 1999)

Of course, this would only help stop some of the discrimination children from single mother families experience. Unfortunately, single motherhood is not seen as an acceptable and emotional healthy way to raise children (Davies & Rains 1995).

## ***DIVERSITY***

I have woven the diversity issues that came up for the participants throughout this study in order to highlight the other main topics that were prominent to my participants. In order to give diversity issues greater attention I have chosen here to discuss diversity issues separate from the other main topics. In this section I will explore four main areas of discussion: first, the diversity I found and how it relates to the participants’ specific experiences; second, the combination of mothering and poverty, race, having a special needs child, and/or sexual orientation and how it affects single mothers in general; third, the reasons why I did not find more diversity among the ten participants in this study; and fourth, the overriding experiences of single mothering which lessens diversity among them. To explore these alternatives, which are not mutually exclusive, I will compare my results to other studies on diversity among single mothers. This hopefully will provide a further understanding of the numerous difficulties single mothers face in addition to shouldering the responsibility of raising a family alone.

Five of the women I interviewed were white heterosexuals, and, although they were poor, they did not experience extreme poverty. Five women, who in addition to being single mothers, also experienced added stigmatized social locations: one First Nations woman, one lesbian

woman, one bi-sexual woman with a mixed race son, one woman with a mixed race black daughter, and one woman with a special needs daughter who made under \$10,000 a year. The various social locations of each of these five women altered some of their experiences as single mothers compared with the other five participants who were white, heterosexual, and fell into the average income range for single mothers. For example, Erika and Kelly each had to deal with additional prejudice against their children and themselves because their children's fathers were black. Erika felt the racist behavior from her neighbors when they blatantly ignored her son, and Kelly felt it when her daughter's teacher constantly singled her out as a "problem" student. Both of these women felt the treatment they received was not only a product of racism but of discrimination against single motherhood as well. As Kelly noted, people talked with her and treated her benevolently when her daughter's father was present at school even though he was black. Another example comes from Donna's experience as a lesbian and a single mother. She also felt discriminated against because she was a lesbian and a single mother. Although she says it was just a feeling, she did *feel* it when she lived in Alberta and still feels it when she visits there. When she was a teenage mother living in Alberta, she, "felt *very* stigmatized and *very* looked down upon" and that people just *knew* she was a lesbian. Donna may have had a partner while she was in Alberta, which may have attributed to her feeling stigmatized. In contrast, the situation was very different for her in Vancouver, especially in the Commercial Drive area, because she had no feelings of being seen as 'other'. Donna also did not have a partner in Vancouver, which may have made her less vulnerable to discrimination.

Poverty, sexual orientation, and/or race combined with single motherhood can provide even more obstacles for single mothers to conquer, as exemplified by Donna, Kelly, and Erika. These additional types of discriminatory behaviors are not just specific to the single mothers who

participated in this study. Many single mothers who are of color, lesbian, or poor run into similar discriminatory behaviors that are similar to those found in this study, but they also encounter many that were not mentioned by my participants (Dickerson 1995; Lewin 1993; Pies 1990; Taylor 1993). For example, McFly, the native single mother in this study, could not recall any specific instances where she felt she was discriminated against as a single mother. In fact she reported that many married mothers were a little envious of her freedom. Although she did not really notice any discrimination presently, she did notice that men, especially her son's father, tried to take advantage of her more when she became a single mother. On the other hand, she reported very negative comments from people when they discovered her band funded her education. Clearly, this is racial discrimination that she saw as well.

Most single mothers of color have experienced some type of racial discrimination based both on their race and single motherhood status (Taylor 1993; Wyche & Crosby 1996). For example, an African-American single mother named Claudine was trained as an instrument technician through the United States Welfare Department but was unable to find a job once she was certified. Although she was interviewed for a few of these jobs, she did not receive any of them (Sparks 1996). Instead this woman had to settle for temporary work in a department store which led to her continuing on welfare. This is why, in the U.S., the average income of black single mothers is \$12,537, which is significantly lower than the \$20,048 average income of white single mothers (Hemmons 1995). Single mothers who have mixed-race children experience various levels of discrimination as well. For example, Maureen T. Reddy's son was called a "monkey" by a white boy, which is similar to Kelly's daughter who was called "brownie" by her classmates. Reddy also pointed out that she and her son once waited to be served in a deli but were ignored as other customers who came in after them were served (Reddy 1994). McFly, the

First Nations mother with a white son, was an exception in this case. For McFly, it was her and soon to be her son's experiences with anti-First Nations racism that was more critical and relevant to her life than having a mixed-race child.

Raising a special needs child brings up diversity issues for single mothers though it does not necessarily produce discriminatory behavior. What mothers of special needs children tend to experience is that their choices are further limited because of their children's particular needs (Taylor McDonnell 1991). In this study, Rachel, whose daughter had Borderline Personality Disorder and underlying traits of ADHD, discussed how her daughter's needs always had to come first, which was physically and mentally draining on her. She also had to worry about covering her daughter's needed treatments that her medical insurance did not cover. Her choices were limited in different ways than the other participants because of her daughter's special needs.

Although there were many differences among the participants due to their semi-diverse social locations, I found the participants to be more similar than different on most topics because of the overriding experiences of being a single mother (McNeill et al., 1998). This is the case for most single mothers in general because they are, above all, mothers, which means for most of them their children are the main priority in their lives (Daly & Reddy 1991; Pies 1990; Reddy et al., 1994). For example, lesbian single mothers have reported that they like not having to answer to anybody and being in control of their children's as well as their own lives (Lewin 1993). This was undoubtedly the number one reason all my participants gave as an advantage to single motherhood. Single mothers also share more similarities than differences because they "are pitted against [the same] two enemies. The first is poverty, which tugs them down on to the lowest rungs in their societies. The second is patriarchy, which sabotages their attempts to climb higher" (Taylor 1994: 1). Poor single mothers tend to resemble other poor single mothers and

middle-class single mothers tend to resemble middle-class single mothers regardless of race or sexual orientation. The cause might be that economics are more central to a single mother's life than race or sexual orientation (Chow et al., 1996). Since most single mothers are poor, they share many similarities with each other. However being lone mothers to their children is really what ties them together.

### ***STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS***

The main underlying strength of this study was the interview process, which gave me a vivid picture of these women's lives. The interviews allowed me to highlight issues other research had missed, such as the importance of time as an economic resource. Choosing this particular method made the women come alive as individuals, which in turn made their similarities I found more compelling. Another strength in my thesis was the relatively large number of my participants pursuing a post-secondary education at Simon Fraser University or another accredited institution. Although these single mothers had the privilege of getting more education than most single mothers, the similarities (especially economic) with other single mothers showed how difficult it is for single mothers to escape poverty and create better lives for their families. My sister is a single mother who recently attempted continuing her education at a local university but found that her schedule was too strenuous. Working six days a week and taking care of a fifteen year old son on a limited budget afforded her no extra time or energy to take even one course.

In my view, the main limitation of this research lies in the number of women who participated in this study. Since I only interviewed ten single mothers of limited diversity, I could not make definitive generalizations or conclusive arguments about race, class, and sexual



orientation among single mothers. Within these limits I addressed issues of diversity, but it obviously would take a much larger study to generalize about various groups of single mothers. However, a study of many single mothers representing various sites of oppression would not have allowed me to do such in-depth interviews and therefore would have limited the participants' voices in this thesis. Additionally, single mothers are not a homogenous group and should not be viewed as such (Fitchen 1995). On the other hand, for a sample of ten women, I think I had a reasonably diverse group of participants. The point is more that I could not generalize from one First Nations woman, one lesbian woman, one bi-sexual woman, or two women with mixed race children.

There was also sample bias which further hindered the generalizability of my study. Six out of the ten participants were attending Simon Fraser University which gave them certain privileges most single mothers do not have. These women were learning to think critically about their situations, which made them particularly articulate informants. They were also likely to obtain higher paying jobs after graduation than most other single mothers. On the other hand, these women probably had even less time available to them which is why it was such an issue among my participants. Only four of the ten participants had been divorced, and none of the participants had been widowed, which may have skewed the results of this study even further. This, for example, may have increased their sense of having chosen to become single mothers. Divorced fathers may also be more likely to pay child support and spend time with their children. This might explain why the participants' ex-partners paid very little child support and spent little time with their children.

In hindsight I might have placed more advertisements in different locations, but I naively thought finding single mothers to interview would be effortless. On the other hand, very few of

my participants came from the places I posted my advertisement, so posting more would not necessarily have meant getting a more diverse group of participants. My participants' isolation from other single mothers probably contributed my difficulty finding participants. This isolation is an important part of what I found in the interviews. I also could not be scrupulous in picking participants because I was new to Vancouver and did not know many people who could connect me with single mothers to interview. When I would be home in California, friends and family would always tell me about diverse single mothers who were interested in my study, but I wanted to keep this strictly a Canadian study. However, I think having a relatively limited geographic scope for my sample made the similarities to other samples of single mothers more striking.

Although poverty was the central theme in the single mothers' lives, this could have been lessened through various factors in their lives. Mainly, the single mothers did not have the time to accomplish all that they needed to in order to support and raise their children. The single mothers needed more financial security from their children's fathers when it came to child support payments, and they needed more participation on the fathers' part in raising their children. Receiving adequate child support would have allowed the women to work less so they could focus more on the education that will better their lives and spend more time raising their children. Donna exemplified this since she received the highest amount of child support, which in turn contributed to her reporting the second highest income out of all ten participants. Because of this she had the most time to pursue her education and raise her children. Fathers taking an active role in their children's lives would not only give single mothers extra time, but it might also lessen some problems that their children were experiencing.

To conclude, I would like to make some policy suggestions that would benefit single mothers in general and single mothers attending Simon Fraser University. To benefit single mothers in general, the government could take court mandated child support directly out of the father's pay check to ensure that single mothers would receive their monthly child support payments. This would lessen the struggles single mothers have with their ex-partners over these payments. At the request of my participants, child care subsidies should be raised in order to further ease their financial strain. Finally, I personally would like to see an education fund established for single mothers' education.

Simon Fraser University could help single mothers by setting aside some of their housing for a single mothers co-operative. This way single mothers could organize their own support groups and therefore feel less alone. These women could also organize their own child care programs by setting up shifts to watch each other's children. Many of my participants were eager to explore ways to work together in order to lessen their time constraints. Finally, Simon Fraser University could also set up an educational fund for single mothers. An illustration of the benefits of education for single mothers is Erika's case. She wrote me a few months ago telling me how she finally graduated from Simon Fraser University and had received a well paying job because of her education.

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## **APPENDIX A: ADVERTISEMENT**

### **VOLUNTEERS FOR RESEARCH ON SINGLE MOTHERS**

**SINGLE MOTHERS:** If you are a single mother living alone with only your children, I would be interested in talking with you. I am a graduate student in the Women's Studies Department at Simon Fraser University doing a study on single mothers' experiences. I would like to make contact with a diverse group of single mothers including women of different racial backgrounds, sexual orientations, and social classes. Time commitment is minimal: one interview of approximately two hours to be arranged at your convenience. All information will be kept strictly confidential. For more information, please call Rolene Roos at 258-7345.

**Groups to be approached:**

Britannia Community Services Center  
Center for Research on Gender Relations & Women's  
Studies (UBC)  
First Nations House of Learning (UBC)  
Gay Lesbian Transgendered Bisexual Community Center  
SFU Children's Day Care Center  
SFU Women's Center  
SFU Women's Studies Department

**Ads to be placed in:**

**Kinesis**

## APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>SES Origin (self-defined)</b>	<b>SES Current (self-defined)</b>	<b>Personal Income</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
<b>Camille</b>	Working Class	Lower Class	\$20,000-29,999	University	Student
<b>Erika</b>	No Comment	Lower Middle	\$10,000-19,999	University	Student
<b>Donna</b>	Middle Class	Working Class	\$30,000-39,999	University	Unemployed
<b>Jenneffer</b>	Middle Class	Working Class	\$20,000-29,999	University	Postal Worker
<b>Kelly</b>	Working Class	Working Class	\$20,000-29,999	University	Counsellor
<b>Lynn</b>	Working Class	Middle Class	\$30,000-39,999	Continuing Ed	Bank Supervisor
<b>McFly</b>	Middle Class	Working Class	\$10,000-19,999	College	Student
<b>Pretzel</b>	Lower Class	Lower Working	\$10,000-19,999	High School	Cashier
<b>Rachel</b>	Working Class	Lower Class	Under \$10,000	Post-Graduate	Student
<b>Regina</b>	Upper Middle	Lower Class	\$20,000-29,999	University	Server

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Year of Birth</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Marital History</b>	<b>Number &amp; Age of Children</b>	<b>Number of Children Living with Mother</b>	<b>Number of Fathers</b>
<b>Camille</b>	1975	New Westminster	Mixed European	Bi-curious	Never Been Married	Patrick, 3	1 son	One
<b>Erika</b>	1972	Canada	Canadian	Bi-sexual	Never Been Married	Troy, 7	1 son	One
<b>Donna</b>	1964	Alberta	Canadian	Lesbian	Married for 5 years	David, 15 Sarah, 10 Amy, 8	2 daughters	Two
<b>Jenneffer</b>	1950	Vancouver	English	Hetero-sexual	Never Been Married	Andrina, 13 Lenore, 9	2 daughters	Two
<b>Kelly</b>	1960	British Columbia	Canadian	Hetero-sexual	Never Been Married	Elisha, 11	1 daughter	One
<b>Lynn</b>	1966	Edmonton	Canadian	Hetero-sexual	Married for 5 1/2 years	James, 8 William, 6	2 sons	One
<b>McFly</b>	1969	Vancouver	First Nations	Hetero-sexual	Never Been Married	Y's, 3 (son)	1 son	One
<b>Pretzel</b>	1959	Quebec	Canadian	Hetero-sexual	Married for 1 1/2 years	Big Bull, 14 Little Rooster, 13 Porky Pig, 10	3 daughters	Two
<b>Rachel</b>	1962	Calgary	Canadian	Hetero-sexual	Never Been Married	Sarah, 12	1 daughter	One
<b>Regina</b>	1963	Canada	Canadian	Hetero-sexual	Married for 9 months	Jesse, 14 Breanne, 6 Nathan, 3	1 daughter, 1 son	Three

## APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

### A. Demographics

What would you like as your code name (first and last)? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you have? Please pick a code name for each child (first name).

(Include all children living with you. i.e. biological, foster, stepchildren)

Age and sex of each child?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Do all of your children live with you? If not, which ones do?

1. What is your date of Birth? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How would you describe your own background? For example, First Nations Christian, Asian Buddhist, European Jew. Are there other ways you would identify yourself?
3. Where were you born? If not Canada, how long have you lived here? What is your current immigration status?
4. Where in Canada and elsewhere have you lived?
5. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

Post-graduate  
University  
College  
Graduated high school  
Grade 9-11  
Grade 6-8  
Less than grade 6

6. What is your occupation?
7. Do you own or rent your home?

8. What is your annual total household income before taxes?

- Under 10,000
- 10,000 - 19,999
- 20,000 - 29,999
- 30,000 - 39,999
- 40,000 - 49,999
- 50,000 - 59,999
- 60,000+

9. Do any other adults live in your household?

10. Have you ever worried about how you would survive financially? When? Under what conditions?

11. I am interested briefly in some background about the people who raised you. What was the family structure like in which you grew up?

- Raised by both parents
- Raised by mother
- Raised by father
- Raised by grandparents
- Other relatives
- Foster family
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the highest level of education reached by each of your parents/guardians?

	Mother	Father	Other
Post-graduate.....	( )	( )	( )
university.....	( )	( )	( )
college.....	( )	( )	( )
high school diploma.....	( )	( )	( )
grade 9-11.....	( )	( )	( )
grade 6-8.....	( )	( )	( )
less than grade 6.....	( )	( )	( )

13. What sort of work did your parents/guardians do?

14. How would you describe the class background of the family in which you grew up?

15. How would you describe your current social class background? (i.e. lower, working, middle, upper)

16. Have you ever been legally married? For how long? When were you divorced?

17. Are you currently in a relationship? If yes, how long?

18. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

celibate  
bisexual  
heterosexual  
lesbian  
other

### **B. General**

19. What are the advantages of single motherhood? Disadvantages? Give specific examples of what you mean.
20. How does your race affect your position as a single mother? Give specific examples. Class? Sexual Orientation?
21. Do you prefer single motherhood or would you prefer to have a partner? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a partner? Give specific examples.
22. What concerns do you have for yourself being a single mother? Give specific examples.
23. Do you see all single mothers as being equal to each other? Do you view other single mothers as better or worse off than you are? Why? In what way?

### **C. Standard of Living**

24. What are your current living conditions like? How would you describe your standard of living? For example, do you own a car or house? Be specific.
25. What would you like to be able to afford for yourself that you cannot now? Your children?
26. How do you make ends meet? Have you ever used any type of social assistance to make ends meet? When? How long? What were the circumstances? What types of support do you receive (both financial and otherwise)? From whom?
27. What do you feel could be done to make your standard of living more acceptable to you (i.e. jobs, child care, partner's help, government assistance)? Be specific on how these could help you.
28. Do you see all single mothers as sharing the same standard of living as you do? If no, why is your economic situation different from other single mothers?

#### **D. Concept of Choice**

29. How did you become a single mother? If it was through pregnancy was it intentional? Did you adopt, become a foster parent, or assume care of a step-child? If so, how did this happen? Was the process different for different children? Describe for each child.
30. Do you feel you had a choice to become a single mother? What were your other options besides single motherhood? Why didn't you chose these?
31. Do you feel discriminated against (excluded, treated negatively) as a single mother? How? In what specific ways (i.e. how do you feel society sees you)? Can you describe a specific situation?
32. What prejudices do you or your children experience as a member of a single mother family (i.e. family's/neighbors/schools'/workers' treatment of you)? Any other prejudices? Give Examples.

#### **E. Fathers and Children**

33. Do you have a relationship with your child's (children's) father(s)? If so, what is each relationship like? What is his relationship like with each of your children? Has this relationship changed? If so, how?
34. Does he provide any support (financial or other) for you and/or your children? Give examples. What is the history of his paternal support? Describe for each child.
35. What were his opinions/attitudes/feelings about your pregnancy? Were either or both of you using birth control? What kind? Did he inquire about your use of birth control?
36. Do you have any concerns for your children being raised by a single mother? What are they? What do you do about them?
37. Do you see any of your children suffering from any sort of emotional problems? Describe or for each child.
38. Any problems at school? Describe for each child.
38. Have your children ever expressed feelings about living with a single parent? What kinds of feelings? Give examples.
40. Have teachers in your children's schools or other professionals ever implied that your children's problems were due to his/her coming from a single parent family? Who? What situation? What happened? How did you act (what did you do)?



- 41. What do you think are the causes of your concerns and/or your child's problems? Give specific examples**
- 42. What do you think the solutions are?**

## **APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM**

The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures and benefits of this research project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study being carried out by Rolene Roos as part of her master's thesis in Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University.

I understand that:

- my involvement is voluntary. I may withdraw my participation at any time, to chose not to answer individual questions as I see fit.
- the interviewer will attempt to conduct the interview at my pace and according to my level of comfort.
- with my permission the interview will be taped. To protect my identity, the tape will be destroyed once transcribed.
- my identity will be protected by the use of a code name selected by me prior to the interview and by changing personal identifying information.
- I will be sent a copy of the interview transcript and may request that any specific quotes or material not be used in the thesis.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns in relation to any aspect of this study, I may at any time make contact with Rolene Roos (258-7345), with her supervisor Dr. Meredith Kimball (291-4130), or with Dr. Marjorie Cohen Chair of the Women's Studies Department at Simon Fraser University (291-5526).

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

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

- ( ) I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview
- ( ) I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_