

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FATHERLESSNESS IN MALE ADOLESCENTS:  
THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the lived experiences of teenage males who did not have a father figure at home during high school. Participants included eight males of varying ethnicities, ages 18-23, who graduated from high school within the last five years. This was a qualitative study with a phenomenological design. The major data collection method was three in-depth interviews. The two research questions asked “How do adolescent males perceive the absence of a father to have impacted them during high school?” and “Were any school-related interventions available for students without fathers, and if so, how did students perceive these interventions to have impacted them?” To analyze the data, horizons were coded, invariant constituents were identified through axial coding, and themes were identified from the invariant constituents. Six themes—attachment, other influences, needs, emotions, behaviors, and identity—were identified from the analysis of the data. The needs that participants wanted and expected their fathers to meet included support, someone to go to for guidance and advice, someone to hold them accountable and discipline them, someone to help motivate, someone to teach them certain skills and gender roles, and someone with whom to share a father-son bond. When fathers were unavailable, participants depended on mothers, grandparents, peers, mentors in the community, teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to meet these needs. The participants in this study conveyed that most of these needs remained unmet during high school. When these needs were not met, the impact was seen emotionally and behaviorally, influencing the participants’ identities

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

— *Proverbs 22:6*

The impact of fathers and male role models can be traced back to the beginning of time. The Bible has many examples of men who incorporated biblical principles to teach, develop, and nurture their children and others entrusted to their care. It was David who imparted a lifetime of wisdom, preparation, and council to help prepare his son, Solomon, for the kingship of Israel (1 Kings 2:1-10, NIV). After wasting his money on wild living in a distant land, the prodigal son returned to his father. Instead of disowning his son, the prodigal’s father reacted in love: “Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

Currently, fathers and other male role models remain an integral part of young boys’ lives; however, there is an abundance of young boys who are growing up without the guidance of a father (Kreider, 2008). The absence of a father in a young man's life increases the probability of behavioral issues, low grades, poor health and an increased likelihood of psychiatric problems (Jones, 2004; Mitchell & King, 2009).

This research study explains and interprets participant perceptions of the challenges faced by male adolescents without a father figure during the high school years. The study also explores whether or not schools offer interventions for fatherless male students and if the offered interventions are beneficial to those students. It is hoped that this research provides insight into both the challenges experienced and support offered.

## **Background**

### **Societal Issue**

Today, many children are growing up without their fathers at home. Fatherlessness has been referred to as “the single biggest social problem in the US today” (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. 98). In June of 2001, while speaking at the National Summit on Fatherhood, President George W. Bush stated, “Over the past four decades, fatherlessness has emerged as one of our greatest social problems” (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007, p. 20). Seventy percent of individuals participating in the 2008 National Fathering Survey agreed that physical absence of fathers from the home is the most significant family or social problem facing America (National Center for Fathering, 2009). The above statements and findings underscore the prevalence and severity of the absence of fathers from the home.

Unfortunately, when fathers are absent from the home, they are also often absent from their children’s daily lives. The Alabama Department of Human Resources (2011) reported the following regarding fathers absent from the home: (a) 40% have no contact with their children; (b) 60% have contact only 69 days of the year; and (c) 26% live in different states than their children. Sorenson and Zibman (2000) reported that only 34% of children not living with a parent saw the absent parent on a weekly basis and that 28% of children had not seen the absent parent in the last year.

Half of all children experience the absence of their fathers at some point during childhood (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). In the book, *Bringing up Boys*, James Dobson (2001) addresses the issue of fatherlessness.

During my review of the latest research for this book, I came face-to-face with the same disturbing issue. Boys are in trouble today primarily because their parents, and especially

their dads, are distracted, overworked, harassed, exhausted, disinterested, chemically dependent, divorced, or simply unable to cope. (p. 55)

### **Trends in Fatherlessness**

The impact and significance of fatherlessness is not a new phenomenon. Citing the findings of Freud regarding fathers, Jones (2004) identifies that “the loss of a father can be the single greatest loss a person can experience” (p. 334). The origin of research on fatherlessness and its effect on children can be traced back to World War II. Bach’s (1946) study following World War II concluded that both a child’s perception of their father and a child’s development were affected when the father was absent.

More than ever, children are growing up in single-parent households, and in the majority of cases, the single parent is the mother. The United States is the world’s leader in fatherless homes (Gottfried, 2007). It is projected that the federal government spends a minimum of 99.8 billion dollars annually on families without fathers (Nock & Einolf, 2008). According to the US Census Bureau, in 2004, there were just over 20 million children, 34.3% of children under age 18, living without their biological fathers; conversely, in 1960, there were only 10 million children living at home without their biological fathers (Kreider, 2008).

### **Contributing Factors**

Several factors have contributed to an increasing rate of fatherlessness. Social trends such as non-marital births, cohabitation, and divorce have increased the likelihood of fathers leaving or being absent from their children (Clarke, Cooksey & Verropoulou, 1998; Gurian, 1996). Other factors such as incarceration (Mumola, 2000) and death (Nock & Einolf, 2008) have also contributed to fatherlessness.

**Non-marital births and cohabitation.** The biggest determinant of whether a child will be fatherless is marital status at the time of the child's birth. Clarke et al. (1998) found that 80% of men who were married to the child's mother at the time of the child's birth lived with their children; conversely, only 22.6% of men who were unmarried at the time of the child's birth lived with their children. Unfortunately, non-marital childbirth is increasing at a rapid rate. Between 1940 and 2006, the percentage of children born to non-married partners increased by nearly 35% (Solomon-Fears, 2008). Hamilton, Martin, and Sutton (2004) stated that 35.2% of children, approximately 1.42 million children, were born to unmarried parents in 2003. At the time, these numbers were the highest ever reported.

As the number of children born to non-married parents has increased over the years, so has the number of cohabiting couples. The problem with cohabitation is that it sometimes involves children and usually does not last long (Lu & Bumpass, 1998; Moore, Guzman, Hair, Lippman & Garrett, 2004). Forty percent of all cohabitations among men and women involve parents with children (Moore et al.) and according to Bumpass and Lu's 1998 study, "cohabitation continues to be a short-term status, with about half lasting a year or less, only one-sixth lasting three years, and about a tenth lasting five years or longer" (p. 13). In impoverished couples, approximately 33% of couples that lived together during pregnancy were no longer living together two to five months after the child's birth (Mincey, 2004). There is a direct correlation between the number of couples that cohabit and the number of children born to unmarried parents. Fields (2003) found the number of cohabiting couples increased from 530,000 couples in 1970 to 4.6 million in 2003. This correlates with the 35% increase of children born to non-married partners from 1940-2006 (Solomon-Fears, 2008).

**Divorce.** Another predictor of fatherless children is divorce. The National Marriage Project (2010) stated that there is a 40-50% chance that first-time marriages today will end in divorce, more than twice the rate of divorce in 1960 (Pew Research Center, 2007; Roberts, 2004; US Census Bureau, 2001). In 2002, 50% of children living with a single parent were living with a divorced or separated parent (US Census Bureau, 2003). While the number of divorces hit its peak in the 1980s, leveled off during the 1990s, and decreased slightly between 2000 and 2010, the number of divorces is still cause for concern (National Marriage Project, 2010). In the majority of divorce cases, custody is granted to the mother. In fact, 83.8% of children under 21 from divorced parents were in the custody of their mother (Grall, 2007).

Children of divorced parents reported higher levels of warmth and control from their fathers than the children whose parents were never married. “As predicted, divorced or separated fathers are more influential for children than are never-married fathers” (Coley, 1998, p. 226). In addition to the level of influence they have on their children, a difference in their likelihood to pay child support also exists between divorced fathers and never-married fathers (Meyer & Bartfield, 1998). Meyer and Barfield revealed that divorced fathers are more likely to pay child support, helping to alleviate economic stress.

**Incarceration.** The impact of incarceration on children living without their fathers was discussed and stressed by Mumola (2000). In his article, *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*, Mumola found that 667,900 fathers of minor children were being held in state and federal prisons. Mumola further stated that 44% of these fathers lived with their children before incarceration and the amount of children below the age of 18 whose fathers were incarcerated had increased by 58% since 1991.

**Death.** Despite its infrequency, death contributes to fatherlessness. In 1960, more than 20% of female-headed households were due to death; however, today only 3.6% of female-headed households are due to the death of the father (Nock & Einolf, 2008).

### **Ethnic Differences in Fatherlessness**

There are greater percentages of African-American and Hispanic children living in father-absent households than father-absent households of White children (Fields, 2008). Kreider and Fields (2005) found that 63% of African-American children, 35% of Hispanic children, and 28% of White children lived in homes without their biological fathers. According to other studies, 80% of African-American children are expected to spend a significant part of their childhood living apart from their fathers (Nock & Einolf, 2008; Ventura, Martin, Curtin & Matthew, 1998).

Although no race demonstrated exclusivity regarding fatherlessness, there are different factors among races that contribute to the phenomenon. In White families, divorce has resulted in a 66% increase in single-parent homes (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1996). Non-marital births are a greater factor in African-American, Native American, and Hispanic families. According to 2008 government statistics, 72% of African-American, 66% of Native American, 53% of Hispanic, compared to 29% of White babies were born to unwed mothers (Washington, 2010). Incarceration as a cause of fatherlessness is also more prevalent in African-American and Hispanic families. According to Mumola (2000), African-American and Hispanic children are more likely to have a parent, in most cases the father, in prison than White children. African-American children are nine times as likely and Hispanic children are three times as likely to have an incarcerated parent (Mumola).

## **Schools and Fatherlessness**

Today, schools are under more pressure than ever to perform. Performance is measured by student achievement. Both the reputation and, in some cases, funding of schools can be affected by low standardized test scores and graduation rates. The same social issues that impact students also impact schools. Schools today are becoming more and more involved with complex personal, family, and social issues that may affect students' performance and behaviors (Comer, 2001).

According to Mitchell and King (2009), "there is near uniform agreement among family scholars that children with nonresident fathers tend to be worse off with respect to behavioral problems and school achievement than children who reside with both biological parents" (p. 650). With the increasing rate of single-parent families and the evidence of lower achievement among students from single-parent families, father absence could have many implications for schools (Coley, 1998; Jones, 2004; List & Woefle, 2000; Mitchell & King, 2009). According to the study, *The Costs of Father Absence*, children with absent fathers perform less well in school, and schools may have to make extra efforts to educate these students (Nock & Einolf, 2008).

Based on the research reviewed, it is evident that fatherlessness is a growing problem in the United States. It is also documented that the problem is cyclical (Nock & Einolf, 2008; Pollock, 1998), meaning that males who grow up without fathers are more likely to be absent fathers themselves. Evidence also supports that because fatherlessness affects many students, it also impacts schools.

## **Situation to Self**

When considering topics, Merriam (2009) recommended that researchers examine a phenomenon encountered in daily life—work, family, friends, and community. Merriam

suggested asking questions such as “What puzzles you?” and “What is interesting to you that you do not quite understand?” when selecting a topic for investigation (pp. 55-56). During my 14 years as a teacher and coach, I have encountered many students who have not had active fathers. I was blessed with a very involved dad; therefore, my experience with father absence is based solely on students and friends with absent fathers. Because I believe that a father makes a unique contribution to the development of his children, the issue of fatherlessness became of interest to me. When the father is absent or not active in a child’s life, it is often detrimental to the development of the child. The role of the school is to help children develop academically, socially, and emotionally. When a phenomenon such as fatherlessness is inhibiting proper development of children, schools are impacted. Schools and teachers can be front-line defenders in helping students overcome issues such as fatherlessness. The goal of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of high school students with absent fathers and to determine if and how schools may be able to help these students.

### **Problem Statement**

According to “The Boy Crisis,” a 2006 *Newsweek* article, “the most reliable predictor of whether a boy will succeed or fail in high school rests on a single question: Does he have a man in his life to look up to? Too often the answer is no” (Tyre, 2006, p. 51). The findings mentioned in the background from Grall (2007), Moore et al. (2004), Nock and Einolf (2008), and Solomon-Fears (2008) help bring awareness to the growing problem of fatherlessness in America. Many family experts (Dobson, 2001; Eldridge, 2001; Gurian, 1999) believe the father’s role in the physical, relational, and psychological development of young males is essential. Dobson (2001) emphasizes that a father’s positive actions and behaviors are the most effective way to develop character in boys. Eldridge and Gurian further stress the importance of

mentoring and active intervention by older adult males as pivotal aspects in a boy's development. Research has found that one of the primary environmental factors essential for high motivation among adolescent boys is nurturing and mentoring by men (Gurian & Stevens, 2005).

Much of the phenomenon of family dynamics and research has focused on mothers and motherhood, but Clarke, Cooksey, and Verropoulou (1998) suggest that the role and importance of fathers and fatherhood has increased in interest.

The role of fathers in their children's lives, the impact of increasing instability in family life on where fathers and children live, and how patterns of fathering affect children's well-being are aspects of family life that researchers have only recently begun to view as important. (Clarke et al., 1998, p. 217)

Fatherlessness is an issue that affects many students. When students are affected, schools and school systems are also affected. Considering the severity and increasing frequency of fatherlessness, schools cannot afford to ignore the problem. One way for schools to examine how to address the problems associated with fatherlessness and to determine what they can do to help is to learn about fatherlessness directly from the students who have experienced it.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences that male students with an absent father faced during their high school years. The objective of this research was to gain a unique perspective into teenage males who did not have a father figure at home throughout high school. The study focused on fatherlessness and its impact on social-emotional, behavioral, and academic aspects from the point of view of teenage boys in high

school. The study also explored the boys' perceptions of if and how schools supported students without fathers.

### **Significance of the Study**

Much of the latest research on nonresident fathers has focused on payment of child support and frequency of contact (Hawkins, Amato & King, 2007), rather than on the effects that father absence has on the experiences of the child. This research study investigated the perspective of male adolescents who have first-hand experience in coping with father absence. According to Irving Seidman (2007), "So much research is done on schooling in the United States, yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of students, teachers, administrators, . . . whose individual and collective experiences constitutes schooling" (p. 10).

### **Research Questions**

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences that male adolescents without fathers at home faced during high school. The literature review concluded that fatherlessness impacts adolescents in different ways. According to the literature, among the ways that adolescents without fathers are impacted includes lower academic achievement, increased behavioral issues, delayed social-emotional development and psychiatric problems. The first research question investigated the impact that fatherlessness had on the participants during high school. The literature also revealed interventions that could help support students without fathers. These interventions include mentoring programs, activities to increase parental involvement, and implementing programs that help meet the various needs of these students. The second research question investigated whether interventions were made available by the school and, if so, how they were perceived. The two research questions that were analyzed are as follows:

1. How do adolescent males perceive the absence of a father to have impacted them during high school?
2. Were any school related interventions available for students without fathers, and if so, how did students perceive these interventions to have impacted them?

### **Delimitations**

There are many phenomena that impact behaviors of adolescents. Not having a father present may be a factor that contributes to specific behaviors, but there are many other factors that contribute to behaviors in teenagers. These factors can include the quality of relationship with their mother, type of relationship with grandparents and other older family members, relationship with siblings, self-confidence, and personality.

Examining parenting practices used in raising teenagers was beyond the scope of this study. Also outside the scope of this study was the examination of other non-traditional family environments, such as living in homes with grandparents, with stepparents, or with two same-gender partners. Another delimitation of this study is that only recent graduates were used. Research has shown that students without fathers are more likely to drop out of school. Using only recent graduates limits this study by not including students who have dropped out of high school. Time constraints limit the study as well. The three interviews and time spent together give only a glimpse of the actual experiences that these teenagers lived.

### **Research Plan**

This research stemmed from the theoretical framework of Lev Vygotsky's social development theory and Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Vygotsky's social development theory was applied by looking at the lack of social interactions the participants had with their fathers. Bandura's social learning theory was applied by investigating the

opportunities for imitation and identification that the participants did not receive due to an absent father.

The study was qualitative and employed a phenomenological design. Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990) and helps attach meaning to experiences from the perspective of those who have experienced the phenomenon (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006). A phenomenological design enabled the interpretation and understanding of each participant's lived experiences.

The primary means of collecting data included three in-depth interviews per participant. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. After transcription, coding and recoding grouped the text into themes. These themes revealed perspectives from the adolescent males about the phenomenon that can be used to help teenagers in similar situations. Perspectives on the perceived interventions offered by schools were also sought. These perspectives may help schools investigate how students perceive these interventions or help schools develop new interventions that could benefit their students from fatherless homes. This information could lead to solutions that contribute to and benefit schools, and impact society as a whole.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Fatherless.** The condition of a family setting in which the biological, step, or adoptive father is absent. This definition includes fathers who are fully absent because of death, incarceration, or abandonment, and fathers who are partially absent and who live in different households due to divorce or separation (Nock & Einolf, 2008).

**Academic achievement.** For this study, academic achievement will be measured through the discussion and perceptions of individuals based on themes present in the interview.

This may include, but will not be limited to, grade point averages, class rank, standardized test scores, and grades earned in academic classes.

**Negative behaviors.** In this study, negative behaviors will be identified measured through the discussion and perceptions of individuals based on themes present in the interview. This may include, but will not be limited to, number of days in in-school suspension, days in out-of-school suspension, number of days absent, and number of discipline referrals.

**Social-emotional development.** For this study, social-emotional development will be identified measured through the discussion and perceptions of participants based on themes present in the interview. This may include, but will not be limited to, social interactions with peers and adults and expression of emotions and feelings.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review examines the pertinent issues male adolescents encounter as a result of not having a father involved in their lives. This review explores problems associated with the role of fathers and the effects of fathers and fatherlessness, including social-emotional developmental issues, substance and physical abuse, delinquency and violence, poverty, health issues, and the impact of fatherlessness on academic achievement. Additionally, this review discusses the benefits of mentors, the influence of male role models, and the implications of this topic on schools. This review also discusses how an absent father can be better than an emotionally or physically abusive father.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is the use of the social development theory and social learning theory. Lev Vygotsky's (1998) social development theory focuses on the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. In this study, social development theory is applied to the lack of social interaction students had with their fathers and its impact on both academic achievement and cognitive development (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010).

Albert Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Kearsley, 2011). As Popenoe (2009) proposed, fathers are role models for both sons and daughters. Children with absent fathers are at a marked disadvantage in human relationships. Social learning theory suggests that socialization and development are established through imitation and identification. In this research, social learning theory informs the observing and modeling of behavior and socialization in fatherlessness participants. Social learning theory suggests that male adolescents will benefit from nonresident father involvement; despite living apart from their fathers, male

adolescents can positively identify and imitate their fathers during development (Mitchell & King, 2009).

### **Role of Fathers**

Today, fathers may be absent because of war, occupations or trades, but the majority of fathers are absent due to societal changes such as non-marital births, cohabitation, divorce, and incarceration (Clarke, Cooksey, & Verropoulou, 1998). Under these circumstances, fathers often have limited or no involvement with their children (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2011). Children under the age of 13 who have both parents at home will spend an average of 1.77 hours per week involved in activities with their fathers compared to children in single-parent families that only spend an average of .42 hours per week with their fathers (Lippman, 2004). When fathers do not live with their children, it is often difficult for them to enact a parental role. Due to limitations and the time constraints of visiting with their children, many fathers want to ensure that their children enjoy themselves when they are together. During such activities as eating out, movies, and sporting events, fathers may become simply a companion instead of an authority figure (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

In addition to the relational challenges nonresident fathers face, a more disturbing trend is emerging. Many studies have stressed the negative effects for adolescents—drug abuse, alcohol consumption, promiscuous behavior—when the father is absent from the home (Anderson, 2002; Biller, 1998; Jones, 2004). What implications do these negative effects have on our society as a whole, and what are the implications for adolescent males in our schools?

In a recent Associated Press article Dr. Natalie Carroll, an OB-GYN in Houston dedicated to assisting low-income African-American women, was quoted, “A mama can’t give it all. And neither can a daddy, not by themselves, part of the reason is because you can only give

that which you have. A mother cannot give all that a man can give. A truly involved father figure offers more fullness to a child's life" (Washington, 2010, p. 1). Michael Gurian (1996), social philosopher and cofounder of the Gurian Institute, observes in his book, *The Wonder of Boys*, "Every son wants from his father to gain a sense of mission in life and receive permission from an elder male to pursue the mission" (p. 109). Research at the Gurian Institute has found that one of the primary environmental factors essential for high motivation among adolescent boys is nurturing and mentoring by men (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). Prior to the Industrial Era, it was common for fathers and sons to work together as the son learned a trade from his father. While acknowledging the value of learning a trade, this interaction also created opportunities for life lessons to be passed from father to son. Later in the Industrial Era, many fathers began working in factories and the bond between father and son was weakened (Bly, 2004).

Unfortunately, a decrease in paternal involvement leaves adolescent males without the guidance of a male role model. Gurian's (1999) book, *From Boys to Men*, stressed the importance of boys having fathers and other male role models as they enter puberty; "[Fathers] know what being a man is, and you need to learn about that from them" (p. 76). Gurian stressed the unique bond that develops when a father or male role model expresses an interest in an adolescent. Psychologist Michael Thompson (2008) defined what kind of man boys look for in a role model.

- A man who can teach a boy both the skills that a man should know and the tools of the trade that the boy would like to learn.
- A man who can demonstrate how to manage the struggles that all men experience with their strength, sexuality, and vulnerability.

- A man who can teach a boy something really useful; someone to say, “I recognize you as an emerging man.”

Without a father to witness his growth, how does a boy know that he is becoming the kind of man he should become? (p. 279)

Similar to Thompson’s (2008) remarks, which stressed the importance of dads and role models, Dobson (2001) stated in *Bringing up Boys*, “Boys watch their dads intently, noting every minor detail of behavior and values” (p. 69). Dobson believes that character development is best instilled in young men through the example and behavior of a father. In William Pollock’s (1998) study at Boston University, he suggested that boys with involved fathers observe how to handle various life situations from their fathers and thus learn how to deal with challenging situations appropriately. Dobson’s and Pollock’s claims are consistent with Bandura’s social learning theory.

Dobson (2001) presented his chief concern as the absence of masculine role modeling and mentoring that should be provided by fathers. Christian author and counselor, John Eldredge (2006), explained how boys develop their identity from men: “A boy has a lot to learn in his journey to become a man, and he becomes a man only through the active intervention of his father and the fellowship of men” (p. 4). Similarly, Pollock (1998) emphasized the role fathers play in the transition from boyhood to manhood. Pollock stated that children lack supervision and discipline when a father is absent. Fathers who live at home provide a much-needed male role model for male adolescents. Of 254 African-American teenagers, 96% stated their resident fathers were role models, compared to 44% of the teenagers polled stating their nonresident fathers were role models. (Zimmerman, Salem & Maton, 1995). David Popenoe (2009), in his book *Families Without Fathers*, explained that fathers play an indispensable role in raising a

child. “They are expected to give their children guidance, instruction, encouragement, care, and love. In giving these things, men bring to their children something quite different from what mothers bring. The unique contributions of fathers, in turn, are strongly related to successful child outcomes” (p. 142).

Unfortunately, today’s culture is doing very little in support of the family and particularly the father’s role in the family. Popenoe (2009) made his case that today’s culture is unsupportive of fatherhood. Popenoe stated, “The end result of the many cultural, social, and economic trends we have discussed [divorce, non-marital births, laws] is a society surprisingly unsupportive of fatherhood” (p. 48). Popenoe discussed the key factors that have caused society to be unsupportive of fatherhood: Society has . . .

1. Made marriage into a very weak institution. [Marriage] is just a piece of paper, little different from simply living with someone at your convenience. Replaced the phrase ‘till death do us part’ with ‘so long as I am happy.’ Indicated that single-parent families and other family forms where fathers are absent can be equally good at raising children as married-father families. Provided for easy divorce, whereby a man can simply walk out of a marriage at any time for any reason.
2. Sexualized our society. Sex is emphasized as often as possible in the media and popular culture. We stress that good sex lies at the root of personal fulfillment. We provide men with abundant opportunity to have as much sex as they want outside of the marital relationship.
3. Instituted an educational system that disregards the fact that childrearing is a major adult responsibility and that marriage is important to childrearing. Pretended that the only adult role of importance is the work role; never mentioned that marriage and

- children may be a major part of a man's future life. Taught no 'family values,' for they are sure to be controversial if nothing else. Provided no skills or knowledge concerning how to care for family. For sex education, assumed that everyone is already having sex and mainly provided the knowledge and devices necessary for contraception.
4. An economic system that does not recognize workers' family responsibilities and that stresses ever-increasing material consumption. Allowed men little time off for family tasks and penalized them with lower salaries and slower job advancement when they take such time. Explained that doing their job is the main thing; what they do on their own time is their own concern. Moved men around a lot from job to job, forcing them to change communities often.
  5. Developed a culture that heavily stresses individualism. As the primary goals of life, promoted individual freedom and self-fulfillment rather than social responsibility and obligation. Emphasized such slogans as 'live and let live,' 'live free or die,' and 'do your own thing.'
  6. In social discourse, through the media, and in the design of the built environment, deemphasized the importance of children to the continuation of society. Expressed no disapproval of men who have children and then abandon them. Featured in the media mostly adult situations in which children are not only absent but never mentioned. Designed communities and shopping centers and transportation systems solely with adults in mind.

7. Overlooked the importance of fathering when discussing male gender roles. Stressed only that men must learn to be less aggressive, less competitive, and less interested in sports.
8. When fathering was discussed, we haven't mentioned that fathers are unique and irreplaceable as protectors, challengers, disciplinarians, and guides. (pp. 48-50)

Dobson (2001) echoed Popenoe's concerns as he stated that

Chief among the threat to this generation of boys is the breakdown of the family. Every other difficulty we will consider has been caused by or is related to that fundamental tragedy. It can hardly be overstated [that] we have been emphasizing for years that stable, lifelong marriages provides the foundation for social order. Everything of value rests on those underpinnings. (p. 53)

As Dobson and Popenoe have explained, with the breakdown of the family, the role of the father is often misunderstood and sometimes left out altogether. When families are split, it is often children who suffer the most. To address the root of the problem of fatherlessness, efforts must be made to strengthen families.

### **Effects of Fathers and Fatherlessness**

There is agreement among family scholars and researchers that children with absent fathers tend to have more behavior issues and lower academic achievement in school (Mitchell & King, 2009). Nock and Einolf (2008) revealed that children from absent father families are more likely to have children out of wedlock, less likely to get married, and more likely to get divorced. They are also less likely to attend college and more likely to end up in jail. Other consequences of fatherlessness include juvenile delinquency, school violence, sexual assault, and drug and alcohol abuse (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Capps & Zaff, 2006 & Anderson, 2002). Jones (2004)

found that children, most notably boys, whose fathers were not present in the home, demonstrated higher degrees of delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and psychiatric problems. As suggested by Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer (1998), deteriorating father-adolescent relationships encourage delinquency and worsen the symptoms of depression.

The findings of Jones (2004) and Nock and Einolf (2008) illuminate the consequences of boys not being affirmed and nurtured by their father on a daily basis. According to Kindlon and Thompson (1999), studies have shown that having an involved father is good for children of all ages—they tend to have better psychological health, do better in school, and get better jobs. In a meta-analysis that examined father involvement and its impact on child well-being in two-parent families, it was determined that 82% of the studies showed significant and positive associations between child well-being and father involvement (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). When there is a weak relationship between the child and mother, children who had a strong relationship with their nonresident father showed less internalizing and externalizing problems than adolescents who had a weak relationship to both parents (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Another study showed that contact between a father and a child was associated with better social-emotional and academic functioning. According to this study, children with more involved fathers scored higher on reading achievement tests and experienced fewer behavioral problems, and this study showed that father involvement is significant in the lives of at-risk children even when the father does not live in the home (Howard, Burke LeFever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006). Children whose fathers are stable and involved are better off in every cognitive, social, and emotional measure developed by researchers. High levels of father involvement are associated with sociability, confidence and high levels of self-control in children (Anthes, 2010). Interaction with fathers and other men are important predictors of healthy functioning in both cognitive and

behavioral aspects of children living with a single parent (Coley, 1998). Furthermore, this interaction can both increase academic achievement and decrease the likelihood of illegal drug use. Henry Biller (1993) stated:

Children with an involved father are exposed to more varied social experiences and are more intellectually advanced than those who only have regular contact with their mother. . . . Well-fathered children have a greater breadth of positive and social experiences than those exclusively reared by their mothers. (p. 15)

Studies have also been conducted on the effect of absent fathers in infants and on the mother and baby during pregnancy. One study indicated that father involvement during infancy, such as cognitively stimulating activities, physical care, paternal warmth, and positive father-child interactions, can reduce cognitive delay in outcomes such as babbling and exploring objects with a purpose (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz, & Kinukawa, 2008). Father involvement has also been related to improved weight gain in preterm infants and improved breastfeeding rates (Garfield & Isacco, 2006). Also, studies have shown that, when fathers are involved during the pregnancy, babies are less likely to have complications during birth (Alio, Mbah, Marty, & Salihu, 2010).

Expanding upon the previous studies indicating the benefits of fathers on infants and unborn children, Pollock (1998) stated that fathers are also crucial to the development of adolescent boys by helping them manage their emotional, academic, and social-emotional health. In an 11-year study that followed boys ages seven to 11 through to ages 18 to 22, Pollock found a correlation between the quantity of shared activities a boy experienced with his father and its effect on the following areas:

1. Academic—there was an increase in the amount of education completed.

2. Emotional—there was an increase in the bond between father and son.
3. Social—there was a decrease in delinquent incidences.

Additionally, Pollock cited the Glueck study which showed that fathers who were supportive of social and emotional development during the first ten years of life had boys who excelled in high school and college.

### **Social-emotional Effects**

While both adolescent boys and girls are negatively affected by fatherlessness, a lack of an adult male role model may be more detrimental to the social and emotional development of boys. Kindlon and Thompson (2000) emphasized the difference between the emotional expression of boys and girls, which promotes emotional development for girls and discourages it for boys. The authors stated that girls are taught to be reflective and expressive of their feelings and the feelings of others. Conversely, boys often do not receive emotional encouragement and are discouraged from expressing emotions. The result is that boys can be indifferent to others' feelings at home and school.

The tendency for boys to demonstrate a lack of emotions can be traced to the influence of their fathers. According to the 1997 Gallup poll, 90.3% of Americans agreed that fathers make a unique contribution to their children's lives (National Center for Fathering, 2007). Pollock (1998) cited research from Boston University that has shown the effect of fathers being actively involved in their sons' lives and concluded that a father's involvement resulted in less aggressive, less competitive, and more emotionally expressive behavior, and the ability to convey vulnerability and sadness. The study also found that boys with active, caring fathers did not feel the need to act out or show aggression in order to win their fathers' love and attention. In a meta-analysis, McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider (2013) found strong evidence that father

absence had a negative impact on children's social-emotional development, particularly by increasing externalizing behaviors, such as smoking and early child bearing, during adolescence. Additionally, the *Fragile Families Studies* (Osborne & McClanahan, 2007) showed that children born to unmarried mothers were more likely to display aggressive behaviors compared to children born to married mothers.

In a study involving 1,517 male adolescents and their primary caretakers, Loeber et al. (2000) compared the interpersonal interaction of single-parent families with two-parent families. Loeber et al. concluded that single-parent families displayed higher degrees of negative communication, poor supervision, and physical punishment. The authors further explained that poor relationships between children and caretakers were more pronounced in single-parent households.

Whereas Loeber et al. (2000) found negative behaviors in single parent families, Mandara and Murray (2000) found positive outcomes in male adolescents with married parents. According to Mandara and Murray, male adolescents with married parents were found to have higher self-esteem, self-control, and feelings of personal power compared to teenagers who only had a mother at home. The teenagers displayed these positive traits even when income, parental education, and the number of people living in the home were controlled.

Kindlon and Thompson (1998) provided further evidence that reinforces the belief that a father's proximity correlates to a boy's emotional well-being:

It is clear to us that the most emotionally resourceful and resilient boys are those whose fathers are part of the emotional fabric of the family, whose fathers care for them and show it in comforting, consistent ways. Sadly, it is a minority of fathers who share this kind of relationship with their sons. (p. 96)

In agreement with Kindlon and Thompson, Dobson (2001) stated that fathers have a huge influence on the social and emotional lives of their children, whether good or bad. Research by Zimmerman et al. (1995) showed that both time spent with fathers and emotional support from fathers was associated with positive psychosocial outcomes. For example, emotional support from a father was associated with positive psychological well-being. In an ongoing study by the National Center for Education Statistics, involvement of fathers, resident or nonresident, appears to affect cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Jones, 2006). To illustrate the effect on a child's outcomes, Nock and Einolf (2008) concluded, "Children of fatherless families use mental health services at a higher rate than children of two-parent families" (p. 8). A study of 3,419 middle school students revealed that participants from single-parent families were four times more likely to experience depression, dysthymia, and bipolar disorders (Cuffe, McKeown, Addy, & Garrison, 2005). Children from single-mother families are one and a half to two times more likely to have one or more behavioral or emotional problems than children living with a father and mother (National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1996). For example, 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes, and 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes (Gottfried, 2007).

Emotional issues are sometimes passed down through generations. The lack of emotional development in men is cyclical. If young boys do not have a male to share their emotions with while growing up, they will be less likely to provide emotional support for their sons or younger males they may know (Gurian, 1996). Children from single-mother families are more likely to show resentment and anger toward their fathers (Nock & Einolf, 2008). Gurian (1996) found that boys without fathers are "at risk for undisciplined behavior, unclear responsibilities, antisocial behavior, and an inability to attach completely to adult women, thus continuing the

cycle of divorce” (p. 111). Boys who grow up without an emotional attachment to their fathers often do not know how to relate to their own sons. A father’s involvement is influenced by his developmental history. Although some fathers try to model the relationship they had with their fathers, some try to establish a different kind of relationship (Nord & West, 2001). According to Kindlon and Thompson (1999),

I still see too many men who are unable to be the kind of fathers they want to be. Often these men are hostile to and critical of their sons—despite their desire to behave otherwise—pushing their boys further and further inside a tight box of impossible expectations and denied feelings. (p. 16)

A study of 40 middle school boys showed that those who lived without a father demonstrated a poorer sense of masculinity and had poorer interpersonal relationships than their peers who lived with their biological fathers (Beatty, 1995). Being raised in a fatherless household may diminish a child’s social support and coping mechanisms and can create a sense of helplessness (Lichter, Daniel, Shannahan, & Gardener, 2002). Lichter et al. also suggested that fatherless children are less likely to engage in volunteerism or pro-social behaviors. Adolescents with good relationships with their fathers show lower rates of symptoms of depression while those with poor relationships with their fathers show an increase in depression (Videon, 2005).

### **Drug and Substance Abuse**

According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (2001), teenagers with involved fathers are less likely to use drugs and be involved in high-risk behaviors. The study also suggested that teenagers living with a single mother are at a lower risk of substance abuse when they spend time with their absent father, and teenagers who

spend time regularly with their biological fathers have a lower risk of substance abuse than teenagers who do not see their fathers. According to the same study, father presence was important, but father involvement was more important. Adolescents whose fathers were more involved and helped enforce rules were less likely to use drugs than adolescents whose fathers were less involved. The conclusions of Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Capps, and Zaff (2006) also stressed the consequences of uninvolved fathers. They found that youth were more at risk for substance use without an involved father; in fact, 75% of all adolescent patients in-drug treatment centers came from fatherless homes (Gottfried, 2007). In addition to drug abuse, children from single-parent households are more likely to drink and smoke (Griffin, Botvin, Lawrence, Diaz & Miller, 2000). Children living with a single mother have a 32% higher risk of smoking, drinking, and using drugs, compared to children living in two-parent households (National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2001).

### **Physical Abuse**

Living in a single-parent household doubles the risk that the child will suffer physical and emotional neglect (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997). While this study and the Sedlak and Broadhurst (1996) study include single fathers as well as single mothers, it is applicable to this research because 87% of the time the single parent is the mother (US Census Bureau, 2011). Sedlak and Broadhurst stated that children in single-parent households are:

- At 77% greater risk of being physical abused.
- At 87% greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect.
- At 165% greater risk of experiencing notable physical neglect.
- At 74% greater risk of suffering from emotional neglect.

- At 80% greater risk of suffering serious injury as a result of abuse.

According to this study, parents are not frequently the perpetrators of the abuse. Popenoe (2009) suggested that a major reason for the increase in child abuse among fatherless children is that unrelated men are more likely to abuse children than their biological fathers. Popenoe pointed out that in single-parent homes and stepfamilies, men who are not the biological father often have close relationships to children.

### **Delinquency and Violent Behaviors**

In a study of low income minority male adolescents, results showed that more frequent social encounters and communication with nonresident fathers decreased delinquency (Coley & Medeiros, 2007). Children raised in single-parent families and surrounded by other children of single-parent families at school are at a greater risk of delinquency (Anderson, 2002). Boys who grow up without married mothers and fathers are more than twice as likely as boys from two-parent families to end up in jail (Nock & Einolf, 2008). Each year spent in the home without a father increases a boy's chances of being incarcerated by 5%. Boys raised by unmarried mothers are at greatest risk because they spent the most time at home without a father (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Gottfried (2007) reported that 80% of rapists come from fatherless homes, and 85% of youth in prisons grew up in fatherless homes. The chief predictor of crime in a neighborhood in the United States is the percentage of homes without fathers. As many as 70% of adolescents charged with murder are from fatherless homes, and 70% of long-term prison inmates grew up in fatherless homes (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2011). As Popenoe (2009) stated, "Fathers are important to their sons as role models. They are important for maintaining authority and discipline. And they are important in helping their sons to develop

both self-control and feeling of empathy towards others, character traits that are found to be lacking in violent youth” (p. 63).

## **Poverty**

According to Nock and Einolf (2008), poverty is a negative impact of fatherlessness because living with a single parent increases a child’s chances of living in poverty. Popenoe (2009) said the economic loss is the “most tangible and immediate consequence” for fatherlessness and that the increase in single-mother households constitutes a national emergency. Popenoe further stated, “no group is so poor, and none stays poor longer” in reference to single-mother households (p. 54). Children from single-parent families are almost four times more likely to live in poverty than children from two-parent families. In 2011, only 12% of married-couple families were living in poverty compared to 44% of single-mother families (US Census Bureau, 2011). In 2003, nearly 40% of single-female households lived in poverty, 32% higher than families with both parents present. Sixty-nine percent of students receiving free and reduced lunches in public schools are from father-absent families. Nock and Einolf further explained that below-average incomes of single-mother families are one of the factors that negatively affect poverty. In 2008, poverty rates for the United States were 13.2% for the whole population, 19% for children and 28.7% for single-mother families (Edine & Kissine, 2008). Poverty rates in children increased by 5% from 1970 to 1996 due to the increase in single-mother families (Sawhill, 2006).

The impact of poverty can negatively affect the educational achievement of single-parent children. As stated by Astone and McLanahan (1991), “One reason children from single-parent families are less likely to finish high school is the precarious economic position of their families” (p. 309). In a meta-analysis of *Nonresident Fathers and Children’s Well-Being*, Amato and

Gilbreth (1999) discussed recommendations in research that were based on nonresidential fathers' economic contributions for improving children's health, educational attainment, and general well-being. The authors asserted that sometimes paying child support can be a bigger contribution to well-being than spending time with their children. Amato and Gilbreth stated that "Fathers' financial contributions provide wholesome food, adequate shelter in safe neighborhoods, and commodities, such as books, computers, and private lessons, that facilitate children's academic success and support for college attendance" (p. 559).

### **Child Health and Sexual Activity**

Research has shown that children in two-parent households are more likely to be healthy than children in single-parent households. Children living with two parents have better access to health care than children living with a single parent (Gorman & Braverman, 2008). Children who do not live with their fathers are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma and have an asthma-related emergency (Harknett, 2009). Children are more likely to be obese when they live in fatherless homes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997). Also, infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher when the parents are unmarried, and high-quality interaction by a father predicts better infant health (National Center for Health Statistics, 2000 and Carr & Springer, 2010). Premature infants who have increased visits from their fathers during hospitalization have improved body weight and developmental gains (Coleman, Garfield & the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2004).

A study of teenagers in New Zealand and the United States revealed that father absence correlated with early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003). In a phenomenological study of teenage mothers, participants reported that living without a strong connection to their fathers was a reason they became sexually active (Burn, 2008). Teenage girls

who reported having a strong relationship with their father were less likely to be involved in sexual activity before the age of 16 compared to teenage girls who reported having a poor relationship with their fathers (Ikramullah, Manlove, Cui & Moore, 2009).

### **School Related Effects**

Nationwide, 39% of students in grades one through 12 live in homes without their biological fathers (Nord & West, 2001), and 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes (Gottfried, 2007). Studies show that children from single-parent families are less likely to study, more likely to miss school, more likely to have discipline problems, and more likely to drop out of school (Mitchell & King 2009; Zick & Allen, 2006).

As a result of the stated percentage of boys who live without their biological fathers (Nord & West, 2001), boys may need male teachers who can serve as mentors. However, 78-98% of the teachers at elementary and middle schools are female (Moore & Ratchford, 2007). Kindlon and Thompson (1999) stated that from kindergarten through sixth grade, a boy spends close to 1,000 hours a year in school. Experiences and the attitudes of and encounters with his teachers and other adults at school can profoundly shape a boy's development and worldview (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). Some researchers have linked the shortage of male elementary school teachers to negative effects including lower test scores among boys (Du, Weymouth, & Dragseth, 2003). Dobson (2001) mentions that because boys spend up to 80% of their time with women—and much more if their father is absent—many do not know how to act as men when they mature.

**Gender differences.** “The average boy faces a special struggle to meet the developmental and academic expectations of a school curriculum that emphasizes reading, writing, and verbal ability—cognitive skills that normally develop more slowly in boys than in

girls” (Thompson & Kindlon, 1999, p. 23). Boys across the US and in all demographics are falling behind in achievement. Tyre (2006) showed that 12th-grade girls scored 16 points higher than boys on standardized reading tests, 24 points higher on standardized writing tests, are 36% more likely to take Advanced Placement and honor classes, and 22% more have made plans to attend college. Tyre also points out that boys in elementary school are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and twice as likely to be placed in special education classes. In addition to performing better than boys in elementary and high school, girls are graduating from college in greater numbers than boys.

Over the past 40 years, the United States has seen a remarkable change in the academic success of boys and girls. Forty years ago, 58% of college graduates were men; now 57% of college graduates are women, and this gender gap is expected to grow soon to 60% on most college campuses. (Thompson, 2008, p. 280)

Reading achievement is the most compelling discrepancy that exists between male and female children. U.S. Department of Education statistics from the past 30 years show that in every age group, boys’ reading levels have been lower than girls’ (Scieszka, 2003). Scieszka also points out that boys need positive male role models for reading. In fact, part of the problem may be that boys do not view reading as a masculine activity or see males reading as often as females, especially in schools. Gurian and Stevens (2005) pointed out the following concerning the gender gap between male and female students.

- Boys get the majority of the D’s and F’s in most schools- in some, as high as 70 percent.
- Boys make up 80 percent of our discipline problems.
- Of children diagnosed with learning disabilities, 70 percent are boys.

- Over 80 percent of schoolchildren on Ritalin or similar drugs are boys. As of 2004, the number of boys on Ritalin approached 5 million. (The United States consumes 80 percent of the world's supply of Ritalin.)
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, our sons are an average of a year to a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing skills. (Girls are behind boys in math and science but to a lesser degree.)
- Of high school dropouts, 80 percent are young males.
- Young men now make up less than 44 percent of our college population. (p. 22)

**Academic achievement.** What impact does fatherlessness have on academic achievement? In a study that examined the post-educational attainment of African-Americans and Whites, Jill List and Lee Woefle (2000) found that when father presence is controlled, there are no substantial differences in educational attainment between White and Black students (2000). In her study, *“Children’s Socialization Experiences and Functioning in Single-Mother Households: The Importance of Fathers and Other Men,”* Coley (1998) stated that “higher levels of control from fathers predict greater school achievement” (p. 225).

Jones (2004) compared the academic performance of two groups of boys between ages 14 and 17: one group with resident fathers and another group of the same age with nonresident fathers. The results of the study showed that boys with nonresident fathers earned significantly lower grades than boys with fathers at home. Also in this study, Jones found that for boys of nonresident fathers, the frequency of contact with their fathers was positively associated with academic performance. Coley (1998) stated, “Children who report more positive and warm social interactions with their nonresidential fathers receive higher achievement scores on standardized school tests” (p. 277). Students who live in single-parent families score lower on

mathematics and reading tests than children who live with both parents, and the gap in reading achievement tests between children from single-parent families and children from two-parent families has increased over time (Teachman, 1998).

Pollock (1998) suggested that, especially during the period of adolescence in a boy's life, when a dad is able to remain active in the boy's daily activities, it makes "all the difference." In an eleven year study that followed boys beginning at age eleven through ages 18 to 22, the more shared activities a boy had with his father, the more education the boy completed. Pollock stated, "this study showed that fathers had more of an effect on their teenage sons in their academic and social functioning than mothers did, and boys reported receiving greater emotional support from fathers than mothers in well-functioning two-parent families" (p. 121).

In yet another study (Quane & Rankin, 1998), it was found that children in families headed by a single mother on welfare placed lower importance on academic achievement and were less enthusiastic about finding a job in the future than their peers from two-parent families. In unstable single-parents families with limited economic resources, parents often lower their expectations for children's long-term educational attainment (Astone & McLanahan, 1998).

**Involvement of fathers.** When fathers are involved on a personal level with their child's education, the child's achievement increases. "When fathers assume an active role in their children's education, there is a positive impact on student achievement" (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Moon-Ho Ho, 2005, p. 213). Students from single parent homes are less likely to have their parents involved in their schools. Fifty percent of single-parents are involved in their child's school, compared to 62% of two biological parents (Nord & West, 2001). The 1996 *National Household Education Survey* found that 69% of non-resident fathers had no involvement in their children's school (US Department of Education, 1998). In a 2001 study

conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, results showed that fathers' involvement in school was associated with a higher likelihood of students earning grades of "A" in their classes and was also associated with a lower likelihood of students ever repeating a grade (Nord & West, 2001). The study, *Spending Time With His Kids: Effects of Family Structure on Fathers' and Children's Lives* (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996), showed that time spent with their children was positively associated with reports of children's grades. Research has also provided evidence that fathers can help promote literacy skills in their children by reading books to them, engaging their children in discussions about books they read, and encouraging their children to read more books (Saracho, 2007). Although it is clear that a father's involvement with his child's school and education is beneficial, fathers are often more likely to attend sports-related events instead of school-related events such as parent conferences. John Badalament (2008) asserted that the lack of men's involvement at school is one reason for the increasing achievement gap between boys and girls. He also stated that dads who only attend sporting events are communicating to boys what is important to men—sports.

The *Survey of Father's Involvement in Children's Learning* revealed the following: 39% stated they never read to their child; 32% stated they never visited their child's classroom; 54% stated they never volunteered at their child's school; and 74% stated they never have lunch with their child at school (National Center for Fathering, National PTA, 2009). Despite the limited involvement of fathers in learning, in the last 10 years fathers have tripled the amount of time spent focused primarily on their children (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2011). According to a 2009 survey, *Father's Involvement in Children's Schooling*, fathers showed an increase in the following school-related activities over the last 10 years:

- 16% increase of walking or taking their child to school.

- 11% increase in visiting their child’s classroom.
- 8% increase in volunteering at their child’s school.
- 8% increase in attending parent-teacher conferences.
- 7% increase in attending school meetings.
- 12% increase in attending school-based parent meetings. (National Center for Fathering & National PTA, 2009)

### **Mentoring and other male role models**

“One of the most significant qualities of being a father, and certainly the most frequently cited is serving as a role model. Imitation, or modeling, is one of the most potent learning processes” (Popenoe, 2009, p. 142). As Dobson (2001) stated, “A father holds awesome power in the lives of his children, for good or ill. . . . When asked who their heroes are, the majority of boys who are fortunate enough to have a father will say, ‘It’s my dad’. On the other hand, when a father is uninvolved . . . it creates an ache, a longing, that will linger for decades” (p. 57). The lack of male role models has been discussed as a major reason for boys’ academic underachievement (Jones, 2006). Psychologist and author, Michael Thompson (2008), cited that boys lacking male role models, both inside and outside of school, are in his top 10 reasons for male underachievement in school.

Unfortunately, male role models may not be present in the life of boys today. With so many fathers out of the picture, who can adolescent males turn to? Can schools fill this void? In the past, when fathers were absent, male mentors from the family—grandfathers, uncles, elder brothers, or teachers—filled in. Sadly, a fundamental difference exists between the current and preceding generation; if a man leaves his children, it is difficult to find another man from the family or community to stand in his place (Gurian, 1996).

The evidence for the benefits of mentoring also raises the question: “In the absence of a father, is any male role model acceptable?” In 2001, four of the five children living in stepparent families lived with their mother and a stepfather (Kredier & Fields, 2001). From 1980 to 1990, the number of stepfamilies in the US increased by 36% to 5.3 million (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Coley (1998) stated that children who receive controlling and disciplinary experiences from non-paternal men demonstrate better social behaviors, lower instances of problem behaviors in school, and a higher pro-social rating from peers. In a review of longitudinal studies on the involvement of fathers and their children’s outcomes, Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, and Bremberg (2007) specified “there are results to indicate that non-biological father figures can play an important role for children in their households” (p. 5). Additionally, in mother/stepfather families, school involvement of the stepfather has been associated with better grades (Bogenschneider, 1997).

Stepfamilies, however, have proven to be less stable than families without a stepparent. A study using a nationally representative sample of 9,463 adults indicated that more than half of all stepfamilies were disrupted after 10 years (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995). A study by the US Department of Health and Human Services (1995) concluded that a stepfather can be beneficial, but may not be as beneficial as a caring biological father. It has been reported that remarriage by a single mother “does not resolve the negative consequences for her children that are associated with growing up in a single-parent family” (US Department of Health and Human Services).

Further examination of the negative consequences could be directly or indirectly related to the contrast of feelings between a child’s biological father and stepfather. Children from biological and stepparent families feel differently regarding how they think about their fathers.

According to Moore et al. (2004), in mid-adolescence, 82% of teens living with biological parents thought highly of their fathers compared to 67% of teens living with stepfather families. When asked if they wanted to be like their fathers, 63% living with their biological fathers said yes, compared to 39% of teens living with a stepfather. Seventy-eight percent of teens living with their biological father said they enjoyed spending time with him, compared to 59% of teens living with a stepfather.

In light of the different perceptions of adolescents who live with their stepfathers, male teachers could serve as role models. However, research by Bricheno and Thornton (2007) claims that boys do not always look at their teachers as role models, and if they do, they are just as likely to view a female teacher as a role model as a male (Sternod, 2011). In a 2003 study in the United Kingdom, only 2.4% of students polled referred to a teacher as a role model. There are also studies that indicate the qualities students want in a teacher are not specific to either gender, but the most important aspect is that the teacher develops a relationship with them (Cushman, 2008). Studies have also indicated that teacher gender has minimal to no impact on student-teacher relations, motivation, and classroom engagement for either male or female students (Francis, Skelton, Carrington, Hutchings, Read, & Hall, 2008; Marsh, Cheng, & Martin, 2008). Another argument is that campaigns to hire more male teachers often do not take into account the different masculine identities (Sternod).

According to Tyre (2006), psychologists say that while other males may be able to step in and help, they compare an adolescent boy without a father to an explorer without a map. The father should be providing much needed direction to their sons (Tyre, 2006). Gurian (1998) gives the following advice to boys whose fathers are absent:

If your father is dead, lives far away, or just refuses to see you, make sure to become friends with one or more other good men—like your grandfathers, uncles, a teacher, a coach, a friend’s father—so that you can learn what a man is and be admired by these men for the special person that you are. (p. 76)

### **Implications for Schools**

Fatherlessness has many implications for schools. Among the implications include motivation of students without fathers, study habits and behavioral issues of these students, and the dropout rate among these students. Gurian and Stevens (2005) recognized motivation as a potential problem for schools when assessing the needs of students without fathers.

Many of our most undermotivated boys lack fathering, male mentoring, or adequate contact with ‘older, wiser’ men. This is a missing center in their lives. With half of our boys today raised without a father in the home, the lack of ‘male motivators’ is a major problem, one every school and home concerned about undermotivation or low-grade learning depression is likely to face. (p. 279)

Of particular interest when examining the implications for schools are the differences in study habits and dropout rates of students from single-parent homes and students from two-parent homes. A study from Utah (Zick & Allen, 1996) shows that boys in single-parent families study on average 3.5 hours less per week than boys who live with both parents. Students from single-parent families are also more likely to drop out of school. After considering race, socio-economic status, sex, age, and ability, high school students from single-parent households were 1.7 times more likely to drop out than their corresponding counterparts living with both biological parents (McNeal, 1995). A study of 549 young adults who were born to single mothers revealed that high school graduation rates correlated strongly with living arrangements

during childhood (Aquilino, 1996). The graduation rates were as follows: (a) 96% for students raised by adoptive or biological parents who subsequently married; (b) 78% for students raised in stepfamilies; and (c) 75% for students raised by their mother only.

Studies have also revealed that students who have experienced divorce, separation or a non-marital birth have higher levels of behavioral problems in school than that of students who have always lived with both biological parents (Tillman, 2007). A study of 2,300 youths found that students from single-parent families were more likely to have discipline problems at school than students with both parents at home (Heiss, 1996). Nord and West (2001) concluded that students living with both parents were less likely to be suspended or expelled, and 27% of students suspended in grades six through 12 were from single-mother families. This statistic is compared to 23% of students from stepfamilies and 13% who lived with both parents.

### **Support Programs**

The absence of a father in a child's life can result in many implications for a school (Nord & West, 2001; Zick & Allen, 1996). To help students, schools should encourage fathers to be more involved, provide mentors for students who do not have relationships with their fathers, and look to other male role models to help fill in for the absence of fathers (Moore & Ratchford, 2007; Fogatry & Evans, 2009). Schools are having success involving dads in activities such as "Donuts for Dad" or a father's breakfast (Fogatry & Evans, 2009). These events benefit children with participating fathers, and can also give children without fathers the chance to see adult males involved in school (Scieszka, 2003).

As a result of the absence of a father figure, some schools are implementing mentoring programs. A middle school study conducted in a southeastern state by Moore and Ratchford

(2007) aimed at decreasing the number of discipline referrals among African-American males. In the study, the principal noted:

The absence of male role models in single-parent households has hampered the young African-American male's opportunity to enter into adolescence in a healthy environment. Our school's demographics showed that 55% of the black boys were products of single-parent (typically female) homes. (p. 22)

The principal developed a “Boys to Men” mentoring program where successful African-American college graduates were paired with males whose fathers were absent from their lives. The authors specified that mentors received training and met weekly with their mentees. Mentors assisted with schoolwork, served as motivational speakers, and became study partners for their assigned students. The mentees improved in both academic performance and behavior. Through the Boys to Men program and cultural diversity training, there was an overall 60% drop in discipline referrals for the mentees during the eighth grade year (Moore & Ratchford, 2007).

### **Summary of Research**

The majority of Americans agree that fathers play an important role in their children's lives. According to the National Fathering Survey (2009), 89% of individuals surveyed agreed that children need a mother and father in the home, and 92% agreed that fathers make a unique contribution to their children's lives. A close relationship between a child and both parents is appropriate for a child's development and well-being (Sobolewski & Amato, 2007). During the difficult phase of adolescence, youth receive conflicting messages from peers and family. Peers sometimes encourage participation in deviant activities, and develop a preoccupation with members of the opposite sex. When adolescents are without a father, the pressures are greater.

This study gained a unique perspective from male adolescents who have experienced father absence. Most of the existing research in this area employs quantitative methods involving surveys, questionnaires, and statistical analysis. A gap in literature was filled by conducting research through interviews with young adults.

Many of the implications of this problem have been addressed including the role of a father (Gurrian, 1996; Thompson, 2008), the effects of fathers and fatherlessness (Mitchell & King, 2009, Nock & Einolf, 2008), and the implications for schools (Nord & West, 2001; Jones, 2004). Michael Thompson (2008) understood the universal yearning in adolescent boys for a closer relationship with their fathers. “This yearning arises in boys who have emotionally or geographically distant fathers and in boys who have never known their fathers at all” (p. 278). Unfortunately, the trend of fatherlessness often repeats itself. Too many boys who grew up without fathers will not value spending time with their own children because that relationship was never modeled to them.

Many states and communities are attempting to increase father involvement. One organization, All Pro Dad, encourages father involvement in their children’s lives. Some activities include a monthly breakfast for fathers and their children, daily email advice for fathers, and an NFL-sponsored Father and Kids Experience, which provides interactive games that strengthen relationships between fathers and sons (Family First, 2011).

The effort to increase father involvement is infiltrating the court system. Today, 50% of the US Family Courts mandate education courses for divorcing parents. The goal of the course is to keep the noncustodial parent, usually the father, involved in their children’s lives (Hawkins et al., 2007). Many states have initiated Responsible Fatherhood programs, which help promote and support fathers with child support obligations, increase access to their children, and promote

better parenting (Hawkins et al.). Mike Gottfried (2007) and his wife have recently established an organization called Team Focus, whose vision is to provide fatherless young men with role models and positive influences that affirm the young man in order to build character and create an environment that fosters self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence. As Gottfried stated in his book, *Coach's Challenge*, "Nobody can replace a father in a boy's life, but no boy needs to grow up without a positive male role model" (p. 23).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives, attitudes, and perceptions of former adolescents who were without a father figure in the home during their high school years. The goals of this study were to (a) identify the challenges encountered by the young men during their lived experiences, (b) glean insights from males on the phenomenon of father absence, (c) and utilize the perspectives of the males to aid schools in providing solutions for students, school systems, and society. This research gained the perspective of the young men who have first-hand experience in coping with father absence. It is hoped that this research provides insight into the challenges that these students faced and reveals perspectives from the adolescent male that can be used to help teenagers in similar situations. These perspectives may also help teachers and schools realize how they are already helping and identify areas where more could be done. This information could lead to solutions that contribute to and not only benefit schools but society as a whole.

To identify and understand the perspectives, attitudes, and perceptions of the young men, the study utilized a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The appropriateness of this research design is underscored by its ability to explain, to understand, and to assign meaning to experiences from the perspective of those who are directly involved (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; van Manen, 1990).

### **Design**

This study is qualitative in nature and has a phenomenological design. In his book, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, John Creswell (2007) stated, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human

problem” (p. 37). In *A Practical Guide to the Qualitative Dissertation*, Biklen and Casella (2007) said that the purpose of the qualitative dissertation is to pose an open-ended question and investigate the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Qualitative research is conducted due to the existence of a problem or issue (Creswell, 2007). Because fatherlessness is a complex issue with many variables, hearing the stories of these young men was the best way to gain an understanding of their experiences. Stories and the details of people’s lives are a way of knowing and understanding (Seidman, 2007). Creswell (2007) iterated that “we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 40). It is also understood that the problem of fatherlessness is unique to individuals and would be difficult to investigate thoroughly using a quantitative approach. Creswell (2007) suggested that “we also use qualitative research because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not fit the problem” (p. 40).

In this study, phenomenology was the chosen qualitative method. Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological study attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation or phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Creswell (2007) said, “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). The task of a phenomenologist is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience, which often involves intense human experiences such as love, anger, fear, and betrayal (Merriam, 2009).

According to Merriam (2009), phenomenology is both a philosophy and qualitative research method. From a philosophical perspective, phenomenology focuses on an experience or phenomenon and the participant's perceptions of the phenomenon. From the perspective of the qualitative method, this study focused on the in-depth interview. The interview was based on a process that is referred to as an in-depth phenomenological-based interview, which is a method that delves into a participant's lived history (Siedman, 2007).

In his book *Researching Lived Experiences* (1990), Max van Manen described phenomenology as an interplay among six research activities.

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interest us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

In this study, the phenomenon of fatherlessness was studied by examining the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of male adolescents who did not have a father at home during high school. Merriam (2009) indicated that “a phenomenological approach is well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 26). This research looked to describe the experiences that participants had during high school and looked for common experiences and themes among the participants. The result of this study was that an understanding was gained of what it was like to be a teenager and not have a father figure present at home during high school. As stated by Seidman (2007), “the goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p. 15).

A phenomenological design was best suited for this study. Creswell (2007) explained, “The type of problem best suited for [phenomenology] is one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (p. 60). Van Manen (1990) believed that “from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world” (p. 5).

I relied on the interview to understand the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Information from the interviews allowed me to describe and interpret the common experiences of the participants. Interviews were based upon broad, open-ended questions.

In a qualitative dissertation, interview questions should explore how individuals make sense of their lives. According to Brogden and Biklen (2007), “When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview will fall out of the qualitative range” (p. 104). Researchers begin with broad, open-ended questions that permit dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Biklen & Casella, 2007). The goal of the open-ended questions was to have the participant reconstruct his experience of fatherlessness (Seidman, 2007). The use of narrow questions can make it difficult to gather information because the participants may not conceptualize the question the way the researcher does. Biklen and Casella further explain that a broad question “usually allows the researcher to get into a meaty situation early on” (p. 13).

### **Research Questions**

The two research questions that were analyzed are:

1. How do adolescent males perceive the absence of a father to have impacted them during high school?

2. Were any school-related interventions available for students without fathers, and if so, how did students perceive these interventions to have impacted them?

In this chapter, a discussion of the rationale of the qualitative phenomenological design will be given. This rationale will be followed by a description of the participants, research site, procedures, and researcher's role. A detailed explanation will be given of the methods used to collect, interpret, and report the data. Finally, this chapter will discuss the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the research.

### **Participants**

Participants included eight males who graduated from high school within the past five years and who went through high school without a father figure present in the home. The participants' racial groups included four African-Americans, three Whites, and one mixed race. The participants ranged in ages from 18 to 23 years old. The socio-economic status of the participants' families also varied. Pseudonyms were used for each of the participants to ensure anonymity. Pseudonyms were also used for the names of the participants' family members, former schools, former teachers, former administrators, hometowns, and any other person or place mentioned during the interviews.

There is no existing method for obtaining a random sample of students from a single-mother family. A purposeful sampling technique along with maximum variation and a criterion strategy was used in selecting the participants. Purposeful sampling simply indicates that the researcher selected the individuals for the study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). When describing purposeful sampling, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) advise to "choose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 3).

Along with purposeful sampling, other sampling techniques including maximum variation, criterion sampling, and the snowball method were used. Maximum variation sampling helps ensure that the sample represents the larger population. Criterion sampling is a strategy used to ensure that subjects meet certain criterion, such as having gone through high school without a father present. Creswell (2007) recommended using criterion sampling with phenomenology research. Creswell states, “It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 128). The snowball method of recruitment was used as well. This allowed for existing participants to recommend potential participants whom they knew to have experienced the phenomenon and met the other criterion.

A phenomenological study does not aim to explain experiences specific to a particular culture or to certain social groups; rather, it attempts to reveal meanings to the experiences that are lived in everyday existence (van Manen, 1990). Acquiring a sample from public school systems helped ensure diversity in the participants’ education, socioeconomic status, and incomes (Hilton & Devall, 1998). The research included participants from a variety of racial and socio-economic backgrounds. This increases the potential for generalizing the findings to a larger population and reduces the probability of the data being dismissed due to individual or ethnic group bias (Seidman, 2007).

Eight participants were willing to share their lived experiences of going through adolescence without their father present at home. Creswell stated that phenomenological studies can range from one to 325 participants. Dukes (1984) recommended studying three to 10 subjects for phenomenology. Examining multiple perspectives on the same situation allowed

generalizations of the experiences to be made from an insider's perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

This qualitative research study examined the perspectives of adolescents who attended high school in the southeast and who lived without a father in their homes. Students who have graduated were able to provide a detailed and comprehensive reflection of going through high school without a father figure present. Participants were limited to individuals who had graduated within the past five years.

Incorporating recent graduates, five years or less, offered a retrospective viewpoint. A phenomenological study is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experiences is a reflection on an experience that is already passed or lived through (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen specified, "A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience" (p. 10). To help ensure the retrospective quality of the design, recent graduates were used rather than current students. Another reason that recent graduates were used was to create an equitable interviewing relationship, one that avoided the interviewees feeling as if they were in a teacher-student relationship during the interview. Seidman (2007) said the "First Commandment" of interviewing is to be equitable.

Permission for this research was granted by the individuals in a consent form. Because all the individuals were at least 18 years of age, parental consent was not needed.

### **Setting**

The research setting consisted of four suburban high schools. Five of the participants, identified by pseudonym, Logan, Jacob, James, Joseph and Robert, were graduates from a suburban public school which currently consists of 2,756 students. The current demographics of this particular school are 57% African-American, 19% White, 11% Hispanic, and 10%

Multiracial. Other racial groups are at or below 2%. Fifty-seven percent of the student population at the school are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The current demographics for public schools in the state are 45% White, 37% African-American, 11% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 3% Asian. Fifty-six percent of the state's student population receives free and reduced lunch. While the demographic breakdown of the school is different from that of the state, access to students of all ethnic backgrounds was available. Three of the candidates were from other public high schools within the state. These schools were also suburban schools and had similar demographics to the state. Kevin attended a school with the demographic breakdown of 60% White, 21% Hispanic, 14% African-American, 3% Multiracial, and 2% Asian. The total population of this school was 854 and 44% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Ethan attended a school with the demographic breakdown of 43% Hispanic, 43% White, 11% African-American, 2% Multiracial, and 1% Asian. The total population for this school was 977 and 73% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Caleb attended a school with the demographic breakdown of 79% White, 12% African-American, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 1% Multiracial, and 1% Native American. The total population of this school was 1606 and 30% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch.

### **Procedures**

After the proposal was approved by the dissertation committee, approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted (see Appendix A). The Liberty IRB exists to protect the rights and welfare of human participants volunteering in any academic research study. All research involving human subjects at Liberty University must be approved by the Board.

Seidman (2007) suggested, “Beginning interviewers tend to look for the easiest path to their potential participants. . . . My experience is that the easier the access, the more complicated the interview” (p. 40). Seidman explained further how interviewing acquaintances, people you supervise, students, and friends can appear to be easier but often limit one’s interviews and can create tense circumstances. Acquiring the requisite amount of participants was a challenge. To increase the pool of participants, contacts were made to faculty and staff from public high schools in the area. When more participants were needed, contacts were made with friends and family members who work in public school systems throughout the state. The research study was explained to coworkers, friends, and family through email or phone conversation to help find potential participants.

Once potential candidates were recognized, friends or family members who made the contact were asked to obtain the potential participant’s phone number. After phone numbers were received, participants were called to see if they were interested in learning more about the research. The phone conversation was brief and consisted of a quick introduction and summary of the research. If the participant was interested in learning more about the study, a contact visit was arranged. An introduction letter (see Appendix B), a contact information sheet, and a survey of interest (see Appendix C) were given to the potential participant and explained during the contact visit. The contact visit was not an interview. The contact visit determined the potential participant’s interest, enabled me to explain the study, and initiated the informed consent process. The informed consent form (see Appendix D) was explained but was not signed until the first interview. The introduction letter summarized the research in writing and provided information for learning more about the study.

Seidman (2007) stated, “The major criterion for appropriateness is whether the subject of the researcher’s study is central to the participant’s experience” (p. 48). Another purpose of the contact visit was to determine if the potential participant fit the criteria of the study and if he was able to commit to three interviews throughout the following weeks. The contact visit also allowed the potential participant to fill out a contact information form. If the potential participant agreed to participate, a follow-up phone call was made. The purpose of the follow-up call was to answer any additional questions following the contact visit, to confirm participation, and to confirm a date and time for the first interview.

Prior to the first interview, informed consent documents were explained again and signed by both the participant and myself. These documents were filed in a secure cabinet in a private location. Data were gathered through three in-depth interviews with each participant. The length of each interview was approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Seidman (2007) found interviewees’ felt more respected and less restricted during the 90-minute interview. Ninety minutes was sufficient time for participants to reconstruct their experiences, place them into the context of their lives, and reflect on their meaning (Seidman).

For most participants, the three interviews were spaced from one to three weeks apart. This amount of time did not allow for the interviewee or me to lose the connection between the interviews. Additionally, spacing the interview between one to three weeks allowed each interview to build on the preceding one (Seidman, 2007). It also allowed for sufficient time to listen to the audio recording of the previous interview and to construct follow-up questions. Due to time constraints, such as school schedules and work schedules, a few of the interviews were conducted within a shorter time frame. Information for the in-depth interview is cumulative:

each interview builds on the previous one. What is taken from all three interviews combined is what is important (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Each interview was recorded to collect the interview data. This is the most efficient way to collect data and is also less distracting than taking notes (Ary et al., 2006). This practice also ensures that the details of the interview were preserved for analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Memoing provided an additional source for gathering data. Memoing included notes made during the interview and notes made after the interview. Memoing was completed at the conclusion of the interview. Notations of the participants' nonverbal cues, my own thoughts, and additional interview questions were recorded. Additionally, the notes reminded me of important follow-up questions or comments that needed to be clarified, while not compromising the flow of the interview. Merriam (2009) recommended taking notes in addition to recording; "The interviewer may want to record his or her reactions to something the informant says, to signal the informant of the importance of what is being said, or to pace the interview" (p. 109).

### **The Researcher's Role**

Qualitative researchers are the ones who gather the information. Generally, a qualitative researcher does not depend on questionnaires or other instruments; they examine documents, observe behavior, and interview participants (Creswell, 2007). In this type of research, bracketing is an important concept in which personal experiences are set aside to try to obtain an unbiased perspective of the phenomenon. It is important that researchers enter the study with no preconceived ideas, biases, or prejudices.

I was fortunate to find five participants; Logan, Jacob, Kevin, Ethan, and Caleb, whom I had not met before the interviews began. Logan and Jacob actually attended the school where I worked, but due to the size of the school and the fact that I taught in a separate building from the

main school, I had not met them. A counselor at the school recommended Logan and Jacob for my research. Kevin was recommended by a friend of mine who was an assistant principal at a school close to where I lived. Ethan was recommended by a director of a nearby Boys and Girls Club. Caleb was recommended by a friend of mine who was a football coach at a school close to where I worked.

I knew James, Joseph, and Robert before the interviews. I had James and Robert in class. I knew Joseph from his participation on the football team. James and Joseph transferred schools during high school and did not graduate from the school where I worked. Robert was a graduate of the school where I taught. Initially, I was concerned that knowing these students could lead to bias in the research; however, I believe it increased the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Data Collection**

Seidman (2007) stated, “I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing” (p. 7). The interview is one of the most frequently used methods in qualitative research. In a phenomenological study, the distinguishing data collection method is the personal, unstructured interview (Ary et al., 2006). The basis for in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of others and how they make meaning of their experiences (Seidman).

This study consisted of three in-depth individual interviews with each participant. In certain research situations, utilizing the in-depth interview as the sole method of investigation is appropriate. Seidman (2007) asserted:

Use of in-depth interviews alone, when done with skill, can avoid tensions that sometimes arise when a researcher uses multiple methods. That is especially the case

when those methods may be based on different assumptions of what it means to understand the experience of [the phenomenon]. (p. 6)

Creswell (2007) said, “For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews” (p. 131). Seidman explained further:

A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of existing literature. If the researcher’s goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient avenue of inquiry. (p. 11)

## **Interviews**

The three-interview series, as described by Seidman (2007), helped put behavior into context. People’s behaviors become more meaningful when placed in the context of their lives. It is difficult to explore a topic, much less gain meaning and understanding, in one interview. The three-interview series helped saturate the data as much as possible and placed the experiences of the participants into context. The format of the interviews accomplished the following: the first interview established the context of the participants’ experiences; the second allowed participants to reconstruct the details of their experiences; and the third focused on reflecting on the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2007).

As stated earlier in the chapter, the interview questions were designed to encourage discussion. A key strategy for qualitative interviewers is to avoid questions with yes or no answers (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Interviews consisted of several key open-ended questions. When an interviewer makes the process too structured or too rigid, participants cannot tell their

story in their own words. If this is the case, the interview will be outside of the qualitative range. Although the interview questions were open-ended, the process was focused on the fundamental research questions. Van Manen (1990) iterated “too often a beginning researcher enthusiastically goes about interviewing subjects using the so-called unstructured or open-ended interview method without first carefully considering what interest the interview is to serve” (p. 66).

To ensure structure in the interview, an interview guide was developed (see Appendix E). This guide included a set of predetermined questions that were suitable for each interview. Merriam (2009) suggested that researchers new to interviewing will feel more confident with the structure that an interview guide provides. The interviews were designed to allow participants to reconstruct their experiences and explore their meaning (Seidman, 2007). The interview guide did not take away from the reconstructive and explorative aspect of the interview. The guide was incorporated as a prompt when necessary and to ensure that we stayed on the research topic. When developing the interview guide, the following suggestions by Merriam were followed.

Most interviews in qualitative research are semi-structured; thus the interview guide will probably contain several specific questions that you want to ask everyone, some more open-ended questions that could be followed up with probes, and perhaps a list of some areas, topics, and issues that you want to know more about but do not have enough information about at the outset of your study to form specific questions. (p. 103)

Seidman (2007) warned that researchers must avoid manipulating their participants to respond to their interview guide.

Interview 1 involved the interviewee explaining as much as possible about himself during high school in regards to the effect of not having a father figure present at home. The

interviewee was asked to reconstruct high school experiences from each grade. This included memorable positive and negative experiences in particular classes, before or after school, times during lunch, or time involved in extracurricular activities. Based on the reviewed literature of Mitchell and King (2009), which discussed how children with absent fathers tend to have more behavior issues and lower academic achievement in school the following questions were asked.

- What were your grades like in high school?
- What was your behavior like in high school?
- Do you think not having a father affected you? If so, how?

Interview 2 built on the first interview by focusing on the prior experiences mentioned by the participant. Seidman (2007) stated “In this second interview, then, our task is to strive, however incompletely, to reconstruct the myriad details of our participants’ experiences in the area we are studying” (p. 18). To help place the experiences into the context, participants talked about their experiences and how they related to their peers, family members, and teachers and administrators at their school. Based on the reviewed research of Gurian and Stevens (2005) that explained how mentoring by men is one of the primary environmental factors essential for high motivation in adolescent boys, the following questions were asked.

- Did you have any adult male role models at school?
- What kind of relationship did you have with adult males at school? Can you describe one?

Based on Pollock’s study (1998) that stated children lack supervision and discipline when a father is absent, the following question was asked.

- If you got in trouble at home or at school and needed to be disciplined, who did this?

In Interview 3, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. This interview helped the participants reexamine the details of their experiences and helped them apply meaning to their experiences. Applying meaning to their experiences required participants to examine the factors which led to their current situation (Seidman, 2007). These questions also involved plans and concerns for the future. Based on Amato and Gilbreth's (1999) study that explained how an absent father sometimes can become simply a companion instead of an authority figure, the following questions were asked.

- Describe the relationship you had with your father.
- How has your relationship with your father changed over time?

Below is a sample script of all the open-ended interview questions. All interviews were semi-structured which allowed for off-script and relevant follow-up questions to be asked.

#### Questions for Interview 1

- 1.) Describe your high school experience.
- 2.) Do you think not having a father affected you? If so, how?
- 3.) What were some of the more positive experiences you had in high school?
- 4.) What were some of the more negative experiences you had in high school?
- 5.) What was your greatest accomplishment in high school?
- 6.) What were your grades like in high school?
- 7.) What was your behavior like in high school?
- 8.) Was there a time during some of these experiences when you can remember saying to yourself, "I wish Dad was here to share this with me or to help me through this?"

#### Questions for Interview 2

- 1.) Discuss your family and the role they played in your high school experiences.

- 2.) Did you have any adult male role models at school?
- 3.) What kind of relationship did you have with adult males at school? Can you describe one?
- 4.) If you got in trouble at school or at home and needed to be disciplined, who did this?
- 5.) How were you similar to your peers?
- 6.) How were you different from your peers?

#### Questions for Interview 3

- 1.) What do you think it means to be a father?
- 2.) If you became a father, how would you want to be perceived by your children?
- 3.) Describe the relationship you had with your father.
- 4.) How has your relationship with your father changed over time?
- 5.) What did it mean when you said you were (different/alike) your peers?
- 6.) What was it like (or what would it have been like) to have a male mentor challenge you to do better in school?

Each participant and I determined where the interviews would take place. The place of the interview was convenient for the participant, in order for the participant to be comfortable and secure. In addition, the interview took place in a quiet and private location that limited potential distractions. The rooms used were suitable for audio recording. As Groenewald (2004) suggested, the interview setting must be as free as possible from distracting background noises and interruptions. Interview sites included conference rooms in two public libraries, a conference room in a university library, and conference rooms at a public high school.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data, the process of making meaning, and the process used to answer the research questions. Analysis involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants have said and what has been observed and read (Merriam, 2009). For this study, analysis of the data began during the collection of the data. Given the emerging design of qualitative research, simultaneously collecting and analyzing data helped identify possible questions for future interviews and helped recognize emerging themes to be explored further in the proceeding interview(s) (Merriam).

Following each interview, the recording was transcribed as quickly as possible. A professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe the interviews, which allowed the transcriptions to be completed in an efficient and professional manner. To protect the participants' anonymity from the transcriptionist, the name of each participant was not used during the interview or as a label on the interview tapes. Also, the transcriptionist was asked to sign an Agreement for Confidentiality (see Appendix F). Losing some familiarity with the data was one drawback to hiring a transcriber. To make sure that familiarity was not lost, transcriptions were read several times and recordings were listened to several times.

The data gathered from the transcriptions needed to be analyzed and interpreted (Biklen & Cesella, 2007). To analyze the data, I used a combination of stages suggested by Ary et al. (2006) and Moustakas (1994). Ary et al. offered general stages for qualitative research, and Moustakas suggested stages more specific to phenomenological methods. This combination of approaches provided a systematic approach for analysis. The methods of analysis for qualitative research suggested by Ary et al. include the following three key stages:

1. Familiarization and Organization

2. Coding and Recoding
3. Summarizing and Interpreting

Moustakas' (1994) stages for analysis of phenomenological data include the following:

1. Listing and preliminary groupings—listing every expression relevant to the experience, which is also referred to as horizontalization.
2. Reduction and Elimination—determining the invariant constituents. Each expression will be tested for two requirements:
  - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
  - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents—clustering the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application: this validates the themes.
5. Using the relevant and validated invariant constituents and themes to construct an individual textural description of the experience.
6. Constructing an individual structural description of the experiences based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation.
7. Constructing a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituent and themes for each participant.

(p. 120-121)

Also, I used a qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 10, to help analyze and organize the data. This software helped recognize codes and helped connect codes to themes. The program also allowed for the ideas and the steps taken to be tracked and recorded.

The first step in data analysis involved familiarization and organization. Familiarization with the transcripts and notes began by reading and rereading them. There is no substitute for studying the interviews (Seidman, 2007). I listened to the recordings several times. While listening to the recordings and reading the transcriptions, I kept a reflective log. This helped me capture thoughts and ideas as they occurred (Ary et al., 2006). These notes and thoughts included potential coding categories, possible themes, and additional interview questions.

The organization of research material made it more easily accessible. The organization included, but was not limited to, keeping contact information for each participant, copying and filing written consent forms, labeling the recordings of each interview, and managing and labeling transcripts from the interviews (Seidman, 2007). I loaded the transcripts into the NVivo 10 software, which helped make organization and retrieval during analysis as efficient as possible.

After familiarizing and organizing the data, I began the coding and recoding process. Codes were the labels used for assigning meaning to descriptive information gathered during the study. This process involved categorizing and recognizing common words, ideas, thoughts, and feelings that appeared throughout the interviews. In Moustakas' method, coding was used with the two steps: 1) listings and groupings and 2) reduction and elimination. Miles and Huberman (1994) said, "Coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis" (p. 56). Ary et al (2006) stated that to code "is to read and reread all the data and sort

them by looking for units of meaning—words, phrases, sentences, subjects’ ways of thinking, behavior patterns, and events that seem to appear regularly and that seem important” (p. 492).

Merriam (2009) explained that the process of analysis begins when the researcher identifies or codes segments of the data that are responses to the research questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) listed some steps of the coding process:

- Search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics.
- Write down words and phrases to represent the found topics and patterns (coding categories).
- Develop a list of coding categories.
- Mechanically sort the coding categories.

To determine the requisite codes for the study, an initial broad coding strategy was used. This type of coding—referred to as open coding—allows the researcher to be open to possibilities. The initial open coding helped put the data into preliminary categories. Merriam (2009) stated, “Assigning codes to pieces of data is the way you begin to construct categories” (p. 179). Open coding involved tagging any unit of data that might be relevant to the study (Merriam). Selected passages with the appropriate code were tagged throughout the data using NVivo 10. The goal for open coding was to establish codes that provided a reconstruction of the collected data (Ary et al., 2006).

After open coding, axial coding occurred. This is the process of grouping open codes into more specific categories and relating categories and properties to each other (Merriam, 2009). Axial coding occurs when the researcher makes connections between and across the preliminary categories that were established during open coding (Ary et al., 2006). This part of analysis required simplifying and reducing the data that appeared in the open coding categories

(Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this process, similar categories found in the open coding process were combined and some eliminated.

Axial coding revealed categories such as effects of fatherlessness on behavior, effects of fatherlessness on academics, effects of fatherlessness on social-emotional development, idea of a father, influences of role models, and suggestions for school interventions. NVivo 10 helped keep track of the frequency that a code appeared. The frequency at which certain codes appeared gave some insight into the significance of that category (Ary et al., 2006). Coding and recoding is over when all the events are classified, categories are saturated, and there are sufficient numbers of regularities (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once all the data were coded, they were separated into the appropriate categories based on theme (Ary et al.).

Axial coding helped reduce the data and led to common themes. The coding and reduction of data speaks to step three in Moustakas' (1994) approach: clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. Themes helped link categories together by looking at common ideas across categories. According to Ary et al., "After the categories have been refined, the researcher explores the relationships of patterns across categories, identifying major themes" (p. 494). These themes provided answers to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Van Manen (1990) stated "Theme gives control and order to our research and writing" (p. 79).

Once themes were established, the process of summarizing and interpreting began. To summarize, I described what was discovered in the data. Entries among codes and themes were connected. Themes and relationships within both similar and different categories were established. As Ary et al. (2006) stated, "Summarizing is beginning to tell the stories and to make connections among stories" (p. 499). Ary's stage of summarizing corresponds to developing the textural, structural and textural-structural descriptions in Moustakas' (1994)

method. Summarizing and interpreting the data helped connect the gathered information to the reviewed literature, the theoretical framework, and helped reveal the significance of the study.

Data do not speak for themselves; meaning must be applied to understand the research. Seidman (2007) stated that data interpretation is the process of developing ideas about the findings and relating them to the literature as well as to broader issues. In interpreting data and applying meaning to them, Seidman recommended answering the following questions:

- What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants interviewed?
- How can these connections be understood and explained?
- What is understood now that was not before beginning the interviews?
- What surprises have there been?
- Are there confirmations of previous instincts?
- How have the interviews been consistent with the literature?
- How have the interviews been inconsistent with the literature?
- How have the interviews gone beyond the literature? (pp. 128-129)

Summarizing and interpreting included using the established themes to develop a textural description, a structural description, and a combined structural-textural description. A textural description explains what each of the participants experienced. This includes verbatim examples from answering the question “what happened?”

A structural description of experiences includes conditions, situations, and context, which, in this study, revolved around adolescents’ families, peers, role models and mentors, teachers, and other leaders in a high school setting. I reflected on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced to form a structural description to explain how the

experience happened (Creswell, 2007). A structural description presents a picture of the conditions that cause an experience, the underlying aspects of the experience, and the feelings that are evoked from the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

A combined textural-structural or synthesis description incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions. This description helps to inform the essence of the experience of living without a father figure during the high school years (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (2007) stated, “This [composite description] is the ‘essence’ of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenology study” (p. 159). The combined textural-structural description gives the experience meaning.

### **Emerging Design**

The qualitative dissertation is flexible and emergent. Biklen and Casella (2007) stated, “You do not design your study in the qualitative approach and then carry out the work. Design is more mobile than this and requires some flexibility” (p. 5). Qualitative research is inductive in nature and does not necessarily begin with a hypothesis and demand strict control over all variables. This is why qualitative research is often described as emerging. Researchers should build flexibility into their qualitative study without sacrificing careful preparation and planning. Seidman (2007) stated, “The danger of overemphasizing the ‘emergent’ nature of the design of the study is a looseness, lack of focus, and misplaced nonchalance about purpose, method, and procedure” (p. 35). The research in this dissertation was carefully planned to allow for the emerging design of qualitative research and to help maintain an efficient structure for answering the research questions.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study refers to how well variations can be explained. It addresses transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability. Bracketing, member checks, the three interview series and an audit trail helped increase the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Bracketing**

Bracketing helps to minimize personal effects and ideas of the experience (Seidman, 2007). Before each interview, I tried to bracket previous thoughts and preconceived ideas associated with fatherlessness. Recognizing my preconceived ideas before each interview allowed me to limit their influence. I reminded myself that each interview is an “object of study and should be studied in the terms that the participants make of it” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 271). I tried to focus my attention on what was being said by the participant and what was recorded on the interview guide. Bracketing occurred as I listened to the interviews, made notes, and created a guide for the next interview.

### **Three Interview Series**

The three-interview series helped add validity to the research by allowing significant time for the participants to place their experiences into context. The three-interview series also allowed time and opportunity for me to clarify or reaffirm what each participant communicated about his experience. Seidman says this about the interview structure:

The three-interview structure incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity. It places participants’ comments in context. It encourages interviewing participants over the course of one to three weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say. (p. 24)

The three-interview series also provided triangulation for the study by using multiple sources of data. As Merriam stated, “Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (2009, p. 216). The three interviews and the member check provided three follow-up opportunities for me to clarify what had been discovered in previous meetings. Maximum variation also provided triangulation by using participants from different ethnicities, socioeconomic classes and different schools, which provided different perspectives. As Creswell (2007) stated, “Typically, this process [triangulation] involves corroboration evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 208).

### **Member Checks**

To help confirm the interpretations and findings of the research, member checks were used. Member checks are a process in which a qualitative researcher asks the participants in the study if their experiences have accurately and realistically been described by the researcher (Ary et al., 2006). Member checks were recorded and transcribed in the same way as the interviews. Member checks helped confirm findings and interpretations by receiving feedback from the participants. After the data were collected, the participants were asked to review and critique the findings and interpretations. This helped ensure accuracy and meaning and gave the study more credibility. Member checks also allowed the participant to clarify miscommunication, identify inaccuracies in the gathered data, and add additional information (Ary et al., 2006). Member checks allowed the participants to judge and help evaluate the major findings in the study. Some researchers have gone as far as to make member checks an ethical issue, suggesting that participants have the right to know what the researcher has found (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Member checks demonstrate a courtesy to the participants by allowing them to see what has been written about their phenomenon (Ary et al.). Ary et al. iterated, “Member checks ask the question ‘Do the people that were studied agree with what you have said about them?’” (p. 506).

Prior to each member check, I outlined what I believed were the most important aspects of the interviews. For each aspect, I would ask the participant if they agreed, disagreed or wanted to clarify any of the information. Some of the participants elaborated on the information, which helped me gain a deeper understanding of the experience.

### **Audit Trail**

Along with member checks, an audit trail was kept to ensure trustworthiness in the study. The audit trail included documentation on how the study was conducted, including how data were collected, how categories were established, and how decisions were made (Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2007). This outlined the research process in chronological order. The audit trail includes entries on all research-related activities such as interviews, transcription, coding, and the emerging theme of the research (Creswell, 2007). Entries were made in a research journal.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Creswell recognizes groups of ethical issues for qualitative research to include informed consent procedures, deception or covert activities, confidentiality toward participants, benefits of research to participants over risks, and participant requests that go beyond social norms. Working closely with the Liberty University IRB and the dissertation committee helped ensure that the research followed ethical practices and procedures.

Critics of qualitative research claim that through interviews, the responses of the participants may be manipulated or participants may be deceived for the benefit of the researcher

(Seidman, 2007). The member checks and audit trails helped negate the potential for data manipulation.

To ensure confidentiality, all files containing participant identities were locked in a secure location. Pseudonyms were used to help protect the confidentiality of the participants. The research process confirmed that father absence can be a sensitive subject matter. Van Manen (1990) warns of research methods having a lingering effect on the subjects. In-depth interviews could lead to new levels of self-awareness, life-style changes, and shifting priorities in living; however, if done the wrong way, the in-depth interview may lead to feelings of anger, disgust, defeat, and intolerance (van Manen). During the interview, an effort was made not to push the participant to talk about subjects that appeared upsetting, hurtful, or embarrassing (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Although participants were asked to discuss potentially painful topics, they were monitored for how they handled the questions and whether the interview process was becoming a problem for them. A list of local professional counselors was made available to participants. As a token of appreciation for the participants' time and effort, a gift card in the amount of \$50.00, along with a thank you note, was given to each participant at the end of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, an in-depth look at the analysis and the findings of the research will be discussed. This chapter will begin by reviewing important aspects of phenomenology, followed by a discussion of the criteria used in open coding, axial coding, and developing themes. Following the criteria for the steps in analysis, descriptions of each theme or thematic portrayal will be given, followed by the textural and structural descriptions of each participant. The essence of the experience of fatherlessness in male adolescents will be described through textural-structural descriptions of each participant as it relates to the themes of the research. In conclusion, a composite textural-structural description will describe the experience as representative of the group as a whole.

The phenomenological methods and terminology used in this research were predominately influenced by Moustakas (1994), Seidman (2006), van Manen (1990), and Creswell (2005). Phenomenology is the study of lived experience, the various aspects of the lifeworld. The lifeworld is the way a person lives, creates, and relates in the world on a daily basis (Moustakas). A phenomenologist looks at a lived experience with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the essence of the experience (van Manen). To gain a deep understanding, the researcher determines what an experience means to individuals who have encountered the phenomenon in their daily lives. As Moustakas explains, it is through the individual meanings of the participants that the researcher provides a universal meaning, which helps reveal the essence of the experience. Knowledge of essences is the ultimate in understanding experience. The invariant meanings are the essences of experience (Moustakas). In this research, the lived experience is going through high school without a father at home. I sought to gain an understanding of what this experience was like for male adolescents.

The findings of a phenomenological study are insightful, rich descriptions of the experience. These descriptions should present in vivid and accurate terms of what appears in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (1990) explained, “The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). To get to such a description, steps and concepts suggested by Moustakas (1994) and Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson (2006) were used. These steps provided a systematic manner of obtaining insightful and in-depth descriptions of the experience. As stated by Moustakas, “The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of the experience” (p. 47).

Ary et al. (2006) provides general stages for qualitative research, while Moustakas’ (1994) stages are more specific to phenomenological methods. I believed that using a combination of the two methods and approaches were the best means of analysis for this research. The methods of analysis for qualitative research suggested by Ary et al. (2006) include the following three key stages:

1. Familiarization and Organization
2. Coding and Recoding
3. Summarizing and Interpreting

Moustakas’ (1994) stages for analysis of phenomenological data include the following:

1. Listing and preliminary groupings—listing every expression relevant to the experience, which is also referred to as horizontalization.

2. Reduction and Elimination—determining the invariant constituents. Each expression will be tested for two requirements:
    - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
    - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?
  3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents—clustering the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
  4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application: this validates the themes.
  5. Using the relevant and validated invariant constituents and themes to construct an individual textural description of the experience.
  6. Constructing an individual structural description of the experiences based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation.
  7. Constructing a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituent and themes for each participant.
- (p. 120-121)

The last step in this approach, the textural-structural description, should give meaning to the overall essence of the experience. Moustakas stated that “descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible” (p. 59).

## **Data Analysis**

After each interview was transcribed, every expression—common words, ideas, thoughts, and feelings—that was relevant to the experience was marked in the computer program NVivo 10. Each expression was given equal value in understanding the meaning of the experience, according to Moustakas' (1994) method of horizontalization. During the horizontalization process, expressions were categorized or classified through the process of open coding. Open coding was done by searching through the horizons and looking for regularities and patterns. Only statements or phrases that were relevant to the lived experience of fatherlessness during high school were marked and coded. Regularities and patterns were identified throughout the horizons and coding categories were formed. The review of the literature helped influence the coding categories that were created. Frequency of the categories was also acknowledged to give insight into the importance of the codes (Ary, et al., 2006). Below are the categories that were formed during the open coding process with the frequency of horizons for each category.

Table 1

*Open Coding Categories and Frequency of Horizons*

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<b>Open Codes</b>	<b>Number of Horizons</b>
Academics	91
Behavior	187
Characteristics of a father	130
Discipline	154
Impact of fatherlessness	248
Emotions	149
Family life	123
Media	20
Peers	162
Relationship with mom	160
Relationship with girls	60
Role models	252
School interventions	326
Skills and situations	131
Teachers	152

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After organizing the horizons into open codes, reduction and elimination produced invariant constituents. Invariant constituents point to the unique qualities of an experience—the horizons that stand out. To help reduce and refine the horizons and open codes, two questions were asked:

1. Does the horizon contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
2. Is it possible to abstract and label the horizon? (Moustakas, p. 128)

Horizons that did not meet the criteria of the above questions were eliminated. If horizons were repetitive or vague, they were also eliminated. The horizons that remained were examined further to identify if they represented the essence of the phenomenon and helped answer the research questions.

The invariant constituents were placed into new categories by the process of axial coding. Axial coding is the process of making connections between and across the coding categories

established during open coding (Ary et al., 2006) and is used to refine and reduce these categories (Merriam, 2009). During axial coding, the following categories were created using the invariant constituents.

Table 2

*Axial Coding Categories and Frequency of Invariant Constituents*

<b>Axial Codes</b>	<b>Number of Invariant Constituents</b>
Impact of fatherlessness on behavior	73
Impact of fatherlessness on academics	264
Impact of fatherlessness on social-emotional development	355
Idea of a father	371
Influences of role models	630
Suggestions for school interventions	142
School interventions made available	435

After the process of reduction and elimination by axial coding, themes in the text were identified. Themes are “ideas” that are formed by aggregating the data into large clusters (Creswell, 2005). These themes were developed using invariant constituents and through an attempt to grasp the structural essences of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Themes are the structures of the experience that give control to the research and writing (van Manen, 1990), and they provide the answers to the research questions (Moustakas). The following themes were identified from the invariant constituents:

Attachment—relationship to parent(s), guardian(s) or caregiver

Influence of others—the influence of those outside of parent(s), guardian(s) or caregiver

Needs—perceived needs that were or were not met

Emotions—feelings and memories connected to the phenomenon

Behaviors—actions related to the phenomenon

Identity—what participants thought of themselves in regards to the phenomenon

Once themes were recognized, a textural description of the experience was formed. These descriptions answered the question, “What was fatherlessness like?” Full descriptions of the conscious experience included thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, and situations that portray what the experience was like for the individual (Moustakas, 1994). Already established themes and verbatim examples from transcripts comprise the textural descriptions. These descriptions help evoke a clear image of fatherlessness in male adolescents. The themes used to help construct the textural descriptions were attachment, other influences, and needs. These themes help capture “what” the experience of fatherlessness was like.

Using the textural descriptions and imaginative variation, a structural description of the experience was formed. Structures are “the conditions which exist for something to appear” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98) and can only be grasped through reflection. They underlie and are inherent in the textural descriptions. Structural descriptions answer the question, “How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?” (Moustakas, p. 98). For this research, the question regarding structural descriptions is, “how did your experience of fatherlessness come to be what it is?” Imaginative variation, as explained by Moustakas, is the process of seeking meanings through using the imagination, varying frames of references, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives. Structural descriptions should provide a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience. These underlying dynamics provide an understanding of how perceptions, feelings, and thoughts are made conscious during lived experience (Moustakas). The themes used to help construct the structural descriptions are emotions, behaviors, and self-concepts. These themes help capture “how” the phenomenon of fatherlessness was experienced.

## Themes

As previously mentioned, the themes that were identified during this research were attachment, outside influences, needs, emotions, behaviors, and identity. The six themes are interrelated and are common ideas found throughout psychological literature. The six themes also apply to the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's and Bandura's research. As Merriam (2009) states,

Every study has some theoretical framework; that is, every study is situated in some body of literature that gives you the tools to even come up with a purpose statement and research questions. Since the categories or themes or findings are responsive (answers) to the research questions, the names of these categories will be congruent with the orientation of the study. (p. 184)

The theme of attachment encompasses exploring the relationship of the participants with their primary caregivers. Attachment is a psychological construct that explains the emotional bond between children, or adolescents in this case, to one or more caregivers (McDevitt and Ormrod, 2010). In this research, caregivers will be defined as parents or guardians who were responsible for parenting participants and who lived with the participants during high school. The quality of attachment in children influences outcomes. A secure attachment to one's caregivers results in positive outcomes in self-esteem, academic achievement, emotional regulation, and social competence. Children who experienced poor attachment to their caregivers are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as delinquency and other behavioral problems (Hoeve et al., 2012). Children with secure attachments are also better adjusted (Steinberg, 1999).

Many of the studies on attachment have focused on infants and their parents (Scott et al., 2011). Varying impact exists in attachment broken at certain developmental stages and attachment that never existed. The scope of this research looked at attachment only with regard to not having a father at home during adolescence. Aspects of attachment during adolescence involve children expecting parents to monitor them, celebrate their success, and to be there for them when they are needed (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). This research explores what happens when an expected caregiver, the father; does not live in the home. The following questions applied to the theme of “attachment”:

1. How did not having a father at home affect the relationship with your parent(s) or guardian(s)?
2. What type of attachment was there with your father during high school?

After examining the relationship between participants and their parents, the next theme “outside influences,” looked specifically at influences outside of the participants’ caregivers. During adolescence, relationships with parents usually change significantly. Although most adolescents remain attached to their parents, outside influences begin to play a more important role in their lives (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). The quality of attachment to parents during adolescence influences the quality of the relationships outside the home (Wilkinson, 2004). Relationships with peers, teachers, mentors, and family members, along with their influence on the participants, were considered. The questions considered regarding this theme were as follows:

1. Did not having a father at home impact the relationship you had with other influential adults?
2. Did any influence help take the place of not having a father in the house?

The theme “needs” takes an in-depth look at the perceived needs adolescent males wanted or expected their fathers to help meet. This theme explores if and how these needs were met. If needs were considered unfulfilled by the participants, the effects were examined. The questions analyzed through this theme were as follows:

1. Did you feel like certain needs were not met because of your father not living with you during adolescence?
2. If so, were other influences available to help you meet these needs?

The “emotions” theme will help describe the feelings and memories connected to not having a father at home during high school. Emotions are feelings that people have in response to events that are personally relevant to their needs and goals (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). The “event” for this research will be the lived experiences of fatherlessness. The “emotions” theme will be interrelated to the previous themes of attachment, outside influences, and needs. It will also be interrelated to the “actions and behavior” theme, because emotions “energize thinking and action” and help determine how adolescents decide to act (McDevitt & Ormrod, p. 419).

The following questions applied to theme of “emotions”:

1. How did not having a father at home during high school make you feel?
2. How did you express your feelings, and if a father was present, would this be different?

The “actions and behaviors” theme interrelates with the “emotions” theme, mentioned above, as well as with the “identity” theme. The research examined whether actions and behaviors of the participants were impacted by not having a father at home and found that these actions and behaviors were preceded by the thoughts and feelings participants associated with an absent father. The following questions are answered through this theme:

1. Did not having a father at home affect your behavior and actions?
2. If so, how did it affect your behavior and actions?

Aspects of this theme will also include the effectiveness of discipline at home and how the participants modeled behaviors from others.

The final theme investigated was “identity.” Identity explains how adolescents perceived themselves. “[Identity] is a self-constructed definition of who they are, what they find important, what they believe, and what they should do in life” (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010, p. 452). During adolescence, students begin to question who they are and how they fit into the world (Ormrod, 2000). The “identity” theme is directly related to the “actions and behaviors” theme. Identity is influenced by prior behaviors, and future behaviors will be influenced by one’s self-concept (Ormrod). The “identity” theme is also heavily influenced by the “attachment” and “outside influences” themes because the quality of relationship plays an important role in constructing a “self-identity” (Wilkinson, 2004). The following questions applied to the “identity” theme:

1. Did not having a father at home affect your feelings and thoughts about yourself during high school? If so, how?
2. Did not having a father during high school affect where you are and who you are presently?

### **Thematic Portrayals**

Thematic portrayals help connect the data to the themes. The thematic portrayals contain verbatim examples of how the data supports each theme. Examples of responses from a few participants will be given following each theme and subtheme.

## **Attachment**

**Mother attachment.** The data revealed that the relationship each participant had with the mother or female guardian played a significant role in determining the effects of the absence of the father. For this research, attachment to the mother was explored in the context of not having a father at home. Each participant had different factors that affected their relationship with their mother or guardian. The strength of the attachment with their mother varied for each participant. Some participants had a strong relationship with their mother, whereas others did not. The strength of the relationship to the mother helped determine what needs were met and unmet for each of the participants. Many of the mothers tried to play both roles of a mother and a father. Some participants looked at the relationship they had with their mother as more of a friendship than a mother-son relationship. Some participants found it difficult to talk to their mothers about certain topics. For the participants, the stronger the attachment with the mother, the better adjusted they were in other areas. Below are supporting statements that describe the relationships participants had with their mothers. Pseudonyms are used to identify the participants.

**Kevin** (on who his biggest influence was): “Honestly, my mom. She’s always . . . been the one that pulled through the tough times.”

**Logan:** “I never told my mom, ‘Hey, I’m going through problems.’ I never really spoke to my mom how a son speaks to his mom.”

**Jacob:** “I mean, if there was ever a talk that I needed to have, it was mainly my mom.”

Below are examples that describe how the mother tried to play the role of a father.

**Logan:** “She would try to take on the father role, but . . . she’s only a mom. She would try to be a lot more reprimanding, but, I mean, it was a mom’s touch reprimanding.”

**Kevin:** “I guess my mom was like my father figure.”

**James:** “Since I didn’t have a father there, I had to go to her.”

Some of the participants viewed the relationship with their mother as a friendship more than a mother-son relationship.

**Kevin:** “We just kind of have that really relaxed, kind of calm and chill relationship, so I can talk to her about anything really.”

**Caleb:** “We could talk about anything; we goof around and stuff like that.”

**Jacob:** “All I had to do was just tell her I was going to be out later. It was a good relationship. It’s as if she was one of my friends.”

**Father attachment.** Father attachment varied, from one strong relationship to four poor relationships to three non-existent relationships, among the participants. Some participants saw their fathers on occasion, and others had never met them. For this research, participants suggested a strong attachment to their father resulted, or would have resulted, in more needs being met for the participants.

**Logan:** “I thought if I had figured out who my real family was, I would find my dad... and then that disappointment came where no one knows my dad. You know, so that disappointment came. Oh well, you’re still not going to have a father.”

**Kevin:** “I just never had a good relationship with my dad.”

**Ethan:** “I wish he could have just been there more to, I don’t know. I mean, it’s kind of like when he left, I knew that you couldn’t make somebody do what they don’t want to do, and you can’t make somebody stay. So, when he left there was a time period when I was hurting, and then when I got over it, I just forgot about a lot of stuff. So, you know, I’ve really forgotten about a lot of stuff.”

**Jacob:** “I mean, in my mind, I was just like, ‘do I even really, technically have a father at this point in time?’ Because at the time, he didn’t even come see me at all; he never really tried to hang out with me or anything.”

**Caleb:** “I mean, I thought about why he never wanted to see me or anything, but I never once thought, ‘I wish he was here right now.’”

### **Other Influences**

Influences outside of the mother and father played a significant role in the participants’ lives. These influences helped meet various needs of the participants. Some of these needs existed due to their fathers not being involved in their daily lives. Among these influences are siblings, grandparents, peers, extracurricular programs, and role models.

**Siblings.** Siblings and a god-brother were big influences on some of the participants. They helped to fill different needs left by an absent father.

**James:** “Older brothers, older cousins, everyone, just observing how they handle themselves. And what do they do when this situation comes up? How do they handle this problem? How do they do this; how do they do that? And just watching everybody. Just sitting back and learning everything that they know and everything they have to teach me.”

**Ethan:** “Because everybody has a person that they look up to. And it’s kind of like my god-brother. I didn’t really think about going to college until I started hanging with him and we started talking about college.”

**Robert:** “My brother. He was very [important] in my life, in my social life, and when it came to women, he was always the one to go to. He had plenty of them. He loved to be around females. He just talked me through the game, not in a disrespectful manner, but

just how to talk to a woman, how to embrace one, how to take care of one, how to treat one.”

**Grandparents.** Grandparents were also a major influence on the participants. Many had a close relationship with and admired their grandfathers.

**Jacob:** “If I learned anything from [my grandfather], it’s mostly about how to fix things; how to be a good handyman. Any time there’s anything broken in our house, like a faucet or a shower, or, you know, anything that’s ever broken—a lamp, overhead lamp, a fan—he comes over and he fixes it. And most of the time, I’m there helping him out, and he’s teaching me how to do it, telling me what he’s doing, how he’s doing it. So, he is a really big influence.”

**Caleb:** “Yeah, [my grandparents] played a big role. I think, if I wouldn’t have had a family, that would’ve been pretty hard, but since I had my mom there and my grandmother and grandfather, I mean, it was pretty easy to cope with because high school’s a big time in a teenager’s life. You’re still going through stuff, still learning everything and you try new things. You learn a lot of things for the next step, whatever that might be, so having a supportive family and one that will push you to do your best, that was pretty easy to cope with.”

**Joseph:** “She didn’t always tell my granddad [about discipline issues], but...my granddad is somebody I respect. I have to call him another role model, too. When he says something, that’s what you want to do at the time. I will do it no problem.

**Robert:** My step-grandfather on my mother’s side, he always took me out. I did yard work with him all the time. He told me how to do this. That’s why I think I’m so good when it comes to maintaining the household or just doing what needs to be done—each

father or grandfather or my father himself, they showed me different aspects of being a man.”

**Peers.** As is the case for most adolescents, peers were a significant influence on the participants.

**Logan:** “Yeah. She would get upset. And it still wouldn’t matter to me. It was just kind of like, ‘well my friends say it’s cool. I mean, I think it’s right because you’re not a male.’”

**Kevin:** “Yeah, in my freshman and sophomore years, [my friends] were a bigger influence. But in my junior and senior years, I just was like ‘whatever man, you don’t know me. You don’t know the stuff I’ve been through, what I’ve had to deal with.’ So I didn’t really care what people thought.”

**Jacob:** “If I had a problem, I would just go to my friends rather than go to family. I mean, if my dad had been in the house, I might have gone to him for a lot of my problems, you know, without my mom actually having to talk to me about it.”

**Caleb:** “Yeah, [my peers] were an influence, good and bad.”

**Robert:** “I talked to only my friends about[not having a father at home]. I talked to only my friends, and mostly just the friends that were going through the same thing I was.”

**Role models.** As previously mentioned, some participants looked at their mothers or other family members as role models. Some participants also had role models outside of their family who played an influential role in their lives. Some participants found role models through programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. Participants agreed that a role model was or would have been helpful in meeting different needs.

**Logan:** “I know what a role model is. He helps you with your problems, tells you good ways to go; that’s what I’d call a role model. But I never called [my assistant principal] a role model dad, I called him a role model.”

**James:** “A lot of my role models came from playing sports. [My coaches] just made sure I was the best possible. In school, out of school, on the team—they made sure I was at my maximum peak, and that I just stayed very positive. Stay learning and stay progressing. A lot of my role models came from sports and things like that.”

**Robert:** “I just had other male figures set an example as well, but those are the only references I had when it came time to learn how to be a man.”

**Joseph:** “I really looked at him like a father figure because I never really had it, so I was calling him Pops. And for me to call you Pops or me to call you anything that has to do with a dad figure, it really has to mean something to me. I’m not just going to call anybody a certain name. I feel like it has meaning behind it, so me calling him Pops, he was doing everything that a father would do, providing for me.”

The following are participants’ descriptions that emphasize the importance of role models:

**Logan:** “But it’s not also about the father figure or the male, it’s the male role model; it’s having that guy to teach you what’s wrong and what’s right.”

**Ethan:** “I definitely agree that everybody [has] their own model; you grow up watching. Some of the stuff you don’t ever know. But if you [have] a role model, somebody that you can imitate, that’s why I think it’s important. Once you find out what you want to do, you find a mentor that’s in the path who can show you why you need to do this.”

**Jacob:** “I didn’t start having role models until my last semester of school. If those people had been there earlier in my life, it probably would’ve formed me into a better person

sooner and quicker than it did. I probably would've done a lot better in certain things. I probably would've found the job that I wanted to do and something to work for. I would've probably found that motivation quicker if I had that role model to look up to."

**School influences.** Schools also helped meet the needs of the participants in varying capacities. The schools' influence on each participant was explored in relation to an absent father. Among the perceived needs schools provided to the participants were support, guidance, discipline, and motivation. School personnel who helped influence students included teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, and administrators.

**Logan:** "It was just my behavior was close to theirs, and [my assistant principal] had been in the school for a while, so he knew automatically [and] picked up 'hey, this guy is trying to get attention from someone or something, so let me just give him attention. Answer his questions and figure out what he wants.' No matter what you were going through, he tried to understand. And if he couldn't understand, he'd stay with you until he did. He'd never pass up the opportunity to understand a person or a child, and that wasn't even his job. His job was to just give out referrals, and that's it. But he took the time to understand children. And that always made me feel like 'Hey, I need to understand people. That's what males do also; understand girls, understand guys, understand it all.'"

**Kevin:** "Just the fact that [my assistant principal] was kind of understanding about my situation and whatnot. Like all the problems I was having, not in school but outside of school, and also in school. He was understanding. He saw I was going through a lot, and he was kind of understanding, you know a little bit more patient, and he took a little extra effort and time and worked with me."

**Jacob:** “I would have to say she was one of those teachers that actually cared a lot. Like if you were slacking, she would literally pull you off to the side and say, ‘Hey, you really need to start working on this and doing better.’ That’s the kind of teacher she was. She was really cool. She did that with everyone. She didn’t pick out favorites. She didn’t do any of that. She just, if she saw something was wrong or you weren’t doing what you needed to do, she’d always try to pull you over and say, ‘Hey, you need to get on top of it. You need to work on this. You need to work on that.’ And then, on top of that, you could stop by her room any time and be like ‘Hi Ms. King,’ talk to her, be friendly. She was a cool teacher.”

**James** (on the influence of his teachers): “Mr. Clark was just a real close friend, a real cool teacher. He made learning easy. Coach Dill, like I said, real cool teacher, real close friend. Let's see, Coach Cobb. I had team sports with him, same thing with Coach Dill. I had a bunch of male teachers that were just really cool and just really easy to get along with, really easy-going type people. They had really laid back personalities. As long as you didn't disrespect them, they respected you. As long as you didn't push them, they wouldn't push you back. So, I had a bunch of male influences in school that I was really close to, yes sir.”

**Robert:** “Ms. Ayers, especially since she was like ‘Grandmother Ayers.’ Now, she looked out for everybody. To me, she was really on top of your game. She did what she had to do to make you feel good. She didn't like to see any student fail... her parenting was just, is what we really needed.”

Here are some examples of how schools offered guidance to the participants:

**Logan:** “[Mr. Jackson] gave me trial and error, you know, to understand what I did wrong, how to fix it.”

**Jacob:** “I mean, if I had a problem that I couldn’t go anywhere else, including Ms. Robinson too, I mean she’s a counselor, I would have gone to her as well. But definitely those teachers would have been probably right next on the list if I couldn’t go to anyone else. It would definitely be them.”

Here are some examples of how schools provided discipline and accountability to the participants:

**Kevin:** “[Teachers] were making sure that you were getting something out of it, making sure that you were doing what you were supposed to do. They didn’t just give it to you and tell you, ‘Alright, I want this turned in at this time.’ They actually went more in depth with it. They were making sure you were doing what you were supposed to do, I guess.”

**James:** “I had a bunch of teachers and mentors that, if I was going the wrong direction, they were quick to pull me back and say, ‘we’re going to try something different for you, just so you can stay out of trouble.’”

**Robert:** “I think it was just sports that mostly helped. Because you practice discipline, every sport you need discipline to be successful. And mental toughness comes, and I think every man needs to be mentally tough.”

Here are some examples of how schools helped motivate the participants in different ways:

**Jacob:** “The teachers, like I said, Ms. King was one of them that showed me that she really cared. It was more of a motivation in that one because, I mean, she was always on my back about doing this, doing that, getting this work turned in, doing this, doing that…”

She would always be on my back about it. But a lot of the teachers they just, you know, sometimes they'll sit you down once or twice and say, 'Hey, you need to do this.' With Ms. King, it was all the time. Every time. So it's not necessarily caring every once in a while. I'm just saying that if you cared enough to where you're always on my back about something, then I probably might have had a little bit more motivation to do something."

**James:** "They just want to see you succeed, and it makes you want to work harder to make them proud. Numerous people, it's just hard to name them because there's so many guidance counselors, so many mentors that want to see you do good. Things like that just made it real positive for me while I was still in school."

## **Needs**

Needs of the participants varied on the strength of the attachment with the mother and father and also the strength of outside influences. All participants said there were some specific needs that they wish their fathers would have provided for them. Mothers or guardians helped meet these needs in varying ways. Also, outside influences helped meet these needs.

Participants believed that some needs were not met during high school. When needs were not met, this took a toll on the emotional well-being of the participants. The needs the participants felt should be met by a father included support, guidance, accountability, motivation, certain gender roles and skills, and shared father-son experiences.

## **Support.**

**Logan:** "Always be there for your son no matter what. Even if there is a divorce, it doesn't matter. Your son, his life depends on you because he's going to be looking for a person who was there for him when he was born to the time he dies. He's going to be looking for his father. 'Thanks dad for guiding me in the right way, you know, thanks for

your encouragement. Thanks for standing at my baseball games, my football games.

Thanks for wanting to be there, giving me that support, telling me to back down from that fight because it wasn't worth it.”

**Kevin** (on the type of father he would want to be): “I would like them to think of me, [not only] as a best friend but also, you know, their father. I'd want them to be able to think that whenever they had something going wrong or something that was bothering them, they could just come to me and be open about what's going on and what's happening, why they're upset, or why they're mad, or anything. If they have any problems, they could come to me.”

**Ethan** (on what was the biggest thing he needed from a father): “Attention. Attention. Just knowing I had somebody there by my side.”

**Jacob**: “They should always be there, just to be there for you. Like, you know, instinctually they should want to be there with their son. Anytime they get a chance, they should want to go hang out with them. Even if both parents are divorced, the father should want to hang out with his child.”

**Caleb** (on the type of father he would want to be): “That I love them and that I might be harsh sometimes, but I am always there for them. I would never desert them like my dad did.”

**James** (on the type of father he would want to be): “You want to be there for that child. You want to be able, if they have a problem, to talk it out with them. You want to be able to help provide for them. If you see that they don't have lunch money, you want to be able to help them. If you see that they're slipping in class, you want to be able to help them.”

**Joseph:** “I feel like I was missing the support as in just having somebody on my side.”

**Robert:** “Well, to be a father, you have to be there for your child in every aspect—physically, financially, any way you can help support your child; give your child everything. Just give your child your all, care for your child, be loving as a mother would, just as loving. That’s about it.”

**Guidance.**

**Logan:** “If there was a manly figure [at home] [he] would be like, ‘Listen that’s not cool. What you’re doing is stupid. Those guys don’t care about you. I’m a man, I know.’”

**Kevin:** “Just with, honestly, it’s more like, you know, the whole having a relationship with a father figure, someone you could go and talk to, someone that will help guide you to make the right choices, do good for yourself, make sure that you’re not just going to get out of high school and then there’s nothing for you. Like someone that is there to help you make something out of yourself, make sure you don’t just end up getting out of high school and doing nothing.”

**Ethan:** “But he still could have gave me some advice on life or how to handle certain situations.”

**Jacob:** “And on top of that, he’s my father so I would have to say it probably would have affected the way I would have gone about things; the advice I would’ve sought would have been better if my father was there.”

**James:** “I could have had a person guide me, [to say] ‘That’s not the right thing. You don’t need to be like that.’ Fighting, I could have had a person to guide me. ‘You don’t need to fight. You don’t need to do this, do that.’”

**Joseph:** “Whenever I felt stressed I would’ve went to him because I feel like I’d be able to get everything off my chest in the way that I would want to, and that would’ve been a very big help to me.”

### **Discipline.**

**Logan:** “So, I wasn’t really disciplined well. From my mom, I was disciplined, but for her, just being a woman, she couldn’t really teach me how to deal with, like really deal with it.”

**Kevin:** “If I had a father figure, it probably would have helped to, you know, help discipline me more. I would do my homework. I probably would have made better grades. It would have led to me going to college or something right after.”

**Jacob:** “I probably wouldn’t have had to take an extra semester if my dad was there, because knowing him, the moment my grades dropped there probably would have been punishment right then and there.”

**James:** “If there was a father, I’d be more respectful and I would just listen to him a lot more when he told me to do something.”

**Joseph:** “If I have somebody on my back and constantly telling me, ‘this is what you’ve got to do in order for you to get to the next step,’ then that discipline would help me guide myself down the right path and then keep me stronger because I know that I don’t want to let that person down.”

### **Motivation.**

**Kevin:** “If I would have had [a father], I probably would have done better. I would have done better for myself. Well, not just for myself, but for, you know, someone that would have made me care. You know, make them proud in that kind of aspect, I guess.”

**Jacob:** “Wouldn’t say necessarily it’s about having a father, it’s more of just finding the motivation and finding someone you can look up to, and that’s what causes you to do better in your life or in school; you know, something to work for.”

**Joseph** (on what it would have been like to have a father challenge him to do better in school): “It would be motivation because you know that your dad is there for you. . . . You expect the mom to be there, but the way the world is now, you don't expect dads to be there as much. So, by seeing a dad there, you know that he is a strong dad; he is a dad that really loves his child. He is a dad that wants to be in every step of his child's career or every step of his child’s life.”

**Robert** (on how his father could have provided motivation): “Just [to know] how to stay motivated . . . I have a big dream, and I'm constantly preached by my mother, but that I don't have the steps to get there. I know sometimes I tend to lose motivation because it feels like it's so much, so I just give up, just momentarily, just for about a day or couple of hours or two and then get back on it. I would like to know how he kept his dream in mind and how he chased it.”

**Gender roles.** Some participants expressed the need to have their father teach them specific gender roles.

**Logan:** “I can’t learn how to be a guy from my mom. My mom kind of just let me do trial and error because she didn’t know what to, you know, how to be a male figure.”

**Ethan:** “I mean, I’d probably say like, the little stuff. Like when I just started going through puberty and stuff. When I finally started talking to girls and stuff. I think it would have been helpful because [Dad] knew what I was getting into.”

**Jacob:** “It would’ve been better to go talk to my dad because when it comes down to relationship stuff, and it comes down to, you know, life stuff that guys go through, it’s easier to talk to someone who’s a guy. My dad probably would have been a better choice; you know, he probably had more knowledge about it.”

**James:** “Life learned lessons that, being a man, certain things you have to go through that a female might not have to go through. Just certain things you do as a male is different from a female, so it’s harder for them to direct me and to guide me, because [Mom] wouldn’t understand what I was going through at the moment.”

**Joseph:** “It affected me a lot because, like they say, a woman really can’t raise a man because she’s not really doing the stuff that men would do.”

**Robert:** “Just how to be a man, just, I would love from his standpoint on how to be a man.”

There were also certain skills and activities that they would have wanted to learn or share with their father.

**Logan:** “I never had a connection with a dad, so you know I couldn’t say, ‘Oh, I enjoyed boating and fixing cars.’ I just didn’t know anything about cars; cars bored me. Watching football bored me because my mom never watched it with me, so it wasn’t entertaining to me. It just felt like I was less of a male, and it bugged me, but there’s nothing I can really do about it because it’s not my interest.”

**Kevin:** “We could work in the garage and stuff. That’s the physical thing right there, like we’d actually do stuff like ride four-wheelers, dirt bikes, fishing, stuff like that.”

**Jacob:** “Now I feel like if I had grown up with my father around, maybe at one point I would have actually learned how to do some of this stuff with a vehicle. You know,

learn how to fix a vehicle when the transmission's gone, when it's shot. You know, learn how to fix it. But I can't do that because I don't know how to. . . . On top of that I played soccer. I played baseball. Neither one of those did I have my dad to come out and throw a ball around with me or, you know, come out and kick a ball around. I never had that."

**James:** "But if I had a daddy, I would love for him to be the one to teach me how to change the engine and fix the brakes and rotate tires and go hunting and go fishing. If I had a father, all of those skills would be a great thing to learn from him."

**Joseph:** "I would have wanted him to teach me about being a man, responsibility. Just some of the other fundamentals like if something breaks around the house, I want to know how to fix it. If we were to be driving, and the car tire goes flat, I want to know how to be able to change the tire. So, if I would have had a father who only showed me how to fix stuff and showed me how to do this the right way or showed me how to go fishing, it's just, I would know different things."

**Robert:** "I would have liked to learn how to manage my time and money, that would have helped. Because right now, I'm trying to learn how to manage my time. Because I tend to pick up a lot of extra activities and the classes and schedules, things like that. And money-wise, I have lot of things that I want, lot of things that I feel as if I need to have [even] if I just don't see a way how to fit that in my budget. I'm trying to learn those skills. [Dad] is very good at it. He is constantly busy. He is never late for anything, never late for a bill payment, things like that. He is just always on time for everything, and he is financially sound as well just because he knows how to do those things, time management and budgeting."

**Father-son bond.** The participants also expressed a need for shared experiences with their fathers.

**Logan:** “Most dads you see sit with their son at a football game or share with them, go fishing. I went fishing with my mom, and that wasn’t much of a fun experience... I’ve already bonded closer to my mom. I bonded with female figures for too long. I need to bond with a male figure. I still haven’t bonded with a male figure.”

**Kevin:** “Someone I could see, talk to, hang out.”

**Ethan:** “It could be like just going fishing, him coming to my football games, what we used to do. Like going to the barber shop and going to play basketball on the weekends, riding bikes; all that cool stuff.”

**Jacob:** “Because that one situation, I mean, he took me all the way out to Panama City, hung out on the beach and everything. We had some fun. Go-carts, boardwalk, arcade games, swimming. You know, what more could I ask for at that point? It was fun. And it was kind of like a father-son thing, and I never really had one of those ever where I had a father-son kind of experience, where it was just me and my dad.”

**Robert** (on bonding with older males): “It was something that I wanted. I kind of did search for that older brother when my brother wasn’t at home, so it was something that I wanted.”

## **Emotions**

Feelings and thoughts associated with fatherlessness varied among the participants. In this study, emotions of the participants matched the level of attachment to the mother or guardian, strength of outside influences, and whether participants felt as if their needs were being met. Emotions associated with fatherlessness included placing barriers between themselves and

others, holding in feelings, harboring feelings of resentment and anger, and feeling additional stress from an absent father.

**Barriers.** Some of the participants placed barriers between themselves and others and held in their feelings:

**Logan:** “Because no one told me that a guy does talk about his feelings. It’s not smart to hold it in, but I don’t really know how to do that so well, and when I feel hurt I close everything off.”

**Kevin:** “I just kind of kept to myself. I’m one of those kinds of people that just doesn’t. I’m not open about my problems unless someone brings it up, or if I know them pretty well, I feel pretty comfortable talking to them. But like I said, I kept most of it bottled up. I just blew it off.”

**Ethan:** “It was like some weeks it would get so bad I won’t say nothing to nobody. I’ll just go to school and sit there. I won’t talk to nobody. I won’t say nothing to my teachers. I won’t ask questions. I won’t do my homework. I won’t do a test. I’ll go home. I’ll just go play video games. I won’t eat. It was just, I felt like I had nobody to talk to, and I know that if my dad would have been there, it would’ve been different because I know he would’ve cared. But, like I said, at times now I still feel like I really don’t have nobody on my side.”

**Jacob:** “I mostly kept to myself throughout most of my high school career. I mean, I’m a shy person, so going out and talking to random people that I didn’t know wasn’t exactly my best; it wasn’t easy to do. The amount of friends, I don’t trust many people. It’s really hard to actually have a really good friend that, you know, that you can count on

and stuff like that. So I don't have many like really, really good friends. I have a select few. The rest of them are more kind of like acquaintances."

**James:** "But the way I grew up, and the things that I saw growing up made it more or less [so that] I would push people away because I had a big trust factor. I don't want to put my trust in a negative person, and they bring me down. I was more of a stay-to-myself, stay-with-my-family type of person. When you see me, you see me with my big cousin. When you see me, you see me with our other big cousin. You didn't see me with a lot of friends unless I grew up with them because it was more of a family situation if I grew up with them."

**Joseph:** "I put a lot of barriers up against males just period. I feel like I don't want to say that all men are the same, but that's the way that I feel because that's what they showed. Because I never had nobody in my life to really tell it to or that wanted to hear it, so nobody wanted to hear it. I felt like there was nobody to talk to. I felt like I just had no choice but to hold it in, so I got so accustomed to holding it in that it was just normal to me."

**Robert:** "I just really didn't like anyone in my business, because I saw how other people talked about others. I really didn't want to be, I didn't have time to be the talk of everyone else."

### **Resentment and anger.**

**Logan:** "I still do not know how to handle things like a male. I do blow up, still. Still, I get angry and just want to fight and take my emotions to the extent where it's kind of like, 'Dude, just let it go, you know it's not that big of a deal; don't let it rule your life.'"

**Ethan:** “But eventually something’s going to happen to where they feel like they can’t hold it in. So, eventually they’re going to open up to somebody, and somebody’s going to listen. I used football to do my damage as far as like, you know, dealing with the absence of my dad because I’m very competitive.”

**Caleb** (on why he was angry): “I guess resentment.”

**Caleb** (on what he resented): “Not having a father.”

**James:** “Without a father, I was more angry because I had to do more for myself so that I can live happily and do what I want to do.”

**Joseph:** “Anger from growing up just without a father just really did it. Because knowing that my father was there and knowing the choices that he made to get where he’s at kind of made me mad too.”

**Additional stress.** Among the added stress participants felt they had because of not having a father at home were financial stresses, taking care of siblings, moving often, and having to take on additional work and responsibilities around the house.

**Kevin:** “Dealing with all the moving I did at the beginning of my tenth grade year. I had been to three schools in the first three months of school, and so it was pretty tough on me. And that’s whenever I failed the five classes my sophomore year. And then my junior [year] . . . I don’t think I failed any. I may have failed one, but it was my sophomore year just all the moving I did.”

**Jacob:** “But if my father had been around, a lot of things could have been a whole lot easier. You know, I moved around to a lot of schools, and I tried to make new friends a lot of the times, but once I made those new friends, they were gone. And the main reason why was because my mom financially, because they were divorced, couldn’t stay where

we were. We had to move around a lot. So that's a big thing right there. And I think that contributed to me just keeping to myself half the time. My father being there probably would have made me do a lot better with certain things."

**James:** "Growing up in different situations I came from. I came from not having a home for some time; I came from being homeless for some time. I came from not eating every night. I came from not having money for new school clothes, not having money for books, and things like that."

**Joseph:** "With me having to discuss things with my mom. I shouldn't be head of the household at that age. I should be able to just to live as one of the children should. Having to wake up for school and having to get all my other brothers and sisters up for school and get them ready before I go made some more commotion. Because when I go to school, I'm tired and I'm stressed out, so I may take stuff from somebody else a different way in my head. They might have been right, but at the time I'm so cranky and I'm so tired of waking up and having to provide for them and having to do stuff for them while she's gone, it makes me stressful, and when I get stressed I feel angry."

**Robert:** "I had to step up, I had to step up a little bit to help my mother out because she was also in school as well, and I had a younger sister, so I tried to help my sister. I tried to take the workload off of my mother. She is a single mother, so I think that was the thing I had to do since I didn't have a father figure at home. That was one of my main reasons to get a job, because I wanted my mother not to have to worry about me anymore. I felt like I was a bill; I was a detriment. Even though she felt like it was her obligation, as her son, as her child to take care of me, I felt like that's that, but I still feel like I'm a bill."

## **Actions/Behavior**

Actions and behaviors associated with fatherlessness were often a result of the emotions the participants felt. These emotions were determined by the relationships the participants had with their mothers and fathers, relationships with outside influences, and the perception of whether or not their needs were met. Among the participants' actions and behaviors associated with an absent father were seeking attention, being rebellious, having to learn by trial and error, some aggressive behaviors, and having to grow up faster than other kids. Also in this theme, a look at how negative behaviors were corrected through punishment by the mother will be explored.

### **Seeking attention.**

**Logan:** "I guess I was trying to get attention from someone who I felt could understand me, control me, tell me, 'Hey, this is wrong,' but not really give me a big consequence."

**Ethan:** "You can always tell who grew up in a single-parent home because they thirsty for attention; they always want attention. They always want everything to be about them, and when everything is not about them, that's when they, wow, they just start getting in trouble. They start going to jail. They start having babies. They start dropping out of school just because they feel like nobody [is] on their side."

**James:** "At home, just because I was out so much, I feel like I didn't get that much attention. I didn't see my mother a lot, just because by the time I woke up, she was already leaving the door going to work. I was leaving the door going to school. By the time she got home, I was still at practice. By the time I got home, I'd see her a little. 'Hello, how was your day. How was your day,' and I'd go and leave again. She tried to give me as much attention as possible, but I just wasn't there for her to focus it on me."

**Joseph:** “I wanted to show out in front of a crowd. I wanted to feel like I was popular. I wanted to feel like I was at the top of the school. I wanted everybody to know me, whether it was knowing me for a bad thing or a good thing. I just felt like I wanted it. It was attention-wise because without having the attention at home, I felt like I had to go somewhere and get attention.”

**Rebellious.**

**Logan:** “When they said I couldn’t, like, go to the bathroom at a certain time, I still wouldn’t care. So I’m like, ‘Well, you’re not my father. You don’t make the rules, so I’m just really going to use the bathroom.’”

**Ethan:** “I’d probably say for guys it’s kind of more of a rebellion thing, because you build that bond with your dad when you come up. It’s just an automatic bond. But once your daddy leaves, he’s not giving you that attention or that acceptance that you need to be shown. That’s when people turn to gangs or they turn to drugs, because they feel like that’s the acceptance that they want.”

**James:** “The absence of a father, how did it affect me? It made me, like I said, a lot more wild than I should have been. It made me a lot more reckless. I did a lot of things that I shouldn’t have done.”

**Joseph** (on negative experiences he had in high school): “Fighting, skipping class. Those were my most negative moments because I knew what I was doing, but I still did it because I didn’t really think nothing of it.”

**Aggressive behaviors.** Some of the participants explained how they felt angry and resented the fact their father did not live with them. This feeling of anger sometimes led to aggressive behaviors in the participants.

**Logan:** “It was always fight, and it was never ‘sit down and talk it out like a male, shake hands.’”

**Caleb** (on why he was often angry): “Probably because I never knew my dad and stuff like that, and my mom was never around because she always worked. I guess that’s just how I felt. I grew up angry for some reason.”

**Caleb** (on expressing anger): “Lash out at people, just become angry over little things. Like, I would hit stuff to let the anger out.”

**James:** “I bumped heads with a lot of other students because of that and most of my anger came, like I said, from not having a father. I would take my anger out on other people for no reason, just because I didn’t have a father. Just because I didn’t have a father, I would take my anger out on other people for just no reason at all.”

**Punishment.** The following are examples of how participants perceived their mothers’ punishment to correct their behavior was often ineffective.

**Logan:** “She’d always punish me. Punishing me didn’t really help. . . . I wouldn’t really care.”

**Kevin:** “She could try to punish me, but I wouldn’t care. I guess it’s a bad thing to say, but she kind of learned like no matter what she did, I really didn’t care. . . . She didn’t seem as a threatening parent figure, she didn’t seem like a, what’s the word I’m looking for? She didn’t seem like a, she just wasn’t intimidating to me, but she did have somewhat of a disciplinary-like figure, I guess. But I mean, it wasn’t as much probably as a father figure would have had on me like impact-wise.”

**Ethan:** “She was strict, but then sometimes she wasn’t. Like, she’d say, ‘You are on punishment for a week,’ but I knew if I was good like three days, [I’d be] out of it. If I

was good Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, I knew I was going to be good. So, she never really took my video games from my room unless I screwed up bad, but as long as I had my video games, I didn't care. So she could whoop me or do whatever, as long as I could go upstairs and play my video games, then I'm still winning."

**Jacob:** "[Punishment] would've made it to where I would've done it. I probably should have done it anyway regardless of punishment, but you know when I was a sophomore and junior and a freshman, those were the main years where if you had a punishment the next day instantly I would just start trying to work harder, start trying to get those grades up. So I mean if [my father] was around and I got punished more, I do believe my grades would've been a lot better."

**Caleb:** "She would never like really discipline me; she would get mad at me and say stuff, but it would never stick. She never followed through on what she said. I guess because she felt sorry, like it hurt her too, to do that. I just think the discipline would've been more harsh if I had a father figure or if I had a father. Because the male's aspect of something like that is sometimes harsher than a woman's. Because sometimes she is more lenient than a male. So, I think if I would've had a father, it would have been different."

**James:** "Like I said, she would discipline me by taking things away, like I couldn't go to this event or I couldn't go do that. I couldn't hang out with these people, but the effectiveness of it wasn't what she expected just because, like I said, I was so slick and so sneaky and just so smooth at doing things and getting out of things and just keeping things hidden that, even if she would lay down rules and things for me to follow, I was

just so good at getting around it that it wasn't effective at all, really. Whereas if I had a father, he would have said it, 'You're not going here,' and I wouldn't go. My mother was more of, 'Okay, you're not going here,' but an hour later than what I expected, I would still sneak out the house and go. She'd say, 'You can't have your phone for this week until those grades come up.' When she would leave the house I'd take my phone, put it back together, take it, go to school. When I get home, take it apart, put it back."

**Joseph** (on the effectiveness of his mom's discipline): "It wasn't effective, but the way she always tried to discipline me was she would take stuff away from me like the TV, but I mean, I don't really watch TV like that. Or she'd be like, 'Don't go outside,' but she's always at work, so I still go outside, so that's why it's not effective."

**Learning on their own.** Many of the participants explained how they learned on their own by trial and error because of not having a father there to show them things.

**Logan** (on how he learned things): "Trial and error in situations; all the aspects of trying to figure out who I was and what's a good route in this world."

**Kevin:** "I learned from my own personal mistakes instead of having someone guide me."

**James** (on how fatherlessness affected him): "Just growing up all together, just solving situations, solving problems. Learning how to make money, hold on to money, how to spend money, how to invest money. Learning how to fight for myself, stand up for myself. Not having a father pretty much forced me to do these things for myself."

**Joseph** (on how he had to learn things): "Doing things myself and making mistakes. That was mostly it because I always did. I felt like it was like a test. I'll do it and then see what happens. I'll base off that and that would be something I felt like I learned. Like if you do this, then this will happen."

**Robert:** “I just sit down because I was never too fond of reading directions but I was always YouTubeing something, or how to do something like tie my own tie--that’s how I learned to tie a tie, tie my own bow tie. That’s how I learned repairing walls [and] some other things”

**Growing up fast.** Participants explained that they had to grow up faster because of the absence of their father.

**Kevin:** “For the most part, I think I knew how to handle [situations]. Because I just, like I’d been through so much, I guess it’s something you learn whenever you go through a bunch of stuff. Like you just learn how to be an independent individual and push through your problems or just blow them off.”

**James:** “Not having a father pretty much forced me to do these things for myself, so now, I’m not an expert at these things, but being forced to learn them myself made me a lot smarter on the decisions I make.”

**Joseph:** “That’s why I kind of believe that most, and I’m saying sons, when they don’t have their dad in their life, it makes them stronger, and it makes them love women more because they actually see a woman working every day or trying to put food on the table when she don’t even have the money to do it.”

**Robert:** “It would have been helpful, but at the same time, when you learn how to do it on your own it sticks to you, sticks to your memory instead of someone just telling you how to do it.”

## **Identity**

What the participants thought about themselves and what was important to them was influenced predominantly by their attachments, influences, feelings, and behaviors.

**Regarding attachment.**

**Kevin** (on how he was alike or different from his classmates): “Probably different. Most of the people at my school probably had a mom and a dad. I don’t know, I think it’s just, my home life was a little bit more . . . not hectic, but it could have been a little bit more relaxed, I guess.”

**Ethan:** “I would say that because sometimes I didn’t feel like I was accepted by everybody, even though I knew a lot of people, I wanted to be cool with everybody when I was in high school. And seeing that I couldn’t be cool with everybody and some people didn’t like me for whatever reason, that kind of bothered me a little because you know I didn’t do nothing to nobody.”

**James:** “That was one of the things that me and a lot of other students didn't connect on, was just our background. They grew up with both parents; I grew up with one parent. They grew up knowing their dad; I grew up not knowing my father. I know, growing up, I never knew my father once. I still have yet to meet my dad, so I know there's a bunch of students that grew up without their father, but they still knew him. I don't know my father at all, so that just made it really different for other students to understand ‘Why is he this way? Why does he act like that sometimes?’ just because we came from completely different backgrounds.”

**Joseph:** “I felt I was different from the ones that had parents, like both parents. Or, I felt like I was different from the ones that had a mom but their mom actually treated them right. I feel like I can be myself without having the support, and that’s why I had to just bring it upon myself to change for myself, not change for nobody else; just to try to make myself better because I'm going to live my life throughout my whole life.”

**Robert:** “Every time I think about [my father not being at home], I just move on. It is what it is, is what I feel. It’s like that for a reason. I’m going to use it to build my character or use it to bring me down. I’m not going to use it to hold me back. I don’t like being in the same place I was in yesterday.”

**Regarding emotions.**

**Logan:** “My not feeling normal was keeping my inner thoughts in about people. I never knew who I was. And I know you say most people in high school don’t know who they are, but I’m talking about deep, deep-wise. I’m talking about I didn’t know, I knew I was a male, but my emotions toward that, was a male figure supposed to be rude or be not rude? And that’s why I felt not normal because I didn’t know. The confusion made me not normal. Because most of us feel like we’re not normal without a father and somehow we’re wrong. We are normal. We’re just going through a lot of feelings, a lot of unbalanced feelings.”

**Caleb:** “I would just want to feel like everyone else. Because most people, usually their dad will do stuff like that for them, and I just felt left out.”

**Joseph:** “Just having that man figure in your life will make you stronger because you know your dad’s at home, and you can go talk to him about anything. Because most dads let you talk to them about anything because they want to be in your life. It just makes you feel better to see both of them there rather than just one. Because you know they can put their differences aside just to make sure that you can have both of your parents.”

**Regarding actions and behaviors.**

**Logan:** “Everything I dealt with was in school, or inner conflict about ‘do I really want to do this?’ Like I couldn’t figure out who I was; I didn’t know who I was. I just knew to

copy off others. To fight or get good grades, and that was the whole aspect, was my whole idea of everything in high school.”

**Joseph:** “I don’t want my kids to live the life I lived, so I’d rather be in their lives to make sure that they’re okay and that I could be the person they talk to every time they have a problem. Or, I’m saying they could be comfortable around me, not just feel me as a threat. They could just understand that ‘I can go talk to my dad because he’s going to listen to me.’”

### **Regarding who they are today.**

**Ethan:** “Everybody goes through different situations for different reasons. I know that if my dad was here, I wouldn’t be who I am. I wouldn’t be in the position of where I am now, to move to another state where I don’t know anybody, just kind of doing my own thing.”

**Robert** (on whether he felt disadvantaged because of his father’s absence): “I was, but I never cared about disadvantages or advantages. I feel like you wake up with the same 24 hours as the next person, so you do what you’ve got to do to be better than the next person.”

## **Descriptions**

### **Logan’s Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Logan was adopted at an early age. He never knew his biological mother or father. His adopted guardian or “mom” was his biggest influence. He and his mom were close in some aspects, but not in others.

All I can say is she was actually always there, but more of a mom way than a dad way.

But she would just be there every night, every day. If I had a problem, I’d talk to her, but

there was just some things I refused to talk to her about. I don't really have a close relationship with my mom.

One of the things that Logan refused to talk to his mother about was his relationship with girls. "My mom couldn't really tell me much [about girls] because, I mean, she's a female. I didn't think she would know better, like she wouldn't know what a male does. She would only see it from her perspective really."

Logan did not know his father. There was never a consistent male role model in his life. "That was really such a hard thing, and I'm still struggling because I still do not have a male figure in my life, and I still got to figure out what exactly does a male figure do. Because without a father, there's really no male figure."

**Outside influences.** Some of the major outside influences in Logan's life were an assistant principal at the school, Mr. Jackson, and a teacher at his school, Mr. Ryan. The following describes how Mr. Jackson had an influence on Logan's life.

Basically, he had a real good connection with my mom. Then he started having a really good connection with me as he noticed what was going on. . . . He just kept sitting me down, and he was also one who gave me encouragement to be like, 'you have all these good grades, why are you stuck getting referrals? Why are you, you know, why are you concerned with what other guys think if it's wrong if it's going to get you in trouble.' He started helping me change my mind and become greater. And it wasn't, it just seemed like it wasn't a scary message, but it kind of just, like, kind of felt like it was strong. It was really strong, you know. It was kind of like my mom felt like water, he felt like soda. He was like super strong for me to understand and like, yeah, I really can't do that because that doesn't seem right. I mean this is coming from a guy who knows.

Mr. Jackson was one of the few male role models in Logan's life.

You know, I wanted someone to care about what's going on in my life. And I wanted a male to care, not a woman, because I already had a woman to care. I wanted a male. I wanted that other half to be a part and Mr. Jackson became that part. Although he wasn't my father, he was a role model, male role model.

Logan was also heavily influenced by his peers. The influence by his peers was negative in more ways than positive. "There is always a negative effect when someone doesn't have a male figure or a father figure. There's going to be a negative effect because he's going to get his ideas from other peers since he does not understand. He's going to get it from other peers or people on TV." Logan's friends often encouraged him to behave in disruptive and disrespectful ways.

**Needs.** There were certain needs that Logan felt were needed from a father. One need was support from a father and someone to be there. It bothered him to see his friends' fathers at events knowing he had no father there to support him. "Although their dads were divorced, their dad was still there to at least to cheer them on."

Another need was a father-son bond. "I bonded with female figures for too long. I need to bond with a male figure. I still haven't bonded with a male figure." There were also certain experiences that he would have wanted to share with his father and skills he would have wanted to learn. "I want my dad to be like 'Let's work on a car together.' You know . . . do something manly, do what a man does with his father. All that, that male bonding. Give my son a high-five and a pound and a junk, that's important to me."

**School interventions.** There were no school-related interventions for Logan outside the relationships he built with his administrators and teachers. Logan perceived that he would have benefited from some school-related interventions such as a mentoring program.

Start male programs, role model programs. That's the number one thing. Invite them. Get them to come. Sit down in one room and have one guy or two guys, three guys, who are older and just start asking them questions. Hey, so we understand, we were the same age as you, we know what you're going through. But let's start to develop you all into males, role models, so you all will be respected in life and have the right females around you, have the right education, all that. Give them attention, because it's that attention that will make them develop and grow. They don't want, it may seem like they want negative attention, but they actually want positive attention.

### **Logan's Structural Description**

**Emotions.** It is evident that Logan did not feel all his needs were met. His mom tried and was a big influence on him, but he believed that he would have benefitted from having a father at home. He needed someone in his life consistently, not just a role model he saw occasionally. He needed someone that would be involved in his life on a daily basis. "I would have benefited from a regular father figure better than a role model."

He attributed his good grades to his mom pushing him; however, there were other needs she could not meet, such as providing male bonding and giving Logan support in some instances. Mr. Jackson was a good role model and a big influence in Logan's life. Through his mom and Mr. Jackson, some needs were met while others were still left unmet.

Logan did not think he handled his emotions appropriately in some situations. He attributed this to not having a father to guide him in the right direction. "Not having a father in

high school affected me a whole bunch, and until this day it still has affected me because I still do not know how to handle my situations. Either I explode or don't think rationally." Logan would often get in fights because that is what he knew to do growing up, and he did not have a father to tell him otherwise. "I was always a fighter ever since I was young because there was no male there to tell me to chill out." His mom tried to discourage his fighting, but Logan disregarded her opinion and was more likely to listen to his friends who encouraged fighting, "...but my friends would tell me 'Dude, don't just step back.'" Taking his friends' advice over his mother's caused problems emotionally and behaviorally throughout high school.

**Behaviors.** Logan was sometimes disrespectful in school. He was disrespectful toward some of his teachers, administrators, and classmates. Logan got into "fights" with a lot of his teachers because he "didn't feel like listening to what they had to say." They asked him to do things, and he would not do them. Part of the reason Logan was disrespectful was because he was "trying to get attention from someone who I felt could understand me."

When Logan got in trouble in school or outside of school, his mother's punishment at home was not effective. He believed that punishment would have been different if there was a father at home. With regard to his mom's punishment, Logan stated, "Like I said, it was soft. It didn't really cross my mind. It was kind of like in one ear and out the other. . . . I would still go back to school and act up, be disrespectful."

Logan needed "stern discipline" and that his mother's discipline was not. Mr. Jackson provided Logan with "stern discipline" when he got in trouble at school, but it was only on a limited basis. Logan thought discipline at home would have been more effective if it was "stern." "Yeah, the stern discipline was better because it wasn't soft. You can't always be so kind about it. In order for someone to get the message sometimes you have to be hard. You've

got to slap it up against their head and make sure they read it, understand it. And that's what I needed. I didn't need anything soft." This "stern discipline" needed to be provided more than just on occasions by Mr. Jackson at school.

**Identity.** Logan did not feel "normal" compared to his classmates. One of the reasons he did not feel normal was because he always felt "conflicted" on how a male should act. Logan's friends encouraged him to act a certain way that was often in conflict with his mother's requests. This left Logan confused and uncertain of how he should act as a male. He believed that a father would have been an important influence and helped determine how he behaved and treated others.

### **Logan's Synthesis Description**

Not having a father affected Logan significantly during high school. Logan believed many of his needs such as support, guidance, and discipline were unmet because he did not have a father at home. Logan felt the unmet needs contributed to his poor behavior, such as fighting, and disrespect toward authority, in high school. An assistant principal and a teacher at Logan's school were important influences and helped meet some needs, but were only able to play a limited role in Logan's life. They were able to help improve Logan's behavior at school, and they also gave him support in other ways.

During Logan's senior year, he began to change for the better. He acted more respectfully toward authority at school and toward his classmates. He no longer fought. "I knew how to actually become and shape myself into a man. And it felt like I graduated high school, graduated college; I started learning how to take care of a family instead of being ignorant, and stop fighting every single thing that comes my way." His assistant principal, Mr. Jackson, was influential in Logan's positive changes.

## **Kevin's Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Kevin's mother was his biggest influence in high school. "She was the one that was always there. You know, like I said before, she just helped me through stuff. She was the one that always, she was the person I could go to and talk about stuff. She was always there. That's really all I can say." Kevin respected her and said that she was also like a father figure in some ways.

Because no matter all the stuff we went through, all the moving we did, she always kept this, you know, strong mental composure. She was like the father figure. I guess my mom was like my father figure. Like when I was younger, she always made sure we had what we needed or more than that, what we wanted. And she just was able to raise me and my sister without the help of my dad really. I guess her being independent and, like, doing it all on her own mostly.

Kevin's father and mother divorced when he was two. His dad lived a few hours away. Kevin talked to his Dad some; however, their relationship was not strong.

I just never really had a good relationship with my dad. Because, I mean, my dad, I would visit him, but after a while it was like I really don't want to see him. Because, I don't know, he's just, I mean I love my dad, don't get me wrong, but he could have done a lot better job. I know being a father is not the easiest thing out there, but it's not like it's impossible. He could have made a greater effort to actually show some involvement in my life.

Kevin thought that having a father to model throughout his life would have been beneficial.

I think that if I'd had a father figure, the same one all throughout elementary, middle, and high school, I probably would have done better. Like, I probably would have made a lot

smarter choices, did all my work. I probably would have been a lot more successful as far as high school goes.

**Other influences.** Kevin said his friends were the most important thing to him in high school.

**Kevin** (on what was most important): Honestly, probably friends, because I never really had many growing up. It was just trying to be the kid that everyone liked, I guess. You know, being the kid that people were like yeah, 'He's cool' . . . you know, trying to prove that I'm a cool person I guess.

The biggest influences at school were an administrator, Mr. Cook, and a teacher, Mr. Allen.

Because they were the ones that worked with me the most. They like, I mean, it's not like they would pull me out of class, but sometimes they would and ask me about my grades; see what I'm doing, what I could do to help bring them up. They always took a little extra time to work with me instead of being harsh on me and whatnot. They worked with me on a lot of stuff. They didn't, like, I guess teachers, you know, in order to get rid of you, they will pass a kid on to the next grade. Kind of like that, like they actually cared and tried to work with me on a lot of stuff and make sure I got a little something out of it, I guess, so to speak.

Kevin also said this about his assistant principal, Mr. Cook.

Well, I mean, on a professional level, he was a good school administrator. And on a personal level, I mean, it's not like I ever really saw him outside of school or, you know, went out and had lunch with him and talked about stuff, but he just worked with me a lot. He was real nice and cared, seemed like he cared about my well-being and whatnot.

Kevin thought that his teachers offered support and that they really cared about him not only as a student but also as a person.

Like they actually thought of you not just as like another student; they thought of you like, 'it's kind of like my kid; they come here every day, and I teach them something.' So, I mean, it seems like that kind of was something I looked up to as well. Like they didn't just think of you like, because, like at most of my other schools that I went to, like elementary and middle school and my ninth grade year, like they just kind of, they didn't look at me like that. They were more like "I'm the teacher, you're the student, I've got five more classes to go, and I'm just going to teach."

**School interventions.** Kevin believed the school did all they could do to help him in his situation. "But I don't really think there's anything they could have done extra to, you know, help me. Because, I mean, part of them helping me is for me to help myself, and that's one thing I didn't do. But for the most part, they did very well with their jobs and the students." Kevin did say he "probably" would have benefited from a mentoring program, if he was able to build a "friendship" with the mentor and talk to him about "stuff."

**Needs.** Kevin felt there were certain things that he would have wanted to experience with his father during high school. One of the things was someone to talk to and go to for advice. "Someone there to talk to. Someone I could go to whenever I'm having problems with girls, school, friends, with anything. Someone that could be there, and I wouldn't have to really worry about what to talk about. Like, I could go to them about anything. Like, just advice."

He perceived that having a father at home during high school could have affected his grades positively and also helped hold him accountable for his actions.

I didn't have someone to help guide me from right and wrong. It probably would have helped if I would have had a decent father figure to help me, telling me what I should be doing, what I should be caring about, and focusing on. And I think that if I had a father figure, I probably would have made some different choices along the way. He would have probably helped influence me, bringing my grades up and whatnot. He would have probably made sure I was doing my work and not just goofing off when I get home and stuff like I did.

Kevin would have also wanted to share experiences with his father.

I mean, [my friends] would go out and do stuff with [their fathers]. They'd spend quality time with them. Go out and fish or go out four-wheeling, do something like that. It seems like if I would have something like that, I didn't really have someone there to just kind of like be my buddy. I mean, I know they are supposed to be a father figure, but they also can be like your best friend and stuff. Someone I could see, talk to, hang out, we would work in the garage and stuff. That's the physical thing right there. Like we'd actually do stuff like ride four-wheelers, dirt bikes, fishing, stuff like that. You know the kind of things you do if you're father and son.

Kevin also would have wanted his father to teach him some gender roles and skills.

“There were some things that I kind of wish I could have done, like hunting. I've never been hunting; I've always wanted to go because it seems like it would be something that's real fun.”

### **Kevin's Structural Description**

**Emotions.** Kevin considered himself someone who did not address his problems. He was more likely to “blow it off” and “move on.” Most of the time, Kevin did not talk to others, including his mom, about issues he was facing. If he talked to anyone, it would be his friends. It

would have helped if Kevin's father were more involved in his life, "It probably would have helped. I mean, I would have had someone to talk to about my problems and like how I felt the whole emotional part of it."

Kevin believed that there were added stresses to him and his family because of his father's absence. Moving as often as they did was tough and made it hard for him to get to know people. He had gone to three different schools in the first three months of his 10th grade year. The reason they had to move was for his mom to find work. During his 10th grade year, he also suffered from depression and went to a clinic for a few weeks.

**Behaviors.** Kevin didn't care much about school. He knew that his grades could have been better. He knew that he was a "smart kid," but he did not always apply himself. He did not study or do school work at home. He believed if a father had been at home, he would have been held more accountable to do his homework and study.

Kevin sensed that his behavior would have also been better if his father were at home. Kevin did not get into any major trouble at school but often had to see the principal for being tardy, using inappropriate language, and sometimes being disrespectful. His father could have provided more structure to Kevin's home life. He would have had someone to guide him and offer him advice instead of having to learn from his own personal mistakes. It would have helped to have someone "guide me from right and wrong." It would have also helped to have someone "telling me what I should be doing, what I should be caring about, and focusing on."

Although he respected his mom, and she was a huge influence, her discipline was not effective.

My mom. I mean she would say, 'Oh, you're grounded; you can't do this or that.' After a while, I mean, it's a bad thing to say, but it didn't really work. She couldn't really

punish me; I'd do it anyway. That's one bad thing I felt about it. Even if I was in trouble, I would still do whatever I wanted. I don't know, I just didn't have that fear instilled in me. I don't know how else to put it. I mean, my mom never really intimidated me, I guess. It's not like I look at her as a friend. I look at her as a parent figure, but you know, she's not just the one I see as someone that enforces discipline and, you know, stuff like that.

**Identity.** Kevin was a student who believed he did not fit in at times. This was because of everything he had been through. He thought that he was different from a lot of his classmates because "most of them probably had both parents at home." Kevin described his home life as being different or "more hectic" than his friends.

Kevin perceived that many of his classmates labeled him as the "loud and obnoxious kid." As he got older, he stopped caring as much about what people thought of him. He associated with whoever "seemed cool" but did not hang out with a lot of people at his school. He often found friends outside of school. Kevin perceived having a father at home during high school would have resulted in him having more options and possibly going to college after graduation.

### **Kevin's Synthesis Description**

Kevin thought he could have and should have done better academically in high school. He believed that if his father were more involved on a daily basis that he would have performed and behaved better. Kevin did not have any adult male role models who filled in for his father's absence. He sensed that, if his father were present, he not only would have done better but also would have had more options after high school.

Kevin's friends were the most important thing to him during high school. If he talked to anyone about anything personal, it was usually his friends. An assistant principal and Kevin's teachers were positive influences for him. Kevin's teachers really cared about him, not only as a student but also as a young man. This made a difference in Kevin's relationship with them and helped motivate him in their classes.

Kevin perceived he was missing out on some experiences due to his father's absence. He wanted someone to whom he could talk to and go to for advice. He would have wanted a male's perspective on some of the situations he faced during high school. Kevin needed to be held more accountable at home. Kevin also wanted someone there with whom he could share experiences.

With no one to go to for advice or share things with, Kevin held in his emotions. This resulted in some emotional issues for Kevin. Moving schools also affected Kevin socially and emotionally. It was hard to meet and keep friends because of moving so much. He believed he did not fit in with many of his classmates. The friends he met, usually outside of school, became his biggest influences.

### **Ethan's Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Ethan did not have a great relationship with his mother. He thought that his mom did not love him enough. He also did not feel comfortable talking to his mom about everything. "But when [Dad] left, it was just like, I know I gotta tell mom everything; a lot of stuff I didn't feel comfortable telling her. And I still don't feel comfortable telling her a lot of stuff just because I know she's not going to understand."

Ethan's dad left when Ethan was in middle school. When his dad left, it affected the relationship between Ethan and his mother. "She was still hurt about the separation between her

and my dad, so since she couldn't take her anger out on him, I was the next closest target. So, a lot of the stuff that I did, she was like, 'Oh, you're acting like your daddy.'"

Once Ethan's father left, their relationship diminished because they did not keep in contact often and did not visit each other.

And then he left, and it went from hearing from him, like, every couple of days to, like, once a week, to, like, once every two weeks, to once every three weeks. It just happened fast, like, that happened super-fast. We'd talk, like, every Friday for, like, two months for a year. It was like, the first two weeks we'd talk, like, once a week. Then we'd talk a few days a week. That next week we'd talk once a week. That next week I wouldn't hear from him. That next week we wouldn't hear from him; then he'd call. Next week wouldn't, next week wouldn't; then he'd call. Then it was just, like, nothing. Like I told you last time, I done forgot. I don't even know the man's birthday.

Once his father left, he felt let down and that a lot of promises were unmet.

It's kind of like, I think one of the rules of being a man is always being held accountable for your words, not only being held accountable for your actions. And I felt like at the time, well I still feel like it now, that I couldn't hold him to nothing. Because I know even if it was simple stuff, he'd say he's going to talk to somebody and do it, it could have escalated to 'Well, I'm going to take you somewhere this weekend.' But when that weekend came, it never happened. Like, he used to pick us up on the weekend, and he'd be like, 'Well we're going to go here this weekend; were going to do this, we're going to do that.' But he'd end up taking us to his mama's house, and we wouldn't see him again until it was time for us to go home. So it was the honoring your word part that kind of bothered me.

**Other influences.** Ethan's godparents and godbrother influenced him. They helped fulfill needs that were unmet when his father left. "I mean, because they stepped in when my daddy wasn't there. So, it was kind of, you know, 'I'm going to put you under my wing, and I'm going to just show you everything. So when you go to college you can't say you didn't know.' That's how our relationship was." His godbrother was a big influence and someone he looked up to.

Because everybody has a person that they look up to, and it's kind of like my godbrother. When I met him, he was in high school. He graduated [and] went to college. I didn't really think about going to college until I started hanging with him, and we started talking about college. That's when I really was like, 'Well, I guess I'll give it a try.'

Having a role model was important to Ethan. "So, I mean, if you're growing up in a single-parent home, then if it really means that much to you, you've gotta find somebody positive that, you've gotta find somebody or somebody to kind of take you under their wing."

Another important influence was the Boys and Girls Club. Ethan said that the mentors at the Boys and Girls Club were some of the most important influences in his life.

When I was at the Club, you know, David, Jeremy, Nathan, and William, they all helped mold me into who I am today as far as, like instilling, like making me more responsible for my actions. But it was the Boys and Girls Club that had the big impact just because they taught me how I was supposed to be.

The mentors at the Boys and Girls Club were there to support him by attending some of his events. "David at the Boys and Girls Club. You know, they always did that stuff for me. They used to come to my football games. They used to come to my basketball games. They used to come to practice." He told these mentors things that he had not told others.

But the Boys and Girls Club, they knew because, like, even when I sit down to talk to them, I tell the little stuff, but I won't tell a lot. I'll just tell the stuff that was kind of bothering me and not touch on some of the stuff, but I wouldn't ever tell all the stuff.

The Boys and Girls Club also helped keep him out of trouble.

That's what the Boys Club did for me. They were like, 'We see where you're going, and we're not going to let you go there. So you get your act right and you don't go that route, or you can be like the rest of them and get in trouble all the time, getting locked up,' stuff like that. So I think that's what saved me because I didn't go through life without having a father figure, like, my main father; my daddy wasn't there. But I had, like, the Boys and Girls Club.

**School interventions.** At school, there were some people who had an impact on Ethan. He had this to say about an assistant principal offering support: "He used to ask me how I was doing all the time, and that kind of made a difference. He kind of made a difference because he showed me that he cared to ask me how I was doing. A lot of people, they don't take the time to ask how you're doing and stuff."

Ethan's basketball coaches were also helpful and men whom he really respected.

I'd say the basketball coaches. They helped a lot as far as, like, staying positive and stuff. I remember in high school I won the optimistic award. It was weird because I wasn't expecting to get nothing, and Coach Davis told me to 'just go, you might get an award or something.' I was like, 'all right, whatever.' So we had went, and, you know, they give the speech before the awards, and they was like, 'this award goes to somebody that always stays positive about everything, no matter if we're losing by 20 or we're up

20. He always thinks positive out of the situation.’ And when he called my name, I was like, ‘wow.’ I ain’t never really think that people really paid attention to it like that.

Ethan thought that if schools offered a program similar to what he experienced at the Boys and Girls Club, it could benefit students in a similar situations.

I would start a program that focused on, not what was going on at home, but just the kids in general. And I’d have a team for the boys and a group for the girls. And I would kind of just have like an open forum. And eventually, they’re going to start talking because they see they’re not the only one going through their problem. Because when you’re young, you don’t think that everybody’s going through the same problem you’re going through. Because everybody’s just so happy, you don’t ever know what’s going on at home. But I think once they sit down and they start talking about different stuff that’s going on at home, then you start making progress. And then I would take them on different trips kind of just to take them and just get them out of the house. And I’d give them different incentives: you make all A’s this semester, I’ll take you to the football game or something. Or, if you got all A’s and B’s at the end of the quarter, a pizza party for everybody. You know, just different small stuff to help build them up. And then as they get older, just kind of increase the incentives, not monetary-wise but more sentimental-wise to help instill different ways in them.

**Needs.** There were certain needs that Ethan felt his dad should have been there to provide. One of those needs was support. “Just being there for his kids, just teaching them all the right things, showing them all their potentials so they don’t gotta go somewhere else to get it.”

Ethan also felt his father should have been there for him to provide guidance. “But I think the father figure should be there, you know, to, like, a real father should be there, to kind of guide you and show you the way that it’s supposed to be done.” He wanted to be taught specific gender roles and skills from his father.

I mean, you know, like the simple stuff--girls, football, how to be a man, shaving, simple stuff, fishing. Just the quality time that needed to be spent during that time, that would have been more effective than just being there with my mama all the time. Like, she knew it was time for her to talk to me about certain stuff, but she didn’t know how to bring it up, so she never brought it up. And I had to learn through friends, or I had to learn at school what I could have been taught at home.

His mom tried to teach him some of these gender roles and skills, but it was not the same. “It was like my mama was trying to, she was kind of trying to teach me how to be a man, but you can’t teach me how to be a man if you’re a woman. So, that was probably one of the toughest parts.”

Ethan also wanted father-son time with his dad. “It could be like just going fishing, him coming to my football games, what we used to do. Like going to the barber shop and going to play basketball on the weekends, riding bikes, all that cool stuff.”

### **Ethan’s Structural Description**

**Emotions.** Ethan and his dad had a close relationship until his father left. Ethan was hurt when his dad left, and Ethan reacted by closing off others. Ethan thought that he needed someone in high school to talk to and was hurt that his father was not available for him. Without having anyone to talk to, Ethan put up barriers. He went days without talking to anyone. During

this time, all he did was play video games. He perceived that no one was on his side and that no one was there for him.

Ethan admitted he did not care about school. “I didn’t care about nothing. I was just going to school to act up, talk to everybody, be cool. That’s about it.” He knew that he could have done much better in school. His mom continually talked to him about his grades, but he did just enough to get by. His godbrother was a big reason Ethan pursued going to college his senior year.

**Behaviors.** Ethan admitted thinking that everything should have been about him in high school. His dad’s choice to leave his family seemed selfish, and he took that to mean that he should be able to do as he wished as well. His dad’s leaving “showed [the family] that it’s always supposed to be about you. You’re always going to get your way.” Ethan was seeking attention, especially from older males. He tried to dress nicely hoping that someone would comment on his outfit. Even though his mom acknowledged his effort, it did not have much of an effect because he wanted “others” to pay attention to him. Ethan’s attitude in high school was “I don’t care what you’re doing, it’s all about me. I’m doing this, and you should be paying attention to me.”

**Identity.** Ethan did not feel like he was always accepted by everyone. He tried to fit in with everyone, and it hurt when it seemed like he did not. He did not spend a lot of time with his friends outside of school.

Despite his father leaving, Ethan did not feel like he grew up without a male role model. His godbrother, godfather, and mentors from the Boys and Girls Club played this role for him. These influences were important in shaping who he is today.

### **Ethan's Synthesis Description**

It was difficult for Ethan when his dad left. Ethan did not have a strong relationship with his mother, so when his dad left, he thought there was no one to talk to and no one on his side. Ethan was fortunate that his godparents, godbrother, and the Boys and Girls Club stepped in to help fulfill needs vacated by his father.

When his father left, Ethan felt like he missed out on having his father's support, being taught certain gender skills, and on father-son experiences. Because his father did not meet these needs, Ethan put up barriers between himself and others. Ethan did not care about school and often tried to seek attention with his behavior.

Despite the circumstances, Ethan did not feel that he grew up without a positive male role model. His godfather, godbrother, and mentors at the Boys and Girls Club were role models that helped meet many of his needs.

### **Jacob's Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Jacob had a good relationship with his mom. He had this to say about their relationship:

"It was a good relationship."

"Me and my mom, we're real cool."

"I'm always comfortable talking to her."

He was more comfortable talking to her about things later in high school.

**Jacob** (on if he would talk to his mom about everything): Now? Yes. When I was going through high school, it wasn't until, like, my senior year when I would pretty much tell her everything. But most of my high school career I didn't talk to her very much. I kept to myself.

Jacob saw his dad at times, but they did not have a strong relationship. “He’s two hours away, and I hardly ever see him. That’s just how it is. I’ve gotten over it a long time ago.” He only saw and heard from his dad on special occasions.

But like I said, before high school, around my freshman year, I got into that mindset where I realized my father is not going to randomly call me and say, ‘Hey do you want to hang out?’ Once I realized that, I just let him. When it was my birthday, I expected a call. When it was Christmas I expected a call. That was it.

He considered their relationship more of a friendship than a father-son relationship.

I would still call him dad. I mean, there’s been some times when I’m just like, you know, I mean, he may be my biological father, and sometimes when I’m around he may act like he’s my father. But you know, when he’s not around, I mean honestly, I don’t talk to my dad for six months at a time sometimes. So, it’s really hard to really consider the relationship between me and my dad as a father-son relationship. It’s more like a friendship relationship.

Jacob respected the fact that his mother worked hard to provide for him, and resented the fact his father did so little.

My mom does the best to still take care of me now. My dad does nothing. One of the things that really got to me, at one point, is my dad refused to pay child support. He refused. My mom had to sue him for it.

**Other influences.** Jacob received support from his grandparents and an older sister. He had this to say about his grandfather.

Well, he’s a really good influence. We go fishing almost every year over my birthday. Me and him, we go fishing. . . . We always have a good time. He teaches me how to do

stuff. I've actually learned a lot about working on cars and stuff like that from him, you know, rather than learning it from my dad, but I have learned it from him.

Jacob had a close, influential group of friends who he went to for advice.

I would talk to my mom about some stuff, but that's normally when no one really had any answers for me. Like, if nobody really has any answers, I'd talk to my mom. I mean, besides that, really no one else besides my friends. I've never actually willingly gone to a counselor or a teacher, or any adult to actually help me. It's normally just my friends; people who were pretty much going through the same stuff I was.

Jacob said that he lacked role models most of his high school career. He believed that role models would have been helpful.

I think the main reason why things might have been bad for me my whole high school career, or just life in general, is because I lacked role models most of my life. I lacked them, you know. People asked me earlier on my freshman, sophomore, and junior year, 'What do you want to do in life? What are you working for?' I'd always have these different things that I think I want, but in my mind, you know, I was highly uncertain that's what I wanted to do.

**School interventions.** Two positive influences at school were Jacob's ROTC instructors. He considered them both role models. When asked what qualities of his instructors he admired he said "Their respect for other people that they had. The respect for themselves and respect for what they stood for, like what they were there to teach us. They served their country. They did all of that, you know." Jacob also shared how his ROTC class positively impacted him.

It was kind of a cool and laid back relationship [with] Colonel Flowers. We would always go into [his classroom] during guided study, fourth period, when they didn't have

class and during my lunch time. I'd never go to lunch, I'd go to the ROTC room and I'd stay there. I'd normally do drill practices there, spinning the rifle, you know, practice the form of it. Practice, but on top of that, I'd also go and I'd talk with Colonel Flowers. One of the awesome things about Colonel Flowers is that when you go in there, generally if he's not working, if he's just on his . . . lunch break, and he's sitting there, you'll see a group of students just huddled around the colonel, and he'll be talking to them. Whether it's about stories, whether it was about war that he's been in, or whether it was just life situations, or whether he was just giving advice. There was a whole bunch of students just wrapped around him, you know, just listening and watching him talk. I mean, he was funny. His personality was just great. He would be a very good role model and a person that I looked up to in school.

Jacob said the school did all they could to help him be successful. Jacob suggested that to help other students in similar situations, it would be beneficial to help students realize what they want to do in life at an earlier age. When Jacob realized what he wanted to do, he was motivated to do well in school.

**Needs.** Jacob felt there were some needs that needed to be met during high school. He did not feel his dad offered much support while not living with them.

If he was around, there probably would have been more times where he would have noticed that something was up, and he probably would have talked to me. But, you know, the thing is, he doesn't know anything that goes on because he's not here. He can't really help. But I feel like if he was here, like, if he was around me more than he is, then he would know that I do go through some stuff, and he probably would try and stop and help.

Jacob thought that he was missing discipline in some ways and that it could have been different if his father were there. “I mean, I guess I was just missing that disciplinary thing. I guess that’s another reason that affected me because my dad wasn’t there. But, I mean, maybe I might have done better in school, I don’t know. Maybe there would have been more consequences for me doing bad in school.”

There were certain gender roles and skills that he wanted to learn from his dad.

I mean, maybe if he was around, there was more stuff that I could’ve done, like you know, guy things—sports, watching football games. See, nowadays, I just go out and I watch football games with friends, but I never really did that with my dad. On top of that, there’s a lot of things that he probably could have taught me that, you know, things that guys do like watch football games, work on cars, play card games, go out, and hang out, and I never really got to do that with my dad.

Jacob would have liked more father-son experiences.

I mean, I would have liked to have some more father-son experiences, but it just never really happened. There was one point where I’d call my dad, and I would ask him to come out and hang out with me, but it got to the point where I started thinking I shouldn’t have to ask my own father to come out here and say, ‘Hey, let’s go and do this, let’s go and do that.’ He should be like, ‘I want to hang out with my son, so I’m going to come down there. Tell him that I’m going to come down there and hang out with him.’ But it never happened. Like, the only time it ever happened was he actually told me when he was going to come down and that was my birthdays.

## **Jacob's Structural Description**

**Emotions.** Jacob considered himself shy in high school. He mostly kept to himself and was not outgoing. He had a hard time trusting people and only had a small group of close friends. If he had a father to talk to, it would have been helpful and made him open up more. He believed that if his dad were living with them, he could have taught Jacob how to be more social.

Jacob experienced some added stress because his father was absent during high school. He believed that life would have been easier and circumstances could have been happier, “probably could have had a lot more fun moments with my family.” His mother had financial restrictions because she was a single parent. Going through the divorce was a “big cutback” for his family, and it forced him and his mom to move for her to find work.

When Jacob's dad refused to pay child support, Jacob felt hurt and this had a negative effect on their relationship. His dad supported him financially for some things, but Jacob was always hesitant to ask and felt like he should not have to ask his father for certain things.

But the problem is that, with my father not being there, it was kind of like, the classes I needed to make up, it was like, ‘How is my mom going to pay for that?’ You know, she's a single parent. My dad, he's not here, and most of the time I'd actually get kind of nervous just to ask him if he would actually pay or help my mom pay to get the classes I needed.

**Behavior.** Jacob believed that discipline would have been different if his father were at home. He thought that he would have been disciplined more and that the discipline would have happened “right then and there.” Jacob said he probably would have done things “right the first time.” He mentioned that his mother never really disciplined him. She took away things, or just

sat him down and talked to him. “I mean, I guess I was just missing the disciplinary thing. I guess that’s another reason that affected me because my dad wasn’t there.”

**Identity.** Jacob considered himself shy. He believed that if his father were more available that he could have helped Jacob with his social skills. Jacob felt he would have done better in certain things, such as school and sports, if his father were there to help. Jacob gained confidence in himself during his senior year when he discovered what he wanted to do for a career and had role models to guide him.

### **Jacob’s Synthesis Description**

Jacob’s strong relationship with his mom made his dad’s absence less of a negative impact. Because Jacob’s dad did not make much of an effort to be involved in his life, there were some needs that were not met. Jacob had strong influences from his grandfather, ROTC instructors, and a close group of friends.

Jacob lacked positive male role models until late in his high school career. This is when his involvement with ROTC began. ROTC provided discipline and accountability—needs that Jacob felt were not met at home—and the class also guided Jacob toward a career after high school.

### **Caleb’s Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Caleb’s relationship with his mom began to “come around” in high school. “In high school, it started coming around. She had always worked two jobs, so I didn’t really talk to her or hang out with her. During high school, I started hanging out with her and stuff.” He and his mom “buted heads,” but he also saw her as a friend in some ways. “It is good in some instances, but sometimes it is not. Me and her are a lot alike, and so we would butt heads. But when we’re good, pretty much, like, we’re friends. We can talk about anything.”

Caleb never knew his father, which he had trouble dealing with. When asked what made it difficult for him, Caleb explained “Just how hard it is to grow up knowing you have a father out there that knows you’re alive. I guess he knows I am alive—I talked to my mom about it and that I actually have siblings, but he has never tried to contact me or had anything to do with me. That just baffles me at night; kind of breaks my heart.”

**Other influences.** Other than his mom, Caleb’s grandfather was his biggest influence. His grandfather was there for support and was someone he could go to for advice.

**Caleb** (on the influence of his grandfather): “Just always being there for me, no matter what.”

When asked to talk about his relationship with his grandfather, Caleb said, “He was everything to me.”

**School interventions.** At school, there were many teachers and coaches who played an important part in Caleb’s life. Coach Jones was his track and football coach. Caleb described their relationship like this: “Pretty much, because we were a lot alike, I just see myself like how I want to be. Like, where he came from to where he is now, that is how I want my life to be.” Coach Jones offered support and was there for Caleb if he needed him. “So, we just started having a bond. He was always the guy I would go to, could talk to. Like, we still keep in contact. I text him. We just talked when I need someone to talk to like that.”

Caleb said he would have been open to a big brother program or a similar mentoring program if his school had offered one. This would have given Caleb a positive male influence to talk to about any issues. Caleb believes this would have helped him as well as students in similar situations.

**Needs.** Caleb perceived that some of his needs were unmet because he did not know his father. One of the needs was having additional support at home. Caleb described how he felt a father should be there for his child: “emotionally and physically, a child should know his father, and he should be able to come to him, just being able to talk to him and stuff like that.”

He believed that a father should not only be there for support but also to guide his children. When asked what he wanted a father to teach him, Caleb said “how to be a better man, like, growing up, taught me right from wrong, how to treat people.”

Caleb believed that he would have done better if he had a male role model to challenge him in school.

**Caleb** (on challenge from a male mentor): “I probably would have actually done better, I don’t know. Like I said, I am competitive, so if it gives me a challenge I am going to meet it.”

There were also some gender roles and skills that Caleb would have wanted his father to teach him. He would have preferred to talk to his father about certain things instead of having to go to his mother. “I mean, it is just hard talking to your mom about sex, girls, and stuff like that. That is more for a father and son to talk about; like about cars and stuff, someone to take me hunting, stuff like that.”

### **Caleb’s Structural Description**

**Emotions and Behaviors.** Caleb was often angry in high school. He “wore his emotions on his sleeve” by lashing out and hitting things. Usually, he became angry over little things. Caleb believed that the reason for his anger was a combination of not knowing his father and his mom being gone at work most of the time.

Caleb said that his mom never really disciplined him. She said some things, but it “never stuck” and “she never followed through on what she said. I guess because she felt sorry, like, it hurt her too to do that.” Caleb felt the discipline would have been “more harsh” if a father were at home, and he believed that tougher discipline was something he needed.

Without having a father, Caleb had to teach himself things and learn from his mistakes. Having to teach himself everything made things harder than they should have been. “I guess without having a father, I would teach myself stuff, and I would have to learn from my mistakes, other than having somebody sit down and talk to me about them.” Some of the things he taught himself that he could have learned from a father were sports, relationships with friends, and relationships with girls.

Caleb sensed that he had to prove himself to his family. He never believed that he was “good enough” or that he “lived up to what they expected me to be.” Even when family members told him how proud they were of him, Caleb felt it was never sincere because he was missing a father’s affirmation.

**Identity.** Caleb thought that he was different than a lot of his classmates because most of his friends had both parents at home. He did not “feel like everyone else” because of skills or activities he did not know like hunting and working on cars. Caleb did not feel like he always fit in with his peers. One of the reasons was because they did things with their fathers, and he just felt “left out” because of not having a father.

### **Caleb’s Synthesis Description**

It was hard for Caleb to spend much time with his mom growing up because she worked two jobs. In high school, when he started to “hang out” with his mom at work, their relationship improved. Emotionally, it was difficult for Caleb to know that he had never met his father.

Both Caleb's grandfather and his track and football coach, Coach Jones, were big influences in his life. Caleb had a close relationship with his grandfather. His grandfather was always there and provided Caleb with needed support. Caleb was also positively influenced at school by Coach Jones, who provided another older male that Caleb could talk to when he needed.

There were several things that Caleb felt he needed from a father and that if he had his father to go to for guidance, it would have been helpful. Caleb felt he would have done better in school if he had a father at home who challenged him and held him accountable. Caleb also felt he missed out on shared experiences and learning certain skills from his father.

Without a father, Caleb often felt angry. Caleb had to teach himself things that his father could have taught him. Having to teach himself everything made things more difficult. Caleb never believed he was good enough, and was always trying to prove himself to his family. Caleb perceived that his family situation made him different from most of his classmates.

### **James' Textural Description**

**Attachment.** James' mother was a major influence in his life during high school, but according to James, their relationship was not as close as it should have been.

Throughout most of high school, I guess you could say we weren't close friends. It was more of a mother-son relationship. She played the role of the mother; I played her child. When she would tell me to do something, I would do it. We weren't the best of friends. When she would tell me to do something, instead of me doing it right at that moment, I'd talk back, wait a couple of hours, then go do something else and then come back and do it. Our relationship wasn't the whole, 'we're close friends; we're best friends.' It was more of a she tells me what to do, I do it, then we don't see each other for the rest of the

day because I'd leave the house. . . . It wasn't that tight friendship as we should have had. It was more of a 'you do this, then I'm gone' type of thing.

Despite not being "close friends," his mother was the biggest influence in his life.

My biggest influence I would have to say . . . just my mother, just because no matter what the situation was with her, whether I followed through what she set for me or not, whether we were friends at the moment or not, she always was there to provide for me. So, even when I knew I was at my lowest, I knew she would probably be a lot lower than me, and she always found a way to provide. That was my biggest influence to stay positive and try my hardest.

James went to his mom for advice and felt comfortable talking to her about anything.

"Growing up without a father, she had to play both roles. Yeah, I feel comfortable talking to her about anything. Just anything that was happening—school, sports, whatever. It was a lot easier to talk to her just because she was forced to play both roles, so I felt comfortable talking to her about anything."

James never knew his father. He often thought about how his life would be different if he knew his father.

Every day I'd wake up and go to sleep thinking, 'If I had a dad today, how would today have went? If I had a dad tomorrow, how would tomorrow go? If I had a father a month ago, how would I be now? If I would have had a father when I grew up, would I still be the same person? Would I be in this position? Would I be in this home? Would I be hanging out with these friends, doing this, doing that?' I thought about not having a father every day.

One of the reasons James stayed gone from his house so much was because he “didn’t want to just go all day thinking about [not having a father].” To make up for not having a father, James dated a lot. “I dated a lot and that was really just . . . making up for not having a father. I didn’t experience the love from having a father, so I would date a lot of different females just to make up that love and that bond that I didn’t have with a dad.”

**Other influences.** Family members such as grandfathers, uncles, and older cousins tried to play a father role in his life, but due to circumstances, it was difficult.

I had a lot of older cousins, my mother’s cousins. I had a lot of older cousins like that. Grandfathers, uncles . . . would try to help play that father role in my life, but just because they didn’t see me every day, they didn’t talk to me every day, it made it a little more complicated for them, and it made it a little more easier for me to be sneaky around them just because they didn’t see me.

**School interventions.** School had a big influence on James. The main influence was through administrators, teachers, and various sports teams that he participated on. “Playing sports, it’s like a big family thing. It’s family oriented. Your teammates are your brothers. Your coaches are your dads. That’s what you know. Role models, a lot of my coaches, weight lifting coaches, just team coaches.”

James thought that it was important and made a difference for his teachers to know his situation at home.

It made a big difference. When they figured out, ‘Okay, he comes from a broken home,’ they focus a lot more. I wouldn’t say they focus more on you than other students, but they try to put more focus into you, knowing that you come from a broken home. Knowing that there may be bigger problems at your home than there is for the next

student because you don't have a father, you don't have a mother, situations like that. Say if I don't come home until three in the morning, I don't have time to do my homework.

I can go to the teacher who knows I don't have a father and explain that to him a lot better than I can to the teacher who thinks everything is fine in my home and explain it to them.

The teachers that knew what was going on, they made it a lot easier to learn and a lot easier just to go to school because they took the pressure of school off your back so that you can focus on other things at home.

Some of James' teachers helped out by getting to know him and offering support. "I had a lot of good teachers that were just strong on getting to know students. They know what situation you're going through. They know what you're doing. They know where you came from because they focus so much on getting to know you before getting to know the lesson."

Discipline and accountability were needs that the school helped James meet through sports and the influence of some of his teachers.

Like I said, playing sports, they didn't offer discipline, they demanded discipline. So whether I wanted that discipline from them or not, they were going to discipline me. So just playing sports and the coaches were the biggest influences as far as discipline went, just because they demanded [it]. That's what they expect of you, and that's what they're going to get from you.

Some of his teachers also tried to instill discipline and hold James accountable.

I had a few teachers, like I said; Mr. Clark, teachers like that who, when they saw me get in trouble or heard about me getting in trouble from another teacher or from the principals, then yeah, they would come sit me down the next day. Or, if I got suspended from school, when I came back, they would sit me down and go, 'You know you're doing

good in this class. You're doing good here. Don't do that again. Now you've learned from that mistake, so go and try it another way. Go and do something else.' So, I had a bunch of teachers and mentors that, if I was going the wrong direction, they were quick to pull me back and say, 'We're going to try something different for you, just so you can stay out of trouble.'”

Outside of relationships built with teachers and coaches, the school did not offer any type of mentoring program. James thought a mentoring program, where younger students are paired with older students, would have benefited him and other students in similar situations.

I feel like the best way would probably be older students, just because they're still students. They may understand what a younger student is going through a lot more easier than a teacher or a community helper would, just because they're still students, so they still had to go through the same thing a year ago or two years ago. So, they could connect and, like I said, make that positive relationship a lot faster.

**Needs.** A certain need that James felt was unmet was having someone there for daily support. He thought having a father at home would have made things easier. “Just like classwork, I could have had another person to talk to, another brain in the house that could have known something. A lot of some of the smaller situations could have been solved a lot quicker and a lot more positively if I felt like I had a father.” When asked about what types of things he would have wanted to talk to his Dad about James responded:

Being a wild student, a wild child growing up, talk about all the troubles I got into, talk about all the fights I could have avoided. I was arrested a few times. I would have talked about how to avoid that. I would have talked about certain conflicts I had at school. I know definitely me and my father, if I had one, I would have talked about sports a lot

with him, how to be better at this, how to do this better, and just making money. I didn't have a lot of money growing up. I would have talk to my dad: 'What opportunities did you have growing up as a child to make money? What did your father teach you?'

I would have asked him more: 'What did your father teach you growing up?' so he could bring it on to me too.

Another need that James felt was unmet because of an absent father was someone to help guide him in the right direction. "I never had that really big male figure to guide me and tell me what was wrong from right, so I did a lot of things to get in trouble, [like] staying out real late. I never had that male figure to set curfews and set certain times to do this and do that, so I would stay out real late."

James also believed that he needed more discipline and accountability at home. James thought that he was "very wild" and that part of the reason was because there was little discipline in his home. James believed that he would have done better if there were set rules and standards that he had to follow.

In high school, I feel like that's where you need the most discipline because you're working your way to becoming an independent person, and just growing up without a father in high school, I didn't have those strict rules. I didn't have those strict regulations, curfews and things of that nature, to help me become disciplined. So, without a father in high school, I was just very wild because I had no rules and regulations to follow being set by that father figure in my home.

James would have been more motivated to succeed if he had a father or a male role model to encourage him.

Just because, like I said, when you have no one to look up to, you have no standards for yourself. You have no goals for yourself. You don't have anything to achieve when you have no one to look up to, just because there's no one to impress when you pass, when you succeed. There's no one to impress, because that person you were looking up to, that mentor, that idol, was never there.

James felt there were situations where he would have listened more to his father than his mother.

If I had a father, he'd have an easier time to sit me down and talk about it than my mother had just because, like I said, a woman isn't the best at raising a man. When she was sitting me down to talk, it pretty much went in one ear and came out the other. More likely than if I had a father, I'd probably sit there and listen more because he would understand everything going on.

There were also certain needs or issues where James would have felt more comfortable going to his dad instead of his mom. "Certain questions that need to be asked. Certain situations that need to be handled a different way. It affected a lot because my mother played more of the role. She played the role as both mother and father, and certain things, not to be bias, but a woman can't teach a man."

There were also some gender roles and skills that James would have liked to learn from his father. "Just growing up around my cousins, their fathers taught them how to fix cars and change brakes and all that, but if I had a daddy, I would love for him to be the one to teach me how to change the engine and fix the brakes and rotate tires and go hunting and go fishing. If I had a father, all of those skills would be a great thing to learn from him."

## **James' Structural Description**

**Emotions and behaviors.** James described himself as being “very wild” in high school. He felt the main reason for his behavior was not having a father at home. He got into a lot of trouble and felt his behavior could have been better if a father were there to “guide me and tell me what was wrong from right.” There were not many rules in his house, and he felt this would have been different if a father were present. He needed the structure and discipline a father would have provided.

Additionally, he was angry in high school, which he attributed to not having a father at home.

...because having that father, he would have been able to talk with me. I wouldn't have been as angry because I would have known my father, so I wouldn't have as much built-up aggression over some small situation just because I would have known my father. So, a lot of that anger wouldn't have been as built up as it was.

James talked about not having a father and “being mad at the world.”

James predominantly associated with his cousins and some close friends. He had a hard time trusting people so he would “push people away.” James dated a lot, seeking a bond and love that was unavailable from a father.

There were some added stresses from not having a father at home. James perceived he had to do everything for himself. There were times when he was homeless and times when he had nothing to eat. He did not have money for school clothes or supplies. James tried to find work when he could so he could have money for himself. “Me growing up without a father, I started working when I was 15. I had to make money for myself so that I can get food, I can

get clothes, because without a father, I didn't have as much income in the home to live as comfortably and as happy as everybody else did.”

His mom tried to discipline him by taking things away and not allowing him to do things. Concerning his mom's discipline, James stated, “The effectiveness of it wasn't what she expected.” He talked about being “sneaky” and “slick” and doing what he wanted to, even when his mom said “no”. He always found a way around his mom's punishment. He conveyed that if a father were present, he would have been more obedient.

**Identity.** James saw himself as being different from his classmates because he did not know his dad. Although many of his classmates did not have fathers at home, they still knew who their dads were and talked to them on occasions. He believed that other students could depend on their dads to do things for them, while there were “things I had to do just to make up for not having a father.” Not having a father “made my situation at home a lot more different than most of my friends' situations.”

### **James' Synthesis Description**

Although James' mom was an important influence, they were not that close. James never knew his father, and this is something he thought about a lot. James' cousins and close friends were big influences, and he preferred to spend time with them. James' most important adult influences were his coaches and some of his teachers.

James perceived that he was missing support, someone available to give him guidance, and the motivation a father would have provided. There was also financial stress placed on James and his family because of his father's absence.

James' behavior was not good in high school. He felt his behavior would have been better if a father were at home. James' mom tried to enforce rules, but she often did not follow

through. James believed that he had to do everything for himself because there was no father there to help provide. James felt different from his classmates for never having known his father.

### **Joseph's Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Joseph lived with his mom and younger siblings. He and his mom did not get along well. He describes his mom as a “worker” and said, “She wasn’t really there because she was really working.” His father was in prison, and Joseph did not talk to him. He was let down by the decisions his father made while knowing he had a family to support.

**Other influences.** Peers were a big influence on Joseph. He looked up to one of his older teammates as a role model.

My biggest influence was one of my teammates that went to college. He was one of the people I always hung out with and always looked out for me. He always talked to me. I looked at him like an older brother because my older brother wasn’t really there either because my older brother was in jail, but I kind of looked to him as my older brother. He was one of my big influences; that made me want to do better.

Another influence was Mr. Mac, who Joseph met at a group home. Mr. Mac became a positive influence on Joseph.

He went out of his way for everything for me, no matter what it is. If he knew I wanted to do it, and he knew that was what my passion was, he would do it for me. He wouldn’t think about it. He wouldn’t hesitate. He always would do it, and he always talked to me. It didn’t matter if it was once a week or twice a week, he always checked in with me, ‘Hey, how you doing?’ He always called me ‘Son,’ and when I seen him calling me ‘Son,’ I felt like I wanted to call him ‘Pops’ because he was there for me, and I didn’t have a dad, so he was the closest thing I had.

**School interventions.** At school, Joseph was heavily influenced by an administrator, some of his teachers, and some of his coaches. His teachers offered support by getting to know Joseph.

I had a lot of good connections with some teachers. I had a lot of teachers that were really on my side and really helped me through high school, really. Because I felt like the teachers was there, but some teachers go out of their job just to talk to some kid. Teachers, they're not getting paid to talk to you. They're getting paid to teach you, but some teachers go outside of that, and they try to get to know you. So, with the teachers that got to know me, I felt better. I felt more comfortable, and it made me want to do better in that class because I know they're here for me.

Dr. Bradley was an administrator who offered support to Joseph throughout high school. "He was like, 'I see the potential,' and when he told me he seen the potential and we talked, he actually talked to me, not just as a counselor or not just as a principal or assistant principal. He talked to me as like we wasn't even in school. He talked to me as he wanted to know me. He actually felt concerned about my well-being. That's what made us get close."

Joseph believed that the discipline he received at home was not effective. He "reacted" to his mom's discipline, and it created more "commotion inside the house." He received discipline at school from some of his teachers and coaches. "My discipline really came from Miss Harris and my coaches. It was the only discipline I really had in school, and I didn't really have discipline at home." One teacher held Joseph accountable for his actions.

. . . my math teacher, Ms. Adams. She was really in my life. She always made sure she checked on me no matter if I was in a different class. She made sure I'm in class, made sure I'm not skipping, whether she's knocking on the door to look in, or she's just

walking past the window to give a little quick go and search, but that's one of the teachers that stood out to me.

Joseph felt the school could have offered better support for him and students in similar situations if more teachers would have gotten to know their students better. "I just feel like the main problem is if they actually understood where the student is coming from. Because if you understand where somebody's coming from, you'll know what kind of person they are, and you'll be able to talk to them. Because you know when they're mad, or you know what's going on, and you'll be able to understand the situation." Joseph also said that he would have benefitted from a mentoring program because it would have given him much-needed support. "I would have felt like I had somebody in my corner. I would have felt like I could have added somebody else to my corner that I know is on my side."

**Needs.** Joseph felt like he needed support and for someone to be "on his side." He felt he did not have the support he needed at home.

My high school experience was kind of tough because of the fact of not really having the support at home. Without having the support at home, I felt like I had to go out and find the support somewhere else. I didn't want to feel like I was alone every time, and I didn't want to feel like I had to solve every situation by myself. I didn't have the support of somebody who wanted to be in everything I wanted to do, and they want to support everything I wanted to do.

Joseph believes that if his dad were there he would have had someone to talk to and go to for guidance and advice.

The talks. I think the talks would have been the most important to me because if I would have had the talks, there are a lot of things that I would have never did. Because lot of

stuff I did was based on my decision, based on me going in my mind and saying I want to do this, or nah, I'm probably going to get caught, or I don't think that's the perfect thing to do right now. But if I would have had somebody to talk to, man wise, not a woman. Because there are a lot things that I wouldn't tell my mom that I did, because I feel like it would hurt her. But if I had a dad I would tell him because I know a man can take it a lot more than a woman can. It would have been the talks that would have been most important to me.

Joseph also wanted to be taught gender roles and specific skills by his father.

I would have wanted him to teach me about being a man, responsibility, not just football and not just school. Just some of the other fundamentals, like if something breaks around the house, I want to learn. I want to know how to fix it. If we [were] to be driving, and the car tire [were] flat, I want to know how to be able to change the tire. Like, [there are] just a lot of things that he could have been there for me to learn. So, if I would have had a father who only showed me how to fix stuff and show me how to do this the right way or show me how to go fishing, it's just, I would know different things.

There were also responsibilities that he felt he should have learned from his father.

Because he wasn't able to teach me the things that I needed to know as a man. There is a lot of responsibility that men have to take, not just taking care of babies, or not just having to change tires, or not just having to cook something, or learning how to barbeque. It's just, I didn't have him in my life, so I wasn't able to learn all those things, and that's why at the age I am now, I don't know those things now.

## **Joseph's Structural Description**

**Emotions.** Joseph was not happy at home during high school, mainly due to the added stress of having to take care of his younger siblings. He often got them ready for school, got them on the bus, and took care of them after school because his mom was working. Joseph felt it was unfair that he had to spend much of his time taking care of his brothers and sisters. He expressed anger at "sitting at home just watching kids all day," and thought it affected his performance and behavior in school. He often got on the bus angry with the mindset that he would not do anything at school that day. This led to poor academic performance and behavior issues in school.

Joseph felt obligated to work and earn money for his family. He felt since he was the oldest, he had to help his mother provide for the family. He resented the fact that he had to do so much to help provide and take care of his siblings, and that the obligations prevented him from doing things that he wanted to do. "I just felt like, I'm a teenager, I want to live my life too. I want to go out there and have some fun with my friends."

Joseph believed his home life would have been more stable if a father had been present. A stable home could have reduced his stress levels and improved his performance and behavior at school. According to Jacob, a big part of his poor academic performance and bad behavior in school was because he felt so stressed from dealing with everything at home.

Joseph put up barriers between himself and others, which he attributed to growing up without a father. He sensed all men were the same as his dad. He felt let down and angered by his dad's absence from his life. He held his emotions in and put up barriers because he "never had nobody in my life to really tell it to," and believed that "nobody wanted to hear it." Holding in his emotions caused him to "blow up" during certain situations. He felt angry that his dad

made the decisions he made that resulted in him being in jail. “So, knowing that my dad had a child and still made the decisions he made to get where he is at, that’s what makes me mad.”

**Behaviors.** Joseph often got in trouble at school. He allowed the absence of a father to be an excuse to act out and misbehave. Joseph often felt angry; his anger built up and he “released the anger with wanting to fight.” These fights were typically about something small that could have been easily avoided.

Joseph did things to draw attention to himself during high school; he sensed that he “didn’t really have attention his whole life.” He “showed off in front of crowds;” he wanted to feel popular and for everyone to know him whether it was for something good or bad. As Joseph got older, he realized that some of his actions were only hurting himself and he started “taking responsibility for myself and my actions.”

Discipline at home was not effective and sometimes resulted in bigger issues between Joseph and his mom. Joseph blamed some things on his father’s absence; “the stuff in my house that happened would never happen if there was a father in the house.” He perceived that whenever he was stressed or angry, he would have gone to his father and been able to “get everything off my chest” and that it “would’ve been a very big help.”

**Identity.** Joseph believed that he was different from his classmates because of the lack of support he received at home. Joseph felt he did not have support from his mother or his father, who was in jail. Joseph’s mother’s work schedule often left him at home to take care of his younger siblings. Having to take care of his younger siblings affected Joseph’s attitude in school. He often went to school angry. Joseph felt an involved father could have kept him on the “right track” and give him more opportunities after graduation.

## **Joseph's Synthesis Description**

Joseph did not get along well with his mom. His dad was incarcerated, and he never saw him or talked to him. Joseph's mom worked often, leaving Joseph to take care of his younger siblings. Taking care of his siblings made Joseph angry because he could not do things that he wanted to do, things that teenagers normally do.

Joseph's friends were primarily negative influences. He often showed off by acting out in front of them. When he got attention from his friends, usually for doing things that he should not have been doing, the attention encouraged him to continue the behavior. Joseph's behavior often got him in trouble at school. He got into trouble for fighting at school on several occasions.

Although there were some positive influences in Joseph's life during high school, most were not consistent influences. Older teammates, who were positive role models, encouraged Joseph to work hard and stay out of trouble. Joseph's biggest adult influences were Mr. Mac, his teachers, and his coaches. Joseph needed someone there to reinforce rules and positive behavior on a consistent basis.

Joseph felt like he missed out on support, discipline, and learning certain skills and responsibilities because his father was not present. Joseph was often angry at home and fought with his mother, which translated to Joseph being angry and fighting and misbehaving in school.

Joseph had to play a parental role in many ways for his younger brothers and sisters. He had to support them and provide for them when his mother was unable. This prevented Joseph from doing some of the things he wanted to do during high school and limited his participation in extracurricular activities.

Joseph often put up barriers between himself and others. He did not easily trust others because he was let down by his father in so many ways. Joseph went through high school seeking attention. He tried to draw attention to himself whether it was for doing something good or bad, which often led to getting in trouble at school. Joseph believed that he was at a disadvantage because he only had his mom at home.

### **Robert's Textural Description**

**Attachment.** Robert had a strong relationship with his mom.

We loved each other a lot because we always looked out for each other. I was a very caring soul; I got that from my father's side. I would try to look out for everybody, and she loved that about me. The reason why our relationship is so strong is because she had me in college. She was still in school with me. My father told me stories of where she had me in one hand, and studying in the other, so I think that's why she said I was her motivation in getting through school and to do what she wanted to do.

Robert also had a close relationship with his father, even though he lived in another state. He says that his mother and father were the most important influences in his life. Robert talked about missing his father and how he would have liked to have him around the house when he was growing up.

I missed him a lot because he was, he's still my father. I'm still in contact with him, so I missed him a lot. Just to have that other male figure around because I'm the only male in my household. So, being around a bunch of women all the time is . . . you kind of don't want to be there all the time. It's not the fact that I don't like being with them, it's [that] they're females; they like to do girl things.

Robert also spoke about how he wished his dad were there to support him during certain activities. “My father has never seen me play, play a game, play a sport, period. He was always the person to fund it, but I was just . . . instead of his money there, I would have loved for him to actually be there. Because to this day, he still doesn’t know if I’m even able to play or not.” Even though his father lived far away, Robert thought he did a good job of raising him.

With anything else, he has done his job. He’s done his job even though he’s far away. That’s the only thing. I really wish I was right there with him, because he used to take me out a lot when he came. He used to teach me things when he’s doing bills, things like that. He used to teach me the works. It’s crazy right now, I really wish I was taught that before because I look at it now, there’s a lot of things I really don’t understand, that I think they can teach in school as well. But my father could help me out with that.

**Other influences.** Outside of his parents, Robert had several other family members who were positive role models. He often went to his older brother for advice.

**Robert** (on who he went to for advice): “My brother. He’s older, he’s 23 years old, full-time job, in college as well, and he has dreams and aspirations.”

Robert was also heavily influenced by his grandparents.

My step grandfather on my mother’s side, he showed me how to maintain the yard. He was always working in the yard since he was young. My father, he showed me how to treat females, how to take care of business when he could. My older grandfather told me how to stick to a marriage. My other grandfather on my father's side, his father told me how to stick to a marriage because he has been married since he was 16. I couldn’t tell you how long, but he is still with his wife. They have been through it, and he knows, he

showed me, not verbally, but by his example, how to apologize and keep moving for the better and keep strong for the marriage.

As for peers, Robert was closest to his girlfriend and best friend, Jason. Robert's girlfriend and Jason both had similar home situations to Robert's.

**Robert** (on who understood him the best): "Jason and my girlfriend because we all three, we were almost in the same situation—had our fathers, but didn't really have our fathers, and we knew how it was like coming up, and we went to school with each other since middle school, so we all were close."

Robert also talked about how his teammates were positive influences. "I had a close group of friends. With football and wrestling, it made it more broad. They're more like family than friends, whether or not we got along. Somehow I would have that person's back just because we sweated, cried and bled together, things like that. I just really had a closer group of people that I could really trust and could be loyal to." He also spoke of how some of his close friends did not have fathers, which made them closer. "Yes, I think that's what made us closer. We bonded with each other since we couldn't bond with our fathers like we wanted to."

**School interventions.** At school, administrators, teachers, and coaches had a big impact on Robert's life.

Dr. Burns, he looked out [for me] a lot. He wasn't my administrator for the group of students I was with, but he always checked up on me, and he always made sure I was okay... Ms. Ayers, now she looked out for everybody. To me, she was really on top of your game. She did what she had to do to make you feel good. She didn't like to see any student fail. Her parenting was just, is what we really needed.

Robert also received support from his coaches.

[My] coaches played a big part in mentorship. We would talk about life lessons. When coaches express that, it made them relate to us because it showed that they have problems as well. There [were] things at home that they had to take care of or things at school that they had to take care of, but they still did it. They did what they had to do to do what they wanted to do. They wanted to coach, so they had to take care of business at home and at school just like we did.

Dr. Burns and his coaches also helped by providing discipline.

**Robert** (on what his coaches and Dr. Burns provided): “They were just there. Somebody to talk to, somebody to instill that discipline within me when I did get out of hand, and that’s really it.”

Sports also helped instill discipline for Robert.

Because you practice discipline, every sport you need discipline to be successful, and mental toughness comes, and I think for every man needs to be mentally tough. . . . I loved the fact of bonding with older males since I didn’t really have a father at home, he was distant. I mean, he was still in my life. He was distant, but with the coaches, I had male coaches, they set that father example for what my father couldn’t show me physically. He wasn’t an actual role model I could see every day and just learn from him, subconsciously learning from him, that’s what I liked about it.

Robert thought the school could have done a better job helping him and students in similar situations by providing more mentors. He felt mentors could have helped students feel more comfortable at school by providing support.

It would help the students, because the students, they are students. They may feel like they're alone at times, and so it will help them build a better relationship with either older

males or older students or older teachers, and it just made for a more homey environment because that's what you need. You need a homey environment. Things get done at home, where you feel comfortable at. You're not going to want to be where you not comfortable at.

Robert also said that a big brother program or similar program matching older students with younger students would have been beneficial.

**Needs.** Robert wanted his father to be there more often. He felt some things would have been different if his father lived at home.

I would have had more support, and I wouldn't have lost focus that much. I wouldn't get it just from one parent; I would get it from the other as well. He was always talking about he was proud of me. He wanted me to be successful, but he wasn't the type to express his emotions and feelings all the time. So it's kind of hard trying to guess how he's really feeling. I was never the type to talk about it, either. With two people like that, you really don't know how each other feels.

If his father were at home, he believed he would have been more likely to open up to him about issues.

Because he is a male as well. I got that stereotype in my head. I think that's the reason why I didn't talk to my mother as much because I had this stereotype in my head. Maybe she wouldn't understand from my perspective, and my dad would since he has been a male and he knows what to do. He is fixing the problem based on trial and error, things like that.

## **Robert's Structural Description**

**Emotions and Behaviors.** Robert would have been happier if his dad were at home. He did not like leaving either one of his parents when he visited the other. He wished his father lived closer so that he could have supported Robert by attending more of his sporting events.

There were some added stresses for Robert due to not having a father at home. He had to do more chores and help his mother pay the bills. He often worried about his family's finances. Robert also had to play a parental role with his younger sister in some situations. Having a father at home "would've taken a load off because he would have been there to help out with more." By not having a father at home, Robert had to "step up" around the house. He got jobs during the summer and after school when he could so his mother did not have to worry as much about providing for him. Robert felt he was a "detriment" to the family's finances.

Robert admits that he would have been more comfortable talking to his father about certain things than he was with his mother. He sensed that his dad would have better understood some of the situations Robert was facing during high school. Instead of going to his mom, Robert usually just kept things to himself.

**Identity.** Robert refused to let his father's absence define who he was. He was determined to make the most out of his situation. "Every time I think about it, I just move on. It is what it is, is what I feel. It's like that for a reason. I'm going to use it to build my character or use it to bring me down. I'm not going to use it to hold me back. I don't like being in the same place I was in yesterday."

## **Robert's Synthesis Description**

Robert had a strong relationship with both his mother and father. Even though his dad lived several hours away, he was still influential in his life. Robert talked to his dad often and visited him whenever he could. Robert's dad and mom made the biggest impact on his life.

Robert had other family members who were positive influences. His older brother was a role model and someone Robert went to for advice. His grandparents taught him how to do different things and spent time with Robert. Robert had a close relationship with his girlfriend and his best friend, Jason, in high school. One thing that made them close was the similarity of their lives at home.

At school, teachers and an assistant principal were major influences. They gave Robert support throughout high school. Some of Robert's coaches were also important influences and were mentors to Robert. It was important for Robert to surround himself with older adult males who were positive role models.

Despite the good relationship with his father and positive role models surrounding him, Robert did miss the support that a father living in the house could have provided. Robert would have wanted his father to have been more involved on a daily basis and wished he was there to teach him things about becoming a man. If Robert's dad had lived at home, Robert would have been able to get a male's perspective on situations.

There was also some added financial stress due to his dad not living at home. Robert felt like he was a bill for his mother, and he often worried about their financial situation. This led Robert to work to earn money whenever he had the opportunity. Robert also had to take on more chores and responsibilities around the house.

Robert said he would have been happier if his dad were home; however, he refused to let his situation affect him in a negative way. Robert had a good support system around him, including his father, and was determined to find a way to use his father's absence to make him stronger.

### **Composite Synthesis**

The participants' attachment to their mothers was one of the biggest factors in determining the effect that fatherlessness had on each participant. Whether attachments with the mother were strong or not, mothers were the biggest influences in each of the participants' lives. Relationships between participants and their mothers were sometimes negatively affected by the mother's long work hours. In most cases, mothers were the sole provider for their families. Perceived effects of the mothers' long work hours were less time spent together, more time unsupervised, and taking on additional responsibilities.

The strength of attachment to their fathers also contributed to the effect the absence had on the participants' lives during high school. If the level of attachment was strong, absence had less of a negative impact on the participants. Only one of the participants described the relationship they had with their father as "good." Three of participants had never met their fathers, and four of the participants did not have a strong relationship with their fathers.

Outside of the mother and father, there were other family members who played important roles in the participants' lives. These family members were siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. When available, mentors and role models in the community helped provide a positive influence for the participants. Many of these "other influences" helped meet needs that participants' felt should have been provided by their fathers.

Peers were also major influences for the participants. In some cases, peer influence was positive and helped participants fulfill needs unmet by their fathers, such as support, advice, and male bonding. In other cases, peer influence was negative and led to disruptive behavior. In some cases, the opinions of friends were valued more highly than opinions of the participants' mothers.

Each participant was influenced by the staff at their school. These influences were teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel. The more interest that was shown in getting to know the participants on a personnel level, the greater the influence the teacher, coach, counselor, or administrator had. All of the participants talked about how they benefited more from teachers who "got to know them." The school influenced participants by offering support outside of academics, providing guidance, helping hold the participants accountable, helping instill discipline, and serving as role models or mentors.

Most of the participants believed they would have benefited from a mentoring program if their school offered one. Participants had similar ideas on the organization of such a program. Participants perceived a mentoring program would help meet some of their needs. Perceived interventions offered by the participants' schools were limited to the relationships they established with their teachers, counselors and administrators, and the participants' involvement in extracurricular activities.

The strength of the relationships participants had with their families, mentors and role models in the community, peers, and adults at their schools helped determine what needs the participants felt were met during high school. Many of these needs existed because of an absent father. Each of the participants expressed a need for support, guidance and advice, someone to help hold them accountable and discipline them, someone to motivate them, someone to teach

them specific skills and roles, and someone with whom to share a father-son bond. When more of these needs were met, the absence of the father had less of a negative impact.

The perceived needs that each participant felt should have been met and whether the need was met determined the participants' emotional well-being. Having more needs met resulted in positive emotions and feelings for the participants, and having fewer needs met resulted in negative emotions and feelings. Closing others off, feeling resentment and anger, feeling that there was additional stress due to the absence of their father, and feeling like they had to prove themselves were some of the negative emotions that participants associated with an absent father.

The emotional well-being of each participant affected his behavior and actions. Among these behaviors was seeking attention, aggressive behavior, being disrespectful to authority, and being rebellious. Many of the participants conveyed the punishment they received at home did not deter negative behaviors and that it would have been more effective coming from a father. The participants also felt like they had to learn positive behaviors and skills on their own through trial and error as opposed to having a father teach them. A perceived positive impact was that participants felt the absence of their fathers forced them to grow up faster than their peers and that they were more mature because of having to handle certain situations earlier in life.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This research explored the perspective of male adolescents who experienced high school without a father at home. The purpose was to gain an understanding of their lived experiences of fatherlessness during high school. Through this research, schools, parents, and anyone working with male adolescents may gain a better understanding of the issues these students face. This final chapter will include a summary of the findings, discussion, and implications for the research, limitations, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of the study.

### **Summary of the Findings**

For the participants, the absence of a father had a unique impact on their life during high school. The measure of impact was heavily determined by the participants' relationships with others. The most important relationship was the level of attachment the participants had with their mother. The stronger the attachment, the more perceived needs were met by the mother, which resulted in the absence of the father having fewer negative effects.

The relationship with their father, or father attachment, was also important in determining the effects of their absence. Only one participant, Robert, considered his relationship with his father "strong." Robert's father lived in another state, but they visited each other often and communicated on a regular basis. Three participants had never met their fathers. Four of the participants' fathers lived in different towns, but their relationship was hindered by distance and lack of communication. These four participants did not perceive their relationship with their fathers as father-son relationships. In the opinions of these four participants, their fathers did not make an effort to be involved in their daily lives.

Grandparents played an influential role in many of the participants' lives. Grandparents helped meet some of the needs of the participants. Grandfathers were responsible for teaching

skills and gender roles participants felt should have been learned from their fathers. Some of the participants' grandfathers helped with discipline, and some provided a bond that helped take the place of the missing father-son bond. Some of the grandparents lived in close proximity to the participants, which provided additional support and allowed for strong relationships to be established.

Like all teenagers, friends were an important influence on the participants. In some cases, the influence was positive, and in others, it was negative. Peer influence was sometimes in conflict with the mother's influence. Peers were positive influences by providing the participants support, giving good advice, and creating strong bonds with the participants. In some cases, the only male influences in the participants' lives were their friends. Peers were negative influences when they encouraged harmful behaviors such as alcohol, drugs, being disrespectful to authority, and fighting.

Some of the participants had role models and mentors outside of their immediate families. This was sometimes experienced through programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club or a group home. For one participant, it was godparents and a godbrother. Some of these role models played a major role in the lives of the participants and helped fulfill needs that were not met by their fathers.

The amount of influence the schools had could be measured in the strength of the relationships that the participants had with their teachers, counselors, and administrators. The more the school personnel showed they cared about the students as individuals, the stronger the relationship and greater the influence. Participants expressed positive outcomes when their teachers, counselors, and administrators got to know them on a personal level. Most of the participants felt it was important for the school to know their situation at home. Extracurricular

activities were also important for the participants. Sports and school programs, such as ROTC, helped provide discipline and accountability. Even when teachers, counselors, or administrators got to know the participants, their influence was sometimes limited because they were not involved to the extent that a parent would be.

There were needs that the participants felt a father should have helped provide. Each of the participants felt it would have been helpful to have another adult available for support. Many of the participants believed that they did not have anyone on their side. Participants expressed a need to have someone there for them, whom they could talk to and go to about issues. They wanted fathers who attended their events and who were there for them during down times. Each participant perceived that if their father were at home, they would have gone to him for guidance and advice. They believed his guidance and advice, coming from a man's perspective, could have been more relevant than their mother's. Participants believed that they needed the discipline and accountability that a father could have provided. Most of the participants did not feel their mother's discipline was as effective as a father's would have been. Motivation was also a need that participants felt their fathers should have provided. There were gender roles and skills that the participants would have liked to learn from their fathers. Many of the participants perceived themselves as being different from their peers because they did not know how to do things that their friends had learned from their fathers. Lastly, each of the participants expressed the need for a father-son bond. They would have wanted to spend quality time with their fathers doing certain activities and learning new things.

The perceived needs that were unmet due to an absent father affected the participants emotionally. Some of the participants put up barriers and closed off others. They held their emotions in and did not share their feelings because they felt they had no one to whom they

could go. Many believed that if their fathers were home, they would have talked to them about issues and been able to open up more emotionally. They perceived that their fathers would have been more likely to understand what they were going through than their mothers. Some of the participants were angry and resented the fact that their fathers were not a significant part of their lives. They felt it was unfair that others had fathers and they did not. They also felt it was unfair that their fathers made the choice not to be involved in their lives. Due to their fathers not being home, there were added stresses to the lives of the participants. Participants felt like they had to do extra things around the house such as yard work, repairing things, and taking care of younger siblings. They felt they had to help their mothers earn money and provide for their families. Most of the participants' mothers worked long hours, and some even worked two jobs to make up for the loss of income of an absent father. Some of the participants had to move often because their mothers changed jobs. Moving to a new school was difficult because the participants had to start over by meeting new teachers and friends and learning new ways of doing things.

Fatherlessness affected the participants' thoughts and emotions, which led to certain actions and behaviors. Some of the participants said they behaved and acted in ways that drew attention to themselves. With only one parent, they did not feel like they were getting the attention they needed at home. Some of the participants were rebellious and did not always respect authority. The feeling of resentment and anger associated with fatherlessness sometimes led to fights and other aggressive behaviors by the participants. Often, these behaviors got the participants in trouble at school and even sometimes with law enforcement.

Most of the participants conveyed that the discipline they received at home was ineffective. Their mothers often threatened to take things away, but did not follow through. The

participants perceived that if their fathers lived at home, discipline would have been tougher and more effective. Most agreed they needed more discipline during high school. Participants wanted their fathers to be available to teach them certain skills and gender roles. The participants felt there were some roles and skills their mothers could not teach them, but their fathers could have. Some of these skills were shaving, how to treat women, working on things, repairs around the house, sports, and other outdoor activities. Without their fathers there to teach these skills, the participants felt they had to learn things on their own through trial and error.

The participants' emotions contributed to their behaviors. These two factors determined how they perceived themselves and shaped their personal identities. Emotions and behaviors were determined by the perceived needs that the participants believed were met during high school. The more these perceived needs were met, the better adjusted the participants were emotionally, resulting in more positive behaviors and a healthy self-image.

### **Discussion**

This section will relate the findings to the reviewed literature and theoretical framework. The reviewed literature and its relationship to the findings will be organized by the already-established themes of attachment, other influences, needs, emotions, behaviors, and identity. Many of the findings in this research were consistent with the literature reviewed.

### **Attachment**

Consistent with Amato and Gilbreth (1999), this study also found that when fathers do not live with their children, it is difficult to enact a parental role. Only one participant's father played a strong parental role in his life. Coley's (1998) study revealed that interactions with fathers are important predictors of healthy functioning in both cognitive and behavioral aspects in children with a single parent. Consistent with Coley's findings, the one participant who had

experienced the most interaction with his father had fewer disciplinary problems and grade issues than participants with limited or no interaction. All participants believed that increased interactions with their fathers would have resulted in positive outcomes academically and behaviorally.

### **Other Influences**

Only two of the participants said that they had a male influence who helped take the place of their fathers. This finding is consistent with Gurrian's (1996) claim that it is difficult to find another man from the family or community to stand in a father's place. Nord and West's (2001) study suggested that boys need male teachers who can serve as mentors. The participants in this study did not prefer a certain gender in their teachers; instead, they expressed wanting teachers who got to know them as a person, not just a student.

### **Needs**

Pollock (1998) stated that when fathers are absent, children lack discipline and supervision. All of the participants in this study believed that discipline would have been more effective if their father was present. Thompson (2008) claimed that boys look for role models who can show them how to manage the struggles that all men experience, and the participants in this study all felt there was a need for a father to teach them certain aspects of being a man.

### **Emotions and Behaviors**

Pollock (1998) revealed that a father's involvement resulted in boys being less aggressive and more emotionally expressive. The current study found that boys with little to no involvement with their fathers were sometimes aggressive and seldom expressed themselves emotionally. Also consistent with the current study, Nock and Einolf's 2008 study claimed that

children from single-mother families were more likely to show resentment and anger towards their father.

Participants in the current study expressed financial stress due to an absent father; this was consistent with Nock and Einolf's (2008) notion that living with a single parent increases a child's chance of living in poverty. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) also stated that a father's financial contributions provided wholesome food, adequate shelter in safe neighborhoods, and commodities such as books and computers. The current study found that the father's absence lead to the participant feeling additional stresses, such as having to earn additional income for food, housing, school supplies, and taking care of younger siblings.

### **Idealized View of a Father**

Some of the statements made by the participants may represent their idealized view of a father, where assumptions were made based on a typical father-son relationship. This idealized view assumes that if a father was present, he would be a good father and that many of the participants' problems would have been non-existent. Examples of statements that could be considered idealistic responses are listed below.

- “The stuff in my house that happened would never happen if there was a father in the house.”
- “If I had a father, I'd probably sit there and listen more.”
- “If I had a father, he'd have an easier time to sit me down and talk about it than my mother had.”

### **Implications**

When students perceive that their needs are not being met, there are emotional and physical effects. Students missing a major part of the family structure, their fathers in this case,

often feel that they have unmet needs. Students may seek other ways to meet these needs through other family members, peer groups, role models and mentors in the community, or through their teachers, counselors, or administrators.

Implications for this research include, but are not limited to the following:

- Supporting individual students based on perceived needs;
- Communicating perceived needs to teachers, counselors and administrators who interact with the student;
- Implementing mentoring programs;
- Working together with programs in the community, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs;
- Encouraging teachers, counselors and administrators to build relationships with their students;
- Encouraging involvement in extracurricular activities; and
- Implementing a class that teaches responsible parenting practices.

A major question that schools have to answer is, “How involved should schools be in the students’ lives outside of school?” If students are missing support at home, how involved should the schools be in helping students receive support? Another question that must be asked is, “If students do not have the necessary support at home, can schools make enough of a difference to change the direction of some of these students’ lives?”

Schools are limited in the effect and role they have on their students’ lives. Schools have limited time and resources and can have hundreds of students with varying needs. The academic demand on teachers and administrators continues to increase. The school’s involvement with students is sometimes met with resentment from parents and family members. However, schools should do all they can to help ensure the success of their students. It is estimated that children

spend close to a 1,000 hours in school each year (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). With this amount of time, schools can and should have a positive impact on their students. If a group of students is at risk due to family circumstances, schools should be open to exploring options that would increase the likelihood of success.

The schools attended by the participants in this study never directly addressed the absence of their students' fathers. Teachers and administrators sometimes found out through the participant or the participant's mother. Participants believed that it would have been helpful if all their teachers knew their home situations.

Each participant perceived that they would have benefited from a mentoring program. However, none of the participants knew of a mentoring program at their school. Suggestions for mentors ranged from older students to community members to teachers. Perceived benefits of mentoring programs mentioned by the participants were someone to help with schoolwork, someone to talk to, someone who was there for support, and someone to help guide them and give advice when needed. Although many schools offer mentoring programs, an implication of this research is for schools to investigate the possibility of implementing mentoring programs.

Schools could also work closely with outside programs such as the Boys and Girls Club or a Big Brother Program. Working together with these programs could allow schools to recommend participants for the programs, and the programs could help schools by helping students meet academic and other needs. Ethan acknowledged the Boys and Girls Club as one of the biggest influences in his life. Other participants acknowledged how a program similar to the Boys and Girls Club would have been helpful to them.

Each participant expressed that the teachers who got to know them best as individuals had the most positive impact on them. Not only were they the most important influences, but

participants also performed better in those teachers' classes. Schools should emphasize the importance of teachers getting to know and genuinely caring about their students. When asked how the school could have helped them and other students in similar situations, "teachers who care" was a theme repeated by all the participants.

Extracurricular activities also helped meet the needs of the participants. Schools that encouraged participation for their students could help meet the needs of discipline and accountability. Involvement in extracurricular activities would also reduce the time that a student may be at home unsupervised.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Limitations of the study included not being able to control the many variables involved in raising a teenager, not being able to control the many variables that affect behavior in teenagers, sampling only high school graduates, and the time period in which the study was conducted. Other limitations inherent to qualitative studies are using volunteers as participants and researcher bias. There were also limitations due to using interviews as the sole source of data collection. Although the in-depth interview approach helped to minimize these limitations, they still exist. The descriptions that tell the story of each participant are limited to the data the participants shared and how I chose to present them. Another limitation of the study is the difficulty of gaining an understanding of four years of high school through three in-depth interviews. No matter how thorough the research was, it is impossible to reduce four years of experience into three interview segments.

There are a number of variables that determine behavior in teenagers. While an absent father might contribute to some of the behaviors, it is naïve to think that an absent father is responsible for all of them.

Recommendations for future research include expanding the study to include the perspectives of mothers and school personnel. Interviewing the mothers of the participants would bring valuable insight to the mothers' perspective of the phenomenon of fatherlessness. Mothers could share their experiences of raising a teenager without a father at home and could give insight on how schools could help. Interviewing school personnel such as teachers, counselors, and administrators could help further the research by providing information about approaches in working with fatherless students that were found to be successful. Conducting a study with focus groups would also be a way to expand the study and gain valuable insight from group discussion. Also, future research could include interviewing high school drop-outs. This would gain perspectives of students who did not achieve the success in high school associated with graduating.

### **Conclusion**

The absence of a father at home during high school has an impact on male adolescents. The degree of the impact is determined by the strength of attachment the teenager has with his mother and father and the relationships he establishes with other influences. The stronger these attachments and relationships, the more needs met, resulting in an absent father having less of a negative emotional and behavioral impact.

There are some specific needs that male adolescents expect their fathers to meet. When their father is absent or unavailable, it is left up to the mother and other influences to help meet these needs. When the mother or another influence meets these needs, they may not have the same impact as if a father had met them. Among the needs that the participants in this study expected from a father included being there for support, offering guidance and advice, providing

discipline and accountability, providing motivation, teaching gender roles and skills, and sharing father-son experiences.

When these needs were not fulfilled, it affected participants emotionally. Participants sometimes felt alone, and they put up barriers to close themselves off from others. Some participants experienced resentment and anger because their fathers were absent and not around to help meet needs. Participants also felt there were additional stresses such as financial issues and the stress of having to do more around the house due to their father's absence.

The participants' emotions affected their actions and behaviors. Participants who felt alone often acted out and misbehaved to seek attention from others. Participants who conveyed there was a lack of discipline and accountability in their lives were rebellious and disrespectful toward authority at times. Participants who felt angry and resented the fact that their fathers were absent often got in fights, lashed out, hit things, or allowed other aggressive behaviors to get them in trouble.

Most participants believed that their mother's discipline was ineffective. They thought that when they did get in trouble, punishment at home usually did not correct the misbehavior. Participants also perceived themselves as different from their peers because they had to learn certain gender skills on their own. The participants had to learn by trial and error instead of having a father teach them.

The effect of fatherlessness was different for each participant. The difference was based on the support system they had surrounding them. The absence of the father had more of an impact on participants who had the least support. Participants with more support experienced a lesser impact due to their father's absence. Even with strong support systems, the father's absence still had an effect on each participant. Schools can help meet the needs of students in

similar situations as the participants by encouraging personnel to get to know their students on a personal level and understanding their needs, having a method for communicating the needs of students to teachers, providing mentoring programs, working with programs outside of the school, and encouraging involvement in extracurricular activities.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



The Graduate School at Liberty University

June 22, 2012

Cory Maret Dickerson  
IRB Approval 1345.062212: A Phenomenological Study of Fatherlessness in Male  
Adolescents

Dear Cory,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



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## APPENDIX B

### Sample Introduction Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Cory Dickerson, and I am completing my Doctorate degree at Liberty University. In an attempt to complete my degree, I am doing my doctoral dissertation on a study involving male adolescents without father figures during high school. The name of my study is "A phenomenological study on fatherlessness in male adolescents."

To complete my research for my dissertation, I am seeking 5-10 individuals who experienced high school without a father or father figure present in the home and who would be willing to be interviewed. There will be three interviews that last approximately 90 minutes. Interviews will need to be audio recorded so that I can get accurate data for my research. All participant information will be CONFIDENTIAL. Interviews can take place at a convenient location for the participant.

I have been teaching and coaching for 12 years. I am currently teaching at (school included in original). I believe that this research can be beneficial to schools, teachers, and the increasing number of students without fathers at home. If you would like to learn more about my research, please fill out the attached contact information and survey of interest and return it by email or with the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. Also, feel free to contact me by phone if you have any immediate questions. Once I receive this information, I will contact you, and we will set up a contact visit for you to learn more about my research. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Cory Dickerson

## APPENDIX C

### Interest Survey and Contact information

- 1.) Would you be willing to learn more about this study? Yes / No
- 2.) When would be a good time for me to set up a contact visit so we can discuss the study?
  - a. Day\_\_\_\_\_ Time\_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.) Please provide the following contact information:
  - a. Name:
  - b. Best phone number to contact you at:
  - c. Email address:
  - d. Street Address:
  - e. City and State:
- 4.) What is the best way to contact you? Phone / Email / In person

## **APPENDIX D**

Informed Consent

### **CONSENT FORM**

A Phenomenological Study of Fatherlessness in Male Adolescents  
Cory Maret Dickerson  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of fatherlessness in male adolescents. You were selected as a possible participant because of meeting the criteria of not having a father figure present at home during high school and recommendations from former teachers, coaches, counselors or administrators. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Cory Dickerson/School of Education/ Liberty University

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to explore fatherlessness in male adolescents during the high school years. What I would like to find out is: 1.) How do adolescent males perceive the absence of a father to have impacted them during high school? 2.) Were any school related supports available for students without fathers, and if so, how did students perceive these supports to have impacted them? The main method used for collecting data will be three in-depth interviews.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: You will be asked to participate in three in-depth interviews. Each interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be recorded. Audio recording is the most efficient way to ensure that everything said during the interviews is available for analysis. It is also less distracting than taking notes. You will also be asked to participate in a member check at the end of the study, this is where you will be asked to review and critique the findings and interpretations.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

This study has minimal risk. The only foreseen risk is that you may be asked to discuss topics that are somewhat uncomfortable. If you find the interview questions to be uncomfortable, please let me know. During the interview, an effort will be made not to push you to talk about subjects that appear upsetting, hurtful, or embarrassing. If at any time you would like to end the interview, please let me know. A list of local professional counselors will be made available to you if you would like to discuss these topics further.

#### **The benefits to participation are:**

In-depth interviews could lead to new levels of self-awareness, life-style changes, and shifting priorities in living. Participation could also help you realize what could be done to become a better father or role model and to help bring awareness to the cycle of fatherlessness. This topic could be something you have never discussed and feel better for doing so. This research could benefit society by bringing awareness to schools, teachers, parents and participants. The

research could also be used to look into strategies schools use or could use to help students without fathers succeed in school.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research data will be stored securely at the researcher's home and only the researcher will have access to the records. Three years after the successful defense of this project, audio recordings will be deleted and transcripts will be shredded. Limits to confidentiality include who recommended you for the study, although results won't be shared with them, and the possibility of being seen during the interview process could also limit confidentiality.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with your former school or school system. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **How to withdraw from the Study**

If a participant decides to withdraw from the study, he should inform the Principal Investigator. All audio recordings and transcriptions will be deleted and will not be used in the study.

### **Compensation**

After completion of the study, each participant will receive a 50 dollar gift card for their participation.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is: Cory Dickerson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at (phone number and email included in original). The dissertation chairman for this study is Dr. Samuel J. Smith of Liberty University. His contact information is: (phone number and email included in original).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

By checking this box, I agree to have my voice recorded during the interview and member check components of the research.

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

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX E**

### Interview Guide

#### Questions for Interview 1

- 1) Describe your high school experience.
- 2) Do you think not having a father affected you? If so, how?
- 3) What were some of the more positive experiences you had in high school?
- 4) What were some of the more negative experiences you had in high school?
- 5) What was your greatest accomplishment in high school?
- 6) What were your grades like in high school?
- 7) What was your behavior like in high school?
- 8) Was there a time during some of these experiences when you can remember saying to yourself, "I wish Dad was here to share this with me or to help me through this?"

#### Questions for Interview 2

- 1) Discuss your family and the role they played in your high school experiences.
- 2) Did you have any adult male role models at school?
- 3) What kind of relationship did you have with adult males at school? Can you describe one?
- 4) If you got in trouble at school or at home and needed to be disciplined, who did this?
- 5) How were you similar to your peers?
- 6) How were you different from your peers?

#### Questions for Interview 3

- 1) What do you think it means to be a father?
- 2) If you became a father, how would you want to be perceived by your children?

- 3) Describe the relationship you had with your father.
- 4) How has your relationship with your father changed over time?
- 5) What did it mean when you said you were (different from/similar to) your peers?
- 6) What was it like (or what would it have been like) to have a male mentor challenge you to do better in school?

**APPENDIX F**

Agreement for Confidentiality for Transcriber

I agree to keep the information from the audio recordings and the transcriptions confidential.

Transcriptionist signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_