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Papa Was a Missing Stone: An Exploration into the Lived Experiences of Father-Absent African American Women

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Father-Absent African American Women

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ABSTRACT

Papa Was a Missing Stone: An Exploration into the Lived Experiences of

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This qualitative phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of adult father-absent

African American women to extrapolate from their stories the meaning they attached to the

experience and to hear in their own words how they perceived the absence of their father shaped

their lives and affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally. Twelve

semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom audio-conferencing with adult African

American women who ranged in age from 20-62 years of age living in various parts of the U.S.

The findings of this study revealed that father-daughter relationship bonds held a special

meaning to each participant as most of them longed for the presence, protection and love of their

fathers. According to the shared stories and perceptions of the participants, living without a

father greatly affected the way they viewed the world, relationships with men, relationships with

family members, and it had a significant impact upon their lives socially, emotionally,

behaviorally and educationally. The women of this study reported that their relationships

suffered because they did not have what they considered healthy male-female interactions as a

model for their own relationships. This study also revealed that more research is needed

regarding father absence and education. The findings of this study can possibly be used to

encourage male relatives such as uncles, cousins, older brothers, and community leader to

assume the role of social father provide male support, guidance and encouragement to father-

absent young women in their families and communities. The findings of this study can also

function as a catalyst to more in-depth discussions about the mental and emotional well-being of young Black women as well as the Black community to assure them that seeking mental and emotional support is nothing to be ashamed of.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family, my friends, supporters and to each woman who gave her time and shared with sincerity their lived experiences with father absence. Thank you for your transparency, thank you for your willingness to talk and share your stories. I am so grateful to you all.

Most importantly I dedicate this work to my God who gave me the strength to make it to this point. Through Christ I was able to overcome the challenges with my health and I was able to overcome the weariness, feelings of inadequacy and utter despair. Thank you, Father, for giving me the strength to finish. This is possible because of you.

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I would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to my chair Dr. Jill Channing for helping me reach this point, to Dr. Hal. Knight who poured a great deal of wisdom and encouragement into me, to Dr. Sharon McGee and everyone in the Graduate School for all you did, and each person on my committee for being a part of this experience and offering your wisdom and expertise.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my husband Carl, daughter Ayana, son-in-law Eli and my bonus son Dae'Jon. Thank you for not allowing me to give when I thought I did not have what it took to finish. Thank you so much for praying me through the toughest of struggles and holding me up when the health challenges looked to not only hinder me from accomplishing this personal goal but claim my life. Thank you for your encouragement through every mental and emotional setback. Thank you for pushing me, praying for me, loving me, believing in me wholeheartedly and giving me permission to pursue this dream. It took longer than anticipated but we did it! God did it!

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Millions of children in America of every ethnicity, socio-economic status, and age live in homes where the fathers are absent and disengaged in their children's lives. Monte (2019) reported that of the 121 million men in America, a quarter of them were biological fathers of children under the age of 18, and 7 million of those fathers were absent and having little to no contact with their children. In a report by the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), a quarter of the 63.1 million homes in the United States with children under the age of 18 were reported to be father-absent single-mother-led homes.

Kramer (2019) reported, "of the 130 countries and territories, the United States has the highest rate of father absence with approximately 23% of its children living in single-mother households" (para 1). Kramer noted that the global percentage of single-mother-led homes was 6.8. In contrast, the percentage of single-mother-led homes in America triples the global average and overshadows the percentages in other countries such as China at 3%, Nigeria at 4%, and India at 5% that were below the global average.

Father-absent/single-mother-led homes have been found to put affected individuals at a greater disadvantage financially, academically, mentally, and emotionally. Harkness et al. (2020) found that children from single-mother homes have more socioeconomic challenges than children from two-parent homes and they suffer more with their mental health. Harkness et al. hypothesized that children from single-mother homes would have poorer cognitive outcomes; they found instead that it was the late departure of fathers from the home that had a greater and more negative effect.

Father absence affects all communities. Father absence affects all genders. Father absence affects numerous people and ethnic groups across the globe. I am interested in learning

more about how the absence of Black fathers affects and has affected the lives of their children, especially daughters. Additionally, one focus of this research is reviewing more literature about the reported disparity of missing Black fathers from the lives of their children as opposed to other ethnic groups in America.

Livingston (2018) reported that in the United States, African American children live in single-mother-led homes 47% of the time as opposed to Hispanic children at 23%, Caucasian children at 13%, and Asian children at 7%. Smith (2020) reported similar statistics as she found that 70% of African American children were born to an unmarried parent and that over half of those children lived in single-mother-led homes. The absence of fathers from the home does not always mean they are absent from the lives of their children; however, Livingston and Smith's data highlight the disparity of Black children born to father-absent homes which is often a catalyst to fathers being absent from the lives of their children all together.

Father absence is not a one-dimensional term as there are multiple factors that contribute to what father absence is and what it means to be father absent. Boothroyd and Perrett (2008) defined father absence as the physical absence of a biological father in the home as well as the lives of their children and does not include fathers who are absent due to death. East et al. (2007) defined father absence as the physical absence of biological fathers in the home and the lives of their children due to factors that included family discord, divorce, disinterest, and death. However, East et al. also stated that father absence was an ambiguous and nebulous term because "all parents are absent or apart from their children at some point" (p. 285). East et al. also discovered that father absence was not always the physical absence of the father. They expanded the definition to include fathers who were physically present yet consistently absent from daily

interaction with their children due to constant attention to work and/or mental and emotional disconnect because of life pressures, health issues, depression, and other mental disturbances.

Father absence primarily refers to the physical absence of biological fathers from the home and lives of their children for several reasons such as disinterest in fatherhood, family discord, divorce, and death (East et al., 2007). Although I am primarily interested in exploring the experiences of African American daughters who have had physically absent fathers, the emotional and mental consequences due to the absence of a father is relevant to the theoretical framework guiding this study. Father absence is not a one-dimensional term as East et al. asserted in their expanded definition of the term; it encompasses the physical absence of biological fathers from the home as well as their mental and emotional absence when present in the home. Gitman (2017) identified seven father types as having profound influence on the mental and emotional well-being of their children: (a) the busy bee dad; (b) the invisible dad; (c) the chronically unhappy dad; (d) the psychologist dad; (e) the nurse dad; (f) the bodyguard dad; and (g) the authoritarian dad.

Each of the seven types identified by Gitman (2017) relates to the mental and emotional well-being of children. The busy bee dad, invisible dad, and chronically unhappy dad, however, are the only father types that align with the definition of father absence offered by East et al. (2007) and meet the criterion of father-absent for this study. The criterion for father absence is the complete physical absence of a biological father from the home at the birth of his child or his sudden departure and/or disappearance from the lives of his children for any reason other than death.

The busy bee father type describes fathers who are physically present in the home but falls under the category of father-absent due to his minimal commitment to life at home,

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emotional avoidance, and his overcommitment to work success. The busy bee dad, ironically, is dedicated to the responsibility of providing for his family (Gitman, 2017). He, however, is often emotionally absent from the lives of his children due to emotional avoidance and his inability to disconnect mentally from work. Hill (2018) defined emotionally-avoidant and/or detached parents as those who lack the ability to form proper attachments with their children. Hill also explained that emotionally-avoidant parents leave their children emotionally crippled as they are often unable to develop proper connections later in in their adult life; this concept is a tenet within attachment theory. Gitman also noted that emotionally absent fathers influence more than the inability of children to develop proper emotional attachments in life. They also cause their children to suffer from feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, and thoughts of being unwanted or feeling rejected which parallel the emotional struggles of children living without a father present or active in their lives.

The invisible father type Gitman (2017) identified aligns with the more common idea of father absence. This father type is completely absent from the home and does not participate in the lives of his children for reasons not including death. The invisible father is disinterested in being a father and rearing children is low on his priority list. The invisible father makes this clear by removing his children from his life, denying his children contact with him, and avoiding all invitations to connect with his children. Children of invisible fathers often struggle with finding their place, they experience elevated levels of resentment, and they often develop long-term depression due to the perceived rejection of their father (Gitman, 2017).

The third father type identified by Gitman (2017) that aligns with the definition of father absence is the chronically unhappy father. The chronically unhappy father, as with the busy bee dad, is physically present in the home but remains emotionally detached. He fails to offer his

children emotional support and relational connectivity due to his chronic dissatisfaction with life. The chronically unhappy father "grumbles, complains, is pessimistic, and grim-faced. His chronic cycles of dissatisfaction are poison to his father-child relations, makes his children suffer a kind of emotional abandonment, and emotional rejection causing them to wonder if their dissatisfied fathers love them" (para 7). Perceived rejection by a father not only leaves children wondering about whether their father loves them, but it also leads children to develop maladaptive coping patterns and to internalize behaviors such as depression and self-affliction as they equate the unhappiness of their father to his unhappiness with them (Lopez & Corona, 2012).

East et al. (2017) described father absence as a life event that can happen suddenly because of death or gradually over time through the physical, mental, and emotional withdrawal of the father due to family discord, divorce, sickness, and mental instability. Bravo-Moreno (2019) in her discussion of the single-mom-by-choice movement reveals that more women desiring children and no marriage are opting to have children via artificial insemination and/or surrogacy which also contributes to the father-absent numbers. Fathers can also be physically present yet inattentive due to their obligations with work, an inability to connect emotionally with their children, and not creating proper relational bonds (Gitman, 2017).

Aside from mental, emotional, and relationship issues, fathers are often absent from the home due to military deployment, migratory work, and incarceration (Rodriquez & Margolin, 2015). Military deployment is the movement of military servicemen and women to combat zones, station locations outside of the United States, or military training grounds for set amounts of time – thus accounting for a substantial percentage of fathers being absent from the home (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015). Willerton et al. (2011) reported there were 1.2 million men on

active duty, and, of those actively serving, 43% were fathers with dependent children. Following the events of September 11, 2001, military enlistment increased significantly among men and women, thereby increasing the number parents serving – more specifically fathers with dependent children (Devoe et al., 2020).

Incarceration is another considerable contributor to the absence of fathers from the home and the resulting effects on the lives of their children. Poehlmann-Tynan et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study on the attachment of youth and incarcerated fathers and found there were reportedly "11.4 million admissions made in the United States jail system in 2014" (p. 3). They also discovered that there were nearly 5 million children in 2015 who had a co-resident parent spending time in jail, and, of those co-resident parents serving time in jail, approximately 90% of them were fathers.

Incarceration, while necessary to deal with law breakers, contributes to father absence and the development of generational incarceration as well (McLanahan et al., 2013). As it relates to generational incarceration, sons of incarcerated fathers run a higher risk of becoming incarcerated adults as they are more likely to destroy property, become violent, become aggressive toward others, and become delinquent which often leads to their spending time in youth detention centers and ultimately jail when the behaviors are not corrected (McLanahan et al., 2013). Daughters of incarcerated fathers, however, are at greater risk of experiencing episodes of depression following the incarceration of their father when there has been no sexual abuse involved (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2020). While sons of incarcerated fathers are more likely to be imprisoned as adults, children – both male and female – are equally affected mentally and emotionally and are more likely to develop social disorders as they tend to isolate and separate themselves from others (Bryan, 2017).

Rodriquez and Margolin (2015) revealed that migratory work is also a significant factor in creating father absence; however, this fact occurs more frequently beyond the borders of the United States in countries such as Mexico, China, and the Philippines. Van Hook and Glick (2020) reported that approximately 244 million people globally make a living in nations that are not native to them. Traditionally, men have dominated labor migration leaving millions of homes absent of fathers as they are expected to be the breadwinners in Mexico and other Central American countries (Van Hook & Glick, 2020).

Migration in Latin countries is primarily driven by "demographic pressures and crumbling economic systems" (DeWaard et al., 2018, p. 6). Van Hook and Glick (2020) discovered that migration has become the most generic form of father absence in Mexico as many fathers migrate with the hope of providing better lives, better educational opportunities, and greater success for their children. Tanzanian fathers, however, migrate not only for the financial opportunities available but also in the hope of securing the survival of their children (Van Hook & Glick, 2020).

This study is designed to examine more closely father absence and the effect it may or may not have upon the behaviors, emotions, mental well-being, and academic success of daughters. Father absence in America is common and has become increasingly more acceptable with movements such as the single-mom-by-choice movement, (Bravo-Moreno, 2019). Father absence, while becoming increasingly more acceptable, is still a traumatic experience for children that often affects them emotionally, mentally, educationally, and relationally as noted by Baggett et al. (2015).

Parentification as defined by Baggett et al. (2015) refers to the style of parent-child interaction "in which the child regularly takes on developmentally inappropriate tasks that are

typically performed by the parent and is associated with maladaptive interpersonal outcomes like dating violence" (p. 761). Baggett et al. hypothesized that paternal parentification would be negatively associated with romantic relationships and positively associated with insecurity among college aged women. Furthermore, Baggett et al. discovered that the insecure attachment between fathers and daughters heightened insecurity in the romantic relationships of daughters who also developed concerns about their own abilities to be good caretakers to their own children.

Baggett et al. (2015) also found that father absence contributes to emotional disruptions that affect future relationships and contribute to behavioral dysfunction in children. Ozborne (2016) similarly discovered there was statistically significant evidence confirming that father absence contributes to emotional disruptions in children. Both studies noted that children of absent fathers are more likely to exhibit internalizing behaviors than externalizing behaviors such as aggression and hyperactivity. Internalizing behaviors, as explained by Antle et al. (2019), are behaviors that are turned inwardly, are not easily detectable, and include anxiety, antisocial behaviors, depression, and suicidal ideation while externalizing behaviors are those turned outwardly as evidenced by aggression toward others or property.

Another factor associated with father absence is the mental and emotional effect it has upon children. Thurston (2015) revealed that father-absent children commit suicide at 5 times the rate of children with fathers who are present. Ozborne also reported that father-absent children were more likely to have issues with their physical development. Educationally, children with absent fathers account for 71% of high school dropouts and truancy (Kruk, 2012). In a more recent study of high school dropouts and depression, Dupere et al. (2018) concur that the absence of fathers affected the child's performance academically and found that stressors such as

maternal depression, the suicide of a close friend, or the unemployment and/or the sudden departure of the father contributed heavily to the rate at which children drop out of school.

It is important to note that absence from the home does not automatically translate into fathers being absent from the lives of their children. Monte (2019) conducted a study on solo and absent fathers and found that "42% of fathers absent from the homes of their children said they had at least monthly contact with their children while living elsewhere (para 8)." Monte also found that there were about 2 million men in America identified as solo fathers raising their children alone without the help or assistance of a spouse or significant other.

The information presented by Monte (2019) was helpful in identifying solo fathers as well as those who are present and engaged in the lives of their children regardless of their presence in the home; however, the number of disengaged and absent fathers still overshadows those who are present. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) projected that "1 in 4 children in America will grow up without a biological, adoptive or stepfather in the home" regardless of their culture, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. In a 2022 study Brewer found there were still 18.3 million children living in homes where fathers are neither present, attentive, nor engaged in their lives.

Overall, the absence of actively engaged fathers affects the behavior of their children. Moilanen et al. (2018) discovered that father-absent daughters engaged in sexual initiation earlier, bore children earlier, engaged in risky sexual behaviors earlier, and contracted sexually-transmitted infections earlier than father-present daughters. McLanahan et al. (2013) reported that father-absent daughters not only displayed sexual aggression, but they often displayed externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency which is more commonly associated with father-absent sons.

Statement of Problem

Father absence is an ever-evolving phenomenon that occurs for various reasons and affects children of all races, ethnicities, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses. Prior to the 2020 U.S. Census, Brown (2018) reported that father-absent homes in America had grown by 4 million increasing the number of father-absent children to about 21 million. Following the 2020 Census, Brown (2020) reported that the number of father-absent homes decreased somewhat to 19.7 million; however, that number still represents a considerable number of children living without fathers actively involved in their lives.

Father absence is not an exclusive experience to any one group as the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau reported that 25% of children live in homes without a father – biological, adoptive or step. While the experience of father absence is not exclusive to one ethnic group or gender, most of the literature available on the topic is more broadly focused on sons. Daughters, however, are equally affected by the absence of their fathers (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017); therefore, the conversation and research should be expanded to include daughters' experiences. Recent investigations such as Baggett et al.'s 2015 study on father-daughter parentification and young romantic relationships, Hernandez et al.'s 2016 research on the effects of boomerang fathering and depression in daughters, and similar studies offer more than adequate support for further investigation into father absence and its long-lasting effects on daughters.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their stories the meaning they attached to the experience. This study also sought to go beyond the discussion of the meaning each participant attached to their experience of living without their father consistently active and present in their lives through having participants share their

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perceived understanding of how the experience of living their life without their father present affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

Research Questions

To collect the data necessary for conducting the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study, the following questions were used to guide the research:

1. What are the perceptions of African American women of their socialization during adolescence without the active presence of their fathers?

2. How do African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

3. How do African American women describe their behavior during their adolescence growing up without the presence of their fathers?

4. How do African American describe their educational experiences as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

Key Terms

The following terms are vital to understanding various aspects of the literature review as well as the research topic.

1. Father-absent. *Father-absent* describes any daughter who has lived "all of their childhood" without their biological fathers present and/or active in their lives (Boothroyd & Perrett, 2008, p. 188). While this definition of father-absent/absence is the primary theme, the overall focus of this study is to examine the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women. Therefore, the discussion will include the stories of daughters whose experiences include the following father-absent types:

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a. Busy Bee Dad. The busy bee dad is present in the home and is dedicated to the responsibility of providing for his family; however, he is emotionally absent and unavailable due to emotional avoidance and his inability to disconnect mentally from work (Gitman, 2017).

b. Invisible Dad. The invisible dad (Gitman, 2017) is the epitome of father absence as he is neither present or available for his children physically, mentally, or emotionally.

c. Chronically Unhappy Dad. The chronically unhappy father is like the busy bee dad as he is in the home and emotionally unavailable to his children. This absent father type, however, is in a constant state of complaint and unhappiness about work, fatherhood, and most things pertaining to life which leaves him not only unavailable, but his behaviors are frightening to his children (Gitman, 2017).

d. Boomerang Father. Boomerang fathers as defined by Hernandez (2016) are fathers who are inconsistently present. They come in and out of the lives of their children often without any warning.

2. Socio-emotional difficulties. *Socio-emotional difficulties* refers to the emotional struggles one develops in response to a traumatic experience from childhood or throughout life in general. In reference to this study, father absence is linked with socio-emotional difficulties such as externalizing behaviors that include violence or aggression and internalizing issues such as depression and self-harm (Flouri et al., 2015).

3. Emotional well-being. *Emotional well-being* is an emotional state in which individuals feel they are properly in control of their lives and coping with life experiences, facing life challenges in a healthy manner, living meaningfully, and taking on responsibility (Jeba & Premraj, 2018).

4. Educational goals and attainment. *Educational goals and attainment* vary depending upon the individual. For this study, educational goals and attainment refer to plans to attend college, perform well academically, and/or obtain a 4-year or advanced degree (Reference.com, 2017).

5. Social father. A *social father* is any male figure other than a biological father who has taken on the active role of father in the life of a father-absent child. A social father can be a stepfather, an uncle, cousin, or a new live-in partner of the child's biological mother (Bzostek, 2008).

6. Intergenerational father absence. *Intergenerational father absence* is the continuation of father absence across generations that occurs more frequently in disadvantaged communities and populations according to Pougnet et al. (2012).

Significance of the Study

Historically, literature addressing father-child relations, father absence, and the effects of father-absence upon children has been dominated by studies centered on sons more than daughters as confirmed by Boothroyd and Cross (2017) in their study on father absence and gender traits. Fathers, as are mothers, are vital to the emotional well-being of their daughters, their overall health, and their mental development. Fathers play a key role in the behavioral and academic development of their daughters as well, but research has not equally reflected that until recently (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017).

As reported by Antle et al. (2019) daughters are more likely than sons to take personal responsibility for the absence of their fathers. Markowitz and Ryan (2016) in their investigation of father absence, daughters, and depression, found that daughters often develop depressive disorders because of the internalizing of the father's absence which they are more likely to do than sons. Horesh et al. (2015) revealed that daughters are more prone to develop body image issues, eating disorders, and engage in self-harming behaviors due to the absence of their fathers.

This research study was developed with the aim of (a) contributing to the current literature to expand the conversation of father absence to include the voices and experiences of daughters – especially African American daughters – to examine the long-lasting effects it has upon their lives and (b) discuss solutions for providing support to those daughters who find themselves suffering from the mental disorders, emotional issues, or eating disorders identified as issues father-absent daughters develop. For example, to provide both spiritual and practical support to the father-absent women I have encountered in my 20 plus years of serving in ministry, I developed the Hadassah Mentorship Program. The Hadassah Mentorship Programs is a faith-based initiative the provides both male and female mentorship. The program also provides resources for mental health counseling, academic advising, tutoring, and job skills training made possible through partnerships with professionals in the community who volunteer their time as mentors and sponsors.

Additionally, this research was developed with the hope of sparking a conversation about father absenteeism as well as the mental health issues associated with it, in the African American community in a healthy, positive, and productive way. Discussions about father absence in the Black community are too often presented in a negative accusatory way by labeling Black fathers as perpetually missing deadbeats who are uninterested and irresponsible when it comes to raising

their children. Ellerbe et al. (2011) found these types of assumptions cannot be substantiated. Father absence is not exclusive to the Black community; nor are Black father less loving or less willing to take care of their children, father absence is, however, statistically more prevalent in the Black community as evidenced by the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau Report that revealed that 50% of Black children live in homes without a biological father present.

Aside from adding to the conversation about father absenteeism and its high prevalence in the Black community, this research is designed to encourage more discussion about mental health issues in the Black community and the importance of seeking mental health support. Mental health issues, mood disorders, and eating disorders have been identified as behaviors father-absent children exhibit. Mental health issues, discussions about mental health, and seeking counseling for mental health in the Black community is frequently see as taboo (Zechariah, 2021). Black people do not talk about these issues; however, these are important conversations to have. Father absence and mental health share a connection according to the literature to be reviewed; therefore, this study has potential to bring more awareness to father absence in general, its prevalence in the Black community, as well as its effects on the mental health of Black boys and Black girls in particular as there have been few studies regarding father-absent African American children in general.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this section examines in-depth the current research on father absence and how it affects children socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally. The first section examines the social-emotional effect of father absence and will investigate how the social patterns of children are influenced and how these children interact with others. As discussed by Kruk (2012), father-absent children reportedly struggle with making connections socially and often become withdrawn and socially awkward.

The second area discussed in this literature review is the emotional weight of father absence, and the articles covered in this section primarily focus on the connection between depression and father absence (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016). Adamson and Blight (2014) examine eating disorders as a surprising behavior pattern that develops in father-absent daughters. The third area of focus in this section is the influence father absence has on the behavior of children living without fathers present in their lives. Father absence being strongly associated with aggression in boys is but one example (Ackerman, 2019).

The fourth area examined literature addressing education and the effects father absence has on the cognitive development of children. Holder in her 2015 study, for example, found that perceived father-daughter closeness leads to positive results and outcomes in school in her study on emotional closeness and education. In reviewing the current literature available on the educational effects of father absence, more US studies are needed as much of the literature available was from studies conducted internationally (Eddy et al., 2013).

Finally, the literature reviewed in the section labeled "The Influence of Present Fathers" was added to highlight the contrast between present and absent fathers. Sections in this narrative are dedicated to literature concerning father absence in the Black community, father-absence and

Black sons, and father-absence and Black daughters. These sections highlight the phenomena of father absence in the Black community; however, the effects of father absence for Black children socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally are no different from children of other ethnicities. The literature reviewed in this section is relevant as this researcher seeks to examine the lived experiences of father-absent African American women to learn from their experiences as well as gain insight into the meaning they derived from the experience of living life without a father present. This section highlights issues experienced by Black children, gives voice to the struggles of Black women who grew up without a father, and to set the standard of how they should be treated in relationships (Makofane, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is guided by Bowlby's theory of attachment that asserts humans seek to establish lasting connections with significant others (Bowlby, 1969). He emphasized parental attachments as important for proper development in children and asserted that children and adolescents with a secure base or secure attachments were confident in their ability to venture out from that base because they trusted in their ability to call upon that base. However, as that base becomes insecure through the illness or departure of a parent, the emotional stability of that child, adolescent, or young adult is affected (Bowlby, 1988).

Bowlby (1988), in his theory of attachment, sought to explain both the behavior of attachment and the attachments that children and others seek to make with significant others. His theory also addresses the distress of separation from important attachments and the emotional damage caused by anxiety separation or mourning the loss of a significant attachment. The father-child relationship is a significant attachment that is influential and impactful in the lives of children as fathers provide male guidance, supervision, and values. When that attachment is

never made or suddenly severed, children – especially daughters – are severely affected (East et al., 2007).

Father absence represents, for children, an inability to connect properly and to establish a secure base with him as a significant other. The sudden departure of a father represents the sudden loss of a secure base that, according to Bowlby (1988), creates in the child, adolescent, or youth feelings of distress, loss, and mourning. Father absence is a type of parental unavailability that contributes to aberrant behavior that negatively affects the emotional development of children and increases externalizing behaviors (McLanahan et al., 2013).

McLanahan et al. (2013) found that father absence contributes to struggles with mental health in adulthood. This finding is consistent with Bowlby's 1988 assertions concerning the emotional distress caused by sudden changes with a secure base and/or attachment thus suggesting that the psychological harms and/or trauma children experience are causal effects in adult mental health which can persist throughout the life course (McLanahan et al., 2013). Father absence is also associated with negative cognitive outcomes such as low verbal skills, high rates of depression, lowered IQ, low academic scores, and decreased social skills (Bernard et al., 2015).

Maternal attachment represents a substantial portion of attachment theory. Yoder et al. (2016), however, point out that there has been equal importance placed on father-child relationship bonds. Yoder et al. found that parental attachments with both mother and father have a substantial effect upon the style of attachment and when there is no reciprocation the child is subject to developing negative views about self and others. Rostad et al. (2014) also found evidence that substantiated the claim that daughters look for their fathers to reciprocate feelings

of warmth toward them. Their early experiences with male caregivers heavily influence their ability to function relationally later in adolescence.

Through reviewing the various patterns of attachment such as secure attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, anxious-resistant attachment, and disorganized attachment, I determined that both the anxious-avoidant attachment style and disorganized attachment style aligned more closely with the focus of this study. The anxious-avoidant and disorganized attachments are insecure types of attachment that lead to aggressive behaviors, improper coping strategies, and disruptive behaviors as well as social isolation and social withdrawal (Ackerman, 2019). Attachment theory asserts that "children develop confidence as a result of feeling protected in times of distress" (Moore, 2016, p. 3). In that regard, father absence indirectly establishes a foundation of distrust for children and creates attachments for them that are insecure and unreliable.

Jain (2015) conducted a study on father-daughter attachments and found that fathers, on average, interact less with their daughters due to stereotypical role expectations and cultural expectations. She reported that this minimal interaction contributed to an insecure type of attachment that provides the daughter "with no option to interact with the father" (p. 76) creating in the daughters a greater sense of insecurity. Jain also identified a host of issues that arose from poor father-daughter relationships such as "psychosocial issues, emotional regulation, communication issues, and interpersonal struggles" (p. 79).

Central to attachment theory is the "causal link between insecure attachment, parental unemotional availability, poor communication and depression" (Demidenko et al., 2015, p. 1728). Rostad et al. (2014) found that fathers are important to the development of their daughters and noted that daughters who "experience a close psychological relationship with their fathers

engage in less risky behaviors" (p. 217). However, when they experience "negative father-daughter attachments it creates negative outcomes in the daughter's behavior at school, relationships with peers, self-esteem, and a sense of fear of attachment with the opposite sex" (Moore, 2016, p. 4).

The literature reviewed covers the following areas relating to father absence and the effect father absence has on daughters in particular: social, emotional effects, socio-emotional difficulties, behavioral impact, educational impact, and father absence in the African American community. Other literature reviewed in this section explores the importance of present fathers in the lives of both sons and daughters. Finally, while the primary focus of this study is adult father-absent African American women, literature available on the topic of father absence in foreign nations has been reviewed to add more insight and perspective to the discussion of father absence.

Social Emotional Effect of Father Absence

The social emotional effects of father absence refer more specifically to the emotional responses that children can potentially develop or display due to the absence of their fathers. Koivula and Huttenen (2018) detailed five key areas of social emotional development in children relevant to the discussion of ways father absence affects children emotionally: (a) self-awareness (understanding oneself as well as one's emotions); (b) self-management (understanding how to control one's emotions and impulses); (c) social awareness (being aware of others and developing the ability to empathize); (d) relationship skills (understanding how to build and maintain relationships); and (e) responsible decision making (having the skills to make constructive personal and social choices). According to Koivula and Huttenen's findings, these five areas, when compromised, have the potential to interfere with the ability of children to be

successful academically and interferes with the ability of children to cope with traumatic life experiences emotionally.

Markowitz and Ryan (2016) discovered that the sudden departure and/or the absence of a father is traumatic for children and exposes them to coping strategies that are maladaptive and impulsive. Wadsworth (2015) described maladaptive coping strategies as primitive forms of coping used by older children or adolescents seeking to escape or to contact caregivers when they are facing stressful and/or traumatic life events. Wadsworth asserted that this type of coping was a problematic type of self-protection because it often led to denial and avoidance. Maladaptive coping strategies are also factors in adolescent depression and can cause individuals to develop patterns of thinking that are negative due to invalidating attachments and/or interactions with caregivers (Wadsworth, 2015).

According to Torres (2020) depression or, "major mood disorder is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think, and the way you act" (para 1). Legg (2020) reported there were approximately 16.2 million adults in 2018 affected by depression in the United States and that over 3 million children between the ages of 12 and 17 suffered from depression, as well. While depression is seen by many as an adult struggle, children (male or female) suffer with depression which can be more prevalent at the departure of their fathers (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016).

Pinpointing the age at which children are most vulnerable to developing depressive symptoms and/or behaviors following the sudden departure of their fathers has been difficult for researchers. Culpin et al. (2013), in their study on father absence and depression, found a strong association between father absence and/or departure with the first 5 years of life having the most profound and long-lasting effects on children well into their adult lives. Markowitz and Ryan

(2016), however, collected significant data from their study on depression and father absence that supports the onset of depressive symptoms and behaviors between the ages of 6 and 14. Aside from their findings about the age of onset for depression in children, Markowitz and Ryan also found similarities and some differences between father-absent sons and daughters.

Markowitz and Ryan (2016) discovered that both sons and daughters who experienced father absence later in their adolescence exhibited externalizing behaviors and experienced an elevation in delinquent behavior. Markowitz and Ryan also found that sons and daughters suffered with emotional stress and psychological pain when the father departed later in their adolescence. The psychological pain and emotional stress experienced did not always lead to depression; however, when depressive symptoms and/or behaviors developed, daughters were found to exhibit more depressive behaviors than sons.

Hernandez et al. (2016) conducted a study on depressive symptoms in girls and disruptive fathering patterns such boomerang fathering and found significant evidence that daughters are more affected emotionally than boys when it comes to the sudden departure of their fathers. Boomerang fathering, as defined by Hernandez et al., is a type of fathering pattern where biological fathers or stepfathers frequently transition in and out of the home contributing to consistent family disruptions. While sons and daughters were observed to be affected equally by this disruptive fathering pattern, Hernandez et al. noted a difference in the response of sons and daughters to family disruptions such as father absence and sudden parental departure. Sons began to display more reactions externally in their behaviors while daughters turned their behaviors more inwardly and displayed more depressive symptoms and behaviors (Hernandez et al., 2016).

Hernandez et al. (2016) hypothesized that daughters would have a "stronger depressive response to the instability associated with disruptions and reunifications that depicts boomerang

fathering" (p. 1289). While boomerang fathering was reported to be disruptive, and daughters experienced a depressive response to boomerang fathers, Hernandez et al. found that the depressed mood of daughters was less than expected as opposed to being exposed to non-boomerang fathers (p. 1293). Though disruptive, boomerang fathering had a minimal effect on the mood, mental health, or emotions of daughters. Boomerang fathering, in contrast to what researchers expected, was found to be a protective shield from depression for their daughters in comparison to those daughters whose fathers did not boomerang, e.g., the fathers who left and did not return (p. 1295).

Boomerang fathering is not an ideal fathering pattern due to its disruptive and unstable nature. However, Hernandez et al. (2016) determined that boomerang fathers provide a protective barrier for daughters developing depression. According to Demindenko et al. (2015) this is possible even with an unstable fathering pattern such as boomerang fathering because father-daughter bonds are important to daughters even when the interaction and contact is infrequent. The aspects that seem to be most important are quality and consistency; daughters have a strong desire to feel accepted and loved by their fathers. Consistent contact makes them feel loved and accepted; however, when that relationship is suddenly ended and/or disrupted, it will lead to emotional distress and disturbance in daughters (Demindenko et al., 2015).

Gobbi et al. (2015) in their study addressing depression and adolescents separated from their fathers following divorce found that children who experience sudden separation from their fathers' experience depression up to 9 months following the departure. During this nine-month period, the children who experienced separation from their fathers were not only depressed – they exhibited higher levels of stress and worry as tension, anger, and discord arose in the family. While this study reported a cessation of depression after a nine-month period, 75% of

children still carried feelings of being rejected by their father up to 10 years following the divorce.

Campbell and Winn (2018) found that present fathers who developed strong bonds with their daughters, whether they were the biological father or a stepfather, had a positive effect on the mental well-being of their daughters. When daughters feel close to their fathers their self-esteem is positive and they are less likely to exhibit internalizing and externalizing behavior. Daughters are also less likely to participate in risky sexual practices or experience fear of intimacy, and they are less likely to have health problems, experience mental distress, or become depressed. Despite such evidence, fathers are often less interested in bonding with their daughters which leads to daughters experiencing feelings of pain and rejection.

Jain (2015) conducted a study on father-daughter attachment and proposed that "patterns of attachment between daughters and their fathers would predict various stages of development for daughters" (p. 76). Jain explored both secure and insecure attachments and found that secure attachments were predictors of higher communication satisfaction, emotional regulation, and higher self-esteem while insecure attachments predicted the opposite (Jain, 2015). These findings are consistent with research that suggests that it is the quality of parent-child relationships that affects the child's psychological well-being (McKenzie & Casselman, 2017).

Demindenko et al. (2015) examined father-daughter attachment and depression and found that perceived paternal rejection, neglect, and perceived feelings of less warmth were significant factors in girls diagnosed with depression. This study also noted that girls who were diagnosed as clinically depressed stated that their communication with their fathers, when present, was poorer than that of non-depressed girls. According to the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory), adolescents who perceive they have been or are being rejected by a parent are

often put at an increased risk for engaging in relationships that are unhealthy as they cope with that perceived rejection and attempt to enhance their self-esteem (Lopez & Corona, 2012).

For daughters coping with feelings of rejection, enhancing their self-esteem carries a stronger and more dangerous meaning that leads to depressive coping strategies that can be quite dangerous. According to Izydorczyk (2017) daughters who experience the absence and/or sudden departure of their fathers have a higher likelihood of developing eating disorders to cope with perceived rejection. Horesh et al. (2015) also reported a relationship between fathers and "girls who felt unloved, rejected and/or criticized by their father attempted to lost weight to please him" (p. 119).

While the development of eating disorders appears to be an extreme response to father absence, it is plausible as present fathers heavily influence the eating habits and weight outcomes of their children and their absence reportedly has the same effect. Adolescent females develop eating disorders for distinct reasons connected to self-image, and father-absent daughters have been found to develop eating disorders based on their perceived rejection by their fathers (Adamson & Blight, 2014). According to Horesh et al. (2015) daughters develop eating disorders such as bulimia or anorexia and have concerns about their body imagine because they are driven by a desire to please their fathers. They regulate their eating only because they are propelled by their desperation to be noticed by their father.

Healthy attachments between parents and children are important to the relationship attachments children form later in life and contribute to ways they develop emotionally (Bowlby, 1969). Izydorczyk (2017), in his study on trauma as it relates to eating disorders, found that the departure of a parent is a traumatic experience that causes children to experience "developmental difficulties in the separation-individuation process," i.e., the process of developing a sense of self

(p. 246). When the process of separation-individuation is negatively influenced by the abrupt departure of a parent, it indirectly influences binge-eating disorders due to the stimulation of various psychological factors such as mood disorders and body dissatisfaction.

Evidenced by the PARTheory, rejection by a parent, perceived or real, is a traumatic relational separation experience that paves the way for emotional distress, destructive behaviors, and unhealthy relationships (Lopez & Corona, 2012). According to Culpin et al. (2013) daughters who feel rejected by their fathers tend to struggle emotionally more than sons do, in part, to their fervent desire for a reciprocated connection or closeness to their fathers. When they are deprived of that closeness with their fathers, daughters in turn will seek ways to fill the void. Castetter (2020) confirmed that girls without fathers who are actively present, engaged, or involved in their lives suffer more psychological issues, are more apt to engage in unsafe relationships, are usually more sensitive and anxious in relationships, and they struggle with feeling incomplete.

Father Absence and Other Mental Health Disorders

Aside from depression, low self-esteem, and the development of eating disorders, several researchers have found evidence of an indirect connection between father absence and more severe mental health disorders. Johnson (2019), in his study on sociopathy, psychopathy, and personality disorders in children, found that parenting, as well as the family environment, was instrumental in the development of mental health issues. Antisocial personality disorder was found to be linked with family violence, parental absence, and other types of traumatic experiences such as sexual and physical abuse during childhood.

Although researchers have found no statistical evidence linking father absence to the onset of psychopathy, sociopathy, and personality disorders in children, father absence has been

found to have an indirect effect on the presentation of serious mental disorders in children. The absence of fathers has a negative effect on the emotional stability of children which often leads to their developing aggressive and self-destructive behaviors. In contrast, children with present fathers are far less likely to develop violent behaviors, and they learn ways to regulate their emotional responses to disruptions happening in their environment (Cabrera et al., 2018).

Behavioral Effect of Father Absence

Flouri et al. (2015) described socio-emotional difficulties as emotional struggles one develops in response to traumatic childhood experiences that manifests through externalizing behaviors such as aggression or internalizing behaviors such as depression and self-harm. There is convincing evidence suggesting that father absence not only influences the emotions of their children, it also significantly affects their behaviors. Pyun (2014) found that father absence, while not always negative, is traumatic for some children because it represents a negative parent-child relationship that contributes to socio-emotional difficulties such as internalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors are behavior patterns that turn inward as a negative emotional reaction to a conflict with which the individual is struggling to cope (Pyun, 2014). Self-harm and self-affliction are examples of internalizing behaviors displayed often by adolescents struggling to cope with the absence of their fathers. While older male adolescents are more likely to display this behavior, Idemudia et al. (2016) revealed that females also engage in this destructive pattern of coping.

Cruz et al. (2013), in their research of the self-destructive behaviors of adolescents in relation to family attachments, found that daughters with low self-esteem and who felt hopeless were likely to engage in self-harming. Father-absent daughters with perceptions of being rejected struggle with their self-image as well as their self-worth and will often experience higher levels

of low self-esteem (McKenzie & Casselman, 2017). In response to those findings, it important to note that father-absent daughters, more so than sons, may be at a higher risk of self-harming due to their on-going struggles with feelings of hopelessness due to their perceived rejection and high levels of low self-esteem experienced at the departure of their fathers (O'Dwyer, 2017).

O'Dwyer, in a 2017 study on father-absent children, discovered that depression rates in children were much higher when their fathers were absent from their lives. He found that children with absent fathers saw themselves as unworthy of being loved and they saw themselves as deserving to be abandoned. O'Dwyer also discovered that father absence leaves lasting effects on children through the course of their lives; this concept is supported by McLanahan et al. (2013) who studied the issue of father absence and depression in father-absent children.

Cruz et al. (2013) identified a connection between father absence and dangerous depressive self-harming behaviors such as cutting and suicidal ideations – connections vital to the discussion of father absence and its influence on the socio-emotional development of children. Cutting, or *non-suicidal injury*, is defined as "deliberate destruction of body tissue" (Hendriksen, 2016, para 4). Suicidal thoughts and ideations are imaginings and plans that one has about killing oneself or fantasizing about death (Nordqvist, 2018). Cutting and suicide ideations are risk-taking and self-harm behaviors identified as serious public health problems that are common among youths (Idemudia et al., 2016).

Fox (2017) reported that the national suicide rate in America in 2017 had risen by 28%, and the rate of suicide amongst adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 24 also reached an all-time high of 40%. Adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to these behaviors especially when their lives are in what appears to be chaos and especially in the event of family dissolution that ends in the departure of their fathers (Hernandez et al., 2016). The research, while limited in

this area, indicates that daughters with low satisfaction with family relationships and/or attachments are at risk for self-destructive thoughts as well as risky behaviors and they display more psychological symptoms (Cruz et al., 2013).

Externalizing Behaviors

Fathers, whether they are present or not, influence the mental health of their children significantly (Bernard et al., 2015). Fathers affect the emotional wellbeing of their children and, when present, have a positive effect on the development of their children as the care they give to their children has been associated with a decrease in behavior problems later in childhood (Lynn et al., 2016). However, when fathers are absent the social-emotional development of their children is affected negatively – particularly through increasing externalizing behaviors (McLanahan et al., 2013).

Externalizing behaviors include physical or verbal behaviors that cause or threaten harm to oneself or others (Liu, 2004). Much of the research available on father absence and the influence it has on the behavior of children often emphasizes sons and their likelihood of engaging in externalizing behavior such as smoking, destruction of property, and aggression (McLanahan et al., 2013). Current research reveals that daughters who perceive they have been rejected by their fathers are just as likely to respond to the absence of their fathers in the same manner including acting aggressively and engaging in behaviors considered risky and dangerous (McKenzie & Casselman, 2017).

McKenzie and Casselman (2017) studied perceived father rejection in young adults and hypothesized that "emotional dysregulation would mediate the relationship between perceived father rejection and aggression" (p. 1093). Emotional dysregulation is an inability to cope with painful situations. McKenzie and Casselman also found that children may learn to avoid intense,

painful emotions associated with parent rejection. Avoidance of these difficult emotions "may hinder children from developing the skills necessary to effectively manage the complex range of emotions experienced in adolescence and adulthood" (p. 1091). Their research, guided by the PARTheory, yielded considerable evidence that parent rejection contributed significantly to aggressive behaviors in young adults who perceived they were rejected by their fathers.

McKenzie and Casselman (2017) found the response of aggression was primarily the same for both daughters and sons; the reason for the children's aggression, however, was mediated by different emotional struggles. Sons struggled with experiencing uncomfortable emotions such as anger and sadness that reminded them of painful memories associated with the rejection of their fathers which led to aggressive behaviors and emotional suppression. However, emotional suppression was not an issue for daughters; they displayed aggression due to an inability to control their impulses and inhibit their behaviors. Sons, according to this study, are more likely to suppress emotions while daughters express and act outwardly on their emotion. Both responses, however, facilitated aggression in both sons and daughters.

This research review identified no definite age that indicated when the departure of fathers has the greatest effect on the behaviors, emotions, and development of children. McLanahan et al. (2013) in their meta-analysis on the causal effects of father absence reported that externalizing behaviors appeared to be more pronounced if the absence of one's father occurred during early childhood. Markowitz and Ryan (2016), however, reported that the late departure of one's father following middle childhood led to higher levels of delinquent behavior more so than the father leaving when the child was younger.

Children, regardless of age, frequently do not have the emotional coping tools to process having a parent leave the household, and the situation is exacerbated when the child connects

that departure to their not being good enough nor being wanted by the departing parent (Wadsworth, 2015). McKenzie and Casselman (2017) reported that sons tend to suppress their emotions due to their inability to process the rejection of their absent fathers. Daughters, on the other hand, tend to grapple with hurt feelings, feel disconnected, and lose respect for their absent fathers (La Guardia et al., 2014).

Sexual Behaviors of Daughters

Father-absent sons and daughters struggle to cope with the absence and/or sudden departure of their father as noted by O'Dwyer (2017). Father-absent sons and daughters both exhibit delinquent behaviors, engage in risky behaviors, and exhibit aggression toward others (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016). However, while father-absent daughters are just as likely as sons to be delinquent and aggressive, the literature available highlights daughters' sexual behaviors as they are more likely to engage in risky sexual activity earlier and be more sexually aggressive around males (La Guardia et al., 2014).

Hetherington (1972), in her study on the effects of father absence and the character development of daughters, noticed a type of aggression in female children that was different from the male children and labeled it *feminine aggression*. This feminine aggression was more sexual than the destructive aggression exhibited by sons. La Guardia et al. (2014) confirm the observation of Hetherington as they found father-absent daughters were more sexually promiscuous and engaged in risky sexual behaviors at younger ages 4 times higher than the norm. Father-absent daughters were also reported to be more likely to participate in risky sexual behaviors and put themselves at a higher risk of contracting sexually-transmitted infections leaving them vulnerable to serious problems in their adolescence (Ellis et al., 2012).

Purvis et al. (2014) found that "female students who reported high sexual engagement and low use of contraceptives also reported that their interactions with their fathers were minimal or non-existent" (p. 8). They investigated the involvement and influence of mothers on sexual behaviors and risky sexual behavior of daughters and found that mothers had no significant effect on the sexual behaviors of their daughters. However, they found that fathers were vitally important to the emotional, behavioral, and social development of their daughters. When fathers were present in the lives of their daughters they served as a protective shield to behaviors that were sexually aggressive and risky which dramatically affected the lives of their daughters as well as the lives of those with whom they engaged sexually.

The contributing factors of sexual aggression and risky sexual behavior in adolescent father-absent daughters are difficult to pinpoint due to conflicting findings. The current research is inconclusive regarding emotional stressors and exactly how father absence affects the sexual behaviors of daughters. Yoder et al. (2016) found "the quality of the relationship between fathers and daughters predicts sexual behavior" (p. 406) while other research findings suggest that it is the timing of the fathers' departure that contributes to the sexual aggression of daughters, their early sexual activity, and risky sexual behaviors.

Ryan (2015), in her study on adolescent sexual behavior, found that girls whose fathers left the home when the child was between the ages of 6 and 13 foretold an earlier age for their first sexual intercourse. Ryan also found that when disruptions such as family dissolution or father absence happens, it acts as a trigger for early onset risky behaviors, thus linking the two phenomena. These findings provide insight into the quality of father-child relationships being a crucial factor in mediating sexually aggressive behaviors in daughters especially if a quality bond is formed during the years of the father being present. Daughters are relational and are

more likely to develop a more positive emotional well-being when a warm bond exists between them and their fathers (Culpin et al., 2013).

A mitigating factor of risky sexual behaviors in girls is the perceived closeness that the daughter has with her father. DelPriorie et al. (2017) found that fathers with low-quality fathering and/or low-quality relationships with their daughters contributed to an increase in the risky sexual behaviors of their daughters due in part to the child turning to peers for closeness and acceptance and who support their sexual practices. However, when fathers displayed a higher quality of fathering by being involved and close to their daughters, the daughters were less likely to turn to sexually deviant peers (1339).

In 2011, Tennessee was facing growing numbers of single-mother households, teen-pregnancy, and one of the highest incidences of sexually-transmitted disease rates in the country. These issues were further illuminated when a Memphis, Tennessee, high school made national news for its teen-pregnancy rate with 20% of its female students being pregnant or reporting they had recently given birth (DelPriorie & Hill, 2013). While there was much speculation concerning the contributing factors of the pregnancy explosion at this high-school such as the then-popular shows, MTV's *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant,* researchers such as DelPriorie and Hill purported that there was a more intimate influence associated with this sudden explosion of teen pregnancy – father absence.

Motivated by the sudden increase of teen pregnancy and births at that Memphis high school, DelPriorie and Hill (2013) conducted a project to examine more closely their theory that parental disengagement and the sexual decisions of women are related. They hypothesized that the disengagement and absence of fathers promoted short-term and risky sexual behaviors in daughters. They are not alone in their assertations as multiple researchers have established that

there is a link between the investment of fathers and the key role they play in the development of their children academically, emotionally, and sexually. Researchers on the subject have found that daughters are particularly "sensitive to the availability and quality of investment they receive from their biological fathers" (DelPriorie & Hill, 2013, p. 235). The bond between fathers and daughters is crucial and when that bond is non-existent or is suddenly disrupted, daughters are significantly affected – particularly regarding their sexual behaviors and decision-making.

DelPriorie and Hill (2013) found that parental disengagement increased sexualized thoughts in women especially when describing the physical and physiological disengagement of their fathers. They also found that women with disengaged fathers had more sexually permissive attitudes than those with engaged fathers. These relaxed ideas and sexually permissive attitudes suggested that the increase of promiscuity in adolescent girls could be driven by the lack of investment and disengagement of fathers in the lives of their daughters. DelPriorie and Hill found that women with disengaged fathers displayed more sexual thoughts and sexual permissiveness, and that women with disengaged fathers were more likely to have more sexual partners and engage in more risky sexual behaviors which often led to teen pregnancy.

Lack of father engagement has reliably been connected to the risky sexual decisions and promiscuity of daughters and is also linked to the male expectation developed in daughters. DelPriorie et al. (2019) hypothesized that daughters with low father engagement viewed long-term male investment in children and partners as unreliable which, in turn, would direct their sexual interactions. Their findings revealed that women with low father engagement had low expectations for men in relationships which, in turn, influenced numbers of sexual partners.

DelPriorie et al. (2019) indicated that proper paternal attachment and engagement is vital to the attitudes and expectations daughters develop toward men. Father-daughter bonds are

important as are any other parental bonds and when those bonds are non-existent, weak, or severed in any way children are frequently adversely affected. Their study shows that low paternal engagement is significantly linked to the sociosexual behavior of women as well as their willingness to pursue short-term or multiple sexual relationships because they have no expectation of commitment beyond their sexual engagement with men.

The secondary focus of DelPriorie et al.'s (2019) study was the belief that women who experienced low paternal engagement would also develop low expectations of men as fathers, and, more specifically, their expectation of whether men would be attentive, engaged, and involved fathers. There were women who reported having low expectations of men as fathers; however, the data was not sufficient to conclude there was a significant relationship between low paternal engagement and expectations of men as fathers. The women in this study, while father-absent themselves, did not develop strong ideas about men becoming disengaged as their own fathers had done., They did, however, develop low expectations of men making long-term commitments and making meaningful investments to them or their relationship.

Krampe and Newton (2012) asserted that women who experienced romantic and career success often did so because they typically had warm relationships with their fathers who were supportive and attentive. Kelly (2017) also found that daughters who experienced positive interactions and closeness with their fathers later developed strong values, confidence, high self-esteem, and relational success. This study also found that daughters who experienced the absence of their fathers in the home following divorce reported no ill feelings toward their absent fathers due to the fond memories created during their time of bonding when their fathers were present. Those daughters with fond memories of their fathers being supportive and easy to approach often

made decisions they believed their fathers would approve because they remembered the love, closeness, and care of their fathers despite his absence from the home (Kelly, 2017).

Positive father-daughter relationships are vital as they have a significant effect on the development and emotional health of daughters. Without the strong positive presence and connection of fathers, daughters find themselves suffering hopelessly with little expectation of healing (Kelly, 2017). Kelly also discovered that daughters need closeness with their fathers, they need compassion from their fathers, and they need positive feedback from their fathers because positive interactions with a father leads to healthy interactions with men and their own families later in life. Kelly noted that women with negative memories of their fathers – whether it resulted from his sudden departure due to divorce or his never being present – find it difficult to love themselves and have confidence because the presence, interaction, and communication of their fathers is vital.

Educational Effect of Father Absence

Children with absent fathers struggle emotionally, behaviorally, and socially, and children living without a father present in their lives also suffer academically. There is statistically significant evidence to indicate the effects of present fathers to support the academic success of their children. Radl et al. (2017) found that children without a father present in the home or active in their lives suffer more cognitively than in non-cognitive ways. They found that children were more likely to score lower on tests and their most affected area was in mathematical scores (Radl et al., 2017).

Qureshi and Ahmad (2014) conducted a study on father absence and child academics with participants between ages 13 and15. They hypothesized that "children from father-intact families . . . show better academic performances that families where the father has died" (p. 3).

Qureshi and Ahmad collected 2 years of data and was able to extrapolate significant evidence to support and accept their primary hypothesis that father involvement plays a significant role in the academic achievement of their children. Qureshi and Ahmad also discovered that children with present fathers are more than likely to participate in group activities than children whose fathers were absent. Children with fathers who were present and active in their lives performed better academically 75% of the time as opposed to 32% of the time for children whose fathers were absent (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014). Children with involved fathers also displayed higher educational outcomes, higher well-being, and higher levels of educational attainment (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014).

Holder, in a 2015 study on the effects of African American father emotional closeness on the educational outcomes of daughters, found that paternal warmth, as perceived by daughters, contributed to their educational success. Paternal parenting warmth, as operationally defined by Lee et al. (2018), is the warmth and responsiveness of fathers that includes active engagement, quality time spent with the child, and expressions of love and affection toward the children. Holder discovered that girls who experienced high paternal warmth achieved higher reading levels and later scored higher on the SAT reading and math areas as opposed to daughters with low paternal warmth or no fathers present at all.

Holder (2015) reported that African American parental warmth and involvement contributed to increased psychological positivity in both sons and daughters. Psychological positivity in connection to the academic success of children refers to the positive feelings, emotions, and attitudes children have toward learning (Shoshani & Slone, 2017). Paternal warmth from African American fathers contributed to the academic success of their daughters and helped daughters establish healthy feelings about themselves, become more confident

knowing they were cared for, and develop hope that they felt for a long period of time (Holder, 2015).

Positive father-daughter relationships have significant and lasting effects on their daughters' psychological and academic development as Holder (2015) revealed. The results of Holder's study are consistent with the assertion of attachment theory that states that healthy attachments create psychological connectivity that is lasting between humans (Cherry, 2018). Quality father-daughter attachments are vital. Daughters, as well as sons, need to know they are loved and supported by their fathers because, when they perceive they are being rejected or they feel the relationship with their fathers lacks warmth and affection, low performance in academics and low educational attainment can be predicted (Holder, 2015).

Father involvement and/or father closeness supports the development of language and literacy in children, and positive interplay with fathers also supports cognition, school achievement, and school competency (Varghese & Wachen, 2016). Along with statistically significant evidence to support her hypothesis that community disadvantage affects adolescent academic success, Gordon (2016) found closeness in father-adolescent relationships to be statistically significant in the academic success of adolescents. More specifically, Gordon discovered that father-adolescent closeness was found to significantly reduce the negative effects that community disadvantage had on the educational success of adolescents.

Present, involved, and supportive fathers shield their children from maladaptive behavior patterns, depression, and academic failure (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Present fathers who have established positive attachments with their children contribute to the positive attitudes their children develop about school (Holder, 2015). For example, daughters who perceive a close attachment to their fathers reportedly get higher grades and have higher occupational aspirations

in contrast to daughters who, when they perceive disconnect and conflict with their father, exhibit behavioral issues and perform poorly in school (Holder, 2015).

Ransaw (2014) observed the positive effects of engaged African American fathers on the academic success of their children and reported that African American fathers, when present, were equally as warm as other fathers were to their children and they were more likely to complete homework assignments with their children. Ransaw (2014) observed that present African American fathers helped their children achieve academic success through homework assistance because of the time these fathers invested in them by going to the park, accompanying them to the library, and driving them to school. Ransaw also discovered that present and engaged African American fathers contributed to the positive emotional and psychological condition of their children. Ransaw also reported that the sudden departure of fathers caused children to suffer from psychological strain, emotional distress, and impeded growth. The mothers left to care for them experienced financial strain, as well. Pruett et al. (2017) found that low income, economic stress, and poverty are factors that contribute heavily to the poor academic performance in children, and father absence is often the catalyst.

Daughters are more likely to have lower academic expectations and success (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Gillette and Gudmunson conducted a study on the relationship between the educational attainment of African American daughters and father absence guided by the following:

- prolonged father absence would lead to lower income and greater economic pressures for the mother.

- prolonged father absence would lead to early menarche and sexual debut.

- high educational expectations such as the desire to attend college would predict educational attainment.

The first hypothesis posited by Gillette and Gudmunson asserted that there was a relationship between prolonged father absence and economic stress for single mothers. This hypothesis was accepted as a strong relationship was discovered between the two. Father absence leads to financial strain as well as economic distress for single mothers and daughters of single mothers who experience lower income and economic stress because of father absence. The second hypothesis posited by Gillette and Gudmunson (2013) deals with father presence and sexual debut which was accepted; however, the details are not relevant to this area of discussion as similar studies were previously discussed. The final hypothesis posited by Gillette and Gudmunson suggested that daughters with high educational expectations and college aspirations would predict educational attainment. This hypothesis was also accepted as they found a significant relationship between the educational expectations of daughters and educational attainment.

Gillette and Gudmunson explained that father-absent children often bear the stress of the financial strain in their home, and daughters, when feeling stressed, will frequently focus on seeking employment instead of planning for college. However, when that financial stress is not present, daughters will develop higher hopes for their academic future and, in turn, they will experience greater educational attainment.

Father-absent children are more likely to score lower on personal assessments for academic competence and they were more likely to drop out of school (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Father-absent families are less likely to transmit parent-to-child educational expectations and they are less likely to provide an enhanced learning environment in the home in comparison

to father-present families (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Father-absent homes do not always equal or represent a negative situation for children; however, they put children at a disadvantage financially and they reduce the likelihood of their succeeding academically or pursuing higher education (Gordon, 2016).

Fathers, when present, have a positive effect on the cognitive, emotional, and social development of their children (Taylor, 2016). However, the absence of fathers negatively affects the cognitive functioning of children. Traditionally, fathers have been viewed as breadwinners and providers who are primarily responsible for providing financial support for their children (Cetin, 2015). Nevertheless, with culture changes in relation to gender norms and roles within the family, the view of fathers being the only breadwinners has also changed over the latter part of the 20th century, and fathers are now being recognized as more than financial providers as McMunn et al. (2017) reported. Fathers are being acknowledged as vital caregivers in the same way mothers are as the father's presence is key to the physical, mental, emotional, and educational development of their children (McMunn et al., 2017).

The redefining of gender roles has been beneficial for the family – fathers especially – as they are no longer expected to be the sole providers and breadwinners of the family as Alemann et al. (2020) detailed in her observation of the expanding and evolving gender roles of the family. The financial support of fathers is still as important as their presence, and when they depart their absence is felt. Gordon (2016) discovered how great an effect father absence has on children in her study on community disadvantage and adolescent academic achievement. Gordon hypothesized that "community disadvantage would have a negative impact on adolescent academic achievement and that father involvement would mediate the association between

community disadvantage and adolescent academic achievement such that the negative impact on adolescent academic achievement would decrease" (p. 2072).

The results from the study Gordon (2016) conducted were found to be statistically significant to support the first hypothesis as community disadvantage was found to negatively affect the academic achievement of adolescents. Gordon discovered that it was the quality of father-child relationships more than father involvement that "mediated the association between community disadvantage and adolescent academic achievement decreasing the negative impact of community disadvantage" (p. 2072). Finally, Gordon revealed that present and involved fathers functioned as a "barrier to their children experiencing low academic success" when controlling for community disadvantage (p. 2076).

Father Absence and College Success

Consistent father involvement and quality father-child attachments are important factors in the growth, mental health, emotional stability, academic success, and cognitive development of children early in life. Consistent father involvement and quality father-child attachments are also vital in the higher educational pursuits and attainment of their children. Doherty et al. (2016), in their observation of past studies conducted on the structure of the family and college attendance, discovered that the sudden departure of a parent during the child's high school years "reduced the likelihood of college attendance by 16%" (p. 265). Doherty et al. also revealed that one of the major factors contributing to the decreased likelihood of children attending college and whose parents divorced while the children were in high school was the immediate financial effect from the sudden departure (which in most cases is the father).

Doherty et al. (2016) conducted meta-analyses of past studies on gender difference and college attendance to examine the relationship between nonmarital birthdates and father absence

following divorce to examine their relationship to gender gaps in college attendance. To complete their study, Doherty et al. reviewed nonmarital births rates in the United States over a 45-year period between 1948-1993 and the college enrollment difference by gender 18 years later between 1966-2011. They hypothesized that there would be a correlation between father absence, nonmarital birth rates, and gender differences in college enrollment.

Following their meta-analysis, Doherty et al. (2016) discovered a strong correlation between father absence, nonmarital birth rates, and the gender differences in college enrollment. When fathers were present, sons enrolled in college at 87.5% higher than the rate of daughters. However, when fathers were absent from the time of the son's birth, the percentage of their college enrollment dropped 7% below that of daughters. The college enrollment rate of both sons and daughters was affected when the biological fathers were absent from the home; however, the college enrollment rate of sons was most affected. Doherty et al. suggested that the gender disparity for college enrollment could be connected to the alleged idea that school environments are more oriented toward females; the researchers assert that this issue could be addressed through administrations' creating more programs for father-absence and encouraging teachers to pay more attention to father-absent sons.

Lundberg (2017) also conducted an analytical study of data collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health but found no significant evidence that father absence early in adolescence lowered the college enrollment of sons more than daughters. Consistent with other studies, Lundberg found that adolescent sons were more likely to suffer with behavioral problems in school, but daughters were equally affected as they are more likely to exhibit depressive behaviors in school. Lundberg also found that daughters complete degree

programs 37% of the time in comparison to sons completing them 31% of the time, but she found no significant disparity in gender as it relates to higher education attainment.

Lundberg (2017) confirmed the belief that girls outperform boys in school and finish college at higher rates. Since the "removal of barriers to women being schooled and working in the labor force," women have exceled educationally while suffering disparity in the workplace (Lundberg, 2017, p. 2). The gender gap in education, according to Lundberg, began to take a turn in 1990 when the numbers of women attending college equaled the numbers of men. Lundberg reported there was a significant shift in higher education attainment with 37% of women completing their degrees in comparison to less than 31% of men completing 4-year degree programs.

According to Saleh et al. (2017) women were reported to have outnumbered men in college, representing 58.1% of those enrolled in degree-granting programs in comparison to men who comprised 41% of those enrolled in degree-granting programs in the year 2017. Lundberg (2017) acknowledged the disparity between the enrollment of men and women; however, that disparity was not significant enough for her to infer that there was a relationship between father absence and the gender gap in college. The absent father, nonetheless, is a key factor in the lowered academic success and college enrollment of sons and daughters. Lundberg found that daughters with present fathers completed their higher education 42% of the time in comparison to father-absent daughters who completed their college education only 24% of the time. Lundberg found the same to be true for men, as well; sons with present fathers completed their degrees 38% of the time as opposed to 18% of the time when their fathers were absent.

While the evidence for a connection between father absence and the gender disparity in college enrollment has been vague, one can infer from the research of Doherty et al. (2016) and

Lundberg (2017) that a relationship exists. In the absence of fathers, sons are more likely to display behaviors in school that lead to expulsion, and sons are also more likely to lose hope in their ability to perform well in school – thus affecting their desire to attend college (Lundberg, 2017). Father-absent daughters, in comparison, turn their behaviors inward; they also struggle with school and continuing their education beyond high school, but that struggle has more to do with depression and involvement in damaging relationships as Radl et al. (2017) discovered.

Aside from the gender disparity in college enrollment, there is much more to explore concerning father absence, college enrollment, and the higher education attainment of both father-absent sons and daughter. For example, Radl et al. (2017) discovered that children from fatherless homes are affected more specifically in mathematics in comparison to children with both parents present in the home. Castetter (2020), in her analysis of father absence and the developmental effects on daughters throughout a lifespan, also found that daughters performed lower in mathematics in both high school and college. Similarly, Hoferichter and Raufelder (2019) discovered that girls who receive the support of both their mother and father, starting in the 8th grade, perform better in the areas of math and science and often go on to enroll in math or science degree-granting programs. However, Hoferichter and Raufelder found that sons were not particularly affected in math and science attainment by the support or lack of support they were given by their parents as boys, historically, are expected to excel in these subjects that are considered best suited for men.

Castetter (2020), as have many other researchers, found that fathers are vitally important to the academic success of their children both in high school and college. Fathers influence the gender gap in college enrollment as Lundberg (2017) discovered. Fathers also influence the gender gap between sons and daughters in the areas of math and science as Hoferichter and

Raufelder (2019) reported, and daughters with absent fathers are less likely to perform well in comparison to boys and will avoid math and science degree-granting programs. Girls need their fathers to encourage their ability to do math and science, just as sons need their fathers present to quell delinquent behavior and poor decision-making that will affect their future emotionally, mentally, and educationally.

Father Absence and The African American Community

Father absence is not exclusive to the African American community as there are father-absent homes among different ethnic groups across the United States (Ellerbe et al., 2018). The topic of father absence in the African American community is one that has remained at the forefront of discussions due, in large part, to its prevalence in the African American community. Ellerbe et al.'s study on racial and ethnic differences in non-resident fathers found that 72% of children in the African American community were born into non-marital unions in comparison to the 26% of White children born into non-marital unions. Smith (2020), in a more recent study, discovered the numbers have not changed as 70% of African American children in 2020 were born to an unmarried parent and over half of those children lived in single-mother-led homes.

Cooper et al. (2019) noticed that while father absence is prevalent in the Black community, Black fathers are hugely underrepresented in the research of father absence. Cooper et al. also noted that most of the information available from research about Black fathers is mostly deficit-focused which has led to the characterization of Black fathers as "uninvolved and disengaged from the parenting of their children" (p. 2048). While I am interested in the phenomenon of father absence in the Black community, it is important to note that Black fathers are no less interested in being present in the lives of their children than fathers of other ethnic groups (Cooper et al., 2019).

Black fathers, while disproportionately absent from the home, are not always absent from the lives of their children. Cooper et al. (2021) in their research concerning the engagement of black fathers found that Black fathers are generally and genuinely involved in the lives of the children even when they are nonresidential. Cooper et al. (2021) also found that Black fathers more often than not are present in the lives of their children and concerned about their emotional well-being and growth. However, the minimal representation of Black fathers in research as it relates to the disparity in their absence of Black fathers from the home, and the minimal reports concerning their active engagement in the lives of their children is significant enough to support further investigation in the matter of Black fatherhood.

Father Absence and African American Sons

The bond between fathers and their children is vitally important as children develop, learn, grow, and mature into adulthood. UNICEF (2018) reported that present and engaged fathers contribute to the positive development, health, college attendance, employment, sociability, confidence, self-control, and behavior of their children. Present and engaged fathers also give their children a sense of safety, protection, and belonging (Barker et al., 2017). Fathers, when present, more specifically are the first mentors, teachers, examples of manhood, and role models for their sons (Cooper et al., 2019). Sons of all races and ethnicities need their fathers; however, as it relates to the discussion in this section, the literature reviewed emphasizes how great the need is for Black fathers to be present for the mental health, survival, and freedom of Black sons.

The emotional, mental, and behavioral effects of father absence for African American males is no different than that of sons living without fathers present in their lives from any other ethnic group. African American males, for example, are at a higher risk of contracting

HIV/AIDS due to higher levels of sexual activity as they are "59% more likely than sons of other ethnic groups to engage in sexual activity between the ages of 14 and 18" due to the absence of their fathers (Harris et al., 2018, p. 2). Father-absent African American males are also more likely to initiate sexual contact, have multiple sexual partners, and father children outside of wedlock more than any other racial group (Harris et al., 2018).

Harris et al. (2018) hypothesized that healthy father-son communication between African American fathers and their sons would reduce sexual risk and early sexual behaviors in sons. Harris et al. noted that research addressing sexual communication between fathers and sons was minimal, yet necessary, as sons reportedly desire open communication with their fathers about sex. They further explained that sons, in the absence of their fathers, are often left with no choice but to depend on their mothers for advice concerning sexual matters, making it difficult and embarrassing for sons to speak with their moms. Harris et al. also found significant evidence that sexual communication between African American fathers and their sons was, indeed, helpful in deterring risky sexual behaviors.

The most significant detail of the Harris et al. (2018) study was the decrease of sexual risk associated with the increase of African American sons feeling close and connected to their fathers (when present) more so than an increase in condom use. Harris et al. found this detail important as it again emphasizes the necessity of fathers – especially Black fathers – being present. Father-absent African American males are at a higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and fathering children at an early age – more so than any other ethnic group. The statistical evidence discovered by Harris et al. strongly supports the assertion that African American fathers are needed and necessary – not only for the development of their sons but for the preservation of their lives.

Black fathers, as are fathers of any ethnicity, are a necessary presence in the lives of their children. They are needed to provide wisdom, guidance, and protection to their children. They are needed for preserving the lives of their children – more specifically sons – as Harris et al. (2018) discovered. Black fathers are also needed to help shape the identities of their sons and break the cycle of generational incarceration that is extremely prevalent in the Black community.

Incarceration is a significant contributing factor to father absence across all ethnic groups, but no ethnic group has been affected as much by incarceration as the Black community. Ryan (2015) reported that there were 2.6 million children in 2012 living in the United States with a parent serving time in jail, and of those children, 11.4% of them were Black. In comparison, the number of Black children with a father serving time in jail or prison is more than double the next largest group with incarcerated fathers – Hispanic children at 3.5%. Historically, Black men have been disproportionately jailed which affects the Black family as well as Black children; these numbers are not changing as Black men still make up a large percentage of incarcerated individuals in America. The most recent available report shows that African Americans comprise only about 12% of the total population in America, but still represent 33% of the federal and state prison population. By contrast, 64% of American adults are White, but just 30% of those individuals are locked up (Brown, 2019).

To put the numbers into perspective, Black men in 2010 "were incarcerated at a rate of 3,074 per 100,000 residents while White men were incarcerated at 459 per 100,000 residents" (Rogers & Young, 2018, p. 110). Historically, Black men have been disproportionately jailed which separates them from their communities, loved ones, and children (Ryan, 2015). The disproportionate jailing of Black men is problematic because it not only removes Black fathers from their homes and communities, but it also removes Black fathers from the lives of their

children thus contributing to the ongoing issue of generational incarceration in the Black community (McLanahan et al., 2013).

Ryan (2015) also discovered the problematic issue with the disproportionate jailing of Black fathers in her study addressing paternal incarceration and adolescents and noted the sons of incarcerated fathers are more likely to be incarcerated themselves. Considering those findings, with Black men being incarcerated at disproportionate rates, one can infer from the research by Ryan and others that Black boys are put at a higher risk of being incarcerated and, thereby, continuing the cycle of incarceration in the Black community.

Rogers and Young (2018) conducted a phenomenological study on the lived experiences of Black children and incarcerated fathers to give voice to the children and their experiences. During their study, Rogers and Young discovered that Black children with incarcerated fathers suffer through a great deal of mental stress, emotional stress, and fear. Rogers and Young revealed that Black children, especially sons, with incarcerated fathers live in fear of being separated from and becoming like their fathers because, historically, the American justice system has penalized Black men more severely for their crimes and mistakes.

Incarceration has become a "normative experience" for minority men, especially those in the Black community and it has become a normal thing for Black children (Rogers & Young, 2018, p. 120). Father absence due to incarceration is a devastating norm for Black children and one that has become a cycle for Black sons (Rogers & Young, 2018). Black fathers are needed to preserve, protect, and direct the lives of their sons (Harris et al., 2018). Black fathers are needed to be examples and role models for their sons, and Black fathers are also needed to serve as a deterrent to their sons spending their lives in and out of jail.

Father Absence and African American Daughters

Black fathers are vitally important to the lives of their children. More specifically, present Black fathers are vital to the preservation of their sons' lives as they help their sons make wiser choices when it comes to relationships and engaging in sexual activities (Harris et al., 2018). Black fathers are needed to lead, guide, and direct their sons. Black fathers are also needed to lead, guide, direct, instruct, and protect their daughters in the same manner.

The literature provided data across ethnicities and gender. Father-absent Black girls as well as daughters from different ethnic groups experienced heightened levels of depression and struggled with developing strong relationships equally. As a result of developing a lack of trust in men due to the abandonment of their fathers, daughters from all ethnic groups struggle with emotional breakdown and disruptions when their fathers go missing (Makofane, 2015). The only possible difference could be teen pregnancy and birth rates, but there were no studies or literature provided there.

The Influence of Present Fathers

The primary discussion and literature reviewed has been centered on the devastating effects that father absence has on children. Children with absent fathers are more likely to suffer academically as Radl et al. (2017) reported. Children with absent fathers' struggle to establish healthy relationships, they struggle with social interactions, and they struggle with depression (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016).

Flouri et al. (2015) hypothesized that father involvement would predict problem behaviors in children. While the evidence to support their hypothesis was minimal, Flouri et al. found that involved fathers had a profound effect on the hyperactivity and conduct behavior of their children at the age of five. Flouri et al. reported a reduction in these behaviors of children in

this age group but noticed no change among the 3-year-old age group. Varghese and Wachen (2016), in a similar study on father involvement, also found that the presence of fathers not only influences the behavior of their children, but the father's presence helps to boost their cognitive functioning, literacy, and their language skills.

Involved fathers have also been found to have a strong positive influence on the academic success of their children. For example, Gordon (2016) discovered that when fathers were active and involved in the school affairs of their children, they mediated or served as a point of intervention between the adversity they faced in the community and their academic achievement. Present fathers function as a buffer for their children and can shield them from negative elements such as poverty in their environment. Also, children with involved fathers were more likely to graduate high school and enroll in a 4-year post-secondary institution (Gordon, 2016).

The most profound influence of involved fathers is often seen through the bonds they establish with their children. Bowlby (1969), through his theory of attachment, asserted that children who establish secure attachments to their parents go on to establish secure attachments later in life. Lynn et al.'s (2016) study on the influence of father involvement found significant evidence to support the assertions of Bowlby as they discovered that the consistent emotional support and quality attachment of present fathers was strongly associated with the positive cognitive development, social competence, and healthy well-being of their children.

Baggett et al. (2015) conducted a study on father involvement with their daughters and reported that daughters who experienced a positive and close relationship with their fathers went on to experience bliss in their romantic relationships. The daughters who participated in this study and reported having close relationships with their fathers also experienced lower levels of maladaptive behavior patterns in their relationships. Ali and Daoud (2016), likewise, found that

daughters who experienced closeness to their fathers also experienced satisfaction and happiness in their relationships and marriages.

The active involvement of fathers is vital for the guidance and support children gain in various areas of their development. Active and involved fathers are necessary because they help children lay the foundation for establishing secure and healthy relationships throughout their lifetimes. Active and involved fathers are also important because they function as barriers to their sons and daughters participating in risky behaviors that could harm them mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Kimberly and Linton (2017) conducted a study to examine the relationship between the quality of the father-child relationships, sexual debut, and the satisfaction of children in their own physical relationships. They hypothesized that quality father-child relationships would mediate healthy relationships later in life. Kimberly and Linton discovered that there was a significant relationship between the positive presence of fathers and the ability of their children to discuss sexual matters. Fathers who were able to have these discussions with their children gave the children comfort to discuss sexual matters and helped them to be satisfied with their own physical relationships. Kimberly and Linton also found that it was the quality of time with the father that had the most positive effect on children and their later physical relationships. Fathers who were present and nurturing were found to have a strong effect on the overall relational health of their children on multiple levels. While the research findings were significant in multiple areas hypothesized, Kimberly and Linton were unable to find statistical evidence or a relationship between the quality of the father-child relationship and the number of sexual partners their children had or would have in the future.

When fathers are present and actively involved in the lives of their children, they create a level of comfort, ease, and trust for them. Attachment theory asserts that secure attachments are "a basic component of human nature and that early patterns of family attachment are a precursor to attachment patterns within future relationships" (Yoder et al., 2016. p. 463). Children, more specifically daughters, reportedly feel more at ease with themselves and comfortable with men in general (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011). Hutchinson and Cederbaum discovered that sexual communication and support from fathers was linked to the positive social psychological outcomes of their daughters. They also found that "increased father-daughter communication delayed sexual debut of daughters and decreased the frequency of engagement in intercourse as well" (p. 550).

As revealed through the literature reviewed in this section, fathers are needed in the lives of their children. Sons need their fathers present to help guide them as men (Harris et al., 2018). Present fathers provide their sons and daughters with insights, perspectives, and philosophies about relationships and sexual behaviors that help them navigate dating and pressures to have sex (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011). Present fathers are needed for the guidance, personal growth, emotional development and self-worth of their children, particularly daughters (McKenzie & Casselman, 2017). Present fathers are needed – especially for daughters – as they teach them to know their value in life. Present fathers are needed for daughters as they teach them to know their value in life and, according to Hutchinson and Cederbaum (2011), they are needed to provide their daughters with insider information to help them with "developing insights about men, comfort in interacting with men, and, ultimately, skill in managing men and their relationships with men" (p. 561).

Chapter Summary

As revealed through the literature reviewed, father absence affects sons and daughters emotionally, socially, behaviorally, and educationally well into adulthood. Daughters, however, are more likely to engage in early sexual activity, exhibit risky sexual behaviors, and experience teen-age parenthood more so than sons. Daughters are more likely to suffer with depression, develop negative coping styles, and develop maladaptive internalizing behaviors such as self-harm due to feeling rejected by their absent fathers. Daughters are also more likely to suffer academically as a result the absence of their fathers which contributes to low self-esteem and low feelings of self-efficacy.

While considering topics of research, this researcher discovered that a greater discussion on the phenomenon of father absence in the Black community and its effect on Black daughters more specifically was very much needed. The decision to focus primarily on father absence in the Black community is not intended to diminish the importance of fathers across all ethnic groups; however, the disparity between father absence in the Black community as opposed to other communities is quite significant according to the literature available. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) reported that Black people account for only 13.4% of the population yet account for the highest rate of father absence. Ellerbe et al. (2019) reported that 72% of all Black children are born to unmarried parents and are usually raised solely by a single mother. Not only are the numbers of Black children born to single mothers disproportionate in comparison to their percentage of the overall population, but Black men are also disproportionately incarcerated which only exacerbates the issue of father absence in the Black community.

According to the literature reviewed, fathers – regardless of their color or ethnicity – are needed for the positive cognitive development, skills, and growth of their children. Fathers are

needed for the mental health of their children, to help children develop healthy eating habits, to promote the academic success of their children, to foster the healthy development of relationships, and to help children navigate through life, learning, maturing, and growing.

As detailed by the literature reviewed, children struggle with their identity when fathers are missing. When fathers are absent, their children struggle with feeling loved, and they are more likely to develop behavioral issues such as aggression and delinquency. Father-absent children struggle with a sense of belonging and they often feel a sense of responsibility for their father not being present in their lives. Children need their fathers, and the intent of this study is to shed light on the areas affected by father-longing in the lives of father-absent children or, more specifically, father-absent Black daughters and their lived experiences.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This phenomenological study uses a qualitative research method. Hopkins et al. (2016) described phenomenology as a research approach that extensively studies the experiences of people to understand a specific phenomenon, occurrence, and/or life experience. This research method is appropriate for this study because of its accommodating factors as it allows the researcher freedom to focus on the phenomenon of father absence and its effect on African American daughters specifically (Van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological approach also allows the researcher to share the stories of participants in their own words, and it allows the researcher freedom to share their own experiences with the phenomenon as a starting point to the discussion of the research topic if the researcher so chooses (Van Manen, 1990).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their stories the meaning they attached to the experience. This study also sought to go beyond the discussion of the meaning each participant attached to their experience of living without their father consistently active and present in their lives through having participants share their perceived understanding of how the experience of living their life without their father present affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

To obtain that information, I conducted an in-depth interview investigation into the lived experiences of father-absent African American women to analyze and identify similarities and differences and to explain, in detail, the meaning each participant derived from the experience of living without a father present in their lives. Van Manen (1990) stated that "phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret

these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness" (p. 11). Finally, in conducting this research, I am seeking to understand better the meaning each woman ascribed to their experience – mentally and emotionally – to have them share their experiences in their own words freely and honestly. This researcher also seeks to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of African American women of their socialization during adolescence without the active presence of their fathers?

2. How do African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

3. How do African American women describe their behavior during their adolescence growing up without the presence of their fathers?

4. How do African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

Qualitative Design

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological methodology was appropriate for this study because research done from a phenomenological point of view allows the researcher to ". . . question the way we experience the world for the purpose of knowing and understanding the world in which we live in as humans" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5). Phenomenology as explained by Bliss (2016) "is a deep investigation of what experiences mean to people and concern the investigation of every human experience to learn the common sense understanding and meaning those experiencing them make of their experiences and those of others (p. 14). Father absence is a human experience common to people of all ages,

genders and ethnic groups; however, the meaning and understanding one derives from that experience will vary from person to person.

The phenomenological research methodology allows the individual experience to be explored and shared as it was built upon the understanding that one cannot generalize human experience as it is not an empirical analytic science (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology acknowledges the nuance of experience while also providing "clarification of the nuanced essence of the lived experiences of the phenomenon based on studying, describing, and interpreting the perception, beliefs, feelings and memories of the person who experienced the phenomena (Bliss, 2016, p. 15). Phenomenology research does not seek to solve problems; it seeks to find meaning in human experiences, and, therefore, asks questions of meaning so that the researcher can respond more thoughtfully with understanding to spark needed conversations ". . . in a personal way, for anyone who hopes to benefit from such insight" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 23).

Phenomenology as detailed by Bliss (2016) involves four lifeworld elements: 1) our reaction to spaces around us like a new city or building; 2) how we experience time like the past, present or future; 3) intersubjectivity of the world or the relationships with have with one another; and 4) the physicality of our experience like being cold, excited or experiencing fear (pgs. 15-16). Exploring the phenomenology of an experience is to "study the consciousness of the person who experienced and the meaning they make of it."

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their stories the meaning they attached to the experience. This study also sought to go beyond the discussion of the meaning each participant attached to their experience of living without their

father consistently active and present in their lives through having participants share their perceived understanding of how the experience of living their life without their father present affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

Research Sample

Gentles et al. (2015) defines sampling in research as, "the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters for characteristics of the whole population" (p. 1772). The population for this study was father-absent African-American women who lived without a father present since birth or experienced his departure from their life before the age of 18. This researcher is interested in learning what meaning they extracted from their experience of living without a father and how they perceive that experience affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally in their mid to late adolescence between the ages of 12 and 18.

The sample for this proposed study was selected using a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling, as defined by Palinkas et al. (2015), is the process of selecting "individuals and groups that are knowledgeable and experienced with a specific phenomenon of interest" (p. 534). This researcher chose the purposive sampling technique for this study because sampling methods such as simple random, systematic, and stratified are more probability driven and they are used to generalize. The phenomenological research approach is not designed to generalize as it is the study of human life experience; therefore, a sampling method that allows freedom in selecting the sample is needed.

Purposive sampling is also appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to choose participants that share similar characteristics from environments that are information-rich (Gentles et al., 2015). Potential participants for this study must have the following

characteristics: (a) they must be an African American woman between the ages of 18-28; (b) they must have lived without their biological father present since birth or experienced his departure before the age of 18; (c) they must have a willingness to participate; (d) they must be open, honest, and willing discuss their experiences in detail; and (e) they must be available for all scheduled interviews.

Potential participants were recruited through social media posts, emails from referrals received about potential participants, and various information-rich environments such as East Tennessee State University and other community organizations. The process of recruiting participants for this study included placing flyers on bulletin boards in the information-rich locations (with the proper permissions and approvals). The flyers included a brief description of the study, criterion required, risk, potential benefits, the name of the institution, and contact information.

After participants were selected, each received a formal invitation letter to confirm their participation. Fifteen women plus three alternates were selected to participate. The alternates were selected as backup participants in the event one or more of the participants selected must withdraw from the study or becomes unavailable; this approach will keep the number of participants at 15. Immediately following participant selection, and before conducting the individual interviews, the researcher conducted 15-30-minute informational meetings via a conferencing service such as Zoom or Skype or by telephone to discuss with each participant the details of the study. Prior to the proposed preliminary meeting each participant received a packet that included a disclosure form detailing the nature of the research and an East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (ETSU IRB) approved consent form giving the researcher permission to share their stories in their own words with the proviso that their names and identity

will be shielded to protect their anonymity. During the preliminary meeting, the researcher allocated time to answer any questions the participants may have about this study.

After the preliminary meeting was completed, each participant was contacted via email within a week. Included in that email was an interviewee instruction sheet that included a date/time-slot sheet for each participant to select up to three possible interview times. Each participant was also provided with a short sample of questions so that she could acquaint herself with the types of questions to be asked. After notification, she had one week to schedule her interview and return the informed consent document for her participation in this study.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected using the standardized open-ended interviewing method. Open-ended interviewing, gives participants the freedom and flexibility to diversify their responses and go in-depth concerning the phenomenon being investigated, giving the researcher a plethora of details to examine and share while telling their stories (Reja et al., 2003). Interviewing in phenomenological research is:

> used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that
>
> may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a
>
> human phenomenon so that it may be used as a vehicle to develop a
>
> conversational relation with the interviewee about the meaning of their
>
> experience. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66)

Open-ended interviewing provides the researcher with the information and resources needed to continue the conversation and follow up with detailed probing questions to develop a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Gentles et al., 2015). Open-ended interviewing also gives the researcher the ability to maintain control and focus during the process

of collecting data while still giving the participant freedom to expound upon and express their thoughts and emotions about their experience (Turner, 2010).

In accordance with the most recent ETSU IRB guidelines, I conducted semi-structured interviews via Zoom audio-conferencing in the privacy of my home in my locked office. To protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality participants were given alias names. I wore ear buds to ensure no one in the home could hear details of the participants interviews and participants were also given the choice to not turn on their cameras during the interview process.

During the informational meeting, details concerning the study, possible risk and expectations were discussed. Following the meeting participants were given 24 hours to give their oral consent to participate in the study. Once consent was received, the real name of each participant was deleted on all correspondence and replaced by the alias name they were given at their selection to participate in the study via the encrypted emails they were sent prior to the start of the study that included a copy of the informed consent form detailing the study, interview questions and a digital journal with their alias name affixed to it.

The digital reflection journal was optional to be used as an additional source of collecting data if a participant was unable to answer a question during the interview, wanted to expound more on a thought shared during the interview about their experience, or share thoughts about the study. Collecting data and detailed accounts of the participants' personal life experiences can be done in various ways during the interview session (Van Manen, 1990) and can be via tape recording, conversations, and the written reflections of the participants. In considering the nature of the study, the digital reflection journals lessen the pressure some participants may feel to

answer questions right away, and the journals may give the participant courage to write out the things they may find difficult to say aloud.

During the interview, I asked 12 open-ended questions while leaving room to ask additional questions as needed during the interview. I used the Zoom audio-conferencing due to my limited mobility, inability to drive at time and for its versatility to use either audio or video conferencing option to interview participants. All interviews were conducted in a private space, using the audio tele-conferencing option. All Zoom interviews were records using the record function available through Zoom and stored on the ETSU One Drive using an ETSU password protected computer.

After the data collection process was concluded, I created a digital folder labeled with the name of the study. Inside the folder, are digital files relevant to the study as well as individual folders labeled with the alias name of each participant to store their audio and transcribed interviews. All interviews were transcribed using two transcription service, the automatic transcription provided by Zoom and @Rev speech to text transcription service at well. This data was uploaded to the ETSU One Network and saved on an ETSU password protected computer in accordance with ETSU IRB protocols and guidelines.

All data collected is stored according to the storage method approved by the IRB for this type of research. Copies of all recorded data and transcribed interviews were made according to the ETSU IRB (2020) guidelines for digital research data and given to the researcher's committee chair. All digital research data was stored using the ETSU "network or ETSU approved cloud solution to reduce the odds of data loss or inappropriate release of sensitive data through accidental means" (ETSU IRB, 2020).

Data Analysis

Through the literature to reviewed, I highlighted father absence, its prevalence in all ethnic communities, and its effect on sons and daughters. More specifically, the goal of this study was to examine father absence and ways daughters are affected in various areas of their lives because of their fathers being absent. While the broader effect of father absence on daughters was explored in the literature reviewed, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American women and the effect the absence of their fathers has had on them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

A thorough investigation into the lived experiences of father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their stories the meaning they attached to their experience as well as learn more about how they perceived the experience affected their life world through in-depth interviews via telephone and Zoom video conferencing. In-depth interviewing in phenomenological research, according to Van Manen (1990), is one of the most effective ways to collect significant data to explore and analyze more closely the phenomenon being investigated. Van Manen asserts that researchers can also use interviewing as tool to expand and deepen the conversation through follow-up questions specific to the participant to probe for more details concerning their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and understanding of their lived experiences. To ensure there is enough data to analyze, Van Manen also encourages the researcher to invite the participant to share stories from their experience, and to give detailed examples about their experience.

The goal of phenomenological research according to Neubauer et al. (2019) is to "describe the meaning of the experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced" (p. 91). In conducting this study, this research was seeking to gain an

understanding the participants experience of living without their father presence to learn from them how they perceive the experienced affected their life socially, behaviorally, emotionally and educationally. More specifically, this research was interested in hearing the thoughts, insights, perception and meaning that African American women derived from the experience and what it meant to them at the time and even now as adults. To extrapolate that meaning from the data collected for this study, this researcher used the interpretive phenomenological analysis method.

Smith and Osborn (2015) describe interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as an "approach that aims to provide detailed examinations of lived experienced" (p. 41). Smith and Osborn explain that IPA is an attempt by the researcher to make sense of the participants' attempts to understand and draw meaning from the phenomenon they experienced. Van Manen (1990) explains that interpretation is the best method of conveying the meaning of the experience because, although description is adequate and helpful during data analysis, description fails to elucidate or make clear the meaning derived from the experience – a factor that is central to the goal of phenomenological research. The IPA method is the most appropriate for analyzing the data to be collected for this study because it encourages genuine reflection on the human experience and it gives the researcher room to "explore how participants make sense of the personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 53).

Being able to develop meaning from one's life experiences can be a powerful tool of personal healing and discovery. Developing meaning can also prove beneficial to others through helping them to find meaning in their personal life experiences as well as start them on a road to strength and recovery if their lived experiences caused them trauma in any way. Phenomenological human science research seeks to explore lived experiences, structures of

meaning, and their themes in terms through which they can be described and interpreted (Van Manen, 1990). The purpose of this study was to understand how the absence of a father in the life of individual participants affected their lifeworld and how those experiences compare and/or differ from other participants taking part in the study.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis, while cognitive in nature, has a reflective element important to analyzing the data for this study (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Interpretive phenomenological analysis involves not only the participant's attempt to make sense of their lived experiences, but the researcher, in their analysis, is also seeking to make sense of the experiences of the participants. To find meaning, I also made use of *dwelling*. Dwelling, in phenomenological analysis, is the act of "mining out meaning and layering themes by dwelling in the stories and experiences of each participant by listening to the whole recorded interview, re-reading transcripts several times to get a sense of the whole" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 131).

To mine out meaning in the process of analyzing the data using dwelling, I dedicated time to reading the transcriptions and listening to each individual interview multiple times. While doing this, I took notes and highlighted details unique to each participant to get a sense of the experience from the perspective of each participant to get a sense of the overall experience of each participant (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2009). After the data had been examined thoroughly, meaning categories or "parts established based on meaning discriminations called meaning units, which are practical outcomes correlated with the perspective of the researcher to help the analysis" were determined. The third step in this process, following the establishing of the meaning units, is the process of transforming those units into the psychological language of the participant or, "everyday expressions full of references relevant to the participant's world, rich with meaning" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2009, p. 252).

Prior to analyzing the data collected, each interview was individually transcribed through an online transcription service name Rev. After each transcription was completed, each transcribed interview was thoroughly reviewed while listening to the live interviews again to verify the accuracy of the transcription. Once the accuracy of each transcription was verified, they were saved individually using the given alias name of the interviewee and filed into the appropriate digital folder for that participant along with all other information relevant to them individually. The data collected for this study was then organized "according to what this study seeks to find and the questions it seeks to answer" (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003, p. 66).

After all the interviews were organized, saved and stored appropriately, the transcribed interviews were uploaded to Atlas.ti 9, a qualitative analysis software, I used to code the data, identify words and phrases frequently used by the participants as well as highlight direct quotes as discussed by O'Connor & Gibson (2003). Identifying words and phrases frequently used by the participants was helpful for identifying emerging themes important to answering the questions guiding this phenomenology research study. Identifying the words and phrases frequently used by the participants, was also helpful for identifying the meaning in the language used by participants to describe their experience of their father being absent from their life. In the process of analyzing the data, this researcher was mindful to identify emerging themes not originally considered during the process of planning for this study.

Reflexive Statement

Reflexivity in qualitative research, according to Dodgson (2019), is the process of self-examination where one examines judgments, belief systems, and practices during the data collection process to ensure "rigor and quality and is the gold standard for determining trustworthiness" (2019). Trustworthiness refers to the "credibility of the findings" (p. 220) which

is discussed in more detailed in the section on trustworthiness. Reflexivity challenges the researcher to:

> focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully monitor the impact of their bias, beliefs and personal experiences on their research; and maintain balance between the personal and universal. (Dodgson, 2019, p. 220)

Van Manen (1990) explains that the "starting point of phenomenological research is largely a matter of identifying what deeply interests you and identifying this interest as the true phenomenon" (p. 40). I chose the phenomenological approach because I am deeply interested the stories and lived experiences of father-absent Black women. Van Manen (1990) says that after that interest has been identified, it is important for the researcher then to orient themselves to that phenomenon to form questions carefully concerning the human experience that are topical to conduct a phenomenological investigation properly.

The orientation I have to this phenomenon is that of daughter, mentor, and counselor. I am a Black woman who grew up without my biological father present. I am a mentor who has mentored many father-absent women of all ethnic groups and I continue to do so. As a minister I have counseled and continue to counsel women who carry various emotions and feelings about the absence of their fathers among other things. I, therefore, have developed several questions relevant to the phenomenon to aid in conducting a thorough phenomenological investigation.

To conduct a thorough phenomenological investigation, the researcher must create space for the participant to share their experiences openly and honestly without limitation and/or restriction. The phenomenological research approach allows participants this freedom through conversational interviewing. Conversational interviewing, as explained by Van Manen (1990), is

a process where the participants are given the freedom to express their personal views about the experience they lived. Through conversational interviewing the participants are given the freedom of perception; therefore, they state openly, honestly, and freely how the phenomena affected them without feeling restricted or restrained. Darlington and Scott (2002) acknowledge that "direct quotations from participants are integral to qualitative research reports because they bring the research to life, and they show the reader the evidence upon which the researcher's interpretations are based" (p. 161).

For the research to have life and meaning of its own, the personal stories, personal reflections, and personal perceptions of the participants are needed. The phenomenological research methodology is best suited for this research because this proposal is a study of human experience, and it allows room for those experiences to be explored thoroughly. The phenomenological research methodology also allows the researcher room to not be researcher, observer, and reporter; it allows the researcher to be an active participant. This unique feature of phenomenological research adds to the richness of the investigation and keeps the lines of communication open between the researcher and participant (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as a hermeneutical human science rooted in philosophy that studies persons and their lifeworld in a way that is reflective and edifying to their personal insight and understanding of their experiences. Phenomenology describes lived experiences; it practices thoughtfulness, it seeks after meaning, and, unlike other research approaches, it does not seek to summarize or draw conclusions (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is different from other modes of qualitative inquiry in that the participant is not the center of the study; the meaning and the essence of the phenomena is (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is instrument. The researcher, according to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), is the only instrument with the flexibility to capture the subtle, complex, and consistently changing situation which is the human experience. To capture that human experience, researchers also take on the role of investigator through their collecting and analyzing of data – a process helped through indwelling or the process of actively seeking out ways to connect with participants through finding common ground with them as well as empathizing and understanding their point of view concerning their lived experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

I have functioned as investigator to examine the stories and experiences of participants through in-depth interviews while making use of indwelling to understand participants thoroughly, connect with them, and relay their stories and experiences in their own words. I have sought to create a safe environment conducive to the honesty and openness of each participant through sharing their common experience with father absence. According to Van Manen (1990) "the interview can be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee concerning the meaning of the experience" which is important to the process of the study (p. 66).

Interviewing in phenomenological research serves as tool to collect data but it also, "helps participants revisit their experiences" and it provokes conversation concerning the phenomenon (Lauterbach, 2018, p. 2884). In conducting interviews, structure must be established as conversations can easily stray from the focus and purpose of the interview which, in this study, is the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women. Conversational interviewing, as explained by Lauterbach (2018), has a needed flexibility but

establishing structure helps to keep the participants "engaged with the phenomenon as it presents itself to their consciousness" (p. 2884).

Researcher Experience

My experience with father absence began when my father passed away when I was four. He was young, having died from cardiac arrest during a routine dental procedure at age 30. Prior to his passing, he had been absent from my life about a year; he was not absent by choice. My father was absent due to a decision my mother made to leave him in Panama – the place of my birth and where he was stationed for military duty.

During my search for information about my father, I learned that my mom was 18 years old when she married my father, and he was seven years her senior. My mother was not mentally and emotionally ready for marriage but the marriage for her was an escape from the chaos and personal pain of her family life. My dad at the time of their marriage was a 25-year-old Vietnam War vet suffering from PTSD having completed three tours of duty as a pararescue medic. According to her memories he was withdrawn, sometimes erratic, hard to talk to, and he would wonder off without warning. My mom struggled with his behaviors as there were times when she felt unsafe and had reminded her of her home life, so she packed up all our things and we returned to the United States. Prior to my mom leaving, I do not have any memories of my dad and what he was like. I do, however, remember the longing I had to know more about him as I grew into my teen and young adult years.

Due to the circumstances surrounding the absence of my father, I personally cannot identify with the feelings of abandonment and rejection that other father-absent women may feel. I was fortunate enough to have a stepfather and uncles who stepped in and gave me the male support, strength, and encouragement I needed and desired as a young girl. They were a blessing

to my life because they made me feel protected and loved. While I was blessed to have men in my life, I do recall times when things got difficult for me around the age of 13 as the presence of my uncles faded and I was no longer connected with my stepfather due to the dissolved relationship between him and my mother. It was then I began to feel the absence of my father in a way I had not felt it before, and the effects of his absence stayed with me until I was much older and came to a place of healing concerning various things in my life including the absence of my father.

My professional experience with father absence stems from my work in the ministry with father-absent daughters of all ages. During my time as an after-school tutor/counsel, I often encountered both men and women who were the products of father-absent homes. In the community where I served and lived there were children living in father-absent homes. Also, in the church my husband and I pastored for 17 years, nearly 80% of the members grew up without fathers in the home or actively engaged in their lives. It was then that I realized father absence was a matter I wanted to research more closely so that I might find solutions and develop ways serve those women in our church and our community more effectively.

Researcher Bias

According to Wadams and Park (2018) bias in a research study refers to the influence of any kind that can cause distortions in the results of the study and misrepresent the experiences of the participants. Shah (2019) noted seven biases to avoid in qualitative research – four of which pertain to the participant and three to the researcher: (a) confirmation bias, happens when the researcher interprets the data to support his or her hypothesis or omit data that is contrary, (b) question-order bias, happens when some questions influence the response of the participant to

other questions, and (c) leading questions and wording bias, questions that guide participants into a particular desired direction.

To mitigate my own bias, I made use of member checking which I discuss in more detail in the following section. As Dodgson (2019) asserts it is important for me to "understand my position as well as my shared experiences with the study participants especially as it relates to similarities and differences" (p. 220). Reflexive journaling is a way for me not only to keep track of my experiences, but it is helpful in keeping track of the data and the judgements I make about it as a researcher so that I may be aware of unconscious bias or pre-existing beliefs held about the phenomenon being researched (Dodgson, 2019). As Dodgson suggests, I have made efforts to self-examine through journaling and seeking out the guidance of a mentor to help me stay focused on the research and the purpose of the research. My personal biases and understanding of the phenomenon are irrelevant to the truth of what I seek to learn and extrapolate from the data which is the meaning the participants accessed to their experience and their perception of how living without a father affected their life.

Member Checking

Member-checking is a "validation technique used to ensure that the participants own the meanings and perspectives" of the data collected during the interview process (Brit et al., 2016, p, 1803). There are many ways to use member-checking; I used member-check interviews to validate the initial interviews with each participant because they allow the researcher to, "confirm, modify if necessary, and verify the initial interview transcript" (Brit et al., 2016, p. 1803).

After all recorded interviews were concluded, I had all the interviews transcribed by @Rev transcription service. All transcribed interviews were color coded, labeled with the alias

name of the participant and stored in the of the participant, and paired with its original recorded

interview. After all interviews were properly marked and paired with the original recorded

interview, three electronic copies were created: (a) one for the interviewee to keep; (b) one to be

uploaded to the Atlas.ti 9 software for coding and data analysis and (c) one for each participant

to check the accuracy of all statements made and questions answered. Along with the additional

copy, interviewees were provided with instructions about what they were to do with the

additional copy, which was to verify all statements, make needed corrections, and return via

email.

Following the interviews, I allotted 3-5 weeks to organize, evaluate, and interpret the

research findings. After this process was completed, member-checking close-out interviews were

conducted via encrypted email. During the member-checking close-out interview, participants

were asked to examine the transcription accuracy of all statements made and quotes to be used

for the final paper and presentation for this study. Participants were given a week to look over

the information they were provided with via encrypted email, they were also encouraged to ask

any additional questions about the study, information to be used and give more insight on

anything they felt they did not answer with enough detail. Participants were also reminded of the

confidentiality of the study and thanked properly for their participation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or rigor as noted by Connelly (2016) refers to the "…confidence in the

truth of the study and its findings" (p.435). Trustworthiness was founded by Lincoln and Guba

(1985) to evaluate qualitative research as they believed using the same criteria used for judging

quantitative research did not make sense. To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research the

following four strategies are used credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020, p. 605).

Credibility in qualitative research is equivalent to what internal validity is in quantitative research in that it is concerned with the believability and truthfulness of the findings and their reflection of the phenomenon investigated (Nassaji, 2020). Credibility, according to Nassaji (2020), can be established through member-checking and triangulation. According to Schwandt (2015), triangulation "can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods" to accomplish that task (p. 298). To triangulate the data collected for this qualitative study, I used the available literature on this research topic and its theoretical framework to compare the findings of this study.

Phenomenological research is not an inflexible scientific approach that seeks to quantify, nor does it seek to generalize; generalizations block the ability of the research to develop understandings that focus on the experience lived (Van Manen, 1990). Transferability, as noted by Lemon and Hayes (2020), is considered a counterpart or "replacement of the concept of external validity or generalizability;" its goal however is not to generalize (p. 605). Transferability "is the extent to which the study can be useful to other persons" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). In considering the aim of transferability, this study is useful to other ethnic groups and women of other ethnicities because father absence can be experienced by any woman, not just African Americans or African women.

Dependability or authenticity is an alternative to reliability, and it seeks to establish consistency in how the data is collected or measured. In other words, another researcher should be able to conduct this study and "arrive at similar interpretation" (Nassaji, 2020, p. 428). Strategies for establishing dependability or consistency include data triangulation, code and

meaning saturation. Code and meaning saturation involve a coding process and the development of themes (Janis, 2022). Dependability for this study was established in the process of dwelling which is the "act of . . . mining out meaning and layering themes by dwelling in the stories and experiences of each participant by listening to the whole recorded interview, re-reading transcripts several times to get a sense of the whole" discussed earlier (Giorgi, 2009, p. 131).

There were twelve total transcribed interviews uploaded for data analysis. Once the interviews were uploaded, I read them through them again while listening to the recorded interview. Following this, I began to code participant responses to the questions asked during the interview and statements made, according to their similarity. Once all similar statements, quotes, and thoughts were coded, I was able to identify several themes from the study. I was also able to identify several responses and statements that highlighted thoughts and feelings minimally discussed or covered the available literature on the topic of father absence and the impact it has upon daughters.

Upon the conclusion of coding, there were 80 inductive codes identified and a total of 468 usable quotes. There were 20 total themes that emerged from the inductive codes and usable quotes that were grouped according to similarity and then placed in one of the following four categories: social, behavioral, emotional and educational guided research questions. After all the emergent themes were grouped and placed into their perspective categories, they were broken down into a maximum of two subcategories per category to discuss details of the findings the aligned with the findings of the current literature as well as those that covered gaps in the research on father absence as shown in Table 3.

The final component of trustworthiness is conformability. Confirmability "…concerns the extent to which others confirm the interpretation and conclusions of the researchers"

(Nassaji, 2020, p. 429). Stahl and King (2020) explain confirmability to be "...getting as close to objective reality as qualitative research can get" (p. 28). To establish confirmability, Stahl and King (2020) suggest that the research be submitted to someone objective for auditing. This final step of establishing trustworthiness can be achieved through triangulation as the process includes the submission of the research to a third party to be checked for accuracy. To ensure the confirmability of this study, I was mindful to take notes and reflect upon my role as researcher and one familiar with the experience of father absence through journaling to increase the "transparency and trustworthiness of the research findings" as suggested by Stenfors et al. (2020).

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the method of research used to address the research questions guiding this qualitative phenomenological study. In this chapter, details of the research procedure were laid out to discuss the process of recruitment, information about the study participants, the interview questions, data collection and the process of analyzing the data following the conclusion of the study. This chapter also included details concerning the experience of this researcher with the research topic along with the process this researcher used to member-check and ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their experiences the meaning they attached to living without the consistent presence, emotional engagement, and active involvement of their biological fathers. This study also sought to determine the essence of the experience by exploring the participants' perceptions of father absence and how each felt the experience of living without a consistently present, emotional engaged, and actively involved father affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

To obtain the data for this study, semi-structured individual interviews were scheduled and completed using Zoom's audio-conferencing service. During the process of each interview, participants were encouraged to speak candidly about the experiences they were willing to share comfortably. Prior to and during the interview participants were informed of their right to decline to answer any question. Participants were also given the option to take breaks or make use of the reflection journal to complete a thought, return to an unanswered question, or share more in-depth information if the discussion about their experience was too difficult mentally and emotionally for them to continue.

Research participants responded to 12 opened-ended interview questions in a semi-structured setting where they were given the freedom to respond or decline to answer a question. Open-ended interviewing, as explained by Reja et al. (2003), gives participants the freedom and flexibility to diversify their responses and go in depth concerning the phenomenon being investigated thereby giving the researcher a plethora of details to examine and share. While conducting the interviews, I also found that open-ended questioning allowed me the opportunity

to share parts of my own story that were helpful in continuing the conversation, redirecting the focus of the respondent when the interview got off track, and provide participants with encouragement to discuss in greater detail parts of their experience that they were hesitant to discuss during the early stages of the interview.

Demographics

At the conclusion of recruitment for this phenomenological study, 16 women in total volunteered to take part in the study. However, due to scheduling conflicts and the potential emotional risk discussed during the informational meeting, only 12 of the volunteers committed and gave their oral consent to participate in the study. Therefore, the sample for this study included 12 adult African American women who ranged in age from 21-62 and who experienced the absence, inconsistent presence of, and or sudden departure of their biological father prior to the age of 18 due to the dissolution of the relationship between parents, incarceration, death, and other causes.

Over half of the participants reported themselves to be single mothers at some point in their life who raised and are currently raising children in a home without fathers present. Some of the participants reported that they were raised by mothers from single mother households. And there were a few like me who had a grandmother that was also raised in a single mother household.

Four of the participants were born and raised in the northeast Tennessee region and are current residents of that region. Four of the participants were born in or spent a significant part of their youth in the North Carolina region, still have family ties in that area, and currently reside there. The remaining four participants were born and raised in California, Illinois, New York,

and Georgia where each continues to reside. To protect the identities of each participant, they were given a pseudonym.

Participant Profiles

Hana is a 55-year-old married mother of one who was the first respondent and confirmed participant of the study. Hana's experience with father absence began with the dissolution of her parent's marriage when she was 12 years old. Initially, the contact between her and her father remained intact following the parents' divorce; however, contact began to dimmish due to her father being physically abusive and other factors that led to him becoming more of a "background father," as Hana described him and the lack of his consistent presence in her life.

Eriya is a single woman aged 30 with no children. Her experience with father absence was due to the incarceration of her father prior to her being born. Her mother encouraged a bond be established between Eriya and her father, but those attempts failed. According to Eriya, her dad was, "disinterested in establishing a relationship with her, and he was toxic," causing her to sever all ties with him and cease all attempts to establish a relationship with him.

Sanisa is a single woman aged 31 with no children and three younger sisters – Kaia age 30, Doceana age 21, and Cherry under age 10. After confirming her participation in the study, Sanisa suggested her sister Doceana become a participant. Ultimately, Sanisa and Doceana were both chosen as participants as they both met the criteria; also, although they had different fathers both fathers were absent from their lives. Sanisa recalls being made aware of her father's absence at age 12 when she and her only sister at the time, Kaia, were visiting family members in their birthplace. It was there that they both learned that the man they had been calling father for many years was not their father. They had different fathers, and Sanisa's dad had passed away – a revelation that left her with many questions and a sudden feeling of emptiness as the man she

called dad stopped coming around. Also, she could never connect with her biological father because he was deceased.

The youngest of all the participants at age 21 is Doceana who revealed that she never met her father even though he lives close to where she lived in North Carolina as an adolescent. The absence of her father became evident during school events as she was regularly active in extracurricular activities such as band. She also recalls being consistently reminded of his disinterest in being a part of her life as she was in constant contact with her uncle (the younger brother of her biological father). While she was thankful her uncle made the effort to reach out to her, she said that it often caused her to wonder why her father was never present or made the effort to reach out to her in the same manner that the uncle did.

Arba, a single mom in her 50s, shared that she became more aware of her father being absent from the home and disinterested in being a part of her following her introduction to siblings living in his home. Even though Arba spent more time separated from her father during her adolescence, she put a great deal of effort into building a relationship with him. To her dismay, Arba revealed that the efforts she put into building a relationship with her father were consistently met with rejection and comparisons to her baby sister. Arba said it was obvious that her father favored her baby sister because he would often buy her pretty things, he protected her when she needed to be protected, and if anything happened to her baby sister at school her father was there to fight for her. These things made Arba feel unwanted, unloved, and unprotected.

Chamisha a single mother of two in her late 30s shared that she became aware of her father being absent from her life following a work injury her father sustained. Her parents met while her father was legally separated from his wife and the relationship eventually ended after years of her mother enduring the physical abuse of her dad. Soon after he was injured at his job,

the relationship between her father and mom ended and he returned to his wife and the family he had with her. Chamisha remembered that there were times when her father was present; however, his appearances were often superficial and self-serving as he only seemed to show to relish in her achievements or appear to be an involved father.

Sheva is a single mom and grandmother in her late 50s who experienced the absence of her father after he was rushed into marrying another woman. She spent Sundays with her father following church as he would come get her to spend time with him. However, the quality time she spent with her father would soon be a thing of the past as Sheva's stepmother did not want her around to steal time and attention from the children they had together as well as his new stepchildren. Due to this conflict and other factors, the presence of her father began to dimmish until it was non-existent.

Bailu, a single mother in her early 60s with grandchildren, also had a father with whom she would spend Sundays. Bailu lived most of her youth in North Carolina until she was about eight years old, and her mom and siblings moved back to the Tennessee area. She, like Sheva, recalled spending time with her father and his family at family church, but their time together was "sporadic," as she described it. She recalls his family being quiet, reserved, and withdrawn even when it came to her.

Tesha is a married mom of three and grandmother in her late 50s. She was made aware of her father through ongoing court proceedings seeking to prove his paternity and hold him accountable as her father. She recalls it was a long and painful experience as she learned her father wanted nothing to do with her. He denied her as his daughter until the day he died. He constantly rejected her which caused her a lot of pain because she remembers seeing him in the court with her siblings by his side that he accepted as his own, but he repeatedly denied her and

rejected her. For her sake, her mom decided to forgo the court proceedings to protect her as his constant rejection became too much for her to bear. She said she spoke her last words to her father at the age of 13, but she had one last memorable encounter with him that sent her down a path of self-destruction and depression.

Participants ShiShi age 52 and ShiYia age 48 are both single mothers who experienced father absence due to their fathers dying when they were young. ShiShi shared that her parents had been married at a young age as teenagers, but they were together until he died from cancer when she was ten 10 years old. ShiYia on the other hand was born to a single mother who was very combative towards her father. When discussing her father and his absence, ShiYia recalled that he was present more before he died. She was not allowed to spend a lot of time with him as she resided in North Carolina, and he lived in New York where she was born. Whenever she visited, she spent time with him and his family, but that time was limited and even discouraged at times by her mom. Those moments of his presence, while few or heavily restricted, were memorable for her as he died while she was under 10 years old.

Lui'ana, a single mother of two in her late 30s, had the experience of living without her mother and before the age of seven. Lui'ana revealed that never met her father face-to-face and was made aware of his choice to abandon her at birth when she was young. Lui'ana was not only abandoned by her father – she was also placed in the foster care system until she was around 7 years due to some sensitive issues related to her mom. Although it was difficult for her to discuss the details of her life experiences, she was very transparent about how her foster care experience and the abandonment of both parents affected her life as an adolescent and now as an adult.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age When Participant Became Aware Father's Absence
Hana	12
Eriya	5
Sanisa	12
Arba	6
Chamisha	7
Lui'ana	6
Sheva	5
Bailu	6
Tesha	7
ShiShi	9
Shiyia	8
Doceana	5

Note: Table 1 is a visual representation of basic information concerning each participant along with their pseudonym

Summary of Participants' Lived Experiences

The lived experiences shared by each participant were unique regarding the circumstances surrounding the absence of their father and the meaning they attributed to living without the consistent presence of their father during their adolescence. While there were unique elements to the individual stories shared, there were multiple experiences, thoughts, and feelings the participants had in common in relation to their home life, social interactions, mental health, emotional health, behaviors, and school experiences as father-absent adolescents. Participants

recalled the financial difficulty and hardships they faced due to the mother having to take on the full responsibility of caring for their family.

Participants reported that school functions, meetings, and their participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, band, and the like often evoked feelings of shame, disappointment, and anger as neither parent was there for them. Their mothers did what they were able to do but were consistently absent due to their need to work; their fathers were consistently absent because it was their choice not to be there. The shame and disappointment each participant recounted was heightened by seeing both the mothers and fathers of classmates present and engaged with them. Participants reported no struggles with school academically; they did, however, speak of how they struggled with fitting in, fighting, and being bullied. Some dropped out of school due increased difficulties at home and early pregnancy for some.

One of the most surprising confessions made by some of the participants is that they developed feelings of anger, bitterness, and resentment towards their mothers. While some of the participants understood their mothers were doing the best they could, they could not stop thinking about and questioning her role in the absence of their fathers. Some struggled with how their mothers handled them regarding relationships with the opposite sex and some felt the mother did not do enough to protect them from the toxic behaviors of their fathers when and if he came around. The resentment expressed by some of the participants was an interesting revelation during the process of this research study, and it raises the need to expand the conversation and research on father absence and how it affects the mother-child relationship.

Participants shared that living life without their father consistently present during their adolescence caused them to experience feelings of rejection, abandonment, anger, self-hatred, and doubt. These feelings often led to their living in fear of being rejected and abandoned. They

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lived in fear of being abandoned by friends, other family members, and romantic partners. Due to their fears, participants spoke of how they wrestled with thoughts of harming themselves, suicide, and depression. Participants stated that they often struggled with making good life choices and often made poor decisions when it came to their relationships and interactions with men as they did not have a pattern of male interaction to go by.

Research Themes

Upon completion of the interviews, the audio files were submitted to Rev.com transcription service for transcription in preparation for data analysis. Prior to uploading the transcribed interviews for analysis, I read the interviews and listened to them multiple times to get an understanding of the experience from the perspectives of the participants and to get a complete view of the phenomenon. After reading the interviews, I uploaded them individually by the alias name of the interviewee and saved them under the project name "Papa was a Missing Stone" into Atlas.ti 9, a qualitative data analysis software I used to analyze and code the data. At the conclusion of coding the data, there were 80 inductive codes identified.

Following the coding process, the coded data was organized into sections according to similar themes, patterns of behavior, and thoughts pulled from participant responses and direct quotes marked for usage in the final report. To organize the quotes and coded data relevant to analysis process, I ran a report to label the data and the quotes so that they could be separated out into the following four categories: social, behavioral, emotional, and educational guided by research questions of this study. After running the report for quotes, there were 468 usable quotes identified in relation to the research questions guides this study.

There were 20 themes that emerged from this study and most of them fell under the emotional and behavioral categories. After the emergent themes were identified, grouped

according, and placed into the four categories created from the research questions guiding this phenomenological study, they were broken down into subcategories. To focus on the findings and discuss the details of the findings in-depth, each category was limited to two subcategories for discussion. There was some overlap with the subcategories of those identified themes as shown in Table 2 below. For example, the subcategory of aggression overlapped across the social, behavioral, emotional, and educational experiences of each participant and will be discussed in each category guided by the research questions. There were also a few themes that emerged from this study – shown in Table 3 – that highlight the gaps in the literature available on the topic of father absence.

Table 2

Related Themes And Research Questions

Themes	Research Q1 Social	Research Q2 Emotional	Research Q3 Behavioral	Research Q4 Educational
Cycles of Unhealthy Toxic Relationships	X			
Poor Decision Making and Coping Strategies	X			
Experienced Emotional Instability & Overwhelming Fears		X		
Consistent Battles with Depression, Low Self-esteem and Poor Self-image		X		
Sought Validation & Acceptance			X	
Developed Aggressive Behaviors			X	

School Attendance Affected by Emotional Struggles and Behavioral issues	X
Became Achievement Focused to Win Affection of Father	X

Table 3

Themes That Highlight Gaps In The Current Research On Father Absence

Theme	Research Question Category
Single Mother Resentment	Research Question 2 Emotional
Intergenerational Father Absence	Research Question 1 Social
Motivation to Achieve and Excel in School and Life to Gain the Affection of Their Father	Research Question 4 Educational

The analysis of each participant interview was guided by the theoretical framework outline for this phenomenological qualitative research study and the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of African American women of their socialization during adolescents without the active presence of their fathers?

2. How do African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

3. How do African American women describe their behavior during their adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

4. How do African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

Interview Results

This section includes the detailed responses of each participant, their personal thoughts, and honest expressions concerning their experience of living without the consistent presence of their fathers during their adolescence. This section also includes similarities to the behavioral patterns and long-lasting emotional effects of insecure attachments as detailed by Bowlby (1988) and the behavior pattern and emotional struggles reported by the participants of this study. Bowlby purported that the emotional stability of a child, adolescent, or young adult is affected by and can become insecure because of the illness or departure of a desired attachment figure. While this researcher is not qualified to diagnose each participant, the theoretical framework of this study was used to highlight the similarities between the reported behaviors of the participants and those associated with Bowlby's theory of attachment. For example, each participant reported the sudden departure of their father prior to the age of 18 for various reasons. Participants also shared pervasive issues that carried over into their adult life akin to the long-lasting effects identified with the insecure style of attachment as discussed by Bowlby in his theory of attachment.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of African American women of their socialization during adolescence without the active presence of their fathers?

The following sub themes emerged during the process of analyzing the data in relation to Research Question 1: participants detailed cycles of unhealthy and or toxic relationships, poor decision making. and destructive coping strategies.

Each participant who took part in this phenomenological study, apart from Lui'ana and Doceana, experienced the sudden and abrupt departure of their fathers. ShiShi, ShiYia, and

Sanisa lost their fathers when young due to sickness. The remaining participants repeatedly shared vivid memories of being abandoned due to the inconsistent nature of their fathers who would come around and make promises of being there for them but leave for long periods of time without a word of warning.

Bailu, Chamisha, Sheva, and Arba fathers lived near them, but their fathers made no effort to spend time with them. Bailu, for example, recalled, "even though mom and dad did not live together, I knew who my daddy was. He may see me occasionally or I might walk to his house occasionally. He was around, but he was never around while I was there." Sheva reported a similar experience; her father was nearby, but when she tried to visit it seemed as if he avoided her on purpose or spent a minimal amount of time with her while she was at his home to visit.

While discussing the details of their individual experiences with their fathers being absent, participants explained that the experience of being consistently let down, abandoned, looked over, ignored, and rejected by their fathers deeply affected every area of their lives. According to their testimonies, the absence of their fathers shaped their views about men and relationships, in general. Participants reported that the abandonment of their fathers caused them to develop a distrust for men, made it difficult for them to understand men, and caused them to develop unhealthy behaviors patterns in romantic relationships, family relationships, and their friendships.

Cycles of Unhealthy and or Toxic Relationships

Toxic relationships, according to Scott (2022), are relationships that involve partners who are insecure, manipulative, demeaning, disrespectful, abusive, jealous, obsessive, or overly clingy. The character traits reported by those who engaged in or susceptible to toxic relationships are like those associated with long-lasting effects of the avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized

attachment styles. Robinson et al. (2023), in their study on attachments, confirms Bowlby's assertation that "experiences that occur between infancy and adulthood can impact and shape our relationship" (p. 2).

Of the experiences shared and stories told by the participants, Hana's experience with her father resembles the assertions made by Bowlby (1988) that childhood attachments to significant attachment figures are important and when that attachment is distressing or suddenly severed emotional damage is caused. Casabianca and Montijo (2022) more specifically discussed how unhealthy attachments lead to unhealthy relationships – something that half of the participants discussed about themselves as they reported a consistent pattern of seeking relationships that were often physically, emotionally, and mentally damaging to themselves.

When speaking of her experience with her father, Hana stated that the relationship between her and her father was not always bad. She shared that it was her father who helped her start her first business at eight years old. It was her father who taught her about the horse business because her parents owned a successful horse business in the sixties (which was a huge accomplishment for persons of color during that time.) Her father mentored her but when his mother died, he became abusive, unfaithful to her mom, and then suddenly left. Hana reported:

> My parents split when I was 12, and that is when he did his disappearing. He became a
> background dad. I was happy to be away from the abuse. I always wished he were there. I
> wanted the good dad. I wanted the guy who took me to the auction. What went wrong?
> This all began after his mom died, so that is what went wrong. I do not know. I have
> often wondered if having both sides of the coin was worse than just the abuse alone
> because him loving you one minute and hurting you the other. So, you are always striving

to get back to that place of being loved and supported and having that taken away and

being like, I just always thought it was my fault.

Hana stated that the experience she had with her father is what contributed to the cycle of

unhealthy and toxic relationships she has had in her life. According to Hana, she developed a

"pattern of looking for dads," as she was searching for someone to give back to her what she lost

when her father suddenly exited her life.

Arba also had a very unhealthy relationship with her father:

I became aware of my father's absence from my life when I began to meet siblings I had

outside the home. I always called him by his name because my mom did. And when the

time came where I was allowed to visit him around age six or seven, I remember being

resentful and jealous because I found out I had a sister who was about three, and she lived

with our father, but I had to leave. When I did get to visit, I felt like I was an outsider. It

was only during times when I would come around when there were certain family

celebrations that he seemed to love me. When I got older, I just felt like I was a trophy.

Arba went on to explain that the relationship between her and her father caused her to develop a

"tough personality," which contributed to her getting involved in abusive relationships. Arba

recalled from her adolescence and young adulthood:

I thought verbal abuse and mental abuse was love. I thought it was okay to fight a man.

That (the relationship between her and her father) played a big role because I did not

know who I was. I did not have a man to teach me or affirm and tell me I am beautiful or

to tell me this is not how you get attention.

Sheva also reported that she developed a tough personality due to the relationship she had

with her father. Developing a tough personality meant she did not easily trust people, she was

always on guard when she encountered men, and she did not like asking for help because she did

not feel she could lean on and depend on anyone because she could not depend on her father.

According to Sheva, her father only came around for the good things, and her father was never

there to take care of her or protect her. This experience caused her to develop a distrust for men

and their ability to be there for her. Sheva said, "I had to take care of myself because no one was

going to do it."

Her mindset of doing it for herself and taking care of herself drove her into personal

success, but it has never led to success in relationships. In discussing her romantic relationships,

she talked about how the men were always comfortable with her spending money and taking care

of them, but the moment she expected the same, she said they would often make her feel like the

problems in the relationship were her fault. "The men never took responsibility" she explained.

In reflecting upon this, she admitted that she was uneasy in relationships because, seeing the way

her father never took responsibility or protected her, created in her a distrust for men and their

ability to protect and care her adequately.

Tesha remembers being driven by the fear of rejection and abandonment into

relationships due to be rejected and abandoned by her father:

When I was nine, I saw his face long enough to recognize him in the streets or whatever.

I saw him again by accident at 13. I had a friend named Noel who would brag about his

mom's boyfriend Quincy and how much fun they have and how he takes him shopping.

He kept inviting me to go with them, but I never went. One weekend, I went downtown

with a friend to pick out a Father's Day gift for her dad and we ran into Noel. He ran

over, and we began to talk. And suddenly he said, this is Quincy. And he said Quincy this

is my friend Tesha. And when I looked up to say hi, and it was my dad, who did not

acknowledge me. The last time I saw him was when we were in court with his other

children, my siblings, that he claimed but he never claimed me. He is deceased now, and

he denied me to the grave.

This rejection shook her and caused her to become very clingy and fearful of being abandoned

and rejected in relationships as well as friendship.

Bailu also carried with her a fear of being rejected and abandoned into her romantic

relationships a result of her father's absence. Bailu shared the following:

Dad really was not in my life a whole lot – just kind of sporadically. I would contact him

maybe once or twice a year, but there was no bond and he never really reached out to me.

I always wondered why I was not good enough for him to stay. Was I not important?

With that, I was always looking for a relationship of my own where we could do things

together and feel like a family. And when the relationships were not working anymore, I

wanted to hold on because I felt like I should not give up.

The abandonment she carried from her father created an insecurity that followed throughout her

adolescence as well as her adulthood. And because did not want to be left alone she allowed

herself to stay in relationships that were unhealthy and abusive.

Chamisha spoke of how the inconsistent nature of her relationship with her father as well

as the times she witnessed him abusing her mom contributed to the cycle of unhealthy toxic

relationships she had during her adolescence and young adulthood. She commented on her

father, his absence, and her relationships:

I never had a man besides my uncles tell me anything. My uncles are not going to be like,

"oh, you're pretty." That just does not happen. And your mom will tell you that all the

time, but you are like, okay, you are my mom. You are supposed to tell me that. I never

got that. My dad was very abusive to my mother. They fought a lot. When I was with my

eldest daughter's dad, it was very physically abusive and not ever seeing my mom stand

up for herself. It is like, I knew that was not normal, but at the same time in my mind it

was like, I am sure a lot of people go through this, so it is not as bad as it seems.

Chamisha learned from the interactions with her father to accept abuse and inconsistency in

relationships because this is the type of relationship she had with her father – one that was

inconsistent and marked by abuse.

Lui'ana's experience with toxic relationships is interesting as she is one of two

participants who never had any contact with her father. Regardless of never having contact with

her father, Lui'ana experienced multiple toxic relationships that finally led to her entering a toxic

marriage. After her marriage ended, she came to the realization that she was never really looking

for a significant other; she was looking for a father. She commented, "I was looking for someone

to love me the way I imagined a father should love a daughter, and he could not love me that."

Lui'ana spent a great deal of her life looking to fill the void of her father's love. She looked for it

in her social circles, her friend groups, and anyone willing to show her that love that she never

received.

According to Lui'ana her social interactions, more specifically her romantic relationships,

were driven by the desire she had for a figure in her life. When speaking of her father, his

rejection of her at birth, and the emptiness that remained, Lui'ana shared the following:

It did affect me in my relationships with men, my future marriage and subsequent

divorce. And it affects me sometimes to this day. I always wanted to find someone who

would love me for me. I chose a man who I thought to take the place of being a father. I

married him assuming that he would love me. I needed to be loved as a daughter needed

to be loved, and not as a wife which set up our marriage to be an absolute failure. And subsequently, the man that I married who also did not have his father abandoned our children.

ShiShi is one of the few participants who lost her father to an illness at an early age. Until his death he was in the home, but she did not have any memorable interactions with him to share. She, as did the other participants, reported experiencing unhealthy relationship cycles. At 15, she became involved with a man 10 years her senior. In speaking about her relationship struggles, ShiShi shared this:

> I am a grown woman, and I did not realize the absence of my father is what kept me from really growing relationally with men because I could not relate to men. I never saw the interaction or engagement of men with another woman in the home. So, everything that a man said and did, I thought it was crazy. I would literally be like; no, you are crazy to their face.

ShiShi went on to say that she was often, "baffled at how men think and how they respond to pain and hurt." All these things she said worked against her and made it hard to trust men and have healthy relationships with them.

Shiyia, who lost her father at a young age, spoke of how she was just ignorant going into relationships and her lack of understanding relationships and men led to her getting involved in relationships that were not extremely healthy. She spoke of how her mother would just tell her not to date, but she was never taught anything about relationships. As her father had died when she was young, Shiyia did not have many memories to share about her father, but she did mention moments she spent with him prior to his death. While the memories Shiyia shared about

her father were mostly positive, she still reported struggles with relationships as an adolescent as she did not have a proper point of reference from which to draw.

The remaining three participants, Eriya, Sanisa, and Doceana, were not currently involved in romantic relationships, but they all had fears and concerns they expressed about relationships because of their experiences with their fathers. They all shared how they struggle with the thought of trusting men to be honest. In Eriya's case she wonders if she will be loved and accepted as she is due to the hurt, she carries because of the verbal abuse she experienced from her father. Father absence plays a major role the romantic relationships women go on to have later in life because fathers are important role models to their daughters.

Poor Decision Making and Destructive Coping Strategies

Yuniar (2021) in his systematic review on attachment styles and the social skills of children found that children with insecure attachments often lacked the social skills to navigate their environment, make good choices, and resolve conflict. Bonache et al.'s (2019) study of adult attachment styles, destructive conflict resolution, and partner violence found that those with highly avoidant attachment styles made use of destructive conflict resolution strategies and they displayed dysfunctional thought patterns.

Each participant shared how they often struggled with making good choices when it came to relationships as they did not have their fathers present to teach them how to interact with men and what to expect from them. Participants also reported that they developed destructive coping patterns in response to the pain, rejection, hurt, anger, frustration, and disappointment with their home life especially as it related to the absence and or inconsistency of their fathers.

In discussing their struggles with decision making and destructive coping strategies, each participant was firm in their belief that the presence of their fathers would have deterred them

from making the poor decisions they often made. Father presence would have been instrumental in helping them develop better conflict resolutions skills in their everyday life. Arba had this to say about the decisions she made in her youth:

> I became very promiscuous seeking male attention. I did not know who I was. If my father would have been a steady part of my life, I would have made different decisions. I am sure if he would have been a part of my life, I would not have dropped out of high school. It was really a lot. I believe I would have made different decisions if my father was a part of my life.

Arba not only suffered with her decision making, but she also struggled to cope properly with the pain of being rejected by her dad. Arba struggled to cope with the jealousy she felt over siblings who had the attention and support of her father. She also struggled with the fear of not having his protection. All those emotions led to Arba developing a "threatening stance and an aggressive personality," as she described it, because she had already determined and experienced the lack of support and protection she needed from her father. Arba was driven by a need to protect herself, but her aggressive response to everything only proved to be more damaging to her.

Sheva reported that she experienced difficultly in making good decisions when it came to relationships in her adolescence and adulthood. Like Arba, she developed a strong, aggressive, and tough personality to protect herself to survive but her decision making still suffered. Sheva recalled the following:

> I became super independent to the point that I could take you or leave you. I decided that I did not need you like that because it was my own protection too, for not having my father there and not having somebody to protect me.

Bailu, ShiShi, Shiyia, and Chamisha shared the same sentiments as Arba and Sheva when recounting their experiences and struggles with decision making and coping strategies as they passionately believe they would have made different choices about life if their fathers had been present. They also insisted that they would not have felt the need to fight in the manner they did if their fathers had been presented to fight for and protect them. Bailu retorted these words passionately with her voice trembling while recounting certain events from her adolescence:

> When I had my first relationship and got pregnant with my oldest daughter, I longed for my dad because the relationship was abusive. I wished that he were there to protect me. And sometimes my mom would have guys that was there that would be mean to her, and I wished he were there to protect her. I felt his absence most when I was pregnant, and I really needed him.

ShiShi stated that present fathers function as a deterrent to child predators. ShiShi reported that she became involved with a 25-year-old man at the age of 15, and she firmly stated that relationship never would have happened if her father had been there. While she did not struggle with feelings of rejection and abandonment, ShiShi, did report consistent struggles with making good decisions. ShiShi also reported that she developed destructive coping strategies in other areas of her life as well. One of the major struggles she mentioned was her inability to interact with men and respond to them properly She felt having a father present would have better equipped her to cope with broken communication and broken relationships.

Aside from their inability to make good choices, Tesha, Eriya, and Lui'ana developed mental and emotional disorders that required them to undergo professional treatment. Due to a persistent eating disorder, depression, and fear of abandonment, Tesha sought out medical help and spiritual counseling to help her overcome the pain of being rejected by her father. Eriya

revealed that she is currently under the care of a therapist for the depression, anxiety, and body dysmorphia that she developed following her experience with her father. Lui'ana confessed that she began to self-harm because of the inability to cope properly with the traumatic experiences of her youth. The maladaptive coping patterns she developed in her youth persisted into her adulthood resulting in her making several suicide attempts. Lui'ana revealed she was finally able to overcome the trauma of her youth, the absence of her father, the depression, and the self-harm by seeking out the help of a mental health professional.

Research Question 2

How do African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

The following sub-themes emerged during the process of analyzing the data in relation to research question two: participants reported that they experienced emotional instability, overwhelming fears, consistent battles with depression, low self-esteem, and poor self-image.

When asked to share details about their perception on how their experience as a father-absent adolescent affected them emotionally and mentally, each participant spoke of how their thoughts towards themselves became a huge issue. Most of the participants reported that they were often off balance emotionally. They experienced all kinds of fears as well, such as the fear of being abandoned, the fear of being rejected, the fear of not being wanted, and the fear of not being good enough. Aside from the overwhelming fears they faced, at least half of the participants reported that they battled depression, thought about killing themselves, and harmed themselves. They also reported having exceptionally low self-esteem and a poor image of self. Cella et al. (2020) found that children who perceived high paternal rejection struggled with psychological emotional maladjustment and in some cases develop emotional eating disorders.

Campbell and Winn (2018) found daughters with fathers who reject or refrain from bonding with them develop self-esteem issues and struggle mentally and emotionally as they struggle with rejection and are more likely to develop eating disorders.

Experienced Emotional Instability and Overwhelming Fears

As each participant shared father absence experiences and the ways each perceived that absence during their adolescence affected them emotionally, participants spoke of how they suffered with emotional instability and overwhelming fears such as the fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, and fear of not being loveable or having successful relationships. Emotional instability for the participants came through bitterness, anger, resentment, and jealousy, as well as the lingering assumption that they were unlovable, unwanted, and unworthy of love during their adolescence. Some of the participants not only battled with these emotions during their adolescence; they also carried these emotions into their adulthood affecting various areas of their lives. Some participants spoke of how they often questioned their worth as did Bailu who said she often wondered, "Why was I not good enough for him to stay?"

Arba revealed that she harbored a deep resentment and anger toward her father because of his absence and inconsistent involvement in her life. She remembers her father being around, but he had little to do with her. What Arba remembers was his favoritism and doting upon her baby sister whom he had with another woman. On the rare occasions that Arba visited or stayed with her father, witnessing the favor her father showed towards her baby sister caused her to feel jealous, angry, unloved, and unwanted. She shared the following from her experience:

> I was very resentful, very resentful. There was a lot of bad blood between us because of how I was treated as an adult and older teenager. I was not treated as if I was one of his children. He accused me of so many things, so I struggled.

As she continued to speak about the absence of her father, she recalled:

> I would see him periodically. He would come by and maybe drop off some money and then keep going. But it was never a consistent thing when I would see him up until I was older. When I would see my younger sister, she and I would talk when I was in grade school, and she would talk about different things and she'd tell me things about her and dad like "we hung out, or we went and did something today and I had on this yellow outfit and daddy complimented me on my outfit and things like that. And I was like, really? So, I asked her do you have a lot of clothes and she was like yes. As a child, I mean, coming up, I just did not have a lot. I equated that to him not being around. And I had a problem because he had my sister, but then there was a stepsister and a stepbrother. And he also at times had some of his other children that lived with him, but I did not get a chance to live with him.

Arba revealed that the rejection and dismissal by her father, whom she rarely saw, was devastating and difficult for her to manage. All she wanted from her father was the same love and attention he gave to her siblings who lived with him. Arba revealed that the longing she had for the love and attention of her father contributed to her getting involved in abusive relationships. Arba also admitted that she often equated the abuse from her partners to love because she had no male guidance, protection, or an example from her father of how men should treat women. She stated that she had no idea of what healthy male and female interactions looked like in a relationship because she did not see it in her home, nor did she see it when she was with her father. Her lack of experience caused her to suffer.

Bailu, when discussing her emotional state in relation the absence of her father during her adolescence, spoke of how the inconsistent presence and eventual absence of her father left her

with a fear of being abandoned and left alone. The fear she wrestled with eventually became the driving force behind much of her erratic behavior when it came to the dissolution of relationships – especially romantic ones. As was true for other participants, the absence of Bailu's father put her mother in the position of providing the primary financial support and caregiver of the family. As a result of her mother's need to work, Bailu as did Sheva, Sanisa, Hana, Tesha, and Arba found themselves tending to younger siblings in addition to attempting to make it through the turbulence of their own adolescence.

In response to the absence of her father, his perceived rejection of her, and the early responsibility she assumed to care for her siblings, Bailu developed a desire for a different outcome in her own life. Instead of a home with an absent father, a mother having to do all the work, and children left to raise themselves, Bailu began to yearn for the perfect relationship and a complete home. Here is what she shared about her thoughts and emotions during her adolescence:

> I wanted a relationship where I could be with somebody and they would love me, and we could do things together. I guess just wanted to have that family feel. However, when the relationship was not working anymore, I still wanted to hold on. I wanted to hold on because I felt like I should not give up. I should hold on to it anyway.

Hana spoke of how the absence of her father left her empty emotionally to the point that she began a search to replace him just to fill the father void. Hana revealed that her experience with her father was not only emotionally scarring for her, but it was also dangerous because it caused her to develop a tolerance in relationships that were sexually, physically, and emotionally abusive. She stated regarding her emotional state in relation to the absence of her father:

When my dad did his disappearing act, my mom did a disappearing act too. She was

working and attending school at Hopkins. She was not there, so my mom and I had

issues. After dad left, I got a new daddy. The first was a neighbor of ours by the name of

Kenneth who was a card-carrying member of the Klan. I am grateful to Casey because he

became a positive male role model in my life. After Casey, there was Hank who was

really like my second dad.

As Hana continued speaking on her emotional state following the sudden departure of her dad,

the quest she embarked upon to fill the void became more difficult and compromising:

After Hank, there was Bruce, who was in his sixties. Bruce was so funny, but he was a

borderline alcoholic. He would often come out to the farm, go riding, and get drunk as a

skunk. He had a little camper on the farm where he would go to sleep it off until he was

able to drive home. I remember there was one day he did not sleep it off. He had come

back from riding while I was out in the barn cleaning stalls. When he came back, he was

drunk, so I pulled him off his horse, laid him out on the bench, and I took the horse to get

him cleaned up. While I was there cleaning the house, I was unaware that Bruce had

come into the stall. The horse was facing the front by the stall door, and I was on the

inside of the stall, and it was at that moment I realized I was trapped. He was just a lush.

He said, let me feel you. Just let me touch you and take care of you. At that moment, I

thought he had power over me so instead of fighting him, I just stood there and was like

just get it over with. For me it was losing power, but it also started a cycle for me. I was

with Bruce up until I was 18 years old, he was my sugar daddy, basically. And there were

more after him.

Hana said that her experience with Bruce coupled with the desire she had for a father figure in her life was the beginning of a vicious a cycle of toxic, emotionally damaging, and mentally distressing relationships for her that would continue into her adult life. As a result of her father's absence and her desperate need for him in her life, Hana experienced emotional brokenness and willingly submitted herself to sexual physical abuse. She was a teenage girl when she became involved with Bruce.

Chamisha described herself as being terribly angry and resentful during her adolescence and young adulthood as she had several issues to work through regarding the absence of her father and her desire for his active engagement in her life. Chamisha reported that she was finally able to overcome the wounds of her father being absent from her life, but it took a significant amount of time and commitment to therapy because the emotional wounds were so deep. He was never there for her and her sister, and when he was around, he was uninvolved. Chamisha said her dad would make promises to take her and her sister shopping, but he never kept those promises. Chamisha remarked that the only thing her father was consistent about was disappointing her and her sister:

> I found myself asking, what did I do so bad that this person is just choosing not there? It made me seek out relationships with men in hopes that they would be there for me, but those relationships always ended badly. I just wanted that love and affection from a male. I hated my father for a long time, but I do not anymore. I had to do a lot of work on me to get rid of those feelings. Other than anger, I just felt betrayed and abandoned and I had a lot of issues with abandonment growing up.

Tesha recalls being struck with the fear of rejection and abandonment in every area of her life. Tesha did not just fear rejection and abandonment in romantic relationships; she feared

being rejected and abandoned by everyone with whom she established close and loving relationships:

> It was not just male relationships that I struggled with. I struggled with levels of rejection in every relationship. I was always expecting them to leave at any point. My thing was let me leave first. So, I even had to find coming into my fifties that I needed to deal and confront those issues that were connected to that because it was so easy for me to walk away from relationships, valuable relationships. But that was fear. I would say if you were going to leave too just go ahead, and I will just deal with somebody and then somebody else would come and not really establish any level of a permanent relationship. I have only had two long-term relationships. All these years that I have lived outside of my family, they are the only two people I have maintained an on-going relationship with.

Eriya reported that she suffered severely in her emotions during her adolescence and in the present because of her father absence experience. The attachment between Eriya and her father was very insecure. Eriya's father was verbally abusive and extremely critical of her looks and her weight. The hurt and circumstances of Eriya's father becoming an absent figure along with the critical words, belittling, body shaming, and rejection stuck with her leaving her emotional broken. When asked to share a little about her emotional state, this is what she said about her past and current emotional state:

> Due to my inability to deal with the trauma, I became an emotional eater. He would say to me that I was too fat and then he would point out my size. He would tell my mom that I was bigger than her. He would tell me that no man would ever love me because I was so fat, and he would say it was because of my weight. To this day I cannot look in the mirror for more than five minutes. I cannot accept compliments from anybody.

Doceana reported that she was able to make it through her adolescence with a strong sense of self, a healthy mindset and emotional stability due to the encouragement and strength of her mom and sisters. Recently, however, she confessed that she has begun to deal with insecurities about herself, questions about her worth and has begun to wrestle with the fear of rejection and abandonment since entering college – an experience she equates to recent thoughts about her father and his absence from her life:

> A lot of times, a lot of insecurities come from it because you do not feel like you are enough. I know it is more of a reflection on his character for him leaving. At the same time though, you cannot help but think, did I do something wrong. My thoughts about myself are usually healthy but you kind of have those times where you get in a slump, and you are just not okay. I just have a bunch of questions.

As Doceana attributed her father-absence experience and her thoughts and feelings about the experience she spoke of how her father's absence has put her at a disadvantage with relationships now that she is dating and is thinking about her future. Doceana recalled this:

> I never had an example to show me how I should be treated or how a lady should treat a man. So, I am kind of at a disadvantage. Recently, my uncle, my dad's brother and the only person from his side of the family that has stayed connected with me, asked me if I plan to get married and having a family. And I was like, yes, for sure. He asked if I would want my dad to be there, and I realized yes, I do. The only part about that, that kind of sucks is this, he was not there for me, so why would he be there that or any kids that I have? So, I have been thinking a lot.

> Lui'ana recalls being in shambles emotionally for much of her adolescence and into her adulthood due, in large part, to her experience of living in foster care until the age of seven.

Lui'ana reported that the experience of being abandoned by her mother exasperated her pains and fears. Although she was later reunited with her mom, she still wrestled with the fear of being abandoned, rejected, and left alone suddenly: a pain that continues to hover over the relationship between her and her mother. She especially had a hard time with never being acknowledged or claimed by her natural father – an experience she believes not only affected her emotionally in her adolescence but also affects her as an adult:

> I did not like myself growing up. I hated every part of me because I felt like it was my fault that my father left. I felt like I did something wrong, and I did not do anything wrong. I was just two days old when he left. I was an emotional wreck during that time. I tried to fit in with so many people that I changed my identity.

She continued speaking about how the absence of her father set the emotional stage for life as a youth as well as an adult. The absence of her father coupled with her experience in foster care left her with traumatic scars that affected every area of her life especially her relationships:

> The absence of my father affected so much for me, my relationships with men, played a role in my marriage and subsequent divorce. Still to this day, it even affects what I think, how I feel, and he words I might say. I always wanted a dad. I wanted someone who was going to be like, let me come and rescue you from some of the trauma you experienced. I was always looking for that father figure, looking for a male to love me and tell me that I was beautiful, that I was perfect, that I was an angel so that I could be daddy's girl, and I never got it. I had always wanted to find someone who would love me for me, if that makes sense and could just rescue me from a lot of the drama that I experienced.

> Sanisa, ShiShi, and ShiYia all shared the experience of their father dying when they were young. Considering that experience, they perceived there was no real effect on their emotional

state because of their fathers being absent. Living in a home without a father present was nothing out of the norm as they had friends and family members who grew up without fathers as well. While they did not report significant struggles during their adolescence, they did make mention of moments where they were emotionally triggered by certain experiences during their adolescence such as the experience Sanisa shared:

The only time I would say that I was really affected. When you see other people shopping with their dad or doing stuff with their dad. And then there was that one time, a friend of the family, her dad had offered to take me and my sister with his daughter to a father/daughter dance and I did not want to go. Cause at the time I was like, well he is not my dad. My sister went and looking back I wish I went because they had a good time. But I just wanted my dad.

When sharing about her experience of losing her father at the age of ten, ShiShi admitted that his death had little effect on her emotionally. She and her siblings were shielded from their father's sickness which caused them more shock than anything. She went on to explain that she and her siblings were able to make it through that experience due to the strength, support, and love of the women in their family. ShiShi also revealed that the emotional break and struggle over the loss and absence of her dad from her life came much later when she was grown with her own children:

I did not know the importance of having a father or the importance of having that paternal love. Because I think though if you never had it, you do not really understand the importance of it. And then when you do not have friends with dads saying things to you like, oh, me and my dad did this or me and my dad did that, you do not know what you are missing. You do not have visually. So it was not until my adulthood, after I had

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already had my children, that I realized how important it was and how much it affected

me emotionally. I am a grown woman, and I did not realize the absence of my father is

what kept me from really growing relationally with men because I could not relate to

men. I never saw the interactions or the engagement of men with another woman in the

home. So, everything a man would do or say, I thought it was crazy. I have been

misjudging, misunderstanding and misinterpreting.

As she continued to speak about her father absence experience and how her emotions were

impacted, she mentioned her disappointment and anger with her uncles.

I remember being hurt because my uncles did nothing when our dad died. I thought to

myself, your brother had five kids. He died and left five kids here. I was upset with them,

I had to get over that. They did not even step up. They never checked in on us. They did

not come by. They did not make sure we had a man in our life. They did not and that just

was not fair. So, I thought that that was foul. But at the same time, they had raggedy

lives, but I was really upset and hurt especially for my brothers because they had no male

role models.

ShiYia remembered fondly the feelings of excitement she experienced at getting to spend

time with him because her mother kept a close reign on her ability to know him and get close to

his family. ShiYia was eight when her father passed away and her memories were those of a

doting father who loved her. Due to those fond memories, she never wrestled with the fear of

rejection or abandonment. She as did ShiShi had a good support system of "strong praying

females" as she phrased it who kept her well-grounded through her adolescence. However, she

experienced a longing for her father:

I felt the absence of both my mother and father during school events when parents needed

to be there. My mom was a single parent and she worked quite a bit, so, she was not

always present. There was no Plan B? Right. So, you know, I remember being at sporting

events in middle school and high school. She was very much absent. And I think some

encouragement would have come if she were there. You knew, she was very much absent

during those times because she was working, not because she did not want to be there,

but she was working. Also, she did not make an effort because I do not think she knew it

was that was important.

ShiYia also noted that her father's absence was even more evident when it came to her emotional

state in relation to her interactions with men:

I would say not having that father figure, that voice, that man's perspective as it pertains

to relationships was a strong disadvantage. My mom did not talk to me about

relationships. She had a fear I would get involved in relationships too young and make

irresponsible decisions and repeat the cycles. But it left me at a disadvantage mentally

and emotionally and I was left to navigate these things on my own.

Consistent Battles with Depression, Low Self-esteem, and Poor Self-Image

In reviewing participant responses regarding their father absence-experience and their

perceived thoughts on how the absence of their father affected them emotionally, depression was

highlighted as a major theme of discussion. According to the literature reviewed father-absent

daughters are more likely to suffer with emotional instability and mood disorders such as

depression. Demindenko et al. (2015) found that perceptions of being rejected and unwanted by

their fathers are significant factors in daughters' developing depression. Spruit et al. (2019) in

their study on attachment styles and depression, found a significant correlation between depression and insecure attachments in children and adolescents.

Hana reported that the dysfunctional relationship between her and her father not only affected her emotional state, but it also influenced every new relationship she entered. She loved her father and had a deep level of respect for him because he was a doting father who taught her a great deal; however, he changed suddenly becoming an abuser to her and her mother and engaged in marital infidelity. The father she knew left the relationship mentally and emotionally and his physical departure soon followed. Hana recalled that things in her life became so hectic that she sought out help for herself:

> I was around 11 or 12ish when things were getting hectic, so I put myself in therapy. I started going to my guidance counselor at school, and she came out, did a home visit, and thought everything was fine. And so, she just encouraged my mother to be more of a help to me with dealing with my father.

Unfortunately, Hana never got the support she needed at that time from her mom because her mom disappeared as well. Hana remained emotionally broken, mentally scarred, and "looking for daddy love in all the wrong places," as she put it. She was so desperate to find a replacement dad that she willingly surrendered to relationships that were both abusive and demeaning at times. In exchange, she received what she desperately wanted from her father: attention and support even though it was at the expense of her mental and emotional health.

Tesha recalls her mental state being heavily affected by her father's rejection because it involved a long court battle that her mother eventually forwent. However, Tesha had previously run into her father playing the role of father to a friend of hers, and she remembers seeing him with her siblings that he joyfully embraced. She was the exception for some reason, and it was

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her father's staunch rejection and consistent bullying she experienced that plunged her into mental darkness during her adolescence and early adult years:

> I struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts until I was probably 30 years old. There were seasons I contemplated suicide because I was just hurt so bad. But I did not know how to put words to it. And I used to think a lot about what I was going through. And what kept me grounded was I gave my life to Christ at nine years old. So, I grew up in the church, and I knew how the worst sin you could commit was suicide, so that is what kept me from following through. There was, however, a lack of self-value, a lack of self-worth and I just never felt good enough. I never felt like anything I was just kind of here existing. I made crazy decisions when it came to boyfriends and everything. I was promiscuous at the age of 12.

Tesha also shared that she developed an eating disorder that she struggled with overcoming late in her adulthood:

> I was regularly active, but I still just ate and ate and ate and ate. And out of guilt, because she could not spend time with me, my mom made sure I had all the cakes and pies and candy and whatever else I wanted.

> Eriya's early memories of her father were of visiting him in prison as he was incarcerated at the time of her birth. When asked to share her thoughts on the absence of her father in relation to her mental state, she stated that her father had a huge effect upon her mental state before he disappeared from her life as he was verbally abusive, hypercritical, and always made her feel that she was not good enough for him or anyone.

> My father was always making nitpicky comments to me about things that did not align with his idea of what his daughter should look like, so the relationship became fractured.

His words, however, followed me. I remembered those snide comments he made. And it started to affect me in school when others were pointing out the same things that my father picked at me about. It started affecting my body image, so I became an emotional eater. His word dragged me down mentally even though he was out of my life.

As she continued speaking, Eriya revealed that it was the death of her grandfather that turned her emotional world upside because he was the only father she knew. Her grandfather was the most influential male she had in her life aside from her uncle who passed when she was twelve and her pastor. The love, support, encouragement, and compassion she received from him served as a counterbalance to the rejection and negativity of her father. She lost that balance with the death of her grandfather which made it difficult for her to fight off the painful words of her father.

Eriya revealed that she continues to carry deep mental and emotional scars because of the toxic relationship dynamic between her and her father. She has been diagnosed with bi-polar depression as well as body dysmorphia and is receiving treatment for those issues. She revealed that she cannot even look at herself in the mirror for more than five minutes or take compliments from people who tell her she is pretty because she is haunted by her father's words:

Mentally I am constantly trying to remind myself that his opinion has no relevance on how I view myself. And I try to remind myself that him calling me ugly, sad, unworthy of being loved and all those things has no precedence over who I am as a person, but it is hard. I try to break those patterns of saying this. I try to tell myself his words are not true, but I feel like they are the truth sometimes.

Eriya painfully revealed that the words of her father were a consistent source of pain for her. While she was relieved to be separated from her father and his verbal abuse, she still questioned

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her value and her worth. She, as did many of the participants, found herself asking, "Why was I not good enough for him to stay."

Chamisha reported that she was heavily affected by her father's words and actions. Chamisha said that her father would often make promises to her and her sister that he broke often with no remorse. He was abusive to her mother – a fact she remembers as they fought a lot. She did not describe herself as being depressed but she did deal with depression in her adolescence, and she had serious issues with her self-esteem:

> I always had weight issues. I was always heavier than most of my peers and my breast did not look the same as the others. My stomach was bigger than my peers during that time and I am also dark-skinned. My dad is bi-racial. His mother was white/native American, and his dad was my complexion, but everyone on that side of the family is light-skinned except for me and my grandfather. So having that sense of not feeling like I belonged or not as good as them because I am darker. It played a huge part in how I felt about myself. And I did not have a father there to tell me I was beautiful as I was.

Initially, Doceana could not comment on how the absence of her father affected her emotionally because she never thought about it, and she did not want to do so. However, as the interview progressed, she returned to those interview questions that were difficult for her to answer initially. She recalled only one emotion she had concerning her father and that was anger, and that anger became more noticeable during her middle school and high school years as they seemed to amplify his absence. In recounting that time in her life she shared:

> I noticed more that he was not there when I saw other people with their dads at school events. When there was a sports game or a concert or any special kind of event, I noticed he was not there. He was not at my graduation. He was nowhere to be found at any event

that was special to me. It is something that you try not to think about as much, but I
believe right now as I am starting to get older, I have been thinking about my relationship
with him.

After a brief pause to collect herself, she continued:

A lot of times, I do not know, a lot of insecurities kind of come from it because a lot of
times you just do not feel like you are enough. His leaving is a reflection of his character,
I know, but at the same time, you cannot help but think, did I do something wrong or
what?

These are things she has begun to ponder as she desires to get married and have a family in the
future. In the traditional sense, she revealed that she wanted her father to be there to walk her
down the aisle. She revealed that she has a desire for her father to be there when she has children
because it would be great for them and her, but she fears she will only be further disappointed.

Sanisa also has just started to explore her emotions, feelings, and thoughts concerning the
absence of her father. Sanisa and Doceana are sisters about 12 years apart and they have different
fathers. Sanisa learned the truth about her real dad and his being deceased in an overly dramatic
and traumatic way. Until now, Sanisa confessed that she rarely had thoughts about her father but
recently that changed. Instead of her nonchalant attitude about the matter, she admitted that she
has had questions arise concerning this man and his character:

Right now, I am just trying to figure out where the other side of me comes from, because
I am nothing like my momma. Where I come from having a dad is normal, but you do get
affected when you see other people shopping with their dad or doing stuff with their dad.
I tried to talk to my mom, but she was making all these excuses, but I learned he knew
about me from all the letters I found.

As she continued speaking about her emotional state as an adolescent and now, Sanisa became quiet when it came to questions about her self-esteem and any possible fears she may have because of her experience. Sanisa described herself as being someone not lacking in confidence while simultaneously admitting that she often struggles with thoughts about whether she will ever be able to find a good man. She revealed that she would love to have a close loving relationship, but she often feels it is not possible for the following reasons she stated, "I am not the prettiest girl." Not only did Sanisa describe herself as not being the prettiest, but she also holds the belief that she is not worthy of being loved.

Lui'ana spent the first seven years of her life in foster care due to the tragic circumstances surrounding her conception and birth. She was abandoned by her dad at birth and was separated from her mom for an extended period, as well. Despite not knowing her father or having a bond with him, Lui'ana reported that she spent much of her adolescence and adulthood trapped in a mental and emotional prison due to several traumatic experiences including the absence of her father.

Lui'ana firmly stated his absence contributed greatly to her mental and emotional distress. She also shared that she is still in the process of healing and overcoming the trauma of being abandoned by both of her parents:

> I did not know where I fit in mentally. My mind was, and probably still is a mess to this day. I had suicidal ideations upon until 2018. There have been plenty of times when I attempted to take my own life. I would also cut because I was in so much pain mentally, and I could not get it out verbally. I remember I threatened to kill myself by walking down a highway for being made fun of. I was trying to fit in with the group, and they did not want me.

Lui'ana went on to share in more detail about the suicidal ideations she experienced until 2018 when she made attempt at ending her life. The trigger of that attempt was the dissolution of her marriage. She was feeling so distraught that she had planned to kill herself as well as her children. As she detailed this experience, she revealed that being abandoned by her husband at the time reopened the wounds of her childhood and it left her feeling unwanted, unlovable, and worthless.

Sheva, Arba, and Bailu did not report major depressive episodes in relation to the absence of their fathers; however, they did talk about the moments of despair, anger, and jealousy they experienced during their adolescence. They spoke of how they often questioned their worth and wondered why they were not good enough to live with their fathers, be cared for by their fathers and receive the same attention siblings living with their fathers received. Sheva struggled with competing with siblings outside the home for the affection of her father and she felt she had to compete with baby sister Lacy with whom she lived for her father's attention as well:

> I would watch other people with their dad, and I would just feel so left out and hurt. And sometimes when my baby sister Lacy's dad would be around, I felt left out of the situation. I was outside looking in watching Lacy and her dad and our mom doing stuff and I was not included. It hurt and it still hurts. And then when my dad did come around to get me for special occasions like Christmas or my birthday my mom would always make my sister Lacy go with us, and I hated that she made her go because he was my dad, and that was our time.

ShiShi and ShiYia did not report the experience of suffering with depression or low self-esteem during their adolescence. They spoke of times they were sad and thought about having their dad around, but they never became so upset that they could not go to school or conduct their daily

tasks. However, ShiShi and ShiYia experienced moments of sadness and longing during special school events important to them where they were able to witness the interactions of their classmates and friends with their fathers.

Research Question 3

How do African American women describe their behavior during their adolescence growing up without the presence of their fathers?

The following sub themes emerged during the process of analyzing the data in relation to research question three: participants revealed that they consistently sought validation and acceptance and developed aggressive behaviors.

Roldan (2022) reported that children who perceive the abandonment and or rejection of their father develop psychological and emotional issues that makes it difficult for them to develop healthy relationships, they struggle with regulating their emotions, they struggle with wanting to fit in, they develop doubtful/insecure personalities, and they develop a need for acceptance and approval. Evraire et al. (2022) found that both men and women with high anxious or an insecure anxious type of attachment often sought-after validation, trust, approval and reassurance in their romantic relationships.

Consistently Sought Validation and Acceptance

Each participant described in detail the desperate desire they developed for the validation and approval of others. Half of the participants developed a strong desire to be validated, noticed, approved, and accepted by males. The other half of the participants reported that in their desperation to be loved and approved by men, they wanted to be loved and accepted by everyone in their environment such peers, friends, desired partners, and family members including their absent fathers.

Arba was one of that first group of women who fiercely sought the acknowledgment and

recognition of men more specifically. It was important for her to gain the approval and validation

of people she loved and respected, but the absence of her father created in her a hunger for the

male validation missing from her father. Arba revealed the following about herself, "I had very

low self-esteem coming up for the most part in grade school on into high school because I was

not very assured of myself." It was that lack of assurance, coupled with her deep desire for the

presence, attention, approval, and support of her father, which contributed to the following:

> I became very promiscuous at a young age because I wanted the male attention and the
>
> male affirmation. I did not know who I was. I did not have a man to affirm me and tell
>
> me I am beautiful and tell me this is not how you get attention.
>
> Tesha also reported that she became sexually active and promiscuous at the age of 12, as

she was in search for male validation, acceptance, and approval. She shared the following details

about herself during her high school years:

> I can remember relationships all through high school and just really being depressed.
>
> When relationships would end, I would go beyond to keep the attention of that male. I
>
> would latch on because I wanted them talk to them every day.
>
> ShiShi began to feel the absence of her father after becoming an adult and realizing how

important paternal love and support is for a daughter:

> I did not even know the importance of having that paternal love. Because I think if you
>
> never had it, then you do not really understand the importance of it. But when I finally
>
> had that male person, my great-uncle Bishop John Ray who provided me with fatherly
>
> support and validation I understood. He adored me. And I believe if I had that adoration

when I was younger as well as his presence in my life, I believe he would have not allowed me to date a 20-year-old man at the age of 15.

As a result of the extreme trauma she experienced, Lui'ana, struggled to recall memories from her childhood. She remembers her middle school and high school years being filled with turmoil. She remembers fantasizing about her ideal of the perfect father coming to rescue her from all her trauma and pain she had gone through. She also remembers spiraling out of control mentally and emotionally in search of the acceptance, approval, and validation she so desperately wanted from a father as well as the environment around her:

I tried to fit in with so many different people that I would change my identity to fit in with the crowd. I was never taught by either parent, let me just say that clearly, I was never taught to be a strong person who could stand up for her own self or stand up on her own. And so, I would seek to fit in with any crowd. I tried to join as many crowds as possible. I was constantly changing who I was because I did not know who I could be.

Hana carried with her conflicting memories of a dad who instilled in her the ethics of hard work and achievement and a father who brutally beat her with the very tools he taught her to use to care for the horses on their farm. Hana reported that her father became someone who lived in the background of her life after he divorced her mom. Even though her father was not around to abuse her anymore, she still longed for his validation and approval. She longed for him to be the dad that helped her first business at the age of eight. She longed for the dad who taught her everything she knew about horses. She missed his proud face when she did something praiseworthy and, due to that hunger for validation and acceptance, Hana found herself in many compromising situations and relationships to gain the validation, acceptance, and approval she missed from her father.

Chamisha reported the following:

I was just trying to seek out that validation, that paternal validation, because I never had a man besides my uncles tell me anything. My uncles were not going to be like, oh, you are so pretty. That just does not happen. There was nobody to do that for us. And your mom will tell you that all the time, but you are like okay, you are my mom. You are supposed to tell me that. It is kind of different seeking validation from a male and that I never got.

ShiYia at a young age lost her father to sickness. She missed having a father actively present in her life, but validation had more to do with the relationship between her and the strained relationship between her and her mother. From her perspective, having a father present meant having someone to validate her feelings and thoughts:

Having two parents, a mom and a dad, balances things out. It relieves a lot of stress instead of it having to be on one person. Single women who are also a parent do not always listen to the kid first. Sometimes they take the opinion of someone in an authoritative position first, whether it is a teacher or someone like that. It is like they are so focused on the role of disciplinarian that they do not listen to you when you need them to listen to you.

The remaining participants Eriya, Sanisa, and ShiYia also sought to be validated emotionally. For them, the validation of men was not more important than them learning how to love themselves and accept themselves despite of the rejection and/or abandonment of their fathers. All three of them had an extraordinarily strong support system of women in their moms, grandmothers, and aunts who did their best to provide them with that validation, acceptance, and support.

Developed Aggressive Behaviors

The participants shared various stories of fighting, aggression, and self-harming. Arba, for example, stated frankly that she developed an aggressive persona and aggressive behaviors because, "I had no one to fight for me." She was led to believe this because her father was never there for her and, during the times he was around, his favor, affection, and attention was cast upon her baby sister. This episode firmly cemented her beliefs about her father and his heart towards her:

> I remember one day when I decided to visit my dad, I happened to overhear him on the phone talking with one of the principals from the high school my sister attended. The way he defended her, had me wishing that I had someone to defend me like that. I would have felt protected if I did, but I did not so I had to protect myself from everything.

Arba went on to describe herself as the stereotypical "ghetto, loud, and angry Black female." The angry Black woman trope as detailed by Samuel (2020) is one of the more damaging stereotypes that follow Black women through portraying them as loud, aggressive, and always angry. Samuel discusses the dangerous stereotype of the loud, ghetto, and oversexualized Black woman who knows no bounds or decorum. Arba's loudness was a cry for help and a cry to be seen or as she put it, "I did a lot just to be noticed or to draw attention to myself. The loudness and the cursing. The fighting. It was like yes, yes look at me. Whatever attention I could get, that was me."

Lui'ana also described herself as being the stereotypical loud and angry Black female during her adolescence. She was loud not because the stereotype about Black women is true, she was loud because she wanted to be seen and heard. She was angry because she was hurt and had been abandoned. She was aggressive because she had no way to express the hurt, so she lashed out. She also confessed the following, "I was in so much pain mentally that I would cut myself.

Because if I could not get it out verbally, then I knew someone would take care of the physical wounds." She began to self-harm and self-abuse to receive the care, compassion, love, and attention she so desperately sought. She lashed out at people because the anger was like a massive wave welling up inside her and crashing onto the shores of her heart and mind. She was overwhelmed by her pain and aggression was the only way to get it out.

Bailu remembers being full of anger during her adolescence due to circumstances at home as well as the absence of her father. Bailu was living in another state with her mom and siblings, but the family moved near the father's hometown so that she could establish a bond with her father and his family. Bailu and her father never established a relationship because he was never around, and he never invested any effort into establishing a relationship with her when she did get the opportunity to see him. The disengagement from her father caused her to remain in a constant state of frustration at home and it affected her so much she said, "I became incredibly angry and aggressive. I was always fighting. If you looked at me crazy, I would fight. I would be in the principals' office quite often for fighting."

Sheva reported that she became aggressive to protect herself from those who sought to fight her. She also said she did not have her father or anyone to protect her, so she became her own protection:

> During then and even now I must catch myself, I would haul off and hit you in a heartbeat. I became super independent. I was my own protection, not having a father there and not having somebody to protect me. There were a lot of people who were afraid of my father so, when people started with me, I would tell them – I am going to tell my daddy. Even though I knew he was not there to protect me; I knew his reputation, so I used that, and they always backed down from me.

Eriya, Tesha, and Chamisha reported that they experienced bullying in school because of their dark complexion and weight. The bullying they experienced, coupled with the pain of their home life and the absence of their fathers, caused them to develop aggressive personas and behaviors, as well. Tesha said of herself during her adolescence, "I was crazy, and I carried such a level of rage. I would fight you in a minute." Eriya reported that she displayed aggressive behaviors such as verbal aggression towards those who bullied her, but her aggression was also turned more inward as she self-harmed. Chamisha did not directly admit to fighting in school; she did, however, express regret over not managing the bullying she experienced in a more productive way.

Hana, Sanisa, ShiShi, ShiYia, and Doceana, reported no significant struggles with anger and aggression towards others in relation to the absence of their father. They shared the experience of feeling unprotected at times, and they struggled more with regulating their emotions at times. ShiYia went into detail to discuss issues that arose between her and her mother (an issue not mentioned by the other participants). When speaking of those struggles with her mom, ShiYia was keen to express her understanding of her mother's situation. Her mom did not choose to be a single mother; it was an unexpected circumstance that caused her mom to carry that responsibility of raising her alone. ShiYia, however, remembers the strain the absence of a father in the home put on the relationship between her and her mom because her mother did not communicate well.

Research Question 4

How do African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

The following sub themes emerged during the process of analyzing the data in relation to research question four: participants reported that their school attendance was affected due to personal struggles, behavioral issues, and bullying and they became achievement-focused to win the affection of their absent fathers.

Some participants made direct references to their academic performance; Bailu recalled:

I lived in the hood, so I did not really spend time together with anybody. I went to school, and I went home, but I hung around my cousins. I made decent grades. When I went to junior high school, I started hanging out with people and started smoking. When I got into the 10th grade, I got pregnant by an older guy, and I quit school. I went to work, but after that, I went back to get my G.E.D.

Lui'ana firmly stated that she would have had the confidence to perform better in school if her father had been around, "I would have done more. I would have gone for the higher classes. I would have gone for my doctorate. I would have done so much more. I wanted to be acknowledged for being the smartest." Eriya made mention of her grades suffering following the sudden loss of her grandfather – the only man she considered a father figure her life.

The loss of my grandaddy broke me, causing me to drop out of school for the first time. But I am thankful for the years that I did have him with me because he showed me how a man was supposed to love his wife. And it is what deterred me from being bitter.

School Attendance Disrupted by Emotional and Behavioral Issues

Although academic performance was rarely mentioned, the participants talked about how their school life was affected by issues in the home, their own behavioral issues, or experiences with being bullied at school. Arba had developed an aggressive personality out of necessity to protect herself at home, in the community, and in school:

Not being assured of myself, a lot of it came out through fighting. I did a lot of fighting male or female. I did a lot of fighting in elementary and high school. I just did a lot to get attention. There were times I felt if I went to live with him things would have been better for me. I would have done better for me. I may not have had a child at 17, and I may not have dropped out of school. I just would have done things differently.

As the oldest child, Bailu took on the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings instead of her mother. Her mother worked hard to take care of the children; however, she was also an alcoholic who often became involved in abusive relationships. This put Bailu in the position of being a secondary mom, having to protect her siblings, and take care them which made her somewhat resentful towards her mother. Bailu also fought often in school which caused her to be expelled and absent from school. She became pregnant as a teen and eventually dropped out of school to work a full-time job, prepare for becoming a mother herself, and continue helping her mom take care of her siblings.

Tesha, Eriya, and Chamisha spoke of how they experienced severe bullying due to racism, colorism, and their weight. Tesha recalled being bullied throughout the entirety of her childhood in elementary through to high school because she was overweight, extra tall, and darker skinned. Eriya shared the following about her school experience:

School was interesting. The school I attended was about 90 percent white. My skin tone is quite dark, and I hated it when I was kid because I got bullied. They called me Blackie and midnight. They said things like if they turned off the lights I would disappear, those types of things. And then when I got a little older, they started commenting on my body weight. And when someone says something about you that your father has already said, it just amplifies all the other thoughts.

Arba, Tesha, and Chamisha shared their personal struggles that indirectly affected their school life such as the financial struggles their moms had and the extra added responsibilities some took on as older siblings. Arba, for example, reported that her family was living in poverty and when school started there were things her mom could not afford. Her mom did her best to provide her children with all that they needed but she did not have ample resources. Arba revealed that their impoverished situation was a huge source of frustration for her and her mother:

> It was difficult to get my dad to purchase new clothes and money for what I needed. If I asked him for one hundred dollars, he would give me fifty. However, my dad doted on my baby sister. He made sure she looked good for school, but it was not the same for me and that hurt.

Tesha remembers her mother pursuing legal action against her father to get him to take financial responsibility for her because he refused to do so voluntarily. Her mother did the best she could for her financially when it came to things she needed in general and things she needed for school, but her mom struggled. Chamisha remembers when she first started technical college, she did not have enough money for items she needed for school, so she contacted her dad for help:

> I knew I was not going to have enough money to pay for my books. I asked him ahead of time if he would help me get my books, and he said he would. So, the time came for me to get my books, and I went to his work to see him. I told him how much I needed it and what it was for, and he told me that he did not have any money and that he could not help. I was so angry, because I was like the one time, I reached out to you to ask you for your help, after you told me to ask for something – you let me down again.

While half of the participants did not report personal struggles, behavioral issues, and bullying to the degree that the other half experienced, they did report having struggles in areas important to their life. Shiyia, for example, spoke of the perspective she gained from watching her mother attempt to make it to school meetings. Before coming to that realization, she carried the belief that her mother did not try hard enough to be there for school meetings and meaningful events. She now understands that her mom did the best she could considering the circumstances. Doceana said seeing her classmates with their parents at concerts and recitals hurt deeply because she wanted her dad there to cheer her on like she saw the fathers of her classmates doing for them.

Most of the participants revealed that they also were triggered emotionally when it came to events such as debutant balls, sporting events, and school dances because they wanted their fathers to be present. As Doceana shared, each participant reported some level of desire to have their fathers present at important school events, dances, and community functions. Unfortunately, some never got the chance to experience that due to the willful absence of their fathers, and some revealed that their mothers could not attend events due to the need for work and the lack of a proper support system.

Became Achievement Focused to Win Affection of Absent Fathers

Even though the participants of this study lived most of their lives without their fathers present especially during their adolescence, it did not diminish the desire of some participants to please and win the affection of their missing and/or inconsistently present fathers. Chamisha reported having a deep sense of resentment towards her father, but she also remembers having a desire to achieve great things in school academically for herself but also to impress her father. Chamisha mentioned that she was accepted into and attended an exceptionally large university in

the region. She did well in college, but she says it soon became overwhelming and she returned home after she became pregnant. She eventually returned to college, completed her degree programs, and works in counseling.

Hana revealed that her father disappeared from her life when she was around 13 and became a "background dad." A background dad, as she defined it, is a dad who fades into the background becoming invisible. Her dad was no longer in the foreground of her life teaching her about the horse business, accompanying her to school events, or attending father-daughter dances. He was not there to teach her about boys, and he was not there to be an example of the type of treatment she should expect from men. He disappeared in the background and her solution to win his affection and get him back into her life front and center was to become an "achievement junkie."

Hana became focused on achieving things that were praiseworthy in school, horse riding, music, and anything else that would draw the attention of her father who would appear like a proud dad to take in all the praise about his daughter's accomplishment. As she recalled she solemnly quipped:

> I learned early on before he did his disappearing act, that the key to winning dad's affection and grabbing his attention was achievement. early on the key to gaining dad's affection and grabbing his attention – achievement. I knew he would show up for, but he never really showed up for me.

Sheva also recalls becoming focused with making noteworthy achievements to gain the acknowledgment of her father. She revealed the following concerning her school achievements and drive for success:

I want to be like my dad and have things like he had them. I wanted to be able to take vacations whenever I wanted. I was told you can just get a factory job, but I did not want that. I did not want to live paycheck to paycheck, so I had that drive in me to go to school and complete a 4-year apprenticeship. My father came from a family of college educators, so it was not a question if I was going to do it. I wanted to make him proud, and I learned later after he died that he was immensely proud of my accomplishments, he just never told me himself. I never got to hear him say it.

The remaining participants shared little in reference to their experiences in school as a father-absent adolescent. The consensus among the participants was it made certain experiences in school difficult. Some of the participants revealed that it was difficult for them to relay the message of the mother not being able to attend a parent/teacher conference to their teachers due to her having to work. Participants Eriya, Doceana, ShiYia, Hana, and Chamisha, who were actively involved in extracurricular activities, revealed that it was difficult for them to look up and see no one there in the crowd rooting for them and cheering. While they expressed disappointment over the absence of their mothers from those events, they acknowledged and understood that their single mother had no choice in being absent because she had to work. The absence of their father, on the other hand, was a little harder to deal with during those important moments because his absence was a reminder of his choice to not be involved in their lives.

Themes that Highlight Gaps in the Current Research on Father Absence

During the process of coding the data, there were three unexpected themes that emerged from the data set. I found no mention of these themes in the literature reviewed nor in any search for scholarly documents. The first was the participants feelings of resentment toward their single

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mother. Second, was the experience of generational father absence. The third was the motivation that some of the participants reportedly developed as fuel for them to excel in school and in life.

Two of the participants mentioned that the absence of their fathers created a barrier between them as they struggled to understand their mother, and they felt their mother did not understand them. Another participant said she experienced moments where she felt both anger and pity for her mom because she wanted to know what her mother did or what was wrong with her mom that her dad did not stay and why she always got involved with men who hurt her. There were other participants who mentioned experiencing moments of frustration with their moms as well, but they did not go into detail about their frustration like the other two women.

Intergenerational father absence or repeated cycles of father absence was mentioned in nine of the 12 interviews; there were three participants who did not have children. In my attempt to research a definition for generational father absence and literature on this topic, I was unable to find anything on the topic in relation to father-absent daughters. The women interviewed for this study came from father-absent homes and nine of the twelve participants were mothers and eight of the nine moms were single mothers. While there are many factors involved in the absence of fathers from the home, this detail was interesting as most of the participants reported that their mothers were also raised by a single mother.

Finally, several of the participants mentioned that they became achievement-focused in school and in extracurricular activities for the purpose of winning their fathers' affection. As it relates to daughters, the literature indicates that daughters feel personally responsible for their father's abandonment. Daughters develop eating disorders and alter their outward appearance to win their father' affection but there is minimal literature available on the motivation of daughters to excel academically. Hana said that she became an achievement junkie due to her desire to win

the affection and attention of her father. Sheva, Chamisha, and Doceana all felt their achievements would gain the attention of their fathers and they were saddened when that did not happen as they craved the applause, approval and affection of their fathers.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to extrapolate from their experiences the meaning they attached to living without the consistent presence, emotional engagement, and active involvement of their biological fathers. This qualitative phenomenological study sought to get at the meaning of the experience as well as examine the essence of the experience through exploring the participants' perceptions of father absence. This researcher was also interested in learning from the participants how the experience of father absence shaped them as individuals and how it affected the following four areas: social, emotional, behavioral, and educational which guided the research whether the results were positive or negative.

Data for this study was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews via Zoom audio-conferencing with 12 father-absent adult African American women who have spent all or some of their life without the consistent presence of their fathers. The questions guiding this research were designed to extrapolate the meaning the participants assigned to their father-absent experience as well as hear their thoughts and perceptions on how they feel the experience of living without their father affected them socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally.

The first question was: What are the perceptions of father-absent African American women of their socialization during adolescence without the active presence of their fathers? Participants reported that they struggled with an inability to communicate with men as they had

no role models for healthy communication. Participants also perceived that their romantic relationships suffered and that they struggled when making decisions and coping properly with everyday life.

The second question was: How do father-absent African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers? Participants reported severe emotional instability and various fears such as being abandoned, rejected, hurt, and used. Participants reported that they experienced battles with depression, low self-esteem, and a poor self-image. Some participants revealed that they engaged in self-harming behaviors such as cutting, suicidal attempts, and eating disorders.

The third question was: How do father-absent African American women describe their behavior during their adolescence growing up without the presence of their fathers? Participants reported that they exhibited attention-seeking behaviors as they were looking for male attention, acceptance, love, and validation. Participants also discussed developing and exhibiting aggressive behaviors for the purpose of self-protection as they felt that the absence of their father left them without the covering, protection, help, and support that they believed fathers offer.

The fourth question: How do father-absent African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers? Participants spoke more of how they struggled in school with their behaviors and interactions with others more than they did about their actual academic performance. A few of the participants mentioned that their schooling was affected, and three of the participants reported dropping out of high school due to early pregnancy. A few participants also mentioned becoming achievement-focused in school and various other areas of their lives to gain the affection and attention of their fathers. The

experiences shared by the participants deeply affected their lives, but most of the participants were able to find healing through counseling, their father, and their support systems.

Chapter 5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore thoroughly the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women to get at the essence of the experience and extrapolate from their experience the meaning they attached to it. This study also sought to serve as a platform for participants to share their perspectives on their experience, lessons learned, and how they perceived the experience affected them socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and educationally. Chapters 1 and 2 provided an introduction to the research topic, presented its purpose, the research questions guiding the study, the theoretical framework for the study, and established support for the viability of this topic through the literature review. Chapter 3 detailed the phenomenological research methodology and how it was the best fit for this type of research study.

Chapter 4 presented details from the findings and themes discovered through this investigation of the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women using the following four categories: social, behavioral, emotional, and educational. These conclusions are based upon the literature reviewed and my interpretation of the themes through interpretive phenomenological analysis of the data collected as presented in Chapter 4. This chapter includes

a summary, conclusions that will be organized by the research questions that guided this study, and recommendations for future practice in higher education.

Summary

Data collected for this qualitative phenomenological study was collected from interviews of 12 adult father-absent African American women living in the U.S. Participants ranged in age from 20-62 and were from various parts of the U.S. with most of the participants being residents of Johnson City, TN. The women who participated in this study were either attending college, had some college experience, or completed a graduate degree program. All interviews were semi-structured with 12 open-ended questions and were conducted via Zoom audio-conferencing.

All participants were provided a personalized reflection journal as an option to record additional thoughts and insights concerning their lived experience, provide answers to questions they may have found difficult to answer during the interview, or offer suggestion for future research on the topic of father absence. Follow up questions for some interviews and all other correspondence following the completion of the study were done via email. There was no additional data collected from the reflection journals as none of the interviewee made use of them.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research was guided by Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory who asserted that humans develop various types of attachment behaviors to seek out connections with significant others. According to Bowlby (1977):

Attachment behavior is conceived as any form of behavior that results in a person

attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual,

who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser. While especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave. (p. 203)

Through his theory of attachment Bowlby (1988) sought to explain the attachment behaviors and the attachments children seek to make while also addressing the distress of separation from important attachments and the emotional damage caused. The father-daughter attachment is an important bond that severely affects daughters when an attachment is never made or suddenly severed according to East et al. (2007).

There are various styles of attachment that have been identified through the years as research on attachment theory has been expanded. The most basic tenets of attachment theory initially identified by Bowlby focuses primarily on infants and the secure base attachment. According to Bowlby (1988) children with a secure base attachment style exhibit confidence and security in the support of an individual attachment figure. That base, however, will become insecure if that attachment figure is suddenly lost for any reason leading to long-lasting struggles with the emotional stability of the child, adolescent, or young adult.

As noted by Cherry (2018), American psychologist Mary Ainsworth made significant contributions in expanding upon Bowlby's research by confirming his findings regarding secure attachment and identifying the anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant styles of attachment. The initial focus of attachment theory was the response of infants and children to various attachment styles theorized by Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth (1979). However, the research has been expanded and reconceptualized to include the long-lasting effects of those attachment styles upon adults socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and relationally according to Hazan and Shaver (1987).

Interpretation of Findings

While reviewing the data collected, I attempted to make sense of each experience to extrapolate the meaning each participant attached to their own as detailed by Smith and Osborn (2015). I also wanted to discover the essence of the experience to understand from the perspective of the participant how the experience affected the individual's life. I began by methodically transcribing the recorded experiences they shared so that I can get an idea of how to go about the process of analyzing the data. I read the participant interviews multiple times, and I listened to the recording multiple times to get a sense of the overall experience of all the participants as well as those experiences unique to each individual relevant to the meaning they derived from the experience.

After taking time to read each interview and consider the experience of each participant by listening to the audio interviews multiple times, I began the process of coding. Coding, as described by Williams (2022), is the process of data analysis that includes the collecting of data, assembling them into categories, and organizing that data to highlight the thematic direction of the research. There are deductive codes that represent a set of predetermined codes set by the researcher as well as inductive codes that arise during the process of analyzing the data that the researcher did not consider at the beginning of the process (Bingham & Witowsky, 2022).

There were no preset themes at the onset of the coding process as I was interested in the direction of the data set and the themes that would emerge from it. At the conclusion of the coding process 80 inductive codes were identified. All identified codes were grouped together according to their similarities and assigned to one of the following categories guided by the research questions of this study: social, emotional, behavioral, and educational.

During the process of analyzing the data, I identified several patterns of insecure attachment behavior among participant responses like those Bowlby (1988) reported. In his theory of attachment, Bowlby asserted that the distress and emotional damage of being separated from a significant attachment will have long-lasting mental and emotional effects upon children. Each participant reported having the experience of mental and emotional distress during their adolescence and into their adulthood in relation to their living without the active and consistent presence of their fathers in their lives. Mandriota (2021), Feuerman (2023), and Robinson et al. (2023) in their studies on attachment theory identified several behavior patterns associated with the following insecure attachment styles that participants of this study reported.

- *Anxious-avoidant attachment* displays dismissive attitude about intimacy and closeness. Struggles with commitment, has trust issues and a strong independent nature, they prefer to be alone and believe they do not need anyone. While they show little emotion, they will display signs of being threatened by others around romantic partners, feels threatened if others get too close. They rarely show emotions, prefer to be alone.

- *Anxious-resistant/ambivalent attachment* displays behaviors that are seen as clingy, needy, controlling, and obsessive. Struggles with boundaries. Craves closeness but distrusts it. Can be jealous and overreacts when threats are perceived in relationships. They struggle with letting go, need constant validation and reassurance. Struggles with poor self-image. Intense fear of abandonment, rejection and can be sensitive to criticism.

- *Disorganized attachment* is a combination of both the anxious-avoidant and anxious-ambivalent attachment style. They fear rejection, and struggle with

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regulating emotions, contradictory behaviors. Associated mental health issues depression, high levels of anxiety, self-hatred, mood disorders and self-harm.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of African American women of their socialization during adolescence without the active presence of their fathers?

The following sub-themes arose during the process of coding participant responses regarding socialization during their adolescence: cycles of unhealthy toxic relationships, poor decision making, and destructive coping strategies were found to be consistent with the literature reviewed about father-absent daughters and attachment theory.

Cycles of Unhealthy and/or Toxic Relationships

Hazan and Shaver (1987), in their reconceptualization of attachment theory, discovered that adult romantic relationships are affected by childhood attachment whether they are secure or insecure as there is a continuity from childhood to adulthood. For example, Park (2016) found that secure attachments buffer against distress in romantic relationships while insecure high anxiety attachments were linked to relationship dissatisfaction as well as aggressive responses. Santona et al. (2019) found that parent-child attachments with high levels of anxiety and avoidance led to physical aggression and poor emotional regulation in romantic relationships.

During the process of coding participant responses concerning their social development during their adolescence without the active presence of their father, I was able to identify several behavior patterns like those of the insecure attachment styles. The behaviors identified are: an

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inability to trust and lean on others, relationship aggression, relationship violence, issues with committing to relationships, indecision/poor decision-making skills, social inhibition, and poor coping strategies. As purported by Hazan and Staver (1987) the personal details reported by each participant concerning their social interactions during their adolescence continued into their adulthood. More than half of the participants struggled with romantic adult relationships and friendships.

While I am unable to assign an attachment style to each individual participant, the reported emotional struggles, behavior patterns they exhibited during their adolescence, and the current struggles some reported are in line with the long-lasting effects of insecure attachments identified by Bowlby (1988) and other attachment theorists such as Ainsworth (1979). According to Ingham (2021) father absence contributes to the development of insecure attachments that leads to the type of relationship struggles shared by the participants of this study. Field (2023) found that fathers who are physically absent from the home and emotionally absent/unavailable to their daughters contributes to them developing having "daddy issues," which often leads to them to searching for father replacements instead of true romantic partners.

Aside from three of the four participants whose fathers died when they were young, each reported that they experienced the sudden departure and or sporadic appearance of their fathers for various reasons. Tesha and Lui'ana reported that their fathers outright denied them and had no interest in being involved in their lives. Hana and Chamisha reported that their fathers disappeared after the dissolution of the relationships their fathers had with their mothers. ShiShi and ShiYia experienced father absence due to the deaths of their fathers. The remaining participants reported that their fathers were missing or inconsistent due to their having multiple children with multiple women.

Sanisa father passed away, as well; she, however, experienced the sudden departure of the man she had called father for many years suddenly. Immediately after the man she had called father for many years exited her life, the identify of her real father was revealed. She reported that she was happy to learn about him but became hurt and angry because she missed getting to know him. Sanisa reported that she was around 13 years old when she learned about her real father – something that she said made her sad because she was not given the opportunity to know her father which was frustrating for her as she has been seeking to know more about herself.

Participants whose fathers made sporadic appearances in their lives reported that their dads were often emotionally detached from them and rarely invested time into building a relationship. For example, Bailu revealed that her father lived within walking distance of her home, she became a member of the family, and she visited his home following church services. Her father, however, remained distant and uninvolved in her life. Bailu said that her father rarely acknowledged her presence, and he did not invest time into building their father-daughter bond. Bailu revealed that the treatment she received from her father made her feel unloved, unlovable, and uncared for which was a sentiment that more than half of the participants reported.

Field (2023) found that women with fathers who were physically and emotionally absent were more likely to exhibit needy, jealous, territorial, and toxic behaviors. Field (2023) also revealed that father-absent daughters were more likely to seek out romantic relationship with older men. As it relates to insecure attachments, Hana exhibited several behaviors such as seeking romantic relationships with older men. Arba, Bailu, Tesha, and Sheva reported that they exhibited aggressive and threatening behaviors during their adolescence as they felt they had no one to protect them in the absence of their fathers. Bailu admitted that she struggled with letting go of relationships that were toxic and bad for her. Lui'ana said that her desperation to be seen

and heard contributed her doing things to harm herself to get the love and attention that she desired from anyone. There is limited research available regarding using self-harm to gain attention.

Hana, ShiShi, and Bailu all reported that they became involved in relationships with older men during their adolescence. Hana revealed that she spent much of her adolescence and young adulthood searching for father figures, and she endured all kinds of abuse and toxic behavior from men for the sake of having that male presence in her life. According to McCoy (2023), the behavior exhibited by Hana is like that of women with fatherless-daughter syndrome or "daddy issues," as it is colloquially known. Fatherless-daughter syndrome refers to the "emotional disorder that stems from issues with trust and lack of self-esteem that leads to a cycle of repeated dysfunctional decisions in relationships with men" (McCoy, 2023, p. 9). Hana revealed that the absence of her father left her with a deep longing for his presence in her life even though their relationship was toxic and abusive. She also confessed that her desire to replace the presence, love, and male interaction she had had with her father, played a huge role in her submitting to and accepting abuse in her romantic relationships. McCoy's found this to be true in her study on father absence African American females.

Poor Decision Making and Destructive Coping Strategies

Douglas (2023) reported that daughters who grow up without fathers present in their lives "suffer extensive damage, even into adulthood and they also develop deep trust issues with men" (p. 83). In response to the rejection of their fathers, Eriya and Tesha both developed eating disorders to cope with their pain. They both described themselves as being emotional eaters. Tesha would binge, "cakes, pies, candy," and whatever else she could get her hands on. Eriya did

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not go into detail concerning the nature of her eating disorder; however, she revealed that it was not until her late adolescence going into college when it was the worst.

Sanisa was one of the few participants who shared that she developed an addiction to alcohol as a coping mechanism in her life. While Sanisa did not attribute her addiction to her father absence experience, the literature reviewed suggests that addiction is related to father absence and insecure attachment styles. According to Coffman and Swank (2021) there is a connection between insecure attachments, negative social relationships, and the abuse of drugs and alcohol. Ingham (2021) also noted that addiction was a long-lasting problem developed by father-absent children, citing sex addiction as well as gambling, food, and substance abuse in that list of addictions developed.

Crone et al. (2019) found a strong correlation between the anxious-avoidant attachment style and the self-reported difficulties in making good choices mentioned by the participants of this study. According to research about the anxious-avoidant attachment style, it affects the self-efficacy and ability of one to make good decisions and choices Griffin (2019). ShiShi, Sanisa, Shiyia, and Sheva reported behaviors such as those associated with the anxious-avoidant attachment: struggles with intimacy, trust, and good decision making. ShiShi said, "I would have definitely made better choices about relationships if my father was present." Bailu, Doceana, Tesha, Chamisha, and Arba reported behaviors patterns more in line with those associated with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style detailed in Table 3 which is also consistent with the findings of Brown (2018) as it relates to the response and behavior of father-absent daughters.

Research Question 2

How do African American women describe their emotions as adolescents growing up without the presence of their fathers?

The following sub-theme was identified during the coding process in relation to the emotions of the participants during their adolescence: experienced emotional instability, overwhelming fears, consistent battles with depression, low self-esteem and poor self-image were found to be consistent with the emotional issues identified in the literature reviewed about father-absent women and attachment theory.

The emotional category yielded the most inductive codes during the coding process as the participants reported high levels of emotional instability in various areas of their lives because of their father-absence experience. Arba, Sheva, Chamisha, and Bailu had sporadic inconsistent encounters with their fathers that contributed to their being in a constant state of emotional flux. They struggled with knowing whether their fathers loved them or if they were just an inconvenience. Eriya and Hana experienced the abuse and infidelity of their fathers. Tesha was outright rejected by her father to her face as a child, and he continued to deny her until his death. Lui'ana and Doceana revealed that they had never met their fathers face-to-face. Lui'ana revealed that her father abandoned her a few days following her birth. Doceana revealed that her father lived in the same town as her and even acknowledged her as his daughter, but he abandoned her with no remorse and refused to take part in her life. Sanisa experienced the sudden departure of the only man she knew as father which affected her deeply.

The remaining participants ShiShi and ShiYia also experienced moments of longing for their fathers even though they lost their fathers when young. ShiShi admitted that her emotional and mental struggles in relation to the absence of her father started late in life – well after she was an adult woman with adult children. ShiYia also admitted that she began to experience some emotional struggles as she got older, as well, due to the absence of male role models, male confidants, and male guidance in her life during her adolescent years.

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Experienced Emotional Instability and Overwhelming Fears

When asked to describe and discuss their emotional state during their adolescence without the consistent presence of their fathers, all the participants reported major struggles with their emotions. Lui'ana for example described herself as being "an emotional mess," during her adolescence and early adulthood. Eriya says she spent much of her adolescence and has spent most of her adulthood in a severe state of depression. Eight of the 12 participants said they spend a lot of time grappling with thoughts of why they were not good enough for their fathers to be present in their lives.

The participants' pattern of questioning their worth, their part in the absence of their father, his abandonment, and inconsistent involvement in their lives during their adolescence and into their adult years for some is consistent with the findings of Antle et al. (2019) that daughters are more likely than sons to take responsibility for the absence and/or rejection of their fathers. O'Dwyer (2017) explained that for daughters the absence of the father is more emotional as they internalize their feelings and have been found to turn those negative feelings and emotions on to themselves as Lui'ana did in developing cutting and self-harm behaviors. She became a danger to herself physically due in part to the pain of being rejected and abandoned.

Horesh et al. (2015) also found that daughters will often make attempts to change their bodies or themselves in some kind of way to win their father back, please their fathers, or gain his attention and to been loved and accepted by him. While she is not interested in establishing a relationship with her father or gaining his attention now, Eriya's reported eating disorder and body dysmorphia started with her trying to achieve an image acceptable for her father as her father often told her that she did not meet the standards of what his daughter should look like.

Gillette (2022) reported that children who experienced the rejection of their fathers carry behaviors with them into their adulthood that manifests emotional unavailability, emotional abandonment of others, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment, low self-esteem, poor self-image, difficulty being alone, jealousy, and a need for emotional reassurance. Arba, Bailu, and Sheva all reported instances of jealousy in relation to their fathers as he took care of their siblings but not them. Bailu spoke of her difficulty in letting go of relationships even when she knows they are bad for her.

According to Ainsworth (1979) these behavioral responses to the loss of a significant attachment and or the thought of possibly losing connection to a desired individual such as a parent, friend, or romantic partner are hallmarks of insecure attachments. These are all behaviors participants of this study reported about themselves as occurring during their adolescence, their young adulthood, and into their late adulthood.

Consistent Battle with Depression, Low Self-Esteem and Poor Self-Image

Barras (2000), in her discussion on father absence, found that women who perceive that they have been rejected by their fathers will develop fatherless-woman syndrome where women develop the belief that they are unworthy and unlovable and who often struggle with depression, low self-esteem, and low self-worth. Moore (2016) also found that negative father-daughter attachments create negative outcomes for daughters leading them to struggle with their self-esteem, depression, and romantic relationships. Arba, Sheva, Bailu, and Chamisha reported that they often battled with depression, regulating their mood, and their emotions because of the negative and hurtful interactions with their sporadically present fathers. Lui'ana experienced extreme depression in her youth and adulthood because of her traumatic childhood experiences. She was abandoned by her father at birth and then placed in foster care for an extended period at

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the age of 7. Tesha reported she was harshly rejected by her father who claimed she was not his daughter. He ignored her in public when he saw her, fought against it in court, and carried his rejection of her to his grave.

Participants like Hana, Chamisha, and Eriya reported disturbing details about experiencing their fathers' terrifying verbal, mental, emotional, and physical abuse prior to his departure from their lives. Hana, for example, was beaten by her father with farming equipment and she also witnessed her father abusing her mother. Chamisha shared the following about her father's abusive nature:

> My dad was very abusive to my mother. There were times I do remember him; they fought a lot. There was one time he had her by her hair with a gun to her head. My sister and I walked in and saw it and he pushed us out the door and asked us what we were staring at and slammed the door in our faces.

Eriya recalls being ridiculed constantly by her father, starting around age eight, who told her several times that she was too fat and that no man would love her. His constant insults led to her developing the mood disorder, depression, anxiety, and body dysmorphia for which she is receiving treatment currently. Her father's words had such a profound effect on her that she struggles with trusting people, she has on and off thoughts of suicide, self-loathing, being alone.

The negative and traumatic childhood experiences such as those shared by the participants of this qualitative study were reported by Briggs-Gowan et al. (2019) to be major contributing factors to the development of insecure attachments in children. Briggs-Gowan et al. also found that young children who suffered either the abuse, consistent separation, or the loss of a primary care giver were at risk for suffering early psychopathology and they also developed a resistance to comfort by caregivers, exhibited numbing and avoidant behaviors and struggled

with trusting others as well into their adulthood. Hana, Chamisha, and Eriya reported that they witnessed their mothers being abused and experienced abuse from their fathers They also reported behaviors and struggles consistent with those related to the disorganized attachment style.

While the remaining participants Sanisa, Doceana, Shiyia, ShiShi did not report having consistent battles with depression, they reported consistent struggles their self-esteem and self-worth. Doceana described herself as being self-confident and self-assured due to the teachings and example of her mother, but she said she began to question her value and worth after she left for college. She said she would find herself asking, "Why was I not good enough for my dad to stay and be my dad." ShiShi and Shiyia did not experience the abandonment and rejection of their fathers as did most of the participants; they however, reported struggles with their self-esteem and self-worth as they did not have the guidance, affirmation, and encouragement of their fathers in their lives.

According to each participant's perceptions about their emotions and the absence of their father, they each felt his absence contributed greatly to their struggles with self-esteem because he was not there to guide them, affirm them, or tell them that they were pretty. Lui'ana, for example, felt she would not have struggled with low self-esteem or the negative thoughts she had about herself if she had had her ideal of the perfect father present in her life to call her princess and beautiful. Arba, who described herself as being loud and aggressive outwardly yet very broken with poor self-esteem, revealed she was challenged to reconsider her actions and thoughts about herself following the confrontation detailed below:

I was a teenager, me and my friends were all hanging out. I remember there were some older guys there, and I was just cursing worse than a sailor. There was this young man

who approached me and said, and it sticks with me to this day, he said, you are a

beautiful young lady, and nothing like that should ever come out your mouth.

McKenzie and Casselman (2017) found that present fathers are vital to the emotional

development, personal growth, and self-worth of their daughters; this concept appears to be

validated by the participants of this qualitative study. Yogman and Garfield (2016) reported that

fathers who take on an active role in the lives of their daughters protect them from developing

maladaptive emotional behavior patterns. Although teenage girls report more frequent struggles

with their mental health and self-esteem than boys, Wasserman (2021) found that the numbers

increase exponentially in single-parent homes without fathers present such as those where the

participants of this study grew up.

Research Question 3

How do African American women describe their behavior during their adolescence growing up

without the presence of their fathers?

During the coding process, the following themes were identified in relation to the

behaviors reported by each participant during their adolescence without the presence of their

fathers: consistently sought validation and acceptance and developed aggressive behaviors were

in line with the literature reviewed about father-absent daughters and attachment theory.

Consistently Sought Validation and Acceptance

Huang (2023) reported that adults with anxious attachments are often clingy and

obsessive with a desperation to be acknowledged, wanted, and loved. Ingham (2021) discovered

that adolescents who grow up without a father actively present in their lives experience problems

with regulating their mood, develop mental health issues, and often seek after the validation of

others. More specifically, Castetter (2020) found that daughters with an insecure anxious

attachment to their fathers are more likely to develop a desperate yearning for male attention and often look for reassurance from men. Barras (2000), in her book on father-absent Black women, revealed that daughters often try to medicate the wounds caused by their absent father through promiscuity or seeking out male validation and approval.

Lui'ana revealed that she spent a great deal of her adolescence looking for validation, acceptance, and approval from anyone who would give it to her. She wanted to be wanted – not only by the father who abandoned her – she wanted to be loved, accepted, and welcomed by her peers, as well. She even revealed that upon the dissolution of her marriage, that she was never looking for her "life partner;" she instead admitted that, "I was looking for someone to love me in the way a father loves a daughter and I thought he could love me the way I was looking for but he couldn't." Chamisha also sought to fulfill her longing for paternal validation during her adolescence and young adult years in relationships but never found what she sought. Chamisha found herself in relationships with the hopes of receiving love, validation, and acceptance from romantic partners, but she has not yet found this.

As discussed earlier, the toxic and inconsistent nature of the relationship Hana had with her father set up a pattern of her searching for the love and validation of a father in romantic partners which only lead to her experiencing more abuse, not validation and love. Sheva also sought after the love and affection of men and that longing only became stronger after the passing of her father in her 30s. As noted by Babul (2016), this thought process and pattern of behavior is common among women who have experienced father absence of any kind as, "daughters need the love of their fathers as the primary example of masculine closeness and acceptance" (p. 120).

Arba and Tesha spoke very openly about becoming sexually active before the age of 13 to fulfill their craving for male validation. ShiShi revealed that she also became sexually active at a young age as well even though her father was present in the home prior to his passing which is contrary to what the research says about daughters with present fathers. ShiShi says the death and absence of her father became a bigger issue for her as she got older, but she felt her early sexual engagement was due to not having male or encouraging guidance at the time.

As detailed in the literature reviewed, early sexual activity, risky sexual decisions, and sexualized thoughts were found to be common among father-absent daughters as DelPriorie and Hill (2013) found in their study. Babul (2016) found that father-absent daughters either developed sexual aggression as detailed by Hetherington (1972) or completely shied away from men all together. While the participants of this study reported struggles with trusting men, they did not shy away from men as Babul (2016) reported. Participants of this study continued to pursue relationships with men and seek men to validate them and support them mentally, sexually, and emotionally.

The youngest participants Eriya, Doceana, and Sanisa reported that they experienced moments of longing for the presence of their fathers especially when they had sporting events, recitals, father-daughter dances, or activities such as parent-teacher meetings that required the presence of a parent. Doceana reported that she just recently began to evaluate and deal with her feelings about her father and his absence from her life. She confessed that her recent thoughts about her father were provoked by a desire she has developed to pursue men as she searches for what she did not receive from her father. During the interview process Doceana exhibited a strong sense of independence and confidence that she attributed to her mom, but she confessed that she was starting to feel unsure about herself. Doceana, admittedly, was not happy about the

sense of uncertainty she was feeling, but she understood it was a necessary part of her making

sense of the experience so that she could move forward.

Developed Aggressive Behaviors

While reviewing the data and coding participant responses, many of the participants

reported that they committed numerous acts of aggression and often exhibited aggressive

behaviors. This finding was different from those reported in the literature review. Outward

aggression, property damage and violence towards others was more commonly associated with

father absent sons according to the report of Antle et al. (2010). Father absence, however, albeit

indirect, is a mitigating factor in the aggression of children. While the literature was minimal,

father absent girls were found to also display the type of out aggression reported by participants

that is more associated with boys like physical violence and committing crimes as detailed by

Ghaffari-Marandi (2019).

Arba revealed that she developed an aggressive persona due her feeling unloved and

unprotected by her absent father. She described herself as having an aggressive stance and

posture that led her to fighting – women and men – frequently. She confessed that she was angry

and hurt by the absence of her father, so she lashed out as did the other participants who reported

similar acts of aggression. Ramatsetse and Ross (2023) found that girls who have been

abandoned by their fathers often harbor feelings of hatred towards their fathers which leads to

them being psychologically and emotionally harmed resulting in behavioral issues like those

reported by the participants of this study.

The most identified type of aggression found among father-absent women is sexual

aggression (Hetherington, 1972). Moilanen et al. (2018) also identified this type of aggression

among father-absent women and found that this behavior was more prevalent among Black and

Hispanic father-absent girls as they were more likely to have an early initiation into sexual activity. The assumption of Moilanen et al. is while father absence was found to contribute to the prevalence of sexual aggression in the Black and Hispanic communities, they also assert that it was due to early sexual behavior being more acceptable in Black and Hispanic communities. That assumption, however, is contradictory to what the participants of this phenomenological study shared. Arba, Tesha, ShiShi, Bailu, Hana, and Chamisha reported that they became engaged in sex at an early age due to their search for male attention and validation and they did not connect this behavior with being more acceptable in their homes.

How do African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

During the coding process, there were minimal responses given in reference to the educational experiences of each participant during their adolescence without their father present. Of the responses provided, the following sub themes were identified in relation to Research Question 4: school attendance was affected due to personal struggles, behavioral issues and bullying and they became achievement focused to win the affection of their absent fathers. While I as a researcher found this information helpful in reporting details of this phenomena, there was little discussed in this discussion that was in line with the literature reviewed.

Research Question 4

How do African American women describe their educational experience as adolescents without the presence of their fathers?

The coding process revealed minimal responses given in reference to the educational experiences of each participant during their adolescence without their father present. Of the responses provided, the following sub-themes were identified: school attendance was affected

due to personal struggles, behavioral issues and bullying and they became achievement focused to win the affection of their absent fathers. While I as a researcher found this information helpful in reporting details of this phenomena, there were very few instances of commentary from the participants that was in line with the literature reviewed.

School Attendance Disrupted by Emotional and Behavioral Issues

According Castetter (2020) early father absence in the lives of females leads to slow cognition and poor academic performance. Castetter (2020) also found that father-absent high school girls were more likely to dislike and perform poorly in subjects such as mathematics than girls with dads who were present. Lui'ana stated that she would have had the courage to enroll in the advanced classes and pursue a career in a math- or science-related field if she had had the encouragement and support of her father. Her statement is in line with the findings of Holder (2015) who found that daughters who perceive closeness with their fathers or feel supported by their dads will have higher academic and occupational aspirations than girls who do not.

Participant responses concerning the experiences reported in relation to their educational experience as a father-absent adolescent had little to do with their scholastic achievements and academic performance. Instead, participants spoke of the challenges such as excessive fighting or being the victim of bullying they faced in their school environment. Participants also discussed the consistent disappointment they experienced due the absence of both parents at important school events and extracurricular activities such as sporting events, school dances, and other special events that often required the attendance of a parent. Many of the participants reported that their mothers wanted to be there and tried their best, but the absence of their fathers left their mothers with the task of taking on the responsibility of two parents.

While participants did not equate their struggles in school to the absence of their fathers, the literature indicates that children are affected educationally by the absence of their fathers. Gillette and Gudmunson (2013) found that father-absent children are more likely to perform poorly academically and drop out of school. Ransaw (2014) reported that children who suffer the sudden and prolonged absence of their father suffer from emotional distress and psychological strain. More recently, Sanchez (2022) found that father absent girls are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.

Arba revealed that she eventually dropped out of school due to the constant struggles she faced in her school and home environment. She fought a lot in school due to her becoming what she described as "loud and aggressive," because she did not feel she had anyone to protect or support her. She recalled overhearing her father on a phone call with the principal of her youngest sister during one of the few visits she had to his home during that time. She heard him fight and defend her sister so passionately and remembers saying, "I wish I had someone to defend me like that, then I would have felt protected." Eventually due to her struggles in school, the home environment, and early pregnancy she made the decision to drop out of school.

Bailu revealed that she had a love for school, and she did well in school; however, she suffered there. For example, her mother insisted that Bailu and her siblings attend an integrated school. This was difficult for Bailu and her siblings because integration was just being implemented. Bailu recalls feeling out of place because they were the only Black children in the school, and she felt as if the poverty of her family was highlighted in the presence of the rich white children who attended the school. She went on to explain that things were not positive for her at school because both her father and mother were missing. Eventually, Bailu dropped out of

school because of the pregnancy and due to excessive fighting, which kept her in trouble with the principal.

Early pregnancy and dropping out of school among high school girls is covered in the literature as an indirect effect of father absence. DelPriorie (2019) reported that father disengagement contributed to the early sexual engagement of daughters which in turn led to early pregnancy. According to Lin et al. (2019) there are over 1 million unplanned teen pregnancies per year to girls under the age of 19, and of these teens, most of them are Black and Latina. While teen birth rates have been steadily decreasing, it is still serious issue affecting adolescent girls of color and it often leads to a "decreased school performance and an increased likelihood of dropping out of high school" (Lin et al., 2019, p. 296) – an experience reported by three of the participants.

Tesha, reflecting upon school during her adolescence, spoke about the struggles she had in her school environment more than her academic performance. Tesha shared that she was constantly bullied in school because of her height and the color of her skin. Eventually the bullying led to her becoming, "abrasive, crazy, and full of rage," in school. She shared nothing about her academic successes or failures. She recently graduated with a doctorate in ministry, so it appears her academic progress was not impeded by her father absence experience. Eriya was quite active in school and did well academically, but her memories of school were filled with experiences of being bullied. Although she did not have academic struggles she remembers wanting to disappear often as she was called names such as "blackie" and: midnight" by her white counterparts. She was also fat-shamed and ridiculed about her weight which triggered the pain she carried from the critical words of her absent father about her weight and looks.

Became Achievement-Focused to Win Affection of Absent Father

Hana, Sheva, and Chamisha spoke specifically about becoming achievement-focused in various areas of their lives in attempts to win the attention and affection of their absent fathers. Hana revealed that she became an achievement junkie in school and in horse competitions for the sake of earning her father's attention and approval. She also started businesses and did things she knew would make him proud. Sheva set out to be successful in her academics and business pursuits to impress her father, and Chamisha did the same as her father and his family were known in the community for their academic achievements.

Holder (2015) reported that African American parental warmth and involvement contributed to increased psychological positivity in both sons and daughters. Psychological positivity in connection to the academic success of children refers to the positive feelings, emotions, and attitudes children have toward learning (Shoshani & Slone, 2017). Paternal warmth from African American fathers contributed to the academic success of their daughters and helped daughters to establish healthy feelings about themselves, become more confident knowing they were cared for, and develop hope that they felt for a long period of time (Holder, 2015, p. 85).

The remaining participants shared nothing significant in relation to their education and the absence of their fathers. Many of them participated in extracurricular activities such Doceana and Eriya who were in band. ShiYia played sports and there were others who participated in extracurricular activities. They shared nothing else except to comment that there were times they wished their fathers were there when they saw other kids with their moms and dads both in attendance. Not having their fathers present made them feel out of place, but they were able to

make it through those troubling times of their adolescences. As far as their academics are concerned, 9 of the 12 participants are college graduates with multiple degrees.

Study Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study offers insight into the lived experiences of adult father absent African American women as well as their thoughts and perceptions concerning their experience and how the absence of their father shaped their life socially, emotionally, behaviorally and educationally.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, I recommend the following areas of improvement for future practice:

- Create partnerships between community-based organizations and schools at the middle school and high school level to assist in creating safe spaces for adolescents to discuss any mental and emotional issues that they might have. During the interview process, all the participants mentioned that discussions about mental health and help for mental health support were not made available to them or encouraged.

  - Provide support, encouragement, resources and education to the family of children and adolescents in need of mental health services to break down the stigma of mental health discussion especially in Black homes.

- Create support groups for single mothers that provide resources to address their financial strain as well as their mental and emotional struggles. The participants mentioned the struggles of their single mothers and how they had to take on the

role of being a secondary parent in the home to support their mothers. Extra

resources, programs, and partnerships would be beneficial for single mothers.

- Create programs that encourage the involvement of men as mentors to father-
  absent girls to provide them with the male presence, support, and encouragement
  participants of this study reported as needed. During the interview process, I
  asked the women about the presence of positive male role models in their lives
  and most reported that they did not have any. Each participant revealed it would
  have been important to them to have an uncle or anyone stand up to offer
  guidance, but they had none. As detailed in the literature reviewed, actively-
  involved and present fathers are vital for the self-esteem, emotional growth,
  academic success, and well-being of daughters. There are also studies that speak
  of the positive effects of social fathers or men who assume the role of father to
  children that are not their biological children. I believe programs with male
  mentors for girls would prove beneficial.

Recommendations For Research

In conducting this study, I identified three areas of focus where the research can be

expanded in relation to father absence.

- Father Absence and Educational Motivation.
  - Research Question 4 of this study sought to gain an understanding from
    the participants about how their educational experience as an adolescent
    was affected due to the absence of their fathers? Three of the participants
    reported that they became driven to make great achievements
    academically and in various other areas of their life for the sake of

winning the attention and affection of their fathers. The intentionality of these three participants highlights a gap in the research as the current literature is unclear concerning the intention or motivation of father-absent children to excel academically. More qualitative research would prove helpful in answering this research question.

- Father Absence and Intergenerational Father Absence
  - Of the 12 women interviewed, 9 of them had children and 8 of them reported being single mothers. Considering that circumstance, a mixed methods study would be appropriate to further exploration into the topic of father absence and intergenerational father absence. Such a study would allow for further exploration into the thoughts of single mothers from homes where father absence has continued through the generations. It would allow for quantitative exploration into the relationship between father absence and intergenerational father absence especially in the Black community which has the largest reported percentage of father absence.
- Father Absence and Single Mother Resentment
  - An unexpected finding of this study was the feelings of anger and resentment some of the participants expressed towards their mothers. ShiYia, for example, said the absence of her father and the lack of male presence in her life in general made it difficult for her and her mother to communicate and understand each other. In her opinion, fathers provide balance and other perspectives would have been beneficial in maintaining

the relationship between her and her mom. Now that she is older and a single mother herself, she stated that she has a profound respect for her because she understands it is not an easy task. Regardless of the respect she has for her mom, she revealed that the two of them are not close. Bailu confessed that she was often angry with her mother due to her alcoholism and other issues that only seemed to be exacerbated by the absence of her father in the home. Bailu did not harbor resentment towards her mom, instead she pitied her and often wondered what was wrong that her dad would leave her mother, her, and her siblings. Lui'ana confessed that she carried deep feelings of anger and disappointment towards her mom and she still struggle with those emotions now as the primary care giver of her mother. Considering this finding, I believe further exploration into this topic would be another interesting aspect to explore the discussion of father absence.

Concluding Summary

This chapter summarizes the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study and offers insight into the lived experiences of adult father-absent African American women. The questions guiding this study were designed to extrapolate from the lived experiences of the participants the meaning they assessed to the experience of living without the active involvement of their father and how they perceived his absence affected their lives in the following four areas: social, emotional, behavioral, and educational. This study was insightful because I learned from the stories and experiences shared by the participants that having a father in their lives was a matter of importance for them. When asked to share their thoughts on fathers and their

importance, each stated firmly that the presence of a father would have helped them to understand men and know how to navigate relationships with them better. Some spoke of how having a dad actively involved in their lives would have prepared them for the harshness of life. Each woman mentioned the importance of having a dad present. For example, Arba built her whole life of learning how to protect herself because having a dad around meant having someone to protect her and be in her corner. For Lui'ana having her dad around meant having someone to treat her like a princess and always be there to pull her out of a jam. These are the things she desired to have but missed.

This research study was limited by time and regarding the educational category, the collected data garnered no significant responses regarding the influence of fathers upon the participants' education and educational pursuits. Going forward, I believe it would be interesting to learn from father-absent women their motivations for pursuing or choosing not to pursue higher education. This study can be converted to a mixed methods study to gain more insight into the relationship or effect of absent fathers on test scores, college entrance rates, and the like as it pertains to education.

In Their Own Words

There is much more to learn about father absence and how it affects daughters. I however would like to close with the thoughts, words of wisdom, and lessons the participants reported that they learned from the experience. These quotes express their personal perception on the experience and what the experience meant to them and what they hope others can learn and take away from their shared experiences.

Arba:

I learned about walking in forgiveness and letting go of the past and seeing what the person needs and meeting their needs. In essence, I had to come to the realization that I may be the only Christ he sees. I have two daughters. So especially with my girls, I would affirm them. I constantly them that they are beautiful. I talk to them about love, and I let them know that they do not need a man to do these things for you to validate who you are. I teach them about loving themselves and caring for themselves. I did not want my children to come up the way that I did and to have the life that I had during that period. So those were some of the lessons I learned about me, and I am still learning.

Bailu:

Living without my father robbed me of knowing what a healthy relationship is with a man. My words of wisdom to anybody would be when you have somebody and when you love somebody, you must learn to communicate. You must be able to communicate, you must be able to trust. Choose your mates wisely and communicate. Know what you are getting into before you get into each other. I spent years trying to find that love I never had. I spent a life-time of looking for love. Do not do that. Not like I did. Let God choose your mates and let him guide you through it. Do not get with someone thinking you can fix them. Also get help if you need it. There were times I needed someone to talk to, but I did not have that, so I cried out to the Lord.

Chamisha:

I had this feeling that I had to be strong all the time and I became tired because of work and having to do everything so I was often overwhelmed. I would say seek validation or seek guidance from your higher power and let go of the past and what you went through

because it is not worth the mental anguish. It is not worth the emotional trauma. It is not worth any of the illnesses whether it is spiritual, physical, mental or whatever that comes along with expecting people to be somebody they are not or are never going to be even if it is a parent.

Doceana:

The greatest lesson I learned living without him is that you are susceptible of being hurt by anyone no matter who it is whether it be family, friends, or cousins. Anyone can hurt you and bring you down if you let them. Through this I have learned that I am perfectly able to do things for myself. I might not have him, but I have a support system. I still have my mom, my sisters, and my other family. I am perfectly capable of doing this life, and it does not degrade me or make me any less of a person because I do not have a dad.

Eriya:

I learned that my opinion of me matters the most and I cannot let what I went through with my father deter me. I also learned their shame is not your shame. For the longest time I would not talk about where he was or what he did because I felt like it was my fault, and I should be ashamed of his actions. So, I would encourage someone to know that that shame of others and the things they had done to you have no definition over who you are as a person. You get to decide who you want to be and so do not let anything that people say to hurt you out of spite affect you because broken break other people. So just continue to grow to seek out your passions, your truths, your things that make your heartbeat and develop your own personality. Do not adopt someone else's stigmas or dogmas as your own.

Hana:

I wanted the good dad. I wanted my dad back who took me to the auction. I was always striving to be loved and supported. It took me a long time and a lot of healing to get to the place of really understanding that I do not have to strive. I had to tell myself, relax, you are not being graded, analyzed, or critiqued. My healing from my experience with my father came in learning that God loves me and has blessed me.

Lui'ana:

So, my greatest takeaway has been to have compassion for others. I know what it is like to sit with the kid who does not have anybody or anything. I know what it is like to long for others to acknowledge who you are as a human being. And I have learned to sit with them in that. And my greatest thing that I always say to people, can I sit with you in this? It does not mean that I am going to fix your problem. It does not mean that I am going to solve all your issues. It does not mean that I am going to be there to make the world rainbows, sunshine, glitter, and puppies. But can I sit with you while you are broken? I have learned to acknowledge the fact that I am broken. My brokenness is very real, and it is very palpable. I have learned it. I will say a lot of times it has been hard to acknowledge God as a father because I did not have one. So, my idea of what a father was, was not good. But I have learned, I have earned that when God says hold on, that he is a father to the fatherless. He is an absolute father to the fatherless because I have been there.

Sanisa:

Do not judge people like me, people who grew up without their fathers. I had a friend who I confided in about not having my dad around and the decisions I have made in my life and instead of helping me she judged me. She made me feel like a bad person.

I would say do not judge people like me. Instead try to understand.

Sheva:

Know what you can and cannot do. Set your own goals. Be your own person and strive to meet your goals. And strive to develop good wisdom. If you do not have your father in your life, be open to the wisdom of others. Listen to what other people have to say. Be open to the truth, know the truth even about. And if you do not know yourself, get to know yourself. Get To know yourself. And first, learn to love yourself and accept yourself for you because nobody else is going do it.

ShiShi:

The greatest struggles and lessons I learned from my experience were relational ones. There were no healthy relationships modeled for me, so I struggled.

Another thing is it is not just about the issue of the father being absent, but I learned it was about the quality of their presence, not just about the absence. It is about who they are as a person. Are they a healthy person to then be what that child needs them to be or model what they need them to model?

Shiyia:

I remember watching my mom having to be strong all the time. She could not afford to be soft because she had to take care of things by herself.

I would encourage others to be kinder to single mothers. Be more understanding and try to appreciate more what they can accomplish in what they are going through.

As a single mom now myself, I have a greater appreciation for the sacrifices and struggles of my mom. I understand more.

Tesha:

From my experience, I learned that it was okay for me to see about myself. I learned, it does not matter how old you are, it is never too late to bring some level of closure and healing to your life. I needed that with my father. My biggest fear was that it would hurt my mom as I went on my pursuit, to learn more about me. I did a 23andme ancestry test because I just wanted to know who my family was. My fear in doing was this would cause my mom to question herself, question her parenting and the whole nine yards. But I had to one day realize that I am important enough to go ahead and get my answers.

I would say the same to someone else. See about you and you are important enough to get the answers you need for your own healing and closure if you grew up without your dad or someone important to you.

While having a dad was important, all were able to come to a place of healing and a place of understanding that the absence and or inconsistent nature of their father was not a reflection of them, and they did not have to live their lives in pain. They came to understand that they are surrounded by love and support. They came to love themselves. There are some still struggling, but they are coping with counseling and prayer. They have come to understand that the experience did not break them; it truly made them stronger and now they are able to help others going through the pain they went through so that others do not have to suffer with it so long.

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APPENDIX: Interview Questions

1) Can you tell me a little about like where you were born, your family history and background? Can you tell me about your dad and when you became aware of his absence from your life?

2) Can you share more about your experience of living without your father in your life? You are free to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable sharing.

3) Can you tell me how the experience of being without your father affected you mentally and emotionally?

4) How often did you long for a father in your life? Do you believe having your father present would have changed somethings in your life? If so, what?

5) Talk to me about school. Were there moments you ever longed for the presence of your father then?

6) What was your personal thoughts about yourself growing up without your dad? Would you say his absence impacted the way you saw yourself? If so, how?

7) Can you tell me about your romantic relationships? Would you say the absence of your father had an impact in that area of your life?

8) Were there any men in your life who provided any male support or mentorship to you? If so, do you believe the help and mentorship of a male or a father figure would have been effective? How did you benefit socially, emotionally, behaviorally and educationally?

9) Are there any lessons learned or thoughts you have concerning your experience of living without your father? What is the greatest lesson you learned? What did you learn about yourself?

10) How would you say your absent father shaped your life if at all? What have you come to think about the experience and what it meant for your life?

11) What is the one thing you would want someone to know about the experience of living life

without a father? Say all that you want to say, no judgment or restriction. Tell us in your own

words what you want people to know the most.

12) Is there anything you would like to add that may have been missed during this time.

Anything you hoped I asked about. Take this time to talk about that.

VITA

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Psi Chi Honor Society, East Tennessee State University 2006