The Fatherless Identity: An Exploratory Case Study of Men's Fatherless Experiences

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Abstract

Fatherlessness seems to have instigated a growing political and social debate in recent years (Daniels, 1998). At the core of this debate lies the questions of whether fatherlessness today is more widespread than it has been historically, and whether the necessity and efficacy of fathers is important in the changing landscape of family paradigms (Daniels, 1998). In the last thirty years, research has defined fatherlessness in terms of parental marital status, father abandonment, and father death (Daniels, 1998; Gallagher, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). Some psychoanalysts extended the definition to include the emotional absence (Blundell, 2002), or emotional unavailability of the father (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Research suggests that children raised by both biological parents have greater socio-economic success (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999), seem to have an intellectual advantage (Research Center for Minority Data, 2009), and are less prone to encounter emotional problems than single-parented children (Cockett and Tripp, 1994). These factors reflect the *deficit model* of fatherlessness that dominated child development research prior to the 1970s (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997). More current research focused on the benefits of father involvement and purported that fathers who are more involved in the lives of their children (Day & Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), and make themselves more emotionally available tend to raise children with fewer emotional problems and better overall mental health (Lum & Phares, 2005). With society producing what some refer to as a fatherless generation (Hydrate Studios, 2006), and a number of researchers attesting that fatherlessness is a devastating modern, social trend (Blackenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996), current qualitative research was warranted in order to explore factors that lead fatherless individuals to assume a fatherless identity. In this exploratory case study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand fatherlessness as experienced by adult male case study participants. The study

focused on the experiences of men in order to manage the scope of research, and defer to the male experiences that prompted the research. Four men self-identified as fatherless with no imposed research definition by responding to the recruitment question *Are You Fatherless*? Results indicated that historical ways of defining *fatherless* were merely factors that intensify the experience; they do not define a person as fatherless. Findings suggested that the father role, family dynamics, emotionality, socio-economic and intellectual factors, disparate ideal and perceived father images, negative emotional connections with fathers, and a son's sense of masculinity all play a part in men assuming a fatherless identity.

Acknowledgements

As I near the completion of a Masters degree, I am reminded of an axiom: "Life is a process." The thesis research process has been such an extensive, arduous, and integral part of my life over the past two years that I could not, in good conscience, end it without acknowledging those who have supported me throughout the journey.

To my supervisor, Dr. Stephanie Martin: Thank you for your guidance, encouragement, and insight, and for helping me believe that I could achieve this goal. Also, to Dr. Brian Noonan and Dr. Alexandria Wilson for taking a keen interest in my research and supporting me in your roles as committee members.

Dad and Mom: You have made countless, selfless sacrifices for me and have provided me with an invaluable, living legacy that nurtures the depths of my spirit and prospers my very soul. I love you to my eternal destiny.

Thank you to my families – biological and spiritual, Canadian and Irish. Whether you have offered a prayer, a supportive word of encouragement, a listening ear, an inspirational place to write, or a fresh cup of coffee throughout this process, I am blessed by you.

Thank you to my surrogate brother, Dale Adrian. You epitomize spiritual brother and define loyalty in friendship.

Lastly, to Abba Father: You are my source and my life. With you all things are possible.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the fatherless among us. May you identify with truth rather than

circumstance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A common philosophy asserts, "You can't miss what you've never had." I have often wondered if this statement rings true for a man who has never known his father. I am intrigued as I bear witness to lives that are impacted by experiences of fatherlessness. I realize that in cases such as absenteeism by death, a father is not given much of a choice. However, when the circumstances are such that the father has abandoned his child, or has not been awarded the opportunity to be a part of his child's life, I question whether the effects of such a circumstance have been fully considered.

I would be naïve to think that in every case a father plays a positive role in the child's development. Obviously, a father's involvement may be brought to question in cases involving physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Even then, there is a "lesser of two evils" choice to be made. The father hungering (Herzog, 2001) that often occurs in children of absent fathers must be considered less detrimental to the child than the effects of a present father in such cases. Herzog (2001) contends that father hunger is a tragic consequence of father absenteeism. In my experience as a teacher, I can testify to this contention in some cases. In others, the means by which the hunger is satisfied may be a suitable alternative to father involvement.

As I reflect on my fourteen years as a teacher, I recall several children that lived apart from their fathers. For some reason, I was more attuned to the effects of father absenteeism on young males that I have taught. I can certainly attribute this to the possibility that I have, at times, wondered whether the connection I have with my father has fostered a greater sense of personal accomplishment in my life; consequently making me more sensitive to the effects on young males than females. I do not in any way suggest that females would not be affected equally, or as profoundly, as males by the absence of a father. However, I present this as a

possible reason for why I may observe the father absentee effects more in the male population with which I have worked.

Most recently, I began to question this notion of father absenteeism when a young man was referred to me for special education services. Throughout the course of my assessment, I discovered that his mother was raising him, and that his father had been absent from the home since his infancy. Prior to my commencement as one of his teachers, only female elementary school teachers had formally instructed this child. Supplemental to that fact, I had been the only male special education teacher in the history of the school possibly making me his first male teacher. I was perplexed to find no major learning difficulties. I did find problems that stemmed from academic listlessness and disruptive classroom behaviour. However, when I engaged him in small group or individualized instruction, the problematic behaviours often subsided and he often worked diligently to complete assigned tasks. I began to wonder if his academic and social improvement was partially a result of the male nurturance he was receiving from the student-teacher bond. More specifically, I wondered if he was seeking to be fathered through our relationship. It is that wonderment that compelled me to research experiences of fatherlessness.

My wonderings about this young boy and his possible emotional search for a surrogate father are summarized in this poem:

I am a buoy

I am a buoy
Alone in a sea of circumstances
The wind howls around me
I know its dissonant refrain
Creating waves of confusion
That conflict with the current that carries me
I am at its mercy
Guiding me towards objects that seem to represent what I yearn for
I find no likeness

The storms rise around me
And again I am separated from what might have been
I wait for the calm
I drift aimlessly
Carried again by the current

Everything seems peaceful now
I am barely moving
The sun beats down on me
Casting a reflection behind me on a mirror that is the sea
I do not recognize the image

The poem stresses the search for what Maslow (1943) determined to be basic human needs; love, acceptance, and security. He purported that these needs, by in large, are met by establishing and maintaining relationships within a family. Historically, family has been defined as a naturally reproductive unit of mother, father, and children living together in the same house (Ball, 2002). This definition is certainly not immutable. However, for some families, the traditional nuclear definition holds true. In that case, what if one of the components that produces and defines the family is missing? Corneau (1991) states:

> A boy whose father has left home will tend either to idealize the father or to seek an ideal father-substitute. Often he will be so blinded by his desire that he will be unable to assess accurately the father figures he has chosen, and this will lead to another betrayal by the substitute father (p. 19).

This quote summarizes my observations of the young boy referenced in the poem. Throughout the course of our relationship, it seemed as though he was drifting through life looking for the perfect substitute father. Time and again, I observed occasions where he seemed to seek identification with an adult male staff member at the school. They were the objects that seemed to represent what he yearned for in a father. The well-meaning teachers would encourage

and guide him to the best of their ability. Eventually, finding no likeness, the young boy would realize that he had chosen a figure that could not father him, attention-seeking behaviours would resurface, and he would rally the support of the next willing surrogate father.

Purpose of the Study

Fatherlessness research will attempt to push to the forefront a topic that may weigh heavily on the minds of those who, for whatever reason, identify as fatherless. Fatherless children often eventually father their own children. Their fatherless experiences may impact the degree to which they will be present in their children's lives. Some may use their experience to be better fathers for their children. Others may continue a pattern of fatherlessness because they have not learned by example what it is to be a father. It is for those fathers, their sons, and the society that breeds them, that this research is important.

The Research Question

The suggestion that a father can fulfill a specific role in the life of his child, and the realization that some children are deprived of fathers drives the need for this research. The primary question is: When adult males identify as fatherless, what factors of their experiences contribute to their *fatherless identities*? Secondary questions include: What is the impact of fatherlessness on a male individual? How has the fatherless experience affected his sense of social, emotional, and/or intellectual wellbeing, and the development of his masculine identity? Answers to these questions will be solicited in the study of significant lives sharing their experiences of fatherlessness. In so doing, we may more accurately recognize issues that contribute to a fatherless identity, and assist fatherless individuals who struggle with their identity in finding possible solutions toward a sense of being fathered.

Terminology

This research document employs terms that help define and explicate the exploratory case of a fatherless identity. This section will clarify how I am defining these terms as researcher, and differentiate their usage for the reader.

Fatherless is used to describe an individual who is devoid of a father, or father figure in his life whether emotionally, or physically. *Father absence* refers to the varying degrees of physical or emotional absence of a father in the lives of the participants. *Fatherless experience* refers to the individual or collective circumstances that comprise the experiences of the adult male participants, and describe situations that mark times when the men identified as *fatherless*. *Fatherlessness* is a phenomenon that refers to the state in which these men were found. *Sense of fatherlessness* indicates that there are circumstances or factors that leave the male participants feeling, or believing, they are *fatherless*, ultimately explicating the case. *Fatherless identity* refers to the persona that was assumed by men who self-reported as *fatherless*. Several factors that contribute to a *fatherless identity* are explored, and these factors offer perspective on what compels men to assume the identity.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review current literature by scholars on the topic of fatherlessness. My primary focus is on research literature that pertains to male experiences with fatherlessness from traditional nuclear family settings, since the impending case study centers entirely on the fatherless experience of men. Furthermore, the wonderings that prompted me to research the topic were rooted in a more traditional way of defining family. In no way do I suggest that female experiences with fatherlessness, or experiences in other family paradigms are of lesser importance. Rather it provides a way of delineating the case in a manageable fashion, and adheres to my ethical obligation as researcher to explore the topic of fatherlessness from a familiar perspective (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001). Having come from a traditional nuclear family, and recognizing that my perspective seems to be influenced by Western-Christian hetero-normative views, I do not presume to know enough about other familial paradigms. I digress and leave those prospective topics to more qualified individuals.

This chapter follows a specific format that denotes a pattern of 'negative to positive focus' for a number of reasons: (a) it imitates the pattern of empirical research on the topic over the past few decades and the shift from 'effects of absent fathers' (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) in child development psychology to the benefits of father involvement (Day & Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Maciadrelli, 2004), (b) it foreshadows the structure of the interviews with the participants in the impending case study and the oscillation between negative and positive aspects of their experiences, and (c) it informs the reader of my rationale as researcher in wishing to end the case study on a positive note, and my hopes that this study will be recognized as a positive contribution to current research.

In this chapter, I present suggestions from two extremes of the fatherlessness debate pertaining to its perceived implications for children, fathers, and family paradigms. I also provide submissions of how father roles and fatherlessness have been defined, and how these ways of defining have influenced a change in focus from the effects of father absence to the beneficence of father involvement in current research. The sources of literature provide a theoretical basis for this study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the current study on the case of the fatherless identity.

The Fatherlessness Debate

Fatherlessness seems to have instigated a growing debate over political and social issues pertaining to child welfare, poverty, sexual identity and initiation, family dynamics, and racial order (Daniels, 1998). At the core of this debate lies the issue surrounding the incidence of fatherlessness today compared to historical accounts, as well as the necessity and efficacy of fathers in the changing landscape of family paradigms (Daniels, 1998).

Some researchers attest that fatherlessness is a devastating modern, social trend (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996) that is fueled by the unprecedented abandonment of marriage - the one sure way (according to one researcher) of converting men to fathers and linking them to their children (Gallagher, 1998). Others argue that children have experienced absent fathers in various ways prior to this current trend; that fathers were pulled away from the family by demands of an industrial age subsequently yielding the nurturance of children to mothers (Griswold, 1998). Still other researchers contend that what society is experiencing is not a diminished quality of family life as a result of fatherlessness but rather the transformation of the family structure from a restrictive, male dominated form to a freer, more enriched one (Stacey, 1998). Others purport that the debate of fatherlessness has controversially crossed racial

and cultural lines; that 'unmarried' does not constitute 'unfathered', especially in African American culture (Dodson, 1998; Roberts, 1998).

The debate over fatherlessness is further convoluted by controversy over biological roots of parenting (Daniels, 1998). Certain scholars argue that children need the maternal-paternal balance provided by the natural, biological order of parenting. Others suggest that children do not need fathers at all, since the paternal function can be adequately fulfilled by mothers, partners, other family members, or friends (Daniels, 1998; Dodson, 1998; Stacey, 1998). Whatever the debate, more than half of all children will spend part of their lives without a father (Daniels, 1998).

Griswold (1998) postulated that a more deep-rooted cause of fatherlessness stems from the erosion of a male dominant society. He purports that modern society has experienced an increase of self-supporting women who may view the fatherless family as a viable alternative to the traditional family; that the patriarchal traditional family promotes male dominance of which no good can come (Griswold, 1998). Furthermore, the social and political change in landscape during the twentieth century has presented a challenge for fathers to stay connected to their offspring. He suggests that increased consumerism, authoritative shifts within the institutions of families, the rise of a therapeutic culture, and accessibility to media may play a part in disconnecting fathers from children (Griswold, 1998).

Given the challenges and convoluted nature of *fatherlessness*, the likelihood that the multifarious debate will produce a practical solution any time soon is nearly impossible (Griswold, 1998). Researchers on one end of the debate dispute that the causes impose consequences on society that are far reaching, and impact a child's development intellectually, socially, and emotionally (McLanahan, 1998; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Popenoe, 1996).

Researchers on the other side of the argument assert that the diversion to paternal rather than maternal focus is a political attempt to oppose family change (Stacey, 1998) and a distraction from the real issues of poverty and ill-being that exist around us (Dodson, 1998); that this shift in focus is not only more destructive to a child than the absence of neglectful fathers (Stacey, 1998) but that it also stigmatizes single mothers in the process (Dodson, 1998). It is increasingly apparent that any attempt at a solution must be rooted in equality between genders; to prevent regression to male dominance while upholding the vitality of a father's role and presence in the life of his child (Griswold, 1998).

Father Role

At the root of *fatherlessness* seems to be the difficulty of fully grasping the crucial role of fathers in the normal development of a child (Herzog, 2001). Over the past three decades, research has suggested that fathers not only benefit the co-parent in sharing and offsetting responsibilities (Parke & Brott, 1999; Popenoe, 1996), but that fathers can bring something very specific to the parenting role (Lamb, 1997; Popenoe, 1996). Roles that have historically been designated to fathers cast them as protectors, providers, and male role models (Popenoe, 1996).

Rationale would suggest that men are instinctually prone to protect because they are more inclined to take risks, and are often seen as more aggressive than their female counterparts thereby melding into the role of physical protector more naturally (Popenoe, 1996). The provider role that fathers have fulfilled in the past has certainly shared equal ground with mothers in recent decades (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996). However, this should not discredit the father's role of providing, since fathers often feel that 'breadwinning' is innately their responsibility and attach more of their self worth to the task (Brotherson & White, 2007; Day & Lamb, 2004; Popenoe, 1996). Another father quality that has been the focus of past research is

the task of role modeling. Sons identify, imitate, and learn from their fathers how to develop a masculine identity, how to gauge assertiveness and independence, and relate appropriately to the opposite sex (Blundell, 2002; Eldgredge, 2001; Herzog, 1980; Popenoe, 1996). While fathers in traditional nuclear settings today may still practice some of these roles, they seem to be less common in a transitioning 'new fatherhood' (Griswold, 1998).

The Changing Fatherhood

The changes occurring in the state of 'fatherhood' has caused some fathers to struggle with making sense of their role because of how they have been historically defined (Griswold, 1998). With the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s, the role of the father began to slowly evolve as studies presented the unequal division of parenting responsibilities in childcare as a social issue (Berk, 1980; Polatnick, 1973-1974). Fatherhood began to take on the more sensitive persona of nurturance that was traditionally the province of mothers. The evolution of the father role suggested that fathers could be more than breadwinners, protectors, and role models (Connor, Knight, & Cross, 1997; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London & Cabrera, 2002). In contrast, 'new' fathers could be companions, caregivers, partners, moral guides, and role models (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). While some fathers have embraced the assertions of feminism and have adopted a more androgynous style of parenting (Blankenhorn, 1995; Ferguson, 1992; Hunt & Hunt, 1987), others continue to make efforts to combine traditional roles with the more modern demands of fathering and co-parenting (Griswold, 1998; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) offer a cautionary response to the expanding research on father roles by imploring that:

There is no single father's role to which all fathers should aspire. Rather, a successful

father, as defined in terms of his children's development, is one whose role matches the

demands and prescriptions of his sociocultural and familial context (p. 11).

Research seems to suggest that 'what' a father does in his role may not be as imperative as the

role itself (Day & Acock, 2004; Lamb, 1997; Marsiglio, Day, Amato, & Lamb, 2000). When a

father identifies strongly with his role - whatever that may be - he is apt to be more involved in

the lives of his children (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buchler, 1993), thereby positively

influencing their wellbeing (Marsiglio et. al., 2000).

Definition of Fatherlessness

Defining the father role is important when attempting to understand the phenomenon that

exists when one identifies as *fatherless*. To present a linear definition of 'fatherlessness', it is

necessary to first define the word from which it is derived. The Random House Dictionary

(2010) defines *father* as "a male parent." The suffix *-less* is "an adjective suffix meaning

without," and *-ness* is "a…suffix attached to adjectives and participles forming abstract nouns

denoting quality and state (and often, by extension, something exemplifying a quality or state)"

(Random House, 2010). Therefore, *fatherlessness* simply defined is the state in which a person is

found to be without a father (Random House, 2010).

Were *fatherlessness* that easily defined, the phenomenon may not have stirred up such

controversy in past decades. Researchers seem to find a literal definition of fatherlessness

inadequate when viewed through a postmodern lens (Stacey, 1998). It is estimated that over 90%

of children under the age of eighteen have living male parents who are capable of performing the

father role (Popenoe, 1996), yet 72% of respondents in a poll by the National Center for

Fathering (1999) saw fatherlessness as the most significant social problem facing America. Many researchers who share the sentiment that fatherlessness is a social dilemma have defined 'fatherlessness' more figuratively and have used residential, marital, and circumstantial language interchangeably when referring to fatherless individuals (Blundell, 2002; Daniels, 1998; Gallagher, 1998; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Popenoe, 1996).

In the last thirty years, research has deemed children *fatherless* if they are products of divorced and separated parents, born out of wedlock, created intentionally by single, self-supporting women, have experienced father abandonment, or have lost a father to death (Daniels, 1998; Gallagher, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). Some psychoanalysts extended the definition to include the emotional absence (Blundell, 2002), or emotional unavailability of the father (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004) that is sometimes provoked by marital conflict (Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Raymond, 2004), or preoccupation with work and other distracting factors (Fein, 1974). Defining 'fatherlessness' in these terms implies that the state of *fatherlessness* has cultural, social, and economic roots (Griswold, 1998). Such assumptions have perpetuated the debate, and prompted a growing body of research on the topic of *fatherlessness* (Daniels, 1998; Griswold, 1998).

Trajectory of Fatherlessness

At the turn of the 21st century, McLanahan and Teitler (1999) reported that less than one half of children were growing up with both parents, compared to nearly 90% in the early 1960s. Three years earlier, Popenoe (1996) noted that the percentage of biologically absent fathers more than doubled during the same three-decade span; from 17 to 36 percent. Such statistics raised concerns about the causation and consequences of father absenteeism and prompted exploration into the growing social trend (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Popenoe, 1996).

The causes, though seemingly obvious, are noteworthy. Historically, father death was the most common cause of fatherlessness (Popenoe, 1998). A study conducted in the state of Virginia in the seventeenth-century estimated that 31% of children reached the age of eighteen with both parents surviving (as cited in Darret & Rutman, 1979). Today, more than 90% of children in America have two living parents on their eighteenth birthday. Death rates were surpassed by divorce rates as a leading cause of fatherless homes by the 1960s (Popenoe, 1998); most likely as a result of advances in medical research and delivery (Francis, 2010). This may be ammunition for researchers who debate that viable solutions to the problem of fatherlessness are to focus on the prevention of family breakup (McLanahan, 1998), and the rebuilding of marriage and fatherhood (Popenoe, 1998). However, these solutions may be seen by others as mere attempts to reinstate patriarchal masculinities in families and undermine public support for single mothers (Stacey, 1998) who are courageously raising children without fathers (Dodson, 1998).

Whatever the debate, unwed and teenage pregnancies continue to be focal points for fatherlessness (Daniels, 1998; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Currently, women bear children, remain unmarried, and forgo the involvement of male partners at unprecedented rates (Daniels, 1998). In 1960, children born to unwed parents accounted for 5% of the births in America. By 1995, out-of-wedlock births rose to 32% (Popenoe, 1998). Divorce and separation rates continue to rise and, in such cases, custodial care is primarily awarded to the mother presenting fathers with a greater challenge to remain directly involved in their children's lives (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Popenoe, 1998).

Theoretically, divorce does not mean there will be an absent father (Popenoe, 1996). However, the reality of family breakdown often means increased father absenteeism (Popenoe,

1996). While there have been attempts to equalize parental responsibility at a judicial level, mothers are often more liable to raise children after divorce (Seltzer, 1991). In the late 1980's, the first phase of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) found that fathers of divorce-imposed absenteeism had not seen their children in the span of a year (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). Nearly a decade earlier, the National Survey of Children (NSC) (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985) revealed that 52% of adolescent children of non-resident fathers had not seen them in over a year. Sixteen percent of those surveyed saw their fathers as often as one time per week (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985).

While non-resident paternity by way of divorce and separation may seem to bolster the argument for preventing family breakup and encouraging marriage (Popenoe, 1996; McLanahan, 1998), it loses fortitude when viewed through a more liberal lens (Stacey, 1998). Janet Johnston (1993) explained that the harmful effects of quarreling parents staying together are potentially more devastating to the child than the alternative of separation or divorce:

> Exposure to parental conflict, together with affective distress and psychological disorders within parents [usually the caretaking mother] is a greater hazard to children than are many other stressful events associated with divorce, including acute loss due to separation from a parent [usually the father] (p. 197).

Research by Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) indicated that children whose parents stay together exposing them to a high-conflict union are generally worse off than children whose parents have resolved a low-conflict divorce. Regardless of marital status, parents who exhibit low levels of conflict increase the likelihood of raising well-adjusted children (Cummings & Davies, 1994).

Further demystifying the assertion that intact families constitute a diminished sense of fatherlessness are the issues of emotionally disconnected (Daniels, 1998), addicted, violent or

abusive fathers (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Emotional distance stemming from stereotypical

father roles may leave children wondering about the level of emotional care their fathers provide

(Daniels, 1998). Gallagher (1998) writes, "The real problem, from the child's point of view, is

not just fatherlessness…but the presence somewhere close by of a father who does not seem to

care" (p. 164). Abusive situations in the home further reinforce the suggestion that parental

separation, or child-parent separation may be in the child's best interest (McLanahan & Teitler,

1999). Studies have shown that marital and child abuse occur concurrently at rates between thirty

and sixty percent (Appel & Holden, 1998; Edelson, 1999). These estimates are limited by

difficulty in standardizing the definitions of abuse, smaller clinical sampling, and failure to

identify the abuser (Holden & Barker, 2004). Nonetheless, researchers tend to agree that if

alcoholism, addiction, or abuse is the root cause of marital conflict, separation from the addicted

or violent parent may be in the child's best interest (Daniels, 1998; Holden & Barker, 2004;

McLanahan & Teitler, 1999).

Socio-Economic Factors

When considering the child's best interest, parents are often faced with tough decisions

that may put families at social and economic risk (McLanahan, 1998; McLanahan & Teitler,

1999; Parke & Brott, 1999; Popenoe, 1996). McLanahan and Teitler (1999) performed a review

of several studies to determine whether educational accomplishments, adolescent and non-

marital childbearing, and work force initiation and earnings of fatherless individuals could

predict their social and economic stability as young adults (see Figure 2.1 for a summary of the

studies reviewed by McLanahan & Teitler). The reviewed studies were longitudinal in nature and

contained large samples that were nationally representative (Institute for Social Research [ISR],

2007; Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2009; Research Center for Minority Data [RCMD],

2009; Sociometrics, 2010; University of Wisconsin Center for Demography [UWCD], 2008; Economic and Social Data Service [ESDS], 2006).

Since their study was not an experimental design, it was difficult to determine whether father absenteeism caused many of the outcomes (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). However, it provided insight into commonalities of social and economic factors across populations with no bias to race, gender, or social class. The review suggested that children raised by both biological parents have greater success socially and economically than those raised by a single parent (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999).

These findings are consistent with those put forth by other researchers (McLanahan, 1998; Parke & Brott, 1999; Popenoe, 1996;) but are not irrefutable. The reader is cautioned to consider the possibility that many other unexplored factors may have contributed to the greater success rates in children of two-parented families. For instance, Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1982) suggested that separated and divorced mothers often sense disapproval from sectors of society causing them to feel socially isolated and emotionally stressed. The studies reviewed by McLanahan and Teitler did not take into account the psychological functioning of the single mothers who participated in some of the studies and acknowledged that parental psychological functioning may account for some of the disparity in children's social and economic achievement levels (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Also, the beneficence of social capital (Coleman, 1988) may account for some of the difference. *Social capital* is a relational resource between families and communities that influences a child's social and cognitive development (Coleman, 1988). For these reasons, observations alluding to a causal connection between father absence and child wellbeing should be interpreted cautiously.

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Figure 2.1 *Descriptions of Longitudinal Studies*

The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) originated in 1968 and followed 5000 families to determine the demographics of family structure, economics, and health. By 1999, the sample size had grown to over 6400 (Institute for Social Research, 2007). The study followed children from panel families after they emancipated from home to setting up their own households. The data used in the McLanahan & Teitler study examined factors such as outcomes of children after high school and early childbearing (ISR, 2007).

The National Longitudinal Survey – Youth Cohort (NLSY) is a study that began in 1979 conducting annual interviews of approximately 13000 young adults that were initially between the ages of 14 and 21. The data provides information on family income of these individuals during adolescence and their young adulthood outcomes; especially academic performance and attitude towards school (BLS, 2009).

The National Survey of Children (NSC) randomly interviewed over 2200 children in more than 1700 households between the ages of 7 and 11 years in 1976. Follow-up interviews 5 and 11 years later when the youth were 18-23 years of age included over 1100 of the initial sample. Information pertaining to the relationships and marital status of parents, as well as the educational and childbearing behaviors of the children was collected. The nature of the study allowed control for family dynamics prior to divorce (Sociometrics, 2010).

Figure 2.1 *(continued). Descriptions of Longitudinal Studies*

The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) interviewed approximately 13,000 households in 1987 and again in 1993 during the second phase. The information provided data pertaining to children's family history, familial relationships, and parenting practices (UWCD, 2008).

The National Child Development Survey (NCDS) is comprised of an original sample of over 17,000 children that were born in Great Britain during the first week of March in 1958. These children were followed through to their 33rd year of life. The number of individuals in year 33 decreased to 11,407 due to attrition rates. The aim of the survey was to better understand the factors that affect human development over a lifespan (ESDS, 2006).

Another study that gained the attention of political leaders and scholars in the late 1990s was conducted by Judith Wallerstein (2000). Her findings on educational achievement, and job initiation and maintenance are closely related to those of McLanahan and Teitler (1999). Nearly four decades ago, Wallerstein (2000) began a longitudinal mixed-methods research study following 131 children of divorce from 60 families over a span of 25 years. These children were the offspring of well-educated parents from affluent neighborhoods in Marin County, California. She conducted follow-up interviews with these families at 18-months, 5-years, 10-years, 15-years, and 25-years (Wallerstein, 2000). Attrition reduced the number of participants by the twenty-fifth year to 93 children from 45 families. One of her findings noted that educational outcomes, and employment sustainability of children from divorced parents were possibly

affected by father absence. She reported that only one-third of the children received high school diplomas, and at the age of 18 when parents were legally relieved of child support, only six of the children received continued economic support from parents and stepparents for higher education (Wallerstein, 2000). These six individuals eventually ended up with jobs in financially stable professions. The remainder of the group struggled with academics and work initiation, and eventually gained employment in jobs that under-ranked their parents' occupations (Wallerstein, 2000).

While it seems the studies by Wallerstein (2000) and McLanahan and Teitler (1999) yielded similar findings, particularly in reference to education and employment outcomes, it is important to note that accurate comparisons are difficult to validate based on the studies' designs - one a review of quantitative longitudinal studies (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999) and the other a mixed-methods longitudinal study (Wallerstein, 2000). In addition, it was not clear from either study whether all of the individuals who responded to surveys and participated in interviews can be considered 'fatherless'. This assumption is based on assertions by certain scholars that 'divorced' means 'fatherless' (Gallagher, 1998; McLanahan, 1998; Popenoe, 1996), which may not be the case for all children of divorce. While it is evident that participants were from mixed family environments, father involvement may have occurred in varying degrees, at different times, and with several participants over the courses of study (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Therefore, it is difficult and imprudent to conclude that fatherlessness caused unfavorable educational and employment outcomes.

Wallerstein's (2000) study, though in-depth and informative, bears other limitations. Researchers have been careful to note that her findings cannot be generalized to the population at large (Cherlin, 1999; Amato, 2003). While the study provides insight into the complexities of

individual experiences with divorce, the small sample of participants was not chosen randomly rendering conclusions less comprehensive. Furthermore, the families were offered counselling sessions in exchange for their participation in the study (Amato, 2003), and Wallerstein observed that many of the parents were dealing with psychological issues during the first point of contact (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This may have lead researchers to inadvertently focus on parents and children who were not coping well with separation (Amato, 2003). The absence of a study control group consisting of married parents with children also posed an issue. Wallerstein may have been aware of this limitation and added a control group in the twenty-fifth year of her study (Amato, 2003). However, without a control sample throughout the entire study, it is difficult to ascertain whether the study's findings are typical of children from divorced situations (Amato, 2003).

Aside from the social factors already discussed, researchers argue that fatherlessness puts children at risk for delinquency and violent crimes (Brotherson & White, 2007; Day & Lamb, 2004; Popenoe, 1996). Popenoe (1998) said, "Many people intuitively believe that fatherlessness is related to delinquency and violence, and the weight of research evidence supports this belief" (p. 41). While he acknowledges that having a father at home is no guarantee that a child will not commit a crime, he suggests that 60% of rapists, 72% of child murderers, and 70% of prison inmates come from fatherless homes (Popenoe, 1996). These statistics were provided by the National Fatherhood Initiative (Popenoe, 1996) - an organization established in 1994 to encourage father commitment and involvement for the wellbeing of their children (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2010). While the statistics may sound an alarm for the social impact of fatherlessness, there is no conclusive evidence that would suggest that fatherlessness causes criminally delinquent behaviour in young adults (Popenoe, 1996). Conversely, there is no

substantial evidence to conclude any other single cause of delinquency and violence. Such evidence is likely never to exist based on the complexities of the topic (Popenoe, 1996).

The rationale that researchers provide for the risk of adolescent delinquency was linked to the economic struggles of single mothers (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990). As the primary source of income in the household, single mothers are often forced to move to low income neighbourhoods and work long hours to provide for their families. Less time at home leads to less interaction with the children (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Some researchers believe that the degree of interaction in the child-parent relationship is a key factor in delinquent behaviour (Steinberg, 1987) and that the primary parent-child relationship often suffers from lack of quality time and discipline in single-parent families (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Further complicating the issue is the premise that discipline has historically been the father's role in traditional nuclear families (Ott, 1997). When adequate discipline is lacking, behavioural concerns may increase leading to social maladjustment (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). The social ramifications are then perpetuated when children in low-income communities have no choice but to attend schools that accommodate other socially maladjusted individuals (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999).

The social maladjustment influence was supported by McCord, Widom, and Crowell (2001), who suggested that peers play a role in adolescent delinquency. If peers are behaving antisocially, others may participate in order to seek their approval, maintain relationships, or prove allegiance to their peers (McCord et al., 2001). Furthermore, time spent with peers who engage in delinquent behaviours is a key predictor of whether they will be pressured to follow suit (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; McCord et al., 2001).

Further evidence supporting social maladjustment affects was indicated in the incidence of teenage sexual initiation and pregnancy (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; More & Chase-Lansdale, 2001). It is not uncommon for adolescents to respond to parental break-ups by acting out, which may include involvement in premature sexual relationships. Early sexual initiation leads to increased risk of teenage pregnancy. Fifty percent of youth in families disrupted by father absenteeism were found in the NSC study to have initiated sex before the age of seventeen (Furstenberg & Teitler, 1994). In the studies reviewed by McLanahan and Teitler (1999) (see Figure 2.1), adolescent girls in father absent families were more likely to become pregnant than girls in two-parent families. Approximately 20% of the young women in the studies reported to have a child before the age of 20 (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Specifically, in the National Longitudinal Survey –Youth Cohort study 27% of the teenage girls who lived separate from their biological fathers had children of their own before turning twenty years of age. Comparatively, if the "norm" is two parent families, 11% of 20 year-old women were mothers in families where both parents were present (BLS, 2009).

The studies referenced in the preceding section provided rationale for the social and economic risks associated with fatherlessness, and cautionary reflections were noted concerning causal links. The following section discusses other risks that have been reviewed in recent research pertaining to fatherlessness; namely, the risk to a child's intellectual development.

Intellectual Development Factors

In reference to intellectual development and cognitive functioning, it is reported that children growing up with just one biological parent (irregardless of race) approximately doubles the risk of school dropout; from approximately 15% in two biologically parented households to nearly 30% in one biologically parented households (McLanahan &Teitler, 1999). The HSB

study showed that youth in two-parent families had a slightly higher grade point average (4.13 versus 3.92 on a one to seven scale), higher standardized test scores (2.62 versus 2.51), reported a higher likelihood of attending college (37.5% versus 32.2%), and had better school attendance records than those in single parent homes (RCMD, 2009).

When compared to studies conducted strictly with African American children from fatherless homes, the conclusions seem fairly robust (Roopnarine, 2004). Studies showed that children from these families were more likely to repeat a grade, achieve lower grades than peers, be suspended from school, and cut classes more often than those in two-parent families (Rodney & Mupier, 1999). African American children in two-parent households had higher reading and mathematics scores (Teachman et al., 1998), were exposed to more educational opportunities, and had more of a positive attitude towards school (Savage, Adair, & Friedman, 1978). It was difficult to determine whether boys or girls were affected more intellectually, since these studies did not differentiate based on gender.

While these statistics may suggest that the traditional nuclear family structure poses a diminished risk to a child's cognitive development, they should be interpreted cautiously (Roopnarine, 2004), since there are studies that have not found a relationship between family structure and the intellectual functioning of children at all (Luster & McAdoo, 1994). Furthermore, some studies suggest that other adults in multigenerational households may impact educational achievement (DeLeire & Kalil, 2002; Entwisle & Alexander, 1996); a factor that was not controlled for in any of the studies favouring father present homes (Roopnarine, 2004). Other cautionary considerations include the availability of economic resources that may be supplemented by non-biological parents, the nature of the relationships between parents and children (e.g. difference in parenting skills, interpersonal conflict), and the psychological

presence of the father (Roopnarine, 2004). It may be that such factors could tell us as much, if not more, about the risk to a child's cognitive functioning as the marital and residential statuses of parents. Moreover, the studies to which these researchers refer have not employed the same methodological or analytical approaches, thereby causing comparisons to be less meaningful (Roopnarine, 2004).

<center>*Emotional and Mental Health Factors*</center>

To this point, the literature has focused on the economic, social, and cognitive factors that may impact the experiences of fatherless individuals. Another factor that has gained the attention of academic scholars and psychoanalysts in the past thirty years is the emotional and mental health risk that fatherlessness may pose to a child's wellbeing (Blundell, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999; Phares & Clay, 2007). The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (2007) reports that children who are raised without a father are two to three times more likely to experience emotional problems such as depression. Cockett and Tripp (1994) conducted a qualitative study that interviewed children and parents in 152 contrasted family settings (76 two-parented families and 76 lone-parent families) and conceded that children in lone-parent families struggle with unhappiness about 2.5 times more, and are likely to score poorly on measures of self-esteem about 3.3 times more than dual-parent families. While it seems that fatherlessness may be a factor influencing the emotional and mental health of children, factors such as genetic predisposition to depression, the psychological functioning of the primary care-giving parent, or the economic struggles that can accompany single-parenthood can all arguably be as detrimental to a child's emotional wellbeing (Day & Lamb, 2004).

Robert Fruman (1991) in *The Father-Child Relationship* proposed a rationale for the affect of fatherlessness on a child's emotional and mental health. He stressed that the father is an

important source of love for the child. His suggestion is similar to researchers who claim children need and seek love from mothers and fathers (Christiansen & Stueve, 2007). Particularly for sons, the father's love promotes maturity and heightens his self-esteem (Fruman, 1991). The admiration that a son seeks from his father when the child displays strength and competence is instrumental in boosting his self-esteem (Fruman, 1991). Without the father's admiration, a child will often be found seeking something that will validate his worth (Ott, 1997). When a father is absent, the child may lack self-esteem, thereby affecting his emotional development. Erickson (1996) agrees that father absence is perhaps the most significant barrier to males' healthy self-esteem development.

Erickson (1996) also proposes that the emotional affect of father absence can be experienced in the very subtle form of the traditional nuclear father. He suggests that these fathers - having been socialized to provide for and protect their families - were often thought to be emotionally unavailable. It seems as if they have an innate duty to provide for the economic and physical needs of their family while leaving the role of nurturing to the mother (Erickson, 1996). For a man to nurture, he would perhaps show a degree of sensitivity that may be considered by other men to be 'unmanly' (Corneau, 1991). Rather than emasculate himself, the father learned to suppress his emotions. As a result, children may not have seen the side of masculinity that is capable of love and tenderness, thereby potentially furthering an emotional disconnection from their fathers (Corneau, 1991). Logically, it would seem that the emotional unavailability of a traditional father would have a negative psychological impact on a child, especially in cases where the child yearns for a deeper emotional connection with his father (Erickson, 1996; Gallagher, 1998; Herzog, 1980). Herzog (2001) referred to this yearning as

father hunger and specifically defined it as "…an affective state experienced when the father is felt to be absent" (p. 51).

Father Hunger

Herzog (1980) psychoanalytically observed and documented the phenomenon of father hunger in a group of twelve boys between the ages of 18- and 28-months in a clinical setting where he practiced psychiatry. The patients were seen over a period of six months and all presented a problem with night terrors. The boys would awaken at night seemingly disoriented and terrified crying for 'daddy' (Herzog, 1980). In each case, the mother reported attempts to console the child but felt they were futile. After each initial visit with these children, Herzog noted prominent similarities in the family configurations. In all twelve cases, the boys' parents had divorced or separated within the preceding four months resulting in the father vacating the home (Herzog, 1980).

It is not clear whether fathers and sons visited during the daytime, which is a limitation in conceptualizing father hunger. However, Herzog (1980) noted other commonalities between the cases of these twelve toddlers. Each boy encountered something scary while sleeping (e.g. a big bird, a barking dog, a monster, etc.) and perceived that his father's presence would be a key factor in causing the fear to subside. Herzog discovered these themes during play therapy sessions where the boys would use puppets or objects representing themselves, their fathers, and mothers to reenact scenarios of the children's sleep patterns (Herzog, 1980). In each case, when the 'father' object was introduced to the scenario, the children would use phrases such as, "All better now," or, "He is like the boy. He can [help] because he knows the boy. He is not a mommy." (Herzog, 1980, p. 224-225).

Herzog (1980) attributed the boys' fixations on their fathers to a developmental stage that occurs between 14- and 18-months during which boys enter a process called androgenization (Abelin, 1977; Herzog, 1980). Androgenization occurs to rid boys of the primary femininity that they acquire as fetuses before their gender is even determined (Abelin, 1977; Bland, 1998; Herzog, 1980). Gender identity may be altered if a male parent is not present for the boy during this stage of development (Abelin, 1977). It is during this stage that the boy begins to turn his identity away from his mother and towards his father. Aggression starts to develop during this stage but begins to stabilize when he sees that he is the 'same' as his father. If the father is unavailable, boys cannot cognitively rationalize his absence, which causes aggression to increase (Herzog, 1980). Piaget (1936) purported that the child can develop a fear that he caused his father's absence and begin to direct the aggression towards 'self'. These irrational, aggressive impulses manifest as monsters or other fearful objects during the regressive and progressive sway of sleep resulting in night terrors (Herzog, 1980). Since the father is the parent with whom the child identifies during this stage, Herzog believes that the male parent can effectively interrupt the child's nightmares and aggressive impulses (Herzog, 1980).

Herzog (1980) was perhaps one of the first in the field of psychiatry to explore the possibility that fathers are needed during the first two years of life, and that their involvement may prevent psychological issues later in life (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001; Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Kipnis, 1991; Wark, 2000). He summarized his theory of father hunger in these words:

> A boy needs his father for the formation of the sense of self, the completion of
> separation-individuation, the consolidation of core gender identity, and the beginning

modulation of libidinal and especially aggressive drives. I call the affective state which

exists when these needs are not being met *father hunger* (Herzog, 1980, p. 230).

As mentioned previously, Herzog's (1980) theory of father hunger was based on clinical data

collected from interventions with twelve boys between the ages of 18- and 28-months.

Researchers have argued the difficulty in ascertaining whether the boys' problems with night

terrors stemmed from the fathers' absences, or the distress the mothers may have experienced

due to the absence of a partner (Target & Fonagy, 2002). Nevertheless, Herzog's research made

a distinct contribution to psychoanalytic evaluation of the father's role in child development

(Target & Fonagy, 2002).

Masculine Identity

With the development of Herzog's theory on father hunger, and its links to the

androgenization process at an early stage of development (Abelin, 1977; Herzog, 1980), the

assertion that a boy's identity with his father helps shape his own sense of masculine identity

(Herzog, 1980) was extrapolated by researchers and child development theorists. Herzog's

clinical observations with toddlers bolstered assumptions that fathers also play a role in the

development of a boy's masculine identity later in life (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge,

2001; Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Herzog, 1980; Kipnis, 1991;

Wark, 2000). Researchers argued that a father's absence may contribute to his son's inability to

establish a masculine identity and stunt his transition into adulthood (Corneau, 1991). Kipnis

(1991) purported that men serve as examples for sons about how to become men and suggests

that this is something that no mother, however well meaning, can do alone. Furthermore, he

believes that the father models how to relate to women. Sons who do not observe the loving

interaction between a mother and father are likely to have a distorted view of how women should be treated (Kipnis, 1991).

A child's first relation is with his mother (Corneau, 1991). Therefore, his first identification is usually with a woman. In order for a boy to develop masculine characteristics, it is necessary for the identification with the mother to transfer to identification with the father (Corneau, 1991). Griswold (1998) suggested that fathers are integral in preparing sons for manhood by helping negotiate the child's connection with mothers as they develop their masculinity. The need for male identification is reflected in many cultures, especially certain tribal societies where boys earn rites of passage into manhood. These practices are usually intended to signify the boy's official separation from his mother, and to celebrate his transition into manhood (Corneau, 1991). Furthermore, the absence of a father's psychological guidance for his son through this process may result in the son's overdeveloped sense of masculinity, which may lead to potential rage against women (Griswold, 1998). Blankenhorn wrote, "if we want to learn the identity of …the hater of women, the occupant of jail cells, we do not look first to boys with traditionally masculine fathers. We look first to boys with no fathers" (Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 31).

The process of developing a sense of masculinity can be a difficult and fragile one (Corneau, 1991). Perhaps it is partially due to the fact that masculinity has to be bestowed on a boy (Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001). Females, on the other hand, have a more natural way of being identified as women (Corneau, 1991). The onset of menstruation signifies to a girl that she is now a woman. For a boy, nature's process has to be supplemented by experiences that educate him about the necessity to transfer identification away from his mother to his father in order to be a man (Corneau, 1991).

Eldredge (2001) described this process as a time when a boy begins to seek his father's affection and attention. This can be difficult for some mothers, especially for those who require their sons to fill a void that their partner's absence may have also left for them. There is a risk that the boy can become the mother's little helper when the father is absent from the family; someone she can confide in and lean on (Kipnis, 1991). However difficult, it is an essential process if this transition is to answer the question that Eldredge (2001) believes every boy longs to ask: *Do I have what it takes*? A boy's interaction with an adequate father can help him answer the question. When a sufficient answer is provided, a boy may be well on the road to developing his own sense of what it means to identify as a man (Eldredge, 2001).

Eldredge's (2001) perspective on masculine identity reflects research on gender identity and the gendered self; topics that have been researched in social science since the late 19th century (Trew & Kremer, 1998). Psychologists in the late 1800s attempted to measure masculine-feminine differences by similar methods used to determine intelligence and personality. By mid-20th century, gender differences were thought to be modeled within family structures that geared boys toward bread-winning tasks, and girls toward socio-emotional and nurturance roles (Trew & Kremer, 1998). The view that masculinity and femininity were human personality traits with cultural influences gained academic momentum (Trew & Kremer, 1998) after the development of the first test of mental masculinity-feminity (Terman & Miles, 1936). Despite attempts by other researchers in the late 1900s to adopt androgyny as the sex-role ideal, masculinity and femininity continued to categorize and sex-type individuals (Trew & Kremer, 1998).

By the 1980s, Bem (1981) refocused her views from androgyny to gender-schematic information processing. 'Gender' was now considered "not as a conglomeration of personality

charateristics but as a culturally embedded schema, defined as an affective/cognitive structure

which is created to lend meaning and coherence to individual experience" (Trew, 1998, p. 5). By

in large, gender identity was beginning to theoretically be considered a social category that was

assumed to impact the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals (Trew, 1998). These

assumptions promoted the view that 'self' is the crucial concept that engenders an individual,

while recognizing the part that biological and social influences play in gender idenity (Trew,

1998).

Grief and Loss

The connections between the development of a boy's gender identity and father hunger

have been explored extensively in research (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001;

Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Herzog, 1980; Kipnis, 1991; Wark,

2000). However, other prominent associations to father hunger have also made in research

concerning grief and loss (Erickson, 1996; Gallagher, 1998; Herzog, 1980) and the part that

separation, divorce, and family break-up may play in developing these associations. Family

dissolution can be a difficult process for a child, and often promotes a great sense of loss. In most

cases, the loss is *father loss* (Gallagher, 1998). However well meaning the father, only one-third

of children who live separately from their fathers get to see them once in the span of a week

(Furstenberg, Nord, & Peterson, 1995). Analyzing data from the *National Survey of Children*

(Sociometrics, 2010), these researchers found that, following the first year of family dissolution

fathers seem to make noble efforts to maintain contact with their children. As life continues,

geographical distance, obligations to new relationships, weariness from post-divorce battles with

ex-wives, or the child's perceived resilience to the situation may be reasons why the father's

contact with his child lessens. A decade later, two thirds of these children have no contact at all with their fathers (Furstenberg et. al., 1995).

The lack of father-child contact in post-divorce situations may contribute to a sense of abandonment for the child (Gallagher, 1998). Limited contact and the changing dynamics of the father-son relationship may lead the child to feel an intense sense of loss. The loss experienced by sons who have been abandoned by fathers compared to the loss of a father to death seems to be altogether different (Blundell, 2002; Gallagher, 1998). In individual psychotherapy sessions, Blundell (2002) observed bereavement in boys between twelve and eighteen years of age that were referred by doctors, teachers, social workers, foster parents, and mothers. In her work with these bereaved boys, Blundell (2002) found that adolescent boys struggled with issues related to father absence long before their fathers died. She suggested that, when the father was alive the son may have held on to the hope that a relationship with his father would one day be restored. When the father died, it brought a sense of finality for the boy. Abandonment may not have offered the same closure (Blundell, 2002).

Gallagher (1998) suggested that abandonment is far more traumatic than losing a father to death. Mishne (1979) purported that abandonment by a parent is a very distinct form of loss that may impose depression, feelings of emptiness and confusion, socially maladjusted behaviors, rage, and pathological tendencies on the child's experience. While children may experience parental death as a type of abandonment, on a deeper level they seem to understand that death is usually not the parent's choice, nor is it the parent's expression of diminished love (Gallagher, 1998). Abandonment, on the other hand, may promote feelings of failed love for the child, and a harsh perception that the father deems other things in his life more important than his

child. Of the two ways to experience father loss, death is likely better (Gallagher, 1998), since the psychological problems experienced by bereaved children seem to be fewer (Emery, 1988).

In response to these observations, a conscientious researcher is likely to point out that the experiences of bereavement and divorce cannot be adequately compared, since there are many factors that contribute to each experience individually. For instance, the quality of relationship with the lost father, the impact of others' emotional responses to bereavement on the child, the interpersonal family dynamics prior to loss, as well as unspecified pre-existing psychological disorders may shape individual experiences. Any one, or a combination of two or more of these factors, may account for the psychological problems that construct the experiences of bereaved children in either case of death or abandonment.

Ideal Father

The psychological issues that often surface in bereaved and abandoned children, and the void that is created by father absence (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001; Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Kipnis, 1991; Wark, 2000;) has implications for research on the development of an ideal father image. Neubauer (1989) found that fatherless children try to fill the void that is created as a result of father absence with a psychological picture of an ideal father. He feels children do this because they psychologically view the father as a significant figure. Children are thought to construct this ideal father image of a father they may have never known from bits of information they gather throughout their lifetime (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). What often comes as a surprise to mothers is the determination their children have to never give up on their fathers, even in situations where the father's actions may not warrant it (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). This is often difficult for mothers to witness, especially in situations where both her and the child have fallen victim to emotional turmoil

caused by an uncaring partner and father. As hard as it may be, however, the mother's role is crucial in this idealization process (Gallagher, 1998). The mother's expectations of the father, whether implicit or explicit, and his perceived role will help shape the child's image of his father (Etchegoyen, 2002). The absence of an ideal father image, or the *internal father* has been argued to cause sexually deviant behaviour (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985) and psychological problems (Lacan, 1964).

Prior to this emergent notion of father hunger (Herzog, 1980), psychologists were apt to believe that the role of the father in child development did not begin until the child was three or four years of age (Corneau, 1991). Between the early 1970s and late 1990s, researchers began to mark a new era that correlated father absence in the earlier stages of child development with problems much later in adolescent and young adult development. Correlation studies revealed similar findings that were consistent with popular assumptions of the time: Boys being raised without fathers seem to experience sex-role and gender identity confusion, weakened academic performance, psychosocial maladjustment, and increased aggressivity (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). These issues are thought to be influenced by (Biller, 1982, Herzog, 1980), risk factors for (McLanahan, 1998, Popenoe, 1996), or responses to (Gallagher, 1998) father hunger.

Gallagher (1998) believed that father hunger not only occurs in earlier stages of development, rather it continues throughout a lifetime. She discussed that divorce and out-of-wedlock births may celebrate the unfettered choices of adults but it comes at a cost to children. The cost: *Father hunger* (Gallagher, 1998). Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (1997) offered her perspective in *The Divorce Culture* that helps explain Gallagher's (1998) rationale for how father hunger may be experienced. Whitehead (1997) posited that society has endorsed divorce as the

essential escape for emotionally weak adults from the stressors of marital discord. Meanwhile, children are presented as emotionally resilient and therefore capable of withstanding the strains of divorce relatively unaffected (Whitehead, 1997). Gallagher (1998) reasons that father hunger epitomizes a child's lack of resilience. She says:

> It's an ache in the heart, a gnawing anxiety in the gut. It's a longing for a man, not just a woman, who will care for you, protect you, and show you how to survive in the world. For a boy, especially, it's the raw, persistent, desperate hunger for dependable male love, and for an image of maleness that is not at odds with love (p. 165).

Beneficence of Father Involvement

Before the late 1970s, much of the research on fathering centered on the 'deficit model' (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997), or the negative effects of father absence rather than on the benefits of father involvement (Day & Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Recent research purports that fathers who are more involved in the lives of their children, and make themselves more emotionally available tend to raise children with fewer emotional problems and better overall mental health (Lum & Phares, 2005). Outcomes that point to better mental health in children depend greatly on the quantity and quality of father involvement (Phares & Clay, 2004). However, the quality of involvement seems to hold a little more importance than quantity (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). For instance, a father who invests a great deal of time with his son but spends most of it engaging in conflict with him is not as likely to have as great a positive impact as the father who spends less time doing more mutually agreeable activities. The amount of time is not as crucial as how they relate during that time (Brotherson & White, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002; Phares & Clay, 2004).

The quality of father involvement seems to be correlated with the emotional availability of the father (Easterbrooks & Biringin, 2000). Fathers are thought to be emotionally available when they show an interest in their children's lives, interact with them, support them, and pay attention to what they need emotionally (Lum & Phares, 2005). Children of highly involved fathers are often more emotionally mature (Parke & Brott, 1999) and experience fewer emotional problems (Lum & Phares, 2005), which results in overall better mental health for the child (Phares & Clay, 2007).

Emotional dimensions of father involvement were measured by Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer (1998) in their interviews with respondents from the 1981 and 1987 surveys conducted in the National Survey of Children (NSC) (Sociometrics, 2010). The adolescents' perceived levels of closeness to parents, degrees to which they identified with parents, and satisfaction with parental affection were investigated to determine the emotional affect of parental involvement (Harris et al., 1998). Separate ratings for mother and father involvement were acquired. Harris and colleagues recognize that paternal and maternal involvement are reinforcing and complementary, which poses a difficulty in separately measuring ways that father involvement matters to children. As a result, the researchers used a reliability index (Cronbach's alpha) to distinguish importance of maternal and paternal involvement. The index was .77 for fathers and .71 for mothers, suggesting that the items that measure parental involvement were 77% and 71% reliable for fathers and mothers respectively in their study. Their findings suggested that, "...high involvement and increasing closeness between fathers and adolescents protect adolescents from engaging in delinquent behaviour and experiencing emotional distress" (Harris et al., 1998, p. 214).

The effect of father involvement on the emotional and mental wellbeing of a child is difficult to substantiate, since there are numerous other factors that can influence an individual's mental health and wellbeing. Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that divorce and separation rates have overtaken death rates as the primary cause of fatherlessness (Popenoe, 1998). There seems to be a growing body of research that points to marital and post-divorce parental conflict as a major factor in affecting children's emotional well-being (Kelly, 2000; Stone, Buehler, & Barber, 2002). If estranged or divorced parents are not interacting with each other in a respectful manner, it would be difficult to determine whether a child's emotional maladjustment is primarily influenced by the father's absence, or the inter-parental conflict that sometimes may occur in the presence of the child (Brotherson & White, 2007).

Surrogate Fathers

Scholars have argued that fathers play a specific role in the development of their children (Brotherson & White, 2007; Day & Lamb, 2004; Gallagher, 1998; McLanahan, 1998; Popenoe, 1996) and some have even ventured to say that biological fathers are most likely the only adult male that can adequately fulfill the father role (Eldredge, 2001; Gallagher, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). While the contributions of surrogate fathers are acknowledged as beneficial in child development (Biller, 1974), those who are not directly related to the child tend not to be as committed as one would hope a biological father to be (Popenoe, 1996). Other researchers contend that mothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, partners, or friends can adequately fulfill the father role (Cornell, 1998; Daniels, 1998; Dodson, 1998). Such views have continued the debate on the efficacy of fathering and whether fathers are essential to the development of children (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Trowell, 2002).

Three examples of *surrogate fathers* are provided and briefly discussed in this section –

stepfathers, grandfathers, and community based organizations. This is not to suggest that these

are the only examples that exist in literature pertaining to fatherlessness. However, they comprise

common examples (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004; Lamb, 2004) and are offered to allow the reader

the opportunity to make judgments concerning the validity of their contribution to biologically

fatherless children.

Stepfathers

Most of the research referred to in this section will be based on samples of stepfathers

who live with their stepchildren, since that is believed to be the most common type of stepfamily

(Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Research shows that remarriage following divorce, or a single

mother marrying for the first time improves the economic wellbeing of mothers and children

(Lamb, 2004; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Teachman & Paasch, 1993). As one might expect,

these researchers found that the median family income of step-father families is more than

double the income of single-mother families (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) and that, when

single mothers marry, it significantly decreases the incidences of household poverty (Teachman

& Paasch, 1993).

One might expect that the economic advantage in stepfather families would offset the

disadvantages that often make up the experiences of single-parent children (Lamb, 2004). Amato

(1994) performed a meta-analysis of children in stepparent homes, single-parent homes, and

homes in which parents were continuously married. It was reported that children living with

stepparents are not necessarily better off academically, behaviorally, psychologically, or socially.

Particularly, stepchildren scored lower on measures of academic achievement, self-esteem, peer-

relational quality, behavior problems, and psychological adjustment. Furthermore, children in

stepfamilies appear to suffer more issues psychologically than those in single-parent dwellings (Amato, 1994). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) in a similar study found that the negative outcomes that are often part of the experiences of fatherless children (such as those discussed previously) were still experienced even after controlling for stepfamily income.

On a cautionary note, generalizations about stepfathers and their impact on stepchildren should not be made based on the information presented in this section (Lamb, 2004). The research is limited to only a single definition of stepfamilies; those in which the stepfather is married to the mother of his stepchildren and living with them as a family unit. There are many other ways to define stepfamilies (e.g. non marital cohabitation, stepchildren from a former relationship, etc.) (Lamb, 2004).

Grandfathers

Research has shown that grandfathers can play an important role in the lives of their grandchildren (Taylor, 2007). In a census by the U.S. Census Bureau, it was estimated that 2.4 million of America's children are being raised by their grandparents (Simmons & Dye, 2003). In the absence of fathers, grandfathers have been known to take on roles of mentor, nurturer, role model, and playmate. In his experience, Taylor (2007) found that grandfathers taught moral principles to their grandchildren and shared meaningful perspectives that gave the children a greater sense of security. They also attended to the emotional and physical wellbeing of their grandchildren and served as positive role models in areas such as honor and respect (Taylor, 2007). Finally, they were prone to engage more in recreational activities with their grandchildren when parents seemed preoccupied with jobs and other responsibilities. Research has shown that grandfathers can positively influence the lives of their grandchildren, thereby affecting the child's growth and development (Taylor, 2007).

Community Based Organizations

Research has found that many organizations seem to be salient substitutes for paternally deprived children (Biller, 1974). Examples include, but are not limited to, Big Brothers, Boy Scouts, athletic teams, camps, and churches. Within these organizations there are often older, well-adjusted young men that serve as influential models for fatherless children. In a study conducted by Glueck and Glueck (1950), it was reported that boys with delinquent tendencies resolved their antisocial behaviors after forming meaningful relationships with father surrogates. Boys who experience father absence may be responsive to surrogate role models, especially if they lack male companionship (Biller, 1974) - a factor that is argued to be essential for healthy, emotional development of boys (Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997).

Summary of Literature Review

Research literature on the topic of *fatherlessness* seems to have instigated a growing debate over political and social issues pertaining to child welfare, poverty, sexual identity and initiation, family dynamics, and racial order (Daniels, 1998). At the core of this debate lies the issue of fatherlessness incidence today compared to historical accounts, as well as the necessity and efficacy of fathers in the changing landscape of family paradigms (Daniels, 1998).

In the last thirty years, research has deemed children *fatherless* if they are products of divorced and separated parents, born out of wedlock, birthed intentionally by single, self-supporting women, have experienced father abandonment, or have lost a father to death (Daniels, 1998; Popenoe, 1996; Gallagher, 1998). Some psychoanalysts extended the definition to include the emotional absence (Blundell, 2002) or emotional unavailability of the father (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004) that is sometimes provoked by marital conflict (Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Raymond, 2004) or preoccupation with work and other distracting factors (Fein, 1974).

Child development research suggests that children raised by both biological parents have greater socio-economic success (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999), seem to have an intellectual advantage (Research Center for Minority Data, 2009), and are less prone to encounter emotional problems than single-parented children (Cockett & Tripp, 1994). These factors reflect the *deficit model* of fatherlessness that dominated child development research prior to the 1970s (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). More current research focuses on the benefits of father involvement and purports that fathers who are more involved in the lives of their children (Day & Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), and make themselves more emotionally available tend to raise children with fewer emotional problems and better overall mental health (Lum & Phares, 2005).

This exploratory case study takes its theoretical lead from child development and psychoanalytic literature. Furthermore, it identifies and discusses the possibility that historical references to *fatherlessness* in research literature have defined the concept in marital, residential, and social terms. This study contributes to fatherless research by suggesting that such references to *fatherlessness* are factors that contribute to a *fatherless identity*. They do not deem a male individual *fatherless*.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Throughout this chapter, I provide a rationale for employing qualitative research using case study method to explicate fatherlessness as experienced by four fatherless participants. I also share the process of data collection through semi-structured interviews and the discussion of symbolic memorabilia as presented by participants. In addition, this chapter presents the process of data analysis from the collection to final analysis stages through the formation of a case record, and how this process lead me to representing the results of the study in a descriptive manner. Quality criteria such as construct validity, external validity, and reliability are discussed. The chapter concludes with a section presenting the ethical issues that were considered throughout the study.

Qualitative Research

The approach to the topic of a fatherless identity as experienced by adult males was a qualitative one. A qualitative approach to research was used to uncover pragmatic reasons for what was happening in the process of men assuming a fatherless identity (Morse and Richards, 2002). The study was innovative in nature, and employed methods by which the researcher could better understand and illuminate particular phenomena; namely, the fatherless identity (Morse and Richards, 2002). This was achieved by examining fatherless references in psychoanalytic and child development research and providing a new perspective that these references, when investigated retrospectively through the experiences of adult male individuals, may be elements that lead a man to assume a fatherless identity. Separately, they do no define him as fatherless.

Berg (2004) asserted that qualitative research allows the researcher to nominally - rather than numerically - seek pragmatic answers to questions by applying systematic procedures to data collected from individuals in particular situations. Accordingly, I was more interested in

how these men made sense of their surroundings and circumstances (Berg, 2004). Qualitative research was a way to assess unquantifiable facts about actual people and the personal effects that took on a specific significance or meaning in their lives. Such research helped bring understanding to 'how' people made sense of themselves and others in varied social structures (Berg, 2004).

The choice to explore men's experiences of fatherlessness from a qualitative perspective was appropriate since I was concerned with how men who have experienced this phenomenon identified with the concept of being fatherless, the factors that lead them to assume a fatherless identity, and how they have been impacted by their fatherless experiences (Berg, 2004).

Case Study Methodology

One useful form of qualitative research is the case study design (Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) adequately summarized the usefulness of case study method for this research study by relaying:

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (p. 19).

A case study can be an account of the circumstances in which a person exists (Bromley, 1986). The value of this case was dependent upon the relationships and facts that explicated the case and the extent to which they are discovered (Bromley, 1986). The case was a naturally occurring entity that was bound in time and place (Bromley, 1986; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Case study was the preferred method of inquiry, since the qualities of the individuals were extraordinary, and the situations in which the individuals were found were unusual (Bromley, 1986).

Yin (1994) provided recommendations that helped the investigator determine the case study strategy. "The three conditions consist of (a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events" (Yin, 1994, p. 4). If the postulated questions take the form of *how, why* or *what*, the researcher should consider the case study method as a likely means for conducting the research. Furthermore, if the researcher has minimal control over the events pertaining to the study, the most effective method may be case study. Finally, when there is a clear focus on real-life situations that are embedded in contemporary phenomena, case study methodology is appropriate (Yin, 1994).

The study of the fatherless identity met all of these conditions. The questions that guided the research took the form of *what* and *how*, indicating that it was a case study of an exploratory nature. The researcher had little control over the behaviors of the participants, the circumstances that explicated the case, and how the participants responded. Finally, the study focused on a contemporary phenomenon as experienced both retrospectively and currently by men who identified themselves as fatherless (Yin, 1994).

Exploratory Case Studies

Exploratory case studies may be employed as pilots for larger, more in-depth investigations (Yin, 1993; Berg, 2004). Pilot studies allow the researcher to determine whether or not research procedures are feasible for larger studies (Yin, 1993). In this exploratory case study, the investigative process was engaged before the research question was fully defined allowing the researcher to follow intuitive paths while aiming to clarify questions and hypotheses for future study (Yin, 1993). Although the primary research question was unclear at the onset of this exploratory case study, the questions that guided the study were often framed as 'what' questions

(Berg, 2004; Yin, 1994). Generally speaking, propositions are stated in case study research. However, this exploratory case study stated a purpose rather than propositions and offered criteria by which the study was deemed successful (Yin, 1994).

Developing a Framework

While the exploratory case study has given notoriety to case study research, it is not exempt from criticism for its perceived 'sloppiness' when contrasted with other more systematic designs (Yin, 1993). Therefore, it was important to develop an outline for how the study was organized (Berg, 2004), or create a framework for how it was conducted (Yin, 1993). Specifically, this meant providing a plan for how the research was carried out - what data was collected and how it was analyzed (Yin, 1994).

In order to build an appropriate framework for the study of the fatherless identity a distinction between single- and multiple-case designs was necessary (Yin, 1994). Single-case designs can often be analogous to single experiments that represent a critical case, an extreme or unique case, or a relevatory case. Multiple-case designs, on the other hand, contain more than a single case and can be viewed as studies that are conducted based on various individual case studies (Yin, 1994).

In this exploratory case study, the case 'fatherless identity' was explicated through the inclusion of multiple variables - four participants (Yin, 1994). The unit of analysis, otherwise referred to as 'the case', was a particular phenomenon that was not as well defined as a single individual (Yin, 1994). It was a single case study in the sense that the concept of fatherless identity was the focus while the variables that illuminated the case were participants who have experienced or identified with the phenomenon of fatherlessness.

The Case

It was important to establish and define boundaries for this case study (Yin, 1994). Requiring that participants met certain criteria for the study was one way of focusing the scope of research. Literature on the topic indicated that the fatherless experience affects males and females differently (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Rather than become overwhelmed with an unmanageable study that included both genders, I felt it was important to focus only on the experiences of one gender at this juncture; males particularly, since initially it was wonderings about how a fatherless male student was impacted by his experience that drew me to the research.

I did not feel it was prudent to include males under the age of 18 years, since the nature of the study required participants to reflectively respond about their experiences after having gained a certain level of understanding. Developmentally, younger males may be at a stage where they are experimentally learning to integrate their experiences with their own ideals and sense of self (Child Development Institute, 2009). This posed an ethical concern for collecting qualitative data on the subject, since younger males may be at a greater emotional risk when discussing the topic if their sense of self is underdeveloped. Furthermore, criteria for time commitment, comprehension of the concept of symbolism required in sharing memorabilia, and obligation to obtain permission for photo use may all have been too stringent for younger males. The goal in collecting data was to develop a database that was purposeful and evidentiary in order that the reliability of the case study was increased (Yin, 1994).

Participants

The case in this study was identified as the 'fatherless identity'. Four adult male individuals participated in this study and were considered subunits of analysis (Yin, 1994). The

case participants were selected using a purposeful sampling technique (Morse & Richards, 2002) that combined criterion sampling with nominated, or snowball sampling (Mertens, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002). This stratified technique allowed the researcher to choose participants based on distinct characteristics that made them suitable candidates for the study. It also provided others with the opportunity to refer individuals whom they felt might have fit the criteria for the study (Mertens, 1998). If others nominated prospective participants, the nominator was instructed to inform the nominee of the advertisement for recruitment (see Appendixes A and B), and was encouraged to allow the nominee to initiate contact with the researcher through the advertisement protocol. This minimized the risk of coercion. The criteria for each participant in this case study were: he was (1) biologically male, (2) a minimum age of 18 years, (3) identified himself as fatherless, (4) spoke fluent English, (5) was willing and able to talk openly about his experience of fatherlessness, and the feelings and emotions associated with the experience, (6) was able to commit approximately three hours of time to the interview and post-interview processes, (7) was willing to share photos or other memorabilia items that signified his experience of fatherlessness, and (8) when photos were shared that included people other than himself, signed consent to use it for the purpose of this research study was warranted; however, since the only photo that was shared was of a deceased father, this criterion did not apply.

Preparing for Data Collection

It has been established that an exploratory case study can be in progress before research questions are fully defined (Yin, 1993). However, preparation for collecting useful data was necessary so that the case study was not jeopardized by an underdeveloped framework (Berg, 2004; Yin, 1993). Yin (1994) provided suggestions for how to best prepare for the data collection process, which begins with the skill set of the investigator. As a prepared investigator,

I was able to ask good questions (Patton, 1980; Yin, 1994), be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible, have a clear understanding of the issues being studied, and be unbiased by preconceived notions (Yin, 1994).

The process leading up to the collection of data was intensive and rigorous. The experiences that drew me to this topic have already been discussed. Once I settled on a topic, I began sharing my thoughts with friends, family, and colleagues. I invited their perspectives in order that I might narrow the scope of the topic to a manageable unit of analysis appropriate for a Masters level thesis. After deciding on the topic of fatherlessness, I began reviewing current literature. I gravitated towards literature that focused on various sociological perspectives in order to gain a clearer understanding of how fatherlessness was conceptualized.

Generating the Data

Upon receiving Behavioural Research Ethics Committee approval for this study, I recruited the case participants by posting an invitation online at www.kijiji.ca. Posters were also displayed at the University of Saskatchewan campus, and at various locations throughout the city of Saskatoon (see Appendixes A and B). Recruitment via these media outlined the inclusion criteria for the case and other participants, and gave a brief introduction to the study. Recruitment ceased after four individuals meeting the criteria agreed to participate in the study with the understanding that these men may provide adequate data to explicate the case. Other respondents were asked to place their names on a waitlist in the events that: (a) more participants were warranted for data collection purposes, and (b) any of the other participants withdrew from the study. Respondents were placed on the waitlist in the order that their response to the advertisement was received. If any of the selected participants were to withdraw from the study at any point, the researcher was prepared to contact the next willing participant on the waitlist. If

no willing participant from the waitlist agreed to engage in the study, the researcher would have entered the recruitment procedure by the same method until another suitable participant was found. Since all initial participants provided sufficient data and remained in the study, the wait list was not employed.

The case participants were contacted through email and telephone to determine whether they met the criteria for the study. The men were asked to explain briefly how they identified as fatherless. The criteria (see Appendixes A and B) were discussed during the conversation. Once it was determined that participants met the criteria of the study, I discussed the purpose of the study in greater detail, explained the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The prospective participants were willing to participate in the study, and semi-structured interviews were arranged at a mutually agreed upon location and time that ensured the participants' confidentiality. All participants agreed to meet in an interview room at the University of Saskatchewan. Prior to commencing the interviews, the informed consent was presented to the participant (see Appendix C). The Informed Consent Form was in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, and included a statement that this particular study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research. Each participant was asked to sign the Informed Consent Form to make his participation in the study official.

Semi-structured Interviews

Yin (2003) suggested the semi-structured interview as an important source of information in a case study. Semi-structured interviews took on the form of guided conversations (Patton, 1980) that were a fluid form of data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) as opposed to forms of

inquiry that may be more rigid, such as surveys (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Data for this study was collected through one semi-structured interview with each participant. A question guide for the interviews is found in Appendix E.

The semi-structured interviews provided rich, comprehensive data. Since the questions I prepared beforehand were used merely to guide the interview, I took the liberty to follow paths that were laid out by the men as they openly discussed their experiences. This resulted in each interview going beyond the anticipated ninety-minute time frame. The participants co-directed the interviews and were given freedom to discuss whatever aspects of their experiences they deemed necessary. The extended time frame allowed them to go into greater detail about their senses of fatherlessness, which resulted in richer, more meaningful data.

A field test of the semi-structured interview questions was completed prior to its application in the study. Yin (1993) suggests that the field test is a formative technique that can assist the researcher in developing relevant questions. The field test was accomplished through an informal review of the questions with two colleagues (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1993). To clarify the intent of the questions, minor changes or rewording occurred after the review was completed. Fielding the questions before employing them in the study provided information about the relevancy of the interview questions and assisted in the development of a satisfactory data collection plan (Yin, 1993).

Once interview questions were peer-reviewed, an overview of the question topics was emailed to each participant. The topics included: (1) how he defined himself as fatherless, (2) the item of memorabilia, or photo, and its significance to him and his fatherless experience, (3) how the fatherless experience has impacted him emotionally, intellectually, and socially, (4) the feelings or emotions attached to his experience, (5) whether his sense of self or "identity" has

been affected, (6) the positive coping strategies he may have employed throughout his experience, (7) the struggles he had as a result of being fatherless, (8) the role he felt a father should play in his son's life, and (9) whether others have taken on a fathering role in his life.

The outline of the question topics gave the participants an opportunity to reflectively think about the topics that were presented before the interview took place. The specific questions were not sent to the participants prior to the interview, since they were meant to merely guide the interview process. The questions were not exhaustive. The semi-structured approach to the interview allowed the order and wording of the questions to be decided during the interview. The rationale behind this method of conducting an interview was to increase the comprehensiveness of the data and provide semi-structure that allowed increased fluidity throughout the interview process (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003).

A minimum of two days after each participant was sent the discussion topics, an interview time was set up with the participant via a telephone call or email at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The participant was asked to bring an item that exemplified his experience of fatherlessness to the semi-structured interview. The discussion of symbolic items of memorabilia provided a useful platform for data collection. As participants talked about the items' symbolic representations of fatherlessness, they were able to connect meaningfully with their past experiences. While reminiscing about the items, it seemed memories and details about experiences with their fathers were triggered. This allowed the fatherless men to more readily access the feelings attached to their experiences. The significant items of memorabilia included a photo, a blanket, a free verse piece of writing, and reference to an eagle figurine.

Collier (1967) introduced the idea of photographs as a valuable method of data collection in ethnographic research and coined what is now known as the Photograph Elicitation Interview

(PEI). PEI involves "using photographs to invoke comments, memory, and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview" (Banks, 2001, p. 87). Since some of the items that were presented did not include photos, it was necessary to provide a detailed description of the memorabilia. Patton (1980) suggested that describing items of data and accurately recording observations in field notes is a useful form of data collection: "The observers notes become the eyes, ears, and perceptual senses for the reader. The descriptions must be factual, accurate and thorough without being cluttered by irrelevant minutiae and trivia" (Patton, 1980, p. 30). By using photographs and other memorabilia during the interview process, I found that participants' memories were sharpened and interviews became more comprehensive. These items also served as an 'ice breaker' to stimulate an open discussion environment and delimit the responses of the participants (Collier, 1987; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Varuchel, 2006).

In this study, the discussion of the photo or item of memorabilia served other purposes. It not only contributed to the collection of useful data, but allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the participant. The participant was asked to give some background information on the item of memorabilia, what significance it held for him, and how it represented his experience of fatherlessness. A detailed description of the item was provided during this discussion so that the data pertaining to it could later be referenced and interpreted. No copies of the items were requested or collected. The participant was free to take it with him when the interview ended.

Before commencement of the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked to sign a Data Collection Form (see Appendix F) that granted permission for the researcher to use the collected data for research purposes. The participants were reminded that the interview would be audio recorded and, by consenting to the study, they are consenting to the audio recording. The first participant was asked to read a short excerpt to cue computer voice recognition

software for transcription purposes. This was not a part of the data collection process, but merely served as a logistical procedure to ensure accurate data collection. Once the computer software recognized his voice, the participant engaged in a dialogue based on the semi-structured interview questions provided (see Appendix E). The voice recognition training session was not performed with the other participants, since it was rendered ineffective for transcribing dialogue. The interjection of the researchers voice coupled with background noises produced an unusable transcript. An official transcript was later compiled from the audio recording of the interview.

All other interviews were audio recorded with a transcript prepared post-interview. The transcripts were delivered to each participant and he was informed of his right to clarify, add, or delete any information in the transcript before it was used in this research study. The participants were allowed as much time as they deemed necessary to review the transcripts and make changes. Two of the participants made minor changes that included gap filling, and clarifying thoughts. Two of the participants made no changes at all. After they reviewed and edited transcripts, the participants notified me so that a post-interview meeting could be set up. These meetings were arranged via telephone calls and emails for the purpose of collecting the interview transcript. The meetings were brief (about 5 to 10 minutes in length), and the transcripts were returned to me. The participants signed the Transcript Release Form (Appendix G), the balance of their fifty-dollar honorarium was disbursed as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study, and to assist each participant with travel to and from the interview and post-interview meetings. Once logistic matters of collecting the transcripts, signing the release forms, and paying the honorariums were completed, the meetings were adjourned.

Analyzing the Data

Analyzing case study data can be somewhat convoluted since strategies and techniques are not well defined in case study literature (Patton, 1980; Yin, 2003). Therefore, it was important to have a general analytic strategy in order to ensure adequate analysis of the data. An analytic strategy helped ensure that the inquiry did not stall and pointed me back to the original question (Yin, 2003): *When adult males identify as fatherless, what factors of their experiences contribute to their fatherless identities?* The critical goal of data analysis was to handle the evidence in an orderly manner so that the interpretations of the data were compelling to the point where no other possible conclusions could be made (Yin, 1994).

Inductive Analysis

An inductive process of analysis was employed when working with the data generated through the interviews (Mertens, 1998; Patton, 1980). Inductive analysis was emergent in nature. Themes, patterns, and categories were not imposed on data, but rather naturally materialized as a result of data analysis (Gillham, 2000; Mertens, 1998; Patton, 1980). The process of analytic induction allowed the relationships among data and the phenomena to be categorized and developed within the case study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Case Record

Before the data for this case study was analyzed, a case record (Bromley, 1986) or case study database (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1994) was developed. A case record is any permanent or semi-permanent compilation of information that is relevant to the study. In the case at hand, the records took the form of audio recordings, descriptions of photographs and personal items of memorabilia, field notes, observations, and transcripts. These items individually are case materials but collectively shaped the case record (Bromley, 1986).

The case record allowed me to manage large amounts of data so that it could be efficiently accessed (Bassey, 1999; Patton, 1980). It contained all major information pertaining to the case in an edited form. The case record was the resource package from which I drew information in order to further analyze data (Gillham, 2000; Patton, 1980; Yin, 1994). When compiling the case record, any redundant information was sorted through, edited, and organized in a chronological fashion (Patton, 1980). For instance, all data pertaining to the first participant interviewed was organized first, followed by the data gathered from the second participant, and so on. In this condensed form, the data was more readily interpretable and provided the foundation for the case study (Mertens, 1999; Patton, 1980).

Once the case record was compiled, I read it through numerous times and highlighted information as I read (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). I also wrote jot notes, observations, impressions, queries, and comments in the margins of the case record. These procedures illuminated the most striking, and the most important data in the case record (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Information that was classified as concerns or issues was written on separate sheets of paper and cross-referenced to the case record so that its context could later be assessed if the information was deemed useful (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This separate list included observations that occurred cross-sectionally in the data (i.e. between participants) (Yin, 1994). Data obtained from the first participant was checked against the list first. Next, data from the second participant was checked, and so on. This repeated observations method of analysis further identified and refined the themes and ideas that reflected the case study's research questions (Yin, 1994). Any piece of information that did not share a common thread between participants constituted a new item on the list. For instance, if the second participant mentioned something that the first did not make

reference to in his experience, that piece of datum was labeled and jotted on the list separately. This list was then reviewed and categorized (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Categorizing Data

Guba and Lincoln (1981) outlined a process for categorizing data. Initially, I looked for regularities from the various sources of data. These regularities formulated categories that provided a basis for sorting the information. They were appropriately labeled and ultimately pointed to the issues and concerns rising from the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). This categorizing process revealed items of data that did not fit into specific categories. Such items were labeled and put on a separate "miscellaneous" list. Once a preliminary set of categories emerged, each category was checked for homogeneity and similarities among concepts (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). For concepts to be categorically linked they had to be logically related; they had to look alike. These categories were reviewed and reworded until a set of categories existed that encompassed the significant concerns and issues that were evident in the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

In order to establish a sufficient set of categories, a prioritizing process was followed (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). For instance, priority was given to issues and concerns that are mentioned by more than one participant, thereby increasing their salience. Others stood out because of their particular uniqueness, or had the ability to open up unrecognized areas of inquiry. Such issues and concerns had significant value in facilitating the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The set of categories was reasonably inclusive of the issues and concerns that were supported by the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To determine whether a set of categories was complete, I checked them internally and externally. Internally, the individual categories were

consistent; they were comprised of concepts that were similar and fit within the category. When

the set was viewed externally, they contributed to a much larger picture (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) liken the process of categorizing as akin to doing a jigsaw puzzle.

The individual categories pieced bits of data together. These categories then formed a complete

set, which tied all pieces of the puzzle together to create the big picture (Goetz & LeCompte,

1984).

Categorization Process

  Earlier, reference was made to a compiled list of items that was extracted from various

sources of data (see section *Case Record*). Essentially, it was this list that was put through a

categorization process to compile an appropriate set of categories (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The

first item on the list was colour highlighted and provided the tentative name for the first

category. The second item on the list was then compared to the first and was highlighted with the

same colour if a similarity was noted. If unrelated, it was left unmarked. This process continued

down through the list until all items similar to the first were highlighted with the same colour.

Next, a second colour was chosen and the list was revisited to highlight a second category. This

process continued until most items on the list were colour coded to a maximum of six colours.

Items highlighted with the same colour were then extracted to form separate lists. The

discoloured items formed a miscellaneous pile. These colour coded lists were reviewed

independently of the others and given labels that encapsulated the theme of the category. Once

named, each category was checked against the others to determine whether items needed to be

re-categorized. Finally, the items in the 'miscellaneous' pile were revisited to determine whether

they could fall within any of the refined categories. If not, they remained in the miscellaneous

pile. Some of these items were later included under specific categories as categories were

constantly changing. The items from the miscellaneous pile that never seemed to 'fit' were eventually discarded (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). For example, one participant speculated about his sister's fatherless experience. Since this piece of datum did not reflect his own experience, it was designated 'miscellaneous' and deemed irrelevant for this study.

Criteria for Judging the Findings of the Case Study

The criteria to evaluate the legitimacy of the results of this case study fell under a Constructivist paradigm. Under this paradigm, knowledge was achieved through interaction between the researcher and the participants, and was co-constructed in such a way that reality was interpreted rather than observed (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The criteria of rigor for this study that judge its credibility and quality include: construct validity, external validity, and reliability.

Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to developing an adequate set of measures in case study research (Mertens, 1998; Yin, 1994) so that the results of the study point to the worth and value of the research (Yin, 1994) ultimately increasing the credibility of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). There are several ways to increase construct validity; two of which were employed in this study. The first way was through utilizing multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary source of evidence. A second source of data was collected from descriptions of meaningful photos and other memorabilia that the participants chose to share during the interview. These items were symbolic of their fatherless experience or represented fatherlessness to them in one way or other (Patton, 2002).

Another way that construct validity was increased in the case study was by maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 1994). This refers to adequately tracing steps from beginning to end and

back again. The reader of the case study is able to follow how evidence was derived from the initial research questions to the conclusions of the study (Yin, 1994). This was achieved by making reference to specific interviews, photos, memorabilia, observations, and field notes contained in the case study database (Yin, 1994). When the database was consulted, the actual evidence was revealed as well as specific circumstances surrounding the collection of the evidence (Yin, 1994).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) also suggested methods for establishing credibility of research relative to construct validity. The results of this case study were validated by concepts of host verification and phenomenon recognition (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). By allowing the four hosts in this study (men who self-identified as fatherless) an opportunity to review and edit transcripts of their interviews, the data was verified. Furthermore, the phenomenon of *fatherlessness* was recognized as 'real' to the men who experienced it, ultimately making the results of this study credible (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

External Validity

External validity refers to "…establishing a domain to which a study's findings can be generalized" (Yin, 2003, p. 34). Researchers that are more critical of qualitative methods argue that single cases are not generalizable. Yin (2003) argues that one can make generalizations from a case study when they are analytical in nature. Analytical generalizations endeavor to broaden the view to a particular theory (Yin, 2003). The theory to which the case study is generalized must be tested through replication logic. This means that the findings that support the theory would have been arrived at in more than one study, or the same study when repeated by another investigator (Yin, 1994). However, external validity was best sustained in this fatherless identity case study by providing a detailed description of the contextual framework of the study. In doing

so, individual readers may identify with the participants' experiences and validate the results through personal comparisons (Yin, 2003).

Reliability

The goal of reliability was to ensure that the study had few errors and was void of bias (Mertens, 1998; Yin, 1994). Reliability required that the results of the study be replicable (Morse & Richards, 2002). This is difficult in qualitative research since data is contextual (Sandelowski, 1993). However, it is not impossible. Yin (2003) suggested that results can be replicated if the researcher is careful to document procedures adequately. The development of a case study database was one way to organize and document the data, ultimately increasing the reliability of the study (Yin, 1994).

Reporting the Findings

In order to effectively represent the data in this case study, the purpose of the study was revisited - to render the fatherless identity to the reader (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). When the purpose of a case study is to render, the appropriate action at an evaluative level should be to epitomize, and the appropriate product should be a portrayal. The portrayal of the fatherless identity is represented descriptively in Chapter 4 of this document (Patton, 1980).

Ethical Considerations

The University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research granted approval for this study. The fatherless study was considered low risk since the adult males that enrolled had reached the age of majority. The manner in which the interviews were conducted allowed the participants to discuss sensitive issues only if they felt comfortable. They were not deceived or coerced in any way about the nature or participatory need for involvement in the study. The participants were presented with the Informed Consent Form at

the onset of the interviews and acknowledged their willingness to participate by signing the form (see Appendix C). Furthermore, the participants were given the opportunity to review their transcript documents in order that it accurately presented their intended disclosures. Consent was re-affirmed by signing the Transcript Release Form before the data was used in the study (see Appendix G).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of this exploratory case study on the topic of the fatherless identity as experienced and described by four adult male participants. These men self-identified as fatherless and responded to recruitment advertisements asking the question *"Are You Fatherless?"* I did not impose a definition of fatherlessness with the intent to explore the phenomenon as defined and experienced by individuals who identified with it. The data represents the amalgamated experiences of these individuals and is presented in response to the questions that prompted this research study: *When adult males identify as fatherless, what factors of their experiences contribute to their fatherless identities?*

Chapter Four begins with a brief description of each of the case participants. Their experiences illuminate the case of the fatherless identity in four categories: (1) Definitions of family, the role of a father, and fatherlessness as understood by these individuals are provided, (2) the impacts of fatherlessness on the individuals' senses of identity, intellectual, socio-emotional, and economic well-being are explored, (3) factors that influence their fatherless identities are suggested, and (4) coping strategies integral to the experiences of fatherlessness are identified. The data will be represented descriptively in this chapter.

To augment the readability of this document, certain conventions are employed. Single quotation marks are placed around words or phrases that infer meaning based on how it is understood by participants. For instance, the word 'father' may not necessarily refer to the biological parent of the individual. Rather, it may reference people with whom the participant experienced a father-child relationship. Single quotation marks also indicate emergent sub-themes or categories from the data. Square brackets are used to interject words to improve the coherence of the text, or to bring clarity to participants' implicit references. A consecutive string

of three dots at the beginning, middle, or end of a quotation is used to omit irrelevant text and increase readability of the document. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Double quotation marks are used to highlight the specific words of participants that offered poignancy to thoughts, ideas, or themes emerging from the data. Quotes have undergone minor changes for comprehensive purposes while maintaining the richness and intended meaning of the data. For example, redundant and repetitious words or phrases may have been extracted from some quotes to increase readability and comprehension for the reader.

Case Participants and their Fathers

The data for the case study on the fatherless identity was collected, analyzed, and interpreted based on the experiences of four men who self-identified as fatherless. These men were asked to bring items of memorabilia to the interview that symbolized their sense of fatherlessness. The fatherless sons are introduced, and their symbolic items are described in this section with the hope that the reader will get to know these men and gain an understanding of fatherlessness through their experiences.

To comprehend the depth of these men's experiences, it was important to get a sense of how these men viewed their fathers, and whether their impressions of their fathers were instrumental in them assuming a fatherless identity. Throughout the course of the interviews, the men provided character descriptions of their 'father figures'. The fathers were described in archetypical, and sometimes stereotypical terms; they were men who took on traditional roles in the family, encouraged masculine behaviours, and disengaged emotionally with their sons. A wide range of characteristics were presented, which increasingly made me aware that the 'father' of the 'fatherless' is difficult to character sketch. It was apparent that well-meaning, loving, and caring fathers can leave sons feeling as fatherless as abusive, uncaring ones.

Steve and His Father, Jim

Steve presented as a creative, intelligent, and insightful individual. He was the first to respond to the recruitment advertisement. After a brief telephone discussion, it was determined that Steve met the protocol criteria. He self-identified as fatherless and briefly explained that his biological parents divorced when he was an infant, and he had no real or meaningful connection with his father. Furthermore, geographical separation and emotional disconnection from his biological father were aspects that contributed to his fatherless experience.

Steve is a tall, slender young Caucasian man in his early twenties. He has a unique and personal sense of style that may be interpreted as trendy. At the onset of the interview, Steve appeared somewhat nervous but we quickly developed a rapport and the nervousness seemed to subside. He disclosed aspects of his experience readily from the onset of the interview. He sometimes appeared shy when talking about the more personal aspects of his character and personality. I got the sense that it was brought on by fear of how he would be perceived. I found I had a heightened awareness to present myself in a non-judgmental manner in order to ease his comfort with sharing whatever aspects of his experience he deemed appropriate.

Steve brought a baby blanket to the interview that was made and given to him by his grandmother at birth. It was an item that gave him comfort as a child; something he could curl up with and love. He gently caressed the item as he spoke of its significance, "It was really important to me as a child." It was an item that had special significance because it served as a prop in his fantasy life. He used it in a creative way during a period of his life that he particularly enjoyed. It was an escape item used in his imagination to take him away when he did not like what was happening in his life at the time. Steve shares, "Sometimes when I was a kid and I was in my room…if I didn't really like where I was at that point, I could just sort of go somewhere

else and pretend like it was an Arabian robe or something." This particular item represented fatherlessness in that it reminded him of the time in his life when he was the closest he had ever been to his father. He realized, "That was actually the time in my life when I had the closest relationship that I ever had with my father." Over the years he had gotten rid of, or destroyed other evidence of his creative self, but this was one of the few items he had kept from his childhood.

Steve described his father, Jim, as an individual with whom he was not interested in developing any sort of father-son relationship. He referenced his father by his first name in the interview. Steve described Jim as a person that was incapable of being present as a father. He was likened to an employer; someone that sent Steve money every month. According to Steve, Jim was a suppressor of emotions and never really learned how to express his own emotions, or respect the emotions of others. He did not cultivate an emotional connection in many of his relationships. Steve recognized this as part of the issue in their relationship. While Steve made attempts to recognize Jim as his father, he described them as token attempts. Steve relayed, "He never really played the role. He never really tried to. All of our efforts to sort of acknowledge him as my father [were] really token." Steve described Jim as not very stoic; he didn't stick with things. Steve expressed his opinion that Jim had hollow ideas of what a father-son relationship should be. On visitations, Steve would prefer that Jim not be around. To Steve, "father" was an unstable term.

Charlie and His Father, John

Charlie responded to the recruitment advertisement by e-mail. He provided a phone number and I initiated a telephone conversation shortly after receiving his message. After a brief conversation with Charlie it seemed that he met the recruitment criteria. Charlie lost his father

when he was a teenager through an unfortunate set of circumstances. His father passed away when Charlie was only sixteen years of age.

Charlie presented as a laid back, conversational, courteous, and friendly individual. He's a Caucasian man in his early fifties, average height, and well groomed. He was very punctual and showed up a few minutes early for the interview. At first he seemed a little nervous, but I felt it was nothing out of the ordinary considering he was meeting me for the first time, and the impending interview might have left him feeling somewhat vulnerable. I offered him refreshments and we chatted briefly about unrelated matters such as the weather and plans for the day. By the time we started the interview, he appeared very comfortable and was open to discussing various aspects of his fatherless experience.

Charlie brought a picture of himself and his father to the interview. The picture was black and white and was taken when he was around thirteen years of age. It represented a happy time in his life. Charlie had been walking down the street with his dad one day and his father spontaneously asked a photographer on the street to take a picture of them. He felt proud that his dad wanted to take a picture with him. He felt loved. Charlie solemnly relayed, "This represents a together time. We were walking. He actually wanted to take a picture with his son. I can't do that anymore with him…He can't put his arm around me." It represented fatherlessness in that it was a reminder that his dad is no longer physically there; he can no longer have pictures taken with his father. This particular photo was significant because Charlie felt it was taken during a time when his father was especially proud of Charlie's physical and intellectual development. It also serves as a reminder of his father's protection over him during a period of his life when he was affected by his mother's behavior in the home.

Charlie described his father, John, as a very loving, caring man. Charlie recalled, "My dad…never yelled…he was very loving. He provided a good home. He did his best around the house." John represented safety and protection for Charlie. Charlie had conflicting thoughts towards his father on this issue. He wondered why John protected him yet failed to extend the same degree of protection to his sister. Charlie explained that their mother abused his sister; his father knew it was happening, and did not intervene. Charlie recalled, "There is sort of a juxtaposition where on one part…very loving, very kind…and on the other part…he knew what was happening and didn't do anything." Despite his faults, he was supportive of Charlie's interests, especially in sports and music. John was described a good provider for the family but was absent from the home for extended periods of time due to work. When John was around, he was the "glue" that bound the family members together. Charlie described John as an extrovert that seemed to get along with everyone. He was a good hunter, fisherman, and builder. John's pursuits were described as stereotypically masculine, but he only included Charlie in some of his pursuits – mostly fishing.

Joe and His Father, Tom

Joe responded to the recruitment poster by email to ask if I still needed participants for the study. I replied to his email, and later we spoke over the phone to determine whether he met the criteria. Joe self-identified as fatherless, and after a brief conversation it became apparent that he fit the criteria based on his own interpretation of fatherlessness.

Joe is in his early twenties, stands about 5-feet 4-inches tall, and is of Hispanic descent. He was dressed in casual clothing, carried a backpack, and seemed to fit well in campus surroundings. When Joe entered the interview room he was quiet and reserved. He seemed to be gauging the environment and his level of comfort in discussing the topic with me. Shortly after

the interview started, Joe pulled out all the stops and talked extensively about his experience of fatherlessness. He spoke at a quickened pace that seemed to be his natural way of speaking.

Joe brought a note he had written about his father. He titled it: *What I Won't Say to You.* He described it as an emotional piece that had no structure. It went as follows:

I still have a picture of you in my wallet and it weighs heavier than you could ever imagine. Yet I still keep it with me and I still have that picture of you in your white tux with your mission tag hung on top. I keep it on my bookshelf but I don't want to lie.

This note expresses Joe's moral dilemma. He attributes a certain meaning to the act of carrying a picture in his wallet. It is a sentimental practice that, in his mind, expresses a particular fondness for the person in the picture. Joe is conflicted because he does not feel a picture of his father should be given the significant value that he assigns to it. The idea that the picture weighs heavy is symbolic of the emotional burden that he carries as a result of his sense of fatherlessness. The picture itself is significant in that his father is wearing a white tux – white being symbolic of something that is 'untarnished'. The mission's tag that hangs on the picture is symbolic of 'good will' or 'good intention'. The image is not a true reflection of how he felt about his father. The picture, its meaning, and significant place it holds in the wallet do not accurately represent how he truly feels about his father and their relationship. He feels it is a lie.

Joe described his father, Tom, as a self-disciplined individual that encouraged Joe to be "the best" at whatever he chose to do - especially academic pursuits. Joe feels Tom's encouragement stemmed from his father's need to work hard, laborious jobs as a result of not having the same educational opportunities as his son. Joe relayed that his father expressed the desire for his son's betterment but did not really support him adequately in achieving the goals. He felt the encouragement Tom provided when Joe was doing well was disparate when

compared to the support he felt when he was not doing as well; that support and encouragement from his father was conditional on his performance. This was a contentious issue with Joe, since he felt a father should not only be supportive when a child is doing well. Joe was emphatic when he said, "He…shouldn't love me just when I make him proud, or when I do the right things. He should need to love me all the time."

Sam and His Fathers, Bob and Ben

Sam responded to the recruitment advertisement via email. We later spoke on the phone and it was determined that he fit the criteria for the study. He asked if a mentor could participate in the interview with him. I informed him that my ethical protocol for the study did not accommodate others to be present so that anonymity could be assured. I gave him time to think about whether he still wished to participate and told him I would seek the advice of my supervisor about having a mentor present. A couple of days later I called to tell him that it would be more suitable for him to do the interview alone so that the account of his experience would not be influenced by having another person present. He agreed to proceed with the study and assured me it would be fine to do the interview alone.

Sam is a slim, average height, First Nations male in his early twenties. He dressed casually in a 'rapper style' with baggy clothes and a form-fitting toque. Sam described himself as, "…a little bit egotistical. Competitive. Aggressive." He entered the interview appearing a little anxious. After offering some refreshments and engaging in casual conversation he seemed more at ease. He spoke fairly quickly throughout the interview and was comfortable in letting me know if he needed to talk more about a specific topic, or move on to a new one. He skirted around some of the questions and I noted that he was uncomfortable talking about things pertaining to masculine identity. He asked to take a smoke break, which I allowed. I paused the

recording. When he returned about ten minutes later to resume the interview, he chose to change the topic.

Sam had intended to bring a figurine of an eagle but did not have time to collect it before the interview. He described its significance in terms of how it represented fatherlessness to him. It was a gift that his father had given his mother when she was alive. It represented a time when his parents were together, and served as a visual reminder that his father abandoned him. The symbolic significance of an eagle was expressed as particularly important in the aboriginal culture. Sam said that it represents strength and courage – characteristics he attributed to his mother for having endured abuse in her relationship with his father, Bob. Sam remembered:

Before she passed away her spirit name was given as an eagle. Something about that reminds me of my dad for some reason. When she was with him it was basically a fight to survive and the fact that I was basically abandoned by my dad…it brings that out.

While the eagle may be a visual reminder of his mother, it is equally representative of his sense of fatherlessness. When Sam sees the eagle he is reminded that he no longer has a mother and begins to reflect on the reason for that perceived reality. It conjures up feelings of abandonment by his father. Sam blames his father for his mother's death and consequently is not willing to accept his father for what he has done. The resentment Sam holds towards his father and his unwillingness to accept him intensifies his sense of fatherlessness.

Sam recognized a number of fathers in his life, but only gave details about his biological father, Bob, and his foster father, Ben. When asked specifically about his biological father, he described Bob as an abusive alcoholic that is currently incarcerated for assault. He feels his father fits the stereotype of a 'typical native father.' When asked to explain what that meant, Sam simply said, "I don't like stereotypes." Sam categorized Bob as part of the residential school

generation. He relayed a particular time when Bob sent an apologetic letter to his children outlining his desire to better himself and be a part of their lives but felt his father made no effort to fulfill that commitment. Rather, he feels Bob continued to feed his own addiction to alcohol, which Sam described as "selfish."

Ben was the first foster father that Sam considered to play the role of father. He felt that Ben was more like a father to him than Bob, since he was supposed to be adopted into that foster family. Sam revealed the details surrounding the failed adoption. He said, "I was considered adopted by the Social Services, but it wasn't in writing because my reserve actually refused my adoption." He described Ben as a hardworking man who took on a breadwinner role in the family. Sam recalls, "My dad was working so hard to pay the bills…He did everything for my mum and I feel that she devoted too much to…her hobbies and my dad had to work really hard to support that." Even though Sam considered Ben a father, he described their relationship as less than ideal because of the amount of time Ben spent working. Sam relayed, "Yeah, but it was not the ideal father-son relationship because he was working. He had no time for us basically."

The participants in the study seemed to be in touch with various aspects of their experiences, and provided adequate descriptions of their fathers, and the symbolic items of fatherlessness throughout the interviews. These descriptions provided insight into their fatherless identities, and helped to bring out aspects of their family contexts. The families of the fatherless men are described in the following section.

Fatherless Family Paradigms

In order to understand fatherlessness and what it meant to the men in this study it was important to take a look at the various paradigms that composed their families. The family structures and the dynamics that occurred within the family units may be key contributing factors

to the men's identification as fatherless and the degree to which fatherlessness was experienced. Furthermore, when considering the impact of fatherlessness on these men it was important to understand the circumstances surrounding family life, since it was difficult to determine whether the impact stemmed from absent fathers, or from the varying degrees of dysfunction within their families. This section highlights how the men defined their families, and speaks to the way that the family dynamics contributed to their fatherless identities.

The families of participants did not necessarily consist of what Steve described as "a normal heterosexual paradigm;" a mother, father, sons, and daughters. In referencing this paradigm, he suggested that defining 'family' in those terms was simply society's way "…to organize human beings", which does not necessarily fit with what some may feel constitutes a 'family'. The families described included immediate and distant relatives such as mothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. The biological male parent in all instances was deceased, incarcerated, or geographically and emotionally distant from the participants.

The family environments in which Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam were raised were very diverse in terms of how they functioned. Participants reported witnessing physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse between parents, between parent and child, or between siblings. At times, the abuse was exacerbated by alcohol and drug use by parent figures. Steve recalled, "It just obviously wasn't a healthy situation for either of them...They were both alcoholics and drug addicts and abusive. I'm sure bad things happened all the time." In Steve, Joe, and Sam's experience this lead to the breakdown of the primary family unit resulting in seconding family constructs. For the purpose of this study, *primary family units* consist of biological parents and siblings and *secondary family units* refer to stepparents and stepsiblings, or foster families. I suggest the use of terms such as *primary* and *secondary family units* in order to help the reader

follow the changing dynamics of the participant's family constructs. In instances of divorce or separation, custodial care was shared among parents. In foster situations, supervised visitation was awarded to biological parents. In Charlie's case, the biological father passed away and the mother eventually remarried but the participant was emancipated from home by that time. Family dynamics played a part in the development of fatherless identities.

<div align="center">*Factors Influencing a Fatherless Identity*</div>

The case of the fatherless identity revealed other factors that influenced the degree to which male individuals experienced the phenomenon. The most poignant influence presented by the participants seemed to be the social aspect of their experiences. The social factors that gave way to a fatherless identity were influenced by society in general, and more familial social pressures. This section disseminates ways that these societal governances made key contributions to a fatherless identity for these men.

Image of Ideal Father

Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam provided considerable detail describing their perceptions of their absent fathers (see section *Case Participants and Their Fathers*). The ways that these sons characterized their fathers lead me to consider the possibility that there was something about the father-son relationships, and the sons' perceptions of their fathers, that contributed to their senses of fatherlessness, and ultimately lead them to assume a fatherless identity. After determining *who* they felt their fathers were, I deemed it necessary for these men to describe the ideal father so that we could better understand what it was that compelled them toward identifying themselves as fatherless. They were asked to describe an ideal father, define an ideal relationship with a father, and describe the type of father they would hope to be to their children if they were to become fathers. Steve, Joe, and Sam had not yet fathered children. Charlie was the only

<div align="center">74</div>

participant that had become a father. This section describes the collective thoughts and perceptions of the ideal father according to these four men.

Steve shared his belief that there is nothing intrinsic that makes a father. He offered, "I don't see there being a role necessarily. I think we create that role. It's nothing intrinsic." The amalgamated characteristics depicted a father who shows unconditional love and support for his child and, not only provides financially, but nurtures his son in an environment where he is free to be himself. Steve suggested, "When it gets down to it, what makes a good parent is just someone who is capable of loving someone unconditionally and making them feel safe and free to be themselves." Steve felt an ideal father has no greater desire than his son's happiness and safety. He teaches his son necessary skills, offers advice, provides discipline, and is 'present' emotionally and physically to offer guidance and help where needed. Joe defined the ideal father role when he stated, "I would expect a father's role to be someone who's supportive and someone who's there to listen and someone who's there to also, if need be…give advice or lend a hand in any opportunity he can." Joe and Sam felt a father should be a son's best friend while still fulfilling his role as a father. Sam explains, "The best friend trait would be…to be there for them to hang out with and have fun with, and the fatherly trait would be to keep them out of trouble."

The perceptions of what these men felt a father 'should be' were disparate when considering their perceptions of their own fathers. Obviously, fathers fall short. Joe summed it up nicely when he declared, "Parents make mistakes." Despite their fathers' perceived failures, two of these men had moments throughout the interview of trying to transform their image of their fathers into their ideal father image. Steve defended, "I don't place all the blame for the way our relationship unfolded on him necessarily. He's not like this intrinsically evil dude." Joe tried to

rationalize his father image when he inquired of himself, "What has he really done to me? He hasn't been there, which sucks, but …he's never been emotionally, physically, or any way abusive towards me at all, and when I was there with him he was fine." There seemed to be something contributing to fatherlessness in this disparity, despite the sons' attempts to make the images conform. Sons had ideas about what fathers should be, and when their fathers did not reflect that image, even after attempting to see their fathers in a more positive light, their fatherless identity was promoted.

Sources that Influence a Fatherless Identity

The ideas that assisted the formulation of these men's perceptions of their fathers and their ideal father images came from a variety of sources. This section uncovers references from the data that indicated the roles that mothers, other family members, and media played in causing this disparity, possibly promoting the fatherless identity.

The Mothers' Messages

Joe and Sam described situations where their mothers withheld them from the fathers. Reasons that were offered for the decisions pertained to differing opinions on discipline between the parent figures, and an unwillingness to allow the child an opportunity to live with the father. Joe expressed a preference to live with his father when he recalled, "I wanted to live with him when I was really young and never. She wouldn't let me." He spoke disdainfully when he said, "My mom told me random crap. She told me he was in jail, which he had never been."

Sam felt his mother kept him from seeing his father because she was angry about the father's decision to join a religious group. Her response was to tell Sam that his father "…doesn't believe in God. He's basically an atheist." Sam remembered, "There was a point in time where she didn't want me to see my dad because she had anger issues with all this. She

basically separated me and my dad." Sam disclosed that he wanted his parents to reunite so that they could be a family again.

Family and Media Messages

Steve referred to messages that were implicitly relayed that influenced his relationship with his father. These messages were often implied from watching examples of father-son relationships on television, and observing other father-son duos in the family. After revealing, "I knew what father was supposed to be from TV," Steve went on to explain:

> From the minute you're born there are lots of expectations that your own family, and families that you see, and the culture…by the time you're six you have a really, really well-developed idea of what a father is supposed to be and what everyone thinks that is, and you either embrace it or you just don't feel it with this particular person.

Steve later described a time when he and his father were cajoled into throwing a football with each other and the awkwardness he felt at the time. Others in the family implicitly expected them to participate in the activity and watched as they tried to engage. Steve remembers feeling the experience was, "Really bad."

The messages that these men received - whether from mothers, other family members, or media – often discredited their fathers. Participants recalled hearing others say things about their fathers that labeled them as alcoholics, emasculated them, devalued their worth, and verbally reinforced the father's absence. Steve posited, "My mom has a lot of [expletive] ideas on what makes a man. By saying he wasn't a man she was discrediting him and discrediting his masculinity." Sam remembered hearing things like, "Your dad's an alcoholic. He's no good. He's in prison now. He's going to be getting out in ten years for assaulting a woman," which may have strongly influenced his perception of his father. Later he admitted the influential nature

of these messages when he disclosed, "Knowing what they have told me about my dad, knowing his history and background, knowing he was in prison, I probably wouldn't trust him because of that." These messages may have influenced their impression of 'father', ultimately affecting their fatherless identity.

Influence of Government Agency and Support Services

Steve and Sam acknowledged what appeared to have been a governmental agency, and support services influence on their fatherless experience. Child and Family Services guidelines, courts that award custodial care and child support, First Nations councils, and school counsellors were identified as influential considerations that affected the degree to which two of these men felt fathered. Sam had the notion that social services withheld his biological father from visiting. Referring to his father in this statement he offered, "He had a bad reputation with the social workers that had our case, he wasn't allowed to see us. The only way to see us would have been supervised visits with a cop or some kind of parole officer." Later, Sam spoke about the foster family and a barrier that kept him from official adoption. He seemed disheartened when he said, "I was considered adopted by the Social Services, but it wasn't in writing because my reserve actually refused my adoption." He went on to say, " My dream would have been to be adopted by a family."

Steve suggested that the law requiring his father to pay child support might have forced an expectation to provide financially when all the while there was no emotional connection that indicated a father-son relationship. He said, "I feel like our culture and laws create certain expectations that are unrealistic but nevertheless need to be met…So, because we have this government, I felt…*it's your job* [emphasis added]." Later in the interview, Steve referred to an

encounter with a school counselor that was especially influential in formulating his fatherless identity. He recollected:

> I had to see a counselor in grade 3 and she made me draw a family tree…and she made me put an 'x' over every line where there had been a divorce in the family. I think that was really significant at the time. It was really, really significant…It stayed in my memory for so long. At the time it was kind of traumatic to have to do that. Up to that point I never thought of…divorce as a bad thing but as soon as that 'x' went through that line, I felt like it wasn't a good thing. That 'x' wasn't a good thing. I think I considered [divorce] a good thing because (a) I didn't really like my dad (b) I knew that my mom and my dad together were a bad mix.

The evidence indicated that, even the most well-meaning messages and intentions could be harmful to an individual's sense of self. In these illustrations, the messages that these men received from various people, institutions, and media seemed to have a significant influence on their fatherless identities.

Inherited Fathering

Further to messages from influential groups, there was evidence in the data that suggested fathers inherited and passed on certain characteristics of fathering that might have contributed to a greater sense of fatherlessness in successive generations. Steve speculated about inherited fathering when he said, "He had an awful relationship with his dad and I don't think it ever really even existed." The experiences of these men were not dissimilar on this issue, at least among three of the participants. Fathers were described as traditional in the sense that they lacked emotional expression, and had preconceived notions of stereotypical 'manly' activities. Steve

suggested that his father probably inherited this way of fathering from his father whom he described as "…master of suppression of emotions."

Charlie feared that he might have become heir to his father's emotional absence. He disclosed:

> Part of losing my father…one of the big impacts was not being a good father to my kids. I felt I wasn't a good father. I always said to myself when I have kids I'm going to be the greatest father. I was good to my girls as far as their dancing and all that. My boys - they both played hockey, but I just didn't have the interest in it that I should have with them. I didn't get involved and I'm thinking that has to do with…because my dad died.

The fathering characteristics that were modeled by predecessor fathers, and the inherited characteristics of fatherhood seemed to have affected the emotional connection that these men had with their fathers. Furthermore, there was indication from Charlie that inherited fathering traits may have continued through him.

Influence of Time

While fathering qualities may have been passed on, the need for a father seemed to have been bound in time. Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam all impressed the notion that there is a crucial time when a father is needed, and in their experiences, when they needed their fathers they were not there. As they grew older, the necessity for a father seemed to lessen. Eventually, the desire to connect with their fathers, or develop a relationship with him was minimally important. Steve and Joe said they reached a point when they thought it was too late; that they were beyond the point where they felt he was needed, or even wanted. Steve was very "non-challant" when he spoke, and Joe took an irritated tone that seemed bitter:

I want him to know what he did, but at the same time it doesn't matter to me anymore because he can't change it now. I'm not going to have a relationship with him for a long time if I ever do and it's not going to be the same relationship I needed when I needed it…I feel like it's too late to build a relationship now. Maybe over the course of years and years we'll have a better relationship than we have now…I have no idea, but I don't really want it now.

Sam felt that he was not ready to accept his father at this point in his life and that he would only meet his father socially for a short period of time if given the opportunity. Charlie shared that he did not have enough time with his father and would love to still have him around to spend time with. Charlie eventually got used to his father not being around, but still felt a void from his absence.

The influencing factors that seemed to assist in the construction of these men's fatherless identities were often related to components pertaining to the impacts of the experiences. At times it was difficult to distinguish the two. It became clear that attributes such as the ideal father image, messages from influential people, agencies, and media, the inherited qualities of fatherhood, and the element of time were influential parts of these men's experiences. Their experiences helped shape their fatherless identities, and their fatherless identities, in turn, generated experiences that otherwise may not have occurred. It is within these engendered experiences that I found the impacts of fatherlessness.

Impacts of Fatherlessness

The case of fatherlessness indicated numerous ways that individuals who have experienced the phenomenon were impacted. This section identifies impacts on a male's sense of masculine identity, as well as his emotional, social, intellectual, and economic wellbeing.

Masculine Identity

The case of the fatherless identity provided evidence that suggested an impact on the son's sense of masculinity. Reciprocally, the adult male's identity may have affected the degree to which he felt fatherless. The men were asked to talk about masculine and feminine characteristics, and whether they felt their fatherless experience impacted their sense of masculine or feminine identity. There was recognition that a father can impact a son's masculine identity.

In terms of masculinity, the men readily identified stereotypical characteristics that had to do with jobs, activities, and emotions. Steve prefaced that it had nothing to do with whether one is 'male' or 'female'. However, when asked about feminine characteristics the men were reluctant to share their views. Joe and Sam suggested that naming feminine characteristics seemed to be a way of stereotyping males.

These men all identified their fathers as having more stereotypical views on masculinity and femininity. Steve provided a poignant example when he said that the masculine tendency is to suppress emotions while the feminine tendency would be to egress emotions. Steve and Joe both felt that masculine and feminine characteristics probably have more to do with physical attributes and appearances rather than emotional expression. Masculine and feminine identity is more defined in the way people dress or wears their hair, or whether or not they wear makeup. Steve relayed:

It's weird because I call myself a man. I identify as a man but I don't think it necessarily has a lot to do with a masculine or feminine characteristic…it's just the way I wear my hair and dress and stuff like that. I have a lot of problems with people who are too

interested in cultivating or emphasizing or placing on a pedestal their masculinity and emphasizing that part of themselves.

Joe offered a simplistic summary of masculinity, "To me it's almost purely defined by your physical characteristics. If you're born with certain genitals, I guess you're a man." While Joe felt physical characteristics define one as masculine, he surmised that, had his father been more present, his father may not have allowed some of Joe's more feminine expressions like wearing black nail polish, nor would he have tolerated Joe's overt emotional behaviors such as self-mutilation.

Steve and Joe identified as having more feminine characteristics based on what they felt society would consider feminine or masculine. In terms of sexual identity and orientation, Steve disclosed that he is gay. Charlie, Joe, and Sam all expressed that others have queried either their sexual orientation or sense of masculine identity. Furthermore, all of the participants stated that they were more comfortable around females, tended to have more female friends, or got along better with females than with males.

Charlie attributed his contentment around females to his introverted personality; it was easier to be introverted around females than males. Charlie felt his father did not like that aspect of Charlie's personality. Charlie sensed his father perceived him as a "sissy"; that he was not manly enough. He felt he was not the kind of kid his father wanted him to be. "He wanted me to be more like a jock, I think… more manly, not as introverted." This may explain why Charlie pursued certain sports, such as lacrosse. Since he felt his father's perception of him was that he was unmanly, Charlie's response may have been to engage in activities that his father considered manlier. Charlie postulated, "He was happiest, though, when I was playing lacrosse because there was his son doing a manly thing with the guys."

Charlie also claimed that he sought out relationships with other males that were more introverted than him in order to appear more extroverted to his father. Charlie hypothesized this clearly when he stated, "I read this somewhere…a lot of introverts pick guys that they think are ten times the introvert they are for friends. So, I did that because it made me feel comfortable." Charlie clearly associated masculinity with extroversion, felt that his father wanted him to be more extroverted, and tried to appear more extroverted so that his father would consider him more masculine.

Sam thought his ease in the presence of women had to do with his unwillingness to engage in competition with other men. He unveiled, "I feel more comfortable talking to women than men because they're basically always competitive and I don't like being in competition with people…I don't like losing. It's something to do with being abandoned." Joe felt his contentment around women had to do with his openness to express emotion, which he felt men often have a more difficult time doing. He offered, "I don't really have a problem opening up. So, to me that is more of an effeminate thing." Steve disclosed that he had closer relationships with the women in his family, chose to identify with feminine characteristics rather than masculine ones, and expressed a dislike for men who "propped up" their masculine characteristics, especially gay men.

Hiding Aspects of Self

Being gay was one of the things that Steve tried to hide for years. Like the other fatherless men in this study, Steve disclosed deeply personal aspects of his experiences that were withheld from other significant people in his life for various reasons. For some men, it was interpreted as an attempt at self-protection; to survive in an environment that may not have understood or accepted them otherwise. For others, hiding aspects or details of one's life was a

way to avoid the complexities that disclosure may cause in an already complicated experience. Whatever the reason, the things that these men kept hidden seemed to have contributed to their fatherless identities.

Steve kept aspects of 'self' hidden because he felt there were implicit expectations that his father placed on him. He recalls, "I don't feel he ever really explicitly placed any expectations on me. I feel like there were a lot of implicit expectations." Steve made reference to a time in his life when he attempted to live out the implicit expectations. He said, "I was younger and I was still in something of a relationship with him. I tried to put on sort of a *normal dude act* [emphasis added]." To appear 'normal' Steve reported hiding his sexual identity and certain interests, such as fashion and antebellum architecture, as a means of protection from perceived judgment and ridicule imposed on him by family and others within his social sphere. Steve poignantly shared:

> My whole strategy, once I sort of developed a strategy, was to go under the radar and do
> well enough so that nobody would try and look for things because I was trying to hide all
> of those things about myself.

As a result, Steve felt he must have appeared blank to others. He disclosed:

> I don't even know what kind of person I must have appeared to them. I must have
> appeared really kind of *blank* because, as much as I hid what I really was, I didn't really
> make much of an effort to be what they wanted me to be [emphasis added].

Joe reported that he also withheld certain details of his life from his father, particularly the details surrounding complicated relationships with women. He announced his engagement to his father that was later called off. He did not feel the need to relay the specific details of the breakup so he framed it in a way that would lead his father to believe the wedding was postponed

rather than canceled. Joe expressed that he wanted to share the details of past relationships with his father but felt it would only complicate matters further. He said, "I don't think he knows when I lost my virginity, or even close to how many women I've been with, or the seriousness of those relationships, or the troubles I was going through with them." While processing his decision not to share certain aspects of his life with his father he said, "This is something that I just know I would've talked to him about had he been there and I trusted him…even if he was there emotionally." The emotional disconnection was barring Joe from sharing things with his father.

The idea of talking about emotions and feelings was a theme for Sam's secret, as well. Sam reported hiding his true feelings about the breakup of his foster parents. After engaging in what he termed *rebellious behaviour* as a result of their breakup, he was referred for counselling. He disclosed that he lied to his counsellor about the real reason for his behaviour. Sam lead the counsellor to believe that he wanted his 'parents' to get back together when in fact he was hiding his true feelings for his foster mother's boyfriend; that he was beginning to see him as a father figure despite an earlier resistance to accept him. Sam reveals, "As a result of anger about having that new father figure in my house…I started stealing…and cutting things…I broke a lot of stuff. I broke into our next-door neighbor's house. I started smoking just to get back." Later in reference to his behavior he confessed, "I remember going to counselling. I had basically told him lies. I didn't want to tell him why I was behaving this way." Sam further explains, "I was starting to like this father figure, despite my actions. You know when there's something you think you don't want but in reality you're basically covering up your true feelings about a person?"

Like Sam, Charlie had also buried a secret. Charlie uncovered a deep secret about his father's death that he had never before shared with anyone. He spoke of an argument that he had with his father the day his father died. He reverently recounted the details:

I was angry because I had a fight with him the day that he did die and I battled with that for a long time… I felt so bad that, when he did die…when we got the call…I blamed myself. I thought *oh dear, look what I did*…and to this day I never told anyone that [emphasis added].

The aspects of these individual experiences that were once hidden, and in some cases remain hidden from the fathers, speak to the necessity of trust and emotional connection in the father-son relationship. Fear of perception and the impending emotional pain that may have come from exposing the 'truth' kept some of these men from sharing important details about their lives with their fathers. Ultimately, this intensified the emotional distance that to some extent has defined their fatherless experience. In Charlie's case, having believed that he caused his father's death not only intensified his fatherless experience, rather impacted him emotionally to a point where he kept the details of his last emotional exchange with his father hidden for years. No emotional connection, negative emotional connection, and lack of positive emotional connection with fathers are becoming clear factors in defining a fatherless identity.

Emotional Impact

Charlie's secret about the argument he had with his father before he died is a poignant example of how the fatherless experience has impacted these men emotionally. The emotional impact was divided in two categories: (1) emotional connections, and (2) emotional responses. The fatherless men provided evidence that emotionally disconnected, or negative emotionally connected father-son relationships contributed to their fatherless identities. Furthermore, the

emotional responses that infused the relationship perpetuated the emotional disconnections, or

negative emotional connections. The result was an impact that not only affected the men's

emotional wellbeings, but more adequately defined their fatherless identities.

Father-Son Emotional Connection. The fatherless identities of these men were impacted

by a host of factors that contributed to the lack of emotional connection, or the negative

emotional connection with their fathers. This section begins with examples of emotional

connections, or disconnections, that were evident through Steve and Joe's experiences. Then, I

uncover how father-son bonding, seeking father pride, feelings of lessened priority, fathers'

unfulfilled promises, lack of forgiveness and reconciliation, and the element of time all

contributed to deficient emotional connections between fathers and sons.

Steve and Joe seemed to be unaware of the extent of their emotional connection to their

fathers. They expressed that they did not care about maintaining a relationship with their fathers.

Steve specifically acknowledged lack of emotional interactions with his father and suggested

there was no emotional connection at all. When these individuals spoke about interactions with

their fathers it became apparent that there were emotional connections, perhaps not the ones they

desired. The connections seemed to have forged negative emotional reactions rather than positive

ones. Steve described an encounter with his father over the phone that illustrated their negative

emotional connection. During the conversation, Steve disclosed his sexual orientation. He

revealed:

> I was really pissed off with my dad. I just phoned him and said, *Yeah, you haven't sent*
>
> *child-support. Oh, and here's your Christmas present. I'm gay* and then I hung up. Rarely
>
> do I ever have emotions in any interactions with my dad but at that point I was kind of

pissed off because he had been so late with the child support all the time that I

just…wanted to get back at him [emphasis added].

This example illustrated a negative emotional connection. The participant's reaction was

prompted by frustration resulting in an act of vengeance.

Joe referred to telephone conversations with his father that caused him to be conflicted

about how he was feeling. He felt happy and excited to be talking with his father but had

difficulty processing his feelings. He talked of feeling displaced for some time after the

conversations ended. Joe said, "Over the phone I get fluttered with emotions because it's

completely in the moment. I don't feel disconnected to him on the phone." Joe was conflicted

about feeling excited when otherwise he would feel apathetic:

> I was thinking that the phone conversation and the fact that I got excited is really odd to
>
> me. It's odd because the way I think I would react to anybody else in a situation where
>
> I'm confused about what's going on is: I would be slightly cold until I know what's going
>
> on. Normally I would carry that over and I would be cold until…the conflict is solved
>
> and then I could feel that I can move on. I guess that's why it's really confusing to me
>
> that I don't react that way - the way that I would normally react.

Joe felt conflicted because his reaction to his father was different than he had experienced in

other relationships. He was not cold towards his father despite his confusion. This suggested that

there is something about a relationship with his father that caused him to behave differently. Joe

continues:

> To me it's complicating, it's confusing, and it completely *screws me up*. I don't want [a
>
> relationship with him] and he hasn't really tried to push it either. So, he doesn't really

want it that much either, to me. It's so contradictory where he says all these things but he doesn't put the effort in to even build the emotional relationship [emphasis added].

In the preceding example, Joe illustrated the importance of 'effort' in building and maintaining an emotional connection. The fatherless men alluded to efforts they made to connect with their fathers emotionally by behaving in ways that invited a sense of pride from their fathers. The sense of pride that these men desired from their fathers may be a factor that intensified their fatherless experiences. Joe disclosed, "For some reason whenever I think of graduating …or getting a degree, I think I really want him to be proud." The men spoke in detail about pursuits and interests that gave them a sense that their fathers were proud.

In one instance, it seemed that the pursuit was more to make the father proud than to fulfill the son's own personal interest; as was evident with Charlie who relayed that his father was proud of him when he was playing a sport. Steve observed that his parents boasted to others about his academic success but never really expressed their pride to him. He recalled, "For both my parents it was more of a *brag to other people* sort of thing [emphasis added]." Even in situations where father pride was acknowledged, as in Joe's case, he felt it was less meaningful because it was not backed with the support he would otherwise expect from a father. Joe unveiled:

I kinda want him to be proud but at the same time *I really don't care*. If he had kept in contact a lot more or made efforts to visit me…I wouldn't have as many feelings of resentment…Maybe I'd still feel like I *had a father figure* or a father [emphasis added].

Joe's allusion to father pride conjured another attribute of fatherlessness that suggested a negative emotional father-son connection. Limited contact and lack of effort contributed to the inability for fathers and sons to share bonding opportunities. The lack, or unappealing quality, of

bonding opportunities did not adequately allow the emotional relationships to fully develop.

Charlie yearningly expressed, "The bonding - there'd be nothing better than me and him working

on a project together." Bonding opportunities were seen as crucial times when relationships with

their fathers could solidify. Participants viewed activities such as telephone conversations, doing

chores, watching television, playing sports, and fishing as opportunities to bond. However, Steve

and Joe expressed awkwardness when participating in some of these activities due to their lack

of interest, or view of the hallow father-son relationship. Steve recalled:

> I remember one particular Simpson's episode that I just couldn't bear to watch with my
>
> dad because it showed how hollow [our relationship] was. Bart and Homer end up
>
> bonding in this weird way because they are father and son and I just remember watching
>
> it and feeling really, really awkward.

Charlie wished he could have participated more in bonding activities with his father but

felt his father limited those he was willing to share with his son. Sam resented having to do

chores alongside his father figure in order to connect. Sam wishfully uttered, "I *so wanted to play*

catch with him and do all that stuff that an eight-year-old would want to do with your dad but…

all we did was work on the farm with him [emphasis added]." He would have preferred to go on

family outings with his father and other siblings but said he was often barred from going along.

Sam iterated:

> They used to go on trips, my dad and the other kids, and I was the one that was stuck at
>
> home. I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to be part of dad's life. I wanted that
>
> experience and I couldn't get it because my mum was basically separating that from my
>
> life. So, I spent a lot of time at home by myself.

The lack, or unappealing quality, of bonding opportunities between these men and their fathers seemed to facilitate greater emotional distance in their relationships. When a father and son failed to pursue opportunities to bond, the relationships were underdeveloped. This may have left the son feeling as though he was not a priority and his sense of fatherlessness was possibly deepened on an emotional level. Steve and Joe felt that they were not a priority in their fathers' lives. Joe adamantly conveyed:

No, I haven't felt like a priority. I can understand why he wasn't there physically, but emotionally the distance…was just too much…way too much distance. If he wanted to keep in contact, that would have been his priority. If he wanted to bring me out every year to see him, that would've been a priority.

There seemed to be a sense that an emotional relationship with a father is essential to sons feeling fathered. The quality and type of bonding opportunities that these men shared with their fathers, and the degrees to which they felt like a priority in their fathers' lives, were instrumental in defining their emotional relationships.

Supplemental to bonding and senses of being a priority, the father-son emotional relationships were affected by fathers' unfulfilled promises, or invitations. Not only did it contribute to feelings of lessened priority, but it also seemed to influence the sons to distrust their fathers on a deeper level, ultimately promoting an advanced sense of fatherlessness. Furthermore, when promises were broken participants seemed to shift into a mode of self-preservation; a way of distancing themselves emotionally in order to lessen the impact.

One participant felt his father should have made more of an effort to attend his high school graduation. Joe relates openly, "If he wanted to be at my grad *that would have been a priority*, which is the only thing I ever asked him to come visit me for. I never asked him to come

to me before [emphasis added]." When his father failed to attend, Joe's oscillated the direction of his emotional response to his father at one point as he verbalized:

> *Well, whatever. I shouldn't be surprised.* But I wanted him to be there. It wasn't like the disappointment you get from someone who's always there for you and then he's not...*It was just you'd figure the one time I wanted you to be there you would*...I was disappointed but not let down as much as I would have been if it was someone I expected. It's something that I thought he should be there for. But he wasn't there for anything else and this was a big deal to me [emphasis added].

While relaying his experience, Joe noted that this incident was the start of him having less contact with his father. In one breath Joe spoke of the significance of having his father attend and in another he seemed to underrate his emotional response. This was possibly Joe's way of self-protecting in order to lessen the emotional impact even as he was recounting the story.

These anecdotes accentuated another facet of the emotional setbacks that comprised fatherlessness. Some men seemed to have an inability or unwillingness to forgive their fathers. Joe and Sam outwardly struggled with the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation to the point where retaliation was considered the desired response. Joe felt it showed his weakness when he chose not to retaliate. He confessed:

> I should have been working on [not holding a grudge] but to me forgiveness is a really hard concept. It's taken me a long time from the past couple of years just to not retaliate when I normally would in instances that maybe I should just leave things alone. I feel weak for not retaliating.

Reluctance to forgive was also evident in Sam's unwillingness to accept his father. At the suggestion of his biological father being a part of his life at this point, Sam said emphatically:

Even if he forced himself into my life, I'd probably be violent towards him knowing what I know and what he's done. I'd probably be violent towards him the first minute I saw him. I'd probably punch him just to show him; *No, you're going to need to back off. I'm not willing to accept you and I'll probably never accept you* [emphasis added].

Consequential to Joe's attitude toward reconciliation was the notion of his father's lack of remorse. To him, when a person shows remorse for wrong-doing, reconciliation is more likely. Joe's emotional charge was elevated as he recapped, "That's one of the things *I hate dealing with...* that is: *Well, it was in the past. It's too late. I can't do anything about it* [emphasis added]." Soon after, Joe expressed his abhorrence concerning such stances:

I *hate that attitude* and I *know* it was in the past. I *know* you can't do anything about it but the fact that you *take that attitude* towards it completely *just pisses me off…*Lack of remorse, I think, is what it would be. That makes me feel better because it makes me feel like they wanted to be there [emphasis added].

This suggested that the fatherless experience could have been less impacting emotionally, at least for Joe, had his father shown remorse for his absence. Later in the interview, this participant expressed that it is too late for him to have a relationship with his father now; that there's nothing Joe can do about it. It seemed the participant had difficulty recognizing his responsibility in the father-son relationship. He appeared to have adopted the very attitude towards a relationship with his father that he expressed a disdain for when directed towards him by others.

Emotional Responses. The frustration that Joe expressed in the previous example is one of many emotional responses that the men attributed to their fatherless experiences. Other emotional responses included anger, fear, sadness and depression, frustration, anxiety, and guilt. All participants at one point or another throughout their experiences felt anger. This was evident

not only in their acknowledgment of the emotion, but also in their tone of voice and body language as they reflected on their experiences during the interviews. Voices got slightly louder, position shifting was more abrupt, or facial expressions furrowed.

Sam identified the source of his anger when he said, "The anger about *abandoning me* is…I partly blame him for my mother's death. It's not really something I should do. I'm not that kind of person [emphasis added]." When trying to get in touch with the plethora of feelings elicited by abandonment, Sam shares, "The feeling of abandonment brings up the sorrow. The feeling of neglect brings out sorrow. Anger would bring out sorrow. I remember there were times I would just cry in anger and it would be mixed with sorrow." Charlie recalled being afraid and anxious when his father left because of the dysfunctional home environment. He felt safe when his father was around. He recalled, "We were all scared - basically scared, and we missed him…When he was home we felt happy and safe."

In addition to anger and fear, Charlie and Joe noted considerable sadness and reported struggles with depression throughout their lives. While it cannot be concluded that their fatherless experience caused depression, these participants believed it played a part; at the very least the degree to which they felt depressed was impacted. Charlie admitted, "Sometimes I still get a little down, a little depressed." Joe purported that he would not have been as depressed had his father been there in an emotionally supportive way. "I don't see myself having been that depressed or going through all that I did because I didn't have someone there to at least uplift me in some way."

The feelings and emotions that participants often struggled with in their fatherless experiences contributed to a lack of self-esteem. There was an element of self-blame that emerged as participants relayed their stories. Sam blamed himself for his father's relapse into

alcoholism. "I stopped [praying] and then I found out he started drinking. I blame myself for him doing that because when I was praying for him, he didn't seem to be doing that at all." Alcoholism was one of the reasons Sam was taken away from his father during infancy. His father's alcoholism contributed to problems in the home causing Child and Family Services to intervene, ultimately resulting in a life of foster care for Sam. While alcoholism did not cause Sam's fatherless state, it was identified as a contributing factor in his experience. The irrational thoughts that lead Sam to blame himself for his father's relapse pointed to the deep emotional angst that fatherless individuals appear to suffer. Moreover, it illustrated the possible connection that they believe they are fatherless by their own doing.

Another poignant example of self-esteem issues was summed up in the feelings of inadequacy that Charlie experienced throughout his lifetime. He felt he had not lived up to his father's expectations. He recalled:

I have one distinct memory. We were in the garage and I don't know if he was showing me how to fight, but he just started punching around with me…and he hit me. I don't know if it was an accident or not. I don't know why he did that. I don't know if I lived up to his expectations. I always thought I didn't. He was happiest, though, when I was playing lacrosse because there was his son doing a manly thing with the guys.

This example illustrated the participant's feelings of inadequacy that were linked to his sense of masculine identity. When his father was alive he tried teaching his son and supported his enrolment in masculine activities. Later in life - after his father had passed away – Charlie recalled a time when the feelings of inadequacy reemerged:

I'm trying to renovate my home. It's taking me a long time and I actually wanted to *curse him* because he *should've taught me*. The things that he didn't teach me I really didn't go

after. I can do certain minimal things and it's only because I had to just in the last couple

of years. I still feel inadequate about that [emphasis added].

At another point throughout the interview, Charlie said, "I think he expected more of me and I

think I let him down."

Steve and Joe's fatherless experiences were riddled with moments of self-hate. Joe

battled with issues related to a suicidal attempt; an emotional point he believed he never would

have reached had his father been present emotionally. He had difficulty resolving the fact that it

was an attempt at suicide rather than a successful one. Joe believed that people who attempt

suicide are seeking attention and are not serious about dying. He expressed a disdain for such

individuals:

If it had nothing to do with attention, you would be *dead*. You wouldn't say *I tried to*.

I'm conflicted with that because *I hate being the person that says that now*. I'm

conflicted about the fact that now I'm one of those people that *I hate* [emphasis added].

Steve also recalled a time in his life when he experienced self-hate. When referring to the

homophobic judgments of his family, Steve felt he had to hide who he was because he was

dependent on them for the necessities of life. At some point he internalized their homophobic

tendencies. In reference to his family's homophobia he said, "I hated myself in a way…because

on some level I agreed with their homophobia."

The feelings and emotions that interspersed these men's experiences contributed to their

heightened sense of fatherlessness, and contributed to their fatherless identities. Furthermore,

their emotional wellbeing was significantly impacted.

Grief and Loss. The depth of the emotional impact associated with fatherlessness was

depicted in the feelings of grief and loss that some of these men encountered. It went beyond one

participant's experience of losing his father to death. Participants articulated experiencing a void in their lives that they believed only their father could fill. The persistent sense of emptiness as a result of their fatherless experience brought with it a deepened sense of grief and loss. Charlie opened up, "There was no one that would really fill that *void*. It's a loss of a relationship, really. *It's a relationship that I lost*…The void itself was something only my dad could fill. I've never had another dad figure [emphasis added]." He went on to say, "It is a void, but I've gotten used to it. I haven't forgotten it, but I've sort of gotten used to the void of him not being there." While the void is seemingly constant, it is something to which one becomes accustomed over time. Joe also related to the void when stating, "No one's *ever* filled that void. No one's *ever* been that father figure [emphasis added]." The recurrence of the theme in the data suggested that grief and loss was an integral part of the fatherless experience and revealed an understanding that, for some, there is a 'place' in a son's life that only his father can occupy and a specific meaning that only a father can provide.

The grieving process for one individual did not seem to impose finality, however. Years after his father's death Charlie sought ways to know his father through the experience of others who knew his dad. I interpreted this as his attempt at connecting with his father - even in death. It also served as a means by which he could resolve some of the unanswered questions he had formulated after his father passed away:

> My dad had another railroad buddy…I want him to tell me about my dad; what he knew about him. What I'd like to ask him is, 'What was dad like - The part I didn't know?' There was probably a lot I didn't know. I would just sit with him and get a bottle of whiskey and just talk.

Unanswered Questions. Charlie's desire to know more about his father, even beyond the grave, embodied another pervasive theme in the men's accounts – *unanswered questions*. Charlie, Joe, and Sam expressed wonderings that have surfaced throughout their fatherless experience. Their questions touched on speculations about what prompted the fathers' decisions to do certain things, the factors that kept them from emotionally engaging, why they did not follow through on certain promises, and whether vague memories of their experiences with their fathers actually occurred.

Sam's mind was inquisitive when we approached this topic. In reference to what he would ask his father if given the opportunity, he responded:

> Why he was the way he was. I'd want to know why he didn't pay for my mother's tombstone, why he drinks…why he basically did not try to *better himself* like he said he would. I want those questions *answered* [emphasis added].

He turned his inquisition directly towards his father when he irritably inquired:

> Why weren't you *there for me*? Why didn't you do what *you said you were going to do* in that letter? You said you were going to *better yourself*. You wanted to be part of *our lives*. You were going to come out and *visit us* [emphasis added].

Sam provided a reason for wanting answers. He submitted, "I want those unanswered questions answered for me so I can have closure."

There was a sense that Charlie also needed closure on a deeply personal issue. When I asked whether he had any unanswered questions for his father, he grew solemn. He told me I could record what he was about to reveal in note form, but he did not want it audio recorded. With the audio recording turned off, he disclosed that his father had touched him inappropriately

when he was about five or six years old. His memory was garbled and one burning question he would like to ask his father is whether the incident actually happened.

The examples that explicated the emotional impact of fatherlessness on men who have experienced the phenomenon were extremely complex. The feelings and emotions related to fatherlessness seemed to be interwoven with attitudes, perceptions, influences, and events that made the severity of the impact seem untenable at times. What became increasingly obvious is the possibility that 'emotion', whether expressed by these men in reaction to experiences, or imposed on them as an effect of their experience, may be a significant contributing factor to a fatherless identity.

Social Impact

In addition to factors of emotion, there was evidence that suggested the social impact of the fatherless experience was an element that helped lay the foundation of a fatherless identity. Charlie felt he was more recluse and socially shut off as a result of fatherlessness; predominantly because his father was a key factor in bringing family together. Steve, Charlie, and Joe's families were forced to move to smaller towns, or poorer neighbourhoods, which resulted in difficult social adjustments that, otherwise, may not have been necessary. Joe spoke of his difficult social adjustment in one small town. He remembered not so fondly:

> As soon as we moved to [that town]- *completely different situation* where I had one friend and there was a whole bunch of people that felt indifferent towards me…Even people that didn't actively *do anything* had negative associations with me…Then it just got *worse and worse and worse* [emphasis added].

Joe made the social impact connection to his absent father in this way, "Him not being there led to someone else being there and moving and being in that town." Charlie related, "The fact that we moved…changed my life dramatically. So, had he been alive we would have stayed in town."

Charlie went as far as to say that life altering decisions may also have been impacted such as his choice of occupation, and his decision to have a civil as opposed to a church wedding ceremony. He attributed many of his social experiences to his father's extroverted personality and ability to bring people together. Charlie fondly remembered, "He got along with everybody…He would meet people and right away they would click because that was his personality." Later in the interview Charlie provided greater detail when he relayed:

> We used to do everything with my mom's side of the family. We were at picnics all the time. Right after the funeral, *that was it*. The families just did not have any more gatherings- *nothing*. It was almost like dad was who bound them all. It was like *dad was the glue* that bound us all together [emphasis added].

The social impact did not end there for Charlie. He recollected, "I was always withdrawn… After he was gone I just closed myself off."

Charlie's example illustrated a reclusive movement socially that he associated with his fatherless identity. Charlie, along with Joe and Sam, noted other social factors that they associated with their fatherless experiences. They felt that, had their fathers been present, they would have instilled a greater work ethic in their sons. Sam's experience was atypical of the others'. He acknowledged his work ethic was affected because he was given too much, rather than too little. Sam put it this way, "It kind of wrecked my work ethic because I had everything I could ask for…everything done for me. That really made me happy at the time, but when I think about it, it ruined my work ethic." Joe's work ethic was oppositely affected. He shared,

Even now I don't try as hard as I should. I procrastinate. I'm not disciplined enough…a lot of it has to do with the discipline thing…because not working hard enough and taking so many years off school, being really financially set back, moving all the time, not being stable, not studying enough, not preparing enough, not having that work ethic…[are things I hope would have been different had my father been there].

Had Joe's father been present, Joe felt that Tom would have taught him to be more self-disciplined in his subject areas, and believed his father may have taken more of an interest in his academics than his mother seemed to. Joe recalled his father explicitly vocalizing his academic expectations for Joe. In reference to academic and artistic pursuits, he recalled Tom saying, "Well, you should be the best…you should be able to top your class…you're capable of it." These expectations left Joe feeling resentful towards his father for pressuring him to do well, yet never supporting him through the process of meeting academic goals.

Steve's academic experience was different from Joe's. Steve excelled in order to grab the attention of teachers. Steve recalled, "There was also a point at which in grade seven I kind of went crazy…trying to present an image sort of like super intelligent. Obviously trying to get the attention of teachers." Aside from Steve, the sons reported little or no work ethic, and a lack of motivation to pursue interests they felt their fathers would have encouraged. The most prominent examples included struggles with academics, getting and holding jobs, developing skills to hunt, building things, and repairing cars – all stereotypical 'manly' things.

Subsequent to motivation and work ethic, another major issue in the fatherless experience involved the development and maintenance of meaningful relationships. Participants disclosed a negative affect on relationships within families, as well as with peers. The affect spanned from immediate and extended family members to others in the community. Specifically, relationships

with mothers were impacted, since in some cases the mother was compelled to work outside the home causing a decreased presence of the primary parental figure. Steve looked at it conversely. He thought his mother's presence increased resulting in more emotional exchange with him, rather than his father.

Participants reported that relationships with peers were also affected. It cannot be fully ascertained that these relationships would have otherwise been affected by experiences of fatherlessness. However, one individual believed his experience being a victim of bullying may have been avoided had he not been forced to move to a new school after his parents divorced. He also believed that a present father could have been a sounding board for emotional issues rather than the friend he chose to disclose to out of convenience.

Further supporting the affect on relationships, the case of fatherlessness presented data that indicated participants had a propensity for pursuing emotionally dependent relationships in the absence of an emotionally connected father. Charlie and Joe alluded to a significant effect on their relationships with women. Early sexual initiation was noted in Joe's case, and he believed he complicated his life with sex and women; something he believed he may have avoided with the guidance and support of his father. Charlie responded to his father's absence by hanging out with his girlfriend whom he claimed enabled his alcoholic tendencies. He described himself as "clingy" and "needy." Later in life, he felt these characteristics caused a lost connection with a good male friend. He recalled, "If I like someone I could become very clingy. Like my good buddy there…I was always the needy one. I would always start getting pouty. So one day he says *that is it*. Basically, I lost my best friend [emphasis added]." It may be that these men were trying to attach emotionally to others in response to unfulfilled emotional connections to their fathers. The product was unhealthy connections that lead to the demise of meaningful relationships.

When relationships are healthy and meaningful, they usually carry an element of trust. Joe and Sam reported not being able to trust as a result of their fatherless experiences. Joe felt he had issues trusting humans in general. He acknowledged:

> I guess the biggest thing is: I don't trust. *I don't trust humans at all*. I can't trust anyone one hundred percent *at all*. No matter who it is. Not even *close to* one hundred percent. I think [my father not being there] may be a big part of it [emphasis added]."

Sam believed his trust issues surfaced more with men. "My relationships with men have been affected because of what I was born into…I don't trust men that much. I do not trust men at all. I have a hard time trusting because they always walk out of my life." Sam attributed his trust issue to abandonment, which was an integral piece in his fatherless identity.

Another facet of Sam's fatherless identity that was specific only to him was the cultural impact of his social experience. Sam felt his abandonment by his father, subsequent placement in foster care, and his upbringing in a predominantly white community forged a disconnection from his culture and assimilation with a new one. He declared, "I've been raised in an all-white community… I was lacking my own culture in the fact that I wasn't going to any powwows. I'm still not with my own culture." Sam went on to explain the impact of his reality:

> It's not the fact that I don't *want* to see my culture. It's that if I go mingle with my own people, they can *so tell* that I'm from the east side…I feel separated. I feel I'm in between the Socialites and your typical Aboriginal youth [emphasis added].

Sam's disconnection from his culture resulted in issues that furthered his fatherless experience. Earlier, he claimed he was to be adopted by foster parents at an early age, but his First Nations reservation would not allow it. As a result, he was raised in three Caucasian foster homes - one of which ended in familial breakdown. He processed it this way, "If I were adopted

by a family, I wouldn't have gotten put back in the system." Had the 'system' been avoided by

his adoption, he believed he would not have experienced the cultural impact as severely. While

he still may have been in a 'white family', he possibly would not have been exposed to as many

'all-white communities', thereby decreasing the degree of separation from his culture.

Economic Impact

Although living in an all-white community had cultural implications for Sam, he

regarded the economic impact as a positive thing. He revealed, "The last foster home was an

upper-middle class family. They owned a business. They owned property. They had tons of cars.

They had probably a $750,000 house because of the housing market boom." When asked what

his 'dream life' would be he shared:

> It probably still would have been a white, middle-class family, but to have weekly visits
>
> where I go for a weekend to see my real family…because in reality…if I had lived in a
>
> time where I had lived with my dad, it would have screwed everything up. I wouldn't be
>
> sitting here. I wouldn't have this Blackberry. I wouldn't be dressed in these clothes.

It appeared Sam could not even imagine a life where his father could have provided the lifestyle

to which Sam had grown accustomed.

The other three men reported a negative financial impact associated with their

fatherlessness. Some lived in single-parent family dwellings where the mother worked outside

the home out of necessity. In Charlie's case, he obtained employment when his father died to

boost family income. He disclosed:

> Dad didn't have life insurance. He canceled it. He didn't have a lot of money in the bank.
>
> My mom had to go to work. She paid the rent. She paid the bills. I don't know if anyone
>
> was sending her money for that. So, it impacted. I got a job at the bus depot after he died.

Limited finances also restricted the opportunities that were available to these men who were raised in single-parent families. Families moved to smaller towns or low income neighbourhoods to accommodate the change in their circumstances. Joe recalled, "Not having him there means mom had to work full time." He went on to explain:

We would have been more financially stable because I think she would have worked anyway, just not as much. I would've been able to have more experiences or opportunities that I didn't; even like playing certain sports when I was growing up that I didn't get to do, or going certain places, and doing certain things we just didn't have the money to do. I didn't have a lot of experiences that maybe I could have because of that.

Joe not only felt the financial impact in his childhood but also disclosed, "I'm still extremely unstable financially." His attitude towards work ethic and discipline that developed at a young age in the absence of his father carried over into his adult life, which exemplified how the effects of the experience can span years, and decades.

The socio-economic, intellectual, and emotional impacts on a fatherless identity seemed nearly unmanageable. The evidence suggested that the fatherless experience is comprised of a plethora of influences, perceptions, experiences, and impacts that convolute the case of a fatherless identity. Fatherlessness is both individualistic and indistinct – individualistic to the men that experience it, and indistinct in its scope of impact. This case study has barely scratched the surface of what builds the framework of a fatherless identity. However, it provides sufficient evidence to justify a working definition. The conceptualization of fatherlessness as experienced by these four men is offered in the following section.

Components of a Fatherless Identity: Fatherlessness Defined

The men in this case study referred to several elements that comprised their fatherless identities. Their collective experiences provided a basis for how they conceptualized 'fatherlessness', and these experiences with fatherlessness illuminated the case of a fatherless identity. *Fatherlessness* for these men transcended family structure and societal influence to include aspects that pertained to the men's emotions, characters, and interpersonal relationships. This section gives a collective definition of fatherlessness as it was experienced and conceptualized by these men.

The experience of fatherlessness is influenced by what some of these men believe is society's commonly accepted meaning of 'father' and a lack of identity with that term. These men acknowledged that the biological male parent exists, or existed at one point in their lives, yet they feel 'fatherless'. Their relationships with their fathers are ones that lack depth or meaning, contact both physically and emotionally, and identity with what society considers a father-son relationship. Steve defined his experience when saying, "I know I have a father biologically but …[the] common socially accepted meaning of the word father, and what that figure is supposed to mean in your life just doesn't really exist at all and never really has."

Fatherlessness is the vacancy of the emotional and physical space that a father can occupy in his son's life. In reference to his relationship with his father, Steve stated, "He doesn't occupy any sort of space in my life and never has." This notion of occupying emotional or physical space conjures a theme of proxemics across the experiences of all participants. In each experience, there was a physical separation that occurred whether through the father's death, divorce, incarceration, or geographic location. These factors affected the level of contact that the son had with his father in varying degrees. Steve, Joe, and Sam described contact with their

father through email, phone calls, letters, or intermittent visits. The infrequency of the contact seemed to contribute to a greater sense of fatherlessness in each case. Sam talked about the time he invited his father to his high school graduation but his father did not seem to make the effort to attend. Sam said, "The start of us having less contact was then…it started waning off around that period of time." In Charlie's experience, his father's death intensified a pre-existing sense of fatherlessness. Charlie uttered, "Dad hadn't passed away yet, but he was gone."

The concept of 'emotional space' that a father can occupy is somewhat convoluted. Steve, Joe, and Sam felt emotionally distant, or disconnected from their fathers and were preferential to it at this stage in their lives. While they believed they had no emotional connection to their fathers there were definitely negative emotional reactions expressed as they relayed their experiences of fatherlessness. When asked how his life would change if his father were to make an attempt to be a part of it, Sam declared, "I'd probably be angry...even more angry…with the fact that he wants to be part of my life but I'm not willing to accept him yet." The emotive responses themselves indicate emotional connections to their fathers; they are simply negative emotional connections rather than positive ones. It seems 'emotional absence' may be more accurately referred to as 'negative emotional presence.'

Other factors that contributed to a sense of fatherlessness were noted. The son's level of interest in his father, the father's lack of effort in maintaining contact, the son's stage of development when the father's absence was experienced, and the son's sense of abandonment were all factors which seemed to clarify a fatherless identity. Steve expressed very little interest in a relationship with his father for whatever reason, which lead to a lack of bonding opportunities and ultimately contributed to his sense of fatherlessness. He relayed, "So, father - *this person that was supposed to fulfill that role* - just as a human being didn't really interest me,

or appeal to me. He wasn't very *participatory or evident* in my life [emphasis added]." Similarly, Joe spoke of his father's efforts to contact him leaving much to be desired, and referred to a point in time when he needed his father more than he does in his adult life. As a child, he was left feeling that he was not a priority in his father's life. Joe said, "With him not being there – [obviously I did not have] all those experiences and all those growth opportunities…while growing up and maturing." Later, Joe provided further explanation when he said, "I was his responsibility…that he *wasn't responsible to*. I was *not priority* [emphasis added]." Sam spoke of feelings of abandonment, not only from his biological father, but also his foster father. Referring to the breakup of his foster parents Sam said, "When they separated, I couldn't believe it. I felt abandoned." These feelings of disinterest in the father, the lack of contact, the time element, and feelings of abandonment were all major contributing factors to fatherless identities.

All participants alluded to points in their lives when their fathers were not available during times they believed their fathers were most needed. Steve, Joe, and Sam reflected on their developmental and adolescent years as being a crucial time for father involvement. With the exception of Charlie whose father is deceased, they gave a sense that it is "too late" now and it "doesn't matter anymore." Joe said, "I'm not going to have a relationship with him for a long time if I ever do and it's not going to be the same relationship I needed when I needed it." Later in the interview Joe continued, "I wanted him to be there for things that he wasn't there for and now it's like it doesn't matter." All participants expressed wanting their father to teach them certain things, to be there to lend support, and to offer advice as important aspects of father involvement. Since their fathers didn't provide such things the sense of fatherlessness was further amplified. Joe illustrated it well in this example: "Something I heard growing up all the time: *Why do you have to learn the hard way?* If he was there and I had someone that I did trust

to help guide me with certain things, maybe I wouldn't have done those things." In this incidence, Joe is specifically referring to emotional issues related to complicating his life with sex and relationships with women.

<center>*Coping Processes*</center>

Joe, Steve, Charlie, and Sam imparted a number of ways they coped with fatherlessness. Cummings, Goeke-Morey, and Raymond (2004) referred to these ways of coping as negative and positive emotional and behavioral reactions. While only a few of the coping processes presented in this section can be directly linked to fatherlessness, participants identified indirect connections between ways of coping and their fatherless identities. The ways of coping are divided in two categories: (1) negative coping processes, and (2) positive coping processes. The negative coping practices will be discussed first, followed by positive coping strategies. This focus on negative-to-positive coping is intentional; in order to parallel the shift in empirical research over the past four decades from a deficit model of father absence to a more positive approach on the benefits of father involvement. Additionally, it denotes the pattern of expression that the participants subconsciously followed throughout the interviews. The interviews with these men focused on negative aspects of their experiences at the onset, and shifted to more positive reflections of their experiences by the end of the interview - specifically when relaying their positive impressions of this study. Like the interviews, the chapter will end on a positive note with a discussion of positive coping processes.

Negative Coping Processes

A number of ways that these men coped with fatherlessness emerged while exploring the case of the fatherless identity. Some of the ways of coping were classified as self-destructive, or negative. These ways of coping included: alcohol abuse, drug use, self- mutilation, vandalism,

theft, and acts of violence. It cannot be determined whether these behaviours would have existed aside from the experience of fatherlessness. However, those mentioned were related indirectly to the case of a fatherless identity. For instance, Charlie and Joe abused alcohol at points during their fatherless experience. While alcohol abuse may have existed outside of their fatherless experience, the participants determined that alcohol was the method of choice when faced with struggles related to their absent fathers.

Joe turned to alcohol when he experienced a breakdown in his relationships with women. He believed that his father could have offered advice and emotional support during those times had he been present. Of course, even if Joe's father was present, it does not mean he would have been available to provide such support. When asked how he coped with his fathers death Charlie confessed, "Drinking. Smoking dope. Hanging out with my girlfriend at the time." Charlie's alcohol problem worsened over the years, and when his marriage ended many years after his father's death, Charlie was abusing alcohol. He relayed, "I've been taking medication for depression and having an alcohol problem." There were no absolutes in either example that the alcohol issues would have existed aside from the fatherless experience. Even so, they were considerations expressed by Charlie and Joe as ways of coping with fatherlessness.

Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam all disclosed experimenting with drugs, as well. No addictions to drugs were acknowledged, but Sam admitted it was a more serious issue for him. He openly confessed, "I did smoke pot a little but that turned bad." The other men's experimentation with drugs was summed up in Charlie's example when he said, "Drugs were never really big deal for me. I smoked some pot." Connections to the fatherless experience were similar to those made with alcohol abuse. They may have experimented aside from their

fatherless experiences, but felt a father's presence may have deterred the experimental behaviour to some extent.

Self-mutilation was a part of Joe's experience from an early age and continued into adulthood. He linked self-mutilation to fatherlessness by recognizing that his father could have been an integral part of his support system. Had his father been present, even emotionally, Joe believed he would not have self-mutilated. Furthermore, he felt his father would have been somewhat intolerant of this way of coping, which may have swayed his decision to engage in the self-destructive behaviour. Joe disclosed, "Had he been there then I would've had a major support system that would've been able to help me. I wouldn't have had to be so overwhelmed with everything." Self-mutilation lead to a suicide attempt when a relationship with his girlfriend ended. Again, he felt it would not have progressed to that point had his father been emotionally present.

Joe raised the concept of 'self-fathering' and Charlie alluded to it, as well. These participants believed one of the roles of a father is to teach. In their father's absence, they taught themselves certain things that otherwise could have been learned from their father. As a result, they felt they were fathering themselves to some degree. Joe observed:

> Learning a lot of things that I learned by myself and taking a lot longer to do it than if I had someone *I trusted* in the role and listened to rather than being *my own father*, which really *doesn't work* a lot of the time [emphasis added].

Among their experiences of trying what may or may not have worked, Steve, Joe, and Sam reported engaging in acts of vandalism, theft, and violence resulting in mild to more severe implications and interventions. Vandalism ranged from painting graffiti art on buildings to destroying things in the home. Theft included breaking into cars to steal change, stealing money

from a workplace, and breaking into others' homes. Steve and Sam stated that these overt behaviours were attention seeking on one hand and a way of dealing with anger on another. Repercussions ranged from counselling intervention to criminal charges. When referring to stealing money from cars Steve said, "I never really sought much attention or got much attention at home. I didn't want my mom to catch me...the guy who caught me…It was like, 'Wow. This person cares that I'm doing something wrong.'

Sam directed the violence to other siblings in the family and was seen as a threat to the point where he had to be physically separated from them at times. He described the circumstances surrounding his behaviour. His 'parents' had separated and another 'father figure' had been introduced into the family. Sam was resistant to the change and expressed that he secretly wanted his mother to reunite with the man he considered his father. Sam stated, "As a result of anger about having that new father figure in my house…I started stealing and cutting things. I broke a lot of stuff. I broke into our next door neighbour's house."

The men who identified as fatherless linked their negative coping processes to the phenomenon of fatherlessness. The men suggested they used negative coping as common practices in dealing with the struggles associated with their fatherless identities.

Positive Coping Processes

Negative coping processes only partially comprised the fatherless experience. Positive ways of coping were also identified throughout the data. Participants learned boundary setting, pursued counselling intervention, and sought relationships with mentoring individuals as means to cope positively. Interests such as visual art, music, nature walks, physical exercise, and spirituality were also identified as ways of coping with the emotional impact of their fatherlessness.

The individual that initially dabbled in the criminal side of graffiti eventually pursued and advocated for the legitimacy of its artistic form. Others found listening to music effective in dealing with emotions; some of which were related to their experiences of fatherlessness. Nature walks beside the river and gym exercise were also noted as effective means of dealing with issues related to their experiences of fatherlessness. Sam optimistically reported:

> Music has a really big impact on my life right now. Living downtown because the river is close by - I'll just go down and lay on the stones and look at the stars. Nature has a big impact. I find it soothing to me.

Another positive strategy that these men employed in response to fatherlessness was boundary setting. Some of the men redefined future relationships with their fathers, and safeguarded their emotional wellbeing by establishing clear, definite parameters and conditions pertaining to father involvement. This was seen as a positive coping strategy in response to anticipated emotional pain. When asked whether they would be accepting of their father if he attempted to be present in their lives at this point, participants were self-preserving. While they believed they would not turn him away, they felt they would be cautious and accept him on a level other than as a father. The parameters that Joe described encapsulate it well. He established, "I don't want him in my life as a father. He can be there as a friend, but he can't be there for me as a father figure, since he was never there for me at all."

Counselling intervention, though imposed in some cases, was also seen as a positive way of coping. For Steve and Joe, counselling began in elementary school when behaviours of stealing money from cars and self-mutilation started. Charlie and Sam reported seeking counseling later in life to deal with other struggles that they believed were linked indirectly to their experiences of fatherlessness.

In addition to counselling intervention, meaningful relationships with mentors or 'surrogate fathers' such as teachers or grandparents were often seen as positive ways of coping. Steve spoke of one influential teacher that he had in his last year of high school. He fondly recalled:

The closest I have ever been to another man was my grade twelve English teacher, [Mr. Smith]. I still talk to him because he was very smart; unlike any other man. He didn't take life too seriously and he loved to debate because I was in the closet. It was all in good fun. He was also very religious; kind of chill. I liked him. I still like him.

Steve also looked to his grandfather for direction. He shares, "[My grandfather] was a kind of a dad at one point in my life for guidance...I knew obviously I had to look to someone else." Sam also acknowledged a mentor in his life – an older male that provided support and guidance for him.

Another type of guidance sought by two of these men took on a spiritual nature. Charlie and Sam prayed – one to God and one to his deceased mother. Charlie testified:

I was meditating…I was feeling good and that's what changed me. I'm not religious but I am spiritual in a sense where part of the meditation was 'Okay God. Guide me. Show me.' I never said do it for me. I just said, 'Listen to me and get all of this…fear. Get it all out of me.'

Charlie used prayer as a way of dealing with his emotional pain. Sam offered his prayers on behalf of his father, his family, and himself. He stated:

I actually prayed for my dad. You know when you have someone close who passes away you sometimes feel their presence when you're feeling down? I know my mom checks in on me every now and then. Whenever I'm feeling down I get this calmness that comes

over me like nothing. I used to pray and say, 'Help dad with his drinking and look after

the rest of the kids and look after me.'

The prayers of these participants were somewhat reflective of their hopes for enlisting in

the fatherless study. Charlie, Joe, and Sam recognized that engaging in the study to talk about

their fatherless identities was a means to help others, which can be regarded as a positive way to

cope. The interviews provided an opportunity for them to talk openly about the issues they faced,

and to a degree, were still facing. The participants' desires to help others as a result of sharing

their experience not only spoke to their character, but showed their determination to create

something positive out of an otherwise difficult experience.

Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam's Closing Thoughts

The men were asked to share their thoughts on this study. Steve's thoughts on the study

differed slightly from the rest of the participants'. He suggested that parents are needed rather

than gender differentiated roles, and attributed many of his struggles to the governmental

institutions that require fatherless individuals to fit within a specific family paradigm that does

not necessarily work for everyone. He suggested our focus should shift from the absence of

fathers to accepting the way we are brought up, and more attention should be given to the

struggle against institutions that make life without fathers more difficult. Steve purported:

I feel in many ways my experience as fatherless wouldn't have been that negative if I

wasn't confronted with a lot of institutions that emphasize the fact that there's these

divorce agreements that made me expect a certain amount of money from this relationship.

I never really developed an emotional attachment based on our relationship.

Steve also expressed the belief that parents – as opposed to 'fathers' - are necessary. He

articulated the hope that society will one day not have label parents with gender specific terms,

since there are many different ways to raise children and we could all be very happy, well-adjusted human beings if it wasn't for government regulations. Steve eloquently summarizes, "We can just as easily live somewhere where father's didn't exist. We'd all be perfectly happy, rational human beings if our families were loving and caring." In reference to society he implored that we ought to be "looking at overcoming fatherlessness not as a personal struggle, but as a struggle against these institutions that are trying to punish people who are fatherless."

Charlie, Joe, and Sam felt the study was beneficial for increasing public awareness on the topic, and felt it may help people who struggle with fatherless identities to relate to others' experiences. When making reference to the study and the possibility that others may read about his experience, Charlie expressed his hope, "I think the study is good and I hope that out of this…if what they read really hits home, then at least they can talk to someone about it." Joe shared Charlie's sentiment when he said, "There's nothing negative about it because the only thing that can come from it is further understanding, and with further understanding there are ways to maybe help combat those issues, or at least be more aware of them within the public."

Summary

This chapter introduced four men who self-identified as fatherless, and through retrospective self-reports of their fatherless experiences, they helped delineate the factors that may have lead them to assume fatherless identities. The aspects of their collective experiences that compelled them to identify as fatherless had socio-economic, intellectual, and emotional associations. They accounted aspects of their experiences that they believed were linked to their fatherless identities, and discussed the impact that fatherlessness had on their lives. The ways that they were impacted (i.e., emotionally, socially, etc.) furthered pre-existing senses of fatherlessness, which lead them to assume a fatherless identity. The ways these men coped with

fatherlessness were discussed, and the chapter ended on a positive note with their closing

thoughts on this case study of a fatherless identity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a brief summary of the findings of this research study on men's experiences with fatherlessness that lead them to assume fatherless identities. It begins with an overview of literature, gives the context of the study, provides a summary of the research, and suggests limitations of this study. I also confirm the findings of the study by linking them to similar outcomes in recent research on the topic, and disclose new and unexpected findings from this case study. In accordance with the professional field of study that prompted this research, I discuss the implications of this case for counselling practice. I offer recommendations for future research, and end the chapter with my concluding thoughts on a fatherless identity.

After an extensive review of literature on the topic of fatherlessness, I felt it was prudent to hear from men who are fatherless first-hand. While some researchers argued that fatherlessness imposes harsh and detrimental consequences on children (Blankenhorn, 1995; McLanahan, 1998; Popenoe, 1996), there were few research studies that alluded to specific disclosures of fatherless individuals. A superfluous focus on divorce, separation, and single-parent statistics seemed to be the contribution to this field of study. On the other hand, some researchers suggested that fatherlessness should be embraced as a new way of redefining family and viewed as an alternative to the more traditional, nuclear definition; that children can in fact experience a richer, more fulfilling family life when free of constricting, male dominated families (Dodson, 1998; Stacey, 1998). The recent approach to the topic seemed to be the antithesis of past convictions pertaining to fatherlessness. Again, no studies were found that asked adult males who identified with the phenomenon to uncover the aspects of their experiences.

This exploratory case study recognized specific aspects of fatherless experiences that swayed men to assume fatherless identities. This study offers valuable perspectives from four

individuals that have experienced what it is to be fatherless. In conjunction with previously held

debates, the experiences of these men illuminate the phenomenon and offer valuable insight into

what leads one to assume a fatherless identity.

Context of Research

This context of this research was a single-case design (Yin, 1994) that explored the

circumstances in which individuals were found (Bromley, 1986) in an attempt to gain greater

understanding of their situations (Merriam, 1998). The value of the case was dependent upon the

relationships and facts that explicated the case, and the extent to which they were uncovered

(Bromley, 1986). The case of a *fatherless identity* was explicated though the experiences of four

men who identified with the phenomenon. Their fatherless identities were revealed through

experiential accounts of circumstances surrounding their relationships with physically and

emotionally absent fathers. The study was qualitative in nature and used semi-structured

interviews (Yin, 2003) and symbolic memorabilia (Patton, 2002) to uncover pragmatic reasons

for what was happening (Morse & Richards, 2002) to these men during their experiences that

lead them to define themselves as fatherless.

Merriam (1998) purported that the interest of case study design is in the process and

context of the study rather than specific variables and outcomes. I was far more interested in the

process that lead these men to identify as fatherless, and the context of their experiences than I

was in any one specific variable, or the outcomes of the case (Merriam, 1998). The sets of

circumstances surrounding the case were unusual (Bromley, 1986) in the sense that three of the

men had living fathers, yet identified as fatherless through what seemed to be naturally

occurring, time-bound processes (Bromley, 1986; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The experiential

qualities of these men were extraordinary (Bromley, 1986) and the unquantifiable facts about

these individuals helped bring understanding to the case by uncovering how the fatherless made sense of the social phenomenon (Berg, 2004).

Summary of Research

This exploratory case study on a fatherless identity involved semi-structured interviews with four participants who self-identified as fatherless. Items of memorabilia and photos that symbolized their senses of fatherlessness were used to engage the participants in openly discussing the topic. The study took an in-depth look at the experiences of these adult male individuals in an attempt to highlight factors that contributed to their fatherless identities, and explore the impact that the fatherless experience had on their socio-emotional, intellectual, and economic wellbeing.

Results indicated that fatherless identities were influenced and imposed by societal factors that included differing ways of defining the father role and family structure. Other factors that influenced the fatherless identities consisted of explicit and implicit messages, perceptions, and expectations that had been internalized by these men from fathers, mothers, other family members, significant individuals in social spheres, media, and government and support agencies, and the men themselves. The influences seemed to gradually impress a fatherless identity on these men over time, and when their experiences did not 'fit' with what was perceived, expected, or internalized about what a father should be, their fatherless identity took form. Many of the circumstances that lead to their fatherless identities were beyond their control, but at one point or another, each of these men identified as fatherless, as was evidenced in their contribution to this study after they responded to recruitment advertisements asking *Are You Fatherless?*

A range of emotions and responses were recorded as Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam relayed their experiences of fatherlessness. What was especially significant about these basic human

emotions was the degree to which they were felt, and the responses they emitted relative to their fatherless experiences. Extreme sadness, grief and loss, anger, frustration, confusion, and fear riddled these men's experiences and were either directly or indirectly linked to their senses of fatherlessness. Although these basic human emotions would be experienced aside from fatherlessness, evidence was uncovered that suggested these emotive responses fostered a negative emotional connection to their fathers, ultimately promoting their fatherless identities and affecting their emotional wellness.

Charlie, Joe, and Sam felt that the presence of an emotionally supportive and well-connected father may have lessened the extent to which emotional issues were experienced, or may have prevented their involvement in negative coping behaviours. Steve felt he had no emotional connection to his father at all. After revealing aspects of their experiences, it was apparent that all participants were connected emotionally to their fathers, but the connection was predominantly negative. Perhaps the connection they desired was a positive one. When they did not sense a positive connection, the negative emotional connection was misinterpreted as no connection at all.

Economic factors were also presented and explored. These involved mothers working outside the home, which limited time with children. Charlie was compelled to get a job after his father passed away to help boost family income. Financial strains that restricted social opportunities (such as sports and traveling) were also referenced. Intellectual impacts were minimal, and in one case, fatherlessness may have enabled one individual to excel because he was trying to hide his fantasy world of fashion, antebellum architecture, and his sexual orientation in an attempt to self-protect from perceived homophobia in his family. Other intellectual impacts were linked with social impacts, since things such as overt behaviours at

school caused some social problems for a couple of the participants. The degree to which these impacts would have differed outside of a fatherless experience cannot be determined in this study, since numerous other factors may impact the individual as forcefully, if not more than, their experience of fatherlessness (i.e., parental separation and divorce, family dissolution, family dysfunction, and abuse).

Social impacts of fatherlessness were also noted, but were interwoven with emotional issues. Participants reported the social impact of losing their father, or realizing fatherlessness, involved up-rooting and moving to other towns or neighbourhoods where some men reported experiencing bullying, negative associations with people, cultural disconnection, and a reclusive, introverted social shift. Three participants also felt their work ethic was affected by their fathers' absences, and believed they would have been more self-disciplined, or had greater financial stability if their fathers were present to model and teach those behaviours.

Three of the men – Charlie, Joe, and Sam – sensed a void in their lives that was left by their fathers' absences. Charlie's father passed away when he was sixteen years of age. Joe and Sam's fathers were still alive at the onset of the study. Joe's father lived in Mexico and had infrequent contact with him. Sam's biological father was incarcerated, and the foster father that he knew for a large part of his upbringing was separated from his foster mother while he was in their care. To fill the void, it seemed the men employed negative and positive coping processes. Negative coping ranged from engaging in emotionally dependent relationships with other men and women to rebellious, attention-seeking, and criminal behaviour. Other behaviours such as self-mutilation, alcohol abuse, and drug experimentation peppered individual experiences affecting the social and emotional wellbeing of these men. The coping behaviours that these men employed in response to fatherlessness may also have existed outside of a fatherless identity, but

the men gave evidence that suggested their ways of coping may have only been partially employed, if at all, had fathers been present at crucial times in their lives.

Positive coping in response to fatherlessness was also explored and reported. These ways of coping included: music listening, physical exercise, relational boundary setting, mentoring relationships, and pursuits of a creative or artistic nature. It is likely some of these pursuits would exist even if fathers were present. However, they were offered as positive coping processes for the men who identified as fatherless, since one or more of the participants linked them to his fatherless experience.

Limitations of Research

The focus of this study of a *fatherless identity* was dual purposed: (1) to explore factors that lead men to fatherless identities, and (2) to discuss the impact of fatherlessness on their wellbeing. In keeping with the context of a case study, this study served its purposes in explicating the phenomenon of a fatherless identity through the experiences of four men that were found in unique circumstances (Bromley, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994) having been impacted socially, economically, intellectually, and emotionally through their exposure to the phenomenon. This study provides rich data from men who are well versed in the fatherless experience. Their experiences certainly offer perspective and insight into the topic. However, this study was limited, since it explored only the experiences of adult males. As a result, only male readers who identify with the results through personal comparisons can validate findings externally. The fatherless experiences of Steve, Joe, Charlie, and Sam can only account for a small portion of the experiences that could potentially illuminate the case of a fatherless identity.

In this study, there was an unintentional focus on men who were raised in traditional, nuclear families. While these men were not recruited specifically from this family paradigm, the

participants that responded and met the criteria were all from once-married, father-mother headed households. This limited the study to perspectives of fatherless individuals that fit within a narrow family paradigm. Therefore, fatherless individuals who have been raised in other types of families (such as same-sex, or single-parent families) may have difficulty validating their experiences with those of the participants in this study, since family constructs seem to play a part in how one identifies as fatherless.

Children's perspectives were not included in this study, which further limits the extrapolation of findings to those under 18-years of age. Furthermore, the study is limited in its ability to generalize findings to a larger population. Yin (2003) noted that single case studies can be generalized if the analytical findings are linked to a particular theory. While this study did link certain aspects of the fatherless experience to Herzog's (1980) psychoanalytic theory on father hunger, the study did not seek to make generalizations.

This case of a *fatherless identity* exposed many variables that emerged from the men's experiences, ultimately leading them to identify as fatherless. These variables are intricately and sometimes indistinctly intertwined with those that may have existed aside from the fatherless experience. This limited the study's ability to produce definitive knowledge on the subject of fatherlessness (Yegedis, Weinbach, & Momsom-Rodriguez, 1999).

Confirming Findings

There were several findings in this study that confirmed research literature pertaining to: historical definitions of fatherlessness and the role that fathers, family structure, and family dynamics play in defining fatherlessness, affects on the emotional, socio-economic, and intellectual wellbeing of sons, and surrogate fatherhood as a way of coping with father absence. In support of other research, there was evidence that indicated the emotional absence of a father

(Blundell, 2002; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004) comprised the definition of fatherlessness.

Further evidence supported contentions about the father's roles of protection, and gauging

aggressivity in boys (Blundell, 2002; Eldgredge, 2001; Herzog, 1980; Popenoe, 1996). In this

study, there were also incidences of families experiencing divorce and separation after periods of

dysfunction that involved parent-parent, parent-child, and sibling-sibling abuse (Daniels, 1998;

Gallagher, 1998; Popenoe, 1996).

Accounts of family dysfunction made it difficult to attribute the emotional effect on the

participants directly to fatherlessness (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Cummings, Goeke-Morey &

Raymond, 2004; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Johnston, 1993). However, fatherless individuals

experienced a gamut of emotions that contributed to diminished emotional wellbeing, which is

consistent with research that suggested emotional issues are common among fatherless

individuals (Blundell, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999; Phares & Clay, 2007). Finally, there was

evidence in this study confirming claims that surrogate fathers (specifically grandfathers and

adult male mentors) may offer support for fatherless children (Taylor, 2007). Conversely,

evidence also indicated that children who were step-fathered (e.g. Joe in this study) did not do

better psychologically than those in single-parent families (e.g. Steve and Charlie) (Amato,

1994).

Defining Fatherlessness

This study provided evidence that the definition of fatherlessness extends to the emotional

unavailability (Blundell, 2002) and the emotional absence of a father (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda,

2004). Steve, Charlie, Joe and Sam felt they either had no emotional connection to fathers, or had

emotionally absent, or unavailable fathers. Steve talked of very little emotional exchange

between him and his father (with the exception of his disclosure to his father over the phone of

his sexual orientation), and believed his father did not cultivate emotional connections in relationships. Charlie had a relationship with his father but described a dad that was absent a great deal from home, even before his death. There were factors in Charlie's experience that alluded to an emotionally disconnected father, especially in reference to the feelings of inadequacy that Charlie experienced in relation to his father. Joe experienced an emotionally absent father that was exacerbated by his physical separation from living in separate countries. Joe also purported that his father did not make much of an effort to develop an emotional relationship with him. Sam disclosed abandonment by his biological father (who was incarcerated), and also by his foster father (who was separated from his foster mother). He struggled with feelings of abandonment and spoke of wanting to connect with his fathers, but was unable to for various reasons. Sam felt his biological father selfishly filled his alcohol addiction instead of following through on promises to be a part of Sam's life. His foster father worked far too much, in Sam's opinion. Therefore, he had limited opportunities to develop an emotional connection with him.

Father Role

This study offered support for claims by other researchers that there is something specific about the father role that is needed in child development (Lamb, 2004; Popenoe, 1996). There was a report of father providing protection for the son (Popenoe, 1996). Charlie viewed his father as his protector and disclosed feeling safe when he was with him. The contentions by other researchers concerning the role of the father in gauging aggressivity for the son (Eldredge, 2001; Herzog, 1980; Piaget, 1936) were evidenced. Joe turned his aggression towards himself in response to the emotional pain he suffered, in part, from his father's absence. He reported self-mutilating and attempting suicide. These acts of aggression did not have direct links to his

father's absence. However, Joe felt they were indirectly related. Sam struggled with issues of aggression towards his siblings in foster care. He acted out directly in response to the breakup of his foster parents.

Family Structure and Dynamics

Individuals who define themselves as fatherless often come from home environments that are riddled with parental conflict and dysfunction (Daniels, 1998; Gallagher, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). Family dysfunction can lead to parental divorce, or separation, often making it difficult to distinguish whether the emotional problems suffered by children are directly related to the absent father, or the dysfunctional environment (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Raymond, 2004: Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Johnston, 1993). Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam reported witnessing parental conflict and dysfunction within their homes resulting in parents divorcing, or separating, ultimately dissolving the primary family unit. These experiences were linked to the men's emotional wellness, and played a part in them taking fatherless identities. The results of this case study also confirmed that another aspect of fatherlessness is defined partly in the emotional disconnection, or emotional absence of the father.

Emotional Factors

The absence of fathers in this study supported contentions in literature involving father hunger (Gallagher, 1998; Herzog, 1980; Herzog, 2001) grief and loss (Blundell, 2002; Emery, 1988; Gallagher, 1998; Mishne, 1979; Whitehead, 1997), masculine identity (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001; Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Herzog, 1980; Kipnis, 1991; Wark, 2000) and affect on emotional wellbeing (Blundell, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999; Phares & Clay, 2007). Charlie, Joe, and Sam gave evidence of a void in their lives created by their absent fathers. This void seemed to trigger a grief-and-loss response that

instigated periods of deep sadness, and depression, particularly for Charlie, Joe, and Sam. Furthermore, Charlie lost his father to death when he was sixteen years of age. He experienced grief and loss as a direct result of father death, while Joe and Sam experienced it as a result of emotional disconnection, and abandonment. These men also spoke in detail about the emotional angst of fatherlessness. Their amalgamated feelings indicated that the emotional wellbeing of these men had been potentially impacted by their fatherless experiences (i.e., bouts of depression, feelings of inadequacy, and lessened priority in their father's lives, etc.).

In conjunction with father hunger and grief-and-loss, evidence was provided in the study that supported the construction of an ideal father image (Neubauer, 1989; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The fatherless men submitted ideas about what they felt a father 'should be'. When this 'ideal image' did not reflect their perceptions of their own fathers, their fatherless identities were promoted. Furthermore, Steve and Joe unconsciously tried to formulate an ideal image of their fathers throughout the interview by combating their perceptions with more rational thoughts toward their fathers.

The absence of an ideal father image, and ultimately an emotionally and physically present father, contributed to an underdeveloped masculine identity for some of the participants in this study (Biller, 1982; Corneau, 1991; Eldredge, 2001; Griswold, 1998; Heatherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Herzog, 1980; Kipnis, 1991; Wark, 2000). There was recognition by these men that fathers could assist in the construction of masculine identity. However, Steve chose more feminine characteristics than masculine ones, and identified more with women in his stepfamily. Charlie reported feeling his father viewed him as a 'sissy' because he was introverted; a characteristic he associated with femininity. He also expressed being more comfortable around women because of his introverted nature, and that his sexual orientation had been questioned at

times in his experience. Joe identified with more feminine characteristics as well. He felt that his father would have been somewhat intolerant of his feminine expressions, such as wearing nail polish. Joe attributed his emotional openness to femininity, as well. The overt emotional expressions of self-mutilation and attempted suicide were also behaviours he was sure his father would not have tolerated. Furthermore, he felt he would never have reached those points of emotionality had he been connected to an emotionally supportive father. Sam, along with all of the other participants, reported having a higher level of comfort associating with women rather than with men. He attributed this to men's competitive natures, and his unwillingness and hesitancy to engage with them on that level.

Socio-economic Factors

Other factors that contributed to a sense of fatherlessness for these men were linked to socio-economic stability (Brott, 1999; McLanahan, 1998; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Popenoe, 1996; Wallerstein, 2000). Steve, Charlie, and Joe reported having moved to smaller towns, or poorer neighborhoods after their fathers left. These shifts involved mothers working more, which limited their time with their children. Furthermore, it limited the resources available to the family, and impacted the opportunities for children to engage in social activities, such as sports.

There was also evidence that the participants developed propensities for delinquent and violent behavior in the absence of their fathers (Brotherson & White, 2007; Day & Lamb, 2004; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990; Steinberg, 1987). These activities may have been part of their experiences outside of fatherlessness. Nonetheless, Steve, Joe, and Sam disclosed involvement in activities such as theft, vandalism, and acts of violence towards siblings. Steve stole coins from unlocked cars while in elementary school. Joe reported stealing money from his workplace, and vandalizing buildings with graffiti. Sam spoke of breaking items

at home as a result of his anger, broke into his neighbor's house, and was violent towards his

siblings. The ramifications of these behaviours ranged in severity from counselling referrals to

criminal charges resulting in probation.

Joe alluded to another social factor that was confirmed in literature. He disclosed early

sexual initiation and linked his decision to engage in this behavior to his absent father. Joe felt

that, had his father been present, he might have offered guidance in this area. Furthermore, he

feels he would not have lost his virginity at a young age had his father been around.

Intellectual Factors

This study confirmed findings pertaining to an impedance of fatherlessness on a child's

intellectual development (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Teachman et

al., 1998). Joe relayed incidences of academic listlessness that he linked to the absence of an

encouraging and role-modeling father. He described his father as very self-disciplined; a trait he

felt he could have learned from his father. Joe felt that, had his father been present during Joe's

developmental years, he would have excelled in academic pursuits. Charlie gave evidence that

linked his father's absence to academics in a slightly different way. When Charlie's father passed

away, Charlie and his mother moved to the city, which required him to attend a different school.

He felt this may have affected his academics, especially since he noted becoming more reclusive

during that time. Had his father lived, he felt confident they would not have moved from his

hometown, or the school to which he had grown accustomed.

Surrogate Fathers

Surrogate fathers (specifically a grandfather and an adult male mentor in this case) were

seen as a source of support (Taylor, 2007) for two participants in this study. Steve reported

having turned to his grandfather for guidance at points in his fatherless experience, especially in

the area of masculine identity. Sam gained the support of a long-term, adult male mentor that he acknowledged helped him cope with his father's absence. The study also revealed evidence that a step-fathered child does not necessarily do better psychologically than children from single-parent homes (Amato, 1994). This was apparent in Joe's experience when compared to the experiences of other participants. Joe seemed to struggle more with depression than other participants and was the only participant to disclose self-mutilating behaviours and an attempt at suicide. Joe was also the only participant who lived with a stepfather for much of his life after his father left. If emotional responses are adequate indicators of psychological troubles, it appeared Joe struggled more (despite the presence of a stepfather) than those who lived with single mothers for a large portion of their development. (Blundell, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999; Phares & Clay, 2007).

New Findings

The qualitative design of this study allowed unanticipated themes to emerge during the data collection and analysis phases. Stake (1995) postulated that the 'unexpected' should be expected in case study research when it comes to emerging themes; that it is common for unforeseen relationships to appear, leading the researcher down a path of rethinking the phenomenon in question. This required a review of new literature in connection to Steve, Charlie, Joe, and Sam's experiences. In accordance with research literature, the present study found evidence that the fatherless identity may be (1) attributed to the disparity between ideal and perceived father images (Etchegoyen, 2002; Neubauer, 1989; Parke & Brott, 1999; Wallerstein, 2000), (2) associated with the emotional angst of hiding aspects of 'self' (Frijns & Finkenauer, 2009), (3) influenced by lack of positive emotional expression between father and son (Biller, 1974; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), (4) exacerbated by the concept of proxemics

(Oxford University Press, 2005) that I term *emotional proxemics*, (5) influential in the ability to clearly distinguish masculinity and femininity (Biller, 1982; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004), (6) influential in promoting androgynous parenting styles (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004), and (7) instrumental in affecting cultural identity formation (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Cote, 1996; Rotheram-Borus, 1993).

Disparate Ideal and Perceived Father Images

Research indicates that boys create an ideal image of their father (Neubauer, 1989) that is often in conflict with the image that society presents (Parke & Brott, 1999). The disparity that occurs between these two images will either drive him further from his father, or move him closer (Parke & Brott, 1999; Wallerstein, 2000). Disgruntled mothers have often been blamed for helping the son create a distorted image of his father (Etchegoyen, 2002). As the image becomes distorted, the boy has difficulty resolving it with his ideal father image (Neubauer, 1989).

Concerning the father image, Steve said, "You…have…in the back of your head what he is supposed to be to." Joe and Sam who had also formulated ideas about the ideal role of a father. The study suggested that the disparity between what they actually thought of their fathers and the ideal father image may have caused them to repel their fathers. This caused a greater emotional distance between father and son, ultimately promoting fatherless identities for the men.

Emotional Impact of Hiding Aspects of Self

Further to father images, this study provided evidence that the men had kept secrets for much of their lifetime. Frijns and Finkenauer (2009) studied the effects of secret keeping in a longitudinal study involving 278 adolescents between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. The study found that there was a correlation between secret keeping and psychosocial adjustment.

Adolescents that started and kept secrets were thought to suffer psychological problems and poor relationship quality versus those who did not start and keep secrets (Frijns & Finkenauer, 2009).

Steve, Charlie, Joe and Sam had all kept secrets at one point or another during their lives. Steve hid that he was gay from his father and other family members. When he finally came out to his father, it was in an attempt to get back at him for not sending child support. Steve recalled that he was frustrated with his father at the time, but after his disclosure he felt no emotion at all. Charlie kept a secret about his irrational thought concerning his father's death; that he caused his father's death by having an argument with him the day he died. Charlie had not disclosed that secret to anyone in over thirty-five years. Joe kept things from his father concerning his relationships and complicated sex life with women. Sam's secret involved keeping the truth from this mother about wanting her to reunite with his father. It appeared that all of these men endured emotional angst over secret-keeping, and in keeping with literature their relationships with their fathers may have suffered as a result.

Lack of Positive Emotional Exchange

Another factor affecting fatherless identities involved literature pertaining to the lack of positive emotional expression between father and child. Biller (1974) purported that expressing positive emotions can be very healthy for both father and son. It is during these exchanges that a son gains a sense of security, feels loved, and develops closeness with the father (Biller, 1974). Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) concurred that this type of positive paternal engagement results in positive outcomes for child development.

According to the men's retrospective self-report, this study showed that there was a lack of positive emotional exchange between participants and their fathers. Furthermore, the men reported having expressed more negative emotions with their fathers. Two prominent examples

from the data included Steve's emotional disclosure of his sexual orientation to his father, and

Charlie's argument with his father the day his father passed away. Aside from the incident

involving Steve 'coming out' to his father, he reported having very little emotional interaction

with him. He claimed, " My emotional reaction…it's just sort of nonchalant."

This case study revealed that the emotional disconnection between fathers and sons

contributed to a greater sense of fatherlessness, and in part defined their fatherless identity.

'Emotional disconnection' in some instances did not adequately apply. In Steve, Joe, Charlie,

and Sam's experiences, there were times when the negative emotional connection was obvious,

and times when it seemed like more of an emotional disconnection. The difference between the

two was evidenced in the emotional response, or lack of response, to the father-son interaction.

Negative emotional connections existed when there were definite emotional responses to

the interaction (as in Steve's example earlier when he disclosed his sexual identity to his father).

His emotional response indicated a negative emotional connection to his father. Another

poignant example of a negative emotional connection was evident in Joe's interactions with his

father. When referring to telephone conversations with his father, Joe said, " I don't feel

disconnected to him on the phone...I at least feel excited…and I get off the phone and…I feel

really awkward and kind of displaced for a couple of hours at least." The negative emotional

connection is apparent in his feelings of awkwardness and displacement in the aftermath of

father-son interaction.

An emotional disconnection was obvious when there was no emotional exchange at all.

Charlie's relationship with his father illustrated this, especially in reference to occasions where

his father would go to Charlie's lacrosse games. When describing his introverted personality,

Charlie admitted, "I wasn't open with him…Because of my personality, I didn't even like him

coming [to my lacrosse games]…My parents would be talking to the other boys and sometimes I wouldn't say a word." Later when talking about interactions with his father about sports, Charlie shared, "I wouldn't talk to him…I remember one day he went to another guy on my team and he said, [Charlie's] not talking to me. What does he need?" When contact with the fathers resulted in no apparent emotional response, or an emotional 'shutdown' on the son's part, the emotional disconnection between Charlie and his father was evidenced.

Emotional Proxemics

Emotional fatherlessness and the need for positive paternal involvement was alluded to in past research (Biller, 1974; Day & Lamb, 2004; Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). However, this study conjured a theme that I referred to as *emotional proxemics.* This theme emerged and its label was coined in my interactions with Steve. The Oxford Dictionary (2005) defines *proxemics* as, "…the branch of knowledge that deals with the amount of space that people feel it necessary to set between themselves and others." When talking about the ways he identified as fatherless, Steve said, "It's emotional. It's physical. He doesn't occupy any sort of space in my life and never has." Later in the interview, Steve relayed, "I really have made no effort to make any room for him in my life." Extrapolating from the Oxford (2005) definition and extending it from Steve's experience, it seemed Steve was not only talking about the physical space that he had set between himself and his father, but rather the emotional space, as well. I call this *emotional proxemics*.

Distinguishing Masculine and Feminine Characteristics

This study also found evidence that the absence of a masculine paternal role (Biller, 1982) may have influenced the difficulty that participants had in distinguishing masculine and feminine characteristics, ultimately impacting their own sense of masculine identity. Some

researchers presented the notion that the absence of a masculine father may cause gender identity and sex-role problems for boys (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). In child development research, not only did the presence of a masculine father seem to matter in a boy's development, but also the relationship between father and son seemed to play an important part. Literature showed boys were more masculine if the father-son relationship was good (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

This fatherless identity case study showed that sons of absent fathers had difficulty distinguishing between masculine and feminine characteristics. This was apparent when Joe said, "I just don't know what would define someone besides their physical characteristics as being masculine." He went on to say, "I just don't like putting things in a box…I don't think these are the traits men should have, and these are the things that a boy should play with growing up." When asked to name feminine characteristics, Joe echoed Sam's sentiment when he said, "I'm not really someone that puts categories on different people. I'm not comfortable with it." These men identified with feminine characteristics, which may explain their lack of comfort in labeling feminine traits. The examples, in conjunction with previous examples pertaining to Joe's feminine expressions of wearing nail polish, provide evidence that gender identity problems may have existed (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997), and the absence of their fathers may have accounted for their propensity to identify with feminine traits (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

Androgynous Parenting

This study cannot determine with certainty that the difficulty in differentiating masculine and feminine characteristics was directly related to fatherless identities. Research by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) pointed out that androgynous parenting could influence the inability to distinguish masculine and feminine characteristics. In this case study, Steve identified himself as

feminine. He also was the only participant to acknowledge an increased mother presence. He said:

> Absence of my father can also be read as...the increased presence of my mother…I
>
> understood my life as having an absent father. It didn't matter. And then, having a
>
> mother…she really played up the role that she was there…I really responded to that.

When asked whether his mother took a fathering role, he said, "She took on all those activities that are supposed to be taken on by both parents…I expected it all from my mom; drew it all from her." Steve's examples illustrate what could be interpreted as an androgynous parenting style.

Cultural Identity Formation

Another new finding that is supported in literature is the aspect of cultural identity formation. Bernal and Knight (1993) discussed the acculturation process that occurs when adolescents of differing cultural backgrounds are placed in varied cultural settings, and the importance that core cultural values play in their identity. Cote (1996) reinforced the idea that culture and identity are interrelated and presented ideas for how individuals can maintain a cultural identity in an otherwise complex and chaotic world. Rotheram-Borus (1993) explored the changing behaviors of adolescents who assumed a bicultural identity across varied situations. The concept of cultural identity was evident in this fatherless identity study.

Sam came from a First Nations background and felt the pressures of cultural assimilation when fostered in predominantly 'white middle-class' communities. His experiences affected the degree to which he connected with his own culture. The circumstances that lead to his fatherless identity are interrelated to his cultural identity and assimilation issues. His fatherless identity began to take form when he was placed in foster care. His father's alcoholic addiction

contributed to an unstable and volatile home environment, which lead Sam to a life of foster care in Caucasian foster families, ultimately limiting his exposure to his First Nations culture.

Implications for Counseling Practice

This case study of fatherless identity has prompted considerations for counseling intervention. I started the study with the intent to contribute to fatherless research. The motivating factors that guided participants to the study made me aware that there are implications for counseling practice. It seemed that the participants all had their own reasons for engaging in the study. However, in at least three cases there was an acknowledgment that contributing to the research meant they could possibly help others who struggle with fatherless identities. Furthermore, Charlie, Joe, and Sam seemed to have benefited from talking openly about their fatherless experiences. While it may not have been the factor that motivated them to participate in the study, the process of sharing their experiences seemed to affect them in an emotionally positive way.

Charlie expressed a personal sentiment when he acknowledged, "You actually gave me an opportunity to speak about it, which I'm really glad I did." Sam shared the sentiment and felt a weight had been lifted. In an unencumbered tone he said, "It's good to let this off my back and to be part of the study…to help." Joe had wanted to talk about his father issues for a while with his counselor but said, "We just never got around to it." He went on to say, "For me verbalizing stuff helps. The other thing is, I know that even if it doesn't help me directly right now, it may help someone else."

There are individual, group, family, and career counseling implications resulting from this study. Research on fatherlessness can help individuals who identify as fatherless seek ways through the psychological struggles that are often integral parts of their experiences. More

specifically, fatherless identity research has implications for helping those who would benefit from grief and loss counselling after father death, estrangement, or abandonment. As was evident in this case, some may battle with issues of deep sadness or depression, anger, and resentment. Furthermore, counselling for concerns about gender identity and sexual orientation is suggested by these findings. Providing individual or group counselling sessions for those who are confused about such issues may be very helpful. For instance, a counsellor that helps individuals focus on their positive affect, and the affirmation that is often found in the disclosures of others may prove to be a source of emotional support for those who struggle with such issues. In situations such as those described by Charlie and Joe, career counseling may have also been useful for guiding them through issues related to work ethic, motivation, and career direction.

The findings of this research study also suggested that family counselling may be implicated. This was indicated in the anecdotes of dysfunction within families described in this study. Specifically, families struggled with the ramifications of alcohol addiction, as well as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. When families of fatherless individuals have difficulty seeing their way through issues that are an effect of father absence, a counsellor may be able to provide insight and offer a beacon of hope amidst their pain and struggles.

In a world where the complexities of balancing personal, relational, and occupational responsibilities are increasingly difficult, therapeutic intervention seems not only a viable supportive option, but an essential one.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research topics pertaining to absent fathers have been explored by conservative, liberal, Christian, secular, and various psychosocial groups. What seemed to be lacking in research was a connection between absent fathers and one's sense of fatherlessness. It may be argued that an

absent father does not constitute being fatherless. After all, if a father exists and is available to be present in his child's life, how can the child claim to be fatherless? The participants in the study did not make a distinction between an absent father and being fatherless. In fact, three of the four participants had living, intermittently-present, somewhat-connected fathers. The sons acknowledged their relationships with their fathers as less than desirable, meaningless, and unimportant in the adult stage of their lives. They considered themselves fatherless, yet recognized that they could have a relationship with their fathers if they chose to. When referencing the chance to have a connection with his father, Joe illustrated, "I have the opportunity in a way…I can contact him but I don't….It doesn't matter to me…It will not make a difference." Research on the topic of the adult son's responsibility in the father-son relationship is necessary to determine whether he perceives the responsibility of the relationship to be the father's province.

To be fathered indicates a relationship. Most of the onus for relationship with the sons in this study seemed to have fallen on the fathers who separated, divorced, or estranged themselves from families. It is understandable that parents should accept primary responsibility for fostering meaningful relationships with their children when they are at earlier stages of development. However, when the child has reached adulthood – whether fatherless or not – what onus is placed on the sons in this case to develop meaningful relationships with their fathers? Furthermore, what barriers keep them from such a relationship? At which point in a child's development is it reasonable for him to assume responsibility for developing and maintaining a relationship with his father? These questions may be viable considerations for future study and are likely to provide insight into attempts at solutions. These solutions may be especially useful for resolving ongoing absent father issues that may have developed during earlier stages of life.

The issues that emerge relative to absent fathers seemed to point to aspects of the fatherless identity that were deeply psychological; a psychological impedance that keeps children from fathers and fathers from children when both child and father are alive, perhaps not willing and able, but certainly available to narrow the gap of the child's fatherless experience. The key components that comprised fatherless identities in this case were physical separation through divorce, and geographical location, father death, negative father-son emotional exchange, the lack of positive, meaningful father-son relationships, and emotional disconnection from fathers. Unarguably, a father can be present while at the same time leaving offspring fatherless. This calls for more research in the area of emotional fatherlessness, especially pertaining to how fathers and children occupy one another's emotional space, or *emotional proxemics*, as otherwise defined. This case study of a fatherless identity has just begun to scratch the surface of how individuals who identify as fatherless understand and explicate the case.

Future research may explore other male perspectives of fatherlessness at different stages of development; particularly experiences of children. Perspectives from female children and adults may also provide greater insight into the case. It may also be worthwhile to limit the scope of research to populations that identify as fatherless in more specific terms such as father death, or parental divorce. Narrowing scopes of research to specific terms may help us understand more fully the various ways the fatherless assume their fatherless identities. Multiple and more specific cases can contribute significantly to fatherless research. Furthermore, studies can be done that compare the experiences of the fatherless with those who feel adequately fathered. Studies with control groups consisting of positively connected father-son duos may help us better understand components of fathering that offer solutions for those who struggle with a fatherless identity.

Conclusion

Given the arguments concerning fatherlessness, the evolving role of a father in past decades, and the more recent research focus on father involvement rather than father absence, this case study highlighted findings that suggested *fatherless* should not be used interchangeably with children of divorce and separation, single-motherhood, father abandonment, or father death. While participants may have experienced many of the struggles associated with father absence in the past, this case study presented further evidence that it cannot be fully ascertained whether the struggles would have been non-existent with a present father. The participants acknowledged and believed that a father's presence may have lessened the impact of the struggles, but their sense of fatherlessness goes much deeper than the residential and marital statuses of their parents, father abandonment, and father death. This case study provided suggestions that the historical terms that defined *fatherless* are merely factors that intensify the experience. They do not define a person as fatherless. Perhaps a more accurate definition of *fatherless* should include factors and circumstances that define the father-son relationship such as attitude towards one another, concepts of forgiveness and trust, and the persona that the child chooses to identify with in relation to his experience.

The case of a fatherless identity requires further exploration. Historically, stereotypical definitions of father and societal impositions of the father's role in the family unit have largely influenced how some define themselves as fatherless. For many, to be fatherless is to be separated from the father through death while trying to maintain a relationship with him through personal memories and the stories of others who knew him. For others, their fatherless identity is summed up in disruption to the family dynamic by way of parental separation, divorce, estrangement, or abandonment. This disruption is often exacerbated by physical and emotional

proxemics posing challenges for both father and son to connect. The optimistic assertion, however, is that these obstacles can be hurdled by consciously choosing to establish and maintain meaningful contact. Meaningful contact can be cultivated through positive emotional exchange and connection between father and son, while sharing aspects of their lives with each other in ways that promotes a sense of positive involvement. If a father-son relationship is a desire for those who struggle with a fatherless identity, it is my hope that this case study encourages them to explore the possibility that a fathered identity is probable when the work is done to assume it.

A Positive Reflection

The process of this study has caused a slight shift in my perspective. My western, Christian, hetero-normative views still influence my personal convictions, and I believe a caring, involved father can make a significant contribution to his son's development. However, these men have taught me that fatherlessness is more broadly experienced than my limited views can delineate. Whether diminishing the significance of a father is a way of accepting and dealing with past and current realities surrounding fatherlessness, or an individual's vigal against the political and social influences that impose unrealistic expectations for a father-son relationship, I have come to understand that the experiences leading males to assume fatherless identities are perhaps more individualistic, psychological, and spiritual than previously realized.

The case study on a fatherless identity has also challenged how I see fatherless individuals. Prior to engaging in this study, I would have defined 'fatherless' as the absence of the male biological parent through death, estrangement, divorce or separation, or emotional disconnection from offspring. I did not impose this definition in the study simply because I wanted participants to identify themselves as fatherless so that I could explore the components of the phenomenon

that comprised their personal identities. What I have learned is that some of my preconceptions were confirmed. Divorce, separation, estrangement, physical and emotional distancing, and death were components of the amalgamated experiences of the participants. However, they do not define a person as *fatherless*. The *fatherless identity* has much deeper emotional and psychological roots than the familial status, geographical and proxemic distance from the father, or personal and relational affinities can afford.

I end this chapter with a final quote from Joe, "I think [to] be best male friends with your father would be the most ideal thing - to connect positive." Developing positive connections and recognizing the value in supportive relationships may very well turn the tide of the fatherless identity. I close with an alternate ending to the poem *I am a buoy*:

<div align="center">

The sun sets
The water cools around me
I am calm for now
I wait

In the distance I see an object
Moving towards me
Creating ripples
Confronting the current that carries me
Challenging my diffidence
We collide
Its presence overwhelms me

Suddenly
A splash
The refreshing water washes over me
And I'm hooked
No longer at the mercy of the current
I feel connected
Joined as if one with this iron object
Could this be what I've been searching for?

</div>

Storms continue to rise
The winds croon
I learn their melody
Creating waves that dance around me
I gracefully feel the rhythm
I await the finale of the ocean's concert

For I know
The calm always follows
The sun eventually shines down on me
Casting a reflection before me on the mirror that is the sea
I recognize the image
I know who I am

I am Buoy
No longer wandering
No longer fearful
No longer alone
Because I am tied to the Anchor

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Appendix A

Kijiji Advertisement

Research Participants Needed.

I am a University of Saskatchewan graduate student working towards a master of school and counseling psychology degree. I am researching the experience of fatherlessness.

I am inviting people who meet the following criteria to be a part of my study. The participants for this study must:

(1) be biologically male,
(2) be a minimum age of 18 years,
(3) identify himself as fatherless based on at least one of the four categories included in the researcher's definition of fatherlessness,
(4) speak fluent English,
(5) be willing and able to talk openly about his experience of fatherlessness, and the feelings and emotions associated with the experience.
(6) be able to commit approximately 3 hours of time to the interview and post-interview processes, and
(7) be willing to share photos or other memorabilia items that signify his experience of fatherlessness.
(8) if photos are shared that include people other than himself, he must obtain signed consent from the individuals in the photo to use it for the purpose of this research study. A consent form will be provided for this purpose.

Please express your interest by contacting Cordell Osmond by clicking the reply button to this ad, or through the following means:
Email: cordellosmond@yahoo.ca
Phone: (306) 934-2575

Appendix B

Poster

Are you Fatherless?

I am a University of Saskatchewan graduate student working towards a master of school and counseling psychology degree. I am looking for case study participants that meet the following criteria to engage in a research study about the experience of fatherlessness. If you are interested, and you meet the criteria below, please contact Cordell Osmond at 306.934.2575, or email cordellosmond@yahoo.ca.

If you:
- are biologically male
- are a minimum age of 18 years
- identify yourself as fatherless based on at least one of the four categories included in the researcher's definition of fatherlessness,
- speak fluent English,
- are willing and able to talk openly about your experience of fatherlessness, and the feelings and emotions associated with the experience,
- are able to commit approximately 3 hours of time to the interview and post-interview processes,
- are willing to share photos or other memorabilia items that signify your experience of fatherlessness, and
- are able to obtain signed consent from individuals that may appear in your photos to use it for the purpose of this research study. A consent form will be provided for this purpose.

Then, you are a perfect candidate for this study!

Thank you for your consideration! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Fatherlessness
Ph: 306.934.2575
cordellosmond@yahoo.ca
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cordellosmond@yahoo.ca
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Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

I seek your participation in my research project for partial fulfillment of the requirements for a

Master in Education degree in the area of School and Counseling Psychology. The title of my

study is: The Experience of Fatherlessness. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask

any additional questions you might have.

1. **Researcher**:
   I, <u>E. G. Cordell Osmond</u>, will be conducting this research under the supervision of <u>Dr. Stephanie Martin</u>, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

   <u>Contact Numbers:</u>

   Student: E. G. Cordell Osmond: (306) 934-2575

   Faculty: Dr. Stephanie Martin: (306) 966-5259

2. **Purpose and Procedure:**
   The title of my study is The Experience of Fatherlessness. The purpose is to describe the case of individuals who identify themselves as fatherless based on one of the categories defined by the researcher. The researcher defines "fatherlessness" as the absence of the male biological parent in the life of his offspring through:
   - (1) death,
   - (2) divorce, separation or estrangement from the female parent resulting in primary care being awarded to the mother,
   - (3) abandonment,
   - (4) or emotional disconnect.

   Through this case study, the researcher seeks to gain knowledge of what it is like to be fatherless from the perspective of the individuals that have been impacted by this phenomenon. This study has been given approval by the University of Saskatchewan's Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research on _____ _____, 2008.

Data will be gathered via personal semi-structured interviews. Prior to commencing the interview, you will be asked to read a short excerpt to cue computer voice recognition software for transcription purposes. This will not be a part of the data collection process. Once the computer software recognizes your voice, the interview will begin. I anticipate that each interview will require around 60 - 90 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio recorded and a transcript of the interview will be produced. By consenting to participate in the study, you are consenting to the audio recording. Once the transcript is prepared, there will be a post-interview meeting and you will be asked to review your statements from the transcript. You will then have an opportunity to clarify, add, or delete any statements. This should require only a few minutes of your time.

3. **Potential Risks:**
There is minimal risk for participating in this study. The researcher is cognisant of the possibility that the interview process may cause emotional distress when talking about the experiences associated with fatherlessness. In such a case, you will be provided with information on where to seek counseling services. Every effort will be made to protect the name of individuals through the use of pseudonyms in all cases. Personal interviews will be scheduled for a mutually agreed upon time and location to ensure privacy and the confidentiality of any statements made.

Your participation in this study will hopefully provide you with an opportunity to reflectively dialogue on how your life has been impacted by fatherlessness. From a broader perspective, your participation in this study has the potential to inform current research on the subject. While much has been written on the topic of fatherlessness, in-depth, qualitative inquiry that presents individual experiences is needed.

The data generated from your participation in the study, namely audio files, and transcripts will be kept in a secure location at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years by Dr. Stephanie Martin, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, in accordance with the university guidelines. All data will be destroyed after this time.

4. **Confidentiality:**
The results of the study will be used to complete my Master of Education degree in School and Counseling Psychology. In the future, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented at a conference/seminar. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all cases.

5. **Right to Withdraw:**
You may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, all data pertaining to your case will be destroyed and another suitable participant will be recruited.

6.   **Questions**:
        If at any point you have questions concerning the study, please contact myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Stephanie Martin, at the telephone numbers provided in section 1. This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Sciences Research on _____, 2008. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services at phone number 966-2975.

        You will have public access to the completed study in the University of Saskatchewan library. You may also request verbal debriefing and feedback on your interview dialogue or final draft of the project by contacting me at the numbers listed in section 1.

7.   **Consent to Participate:**
        I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study described above understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. A copy of this consent form has been provided for my records.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix D

Permission of Photo Use

I, _____, give _____,

the participant, and <u>E. G. Cordell Osmond</u>, the researcher, permission to use the photograph

bearing my image in a research study. I understand that no copies of the photo will appear in the

research findings and that only a detailed description of the photo will be provided for the

purpose of data collection. I also understand that my anonymity will be ensured by the use of a

pseudonym.

_____   _____

Signature of Photographed Individual   Date

Appendix E

Fatherless Participant Interview Questions

1. In what way do you define yourself as fatherless?

2. Describe how these photos or memorabilia items represent fatherlessness to you. What significance do they hold?

3. Tell me about a time in your life when your father's absence was particularly noticed. Describe what you remember feeling and what significance that time holds for you.

4. How would your father's presence have made a difference during the time(s) you've described?

5. If you could tell your father one thing right now, what would it be? What questions would you have for him?

6. Had your father been present in your life up to this point, would your life be different now? If so, how?

7. How did the experience of fatherlessness shape you into who you are today?

8. What impact did your experience have on you socially?

9. How would you describe your personality, how you relate to others? How has your fatherless experience helped shape that, if at all?

10. Do you feel others viewed you differently because you were fatherless? If so, how?

11. How has your experience affected the degree to which you would engage with others? The types of people you would surround yourself with? Your behaviour?

12. How do you feel now about your father's absence? What emotions do you attach to the experience?

13. If your father were to suddenly be present in your life, describe how you would feel? What type of the relationship would you have? What difference would it make in your life, if any?

14. Describe your "academic" history. Did you receive good grades, finish school, etc.?

15. Has your father's absence affected you academically? If so, how?

16. Do you feel teachers, or educators treated you differently because you were fatherless? If so, in what ways?

17. What characteristics do you feel form a masculine identity? A feminine identity? Which characteristics do you feel you possess?

18. If your father had been present in your life, how would it have affected your sense of masculine or feminine identity?

19. In the absence of your father, were there people that took on the role of father in your life? If so, describe how they took on that role and whether they fulfilled it.

20. What role do you feel a father should play in his son's life? Describe the ideal father.

21. If you are or choose to become a father, how will the absence of your father affect the degree to which you are or will be involved in your child's life?

22. What sort of things were you at risk for in your fatherless experience?

23. Describe the struggles you faced in the past as a result of being fatherless. What struggles do you face today? And what do you think you will face in the future?

24. How would having a father ease the struggles?

25. If your fatherless experience has been difficult, describe whether you feel you are resilient and to what degree – 1 being not resilient at all and 5 being extremely resilient.

26. How have you coped positively with your father's absence? What strategies have helped you cope?

27. What are your thoughts about this study?

28. What else would you like me to know about your fatherless experience that you have not yet shared?

Appendix F

Data Collection Form

I authorize the researcher, E. G. Cordell Osmond, to audio record and produce transcripts of all semi-structured interviews for the purpose of this research study.

I understand that any photos or items of memorabilia shared in the interviews will be described in detail for the purpose of data collection.

I understand that I will have to provide signed consent from others appearing in my photos to use the photo for research purposes.

I understand that pseudonyms for people appearing in photos will be used in order that their identities remain anonymous.

Signature of Participant	Date

Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix G

Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal

interviews and hereby agree to release it for use in this study. I have been given the opportunity

to read the transcript to clarify, add, or delete information so they will accurately represent my

thoughts, ideas and intentions. I acknowledge that after having the opportunity to edit the

transcript, it accurately reflects what was said in my personal interview with the researcher, E. G.

Cordell Osmond. I understand that my participation in this study continues to be strictly

voluntary, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I also understand

that although the data from this study may be published and/or presented at seminars or

conferences, my identity will be kept completely anonymous and confidential through the use of

a pseudonym. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to E. G. Cordell Osmond to be used

in the manner described in the Informed Consent Form. I understand that a copy of the

Transcript and Transcript Release Form are available upon request.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date