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The Role Gender Plays for Heterosexual Single Parents Interacting with Social Workers

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THE ROLE GENDER PLAYS FOR HETEROSEXUAL SINGLE PARENTS
INTERACTING WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Andreanna Royelle King

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

Social workers interact with a variety of individuals in the field. In their profession social workers are to adhere to a Code of Ethics that ensure every client is treated equally. There are some under-represented populations that do not receive the same services when they interact with social workers in various systems; heterosexual single fathers are amongst this group. This study was conducted to identify if there was a gender bias amongst social work students working with heterosexual single parents. The researcher hypothesized that the participants in the study would favor single mothers and inadvertently offer more services to them. Social work students at California State University, San Bernardino, were identified as the population for this study. All currently enrolled students in the School of Social Work were invited to participate in the study. The students were sent a quantitative study via their university emails. There was a total of ninety-three respondents. The majority of the respondents felt that the parent with the same sex as the child should be the custodial parent of that child. None of the participants identified the father as an option for custodial guardianship. The participants offered more services to the custodial parent than the noncustodial parent. As a result of this study, the researcher recommended more representation of under-serviced identities in social work curriculum, more research on this population, and more curriculum that integrates social work education with social work practice.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Discrimination is a part of life that individuals belonging to a minority group face regularly, however discrimination is not something a family in need of social services would anticipate encountering. There are families who seek social services who feel as though they do not receive equal treatment from the social workers they work with in regards to quality of care and services rendered (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016). There is a disparity between the services single mothers and single fathers receive, and this unethical (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016). This research helped to uncover if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents.

Families seek the assistance of social service agencies for a variety of reasons. There are a multitude of services that a social worker could provide to a family in need. It is at the discretion of the social worker what services and resources will be provided to each client. Since social workers have discretion over how case management is handled for each individual client, they are held to a professional ethical standard. This ethical standard ensures that all clients are treated with the same dignity and respect. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics promotes values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (Code of Ethics, n.d.). Per the values of the NASW Code of Ethics,

all social workers are to equally distribute resources and services to clients despite race, gender, marital and socio-economic status (Code of Ethics, n.d.). A study conducted by DiFranks (2008) revealed that although the majority of social workers studied the code of ethics throughout their MSW curriculum, there was a disconnect in the actual application of the code of ethics in social work practice outside of school. Social workers may agree with and believe in the NASW Code of Ethics, but there is a lack of congruence in how the code is applied with clients (DiFranks, 2008). For this reason, there are clients who do not feel as though they are given the same level of treatment by social workers with whom they have encountered (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016).

Single fathers are amongst this group of individuals who do not feel as though they receive the same services as their female counterparts (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016). Since social work ethics uphold the values of social justice, dignity and worth of the person, integrity, and service (Code of Ethics, n.d.), single fathers should be confident that they are receiving the same equal treatment as single mothers. Each family is unique in the circumstances they are faced with, but the way people are socialized shapes the ideology with which they handle those circumstances. This same socialization applies to the roles individuals in a culture believe each gender should hold in society.

A shift in family dynamics has been present in US society since the mid-nineteenth century (Cabrerera et al., 2000). Prior to the nineteenth century, men would be awarded custody of their children if there was a dissolution of marriage,

because children were viewed as property (Pinkerton, 2007). The Industrial Revolution forced men to leave the home to financially provide for their families, which caused the shift in women being awarded custody if there was a dissolution of marriage (Cabrrera et al., 2000). Women were now seen as the only care provider's children had, and children were no longer valuable property because agriculture was no longer the means used to support the family (Pinkerton, 2007). Single mothers have been favored in child custody and support matters for over one hundred years, due to this shift in economics during the nineteenth century (Cabrrera et al., 2000). This history is important, because it explains the cultural beliefs US society upholds.

The way cultural norms are created is equally as important as why they are in place. Cultural norms can be detrimental to individuals who live outside of what is normal to that culture. This study will examine if the cultural norm for custody arrangements causes favoritism from social workers who interact with heterosexual single parents. The socialization and cultural beliefs of an individual creates the biases that the person possesses. In the field of social work, those biases could lead to differential treatment of individuals and the resources and services they are provided.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to assess if there is a discrepancy between the services a heterosexual single mother is offered by social work students and the services a heterosexual single father is offered by social work students at the

same university. This study addresses any bias social work students have towards a gender when interacting with heterosexual single parents in need of social services.

The student population selected for this study was taught the NASW Code of Ethics in their curriculum. Since the NASW Code of Ethics believes that individuals should be treated equally, this population is ideal to evaluate if those ethics are being upheld in practice. Any client who seeks the assistance of a social worker, should feel assured that they are receiving the same quality treatment as any other individual who seeks services.

The research method used to conduct this study was a quantitative design. The participants were asked questions regarding child custody and support, gender roles within a heterosexual single parent family, personal experience working with heterosexual single parent families, and social services offered to heterosexual single parent families. The survey aimed to measure bias that the participants may hold based on the gender of the parent. The participants for the study were students who were currently enrolled in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. The participants included students at the graduate and undergraduate level, full-time, part-time, and Pathway Distance Education online students. The study used social work students as participants to assess if gender bias is present in social work practice prior to working in the field as a professional social worker. The survey was distributed via email at the university to assure the largest possible sample

group. A quantitative design and survey was utilized to ensure the researcher's own values and biases were not present.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice.

This study is significant to the field of social work, because it sought to uncover whether social work students are entering the field of social work with a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parent families. If a gender bias did exist, this would demonstrate that social work curriculum needs to be implemented that addresses the bias so as not to negatively impact client care. If no gender bias was found, this would show that the current curriculum is sufficient in addressing equity amongst clients. In the field of social work there is a lack of research done regarding gender bias towards heterosexual single parents. This study aimed to fill a void in the literature as to whether heterosexual single fathers are receiving equitable treatment in social services from social workers.

This area of research is important to both the client and the agencies that employ social workers. Agencies have a commitment to the populations they service to provide consistency to all clients in the resources offered and services provided. There should be no preferential treatment to a client based on the discretion of the social worker in the agency. Clients need assurance when seeking treatment, that they are being treated with the same level of impartiality as others who are seeking services. This study could show how each aspect of the generalist model is impacted by gender bias when working with heterosexual

single parent families. This topic is important to understand further, because gender disparities should not exist in social work practice. Appropriate curriculum could be implemented to assist in preventing individuals with gender bias from entering the field and practicing social work in a discriminatory manner. This research could impact agencies and the trainings offered to staff upon hire, if the agencies were aware that social work students may hold a gender bias in regards to heterosexual single parent families. Trainings regarding gender bias could help to reinforce agency's values of equal treatment of all clients regardless of the client's gender.

Research Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the participants in this study would favor heterosexual single mothers. This hypothesis assumed that social work students would offer more services, and potentially superior services, when working with a heterosexual single mother than with a heterosexual single father. It was believed that the social work students would unknowingly uphold cultural norms and expectations when working with families, which inadvertently disadvantages the men that are custodial parents of their children.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are plights that single parents must face that are unique. The differences in the perspective of heterosexual single mothers and heterosexual single fathers is rarely examined. As the literature will show, this is not a topic that is often researched. This study aims to fill the gaps left in the literature regarding disparities in services provided to heterosexual single parents based on their gender. The researcher will begin by introducing a timeline of single parents and the various obstacles single parents have had to overcome throughout history in this country.

Living Arrangements

There are a variety of different environments that a child can be raised in. The most common environments would be in a two-parent household, single parent household, parent and stepparent household, and various forms of non-biological parent households (foster care, grandparents or other family members) (Zoil-Guest & Denison, 2014). The environment that a child is raised in affects their perception of the world around them and the child's place in the world (Zoil-Guest & Denison, 2014). Social workers carry a variety of roles when they encounter a family, but one of their main roles is to ensure the well-being of all parties involved. With the way child custody is currently set up, this is not always the case.

Ziol-Guest and Denison found in 2012, that twenty-eight percent of children live in a single parent household (2014). That same study found that more than eight out of every ten children living with a single parent, lived with their mother; yet the same study found that children have better health outcomes, both physically and mentally, when they live with their biological father (Ziol-Guest & Denison, 2014). Children with the worst mental health conditions live with single mothers or mothers who live in cohabitation (Ziol-Guest & Denison, 2014). The study suggests that children thrive better when living with their biological fathers, yet the Brammlett & Blumberg (2007) found that only five percent of children live with a single father. Social workers are to be the voice of underserved groups, given these statistics single fathers and their children are an extreme minority in the realm of head-of-households.

Paternal Custody and Discrimination

The largest arena fathers face discrimination in is child custody court. Fathers begin to face discrimination from the moment they decide they want to be the primary custodial parent of their children. When determining child custody cases, judges rely on several factors which usually are detrimental to the father (Orthner & Lewis, 1979). For child custody cases judges utilize statutory laws, decisions in similar cases, evidence to this case, their own personal values, and research in the social sciences (Orthner & Lewis, 1979). Statutory laws usually uphold the “tender year’s law”. This was a law enacted in the 1800s to change custody from fathers to mothers, because children were no longer seen as

property and mothers were viewed as the only parental figure that could provide nurturing during a child's younger years of development (Cabrerera et al., 2000). Despite this law being over two hundred years old, and holding no scientific value, it is still upheld in most child custody cases (Orthner & Lewis, 1979). Decisions in similar cases also favor the mother. Since the "tender year's law" awarded custody to the mother in most cases for over two hundred years, fathers are at a disadvantage when judges consider decisions made in similar cases. Evidence in the case is usually circumstantial, because there is no real evidence a person can provide as to his/her ability to be a fit parent that would disallow custody from the other parent. The parents are then left to the personal values of the judge, which allows the judge's biases to be considered when making a ruling in child custody. In Orthner and Lewis' (1979) research, they found the biases that judges had were always against fathers. The judges in this research stated they felt fathers seeking primary custody were attempting to avoid child support payments, were unable to devote as much time to their children as the mothers due to work obligations, and did not have feminine qualities to be able to raise their female children (Orthner & Lewis, 1979). Recent research has shown these same beliefs have been upheld throughout the years in child custody cases (Cabrerera et al., 2000).

The literature shows that single fathers face different obstacles and dilemmas than single mothers. Being a single father is not an idea that has assimilated into American culture and thus single fathers face a variety of barriers (Nieto, 1982).

Since it is rare for a father to have primary custody of a child, it is assumed there must be some extenuating circumstance that led the father to be the custodial parent; conversely single mothers never need to justify how they obtained primary custody of their children, because it is an assumption by the public that the mother deserves to be the custodial parent (Nieto, 1982). As Nieto (1982) best puts it: “established, and therefore, acceptable and useful responses to personal, family, and societal demands do not yet exist in American society for this group to the extent that they exist for the single mother” (p. 474). Since there is not a niche for single fathers in our society, they must create one on their own. This lack of belonging in society can prevent single fathers from accessing the necessary resources they may need throughout their children’s lifetime.

One of the largest obstacles single fathers must overcome is the socialized belief that they are incapable of raising a child without a female companion. Individuals have been socialized to believe that women have an innate nature that allows them to naturally be caregivers, and conversely that men lack that same intuition. The topic of gender bias in social work practice is under researched. Romero (1978) conducted the only study on gender bias that is like this research design. The single subject case study was conducted by Romero (1978) during his 1977 dissertation. This study examined the gender bias of social workers when conducting family assessments. Romero (1978) altered the gender of the child to discover if there was any gender bias present in the participants of his study. This study found stark differences between female and

male respondents, and the assessment of the family in the case study based solely on the gender of the child (Romero, 1978). Romero's research will provide an outline for this topic and how to conduct the research and analyze the responses.

Maternal Custody and Discrimination

In order to have a full scope of the issue to be examined, the lives of single mothers must also be researched. Single mothers have their own hurdles to overcome in the societal norm. Living outside of the norm of a two-parent household proves to have its disadvantages for single mothers as well. The historical context of negative imagery of single mothers goes back over two hundred years. It has always been frowned upon to have a child out of wedlock, due to the Christian foundation of this country, but after the abolition of slavery single mothers were viewed as an African American problem (Williams, 2009). Families were split up during slavery by children, fathers, and mothers being sold like chattel. Once slavery was abolished, this left many families broken apart and "fatherless". White women have always been looked to as the moral guide for this country, and their families being intact since they could not be sold as property, allowed for a divide to be made between white mothers and black mothers after the abolition of slavery (Williams, 2009).

After World War II there was a mass influx of women forced into single motherhood. These women were single mothers because they became widowed, which became the new moral compass as to "acceptable" single

motherhood (Williams, 2009). As the times have changed, divorce and children out of wedlock have become more prevalent. This shift in morals has created a deeper divide on who are the deserving mothers and who are not. Age, class, race, and ethnicity all play a role in who is an acceptable single mother and who is not by this era's standards (Williams, 2009). These divides can be seen through policies and laws that have been enacted to specifically discriminate against poor, ethnic single mothers by limiting their access to social service resources. The oppression these women face lead to poorer health outcomes both physically and mentally. Discrimination and poverty have led to higher rates of depression in single mothers than in married mothers (Tran & McInnis-Dittrich, 2000). These burdens carry over into how a single mother is able to provide for her children.

Research shows that single mothers are disadvantaged in many arenas when it comes to providing for their children. Single mothers face financial stress, parental stress, and lack of social support. The research shows that single mothers receive about a third of the income as two parent households (Tran & McInnis-Dittrich, 2000). Many single mothers are underemployed or unable to obtain a higher paying job due to a lack of education (Tran & McInnis-Dittrich, 2000). There is parental stress for single mothers, because there is not another adult present to assist with discipline, guidance and educational support for the child (Tran & McInnis-Dittrich, 2000). Despite these facts about the plight of single mothers, each of these can be applied to single fathers who face to the

same hurdles; however single fathers do not receive the same support for their lack of opportunities as single mothers do (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016).

The Divide Between Single Mothers and Single Fathers

There have been a variety of laws put into place to help eliminate the financial stress placed on single mothers. Most of these laws are in regards to child support payments; yet these laws are in place for custodial mothers, not fathers (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008). There are less custodial fathers that receive child support payments than mothers; nearly sixty percent of custodial fathers do not receive child support from the non-custodial mothers, and more than fifty percent of custodial mothers do not receive child support from the non-custodial fathers (Grief, 1986). The laws for enforcing child support payment are in favor of custodial mothers, despite the disproportion of single fathers who also do not receive support (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008). Per the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau, only fourteen to thirty-seven percent of non-custodial mothers were ordered to pay child support, but sixty-one percent of non-custodial fathers were ordered to pay child support (Christensen, Dahl & Rettig, 1990). Child support was created to secure the financial responsibility of caring for a child is equally distributed between parents, yet the courts place the burden of financial support firmly on fathers disregarding if the fathers are the custodial parents or not. This data does not take into consideration the families that were not married and have non-

custodial mothers. The system is skewed against single fathers, and social workers are a part of that system (O'connell, & Difonzo, 2006).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A theoretical design that defines gender roles and performance is the interactionism perspective. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013) explain the interactionism perspective as a process by which individuals learn how to behave due to the social interactions exchanged daily. This means that an individual's performance of gender is based upon how that individual perceives he/she is viewed in society. Men believe society views them as tough, work-oriented, lacking emotion and strong, therefore they behave in that manner. Women believe society views them as gentle, nurturing, caregivers and they therefore exude those behaviors. This theory applies to this study as it relates to the services heterosexual single parents may seek from social workers due to gender norms and expectations. This theory supports the ideology that is present in American culture, but does not coincide with the perspective from which the research will be conducted. The research will not be conducted from this theory, because the theory upholds the dichotomy of genders. The dichotomy of genders is a contributing factor to the inadequate services single fathers feel they receive (Kramer, Myhra, Zuiker & Bauer, 2016). This theory could be used to explain any gender bias found during the research.

The conceptual framework that best fits the researcher's perspective on gender performance is the feminist theory. Per Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman

(2013) the feminist theory works to emphasize the elimination of the false dichotomy of genders. By eliminating the false dichotomy of genders, the feminist theory upholds that men and women are equal in their abilities and differences are a result of socialization and cultural beliefs upheld by society (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). The researcher believes that the obstacles heterosexual single mothers and heterosexual single fathers face are different due to the dichotomy of genders. The researcher believes that men are as capable of providing for a child physically, emotionally, psychologically and financially as his female counterpart. Since men are equally as competent and capable in parenting, the resources and services they receive should be equal as well. Since the NASW Code of Ethics upholds these same values (Code of Ethics, n.d.), this should be practiced by all social workers who claim to work by this code. This research will help to reveal any unconscious beliefs social workers possess that are contrary to the feminist perspective.

Summary

The plights of discrimination, lower income due to single head of household, lack of child support from non-custodial parent, lack of social support, and lack of education all equally apply to single mothers and single fathers. The issues at hand seem to universally be viewed as single mother issues, and the literature seems to also overwhelmingly present it as such, but no attention is given to the plight of single fathers. The purpose of this research was to uncover the biases that exist that limit single fathers from receiving the same resources

and services as single mothers, and to show the need for more diverse curriculum and agency trainings to educate social workers regarding gender bias.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents. This chapter contains details regarding how the researcher proposes to collect the data for this study. The sections discussed in this chapter will be the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents. This was descriptive research as there is not substantial research regarding gender bias with heterosexual single parents. The research design was quantitative in nature. The researcher used a quantitative design to allow for a larger sample size and to eliminate interviewer bias. The data was collected using an online survey. The survey was administered to all social work students who were currently enrolled at California State University, San Bernardino. The students selected for the survey were current social work students at the graduate and undergraduate level, full-time and part-time students, and Pathway Distance Education online students. The survey was emailed to all currently enrolled

students through their university email. The quantitative survey design allowed the researcher to gather the data in a timely manner, since it was administered to several different cohorts within the school of social work. A quantitative survey design allowed for the participants to participate in the study at their own convenience. A Qualtrics questionnaire was used to gather the information from the participants. The questionnaire was self-administered to all participants and was on an at will basis.

The limitation of this study was that it was a self-administered, email survey. This form of communication allowed for participants to decline participation in the study without any knowledge of the study's purpose. For this reason, the researcher elected to include both graduate and undergraduate level students as participants. Utilizing all currently enrolled social work students at California State University, San Bernardino, allowed the researcher to contact more participants to be included in the study. Since this is non-probability, convenience sampling, the researcher did not intend for the findings of this study to be generalizable to all populations of social work students.

This study sought to find if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents. The purpose of this research was to uncover if social work students at California State University, San Bernardino, were more likely to favor single mothers as opposed to single fathers when in a position to offer services and resources. It was hypothesized that the

participants in this survey would be biased towards heterosexual single mothers and inadvertently disadvantage heterosexual single fathers.

Sampling

This study utilized convenience sampling to obtain participants. The study used convenience sampling of a population readily available to researcher through the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. Students who were currently enrolled social work students were emailed through their university email. All students who were currently enrolled at the university in the social work program including graduate level, undergraduate level, full-time, part-time, and Pathway Distance Education students, were sent the survey via email requesting their participation. The participants were able to access a survey online through Qualtrics to participate in the study. There were ninety three participants in the study.

Data Collection and Instruments

The participants were asked questions regarding child custody and support, gender roles within a heterosexual single parent family, personal experience working with heterosexual single parent families, and services offered to heterosexual single parent families. The researcher developed an instrument for this study as there was no preexisting instrument that could be utilized. The researcher gauged validity and reliability of the instrument to be used, by working with a research advisor. The survey prompted the participants to answer multiple

choice questions and interval questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey aimed to measure bias that the participants may hold based on the gender of the parent. The researcher created a scoring method, with a researcher advisor, to determine if bias exists based upon the answers given by the participants.

The survey began with questions regarding the demographics of the participant. Those questions included: age, gender, race, current level of education, cohort (full time, part time, and online), work/internship experience, and who raised the participants when they were children. The participants were not asked any identifiable information.

The questions asked of the participants in the survey were measured both in a nominal and ordinal fashion. The age of the participants was measured on an interval level. The demographic factors were measured on a nominal level. The work/internship experience of the participants was measured on a ratio level. The demographic factors were used to identify any patterns as related to the questions that were analyzing the univariate of student bias.

The survey then examined the perceptions of the participants in regards to the role of a parent based on gender. These questions included financial support, custodial guardianship, and resources offered to the parent. These questions were measured in an ordinal manner. This was a univariate analysis measuring student bias. The responses were scored on a frequency of male and female responses to identify if bias exists. The purpose of the questions

provided in the survey was to explore if a gender bias exists amongst the participants when working with heterosexual single parents.

Procedures

The researcher contacted the Director of the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, Dr. Laurie Smith, to gain approval to sample the social work students for this research. The researcher provided the Director of the School of Social Work with an IRB application, informed consent, and sample of the survey to be utilized. The researcher was given approval from the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, to sample the students currently enrolled in the social work program.

The researcher prepared a questionnaire utilizing Qualtrics. The link to the questionnaire was provided to participants through their university email. All students who were currently enrolled in the school of social work at the university were contacted via email to participate in the survey. An email was sent using a blind carbon copy to keep the identity of the participants anonymous. Participation in the survey was voluntary and participation could have been terminated at any time without consequence. The researcher collected data during the months of January and February 2017. The participants were provided with IRB approved informed consent in the questionnaire.

The researcher was the only individual who had access to data obtained from the questionnaires. The data was password protected, and the researcher was the only individual who has the password to access the data. After the data

was collected, the researcher utilized IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) to analyze the data. With the use of IBM SPSS the researcher coded and analyzed all data collected. The researcher obtained frequency measures of the data collected through the survey and used univariate analysis to determine if a gender bias exists amongst social work students interacting with heterosexual single parents.

Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the participants remained confidential. The information collected in this study did not record any identifiable information and cannot be traced back to the participants. The data collected from this study was backed up on a password protected computer that only the researcher had access to. The IRB approved informed consent was included in the survey administered to each participant. There were no foreseeable risks associated with being a participant in this study. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The participants could have withdrawn from the study at any time without any consequence or penalty. The questionnaires and any other information related to the questionnaires were destroyed upon completion of this study by the researcher.

Data Analysis

This study was completed using a quantitative method to assess gender bias amongst social work students when working with heterosexual single parent

families. The hypothesis to be tested was that social work students possess a gender bias towards heterosexual single mothers when working with heterosexual single parent families, and that the gender bias inadvertently disadvantages heterosexual single fathers.

The quantitative data gathered from the researcher's questionnaire was entered and analyzed using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the characteristics of the participants through frequencies. Frequency tables were used to describe the population surveyed and determine if a gender bias exists amongst the participants. These frequencies were able to provide the researcher information regarding the causal relationship and correlation between demographic factors, the sex of a single parent, and social work student bias.

Summary

This study examined if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents. This study explored if social work students were biased towards heterosexual single mothers when working with heterosexual single parent families. The data collected for this research was gathered from currently enrolled social work students at California State University, San Bernardino. The researcher used an online questionnaire that was administered to the social work students via their university email. A quantitative approach was used to reach as many social work students at the university as possible to assess if they possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parents

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will present the data from the self-administered questionnaire used in this study. The demographic results of the study will be noted in this chapter. This chapter will include the results of the social work student's perception of child custody and services offered to heterosexual single parents.

Results

Table 1 describes the demographic factors of social work students enrolled at California State University, San Bernardino. There were ninety-three participants in this study: 59.1% were between the ages of twenty and thirty, 24.7% were between the ages of thirty-one and forty, 10.8% were between the ages of forty-one and fifty, and 4.3% were between the ages of fifty-one and fifty-six. There were 14% male respondents, 84.9% female respondents, and 1.1% other gendered respondents. There were 38.7% Caucasian respondents, 2.2% African American respondents, 44.1% Latino respondents, 1.1% Native American respondents, 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander respondents, and 11.8% multiracial respondents.

There were 19.4% Bachelors student respondents, 79.6% Masters student respondents, and 1.1% other educational level student respondents. There were 64.5% full-time student respondents, 17.2% part-time student respondents, and 18.3% Pathways Education student respondents. The field of social work that the respondents were interested in being employed were 32.3% child welfare, 32.3% mental health, 17.2% medical, 4.3% geriatrics, and 14% other fields of social work. There were 55.9% of respondents who were raised by both biological parents, 26.9% of respondents who were raised by a single mother, 4% of respondents who were raised by a single father, 4% of respondents who were raised by a biological mother and stepparent, 2% of respondents who were raised by a biological father and stepparent, 5% of respondents who were raised by another biological family member, and 1% of respondents who were raised by another caregiver.

Table 1. Demographic Factors of Social Work Students

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage(%)
Age:		
20-30	55	59.1
31-40	23	24.7
41-50	10	10.8
51-56	4	4.3
Gender:		
Male	13	14.0
Female	79	84.9
Other	1	1.1
Ethnicity:		
Caucasian	36	38.7
African American	2	2.2

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage(%)
Ethnicity:		
Latino	41	44.1
Native American	1	1.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2.2
Multiracial	11	11.8
Education:		
Bachelors	18	19.4
Masters	74	79.6
Other	1	1.1
Cohort:		
Full Time	60	64.5
Part Time	16	17.2
Pathways Education	17	18.3
Area of interest in Social Work:		
Child Welfare	30	32.3
Mental Health	30	32.3
Medical	16	17.2
Geriatrics	4	4.3
Other	13	14.0
Care provider as a child:		
Both Biological Parents	52	55.9
Mother	25	26.9
Father	4	4.3
Mother and Stepparent	4	4.3
Care provider as a child:		
Father and Stepparent	2	2.2
Other Biological Family Member	5	5.4
Other	1	1.1

Table 2 describes the perception of child custody matters from social work students at California State University, San Bernardino. Nearly two-thirds of the participants (75%) felt both parents should have custody of a child in a single parent heterosexual family, 14% felt a mother should have custody, 4% felt there

should be another child custody arrangement, and 0% felt a father should have custody. More than half of the participants (57%) felt the custodial parent should be the primary source of financial support, 30.1% felt there should be another primary source of financial support, and 12.9% felt the non-custodial parent should be the primary source of financial support in a heterosexual single parent household.

Over half of the participants (59%) either strongly agreed or agreed that a mother should have custody of her daughter in a heterosexual single parent family, while 32% of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed. Nearly half of the participants (49%) either strongly agreed or agreed that a mother should have custody of her son in a heterosexual single parent family, and 42% either strongly disagreed or disagreed. More than half of the participants (53.7%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that a father should be the custodial parent of his daughter in a heterosexual single parent household, while 46.2% either strongly agreed or agreed. More than half of the participants (54.8%) agreed that a father should be the custodial parent of his son in a single parent heterosexual household, while 43% either strongly disagreed or disagreed. More than two-thirds of the participants (83.7%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the sex of a parent should be a determining factor in child support, while 16.3% either strongly agreed or agreed.

Table 2 Respondents Perception of Child Custody

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Custodial parent:		
Mother	13	14.0
Father	0	0.0
Both	75	80.6
Other	4	4.3
Primary source of financial support		
Non-custodial parent	12	12.9
Custodial parent	53	57.0
Other	28	30.1
Mother having custody of daughter		
Strongly Agree	11	11.8
Agree	48	51.6
Disagree	26	28.0
Strongly Disagree	6	6.5
Mother having custody of son		
Strongly Agree	10	10.8
Mother having custody of son		
Agree	39	41.9
Disagree	36	38.7
Strongly Disagree	6	6.5
Father having custody of daughter		
Strongly Agree	2	2.2
Agree	40	44.0
Disagree	42	46.2
Strongly Disagree	7	7.7
Father having custody of son		
Strongly Agree	3	3.2
Agree	48	51.6
Disagree	33	35.5
Strongly Disagree	7	7.5
Sex of parent as factor in support		
Strongly Agree	2	2.2
Agree	13	14.1
Disagree	41	44.6
Strongly Disagree	36	39.1

Table 3 describes the services social work students at California State University, San Bernardino, believe heterosexual single parents need when seeking services. More than half of the participants (60.2%) have had experience working in the field with heterosexual single parents, and 39.8% have not had any experience working in the field with heterosexual single parents. Of the participants who have worked with heterosexual single parents, 2.2% most frequently encountered single fathers, and 63.4% frequently encountered single mothers.

There were ten options offered for services to offer custodial parents in a heterosexual single parent household. The participants collectively selected 556 services to offer to custodial parents in a heterosexual single parent household. Of the 556 services notated in totality, 12.4% belonged to housing, 11.0% belonged to employment, 13.6% belonged to child care, 10.6% belonged to CalFresh, 10.1% belonged to CalWORKs, 11.3% belonged to Medi-CAL, 9.7% belonged to mental health services, 9.9% belonged to legal services, 10.3% belonged to transportation, and .2% belonged to other services that were not listed. There were ten options offered for services to offer non-custodial parents in a heterosexual single parent household. The participants collectively selected 499 services to offer to non-custodial parents in a heterosexual single parent household. Of the 499 services notated in totality, 11.4% belonged to housing, 15% belonged to employment, 10% belonged to child care, 9.4% belonged to CalFresh, 9.4% belonged to CalWORKs, 10.4% belonged to Medi-CAL, 10.8%

belonged to mental health services, 10.4% belonged to legal services, 10% belonged to transportation services, and 3% belonged to other services not listed.

Table 3 Services Offered to Parents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Experience in the field		
Yes	56	60.2
No	37	39.8
If experienced, sex of parent's serviced in the field		
Male	2	2.2
Female	59	63.4
Custodial parent resources		
Housing	69	12.4
Employment	66	11.9
Custodial parent resources		
Child Care	76	13.6
CalFresh	59	10.6
CalWORKs	56	10.1
Medi-CAL	63	11.3
Mental Health Services	54	9.7
Legal Services	55	9.9
Transportation	57	10.3
Other	1	0.2
Total	556	
Non-Custodial parent resources		
Housing	57	11.4
Employment	75	15.0
Child Care	50	10.0
Non-Custodial parent resources		
CalFresh	47	9.4
CalWORKs	47	9.4
Medi-CAL	52	10.4
Mental Health Services	54	10.8
Legal Services	52	10.4
Transportation	50	10.0
Other	15	3.0

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Non-Custodial parent resources		
Total	499	

Statistical Tests

A chi-square test was performed to assess a relationship between gender of the participant and gender of the child and parent in regards to custody ($\chi^2 = 16.854$, $df = 9$, $p = .051$). Male participants tend to believe that parents of the opposite sex of their child should not be the custodial parent. There were a series of statistical tests conducted, and there were no significant findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the major findings of the study. The limitations of the research will be discussed. From the findings of the study the recommendations for social work practice, policy and research will be notated.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess if social work students possess a gender bias when working with heterosexual single parent families, and if there was a discrepancy in the services to offered to heterosexual single parents based on the sex of the parent. The results indicate that social work students favor custody be awarded to the parent who is the same sex as the child. It appears the social work students favored custody being awarded to the parent with the same sex as the child because of popular American socialization. Social learning theory and psychoanalytic theory hold that parents are the primary source of gender role development in children (Arditti & Others, 1992). These theories are demonstrated in societal beliefs that fathers are not equipped to nurture the feminine side of their daughters, and mothers are equally unable to foster the masculine side of their sons. These societal beliefs are not upheld in research. Houtte and Jacobs (2004) found that there was no difference in the

well-being of children who had the same sex custodial parent. The data did not support that children were better off living with the parent of the same sex (Houtte & Jacobs, 2004).

Family law judges state that child custody is determined by the best interest of the child (Houtte & Jacobs, 2004). The most relevant factors in determining child custody are the level a child has bonded with the parent, and the parenting skills of the parent (Houtte & Jacobs, 2004). Licensed Clinical Social Workers are assigned by the court to act as mediators in family law and make recommendations to the judges as to what the child custody agreement for each family should be (Mantle & Critchley, 2004). As stated previously, only five percent of fathers are granted full custody in family law court rooms (Brammlett & Blumberg, 2007). The inequitable arrangements of child custody favoring single mothers in the legal system demonstrates a gender bias that was revealed in this study as no participants felt fathers should be custodial parents of their children.

One finding of this study was that although the majority of the social work students felt both parents should have custody of their child, there were no social work students who felt a father would be the appropriate custodial parent of a child. The author believes that socialization on the role fathers uphold in the household contributed to the social work student's lack of selecting a single father to be the custodial parent of his children. The structuralist and ecologist perspective hold that the roles of parents are an adaptation of their environment (Houtte & Jacobs, 2004). As conditions change the roles an individual holds

adapt to the altered situation. Social work students did not appear to practice this theory in regards to single fathers being granted custody of their children.

This study also found that the majority of social work students felt that the custodial parent should be financially responsible for the child. This is not practiced in family law as sixty-one percent of noncustodial fathers are ordered to pay child support and as little as fourteen percent of noncustodial mothers are ordered to pay child support (Christensen, Dahl & Rettig, 1990). Due to contact with their children in the form of visits, calls, letters and overnight stays, noncustodial mothers are less likely to pay child support due to a “substitution effect”, where time with their children is substituted for dollars in child support (Stirling & Aldrich, 2012). Stirling and Aldrich (2012) found that after evaluating the income of each parent, noncustodial mothers were ordered to pay only half of the amount of the ratio of child support to income as noncustodial fathers. They also found that noncustodial fathers were ordered to pay twenty-one percent of their income, and noncustodial mothers were ordered to pay ten percent of their income for child support (Stirling & Aldrich, 2012). In practice, the belief that the custodial parent should financially support their child is not being upheld as noncustodial fathers are more likely to be ordered to pay child support and have a higher percentage of their income be allocated for child support.

This study found that social work students were willing to offer more services to custodial parents than noncustodial parents. Childcare, housing, employment and Medi-CAL were the most offered services to custodial parents.

Employment, housing, mental health services, and legal services were the most offered services to noncustodial parents. There was a discrepancy of fifty-seven more selections made for custodial parents than noncustodial parents of the ten services offered in the survey. Stirling and Aldrich (2012) did find that the standard of living for a mother in a single parent household declines whether or not she has custody of her child. It could be argued that due to this a single mother would require more services than single fathers. For social workers, the sex of the single parent should not be a determining factor in the services offered to a consumer, and neither should their status as a custodial or noncustodial parent. The NASW Code of Ethics upholds that social workers are to equally distribute resources and services to clients despite race, gender, marital and socio-economic status (Code of Ethics, n.d.). If the social work students were upholding this NASW standard, the results of this study would have indicated the same services being offered to both parents equally.

Limitations

There were a few factors that created limitations in this study. The limitation that prevents this study from being generalizable is the sample size. There were ninety-three participants that were currently enrolled undergraduate or graduate students in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. This small sample size prevents the results from being generalizable to both the population of social workers, and social work students within the nation. The study had an overwhelming female representation. With

only seven male students as respondents to the study, there was a lack of diversity in regards to gender.

The instrument used in this study is another limiting factor. The survey used could have been more specific, reduced response options, or allowed for respondents to provide their own answers. Due to the variety of responses given to the respondents, the researcher was unable to uncover any valuable significant findings.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The findings of this study and literature support that regarding child custody matters social work practice is not upholding the values taught in undergraduate and graduate school. Social work curriculum teaches the values of the NASW Code of Ethics. This study revealed that the NASW Code of Ethics is not being practiced regarding equitable treatment of heterosexual single fathers and heterosexual single mothers due to their sex. This study demonstrated the disconnect between social work practice and social work curriculum. It is recommended that there be a larger emphasis on applying social work curriculum in the work force.

Another recommendation, as a result of this study, is to include the experiences of a variety of under-represented groups in social work curriculum and research. There is limited research available regarding the experience of single fathers, yet the literature demonstrated that there are more single fathers

now than ever before. Due to the rise in custodial single fathers, social workers need to be educated on the needs of this population.

It is recommended that there be more research conducted on the growing population of custodial single fathers. There is a lack of research on the needs of this population. Having a better understanding of the unique identity of this population would enhance social worker's ability to provide appropriate service to them.

It is recommended that more policy be established on the equitable treatment of all parents requesting services. Parents who are seeking services should have confidence that they are being treated impartially, and are being offered the same amount of services as any other consumer. To prevent any discrepancy in services offered, it is recommended policy be put in place to prevent any form of bias from effecting the services and resources offered to families.

Conclusion

Social workers interact with a variety of individuals in the field. In their profession social workers are to adhere to a Code of Ethics that ensure every client is treated equally. There are some under-represented populations that do not receive the same services when they interact with social workers in various systems; heterosexual single fathers are amongst this group. To fill this gap in research and understanding, it is vital that social worker researchers and social work curriculum fill this void. If every identity of an individual is to be treated

equally, these under-represented identities need to be understood by the social workers who should be advocating for them. This study found that social work students favored custody being granted to the parent with the same sex as the child, and that social work students were more likely to offer more services to the custodial parent of a child than to the noncustodial parent. These findings identify a gap that is present between the curriculum that is being taught in social work coursework to treat all consumers equitably, and social work practice.

APPENDIX A
THE ROLE GENDER PLAYS FOR HETEROSEXUAL SINGLE PARENTS
INTERACTING WITH SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS
QUESTIONNAIRE

Developed by Andreanna King

1. What is your current age? _____
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other _____
3. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. Caucasian
 - b. African American
 - c. Latino
 - d. Native American
 - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - f. Multiracial
 - g. Other _____
4. What is your level of education?
 - a. Current Bachelor's level student
 - b. Current Master's level student
 - c. Other _____
5. What cohort do you belong to?
 - a. Full-Time
 - b. Part-Time
 - c. Pathways Education
 - d. Other _____
6. What area of social work are you looking to be employed in?
 - a. Child Welfare
 - b. Mental Health
 - c. Medical
 - d. Family Law
 - e. Geriatrics
 - f. Other _____
7. Who was your primary care provider for the majority of your childhood?
 - a. Both biological parents
 - b. Mother
 - c. Father
 - d. Mother and Stepparent
 - e. Father and Stepparent
 - f. Other biological family member

- g. Foster care provider
 - h. Other _____
8. When a child is living in a heterosexual single parent household, which parent do you believe should be the primary custodial parent of that child?
- a. Mother
 - b. Father
 - c. Both
 - d. Other _____
9. In a heterosexual single parent household, I believe a daughter should live with her mother.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
10. In a heterosexual single parent household, I believe a son should live with his mother.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
11. In a heterosexual single parent household, I believe a daughter should live with her father.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
12. In a heterosexual single parent household, I believe a son should live with his father.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
13. Who do you believe needs to be the primary source of financial support to a child in a heterosexual single parent family?
- a. Non-custodial parent
 - b. Custodial parent
 - c. Other _____

14. I believe the sex of the non-custodial parent in heterosexual single parent families should be a determining factor in child support decisions.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
15. Do you possess any experience in the field of social services working with heterosexual single parent families?
- Yes
 - No
16. If you answered yes to question 16, what was the sex of the parent you saw most often?
- Male
 - Female
17. As a social work professional, what resources do you think would be beneficial to the primary custodial parent of a child in a heterosexual single parent household?
Select all that apply
- Housing
 - Employment
 - Child Care
 - Cal Fresh/WIC
 - CalWORKs
 - Medical services (Medicaid/Medi-Cal)
 - Mental health services
 - Legal services
 - Transportation services
 - Other _____
18. As a social work professional, what resources do you think would be beneficial to the non- custodial parent of a child in a heterosexual single parent household?
Select all that apply
- Housing
 - Employment
 - Child Care
 - Cal Fresh/WIC
 - CalWORKs
 - Medical services (Medicaid/Medi-Cal)
 - Mental health services
 - Legal services

- i. Transportation services
- j. Other _____

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine social worker perceptions of gender when working with heterosexual single parent families. The study is being conducted by Andreanna King and supervised by Professor Dr. Janet Chang, School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to assess the role gender plays for heterosexual single parents interacting with social workers.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked several questions in regards to child custody and support, gender roles and expectations within a heterosexual single parent household, and social services offered to heterosexual single parents.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Associate Professor Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184.

RESULTS: The results of this study will be available after June 2017 through the Scholar Works database at the John M. Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino.

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

Date

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University • Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles
Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

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