

Understanding the role of male elementary school teachers in the social development of
children raised by single mothers in the Jewish community of Montreal, Canada.

Stuart Cohen, Department of Integrated Studies in Education
McGill University, Montreal
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Abstract

This is a phenomenological study exploring the role male elementary school teachers have in the social development of children raised by single mothers in the Jewish community of Montreal, Canada. This qualitative study explores the experiences of 11 individuals from the Montreal Jewish community, as well as my own narrative perspective. It offers insight on an emerging issue of the role male teachers have in the social development of children growing up in the absence of a supportive father. This study explores educational issues and the role teachers play in the lives of children. It explores sociological issues of child development, family structure, the increasing rate of separation and divorce, and their effects on children. This study will add a different perspective as it explores how an increase in male elementary school teachers can have a positive influence in the social development of children, and especially boys, in our society.

Résumé

C'est une étude phénoménologique traitant du rôle des enseignants masculins au primaire vis à vis le développement social des enfants de mères monoparentales dans la communauté juive de Montréal, Canada. Cette étude qualitative révère les expériences de 11 individus de la communauté juive montréalaise ainsi que mon propre témoignage narratif. L'étude nous donne un aperçu sur la problématique émergente du rôle que les enseignants ont sur le développement social des enfants qui vieillissent en l'absence d'un père et de son soutien. Cette étude explique les problématiques éducatives et le rôle que les enseignants ont dans la vie des enfants. Les problématiques sociologiques du développement de l'enfant, de la structure familiale, du taux grimpant de séparation et divorce ainsi que leurs effets sur les enfants sont aussi discutées. Cette étude rajoutera une perspective différente en explorant comment une augmentation du nombre d'enseignants masculins au primaire peut influencer d'une façon positive le développement social des enfants dans notre société, spécifiquement les garçons.

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1. Introduction

If we are not able to hold the focus of today's children or help with their development, they will not learn what schools are teaching. The absence of men in the life of their children, the loss of social schooling, the loss of the strong and clear value driven philosophy of schools, and the loss of the cohesiveness in communities are all leading to the poor development of children. We are paying the price as social workers are seeing more children than ever before. Without question, there is a need for more male teachers –Vivian, Clinical Director in the Montreal Jewish Community, interviewed on April 28th, 2009.

It may well be an axiom: there is nothing more important to a country than the education of its youth. Just as societies have adapted to change in the past, our modern society must adapt to the challenges of the early 21st century. Over the past few decades the role of the teacher in society has been changing. Governments have been highly involved in defining the reformed educational landscape, especially in the Province of Quebec. The speed of innovation, the ease of information, the influence of the mass media, and the demands of the current global marketplace, among other factors, have forced educational institutions to become more technological and competitive in order to meet the increasing and diverse demands of relevant stakeholders.

In addition to the increased demands of intellectual growth and technological development, a more serious phenomenon has changed the landscape of the teaching profession¹. The inconsistency of child development, as a result of the continued breakdown of the so-called traditional family structure (one male and one female in a married situation), has manifested in the daily lives of children, especially young boys.

Today, teachers not only must take on a responsibility for the curriculum objectives, but must also address the child's continuing cognitive, physical, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual growth. They find themselves in a position where they spend as much, if not more, time with the children than parents. "Thus, relationships

¹ Although not legally ranked as a "profession," this terminology will be used to indicate the unique place that teaching has in our society.

with day care providers, psychotherapists, and school teachers may be qualitatively similar to those with the primary attachment figure” (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004, p. 251).

The obligation of the teacher to adapt to the increased responsibilities of the curricular objectives, as well as the evolving social and emotional involvement that has been demanded of them, have placed the teacher in a very influential position in the development of the youth in our modern urban society.

The Supreme Court of Canada endorses the definition of the role of the teacher espoused by the British Columbia Court of Appeal in *Cromer and Shewan*. The Majority of the Court state, ‘Teachers are inextricably linked to the integrity of the school system. Teachers occupy positions of trust and confidence, and exert considerable influence over their students as a result of their positions.’ This reasoning demonstrates the willingness of the Supreme Court to accept the proposition that teachers have a fiduciary duty towards students (Oliverio & Manley-Casimir, 2005, p. 412).

The role of the teacher will be generally defined by the consistent presence and involvement that teachers have in the development of children; the adaptation to the increased responsibilities of their curricular obligations; as well as their perceived increase in influence over students. This role is being shaped, challenged and changed every day in classrooms, schools, homes, and courts across Canada and the United States.

As a male elementary school teacher working in a female dominated profession, I continue to take a very strong interest in the ongoing research about the influence teachers have on children. I have a particular interest in the role male teachers have in the development of children at the elementary level who come from homes with the absence of a supportive father figure. After actively searching for research done in this specific subject, it became clear to me that there was a lacuna in this area. “Further research is required on the role of supportive male teachers in the adjustment of males in mother-headed, single-parent families” (Saintonge, Achille & Lachance, 2005, p. 49). I have decided to take a more positive approach from most of the research, which points to the

reasons why male teachers stay away or are pushed out of their classrooms (Allan, 1993, 1996; Cognard-Black, 2004; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Sargent, 2000, 2005), by focusing on the influence male teachers can have on their students inside their classrooms.

The purpose of this thesis is to begin to understand the role male elementary school teachers have in the social development of children raised by single mothers in the Jewish Community of Montreal. According to Charles Shahar (2001), the Montreal Jewish community is defined as having a population of 92,970. He said that this number decreased over the past decade.

This study hopes to further the development of the research for the increasingly persistent question: Is there a need for more male elementary school teachers? This study proposes a different question: Is there a unique influence male teachers and male role models can offer children by creating a more gender-balanced profession at the elementary level?

This study will explore the role of education, teachers, and more specifically, the state of male elementary school teachers through the experiences of the thesis participants from the Jewish community of Montreal. It will explore sociological aspects of child development in order to understand when and how children develop their norms of identity. This study will explore the current trends in the state of the family structure and the rate of divorce. It will explore the void created in the lives of young children, especially boys, as a result of the increased absence of a supportive father.

According to the existing research, there is a significant lack of a male presence during the developing years of young children. Schools across Montreal, and throughout North America, have revealed an absence of male elementary representation. According to a 2004 Ontario College of Teachers report, 16% of elementary teachers in Quebec

were male. There were similar low provincial figures for male teacher representation in schools across the country.

In the United States, the National Education Association reported that the difference was even more severe at the elementary level, where men made up only 9% of teachers, down from 18% in 1981. This number stands at a 40 year low (Scelfo, 2007).

Statistics from several other countries supported those of North America. In 2001, men made up fewer than 20% of the teachers in elementary schools in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Portugal, New Zealand, Ireland, Poland, and most of Eastern Europe (Bernard, Falter, Hill, & Wilson, 2004).

A great deal of the research in child development highlighted the importance of the attachment of the child to its mother. The deep bond between mother and child, as described in attachment theory originated by Bowlby and Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992), has roots in the foundation for the early seeds of identity, protection, and the personality of the child. During the formative years of child development, it is important that children are exposed to love, care, nurturing, security, discipline, and social companionship offered by the similarities and differences of both males and females. The mother has the deepest level of connection based on birth, nurturing, and feeding. The father is recognized as the other primary caregiver.

As children grow, their independence from their mother and their father starts to include the secondary caregivers of extended family and those who are on the periphery. They include nannies, babysitters, day care workers, and teachers. It is at this point of socialization and development where children begin to define their norms of understanding gender identity and define patterns of behaviour. It is where boys develop and define their sense of masculinity. As children develop, the involvement of teachers

approaches primary status as a caregiver. How a child grows and develops is highly dependent on the care it is given and the norms created during these crucial developmental years (Bretherton, 1992).

When any parent is absent from the life of a child, it affects the way children grow, understand their gender roles, view relationships, and perceive the world.

The importance of children's relationships with fathers, other family members, and nonfamilial adults has received inconsistent and inadequate attention. Concern for children's relationships with fathers and other nonmaternal adults is especially relevant for children residing in unmarried-mother households (Coley, 1998, p. 219).

Jones (2007) wrote about the work of Sigmund Freud in her study covering the impact on children due to the absence of a father. She highlighted the importance of the father in the development of children. Jones continued by saying that the development of a loving attachment to the father, most particularly for boys, was crucial to healthy development.

In a recent lecture, Jackson Katz stated that it was incredibly important that boys had adult men in their lives at different levels in order to provide them with a model of positive masculine norms. "Until fathers, men, and male teachers are part of the early socialization of boys, any true form of gender equality is at risk. The development process is so profoundly affected in the early years, and with the absence of men in nurturing roles, equality is not going to apply" (Katz, 2009).

For nearly four decades, the increased rate of divorce and prevalence of restructured families has influenced the social development of children and members of today's society who hold a fiduciary position in relation to them. Social problems, economic problems, the decreased importance of religious observance, and the increase in options and choices for both genders were all contributing to the breakdown of the family

structure (Ambert, 2009; Katz, 2009). Children of separation and divorce are growing up in an unorganized and inconsistent world. They are often left to navigate their way through the lessons of life in order to find their own path. When the consistent norms of love, comfort, and security of the family structure are fractured, children are left to find these constants in other people and other places. Many studies have converged on several key findings to substantiate the adverse effects of separation and divorce on children, and particularly on boys (Evans, 2004; Jenkins & Guidubaldi, 1997; Le Bourdais & Marciel-Gratton, 1998).

Children develop gender norms from a very young age. With the dramatic increase of single-parent families, these children are raised often only by their mother, with the possibility of grandparents, female nannies, babysitters, and housekeepers also getting involved. Boys growing up in a feminized world are more prone to developing generalized interpretations of masculinity which can affect their behaviour and how they will interact with the opposite sex (Katz, 2002). Girls, and especially boys, might not interact or connect with an influential male figure until high school. Although the boys and the girls are equally growing up without the presence of a male figure, this situation may affect boys in different ways than it does girls.

Children have a very strong resiliency factor. Any positive male figure in a boy's life, be it an uncle, friend, teacher, or coach, could make all the difference in the world whether that boy goes down the right road or the wrong one. Society needs more men working with children (Katz, 2009).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Role of Education

In its simplest definition, education in Montreal, and almost any community in North America, had its roots with the gathering of young children to listen to the stories of elder family members. School was viewed as the way to socialize children before entering the responsible world of adulthood. The focal point of the children was the home and their family environment; working, sharing, helping, playing, and growing together.

Today, we are witness to the urban bussing of children to school. They are moved from class to class in order to be provided with all the information and tools that will give them a chance to succeed in our modern times. Education has now evolved to incorporate a global community with world markets, economic policies, and a technical age never experienced before. The concept of school has shifted from a social and religious function centered on the home and the community, to an academic means of survival centered on profit margins and a bottom line. It forces people away from their family and their community, and places them in search for more and better opportunities for success.

Robert Evans (2004) made some generational observations in his book, *Family Matters; How Schools Can Cope with the Crisis in Childrearing*.

The demands of the workplace and our obsession with wealth and individual fulfillment have drawn parents, by necessity and choice, away from home and children, and helped to sever generational and community connections (Evans, 2004, p. 18).

Children in the 1950's and 60's learned important family values that were the foundation of each generation growing up within the community. Life for them was centered on the religious institution in the community. Finishing high school was the doorway to success. A university degree was a privilege for only a few in those years, as highly skilled jobs were limited, while the unskilled labor force was the norm. A

household back in the 50's only required one primary income. It was mainly the men who completed a higher level of education and became the breadwinner. The majority of women at the time stayed home and directly provided for the social development and well being of their children. The family and the home was the priority of the female. The family stayed close because people did not move very far. All the jobs were close to home allowing for a comfortable quality of life and a stable environment for children (Nelson, 2002).

Feminism and woman's liberation of the 1960's and 70's created an influx of women who became more involved in higher education and in the workforce outside of the home. Women began to acquire a more independent life outside the home. This, in addition to economic factors, would put a strain on families, forcing many to have two primary incomes and adding tension to the family structure (Evans, 2004).

As the 1980's turned into the 90's, the demands of the world started to change. The world was opening up and becoming a global village. Communication, free-trade between countries, and a productive workforce were faster to operate, cheaper to administer, and easier to manage. Competition in the job market, coupled with the increase in technology, created a gap in the workforce where uneducated people and the unskilled labour force were left behind, while the demands for more highly skilled training increased. These jobs could only be obtained with a higher level of education. The university degree became the standard and the priority. Family members could find opportunities for financial success in many parts of the world. It was not uncommon to see kids move away from home and start their families at a great distance from their roots. The sense of togetherness and community was now more permeable in contrast to the stability that the family unit held in previous generations (Evans, 2004).

The research speaks of a generation of parents today who have a limited role in the social development and academic life of their children. As a result, a lot of added pressure is being applied to teachers and schools.

“Even as they (schools) are pressed to innovate, to accelerate academic performance, and to prepare students for the demands of a high-tech, globalized, multicultural world, they find themselves struggling to fill more gaps of the most basic kind. More and more children arrive at school less ready to learn- not less intelligent; less ready to be students” (Evans, 2004, p. 13).

Students today are being forced to adapt and to excel in more international languages, more complex mathematics, more computer technology, and especially more sciences in order to position themselves for success. Curriculums are shifting in priority, affecting many subjects and social functions. Music, drama, physical education, and art classes are being diminished. School days average between six to eight hours in Quebec, an increase of an hour each day from 20 years ago, leaving only a handful of hours for quality family time (Kohen & Hertzman, 1999).

Alan November (2009), an international leader in education technology, said that major companies were looking for three important qualities in their future leaders. First, they should be self-directed and independent learners. Second, they should be able to sift through huge collections of technical research data and information in order to be able to understand the most essential ideas. Third, they need to understand and be a part of the global communications network of wireless devices and computers. These demands force a shift in education and demand the teaching force to adapt quickly. They apply added pressure on the students to perform and succeed in a more complicated and chaotic world.

In a society where families and churches (religious institutions) generally no longer play their role as educators, everything falls on the schools. Can the schools be expected to shoulder the entire burden of shaping not only individuals but also citizens who are capable of participating in society and who have the sense that they have not only rights, but also duties? This shift is worrisome; clearly, the challenge must be taken up by everyone—and not just the education system (Delors, 1999, p. 12).

Student life today is more academic, competitive, and rigorous. Employers are now looking for the best and the brightest. Governments demand more of the schools and schools demand more of the students and their parents. The stresses applied to the schools, and thus transferred to the students and their families, are enormous.

These multi-faceted factors are contributing to the increased demands put towards teachers at all levels of education. In addition to teaching the curriculum, teachers become involved in the development of their students; they help resolve inter-personal conflicts; they help identify and make accommodations for those suffering from attention deficit or learning disabilities; teachers help identify children who might suffer from abuse, neglect, or a variety of emotional problems resulting from a variety of factors; they may act as a mentor or provide counsel for those wishing to talk to someone familiar about personal issues (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). As a result, teachers are called upon to fulfill duties for which they may not feel comfortable or qualified to face.

Many students are coming to school with an increased amount of emotional and social needs. They have emotional and social anxieties as a result of their home life. They may feel added stress and pressure in order to achieve in our generation, contributing to an identity crisis, as they continue to develop in an increasingly confusing and unorganized world. These influences all add to a decrease in academic performance and an increase in behavioural issues resulting in the complex landscape that teachers find themselves in today (Evans, 2004).

2.2 Male Teachers

Until the 1800's, almost all teachers for formal instruction were men. The percentage of women started to surpass the number of men in the middle of the 1800's and into the 1900's. The percentage of male teachers has been in a constant decline since

the 1970's, where 35% of teachers were men (Nelson, 2002). There is an overwhelming difference between the numbers of male and female elementary school teachers. Male teachers make up only 16% of the elementary school labour force in Quebec. The numbers were less in Alberta, with 15% in Calgary, and 18% in Edmonton. Ontario had the lowest average, with 10% of the teaching population being male (Bernard, Falter, Hill, & Wilson, 2004).

Male teachers at the kindergarten to grade three level accounted for only 6% of the teaching population, while male teachers at the grade four to six level accounted for 28% of the teaching population in Canadian schools (Bradley, 2000).

At the start of the 2009-2010 school year, for example, the 7 main Jewish private elementary schools in the Montreal area had a professional body of 307 teachers. Among them were 19 male teachers (11 in the classroom): that is, just over 6% (Appendix A).

Currently, there are significantly low numbers of male teachers in the global labour force. In Canadian schools, women accounted for almost two-thirds (65.8% or 179,000) of full-time teachers in 1999. This rose to 204,000, or 69% by 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2005).

In the United States, Cognard-Black (2004) stated that, "looking more closely at the major divisions within the occupation, we see that school teaching is quite segregated by sex" (p.114). In the decades up to and including 1990, men represented only about 15% of elementary school teachers (Biedenkapp & Goering, 1971; Williams, 1995). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) report on the current population survey, of the almost 3 million elementary and middle school teachers, only 18.2% were men. Approximately 2% of teachers in kindergarten through third grade were men. In preschool and childcare centers, the proportion was even less, and 20% of the elementary

schools listed had no men on their teaching staff. Even more dramatic were the findings that 65% of the elementary schools had no men teaching at the youngest grade levels and over 90% of the pre-kindergarten centers were devoid of men (Sargent, 2005).

A similar picture exists in many other countries around the world, where women made up 80% of the labour force in the elementary schools. A 2002 Federal study in Australia, *Boys: Getting it Right!* noted a,

Widespread concern about the decline in the number of male teachers, particularly at the primary level, where the proportion, federally, was 21 per cent. Male role models do matter, and boys benefit by men modeling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and women (Bernard, Falter, Hill, & Wilson, 2004, p. 9).

In The United Kingdom, similar concerns were echoed in a 2001 research paper, *Male Students in Primary ITT: A failure to thrive, strive or survive, delivered to the British Educational Research Association*. It stated that,

Currently, the provision of male teachers for primary school teaching is at a critical stage with a prediction that less than 10 per cent of teachers will be males by 2020 if the current decline and failure to retain continues unabated (Bernard, Falter, Hill, & Wilson, 2004, p. 10).

As we have seen, the percentage of male teachers in Canada and throughout the world is significantly low. The extensive bulk of the research identifies various reasons, summarized below, for the decreasing proportion of male teachers as more leave the profession or retire without being replaced. The gender gap is increasing.

Since women surpassed men and became the overwhelming majority of teachers, there exists a general societal impression that being a teacher, especially an elementary teacher, is 'women's work.' The employment of men in, 'female jobs,' is unusual and often brief. Men in this position suffer both prestige and wage penalties (England & Herbert, 1993; Jacobs & Powell, 1984). Men may encounter suspicion about their masculinity and sexual orientation, arguably large components of many men's identities.

Being thought of as gay men, effeminate men, men who eschew competition or traditional definitions of success, were examples frequently cited (Allan, 1996; King, 1998; Murray, 1996; Skelton, 1994; Williams, 1989, 1993, 1992). Men are being marginalized by other men according to their own norms and traits of manhood.

Subordinate masculinities are those behaviors and presentations of self that could threaten the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity.

These men are vulnerable to being abused and ridiculed by others (Sargent, 2005). The job requires a degree of nurturing and physical contact with small children, but men's gender role expectations preclude such behavior and invoke suspicion of pedophilia if they meet the nurturing expectations of the job (Allan, 1996; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; King, 1998; Murray, 1996; Sargent, 2000; Skelton, 1994). There is some qualitative evidence based on research on elementary school teachers that men perceive interpersonal resistance from female colleagues, whereby they are pressured to take on responsibilities as the resident disciplinarian (Allan, 1993, 1996; Sargent, 2000).

2.3 Family Structure

In the past several decades, there have been significant changes in the structure of families. The most dramatic includes the rise in the number of fractured families due to separation and divorce. Since the 1950's and 60's, families have shifted from the breadwinner-homemaker couple with several children, to single-parent, remarried, and two career households. Divorce and separation, particularly since major legislative changes introduced in 1968, became a reality of life for a growing number of Canadian families as the divorce rate increased five fold from 1969 to 1995 (Ambert, 2009). The number of single-parent families increased by almost 50% from almost 500,000 in 1971 to almost 1 million in 1991. Statistics from the most recent Canada Census showed over

1.4 million single-parent families in Canada, with women heading over 85%, and only about 14% of children living with their father (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Anne-Marie Ambert (2009), author of the Vanier Institute of the Family 2009 report entitled *Divorce: Facts, Causes, and Consequences*, highlighted the latest Canadian estimate of 38% from Statistics Canada (2008) for the occurrence of divorce by the 30th anniversary. Quebec's divorce rate of 48.4% was the highest in Canada in 2008. Ambert stressed that divorce rates peaked in 1997, declined, except in Quebec, and have fluctuated since. She said they were unlikely to drop in the near future. An actual divorce rate of 50% existed in the United States in the 1980's and it created a myth that this was the case in Canada as well. Her report highlighted the latest divorce rate of 44% in the United States.

In the United States, for example, 75% of children had a full-time parent at home in the 1950's. Today, barely 25% do, with almost 80% of families working two careers (Evans, 2004). Research showed that the proportion of children living with one parent increased from 40.5% in 1970, to a staggering 77% in 1991. The proportion of single-parent children increased by approximately 37% during the past two decades (Jenkins & Guidubaldi, 1997) and arguably more in the past 15 years since, as demonstrated in the Canadian statistics. International rates of divorce in Russia, United Kingdom, Sweden, and France are higher than Canada.

According to Evans (2004), 40-50% of first marriages in the United States break up. Those numbers increased by 10% for the second marriage. Over 25% of all families with children were headed by a single parent, with the mother being the overwhelming majority with custody. The numbers are increasing each year and they are not

encouraging. The typical child may likely live apart from at least one biological parent during their developing years.

40% of North American families are fractured (Ambert, 2009). More and more people are involved in the workforce. As a result, the social time parents have to spend with their children is decreasing, encouraging children to find other mediums to spend their time. Television, computers, or multi-media entertainment devices, peer gangs, and famous male and female icons of popular culture, are all playing a role in raising children today. These factors put a strain on the family. They distance many children from their roots and thus create a false sense of support. Children start to look for other stabilizing factors for family and community.

On a positive note, fathers are much more involved in the social lives of their children since the post world war II generation of fathers. Those men were categorized as absent or emotionally distant and disconnected from their children, affecting the generation of parents we see today. This increased male involvement is not equal to the time and influence women have with their kids, but it is a work in progress (Katz, 2009).

Children need to grow up and develop around nurturing and responsible parents with warmth and a responsive approach to their needs. Children require structure, authority, and a semblance of control, demanding their participation in order to earn their latitude from their primary caregiver, and develop their own sense of independence (Coley, 1999; Evans, 2004).

2.4 Social Development of Children

Attachment is an affectional bond between the child and primary caregiver...that develops over the course of the first 18 months...ensuring protection and a sense of security. During this time, toddlers are forming an internal working model of the attachment relationships which informs them about their own self-worth and the dependability of others to provide needed attention and care (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004, p. 247-248).

Attachment theory, originated by Bowlby and Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992), provides an understanding that, as toddlers develop from a very young age, they begin to process the norms of care, love, affection, safety, and security from their parents and the people they trust and depend on the most. This nurturing affect is crucial as children develop their identity through the influence of gender and behavioural norms around them, and grow into adolescents and adults who function as members of a community (Evans, 2004).

J. Kennedy and C. Kennedy (2004) used an example of a toddler being less insistent in demanding that their needs be met immediately if the toddler had developed confidence in the caregiver's dependability in meeting their needs. It showed that early experiences influenced the quality of later attachment relationships, including later social, emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes. Children with positive and secure attachments were more likely to be expressive, helpful, and positive individuals who related well to others and saw themselves as competent partners with a lot of self worth and trust in others. Children surrounded by conflict, inconsistency, tension, and insecure attachments were at a high risk for internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems.

Recent research, as noted by Jones (2007), for example, viewed the father as an integral attachment figure. She mentioned Freud's hypothesis that boys idealized the experience of the role of the father as a competitor, as well as a protector.

Attachment theory was one of many factors which explained the future behaviour of individuals. The development of social norms is a sociological phenomenon that also contributes to those future personality traits. This supports the views of Jackson Katz (2009), whose body of work centers on the sociological principle that boys developed violent behaviour from the norms they saw within the larger structures around them. He

had a view that children shaped and developed norms of gender and masculinity from a very young age as they viewed the world and experienced it each day.

In her new book, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow Into Troublesome Gaps—And What We Can Do About It*, neuroscientist, Lise Eliot (2009) presents her findings which claimed that boys and girls were genetically born very similar, but they were raised and treated differently in many ways, thus increasing the gap in cognitive, spatial, emotional, and social awareness and behaviour. She claimed that children were being raised by their parents and people around them to conform to gender norms. Eliot made a reference to differences in sociability, emotional expressivity, and verbal ability, which all depended on interactions with parents, and how they grew throughout childhood.

Eliot pointed out that six and twelve month-olds of both sexes preferred dolls to trucks, according to many studies. Children settled into sex-based play preferences only around age one, which was when they grasped which sex they were, identified strongly with it, and conformed to how they saw other, usually older, boys or girls behaving. Those play preferences then escalated, producing brains with different talents.

As infants we arrive preadapted for lengthy dependence. The obvious aspects of this dependence are physical and behavioural, but the psychological dimensions begin early and last long. We remain connected to, engaged with, and psychologically dependent upon our parents far beyond childhood and adolescence. And when we move out of our family and into the world we take with us predispositions and ways of treating others that we learned from home (Evans, 2004, p. 19).

Sexy Inc., Sophie Bissonnette's 2007 documentary analyzes the sexual influences of our environment and their harmful effects on young girls and boys. It highlighted the unhealthy culture surrounding children, where marketing and advertising were targeting younger and younger audiences and bombarding them with sexual and sexist images.

The images they see in advertisements of what bodies should look like, the gender specific toys they play with, whether they are violent guns or the proportionally inaccurate bodies of Barbie or G.I. Joe, the sexualized or violent shows they watch, the celebrities or sports stars they choose to model, the behaviour of adults they see in the home, or on the field, all contribute to the internal understanding of gender norms. For boys and the masculine norms they are exposed to, this can create a false interpretation of boyhood.

85% of girls will have their mother and female model to guide them in womanhood after a divorce. Boys growing up in the absence of a father may be inhibited in development of certain perceptions of manhood. At a young age, “the competitive feelings, fears, and humiliations that boys need to learn to cope with have no reality figure with whom to work them out, and thus may become highly distorted” (Jones, 2007, p. 46). These boys experience moderate levels of depression and long for his return. These boys associate his leaving with rejection. As these boys enter adolescence, the absence of a father has shown to cause regression to the development skills and talents through modeling and identification with the father. It also causes anger and a shaken sense of identity (Jones, 2007). These influences of power, control, and dominance shape and develop the role boys believe they need to portray in order to be a man in society. “With few positive models of men in our schools, children learn about men either at home or in the media” (Nelson, 2002, p. 5).

In his film, *Tough Guise*, Jackson Katz (2002) used the metaphor of the great and powerful Oz to show the damaging way men masked or hid their insecurities and emotions behind a figurative curtain. They publicly put on a front, or guise, that was learned and developed over time from the norms around them of a tough, controlling, and

powerful man. According to Katz (2009), it is this precarious interpretation of masculinity that exposes violent tendencies and thus shields the vulnerability and humanity of men.

The majority of babies arrive in the world with as much love and care as any other. There must be some influences that take place during their developmental years that make boys grow up to commit over 85% of all murders, assaults, acts of domestic violence, child abuse, and rape (Katz, 2009). There is a strong connection between the influences affecting the social development of children and the current fracturing of families taking place in our communities.

2.5 Effects of Divorce

Child development scholars have increasingly been critical of contemporary families, often reaching a consensus that family socialization practices have been deteriorating for a considerable length of time. They are largely responsible for negative child outcomes and the erosion of societal standards of conduct. They stem from the increased rate of divorce and the burden put on the child stuck in the middle, and the decrease of responsibility and accountability found in an increasing amount of modern families.

Jones (2007) found that the effects of divorce were indeed long lasting. These conclusions were supported by evidence of increasing juvenile delinquency and declining academic performance during the past three decades (Thomson, Hanson & McLanahan, 1994). There was also a general consensus among researchers that divorce yielded a differential gender effect, with boys showing more adverse and long-lasting effects than girls (Jenkins & Guidubaldi, 1997).

Evans (2004) summarized the sociological effects of divorce as leading to academic and behavioural problems at school. Children exhibited low levels of

motivation and attendance, leading to an increased risk of dropping out. Health risks included more problems with asthma, headaches, and speech defects. Children were more vulnerable to emotional problems, anxiety, and depression. These children were more likely to smoke or be attracted to stronger substances as a means of escape.

Saintonge, Achille & Lachance (2005) stated that various researchers such as, Amato, (1993) Amato & Keith, (1991), Wallerstein & Bladteslee, (1989) have uncovered a number of short and long-term effects of parental separation and divorce on children, especially impacting boys who lose their father. These effects included poor self-esteem, depression, learning problems, and delinquency. They also lead to a poor quality of life with regard to their socioeconomic status, the relationships they had with family and friends, and their views on future relationships with the opposite sex.

Psychologists see these effects as chronic, often hard to break out of, and thus affecting the future generations of these individuals. According to Katz (2002), 81% of boys who are abused, commit abuse themselves in their older years.

Although adequate data is still lacking in quite a few instances, recent research showed that boys who had experienced parental separation or divorce tended to leave home earlier. They did so for more negative reasons than those whose parents had stayed together. There was potential for more conflict, tension or friction. Since single mothers and their children often experienced economic hardship, offspring from divorced families achieved less education, earned lower income, and held lower status jobs (Le Bourdais & Marcil-Gratton, 1998).

Many studies, including Saintonge, Achille & Lachance (2005) showed the importance of the father in the psychological development of children and adolescents. The presence of the father facilitated the separation-individuation process. He helped end

the psychological connection with the mother, enabling the children to consolidate their own independence, sexual identity, and sense of individuality. Divorce is thought to complicate this process.

According to Coley (1999), there were many challenges experienced by mothers who assumed the parenting functions alone. Among them were; a decrease in economic support as a result of living on a single female income; increased stress while trying to balance and organize the home and day to day obligations; and difficulty exercising authority, discipline, and supervision. They contributed to the poor functioning of children in single-parent families in the emotional, behavioural, and cognitive realms.

There is mounting evidence that parental divorce or separation is associated not only with an increased risk of offspring divorce later in life, but also with several other types of behaviour where the impact of family disruption affects self-esteem, social adjustment and educational attainment. It can lead to “few opportunities for positive and warm interactions with adults and to lack adult, especially male, role models” (Coley, 1998, p. 219).

The domain of social work for family research has, throughout history, focused on the impact of mothers in child development, while the importance of the relationship with the father or other males has been given inadequate attention (Coley, 1998). It is especially important to understand the role of male role models in child development in the modern family structure of fragmented families and homes with only a single mother.

2.6 Role Models

In recent decades, images of men with all the muscles, who always gets the girl, has all the money, is the best athlete, and images of women with the perfect body, the latest in fashion, with all the jewelry, have dominated the media and popular culture.

They personify, for those who look up to these images, what it is to be a man or woman. These images become acceptable models when all other models from their personal life lose integrity or reliability. They will always be there when the real world lets them down. They will always make them feel better and never judge them. Children looking to fill a void get absorbed in the world of media and popular culture. Boys are developing false norms of masculinity that say stronger and tougher is better (Katz, 2009).

Boys and girls need to see more images of a realistic and balanced world. When looking to fill a void in their life, children need to look closer to home or the next safest place, school. Children need to be surrounded with family and community leaders. Real everyday role models, like teachers, who they can connect with, associate with, and who do things that inspire positive action.

Two recent headlines reflect the call for more male teachers. The first is from the *Montreal Gazette*. “More male teachers needed as role models, minister told” (Block, 1994, February 16). The second is from the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. “Children of single-mothers show increased problems” (Lipovenko, 1996, October 18). The *Montreal Gazette* article outlined some of the comments and recommendations contained in a 108 page report presented by the Superior Council of Education, an advisory body to the Quebec Minister of Education. Among the comments were several directed to the issue of gender and elementary education, including the fact that almost 90% of the province’s elementary teachers were women (Penny, 1999). The absence of male teachers, combined with the increasing number of single-parent families headed by women, leads to the notion that there are more children who do not have male role models in their upbringing.

The need for more male teachers that was most often expressed in the research was that of a male role model, especially for young boys in society. Sarah Farquhar

(1997) stated that the presence of a male teacher could reinforce the notion, to children and adults, that it was normal for men to be teachers and involved in early childcare, and that it was not only a profession for women. She also believed that with the constant presence of a positive role model, many social problems could be avoided. Farquhar (1997) went on to suggest that male teachers made a beneficial contribution to the teaching of children. She suggested that male teachers brought a different style and approach to intellectual activities, as well as to the social development of the child.

A major factor of the development of boys is their involvement in sports culture. Athletics is a social phenomenon that teaches about society, positive teamwork, sacrifice, delayed gratification, and shared goals. There are many great coaches, mentors, and teachers who work to shape and mold these individuals into a team. Like teachers, coaches sometimes spend more time with children than their parents and thus play a very influential role. Coaches need the tools for teachable moments of respect and dignity. They can influence social change where positive relations between boys and those between girls can be seen as a partnership where everyone benefits (Katz, 2009).

The set of definitions most commonly employed include the idea of male teachers acting as surrogate fathers (Allan, 1993). It supports the notion that men will provide a living model of masculinity to boys who presumably lack a constant male presence in their lives. They will never replace a father, but they can model positive masculine norms in contrast to what they may be seeing from males in their lives, or in popular culture. They can provide consistency, support, familiarity, and guidance when necessary.

Teachers are not only viewed by the students as reliable and trustworthy individuals, but they are being held to a higher standard by the courts in comparison with ordinary citizens in society. "They have a clear responsibility to look out for the well

being of their students on all levels (Oliverio & Manley-Casimir, 2005, p.412). The Honorable Mr. Justice La Forest of the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed their fiduciary position.

Teachers occupy positions of trust and confidence and exert considerable influence over their students. They are in a very real sense 'role models' for their students. As a result, it is not enough for teachers to merely 'teach' these values. We also expect them to uphold them, and this may involve their activities both inside and outside the classroom (1998, p. 120).

Those role models who have the power, also have the responsibility to be engaged in order to work together to make changes. Adults need to realize that they need to make changes in their behaviour in order to help the future generation of children.

2.7 Feminist Perspective

This thesis is in agreement with most of the research done that defends the idea that men are not better teachers, but it is not a question of 'better' but a question of 'different' (Johannesson, 2004). The search for a gender balance is in no means an effort to reverse the gains that women have made in education. School was once a place dominated by men. Since the middle of the 1800's, women have found their niche and made many positive gains (Nelson, 2002). Some of the feminist research referred to the many strides women had to take in order to get to where they are in the field of education. They highlighted the push for more gender reforms and further opportunity at the administrative and university levels of the profession (Coulter, 1996). Men must support those initiatives. However, we must broaden this view to include the realization that a huge disproportion of male teachers is being left at the elementary level where children are the most impressionable.

There is an unfortunate dark side to sports that comes out and is reinforced at the expense of all the previous lessons. It is when bullying and verbal and physical abuse is

justified for the sake of winning at all cost. There are some real fears in news media reports that were supported by feminist theory and other bodies of research which were built on the notion that when children were threatened, discriminated against, abused or violated at school or in organized sport, it was most often a male offender (Farquhar, 1997). We cannot generalize and put all male teachers, coaches, even Catholic priests into this terrible category. We need to consider the majority who are doing a lot of good, as well as the increasing amount of false accusations. There are terrible acts performed by both genders and they should never tarnish the nurturing and developmental role most adults have with children.

There was an ever present idea that men represent danger whereas women represent love and protection. The idea that women equal safety and men equal danger effectively denies the dangers of abusive women teachers and the safety of loving men teachers (Sargent, 2005, p. 254).

Male teachers in the primary level of teaching find themselves in a strange cross-section of society. They are a minority in their profession within a gender majority group being male. They find themselves marginalized as much as the feminist thinkers view women entering the profession where men dominate (Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

As a society, we need to break the social stereotypes of the image of the teacher that teaching is 'women's work' and that men who work with children are pedophiles, just as we need to break the stereotypes that keep women out of science and engineering (Helmer, 2005).

The statement, 'We need to show more men doing it,' is revealing because one of the keys to recruiting more men, according to the majority of the men teachers themselves, is to begin changing the image of teaching that is habitually presented. Recruitment posters and public service announcements typically show women in early classrooms and, in the rare instance when men are shown, the men are presented in less nurturing positions than the women are, which, sadly, reflects the reality of how men must behave around children (Sargent, 2005, p. 254).

The women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 70's has done a lot to advance the cause of women in the name of equality. It has also done wonders for men as well. According to Katz (2002), men have learned to be more comfortable with their insecurities as they communicate and express themselves more in this post war generation. Years ago, men were more reserved and less emotionally connected to their family. Today, fathers can be found spending more quality time with their children. However, there is still so much more room to go.

Compassionate, emotional, and caring men need to join the cause to end violence against women in order to act as real male role models of masculinity. Men need to help break the cycle of boys growing up with these false masculine norms where intimidation earns power, control, and dominance over others.

2.8 In Search of a Balance

Research done by Johnston (1970), Kendall (1972), DeCorse & Vogtle (1997) and Farquhar (1997) made note of the unique interaction that a male teacher had in the education of young boys. They all made reference to the need for a male teacher to be present in order to give young boys an alternative, as boys are currently limited in who they chose to talk to and connect with. According to the statistics, they are most often exposed to female teachers. However, if they need the support of a male, they should have that option available to them because nothing else would be good enough for them at that crucial moment. "Many boys in school need to 'make do' because no alternatives are available" (Johnston, 1970, p. 146).

Johannesson (2004) stated that additional male elementary school teachers would not only impact the lives of boys in a positive way, but they would change the learning environment for the girls as well. "The girls also need male role models. Teachers of both

genders need to be role models for children of both genders” (p. 39). Girls also suffer when they do not have a positive male authority figure present in their life. They also need a male role model so they can create a relationship based on trust and respect. “Girls in our society are often actually conditioned to distrust or even fear males” (Johnston, 1970, p. 146).

In one study, Kendall (1972) noted that children needed exposure to adults, both male and female. They thrived on the opportunity to experience contact, and had meaningful relationships with several types of adults during their lifetime. “Children need exposure to men just as they need to be with grandparent figures, high school and junior high students, adults and children of all races and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 360).

“Children need loving men in their lives to balance the distorted and negative image of men in the media. Children have few opportunities to see images of gentle, nurturing, competent men” (Nelson, 2002, p. 5)

The importance is stressed for both sexes to be present in the life of children, especially in their early years. The reality is that there is an imbalance in the teaching profession that is weighted heavily on the presence of women. The research does not say that men are superior. The research for this study is being conducted in order to provide an alternative, “to point to the need for both” (Johnston, 1970, p. 147).

3. Methodology

This qualitative research study is formulated using a phenomenological approach, based on the work of Husserl (1922) and Heidegger (1927). This approach comes from the constructivist domain which views the person as integral with the natural environment. It will help identify and thus interpret the essence or meaning of the lived experience of the participants, “Through the structures of human consciousness” (Patton, 2002, p. 124).

I am a male elementary school teacher in a Jewish school in Montreal. Therefore, I will also incorporate a narrative inquiry approach. The narrative is based firmly within Dewey’s contextual composition of ‘experience’ and ‘continuity.’ It allows the researcher to see themselves, “in a nested set of stories – ours and theirs” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63).

Methods of inquiry include a phenomenological reflection of descriptions elicited through purposive sampling of 11 individuals who were willing to express their inner feelings and describe any experiences that occurred with the feelings (Patton, 2002).

A call for participants was placed through the McGill University electronic mail system and through flyers (Appendix B) that were posted at Jewish elementary schools in Montreal, as well as at Agence Ometz, a Jewish community organization that provides many social services. The participants for this study were all found through snowball sampling of professionals and individuals that I knew directly or indirectly within the community. I was also able to obtain recommendations from them for future participants at the conclusion of each interview.

I purposely chose to interview participants who were close to the phenomenon being studied, and who could reflect on their past experiences. I received the necessary ethical approval. I interviewed each participant individually, and in a location that was

private, familiar, and comfortable to them. I used a digital recorder to collect the data, transferred the files onto my personal computer, and erased them from the recorder. I made it a point to respect the rights, values, needs, privacy, confidentiality and the desires of all the participants by verbally articulating my research objectives to them. I presented the participants with an informed consent form (Appendix C), stating that their rights would be protected. I assigned pseudonyms for the participants (Appendix D) so that they remained anonymous within the research document.

The participants included:

- Three adults between the ages of 20 and 40 who grew up in the absence of a supportive father figure, due to divorce, in the Montreal Jewish Community. **Samantha** is a married mother who currently works as a psycho-educator in the Montreal Jewish school system. **Stephanie** is an undergraduate in Social Work. **Steven** currently works in fashion and merchandizing.

- Two single mothers who continue to raise their young children on their own, in the Montreal Jewish community. **Kate** is the mother of a young boy who currently attends elementary school. Her husband left when their son was just six months old. **Karen**, who also grew up in a home without a supportive father due to divorce, is raising her two young daughters in a similar environment.

They reflected back on their life experiences and offered insight into the phenomenon of growing up, and then raising their children without a supportive father figure.

- Three social workers who all worked or currently still work for Agence Ometz, formerly Jewish Family Services, in the Jewish community of Montreal. **Vivian** is currently a clinical director with many years of experience in the Montreal Jewish

community. She previously helped organize many services that are now offered to the Montreal Jewish school system. **Victoria** is a social worker who grew up in the Montreal Jewish community. She is working to maximize youth potential for families living in poverty in the Montreal Jewish community. **Valerie** is a social worker who grew up in the Montreal Jewish community. She worked with women and children at Auberge Shalom Pour Femmes, a shelter in the Montreal Jewish community for women and children exposed to domestic abuse.

- Two male teachers and one female teacher. **Michael** grew up in the Montreal Jewish community and taught in the Montreal public school system. He is currently a Jewish summer camp director. **Matthew** had a long and distinguished teaching career. He later became a principal of a Jewish elementary school until he retired. **Monica** grew up in the Montreal Jewish community. She taught early elementary and later became the special education coordinator at the Jewish school where she currently works.

The experiences and reflections of these professionals added a profound level of understanding of the family structure and social development. The experiences of social workers, classroom teachers, and camp directors were able to add informed insight into the phenomenon.

This study employs a phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing based on the techniques suggested by Patton (2002). It is formulated using a phenomenological approach that helps identify and thus interpret the essence or meaning of the lived experience of the participants. This study explores the retrospectives of the participants in order to elicit descriptions of their prior experiences with the phenomenon. As the interviewer, it is also important to understand what could not be observed; the feelings,

thoughts, intentions, previous behaviours, and the meanings they attach to their interpretations of the phenomenon.

I began my in-depth interviews by applying the general guide approach to interviewing, as a general rule, by listing my focused questions or issues to be explored with each group of participants, “To ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed.” (Patton, 2002) I had a group of questions that were the same for all the participants. I also had a set of questions that were unique to the group of participants I interviewed. For example, all the social workers had the same questions. It also provided me with the freedom to probe their responses and ask follow-up questions.

The opening statement to the participants came with 4 possible choices, adding a personal focus to the individual group being interviewed.

I am an elementary school teacher and I am conducting a study concerning the development of children growing up in homes run primarily by a single mother in the Jewish community of Montreal. I am very much interested in looking back at your personal experience throughout your life,

- (Single Mother) as well as your life with your child/children as they have been growing up in an environment without a supportive father.
- (Social Workers) as well as your professional experience in working within the field of family services for the Montreal Jewish community.
- (Teachers) as well as your professional experience in working within the field of education in the Montreal Jewish community.
- (Adults growing up without a supportive father) with a focus on the time you spent growing up in an environment without a supportive father figure.

Some of the questions may be difficult to answer, but your thoughts are important, so take all the time you need.

Most of the research I have found focuses on why men stay out of teaching. I am looking to understand what role male teachers have in the social development of their students.

The interviews explored the personal experiences of the participants as they reflected back on their life. I began each interview with a brief introduction of the participant and what brought them to this point in their personal or professional life.

Questions asked of the adults who were raised without a supportive father were:

- Can you tell me a little about your family life prior to your father's absence?
- Looking back now, how do you feel his absence affected your life?
- How do you feel the absence of a father influenced or affected your development, view of the world, view of the family unit or nuclear family?
- Do you feel that the absence of a supportive father will affect the way you view your personal relationships?
- When looking back, Can you think of some people that helped you fill the void of missing your father and male role model in your life?

Questions asked of the professionals working with children were:

- In your experience, talk to me about the state of the structure of the families you work with?
- Has it changed over the years, any trends?
- What are the effects of divorce on children?
- How do you view the social development of children in our modern times?
- Why did you enter the field of teaching?
- What was the faculty of education like as you started your professional education?
- Any conversations stand out, remarks from parents, colleagues about you being a male working with kids?
- Do you view yourself, or are you viewed as a role model to the kids?

- What exposure have you had to the services offered by the Jewish community for kids in your care?
- What are your experiences that stand out with children you remember?

Questions for the two mothers living with divorce and with full custody of their child/children were:

- How do you feel your child has developed through their early years with the absence of a father?
- You must be involved in extra curricular activities with your child, how has that been for you?
- Have you ever compared your situation to that of a nuclear family?
- Has your child had any outward questions, moments in the house, conversations, comments from others, moments you were uncomfortable with as your son grew older, feeling different from other kids?
- What is your experience with male teachers in the life of your child?

Questions asked of all the participants were:

- Thinking back, what is your experience with male teachers in your primary life?
- How do you view the role of the male in the family?
- Do you believe a positive father figure affects the development of young children?
- What is your opinion on the role of education?
- What should universities offer future teachers in order to understand the way kids are growing up in this generation?
- Statistically, men represent about 9% of the teaching profession in primary school, what is your opinion of this (Statcan 2005)?
- Do you feel more male teachers and role models would benefit young children growing up in our generation?

Those were only a guide that led to the structured protocol of questions asked at each interview. I concluded each interview with a suggested concluding question from Patton (2002): “That covers the things I wanted to ask, is there anything you care to add?”

I employed the conversational approach to interviewing. This allowed me to build an interactive conversation with my participants. It provided me with the flexibility to decide when to explore a subject in greater depth, or pose questions about a new area of inquiry that came up during the interview, thus demonstrating the individuality of each interview. I incorporated detail-oriented and elaborate probes in order to obtain a complete picture of the experiences being shared. During data collection, it was important for me to consciously bracket myself and set aside all my preconceived notions about the phenomena being studied, as well as set aside all inhibition to elicit recourse to theory, deduction or assumptions from other disciplines in order to understand it through the voices of the individuals being interviewed (Creswell, 1998, 2003).

The Hermeneutic circle approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) influenced the interviews as the analysis began when the first sets of data were collected. Each participant was interviewed once. As I gained insight into the phenomenon through the interviews, I used the data collected for future in-depth questions in other interviews. For example, I had the participants react to what others had said in previous interviews. I explored what the existence of these feelings and experiences indicated concerning the nature of education, the social development of children, the evolution of the family structure, and its effects on today's society. This initial analysis acted as a guide for future questioning and decisions related to future participant interviews and further data collection.

This research study was conducted over a two year period on a part-time basis in Montreal, Quebec. Eleven months were dedicated to collecting data from the interviews previously discussed here. Eight months were dedicated to interpreting the data collected.

4. Analysis

The analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection period. Having conducted the interviews, I was familiar with the tone and the nuances of each interview. I personally listened to, and transcribed, the data into a word document. The interview data was the main source of interpretation in order to describe the understanding gained from the experiences of the participants and establish the conclusions of this study. Horizontalization of the data from the adults who grew up without a supportive father, social workers, male and female teachers, and the mothers who raised their children in a single-parent home, was conducted in order to present the findings. By doing this, I was able to extract significant statements and find common ideas from the transcribed interviews. The following data is presented as an exploration of the themes generated from the data collected from the participants. Each participant was given credit throughout the analysis for their reflections, experiences and opinions. Quotations from the transcribed interviews were typed as I looked for shared experiences across individuals. I coded them under the themes that set the outline for the headings in the analysis. The cycling and recycling of questions eventually elicited a consensus that emerged. These statements were transformed into clusters of meaning. Finally, these clusters of meaning were tied together to reach a consensus and gave a general description of the experience.

The conclusion and summary of the study were conducted using the interpretation of the phenomenon from the interview data used to search for an understanding. It was then connected with the earlier research done in the literature review, as well as my personal narrative experience. Each individual had their own reality, including the researcher. The more who shared that interpretation, the more factual it became (Guba &

Licolen, 1989). I incorporated my personal meaning of the experience using the narrative approach in order to come up with a theoretical statement that answered the research question which I developed about the nature of the phenomenon.

4.1 Role of Education

When asked to reflect about the role of education in our current generation, Monica, an experienced teacher and coordinator of special education, recognized the challenges for schools in today's generation. She highlighted the influence of technology on this generation of students. "There are so many resources for children to find the information they needed. Schools need to teach them how to glean through it all in order to understand what they are reading and how to find the necessary information that is pertinent to their work."

Matthew, a retired male teacher, as well as a former administrator in the Montreal Jewish community for many years, said that teaching was once a more social oriented profession. He expressed a lot of disappointment when he said, "Our culture today doesn't really respect the field of teaching and they pretend to like kids. Governments even harm children by over-testing them and cutting essential programs like art, music, and gym in order to increase academic standards to prepare them for the working machine of today's society."

Vivian, a social worker for many years in the Montreal Jewish community, said that schools were originally a place to socialize children. "Over the years, the academic curriculum has expanded and the socialization went to the side."

Victoria and Valerie, two younger social workers who grew up and who currently work in the Jewish community, shared similar concerns about how children were growing

up in this generation. Victoria said, “Children are being programmed for the future job market and increasingly being distanced from their community.”

Valerie noted, “Schools serve a purpose in building identity for boys and girls at a young age and families are more and more disorganized. Schools need to be a consistent place in the lives of the children.” These child-care professionals could not stress enough the importance of school for children in their care, as well as the role and impact that schools had in child development.

Monica made sure to express a very large positive change which took place in schools over the past few decades with regard to how they viewed students with special needs and disabilities. She said, “Schools are more accepting, sensitive, and tolerant of children with difficulties. Differences are being celebrated and everyone has a chance to get an education.”

Michael, a male teacher who is currently working as a Jewish summer camp director, also said that schools were excessively focused on preparing students for the workforce. He offered a personal view from his experience as an informal educator with children who were away from their parents during the summer. Michael found that children who were living among their peers were learning independent life skills, such as problem-solving, and socialization skills, such as teamwork, that they were not getting from home or from school. He viewed the summer camping experience as a good experience for children. “They are given boundaries from the staff that they might not have at home. If they miss it at home, then they will get it here.”

Karen, a single parent, made it very clear that nothing came before an education for her children. She reflected on her own life and explained that she would probably have had an easier time if she were fortunate enough to have a higher education. Karen

said that an education to her was crucial and the Jewish elementary education of her children will give them the foundation they need for their future in school. “In our generation, an education was not something my children should want, but it is something that they have to know they need.” Karen is also a firm believer in informal education. With the help of Agence Ometz, her children were able to attend a Jewish summer camp. She said that it was good for them to get away because they dealt with her every day. She believed that it was important for them to have a variety of authority figures, models, and leaders. Karen’s eyes lit up when she reflected on how much her children grew up in the summer. “I see a huge change in them, when they walk off the bus, they seem older, wiser, more beautiful, and more experienced in life.”

Stephanie, Samantha, and Steven are three adults who were raised in the Montreal Jewish community and attended Jewish schools. They grew up in the absence of a supportive father from an early age due to separation and divorce. They all saw education as critical for social and cognitive development. Stephanie said, “An education must be available for everyone, and must accommodate for those families and children where it does not come easy.” Samantha agreed and felt that there needed to be more focus on social issues of family life, moral education and relationships, with a step back from deep academics. Each of them in their own way reflected on the difficult times they had concentrating and connecting to what was being done in the classroom. They felt distant from the classroom lesson because their minds were preoccupied with their home situation.

Due to the distractions in their lives, they went through the motions and did their best to fulfill their academic obligations. They did not view the structure of their school as an outlet for socialization that could have been a benefit to their growth and development

because they did not let anyone know they were vulnerable and suffering. They internalized a lot, did not have much support at home or at school, and found that they had to make do on their own.

These individuals are just three examples of the many students who come to school today with much more going on in their personal lives. Their cognitive development is far from being fulfilled when there is so much more going through their minds and taking place in their personal lives. The schools and especially the teachers are finding themselves, more and more, in a position to have to fulfill the increasing needs of children in society.

The teachers who participated in this study said that being an effective teacher for the children in our society was not just being trained to have the knowledge of a curriculum and being able to transfer that knowledge to children. It was a profession which has changed with the innovations in technology and the improved understanding of how children learn best. Beyond the cognitive, technological, and academic demands of the modern day classroom, teaching increasingly included a counseling aspect. There were more and more children coming to school with multiple needs that needed to be addressed by the school and especially by the classroom teachers. According to the professionals in this study, teachers spent almost as much quality time with children, in comparison to their parents, during their developmental years. This put them in a primary role of social development. The majority of emotional, psychological, and social development of children went beyond the family home and more and more into the classroom.

Michael, like most teachers, saw his teaching as a developmental role in shaping and rearing his students to grow up and be good people. He wanted to prepare them to appreciate education and have the necessary tools to succeed in life.

Matthew raised the idea that as more and more jobs required a high level of education today. “There are many pressures put on the students, families, schools, and teachers.” Matthew reflected on teaching and said, “More often, teachers today fill some sort of void in the life of their students. Successful teachers today need to personalize themselves with their students and their family.”

Monica and Matthew wanted to make it clear that teachers were no longer the only imparter of knowledge. The world changed very quickly and there were more and more resources to access information and learn about it. Monica said, “There is no more singular source or textbook as information is constantly changing and being updated.” The classroom was taking on a different dynamic and teachers should bring the world into their classroom via the internet and computers. However, Matthew also stressed the point that teachers should be bringing the students outside of the classroom as well in order to learn and benefit from the experts and professionals in the community.

Monica reflected on the increased role of teachers. She felt that there were more needs for schools and teachers to address that were outside the objectives of the curriculum. “Teachers are moms, dads, babysitters, buddies, nurses, and social workers.” There were more responsibilities which moved from the social world and family life of the home, to the shoulders of the teachers in the schools because of a certain upbringing being seen. Monica concluded by saying, “There is more responsibility moving from the home to the school. Kids are coming in without skills learned at home, and teachers must deal with that. Parental skills are not what they used to be and it is a sign of the times.”

Victoria said that schools and teachers were asked to do so much. They were feeling more pressure to fill what kids were not getting at home. She echoed the concerns of Vivian when she said that the burdens of responsibility were being pushed from the parents onto the shoulders of the children, and thus onto the teachers. “They (teachers) need to play this role because there is no other alternative to fill that role within our communities. Academics are not enough. Teachers must focus on the real world, build social skills, and instill a sense of community.”

Valerie saw school as a place where boys and girls would build their identity at a young age. “Teachers have a huge weight on their shoulders. It was placed there by parents to fill the void of social development for their kids. Teachers must be consistent and teach the whole child. That involves much more than the objectives of the (academic) curriculum.”

Stephanie and Samantha both said that schools provided teachers with a door into the world of their students. “However, teachers may be lacking real life experience with the needs and issues their students are bringing into class. They need to be more aware and involved in knowing what their students are dealing with in their everyday life.”

Vivian said that teachers were taking on more at school. “There are many issues surfacing in schools that were never seen before. There is a burden passed on from some parents and thrust upon the shoulders of the students and teachers. Teachers are not given sufficient training in order to deal with it.” The school and the teacher sometimes found themselves as the sole support for the children who presented many issues. She said that teachers needed to shift their curriculum in order to be sensitive to the needs of all children and their specific family issues. “Sometimes certain tasks will be achieved, and

some will be impossible. In more and more families there is no role model or help to achieve them.”

As noted, the role of education has changed a lot over the past few decades. Many of the participants supported the view that the main function of all elementary schools in Montreal from the 1950's to the early 1980's was to socialize children within the community. They said this orientation had changed and that schools became increasingly more cognitive and academic based. As you will see in the next section, they also felt that children had changed in terms of the skills they brought with them to the classroom. Schools and teachers have been forced to adapt in order to accommodate their needs.

Matthew and Monica expressed some concerns in the development of their students. They felt that the focus of their students was scattered. Vivian echoed the sentiments of the teachers when she said that children had access to much more information than ever before and they did not know what to do with it. Life had become a lot more complex for students today. The increased use of technology in their lives has decreased their reading and writing skills. As a social worker, Victoria said that with the world of the children getting bigger, it was distancing them from some fundamental norms and understandings of community.

Vivian raised the issue that there was an increase in the diversity of learners. A growing number of children were being exposed to many family types, ethnicities, parenting styles, and they were creating a discomfort in children. They no longer found themselves in a homogeneous environment, which made everything in their life more difficult to manage. Samantha highlighted the need for schools to accommodate as much as possible for families where it did not come easy.

Children were coming into school from a young age without the basic skills that were normally taught at home. There was a feeling that students needed to be reached before they could be taught. According to several of the participants, school was increasingly turning into the place which filled the void of parenting for these children. Many participants made reference to a respect that was lacking in students. Michael said, “There is a missing appreciation for education in the students and their parents.” And yet, more pressure from universities, which continue to search for the best of the best.

The teachers I interviewed said that parents and teachers all helped in shaping and preparing children for life. However, it seemed more and more now that teachers had to deal with the shape the students had become as they entered their classrooms.

A common concern from all of the participants when it came to the involvement of parents in the education of their children was that their education was rarely supported when the children went home. Vivian said, “Many try very hard, but there are few supports.”

Monica shared a concern for the busy lives of families, where most had both parents working. “Children spend a very long day in school and are then chauffeured around to the many extra-curricular activities that they are involved in. There are very few moments for family time or sitting around socializing around a dinner table if that even happens anymore.” She said that with the busy life that children lived today, with videogames, computers, and the increase in social networking, children were not playing, talking, or expressing themselves as much, and it was affecting their language skills and their development.

Michael said that teaching had become more challenging over the years. He felt a growing disconnect between the home and school, with parents being less and less involved. “I don’t know what happens when they go home.”

Kate said she was very much involved in her son’s school. “Parents are not paying enough attention.” She was shocked that some kids came to school with empty workbooks and reading was not being supported at home. As she was reflecting she said, “With all we know about the importance of education, it astounds me.”

Valerie felt that in her experience, she saw that the weight of making sense of the world, as well as finding organization and clarity from the confusion, was being shifted from the shoulders of the parents to those of the children to figure out on their own. As a result, “The role of the teacher becomes increasingly important in order to help shoulder that burden and help the children make sense of the world as best they could.”

Samantha and Steven stated that there was no help, accountability, or consequences when it came to their education. Their parents did not take an active role. Steven thought for a moment and said, “My Parents were not actively involved as parents should be.” He said they never helped with homework or concerned themselves with his progress. Stephanie had more support at home but struggled in school. They all shouldered the burden and managed, unlike others, to make the best with their skills once they found their own passion.

Vivian said that many parents did not alert the schools about many issues. “I have seen many parents give excuses and put up many obstacles that prevent the home and school from collaborating together for the best interests of the child.” She had seen children being used as leverage in divorce negotiations. She explained, for example, that

one spouse might not financially support the after-school activities of the child if the other spouse tried to keep some material possession.

Michael talked about how camp filled a void in parenting during the summer months. He had experiences where children would come to camp without the necessary skills or boundaries to function as a part of a group. “They would develop homesickness or behavioural issues right from the start.” In his experience, with the right support, reassurance, and guidance from the staff, children would quickly develop a bond and learn how to interact and live in a communal environment where everyone played a part and had a role in the success of the group.

4.2 Male Teachers

All the participants I interviewed did not take long to reflect upon their own personal past experiences with male teachers in order to come up with a similar response. The overwhelming response was that there were very few male teachers at every level of their education. The teachers from the group could remember only a handful of men in their teachers college program. Matthew attended McDonald College in Montreal in the 1950’s and he felt that he was in a male minority of about 20%. Monica attended McGill’s Faculty of Education in the mid 1970’s and found very few men in her program. At the turn of the 21st century, Michael experienced larger proportions of about 35% because his program at OISE in Toronto included high school teachers. Some participants could only refer to the gym teacher as the token male at their school. They all recognized that the proportion of male teachers increased as they moved up through high school and into university.

Vivian had access to many schools in her career and she said, “I can only count on one hand how many male teachers she has met over the years. The percentage is low and

it remains a challenge to get men in there.” She never had one herself, but her son did and she thought, “It was unusual but nice for the kids.” She liked it and thought it was important because it was familiar. It exposed them to a common gender in the classroom.

Michael, Matthew, and Monica never had a male elementary school teacher. Matthew said the current statistics were terrible. Michael and Valerie remembered that there was a male kindergarten teacher at their Jewish school, and thought it was strange at the time, but thought nothing more of it. Reflecting back, they saw it as something rare and special for the children in that class.

Kate spoke very highly of the male music teacher that her son had. He was the only male teacher in his school. “I try to make sure he is around positive adult males because when the same-sex parent is absent, when they’re little, they need that.”

Karen’s two daughters attended Jewish elementary school where there were four male teachers. Her eldest “saw it as normal and that was great.” Her youngest “needs her daddy, and her school experience really gave her something she needed.”

Samantha, who currently works in a Jewish school in Montreal, said in reference to male teachers, “There are not enough of them, definitely not enough of them.” Samantha said the percentage was really unfortunate, but there was not enough incentive for males to enter this field. “There is a need for an entire paradigm shift.”

Monica reflected on several experiences where parents were very excited to have a male teacher for their kids. “There was a positive role model that was a man. With fathers being more involved in family life, it is great to extent it to a school situation.” She said that as a society, we needed to continue to strengthen the balance of gender involvement in child development in order for it to reflect family life and society.

Vivian, Victoria, and Valerie each made a very interesting correlation between male teachers and male social workers as they said both professions were significantly dominated by women. Whenever possible, they tried to find male social workers because some children would relate better with a male. Vivian remembered a time when a male counselor made a significant difference. “Being male was the defining factor for a positive experience.” Victoria remembered a boy who requested a male to fill a fatherly role in order to try to replace what he had lost.

Valerie also saw good experiences with male counselors, but because of her experiences in the women’s shelter, she provided a caution. “Some people who suffer through domestic violence, usually perpetrated by men, may have a hard time trusting or talking to a male counselor because it can remind them of the trauma they went through.”

In order to understand what role male elementary school teachers had in the social development of children during those important years, I first needed to find out in what way male teachers were different from female teachers in their educational approach. The overwhelming response from the experiences of most the participants, was yes, there was a different approach when men were teaching in a classroom.

Monica, a female teacher and coordinator said that she only encountered a few male teachers in her many years of experience. She said they all had a very unique passion for the profession. “They are nurturing, caring, and relate well to the children.” Monica said, “Men had a definite special dynamic in the classroom.” She felt they tolerated more behaviour issues, noise, and movement which allowed for fewer control issues. “It’s fun. I sense a feeling of fun. Not that they play all day, but it takes on a different atmosphere in the classroom.” Monica mentioned that kids respected the male

teachers in a different way. “They look up to them. They try to please them and seek acceptance from them. They interact well with the boys and the girls love it too. The attention they get from them leads to a positive experience.”

Michael and Matthew, the male teachers who participated in this study, reflected back to their practicum. Michael was welcomed by the administration and encouraged to try out a range of classes and levels. “They thought it would be exciting for the kids.” He said that boys liked it that the male teacher was like them. “They identified with me wearing a kippah (Jewish head covering) like them. The boys felt more comfortable with me as apposed to the usual female teacher.”

Matthew made reference to memories he had when he did extra-curricular work with his students before and after school. He said that when he saw them in class, that personal interaction “made a difference in their behaviour.” He made it clear that by being more informal at times, he was more approachable and the children were more comfortable to talk to him about personal issues.

Victoria had two male teachers who stood out in her memory. “They did lots of extra activities that engaged the kids. There were chess competitions, a rock choir, and it was all part of class. It made it more fulfilling.” She remembered them being gentle and understanding. In her experience, the male teachers she had “tended to have more of a hand on discipline with an intimidating presence.”

Samantha, who grew up without a supportive father in her life, reflected on her professional experiences watching men teach in contrast to women. “The male approach was different. There is a unique role.” She continued to say, “It was more fun, relaxed, and it offered a structured environment without the intense yelling. There were more activities being done, they had more patience for silliness.” She made reference to a

command that male teachers had on a classroom, as if the respect came from an inherent sense of authority. “There was less need to control with external consequences.”

Karen said that women were not the only nurturers for teaching. “Men are equally as maternal. More male teachers will mean that boys and girls will have a more well-rounded view of what is possible.” She said her youngest daughter “adores her male teacher. Even to the point where I feel she would rather disappoint me than him.” That was a powerful statement coming from a mother who is doing so much for her children.

Monica concluded by saying that it took a special person to see the gratification in working with young children. “Children who go to school where there are no male teachers are getting a skewed picture. It better reflects society and the microcosm of what society is. It is important for children to have a male influence and participation in their life.”

4.3 Family Structure

In order to understand the social development of children, I needed to look at the structure of the family, and who the primary caregivers were. Valerie said, “I remember learning about attachment theory where the care, love, and comfort of the mother are primary for early infants.”

The role all of the mothers played at every level of life for the participants I interviewed, with a couple exceptions, spoke volumes to the stabilizing force a mother had on the household and on the social development of her children, even with the father present at some capacity until the divorce took place. Karen talked about her mother and grandmother as the leaders of her family. “My mother made all the decisions, ran the house, and did it all.” She could not help but laugh at the irony when she said, “I did not want to live my mother’s life, but it is frightening how my life evolved the same way.”

For most of the participants, it was the mother who dictated the daily life within the household. It was the mother who made sure all the holidays would be celebrated. It was the mother who checked up on how their day was. It was the mother who was there at the end of the day, no matter what took place in their life and to make sure they had everything they needed to keep moving forward. Matthew said, “The mother is the focal point of the family. When any child has a situation that they want to communicate, mothers always make themselves available.”

The involvement and role of the father in child development has been given more value and significance in the past few decades. Monica added that just having the father involved from the start and being allowed into the birthing room, was a huge change in the view of their role. “They are present when their children are born. They are more involved in playgroups and actively involved with their children. The role of the father is equally and extremely important to the development of children.” Matthew echoed the statements of Jackson Katz when he said, “Many more fathers today are making themselves available to their children.”

Vivian acknowledged that the role of the father was crucial. “There is research, as you must know, about role modeling, as well as vocabulary development, the development of gender roles, and identity for boys and girls. They learn social skills, sensitivity, and acceptance when they see the partnership between the father and the mother.”

Valerie and Monica agreed that children benefited from the consistency of having two parents in a loving and nurturing relationship. They developed an understanding of a working partnership. “They benefit from a dual income where it can pay for more after-school programs that add to the socialization of the child.” They made reference to the

father-daughter relationship as “the first with another gender.” It sets the tone for how they treat others. Valerie continued to say, “As girls grow up, they look to find someone to date who is like their father. If they don’t have that basic relationship, it can damage their perspective or understanding of what to look for in future relationships.”

Samantha added, “The relationship between the father and his daughter is critical to development because sometimes the mother and daughter will clash and it is important to have someone else there to provide an opinion about how to deal with the issue.” After witnessing the relationship her husband had with her own children, she started to reevaluate her views about her own father. She saw how important her husband was to their development as boys, and integral to their lives. “Their relationship is unconditional and can never be replaced.” She initiated contact with her father and started to include him in their life as well. “He is now a great father and grandfather.”

Steven lit up when he started to talk about his father-son time. “My dad was an extroverted guy. He was a blast. He was fantastic. Kids loved him. My cousins wanted my dad as their dad. Our relationship was powerful. It was my whole world. I looked up to him as this person who knew everything, did everything. He was the quintessential macho cool guy. I looked up to how he related to others. We spent our weekends together. All that changed when my parents got divorced.” As we will see later in this study, Steven’s father changed and their relationship was never the same.

The participants said that there are many high functioning families, but the old view of family was being tested more today than ever. They all stressed that it was much harder to keep a family together in our generation and they saw that it was having an effect on the social development of their children and others they knew in the community.

Vivian stressed that there were many types of socially accepted families these days. The so called nuclear family seemed to be a term of the past. She made reference to families of mixed marriages, single-parent families, blended families, and same sex families. “In the past few generations, parents have presented insecurities of their own parenting skills. There are many more books about good and poor parenting that they read and they develop unreal expectations for themselves.”

As we looked at family life after the 1970’s, the participants in this study outlined many factors which took a toll on the family structure. They saw the pressures of success adding stress to the relationship of the parents and of the children. Matthew talked about life in the city. “It takes 2 adults to work in order to maintain their desired lifestyle and acquire the material things. It puts a strain on the family and they really have to work hard and work something out so it isn’t disruptive to the children.” He concluded by saying, “It is very important that families are organized. If they are not, the kids pay a penalty.”

Karen expressed a great deal of disappointment and frustration with today’s modern Jewish community. “So much has changed and become very elitist and pretentious. As a single parent, the values I need to teach are very different from a two-parent home. I teach about independence, self-reliance, autonomy, and what a unit means in a different way from other families.” She said that these values and morals were not being supported or modeled in other homes in the community. She continued to say that parents today did not spend the necessary time with their children. “They are in front of the computer or the television, often without supervision or accountability. Parents have no boundaries for kids. They let them do whatever they want.” She stressed the importance of doing things together so children could be responsible for their actions and how they affected others. Karen said that there was a lack of manners. “It is hard to raise

my children with self-respect, values, and an appreciation for what they have when it is not being supported.”

Valerie spoke about higher expectations on parents and how some may not be prepared. “They need to learn how to do it. Both parents are working and they are not there for their kids.” She made reference to the loosening of boundaries and the freedom that children had at home. “It is a busy material world where family time is almost non-existent.”

4.4 Social Development of Children

Childhood development starts from its earliest attachment between the mother and her baby. Slowly, the father enters this world and the term family takes shape. Each parent plays a significant role in shaping the young life of the child.

The relationship between the parents, as the primary caregivers, and the child was one of several factors that affected the security, stability, and social development in the upbringing of the lives of those I interviewed. Other internal factors included; their relationship with extended family; the organization and consistency of the family; the communication between parent and child; and the emotional well being of those mentioned. Some external factors were the social, economic, and cultural environment that the family was a part of.

Vivian talked about how children were different today. “They have more access to information and no idea what to do with it.” Coupled with the fact that children had both parents working or unavailable, children had less supervision or accountability for their own actions. “Children are given freedoms they never had before.” Vivian said that in her experience, “Children are being asked to rise to occasions they were never asked to do

before. On top of all that, they need to find a way to develop their sense of identity while managing family issues.”

Monica reinforced the concern that more responsibility for child development was moving away from parents in the home to the teachers and support services of the school. “Parenting skills are not what they used to be.” She added that children are coming to school without the basic skills of right and wrong. “Parents are overly concerned with being more of a buddy to their child.” Thus, they were more reluctant to set the necessary rules needed to develop as part of a community. “Children need boundaries and a sense of knowing what is fair, what to expect, and they need to be constant.”

Victoria said that in her experience, children from single-parent homes were growing up in a confusing world of mixed values, mixed messages and without structure or organization. Victoria added that most of her clients were struggling in school. She was surprised by the emotional need that existed in them. “Kids are given too many options and they are lost. They have a hard time finding consistency. Then they start to look elsewhere.” Michael and Matthew believed that a disconnect existed between families and their children. They said that in their experience, there was limited modeling at home.

Kate continued to say that children were learning structure from school and not from home. She said that parents seemed to have this idea that their job was to pick up and drop off their child at school and that was the essence of their learning. “They are neglecting their continued role at home.” She mentioned the lack of respect from children that she felt, at times, when she was volunteering at her son’s elementary school. “They talk like they do at home. They try to get away with things at school that they try at home. They speak in a rude way, with foul language and disrespect, to kids and teachers.” She

said that the students she helped were starving for attention and had a hard time dealing with positive reinforcement because they were not getting any at home.

Karen felt that she was being old fashioned when she shared similar concerns over the values that parents were teaching their children. “Computers and television are raising the children.” She said that there was no respect any more for the value of education and the values that people must have for each other in a community.” She said that families did not spend enough time together.

Michael reflected on the role of informal education on children. He could tell that those who did not get sufficient care from home were behind in their development. “They are coming with more social and behavioural issues.” He explained that their discipline issues could be turned around much quicker in camp because they were forced to adjust and be a part of the group. Children learned independence and life skills that could only be learned from making it on their own, away from the interference of their parents during those few weeks. Michael said some campers and even staff needed extra care and attention as they dealt with homesickness, or as they were dealing with social and personal issues that came up throughout the summer. “We develop a bond as there is good one-on-one time. This consistency allows them to be reassured.”

As Samantha reflected on her childhood, she did not remember much about life in her house before her father left for the first time at age seven. She had memories of being close with her siblings and her parents not being very happy.

Stephanie had a different experience. She remembered the closeness of her family and how “there were never family fights except the usual sibling arguments.” They had a Sabbath dinner together at the end of each week. She remembered the close relationship she had with her father when it came to her school work.

Steven remembered both his parents as they took turns to say goodnight. “It was a consistent routine every night.” He added that, “I have more memories of my father being a father than my mom being a mom.” He started off by saying that he did not remember any negative thoughts in his younger years. Later in the interview he said, “There were fights but no real bad fights. I was very little and they kept me out of a lot.” Steven reflected a lot about his development and the negative influences around him. “I grew up adopting the norms around me. My dad had a huge temper. He thinks he’s the only right one. Whatever he says, goes. Whatever he wants, he gets. Growing up, I was talking and acting like him too. I got the screaming thing from him.” Steven said he eventually realized that he had to get away from that negative image of masculinity.

Valerie talked about some of the children she worked with and the image they had of men. “The dads were tough guys. The kids were told they couldn’t talk about their feelings and crying meant they were a sissy.” Vivian talked about how the definitions of masculinity needed to be rethought.

It became clear that in talking with the participants, as children grew up in the world, they learned gender norms from the actions and directions from those around them. They acquired and developed their social skills and behavioural cues from those closest to them.

4.5 Separation and Divorce

According to the research, the divorce rate in Quebec is 48% and as a result, there has been a five fold increase in single-parent families since the start of the 1970’s, which contributes to the instability in the family structure we see in the research, and the influence it has on the social development of children in single-parent homes today (Ambert, 2009).

Vivian made reference to the increase of single-parent families through divorce and separation in the Jewish community and said that it was likely to be close to the percentage represented in the general population. “There is more in the Orthodox community where we never would have seen it in the past.” Vivian noted that there was no longer a stigma attached to being a single parent.

Victoria grew up in a generation of divorce. “My parents were together and I felt like the oddball. Most of my friends come from split homes.” She said that it felt like the divorce rate was over 50%. She raised the issue of an extreme crisis in the Jewish community and in society where “negative patterns are building.”

Valerie said, “Just as I hear someone is getting married, I hear that someone is getting divorced. As a young professional, it is so depressing.”

Michael noticed a rise in divorce and separation over the past decade in his classroom experience, as well as in his experience as a summer camp director. “It went from being taboo and not spoken about, to something that is common and accepted. Everyone is all at ease with the language.”

Matthew said, “Divorce is socially acceptable. The burden is on the school, the teachers, and the school counselors.”

Monica reflected back to when she was growing up in the Jewish community and said that she remembered one family of divorce. “Today the divorce rate is much higher. There are split families living in two homes. There are re-married families with step siblings involved and all this is very different.”

With the fracturing of families, as well as the decreased role in socialization that schools were playing, Vivian continued to say, “We are now paying the price as there are fewer and fewer places left for long term access to children for psychological, social, and

emotional growth.” The school, and not the home, is an increasingly more consistent place in the lives of many children.

At the time of the interview, Victoria was heading a group of 35 children of various ages. From that group, only two were living with both parents together. “Mostly the mother was the parent at home.” Victoria and Valerie both had experience working in youth protection and they both said, “It was rare to see both parents together.”

Samantha spent some time working in a school in the Jewish community of Toronto. When she returned to work in Montreal, she was “shocked that the incidence of divorce and separation was higher in the Jewish community in Montreal compared to Toronto. It is present in almost every grade.” Stephanie could only think of 3 friends in her circle that lived with both parents.

Steven said, “When my parents got divorced, it was beginning to be more common. In high school, during introductions, I said my parents were divorced. Why, I have no idea, but this other boy said his were divorced too and we became best friends.”

Karen talked about divorce being rare and taboo not long ago, “But now it’s normal and that is unfortunate.” However, she did say that it was at least much healthier for the children now that it was part of the norm. “It is accepted, and it is being talked about.” She continued to say, “My husband and I came from divorced homes, which was rare back then. We were best friends who worked hard and managed for 15 years.” They promised themselves that they would never put their children through that, but in life, there were no guarantees. Listening to Karen, it was clear that she prided herself on learning from her experiences. She was careful to make this stage as smooth as possible for her daughters.

The views of the court system have shifted in the past five years. They went from almost always granting full custody to the mother, to looking more favourably on the father and almost insisting on shared custody, unless there were outstanding circumstances. Fathers were also campaigning more and more for their right and obligation to help in raising their child. Matthew and Monica said that there were many more joint custody cases taking place today. Matthew said that shared custody was best. “When both parents live in the same area, everything remains more or less familiar. Too much change affects the child immensely.”

Vivian explained that with the increase in fractured families and children in need, there was a growing use of community services. She said that the primary source of assistance for the Montreal Jewish Community was Agence Ometz, formerly Jewish Family Services (JFS). They provided the Jewish community with a variety of resources and services to individuals, families, schools, camps, and businesses.

Vivian, a clinical director, also provided a group services department of social and psychological development workers who went into Jewish schools around the community. She said that the Jewish schools were fortunate to have counselors so they could help fill the void or gaps of the families.

Matthew remembered frequently using the services of social workers and school counselors from JFS with kids who needed to talk about personal issues. “There are more resources coming into schools today.”

Monica said in her years at her school, there had been an increase in the use of the social workers and counselors from Agence Ometz. They were addressing more needs than ever before. “With the increase of divorce, and as families change their model, kids

are exposed to more. School is where they become very overt and you see behavioural and emotional distress. Kids have emotional needs and they are not handled at home, so we need to deal with them at school.” Monica said that she was impressed with how the school counselors have been able to support children with learning disabilities and emotional needs. “They are busy and they are only there on a part-time basis. If they were full-time in every school, there was not a doubt that they would be very busy.”

Valerie reflected on her experiences and echoed the thoughts of Monica with added concern. “There is a growing need for more professionals in schools. It is barely patchwork to say that it is there. There is not enough of a presence in schools. There is no time for prevention or intervention. It is ineffectual when so many issues are falling through the cracks.”

Samantha remembered that when she was in school, nobody recognized that there was a problem. “We hid it well. We were smart and knew our way around the system. Looking back now, we needed a teacher, principal, or guidance counselor to recognize that I, at 14, went to parent-teacher interviews for my siblings. That is a problem.”

Stephanie never made use of the social worker or guidance counselor in school. She kept everything inside. She did seek help after seeing her father for the first time since the divorce, and not knowing how to deal with it. As a social work student, she reflected on how she reacted and said, “It is important to speak and acknowledge it because it’s the only way to really get through it.”

Vivian talked about a volunteer department of big brothers and big sisters for kids who needed positive role models. “Many single-parent families are accessing these services.”

Kate found it hard to access their services because she lived in the suburbs. “I applied, but it is all in the city. It never worked out.” She used family therapy to get her son through the tough times. “He was thinking that I was going to leave him as well.”

Vivian responded with, “It was hard to reach many families. We know there is a need and we are trying our best to provide services. However, many are not reporting it.”

Victoria talked about a huge need to recruit more male role models to fill the need for big brothers so mothers like Kate could find the support they needed. “Not expected was that boys were participating more than girls. The girls had more support systems in place and people to turn to. There was a bigger crisis with the boys because they had fewer options.” She referred to the lack of same-sex role models for boys.

Victoria talked about the case managers for single mothers. “They try to strengthen skills, build autonomy, provide financial help, and organizational skills to be more accountable.” She continued to talk about the services provided for children. “They try to fill the gaps kids are experiencing. There is tutoring, counseling, career counseling, common needs workshops, and bereavement workshops.” She said that a quarter of the 35 individuals she worked with already lost a parent to death. “We do a follow-up throughout the year and provide incentives for it. We offer financial incentives for university or social and developmental activities.”

Valerie reflected on her experience working at Auberge Shalom Pour Femmes in Montreal. “I was a child youth worker and I remember how busy I was.” She informed me that it was the only shelter for Jewish women and children in North America. She said it followed Jewish dietary laws, but remained open to anyone, Jewish or not, who lived in the community and who were in need. “Divorce is shunned upon in the Jewish orthodox community. For a large orthodox family to uproot their lives and seek help in a place that

was not 100% Jewish, it had to be a catastrophe.” Valerie worked with children who were neglected and abused. They were behind in their physical and cognitive development. “Parents in the community are afraid of social workers and child welfare workers because of the fear of having the kids taken away from them.”

Michael had used social workers or counselors from Agence Ometz in order to prepare and train his staff before the camp season started. He had also seen them assist in grief counseling “when there is an emergency or a sudden traumatic event in the life of a camper or a staff member.”

Stephanie’s mother benefited from subsidies offered by Agence Ometz to attend summer camp. Karen also found help to subsidize the cost of sending her two daughters to sleep away camp for a month during the summer. “Too many single mothers I know cannot wait for that weekend or the summer to send their children away. I am with them 24/7 and I want my girls to get away from me. It was an adjustment, but it has been amazing for our relationship. I could not do that without Agence Ometz.”

The professionals I interviewed made reference to a correlation between the increased fracturing of families and the visible increase in need for social and behavioural intervention by social workers and school counselors. The experiences of the professionals and the adults I interviewed allowed them to clearly explain the negative effects of separation and divorce that personally touched their own life, or the lives of those in their care.

According to Vivian, who reflected on her years of experience in social work addressing the needs of families and children in the community, the impact of divorce on children in their care affected the development of social skills, friendships, and

relationships. “Children were more introverted when they lost the consistency, stability and support they needed to thrive. They developed insecurity and allegiance issues. The noticeable effects manifest in poor academic performance. School becomes difficult for them.” Victoria and Valerie shared similar findings and talked about the emotional instability of children and how divorce affected how messages and values were interpreted and learned. Children learned bad communication skills and saw negative modeling of demeaning behaviours.

Victoria noticed the decrease in productivity in children who did not have the proper support and attention at home. They ended up going to school unprepared and distracted. “The child may be labeled as not showing up because it is hard to be organized in an unorganized environment.”

According to Matthew and Monica, a major cause for the suffering of children in school during a time of divorce was if parents focused solely on their own needs and never put aside their animosity. Monica said, “Learning issues may not get the necessary attention.”

Matthew added, “If families denied the situation existed, that is when not much will be solved and they become the enabler of the problem.” He said that parents needed to unite in order to handle the needs of their children. If they were busy arguing about their own issues, support usually ended up at the bottom of the list.

Victoria said that parents sometimes used the child to hurt the other parent out of spite and to gain leverage. She said issues of finance had a large effect in the lives of divorced parents and children. “The child always loses out because one parent might refuse to provide money or services that the child will always benefit from.”

Valerie introduced some of the dangerous patterns of behaviour that developed in children as they got older and dealt with their reality. Children, especially boys, had a hard time dealing with issues of identity as they grew, developed, and searched for who they were. If children were not raised in a healthy environment, “The effects of neglect can be so deep in the psyche of a person. They rarely have an outlet to express their feelings.” Valerie said that as children entered adolescence, many would look for means of escaping the sadness, anger, and depression of their reality. There were various extremes to the outlet that they chose in dealing with their search for comfort.

Valerie identified a variety found on a spectrum from one slight extreme of addictions to smoking cigarettes; recreational drinking; minor drug use; vandalism; and sexual promiscuity that they could usually grow out of, to a more severe extreme of alcohol abuse; theft; running away from home; violence; sex; and hard drug abuse. “They take everything that has happened to them, all their feelings, and express themselves outside their bodies.” Valerie explained that this had drastic and long term consequences to their body, their health, and their future relationships.

Valerie talked about the cycle that social workers saw in individuals who suffered from developmental traumas occurring from abuse, neglect, and divorce. It was a cycle that was hard to break and often repeated itself as it manifested in future relationships with others. “It affects them, their behaviour, and their relationships with everyone they come in contact with throughout their life.”

The adults I interviewed, who grew up in a world of separation and divorce, became uncomfortable and reserved when they articulated many of those struggles. There were financial difficulties, academic struggles, a search for their identity, a search for escape, and in some cases, some substances used to provide that escape. Trust issues were

something that Samantha, Stephanie and Steven all expressed in their interviews. Like Valerie stated earlier, there was the possibility that they would project their experiences onto the men or women that they would meet in their lives. Those who never saw a positive, loving relationship might not know what love was or gain those norms in order to know what to look for in their relationships.

Samantha and her sisters quickly found themselves in relationships after the final departure of their father. They all handled it differently. “I was lucky to have found him so soon because if not, I would be a very angry and bitter person.” She also saw evidence of that continuing pattern or cycle, as one of her sisters was now divorced. Samantha said she tested the limits of the commitment of what would be her future husband by often pushing him away to see if he would come back. “My dad left, I needed to see how far until he would leave.” Samantha reflected on the birth of her first child. She had a son and had no idea what to do with a boy. With no father or brothers in her own childhood, she was lost. “If not for my husband, I wouldn’t know what to do with my own child. I would have to turn to the community for help. We were four girls, and I cannot imagine having a brother who would have had to grow up without my father.”

Stephanie was nine when she noticed the difference in the pattern of behaviour of her father, and she knew something was wrong. “He used to help me with everything, and when that stopped, it was a breakthrough that he was not who I thought he was.” The seeds of doubt entered her mind about the person she thought she could trust to always be there to protect her. Stephanie kept everything inside. It was not until three years later that she started to feel comfortable to talk with a friend about it. As a student in social work herself, she also made reference to the many dangerous and negative effects of divorce she had studied or seen in other people. Stephanie said she had issues trusting men and

acknowledged that it could affect her future relationships. “I am not naive. It opened up my eyes to see that cheating and divorce can happen to anyone.”

After the divorce, Steven started with regular visitation twice a week with his father. With the changes that took place in their relationship, he developed a fear and anxiety as he grew older. He attributed it to the time he spent waiting for his father and the inevitable lecture that was going to take place. “My stomach was in knots and my panic attacks started there. It was a marathon just to make it to the afternoon. I smoked more, I was not active, I had a poor diet, I could not see straight and I could not breathe.” Steven confessed that he had trust issues. “The minute I meet someone new, I tend to not like them. I need time to warm up to people.” Steven said he has not really been in a serious long term relationship. “It has to be the right person. I cannot settle. My parents did and I don’t want to be in a miserable relationship.”

Depending on the support system in place, the effects ranged from minor to severe. They impacted one individual, or an entire family. The effects were cyclical and influenced future offspring and their relationships. Stress and depression developed due to the inconsistency and disorganization in their life. When children were added into the mix, the effects of parental divorce had long-term effects on the ongoing social development of everyone involved.

Kate and Karen are doing their best to shoulder all the burdens of their reality and avoid the peripheral struggles of the divorce from affecting the social development of their children. Their life is not easy. They are doing their best to educate their children about the reality that they live in. They are not alone and they work as a team with their children in order to overcome the challenges together.

Kate said that she and her son were a team of two. She worked two jobs from home in order to provide the most balanced childhood possible under the circumstances. “One income is challenging.” She tried her best to have a strong secondary support made up of family and friends in order to nurture all of her son’s needs. “My son is a boy who isn’t around males a lot.” Kate reflected on her own situation. “Every child deserves two parents. That is the ideal, even if they are not living together. I am lacking with the boy stuff.” She was referring to sports, puberty, his Bar-Mitzvah (the Jewish rite into manhood), and teenage life. Kate found it hard at times to stay strong and keep up with the stay-at-home moms in her community. “I don’t ever stop. I work, I am mommy, I organize and pay the bills, and do house chores. I never stop.” She was thankful for being able to keep up with extra-curricular programs that kept her son involved socially. Kate said her son loved kids and he would love to have a sibling. “Not without a father. It would be selfish to satisfy my own needs and it is not fair to the child. I won’t consider it.” Kate expressed a concern for her son as he grew older. “It must be hard to walk around in a world knowing that your dad doesn’t care or love you.”

Karen grew up in a divorced family where her mother was the family leader. She learned a lot from her situation, but said that she and her daughters still raised each other. She said they had been partners for five years now. “I will supply play but we need to work together on house chores. We will have extra time to play and they learn to work with me, although, there is not much option.” Like Kate, Karen also never stopped. She worked full time and came to terms with the fact that she would never get a salary like someone with a university degree. “I am working to hang on to what’s here. I make sacrifices but they want to stay in this house.” Karen prided herself on being organized

and tenacious in order to get past the many obstacles and challenges. “It depends how you look at them, and you find a way to manage and get through them.”

It was not easy at the start. Karen and her children went through a very tough three year period after the divorce. “I was very sick, their grandma passed away and the kids were very attached to her, and their aunt moved to Israel.” They did not know what was consistent and safe. “Dad was not around, I was juggling, and they didn’t know where to grasp onto.” Karen was lucky to have such good friends who helped out. “They were amazing and the kids were resilient. We all did what we had to do.”

Karen’s kids were fortunate that their mother was very active growing up. “I was a tomboy. I can do the boy things and the girly stuff. I do their hair and I taught them to throw a football. I coach baseball and my kids are involved in many activities. It was hard to balance everything in the first year of the divorce and we made adjustments by finding other ways of doing things.”

Karen made it clear that her priority was her children, not herself. When I asked her about looking for any relationships of her own, she echoed the thoughts of Kate. “I cannot be selfish at this point. It is hard but it would be unfair.” She did not want to sacrifice the stability of the world they had together by looking to fill any needs of her own. “Too many people try to replace the father with what they think they need, a companion who helps raise the kids and pay the bills. Couples now work on themselves and they lose time with their kids. Once you have kids, life is theirs, not yours.”

In talking with them, I knew that these mothers were especially involved with the growth and education of their children. Something I noticed that was in common and so very important with both mothers was the way they talked about the father of their children. Kate didn’t want her son to have a bad image of fathers. She consciously made

sure to never speak badly of him. “Your father made a bad decision and went away. That is what I tell him.”

Karen learned a good lesson from her mother. “Her emotions were too visible in how she felt about my father. No matter how pissed you might be, he is still their father and I cannot disrespect him or talk down about him.”

Stephanie talked about the closeness that developed over the years with her mother and sister. “We do everything together.” Stephanie saw her mother raise two kids on her own. She said she learned independence from that. “It became comfortable and some friends were even envious of our close bond of three girls having fun.” It was that supportive bond that made it easier to move on without their father.

Valerie’s experiences in social work reinforced the experiences of Kate, Karen, and Stephanie. Valerie talked about the immense pressure that fell on the shoulders of these mothers in order to cope with their new reality after a divorce, as well as provide for the welfare of the children involved. “Many single mothers do not have a higher education. They are on welfare and do not have enough resources to improve their situation. They are barely surviving. They often enter a depression, remain unmotivated, and unhealthy. Some never even learned to be a parent and do not know the basics.”

Victoria added that single-mother headed homes were often in low economic situations after the divorce. “90% of children in these homes end up with multi-risk issues. There is limited parenting due to the absence of the father, where the mothers often have limitations, with an increase in mental illness.”

Not all mothers are able to handle the burden and responsibility of raising their children on their own as well as Kate and Karen. Growing up in an environment of

divorce could be a dark, lonely, and dangerous place for a child, which could lead to traumatic consequences. Stephanie remembered how the divorce affected her mother at the start. “It was difficult and there was a denial phase. She was depressed and isolated herself from others. Her eating habits changed and she didn’t go out. Work kept her active, busy, and sane.” At the start, her mother insisted she maintain a relationship with her father, but after it became too emotional, she was allowed to make her own choices. Stephanie’s mother, like Kate and Karen, was honest and gave her no negative impressions of men. Her father did that on his own. “We were happy and he ruined that.”

Samantha and Steven attested to the differences they felt in their life as they continued to build successful lives for themselves. However, that was not without shouldering much of the burden and overcoming obstacles which impacted their social development in many ways.

Samantha remembered how protective she was over her mother. “My strongest memories are not of her, but my need to protect her and not cry or be sad. School was a miserable place for me because I wanted to get back home and make sure things were okay.” She said her mother was a victim, and acted like one so they saw her as one and that made dad the victimizer. “But in reality, he just left.” Samantha and her sisters broke all connection with their father because it made their mother feel better.

Samantha remembered her mother telling her terrible things about her father. “I had to agree and never ally with him.” When she was 15, she remembered that he did not handle the divorce well. “He did not act like the grown-up. He validated the horrible things I thought of him.” When she brought him back into her life after almost 17 years, her mother did not talk to her for a month until she came to grips with it. “She had her perception of things and now that I am older, I am able to have mine.”

Steven's life changed completely after the divorce of his parents. His perfect relationship with his father was never the same again. "Dad was not a happy person. He was not the same person. He would sit us down and lecture us...lecture, lecture. This was the guy, the fun loving dad that would take me out to play. But now he was bitter, upset, and no fun at all." He remembers that his mother "went on strike." He realized later that it was a serious depression. "She smoked and slept all day. There was no cooking so my brothers and I had to fend for ourselves."

For better or for worse, everyone I interviewed attributed the norms they developed and the person they were today to their primary caregivers, their parents, as well as the secondary caregivers who were involved during their development during those difficult years.

The social workers I interviewed said that when tensions rose in a marriage that involved children, the priorities often became about the parents and their needs. The children were sometimes overlooked in the process and the burdens of growth and development fell on their own shoulders.

Victoria said that parents who were involved in their own stress and did not acknowledge the child's situation, were putting them in a disadvantaged position. They were putting a heavy burden on their shoulders. Valerie referred to many examples of children who sounded smarter than their parents. "They are growing up faster and taking on responsibility faster. I worked with a nine year old who didn't want to play games, but have a profound discussion. Often, the mother and the child became dependent on each other, and even best friends. I worked with another boy who knew about the whole court case." She said these children should never be exposed to that information and that those children were growing up much too fast and often missed out on their childhood.

Kate mentioned that her biggest concern was her son growing up in the world with the burden of knowing that his father did not care for him or love him. Kate said that he was too grown up for his own good. At age four, he made a valentine and a detailed plan “to grow up and get what I cannot give him.” She was referring to the nuclear family. “It was hard to hear him try to fix what was ‘broken.’ He said that he would be a daddy who stays, he will do stuff with his kids, be the best daddy, and how he would never leave his kid.” She also said at age four, he asked her how to use the washing machine and make sandwiches. “His father left, so in his mind, it was only normal that I was going to leave him too.” She explained that she was a mommy that stayed and she proved it further by removing the burden that the government was going to impose on her son for life. The government gave her a tough time, but she succeeded in having his surname changed from that of her ex-husband at the time of his birth, to her own. “There was no reason for this boy to walk around for his whole life with the name of the man that abandoned him.”

Samantha spoke for herself and her sisters when she said, “With dad gone, we had to take care of our mother. We became the adults and had the burden of parenthood.” Samantha said that life at home became chaotic. There was no consistency or predictability. There was no routine or structure. “We didn’t have anyone to protect us. When she was sick, we were there. He did not save us from that burden and we raised ourselves in the process.” Samantha and Steven were put right into the middle of the divorce. Samantha attended mediation and was aware of all the legal issues involved. “I grew up too fast and found out things I didn’t need to know.”

Steven was involved from the first day when his father started to explain the reasons why he was leaving. He reflected and said, “Why would they tell this to their kids, if you want a divorce, just get one. We are not judges.” Steven was put into the role

of messenger between his parents. “I told them I hate it. They always turned it against me. My dad blames the fact that he is not close with his children, on his children.” He continued to say, “I was forced to grow up and be independent all at once, all at once.” Since the age of ten, he was making his own lunches for school, and dinners when he returned from school. In high school, he took buses everywhere. I could tell from his tone that these were changes that must have been hard for a nine year old to absorb.

Steven said there were always fights about money, but he was always able to get what he wanted. “Mom never said no, her parents helped out.” Steven learned to be financially independent. He started working at the age of 13. “I couldn’t wait for school to be done so I could work.” He was annoyed that he had to miss out on his weekends and his social time, unlike other teens.

Stephanie had a hard time dealing with her new reality. She never shared anything and internalized it for a long time. Her mother and sister would talk, but she was in denial and did not want to accept that there was a problem. “I went in my room and played with my Barbie and Ken doll because they were happy.”

Samantha, Stephanie, and Steven lost part of their childhood and had the burden of growing up and knowing all too soon that the world was not perfect.

“A boy growing up without his father must be like a girl growing up without her mother.” Kate said that in order to describe the void created in the life of her son, and all children, as they grew up without a supportive father. “He absolutely feels that there is something missing in his life. It is always on his mind and all around in his world. There is no one else, no other boy in his situation at his school. There is no one for him to relate

to.” She said she knew how hard it was for him, and imagined how difficult it must be for all children without a supportive parent.

Steven said, “Dad stopped contributing to everything. I don’t remember the last time I got a birthday card or present from him. It was like pulling teeth, a call was huge.” Valerie said that a father could not be replaced. Each gender contributed in different ways.

Victoria said earlier in this study that life for boys growing up with divorce was limiting. They needed more support because the male figure was absent and it was harder for them to find people to reach out to. Girls had more same-sex support around them and they were able to adjust well to the feminized world in their younger years. Victoria remembered running a workshop where single mothers were worried that their boys would become too feminine. “They were afraid they would be more dependent on females and become mamma’s boys. They were worried about homosexuality.”

Steven was on the cusp of adolescence when his parents divorced. “The minute my dad left the picture, we were not playing sports anymore. We weren’t being active. We weren’t going skiing. I stopped playing baseball and basketball. It all stopped. I am no good now and I think it’s a result of that. I have bad coordination and I am not good at it anymore.” The effects of not having a dad “were huge, wow, huge.”

Kate had this same concern for her son. “He’s big and I cannot wrestle or rough house with him. He’s a boy, he needs to be active, but he hurts me. I have him involved in sports, but what do I know from hockey bags, tying skates and all the equipment. I am the only female in the dressing room.” Kate also had a concern as he entered puberty and adolescence. “I am learning, but I can only do so much. There is nobody to show him the guy stuff.”

The absence of a parent creates the feeling of discomfort and abandonment. Like many of the participants or their children who grew up without their father at a young age, the children eventually developed a feeling that this person was not important in their life and as a result, they developed no expectations of their father. Stephanie, along with Karen's children all developed those indifferent feelings. In contrast to Samantha and Steven's childhood development, they continued to have their mother as the focal point, and a strong support system around them who helped in their development. Stephanie said, "I developed without him for 11 years and I succeeded."

Samantha, who was the oldest of the children who grew up without a supportive father, moved on without him for over 15 years. "I wouldn't allow myself to feel sorry. That would acknowledge a loss. I recognized what I lost and it reinforced my anger. I had someone to blame. It was not until now that I feel bad. When I look at me, the kid me, I want to hug myself. Now I recognize what I didn't have. It bugs me a lot, even today to think of the moments we lost together. I feel bad for my father to have lost what he lost as well. A father's relationship is unconditional and I can never replace that."

Kate said that her son understood that it was just him and his mom, but he would still like a chance to ask his dad if he liked pizza and karate like he did. "He also wants to ask him why he left."

The professionals who participated in this study raised many issues they saw in children who grew up without a father. Children missed the consistency of having two loving parents modeling and working together. They were often missing organization, consistency, and reliability in their own life. The rigid boundaries that they needed became permeable. They were exposed to outside influences rather than internal family

values and morals. Children who grew up with only one parent were missing a perspective, someone who offered another opinion about an issue.

Karen reflected on divorce in many families. “Boys grow up in the shadow of their father. They end up in that shadow because as they grow up, the way they feel is repressed. They can be isolated. It can be a very negative experience.”

Vivian referred me to the work of Jackson Katz. He focused on the socialization of boys and how their perception of masculine norms leads to the victimization of women. She said, “The definition of what is masculine needs to be rethought.” Both boys and girls might grow up with a skewed view of how relationships were built. With all the inconsistencies they experienced, there was an impact as they grew where they learned bad communication skills and saw modeling of demeaning behaviour.

In our contemporary generation, more boys were growing up with violent tendencies. According to the social workers who participated in this study, and supporting earlier research, most violence they witnessed was perpetrated by men. Valerie said, “During their development, when boys begin to act like boys, something is triggering their norms of masculinity that creates this world of what boys are supposed to be, and this violence later in their life.”

Steven developed anxiety and trust issues that continued to affect him in his adult life. After the divorce, he had to make drastic adjustments as he grew older in order to find his own identity and change the norms that were modeled to him by his father.

Victoria finished by saying, “If boys are isolated, there can be a problem. If there is a support system in place, life can be more normal.”

The absence of a father affected the development of Samantha and Stephanie, who grew up in that environment. When they lost the companionship that a daughter shares

with her father, as their first relationship with the opposite sex, they developed issues of trust that put pressure on their future relationships. Stephanie said a girl would search for her father's approval, and that there were expectations to uphold. Stephanie said many times that "a father is supposed to protect you." She and others felt like they were left on their own to defend themselves. Without the foundation of a positive and balanced relationship between the husband and the wife, children would not have a working model to apply to their norms and views of companionship. Samantha and Stephanie talked about losing out on their father taking them shopping for the day, or out to lunch. Stephanie reflected on a day when she was sitting in a coffee shop and saw a girl her age having a coffee with her father. "It was a picture perfect moment on a nice Sunday." She thought for a moment and said, "That would be nice."

With the loss that was felt in the early lives of those who grew up without a supportive father, there were some positive outcomes found in their later years of development. While all the participants had to grow up quickly, they learned independence and a lot of other life skills in the process.

Stephanie, Samantha, Kate, and Karen all talked about the teamwork and the bond they all shared with those closest to them. Stephanie talked about the strong bond she had with her sister, mother, and her grandparents. "I am lucky to have their support and never took it for granted. I learned a lot and I am happy with who I am. I feel stronger in knowing that life does not always have straight roads." Samantha talked about the strong bond she had with her sisters, her husband, and her children. Kate and Karen talked about the relationship and the teamwork they developed with their children as they were growing up and developing their personality and their identity.

Valerie talked about the advantage when divorce happened very early in the life of a child. We saw that clearly in the contrast between Steven and Kate's son. Steven had a fantastic relationship with his father until he was nine. He knew what he lost. Kate's husband left when their son was six months old. She said her son would grow up without a father but he would not feel the same effects of losing something he once had. When Steven or other kids like him looked around at other kids and their fathers, they could flashback and relive all those memories. Kate's son had no lived memories to connect his loss to, which in Valerie's experience, made the burdens a little less traumatic.

Steven learned a lot reflecting on his childhood during his search for his identity. "I was forced to learn independence and the value of a dollar. I learned to cook, clean and do laundry. Moving out was no shock because I was doing it all anyways." Earlier in the study, he said that he was adopting the negative traits of his father and he needed to change his behaviour. "Luckily, my friends and I recognized my issues. I am a passionate person with firm and direct beliefs." Steven echoed a lot of the same feelings that Samantha and Stephanie shared at times during their interviews. "I know my parents' mistakes, and I will never make them. They taught me how I want to be with my children. I would never have seen it if the divorce never happened with my parents. I would not be the mature, articulate person I am today if their marriage was fine. Dad would never have changed and I would never have recognized his behaviour as being bad. I would not have changed as a result."

Samantha said her experiences shaped her into the person she was today. "Marriage is hard work and I am aware of it every single day. I would never change a thing in my past. I am sorry for my dad because it came at his expense."

Samantha, Stephanie, and Steven were just three examples of the resiliency that children have inside that could enable them to adjust, adapt and get on the right path to overcome the challenges in their life.

Steven said, “I still have high hopes for my dream of family because I didn’t have that. I want it more than anything in the world. It looks like the hardest thing to do and I do have doubts, but I believe I can work at anything. I can compromise, understand and make it work more than them.”

Some of the adults I interviewed looked for direct personal involvement and companionship with other family members to fill the void in their life. Stephanie talked about the threesome of herself, her sister and mother, as well as her close relationship with her grandparents. She said her grandfather filled that fatherly protective role. Samantha talked about how inseparable she and her sisters became while dealing with their life. “We divided and conquered in order to take care of the home.” Steven talked about his brothers and how he emulated them. They helped him with the first time he had to shave, use deodorant, and in his transition to adolescence.

Some looked within the core of adults, friends, and professionals around them. At times they all needed to lean on someone. They all talked about the dedicated friends they had, to whom they stated that without their help, they would not be where they were today. Kate and Karen were thankful to the husbands of their friends, who offered to spend time with their children in order for them to be exposed to a balance in gender.

Kate spoke to the teachers at the start of every year and made them aware of her son’s situation. “They would modify and change words in stories to keep him included.” Father’s Day was one of a few hard days for her son at school. “Last year, he made a card

for me because I was his mom and dad. The teachers and even the kids in his class are very sensitive to his needs.”

At age 17, Samantha was fortunate to “meet the man of my dreams.” The love and stability of his family was the consistency that she needed in her life. “I was amazed at watching his family together with his father as the leader. I wanted to be there all the time. I saw how a father made sure his kids had what they needed.” She was jealous that her future husband was able to turn to them for advice. When Samantha’s father rejoined her life, she started to regain some pieces of her childhood through his relationship with her children, and said she needed it. She never recognized that void growing up. “You don’t know what you’re missing until you get it back.”

Since Stephanie was 17, she had a male supervisor that she met with twice a year to discuss her education, life decisions, and her career path. “I know that I can pick up the phone and schedule a meeting. I feel comfortable in knowing that he is there.” When I asked her if he filled a fatherly void in her life, she reflected and said, “Very possible. Thinking about it, it is true, he’s been there for me.”

When Steven had his first car accident, he did not call his father. “I didn’t trust my father for things like that. I have no idea why, but I called my friend’s dad and he came to help.”

Some looked to television, video games, popular culture, and images of role models who indirectly influenced their lives. Stephanie turned to her Barbie dolls. Steven talked about how his mom did not fill the fun void that was missing on those once busy and active weekends. “My video games filled it. I sometimes wanted to escape. I longed for that functional family. When I used to baby-sit, the family sometimes invited me to

stay for dinner. I loved the dynamic at the supper table. In high school, I escaped to the influence of television.”

Some children turn to negative models as they grew up in order to become someone different. Some of the participants I interviewed dabbled in a few of the more moderate negative influences mentioned earlier in this study in order to control their stress and anxiety, or attempt to escape their reality.

4.6 Role Models

As we have seen so far in this study, the increased rate of divorce and the fracturing of the family structure had a direct effect on the social development of children, and especially boys, who were growing up without a supportive father figure. A void was created in their lives and there were fewer male role models present. The importance of male role models as friends, teachers, community leaders, or mentors was a common theme among those interviewed. Those role models could help fill the void in the developing lives of boys and girls without a supportive father.

Michael was influenced by his schooling to become a teacher. He remembered when the boys he taught in class liked it that the male teacher was like them. As a camp director, he said he often dealt with the more challenging issues that the staff could not handle. “I develop a bond with kids who need extra attention, or need to be reassured. I appreciate the experience to shape and rear children into growing up as good human beings. I have been viewed as a role model by my staff. They enjoy the relaxed and respectful way I handle situations.”

Matthew remembered one male teacher from the two he had, who really influenced him. When he became a teacher, he used him as a model and consciously taught in the same style. Matthew always believed in personalizing his approach with the

students in his care. He made it a point to be involved in their interests. “It made me approachable and it made a difference for some kids.” Matthew told me a story from the early years of his career about the day he found the remains of a strap in a classroom. He had the children sit in a circle in the gym and he threw it away. “I said, there is no room for this, and the tension just left.”

Monica said she worked with fragile students who had a variety of needs. “They are sensitive and I need to be approachable so they can come to me. Trust is very important to them because they are not so open with their weaknesses. They finally get comfortable and they are able to build a trust with an adult.” She said children needed to see a variety of opinions and different ways to handle situations. “There used to be a male playground animator who was a positive influence on the kids. He had them deal with their conflict, emotions, and many positive things were learned.” Children need to see men in these nurturing roles in order to develop a balanced sense of gender norms.

Kate made it a point to have her son around male role models when it was possible. “I don’t want him to have a negative view of men. There is my brother and my friends’ husbands. I request male counselors and swimming instructors and my son hangs off them when he gets the chance. Obviously he needs the physical roughness of a man.”

Karen said she modeled herself after her mother and especially her grandmother. She reiterated that her youngest daughter “needs her daddy, and her school experience really gave her something she needed. She adores her male teacher. Even to the point where I feel she would rather disappoint me than him.”

The social workers in this study talked about the need for more male teachers and social workers. Vivian said, “Many children today have poor role models for parents. These kids growing up will be the next generation of parents. We need to step in more

and help now.” She continued to say, “Male teachers can be role models for those children without a father. There is a need for more male role models in teaching and in mental health, where there are not many men. It is important that how ever men can make a contribution to encourage and support the development of children, men should be encouraged to do that. There is a lot of need for more male teachers.”

Victoria said it was important that there was a balance in every profession where children were involved, so they could have an option. Victoria told me about an article about a mentoring program geared toward boys in schools in the United States. It said that parents couldn’t be fixed so the next step was the school. “Older mentors would work with children in schools and they would become mentors to younger children in the school. So they had someone to lean on and where nobody would ever feel alone.” She remembered another boy who refused to go to school and had a bad experience with his father. He felt attacked by everyone and he viewed teachers and adults as monsters. He was addicted to computers and by chance found a mentor in the computer technician who worked in the agency office. “It made a beautiful relationship for a boy that never liked a man so much. He now looks forward to it and grew attached to the time they spend together. It was nice to see it develop.”

Valerie said that children were not getting the basic needs or values from parents. “There is a void of influence and guidance. It is up to other models to fill that gap.” Valerie agreed that more male counselors would be a benefit to the balance of interaction with children. She did express some hesitation when it came to social work and domestic abuse victims. “Seeing a male can remind the mother or the child of the victimization they experienced.” She said that the more positive experiences these women and children could have with men, the better or more balanced their perception would be in future

relationships. “Having significant female and male role models in your life outside your parents is essential.”

Steven said his experiences helped fuel his desire to be a male role model as a camp counselor and a babysitter. “I wanted it for others because I never had it.”

Samantha met the man of her dreams and had him, his father, and their family as role models in her life. She said that with the incidence of divorce and separation being so high in our society and our community, “it is critical to make sure children have a positive male role model to look up to.” When asked about her opinion of the number of male teachers at her school, she said, “There are not enough of them, definitely not enough of them.” She said she did her best to find male role models to pair with the students who did not have a supportive father at her school. “I find teachers when I can or I use older boys. How else will they learn otherwise?”

5. Conclusions

5.1 In Search of a Balance

Two years ago I had the privilege of meeting James Valitchka, a twelve year old boy from Canada who became a published author at the age of ten. He grew up in a single parent home with his mother. He struggled a bit with his identity and self esteem. He felt vulnerable and inadequate at times. He was also bullied at a young age. He was grateful to his mother and the females in his life who taught him so much, but he looked around for reliable male role models. He realized that, “Superheroes don’t have dads” and that became his best selling children’s book by the same name (available through his foundation found at www.jamesvalitchka.com).

It has an anti-bullying message about growing up with confidence, security, and the love of those around you. He realized male role models were all around as he found family friends, neighbours, teachers, coaches and even a grocery store owner to help teach him about choices, responsibility, discipline, male and female interaction, and growing up as an adolescent.

James is now 14 years old with eight published books under his name. He continues to spread his anti-bullying message. Like many of the participants in this study, he told me that he would appreciate seeing a balance of male and female teachers in classrooms because schools are the safest and most structurally neutral place in which to observe good male role models.

This study proposed the question: Is there a unique influence male teachers and male role models can offer children by creating a more gender-balanced profession at the elementary level? According to the research, as well as the lived experience of the participants in this study, men occupy an essential role in child development and the

development of gender norm acquisition in girls and especially in boys. In every step in the development process, children need to see a balance of gender to mirror the broad based roles evident in society. According to the participants, it is even more important for children who are looking to fill a void in their lives because they do not have the consistency, organization, and the support of a male role model.

Vivian said that it was important to have a balance of gender in schools so boys could have access to male role models. She said it would lead to different types of conversations that children needed to have as they developed. Monica noted, “It is important for children to see the different gender roles.” In her experience, the male teachers have been respectful of the female teachers. They are not uncomfortable and know how to interact together. Monica, again, pointedly stated that, “There should be males in art, kindergarten, and social work. They cannot just be principals and seen in a role of authority.” She mentioned that kids respected the male teachers in a different way. “They look up to them. They try to please them and seek acceptance from them. They interact well with the boys and the girls love it too. The attention they get from them leads to a positive experience.”

Matthew said that there needed to be a balance. “We look for models all the time. It is important for boys to have different models. Masculinity has many ways of coming out and children should be exposed to a variety of people.”

Victoria reminded us that “school is a place where boys and girls also build their identity from a young age.” Victoria said that there were more gaps to fill with boys than with girls because of the unbalanced proportion of male to female teachers. “Girls have more support around them. They have an easier time reaching out. Males have limited options. Schools are limited, counseling is limited.” She said that there was a growing

need for more male representation in the development of all children, especially boys in our modern community. “We want to build their confidence and their character. The children I see are detached, and I try to get them to find something to hold onto. I try to make them stronger and detach them from their dysfunction. The more schools could provide the better.” In elementary school, there is much more interaction between children and their teachers. Victoria said that there were more social dynamics and opportunity for nurturing relationships. “More male teachers would be valuable for kids, more for boys than girls. Most won’t experience what a non-aggressive male would be like. Balance is necessary. Social workers, schools, and even parents cannot fix everything, but the more things to plug in, the better. We must do anything we can do for children at a young age to stem the burdens that will take place later in life.”

Valerie said schools needed to socialize those students who were not getting the necessary skills from home. However, the expectations and the demands of the curriculum have limited the opportunities for socialization in schools today. “Schools don’t have enough money or time in the curriculum for socialization and the arts.” She said children needed to see and view both genders in many ways. “There needs to be more programs about gender identity with more males taking the lead. More exposure would help develop social and gender norms. There is literally nothing negative that can come from having positive, influential males involved in the younger developmental years of children. Women cannot speak for men. There is room for more male teachers to be there. There needs to be a joint initiative of female and male teachers to work together and show the students a balanced partnership.”

As a single mother of a young boy, Kate made reference to the huge value to having more men in elementary schools. “A balance would be ideal.” For a boy who was

not around men often, she tried to surround him with male role models. “When the same sex parent is absent, when they are little, they need that. I am sad for him. It is very hard.”

Karen said that there were still many professions that were not balanced. “We need to find a balance in the roles we play. We need to give men a chance to show who they are. Men are equally as maternal, but most children only see the gruff. Society is not seeing what is happening with boys.”

Samantha said that there was a need for a balance and more male teachers. “There are not enough of them, definitely not enough of them.” She said the absence of a father affected the view of the world for the child. “I strongly encourage interactions between fathers and kids. A major goal of mine, my primary goal as a mother, is to make sure my children have a positive male role model in their life.”

Stephanie raised the need for a gender balance in social work as a comparison to education. “They (men) stay away for the same reasons. Kids are raised with the idea that males are not sensitive. If you fall, you must be strong and you cannot cry. Kids need to know that it is normal and okay to feel. They cannot deny their emotions and hold them in. Viewing men in nurturing professions help break down the stereotypical norms.”

Steven said that these days, the role of males and females must be equal. “50-50 in the home and everywhere. Children need to see the balance of people helping each other and learn from it.” He said it was so important for children to see more positive male teachers “to see a sense of sensitivity in their teacher.” He said, “Everything is better if there is a balance. This generation of kids would benefit from more male teachers.”

With the proper personality, motivation, and education, male teachers can be a role model to aid in the social development of masculine norms in boys as well as girls from homes with an absent father. Adult males can provide all children with a balance in

gender and masculine identity. An increase in male teachers and role models helps support a more balanced developmental growth in children who are looking to fill a void created by the absence of an influential father figure. They can offer guidance and consistency in a time of confusion and loss.

The participants of this study expressed the need to bridge the gap towards a gender balance in the Jewish community of Montreal. This declaration also comes out of the research presented earlier in this study and it should resonate in communities throughout North America, and the world. The Jewish elementary school where I teach is more representative of the provincial average. 15% of the teachers are male with 5 male teachers out of a teaching body of 40. It is wonderful for the children there, but what about the girls, and especially the boys, who do not have a male role model to turn to in their life, or in their school?

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations outlined here are potential approaches meant to generate further ideas for discussion. These efforts are meant to ensure that all children benefit from the balance of gender in their development. It is even more significant for children who are growing up in a fractured family, without a supportive father. The educational landscape is a difficult path to navigate even with all the tools necessary to succeed. When children go through distress, it is up to the family, the school, the community, and the government to put the right structures in place to minimize that burden.

Kate echoed the sentiments of most of the participants being interviewed. “Universities can do more to recruit more male teachers.” There is a clear need for more male teachers in elementary school. There is further research necessary in order to help faculties of education find new and innovative ways to recruit more male candidates.

Victoria and Steven hoped that teachers were in tune with the needs of the child. Victoria said, “If the teacher is not going to be able to help, who will?”

Vivian said that faculties of education should provide future teachers in training with more information on how to deal with families, parents, and children. Michael and Matthew said that they had no formal class where they learned about the state of families, student issues, or how to deal with them. Matthew said, “There is no social or psychological support. The structure makes it hard to stay updated.”

Valerie agreed with the previous concerns and said, “I participated in a program to train teachers. We did a lunch and learn session at a Jewish High school. It was successful in talking about anything negative and vague that could be warning signs of a larger issue. More professional coverage is needed in schools.”

Remember how Samantha attended parent teacher interviews for her younger siblings and nobody picked up on it? She needed a teacher, principal or counselor to recognize that they were in need. This is a glaring sign to me that there are children and parents who are trying to hide many issues. Teachers need to reach kids in a different way for this generation of kids. The more educated and prepared teachers are to understand the needs of children and families, the more they can help.

Monica said that teaching was not just about children behind a desk. She said it was important for universities to get future teachers involved in different areas of school life, “like doctors who do rounds in medical school.” She said, “They should definitely be involved and follow people like the principal, social worker, and other teachers.”

The resources and services of Agence Ometz are there to help the Jewish community deal with, and recover from trauma in their lives. This agency is limited, as are all professionals in the general community, to identifying and assisting in the

spectrum of negative effects that influence the social development of children. Educating teachers about those effects could only benefit the development of those children in need. With the reality of the current trends in the family structure, child development, and socialization, more research is necessary in order to explore the benefit of providing education students and practicing teachers with some beneficial academic and experiential background in child development, and social work.

Children in the area of this study are growing up in a world where about half of marriages are ending in separation or divorce. Dual custody is increasingly becoming the norm. However, children are still more likely to live with their mother and have a limited or non-existent relationship with their father. For better or worse, these girls and boys are missing out on a large part of their social development. This study placed a heavy emphasis on the social development of boys. However, additional research is necessary to further define the role male teachers can play in the social development of girls growing up without a supportive father.

During my interview with Monica, I raised the issue of informal education during the summer months at camp. Children grow up in different ways during the summer and demonstrate different qualities. I asked her if schools and camps shared information about children. She said, "Schools and teachers are not known to share information about children and what is going on in their classroom." I believe that further research is necessary in the benefits of increased communication between schools and summer camps as it can lead to an improved understanding of the social development of children.

5.3 Summary

"If we are not able to hold the focus of today's children or help with their development, they will not learn what schools are teaching. The absence of men in the

life of their children, the loss of social schooling, the loss of the strong and clear value driven philosophy of schools, and the loss of the cohesiveness in communities are all leading to the poor development of children. We are paying the price as social workers are seeing more children than ever before. Without question, there is a need for more male teachers.” Vivian’s message can be felt in schools and homes in the Jewish community of Montreal, in North America, and in schools and homes around the world.

It is essential for all children in our generation to get a solid education in order to be prepared for the demands of an increasingly difficult job market. Many experts in the field of education, such as Delors (1999), Evans (2004), and November (2009), have explained what the future workplace will demand from today’s students. The first was the ability to be a self-directed, motivated, and independent learner. The second was the ability to know what information was pertinent to their work from the masses of information available at their fingertips. The third was the ability to work as a part of a team in their workplace, as well as through the network of global communication devices.

All the participants I interviewed said that the pendulum had swung too far. They all felt that there was too much of a focus on academics. Additionally, they felt that without the proper support of parents, the social development of the children was at risk and teachers had to fill the gap.

Furthermore, the participants stressed the need for variety. All schools should have a mixture of disciplines such as, the arts, the sciences, languages, athletics, and humanities. This variety will allow for more social interaction, reflect the world outside, and allow the students to discover their place.

It is equally important that children have a positive experience in school as it is becoming an increasingly influential place for them to develop their social skills and form

their identity. Teachers find themselves in a fiduciary position that increasingly involves meeting the needs of each individual child inside and outside the classroom, in order to see them succeed in an increasingly complex world.

From birth, children begin to adopt certain personal attachments and social norms that begin the process of their development. We saw this with some of the participants in this study (Steven, for example) who were deeply affected by the distress in their young life, and who were still constructing their identity. Without the proper nurturing, care, and love, children will grow up in a confused world with many distractions.

All children are affected by their surrounding and the people they come in contact with. The statements from the professionals I interviewed, who said that children were growing up too quickly in our generation, is a testament to the increased responsibility demanded of them at such a young age. Children are increasingly growing up in a world of confusion and disorganization, with a huge amount of pressure on them to find their way on their own. It affects their social development as they gain different perceptions of interaction and social connection. According to Katz (2002), Evans (2004), and Eliot (2009), and the experiences of the social workers in this study, children develop skewed norms of gender roles, and have a vague sense of their own identity and their place in the world. It can have drastic consequences on their future potential in school, their place in the work force, their mental and physical health, and the health of their relationships.

The family structure has evolved in the past 40 years. There is currently a 40% divorce rate in North America (Ambert, 2009). Statistics from the most recent Canada Census show over 1.4 million single-parent families in Canada, with women heading over 85%, and only about 14% of children living with their father (Statistics Canada, 2006). According to the social workers I interviewed, when single mothers have no social

support network, the healthy development of adolescents is affected. With the increased fracturing of families due to separation and divorce, the role that parents play in the development of social norms and behaviours in their children is limited.

It is limited in the increase in responsibilities that parents have in our generation. It is limited to the decreased amount of time they spend with their children. It is limited to the changes in priorities that parents have within their families. It is limited to the level of commitment that parents have towards the positive role they play in the development of their children. The primary nurturing role is shifting from the home to the schools, thus putting the burdens of responsibility on the shoulders of the children and their teachers.

There is not a balanced representation of men in elementary schools during the important years of child development. Male teachers make up only 16% of the elementary school labour force in Quebec (Bernard, Falter, Hill, & Wilson, 2004), coincidentally, the same minute percentage of single-parent families led by a male. The data presented allows us to conclude that during these crucial developmental years for children, there are not very many positive male role models present.

The schools and the teachers are becoming more influential models in the lives of children due to the current breakdown of the family structure. All teachers need the proper tools in order to reach the child and evaluate how to best assist them in order to fill the void created by external factors and burdens forced upon their small shoulders.

Children who are put in the position of having to find their way on their own are turning to other models in order to help guide them through their difficult journey. Role models are necessary in the lives of children who are in a situation of distress. When a parent is absent, children miss out on this very influential person.

They are missing the model of a balanced working relationship between the genders. They are missing their best friend and support for the tough times. They are missing the option of having a different perspective or opinion. As a result, children may seek out individuals who can fill their void. Some will be negative influences or individuals that lead them down a dark path. Some will be positive individuals who support their ongoing development and encourage their continued growth.

The adults in this study who grew up with the absence of a father, and who showed the effects of the divorce in their family, all shared a common and encouraging trait. When they were faced with the challenges in their childhood that exceeded the limits of what most children could manage, they showed a remarkable resiliency. They used the experiences of their adolescence to rebound from their early deficits.

According to the experiences of the individuals who participated in this study, as well as the research that supports it, there is a unique and influential role that male teachers offer their students. There is an understanding which suggests that there is a need for more male elementary school teachers. Positive male teachers and role models should be present in schools in order to support the balance of gender for girls, and especially boys who are missing that influential role in their early years of child development. More male teachers are necessary to benefit the growth of children growing up in our society.

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Appendix A

2009-2010 Population of teachers in Jewish day schools in Montreal, Quebec, Canada
obtained from the Federation of Teachers of Jewish Schools (FTJS)

Jewish Day Schools	Total Number of Teachers	Number of male teachers	Subset: Number of male gym Teachers
Hebrew Foundation School (HFS)	40	5	1
United Talmud Torah (UTT)	54	4	0
Jewish Peoples and Peretz School (JPPS)	50	4	2
Solomon Schechter	55	3	2
Hebrew Academy	30	1	1
*Akiva	60	1	1
*Maimonide Cote-St-Luc	18	1	1
Totals	307	19	8

- Statistics obtained directly from the school.

Appendix B

Participants needed for research on the role male elementary school teachers have in the social development of children raised by single mothers in the Jewish community of Montreal.

I am a male elementary school teacher and an M.A. student in Leadership Education, with the faculty of Education at McGill University. I am currently conducting a research study that will generally identify the status of male teachers at the elementary level, and more specifically, their connection to the social development of children with regard to the increasingly fracturing of families. Additionally, I will examine if an increase in male representation at the elementary level will benefit the growth of all children.

I would like to ask for your participation in discussing your experiences in an audio recorded interview for this study.

I am looking for individuals who live or work in the Jewish community who:

- **Are over the age of 18 and who grew up without a supportive father.**
- **Are single-mothers and raising a child without a supportive husband.**
- **Are professionals who have had some experience (clinical or classroom) working with children from homes without a supportive father.**
- **Fluent in spoken English**

Please be assured that the interview is completely confidential and it will not be possible to link any responses to participants.

For participation or more information please contact,
Stuart Cohen, B.Ed, M.A. Leadership Candidate, Faculty of Education.

Contact Information: Voicemail: 514-334-1903,

Email: stuart.cohen@mail.mcgill.ca

You may also contact my McGill Supervisor: Ass. Prof. Jon Bradley
Office Voicemail: 514-398-2467 Email: jon.bradley@mcgill.ca

Appendix C
Research Consent Form for Participation
McGill University

Title of the Research: Understanding the role of male elementary school teachers in the social development of children raised by single mothers in the Jewish community of Montreal, Canada.

Researcher: Stuart Cohen, B.Ed, M.A. Leadership Candidate, Integrated studies in Education.

Contact Information: Voicemail: 514-334-1903
Email: stuart.cohen@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Ass. Prof. Jon Bradley Office Voicemail: 514-398-2467
Email: jon.bradley@mcgill.ca

I am asking for your participation in a study that will investigate the role of supportive male elementary school teachers in the social development of children raised in mother-headed single parent Jewish families. Due to current family trends and various societal factors over the past 20 years, I am investigating whether it is becoming increasingly beneficial to have more male teachers in order to create a gender balance in our elementary schools.

I would like to ask for your participation in an audio-taped interview for this study. I will ask you a series of questions and have a conversation with you about your prior experiences and the phenomenon of male teachers. Reflecting on the past can elicit some emotional, perhaps some psychological responses depending on your relationship to the topic. I will be respectful of your feelings and give you the time you need if it is necessary. I want you to view this as an opportunity to add to the discussion and perhaps make a difference for young boys and girls growing up during their primary years. We will discuss the location and length of the interview together and it will be at your own convenience.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose to decline to answer any question or even withdraw at any point from the study without fear of negative consequences. My pledge to confidentiality means that the information will be reported in such a way that making any direct associations to you will be impossible. It also means that no other person or organization, other than my McGill supervisor, will have access to the interview materials and that they will be coded and stored in such a way as to make it impossible to identify them directly with any individual.

I agree to be Audio Taped ___ YES ___ NO

Participant's signature: _____ Researcher's
signature: _____

Participant's name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Pseudonyms for the people interviewed in this thesis

Social Worker 1.....	Vivian
Social Worker 2.....	Victoria
Social Worker 3.....	Valerie
Male Teacher 1.....	Michael
Male Teacher 2.....	Matthew
Female Teacher 1.....	Monica
Single Mother 1.....	Kate
Single Mother 2.....	Karen
Adult who grew up with the absence of a father 1.....	Stephanie
Adult who grew up with the absence of a father 2.....	Samantha
Adult who grew up with the absence of a father 3.....	Steven