

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ABSENT FATHERS:
PERSPECTIVES, RATIONALE, FACTORS

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DEDICATION

As a child, it pained me to not know my father beyond his full name, Charles Edward Peterson. I hated him for not being a part of my life to help mold me. As a teenager, I vowed to be my best so in the event we every crossed paths I would show him how much of a successful man I became without him. Because of his absence my mother, Lois T. Blount, served as my mother and my father. She taught me to be a man and not a mouse. She never missed an opportunity to inform me that I could be better and also encouraged me to aspire for greatness in her own special way.

When I graduated from Sam Houston State University in May of 2004, she came to help me celebrate. It was at this moment I knew I became a man in her eyes. She was amazed at my ability to set out a goal and strive towards accomplishing said goal. After Sam, I went straight into my master's program at Texas Southern University. I told her I was pursuing Counseling. My mother said, "That's dumb, Black people don't do counseling. You should use your degree and become a member of Houston Police Department." Because she knew once I had a desire to do something it was going to happen regardless she encouraged me and prayed that I knew what I was doing with my career.

Upon graduating in August of 2007, she was proud once again proud of her baby boy. She said, "I'm impressed you so smart. I ain't think you would do it, you impressed me." At this moment, I knew she respected me as a man able to make sound decisions for my life. I worked as a school counselor for couple of years and she proud and happy for the life that I had established for myself. But me being me: enduring personal hardship and always wanting more for myself, in November 2008 after some research I told my

mother I was interested in the doctoral program at Sam Houston State University. She affectionately told me, “Well good, you need to be a doctor because I wouldn’t go see anyone with just letters behind their name. You would need to be a doctor to help me!” I laughed it off with some anger, but I knew that was her way of showing me her tough love. And in response I told her I would show her I would get into the program and become doctor. She stated, “You’ll just be a quack anyway.” I was furious on the inside so I knew I had to prove her wrong.

I have always been appreciative of the way she loved me as her son her. Her love me was never too soft and never too hard, it was just what I needed. My mother passed away in February 2009, after her death I felt that I lost all direction; I lost my number one heckler. I needed her here to encourage me along the way, but I found a way. I am so proud for her to see me become Dr. Lawrence Kirk Taylor, Sr. although, she is not here her remarks resonate and echo in my mind. My dissertation is first dedicated to her for without her cunning remarks I would not have chosen to undertake and complete this endeavor.

In addition to my mother my dissertation is also dedicated to my ex-wives, LaChel and Chenise. These two women loved me unconditionally even in my broken state. They both showed me a different side of myself and I am thankful for the ability to experience life and love with the both of you. LaChel you helped to push me towards greatness. Without our flame dissipating I would never have pursued a doctorate degree. The pursuit of the doctorate served as my legitimate reason to leave Fort Worth after the divorce and flee back to Houston. Chenise I met you while in a space where I was ready to try love again. You have always believed in me and served as my number one fan and

supporter as I navigated the doctoral program. You encouraged me when I wanted to give up, when I was being lazy and unmotivated, and especially when I was frustrated about the aspects of finishing the dissertation. I dedicate my dissertation to the both of you because you both helped me get to this stage in life as well gave me two of the best gifts in life my sons.

To my sons, Lawrence Kirk Taylor, Jr and Lennox Kirk Taylor I love you both with my whole heart. I will always be your father and I will always be a part of your life. You both amaze me because you all are so reflective of me as a child and I am more than excited to be your dad. I look forward to watching you grow up and develop into Taylor men. Because I am your dad, you both have big shoes to fill and I expect nothing but the best from the both of you. I will always be here to help you, guide you, and love you. I only ask that you strive for greatness as your father has and never settle. I love you my kings in training.

ABSTRACT

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Father absence is defined as a man who has had no physical interaction with his children and has not provided any form of financial support within 12 consecutive months (Black, 2008). Father absence affects poverty, child health, incarceration, crime, teen pregnancy, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and education (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2011). There is research available on the impact of father absence, but there are few studies that discuss father absence from the perspective of the absent father. The researcher chose to fill a void within the literature and give voice to a population that has been researched, but not studied from their perspective. A phenomenological examination into the lived experiences of absent fathers was investigated to uncover their perspectives. Seven men expressed their feelings, rationales, and justifications regarding their absence. Using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method nine themes emerged from the data. To enhance credibility participants conducted member checks of their verbatim transcriptions to ensure accuracy of content. The author found absent fathers' can formulate a conceptualized definition of what it means to be a father. Although, they have an understanding their comprehension did not yield application. Implications are presented for practitioners to assist absent fathers in overcoming feelings of shame, grief, guilt, and inadequacy. The author created a Model of Reunification for Absent Fathers to serve as a guide for those who wish to assist absent fathers who are motivated to engage in the process of reunification with their children.

KEY WORDS: Absent fathers, Father absence, Non-resident father, Model of Reunification

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Based on U.S. Census Bureau (2010) statistics, there were 15.3 million single female headed households reported, an 18.2% growth from 2000. Due to this substantial increase, children who are supervised by female parents alone represent approximately 24 million children (one out of three) residing in homes with absent biological fathers (U.S. Census, 2009). As a result, the “father factor” has been created among social issues currently facing America (i.e., poverty, child health, incarceration, crime, teen pregnancy, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and education; National Fatherhood Initiative, 2011). Specifically, the poverty rate in 2008 for households headed by females alone was 28.7% compared to 13.2% for the entire population (Edin & Kissane, 2010). In addition, Alio, Mbah, Kornoshy, Marty, and Salihu (2010) found that when fathers are supportive and involved during their wife’s/companion’s pregnancy, newborns tend to have fewer complications at birth.

In relation to other “father factor” issues, youth who have never had a father in their lives versus those raised by both parents displayed significantly higher odds of becoming incarcerated (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Similarly, Anderson (2002) found that adolescents—more especially boys—from father absent households were at higher risk of becoming involved in status, property, and/or person delinquencies. Youth in father absent households were also more likely to be sexually active (Hendricks, et al., 2005).

With regard to child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and education factors, married mothers, high educational attainment, and positive father involvement were

significant predictors of lower maternal physical abuse (Guterman, Yookyong, Lee, Waldfogel, & Rathouz, 2009). In addition, Mandara and Murray (2006) found that boys from father present households were less likely to use drugs than those from father absent households. Finally, Tillman (2007) indicated that students living with step families or in a single parent home were shown to have significantly higher levels of behavioral problems at school than those who had always lived with both biological parents. Thus, two questions in particular should arise from the above mentioned social concerns: (a) why are fathers deserting their children and (b) what factors tend to influence their absence?

The lack of a father figure in the home, financial instability, criminality, and an adverse relationship with the child's mother were indicators of father absence (Black, 2008; Corcoran 2005; Glauber, 2008; U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). In Black's research, which focused on African American absent fathers, all of her participants were products of single family female headed households. These men, also, grew up without the presence of a father in their homes; therefore, they did not have good role models for their own position as fathers. In addition, these men believed that a financially deficient father should not be allowed around his child. Hence, being unable to financially support their own families also discouraged any involvement with their children. In a study conducted by Glauber (2008), for example, a wage disparity between African American, Latino, and White men was found in which African Americans were more likely to earn less.

In comparison to the reported incarceration rates of male offenders per 100,000 U.S. residents, the Black rate was 4,749 followed by Hispanics, 1,822 and Whites, 708

(U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Accordingly, there are numerous men residing in prison who cannot be physically present in the lives of their children. Corcoran (2005) found that other reasons besides financial instability and criminality may include a divorce, the end of a relationship, or because they became fathers unexpectedly as the result of a casual sexual encounter.

Regardless of the factors associated with a father's absence, this phenomena directly impacts his child. For example, Jones (2008) described a father's presence as being essential in the child's navigation through the early stages of development; thus, a father's absence during these crucial periods in a child's life can be detrimental. Likewise, the presence of a father can be influential in a child's psychosocial development as well (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006). A father's presence impacts a child's development in a positive manner during times that require emotional reactions and interaction (Pleck, 2007). On the other hand, a father's absence may negatively impact a child's behaviors, attitudes, and development (East et al., 2006; Rodney & Mupier, 1999). As is evident, the effects of a father's absence can be damaging for some children who are reared in single parent households.

Research pertaining to fathers has advanced beyond viewing them simply as the other parent (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2007). I have found that previous research concerning how fathers impact their child has focused primarily on their fertility status and behaviors (Pleck, 2007). Although information regarding a father's effect on his child is important, understanding his role in terms of interactions with his child or the lack thereof adds significant knowledge to the current body of literature (Cabrera, et al., 2007a). In advancing the research concerning father absence, a

new focus should be placed upon understanding the father. My dissertation is designed to fully comprehend this social issue taken from individual viewpoints of estranged fathers. Understanding the stories of the fathers is essential in addressing the impact of their absence on the children. A change in research ideology will prove to be instrumental in continuing the advancement of knowledge pertaining to the fathers in question.

Statement of the Problem

Previous research related to father absence has focused on the following aspects that affect a child's life negatively: separation-individuation period (Jones, 2007); well-being (East et al., 2006; Senior, 2010); gender role identification (Mandara, Murray, & Joyner, 2005); educational abilities (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Downer, Campos, McWayne, & Gartner, 2008; Ward 2008); maladaptive behaviors (Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003); and sexual activity (Burns, 2008; Hendricks et al., 2005; Mendle et al., 2009). Although numerous researchers have addressed the effects on children from fatherless homes, I found few studies that centered primarily on the perceptions held by absent fathers.

In an effort to address the issue concerning father absence, researchers have studied the phenomenon in terms of the fathering role and father involvement (Cabrera, et al., 2007a; Palkovitz, 2007; Pleck, 2007). Though paying close attention to the fathering role is important, it is equally important to first understand a man's experience in becoming an absent father, a factor that researchers have apparently failed to acknowledge. Due to the lack of research regarding this topic, this study fills a void in

the literature that will assist in better understanding this growing social issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to examine the lived experiences of absent fathers. By addressing the issue from a father's perspective, a firsthand account was obtained. In other words, a study that is reflective of the father's experience may be instrumental in determining the rationale for his absence. In turn, this understanding is important given that an increasing number of today's adolescents are becoming absent fathers themselves (Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009); thus, perpetuating a cycle that will negatively affect their own children. By reaching an understanding from a father's point of view, proactive interventions may be established in order to counteract the occurrence. In particular, themes that emerged may provide practitioners with firsthand knowledge devised to better assist them in working with absent fathers.

Significance of the Study

Consistently, previous researchers indicated that the absence of a father negatively impacted the life of his child (Burns, 2008; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003; Seutter & Rovers, 2004; Ward, 2008). Although there are numerous accounts of how the child is hindered, I found few studies that documented the phenomenon of the absent father from his own viewpoint. For example, only one dissertation (Black, 2008) addressed developmental characteristics which provided relevant information concerning factors that predispose a father to become absent.

Essentially, my study adds to the literature by moving the focus away from the

negative effects regarding absent fathers to one of understanding them through their lived experiences. In addition, it may be influential in stimulating more research on the topic from a perspective that seeks to understand the rationale behind this social problem. By offering a marginalized group the chance to be heard, the results will afford absent fathers with an opportunity to voice their opinions from a different point of view. Thus, researchers may be able to establish a model of reunification between the absent father and child and/or develop programs geared towards rebuilding the family unit. Finally, an established program designed for practitioners could assist absent fathers in understanding the importance of their role as a father and encourage them to remain involved in their child's life.

Definition of Terms

The following terms derived from the literature review are used in order to better acquaint the reader with the intended meaning of each definition.

Absent father and father absence are used interchangeably when referring to a father who has had no physical interaction with his children and has not provided any form of financial support within 12 consecutive months (Black, 2008). In addition, an absent father has been referred to as a male who is not present, deceased, or absent due to circumstances (East et al., 2006).

Ambiguous loss is experienced within a family when an individual member is simply absent either physically or psychologically from family members (Boss, 1999). Furthermore, ambiguous loss includes a stressor situation (Boss, 2006).

Boundary ambiguity occurs when an individual is preoccupied with his or her ambiguous loss, and is the perceptual response to a stressor situation (Boss, 2006).

Father in the context of my study describes a male who has biological children.

Fatherhood includes fertility status and when a man has biological, adoptive, or step children. In addition, fatherhood includes the fathers' behaviors and identity in terms of what they do and experience in their role as fathers (Pleck, 2007).

Father involvement refers to the *engagement* (care giving and shared interactions between father and child), *accessibility* (father's presence and availability to children), and *responsibility* (providing resources to care for his children) (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Paternal warmth, support, control/monitoring, and economic support also represents father involvement (Pleck, 2007).

Non-resident father refers to a father who has left the home due to the dissolution of a marriage, short-term or long-term relationship, or he was never present due to the dynamics of the relationship between the father and mother (Corcoran, 2005).

Perspective refers to thoughts from the absent father's point of view or frame of reference in understanding a particular concept or idea.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

Given that scholarly research pertaining to a father-child relationship has occurred only within the past 30 years, there is no current all-inclusive theory of fathering. Hence, it would be overwhelming to address the vast diversity of fathering contexts, and understanding fathering from a developmental framework would become divided due to the various theories related to lifespan development (Palkovitz, 2007). Since there is no exact fathering theory, I selected several theories with relevant concepts to guide my research. First, Boss' (1977) ambiguous loss theory will be discussed to understand how the absent father impacts his child. Second, Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory will be

used to describe how early child-caretaker interactions affect a child's development and to understand how the father plays a vital part in his child's life. Third, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory will be used to explain how reciprocal interactions between children and their system promote development from childhood to adulthood. Finally, Cabrera, Fitzgerald, et al.'s (2007) heuristic model will be discussed to describe the dynamics of paternal influences over a child's life span.

Ambiguous Loss Theory

According to Boss (1999), ambiguous loss theory is described as a resiliency-focused theory in which a family experiences a loss of a loved one, but the loss remains unclear to them. For example, ambiguous loss is experienced when an individual within the family unit is physically or psychologically absent. Individuals who experience either their father's physical or psychological loss tend to have a preoccupation with him (Boss, 1999). In physical loss, the father's presence is absent yet he is alive in thought. Typically, family members who deal with physical loss are frozen between their grieving and coping processes (Gergen, 2006). Conversely, the father is present in psychological loss but is not involved in the family unit because his thoughts are preoccupied. When this occurs, there is disequilibrium in the family unit (Boss, 1999).

Family members respond to ambiguous loss by attempting to either keep the past alive or leave the past completely behind (Boss, 1999). To illustrate, there are seven assumptions within the ambiguous loss theory that demonstrate resiliency factors which enable the family to cope with their loss. First, families have physical and psychological structures that serve as sources of resiliency (Boss, 2006). Second, families experience boundary ambiguity when individuals encounter an impasse due to their preoccupation in

hopes that the father may return. Third, the higher the level of boundary ambiguity, the more negative are the outcomes experienced by the individual (Boss, 2007). Fourth, families' culture beliefs or values influence their level of tolerance for ambiguity. Fifth, there is no relative truth about the loss; basically, "[the] goal is to find meaning in the situation despite the absence of information and persisting ambiguity" (Boss, 2007, p. 106). Sixth, individuals are forced to live with unanswered questions and are unable to find coherence or meaning in the situation. Finally, families are naturally resilient; therefore, members are able to handle the ambiguity and live well despite the persistence of the loss.

Ambiguous loss is best researched from a qualitative lens (Boss, 2007).

According to Carroll, Olson, and Buckmiller (2007), reliability does not make sense in assessing a perceptual phenomenon that is expected to change over time. Although individuals who experience ambiguous loss are resilient, the preoccupation with the loss is still experienced.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory is based on understanding the relationship between children and their parents, and more importantly, how children are treated greatly affects their pattern of attachment and how they will develop. Simply stated, the parent affects the child's development of attachment patterns. Ainsworth (1989) further described attachment patterns as secure attachment, anxious resistant and anxious avoidant. Secure attachment is established by the parent being sensitive to the child's needs and responding accordingly, whereas anxious resistant attachment is established when the parent is inconsistent in responding to the child's needs. Finally, anxious

avoidant attachment is developed when the child learns not to trust his or her caregiver due to past experiences of being ignored or rejected. In short, children learn how to trust as a result of interactions with their primary caregivers (Page, 1999). Essentially, either paternal absence or low paternal presence represents disruptions in the child's attachment process that can contribute to development impairments of trust (Senior, 2010). In the context of my study, attachment theory details how the lack of a father's early interaction may adversely affect his child.

Ecological Theory

Pleck (2007) believed that father involvement could be better understood through the proximal process, a concept taken from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory where a child's development is affected by reciprocal interactions between the child and his or her systems. Bronfenbrenner's theory focused on how each system affects a child's overall development. These systems are arranged in terms of five connections: (a) the microsystems or relationships the child has with individuals within his or her quality world; (b) the mesosystems or interactions between members within the microsystem; (c) the exosystem or interactions between members of the child's microsystem that do not directly involve the child; (d) macrosystems or how previous systems are impacted by societal influences; and (e) chronosystems or how the previous systems change and impact the child's development. It is not the mere systems' interaction but rather what occurs within each system that promotes the child's development.

The child's development is considered a relational occurrence and not an individual feat according to Bronfenbrenner (1979). In other words, development occurs through a process of increasing complex reciprocal interactions between children and

their immediate environment. According to Pleck (2007), fathers function as microsystem members in which the more microsystem partners present, the better for the child's development. Further, the father is a unique microsystem member, because his personality differs from the mother's; therefore, his interactions with the child differ from the mother's in ways that are potentially important for development. For example, there is loss of a vital member in the microsystem and a deficiency in interactions when the father is absent.

Heuristic Model

In an effort to extend the research on father involvement beyond them being viewed as only the "other parent," Cabrera, et al. (2007a) established a heuristic model from an ecological perspective in order to guide measurement and conceptualization of the father's impact on his child. Developmental in scope, the heuristic model details the dynamics of paternal behavior and their influence on children over time. The model provides a framework to understand predictors of father involvement: (a) a father's relation to the child's well-being and development; (b) factors that hinder paternal involvement; and (c) factors that generate father involvement to child outcomes.

Cabrera, et al. (2007a) also included predictors into their model in order to account for variability, namely a father's rearing and his cultural and biological histories. "The mechanisms by which fathers influence children can range from specific to general and from simple direct effects to complex mediated or moderated effects" (p. 187). The direct effects (father to child), reciprocal effects (child to father), and family effects are dynamic interactions that may result in complex outcomes. In order to examine father impacts at different points in time, the integrative framework of Cabrera, et al.'s heuristic

model therefore takes into account the dynamic nature of what fathers do within the family, responsibility to their children, and their behaviors. In establishing a theoretical framework for father absence, ambiguous loss theory focuses on the thought preoccupation that occurs as a result; attachment theory describes the importance of father presence in a child's development; ecological theory focuses on the child's interactions within his or her systems; and the heuristic model defines factors that influence paternal involvement.

Research Questions

Informed by Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, my dissertation is geared towards understanding the lived experiences of absent fathers in relation to the following research questions:

1. From a father's perspective, what is his rationale for being absent from his children's life?
2. What are the characteristics of an absent father's lived experiences that allowed him to remain absent from his children's life?
3. What are some of the feelings that absent fathers experience due to their absence?

Limitations

The goal of a phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences or culture of an individual or group (Gorgi, 1997). In understanding the lived experiences of the group of men in my study, it appeared that they were willing to truthfully disclose certain information relative to their relationships with their children. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006), for example, determined that when participants are aware of their presence

in a study, their responses may be altered which refers to reactivity that threatens a study's internal credibility. In conducting semi- structured interviews, it is the participant's discretion as to what he chooses to disclose about his lived experiences. To account for reactivity, Onwuegbuzie and Leech suggested that researchers collect rich and thick data descriptions. By doing so, the researcher maximizes the opportunity to determine whether or not results may be transferred. I did this as part of my study.

Delimitations

Because I am only interested in understanding the lived experiences of men who remain absent fathers, my study centered on a very specific sample population. Therefore, focusing on this particular population does not give voice to other categories of men who do not have active connections with their child. To this end, results cannot be transferred. The scope of my participants was limited strictly to a sample of men who remained absent from their children, namely those who did not contribute either financially or emotionally and/or have never established any form of father-child relationship. By focusing specifically on the aspect of these fathers remaining absent, themes that emerged might not be transferable to a larger male population. In addition, my study was delimited due to geographical locations; specifically, participants represented individuals who frequent businesses, churches, social services agencies, or professional organizations situated within a large metropolitan area in southwestern Texas.

Assumptions

The following four assumptions were inherent to my study. First, it was my belief that all participants would answer the interview questions to the best of their ability by

disclosing truthful information. Second, it was my assumption that all participants would adequately comprehend the scope of the study and interview questions. Third, I presumed that all participants are genuinely interested in sharing their stories from their perspective in order to add to the scant body of literature related to the absent fathers. Finally, it was my assumption that the results would be presented in such a manner that they would adequately portray the participants lived experiences.

Organization of the Study

My dissertation was organized into five chapters relating to the lived experiences of absent fathers. Chapter I contained a background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. In Chapter II, a review of pertinent literature related to absent fathers included the importance, the understanding, and the impact of father absence. In Chapter III, descriptions of the methods I used to conduct the study and analyze the results were presented. In Chapter IV, results of my research were presented in themes that represented the essence of the experience of being an absent father. Chapter V, included discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

In order to understand the internal thought processes that have resulted in fathers remaining absent in the lives of their children, the rationale for conducting research from the fathers' point of view is described in this chapter. After an exhaustive search through scholarly research databases (i.e., Academic Search Complete, ERIC, JSTOR, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses), *father absence* and *absent fathers* were terms used to locate numerous articles; however, only one study (Black, 2008) was found that focused on this dilemma from the fathers' perspectives. In addition to research databases, I went to public libraries in search of topics related to missing fathers. For example, in a book entitled *Absent Fathers*, Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner, and Williams (1999) explored the mindsets or attitudes of European men who became non-resident fathers. The remaining sources obtained from various databases focused primarily on the impact of father absence related to children. Specifically, researchers have indicated that the absence of a father negatively influences a child's periods of separation-individuation (Jones, 2007), well-being (East et al., 2006), gender role identification (Mandara, Murray, & Joyner, 2005), educational outcomes (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; Ward, 2008), and behaviors (Burns, 2008; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003). Although Black (2008) described the developmental characteristics of absent fathers in-depth, I expanded upon these findings by focusing on the absent fathers' thought processes and decision making skills that led them to become and remain absent as well as the perceptions they

held concerning their experiences. In addition, I expanded on Bradshaw et al.'s (1999) work by providing up-to-date information and utilizing participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

This review of literature consists of three main sections and a summary focused on understanding father absence. First, the importance of a father's presence from a psychoanalytic viewpoint is explored followed by the dynamics of paternal involvement and fathering. Second, a father's absence taken from a child's perspective or understanding is explored by defining the construct and detailing characteristics common to absent fathers. Third, the impact of a father's absence is analyzed in terms of his child's well-being, educational outcomes, and behaviors. Basically, information presented in Chapter II describes how better understanding a father's absence can be expanded in order to fill the gap in literature pertaining to this topic.

Importance of a Father's Presence

In an effort to understand the importance of a father's presence in his child's life, information must first be gleaned from a historical rationale. For example, researchers who adhere to a psychoanalytic viewpoint contended that a father's presence is needed during periods of both separation-individuation stages (Jones, 2007; Jones, 2008; Jones, Kramer, Armitage, & Williams, 2003). Accordingly, a father's role is essential in assisting his child through the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phases at which time a child's sense of needing a second other is developed (Target & Fonagy, 2002). Essentially, a father's presence is vital during these phases given that he is viewed as an important object that is needed to support the child's real self-development (Jones, 2008). In contrast to the benefits, there are consequential effects experienced when a father is not

present for his child, which negatively affects his child's cognitive development (Juby & Farrington, 2001) and social development (Clark, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). In addition to a father's presence during his child's developmental years, positive fathering activities greatly influence the child (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2007a; Palkovitz, 2007; Pleck, 2007). According to Lamb (2000), fathering activities include nurturance or the provision of care, moral and ethical guidance as well as economic obligations. Similarly, Palkovitz (1997) described fathering as becoming involved in activities such as teaching, monitoring, care giving, availability, providing affection, and supporting the child emotionally. In a later work, Palkovitz (2002) identified positive effects pertaining to child development when the father is present and takes part in his child's early development, school performance, and social competence. As discussed next, researchers (Cabrera, et al., 2007a; Palkovitz, 2007; Pleck, 2007) created theoretical perspectives and models to describe specific activities that influence paternal involvement.

Psychoanalytic Viewpoint

Presence. From a historical psychoanalytic perspective, a father's presence is deemed to be critical for the child to successfully navigate through the distinct periods of separation-individuation (Blos, 1967; Eliezer, Yahav, & Or Hen, 2012; Freud & Burlingham, 1943; Greenson, 1968; Jones et al., 2003; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Shields, 2003). During separation-individuation, the child first gains a psychological understanding of self in which he and/or she goes through three sub phases: (a) differentiation, (b) practicing, and (c) rapprochement (Mahler et al., 1975). The differentiation sub phase that tends to overlap with the practicing sub phase is categorized

by an infant undergoing psychological birth, thus differentiating one's self from related external objects. During the practicing sub phase, for example, the infant becomes more concerned with his and/or her own faculties or the ability to physically move away from the mother. Thus, the mother's presence becomes secondary to the excitement gained from establishing physical distance. As a result, the toddler becomes more aware of separateness from the mother (Shields, 2003). Rapprochement, the final sub phase, involves the toddler attempting to simultaneously reengage with the mother and manage his or her fear of object loss (Mahler et al., 1975).

A father's presence is essential during the first period of separation-individuation, *infancy*, given that he becomes opposite to the *first other* mother and is viewed as the *second other* who fosters security when the child is navigating in and out of maternal dependence (Jones, 2007). According to Greenson (1968), when the father is present, the child is able to disengage with the mother and identify with his or her father. More especially for boys, this aids in the awareness of masculinity and gender identity development. Thus, the father's presence helps the child to form an individualized sense of self and gain greater psychological separateness (Abelin, 1975).

During *adolescence*, the second period of separation-individuation, a father or father figure is regarded as a child's protective external object (Jones, 2008). However, Bos (1967) noted that the same protective father or father figure must be relinquished during a child's late adolescence in order for a normal and healthy development to continue. According to Jones (2008), a father's role taken from a psychoanalytic stance has historically gone through several transitions that range from being viewed as an unimportant factor to the current understanding that recognizes a father's role to be a

central component in facilitating his child's development from infancy throughout childhood (Eliezer et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2003; Leibman & Abell, 2000).

Absence. Psychoanalytic perspectives held by theorists indicate that the father can be seen as an attachment figure (Leibman & Abell, 2000; Target & Fonagy, 2002); therefore, negative consequences may extend from a child's infancy to adolescence in the event that the loss or absence of a father occur (Huttunen & Nissan, 1978). For example, decreased self-esteem (Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Mahler, 1966) and/or anxiety and depression (Eliezer et al., 2012) may result. According to Burgner (1985), experiences involving absent fathers during a child's infancy into early childhood is further associated with a greater need for maternal closeness as well as heightened fears related to object loss or abandonment. Nuebaur (1960) noted that boys who have experienced absent fathers during the Oedipal period tend to be inhibited in developing perceptions and age specific feelings. In particular, they have no father figure with whom they can work together in solving problems. The male child may also be inhibited from reality testing as well as the acceleration of sexual fantasies. According to Gauthier (1965), the absence of a male child's father from latency through adolescence affects his sense of mastery or productiveness which may result in the child regressing back to the Oedipal level of psychosexual development. Nuebaur and Gauthier contended that the father's presence is important, but the conclusions made are obsolete and there is a need for updated information regarding the separation-individuation process and boys.

The importance of a father's role during the Oedipal phase is significant for the daughters' development as well (Williamson, 2004). In many ways, for instance, girls navigate through the Oedipal phase in the same manner as boys. According to Freud

(1931), when girls come to realize that they are similar to their mothers in that they do not have a penis, this awareness may cause them to envy male superiority. If penis envy does occur, emotions become displaced from the mother to the now cognitively present father (Williamson, 2004). Previous researchers (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Fast, 1984) suggested that the father plays a role in helping the child separate from the mother, because the father represents *otherness*. Thus, according to Benjamin (1991) the presence of a father in a girl's life is necessary because their mutual recognition of one another and the relationship between the two furthers her development. Essentially, a healthy relationship between father and daughter is where she is taught to love and be loved and can relate to male expectations (Mitchell, 1990; Target & Fonagy, 2002; Williamson, 2004).

Although having a father present may have benefits for daughters, there are some theorists who challenge the importance of his presence. Feminist theorists have held various views regarding psychoanalysis. Young-Bruehl and Wexler (1992) provided a review of the four paradigms of thoughts regarding feminism and psychoanalysis. From the point of view of feminists, the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis has undergone several changes in paradigms. Young-Bruehl and Wexler (1992) characterized the four paradigms as Dissent, Rejection, Appropriation, and Critique, and noted the advancements made within each paradigm shift. Although the psychoanalytic school of thought has been criticized, understanding the relationship between a father's presence and the impact he has on the separation-individuation of his child may be beneficial.

Impact. Jones (2007) described the impact of an absent father in relation to separation-individuation and indicated how a child's successful navigation was affected

through this process. In a case study analysis conducted by Jones (2007), a young male participant was found to be negatively affected by the absence of a father during the separation-individuation phase. Specifically, the adolescent experienced attachment and separation-individuation issues during the rapprochement sub phase. Because the alignment process between father and son ended prematurely due to the father's departure, the adolescent was unable to successfully resolve rapprochement issues that resulted in violent and uncontrollable behaviors. Although Jones' (2007) research was conducted based on one adolescent male who experienced limited contact with his father, he also had a stepfather through which he developed an idealized image of his biological father; therefore, complete father absence was not addressed. The results from this study cannot be generalized as there was only one study participant.

To further examine the impact that father absence has in relation to separation-individuation, Jones (2008) assessed the influence in terms of physical absence (not present in the home) and psychological absence (father present, but psychologically absent). A case study analysis was used consisting of two participants: a six-year-old child and a 50-year-old-adult. The child experienced a disruption in the separation-individuation cycle due to the father's physical absence, whereas the adult experienced a father's psychological absence. Because the child demonstrated an inability to separate from his or her mother, therapeutic goals were centered on teaching the child to gradually move towards separation through behavioral tasks. In addition to assessing physical absence, Jones reported from the analysis of her two participants that fathers who were psychologically absent affected separation-individuation of the child as well. Although a physical presence of the father existed, this fact did not assist the participant in navigating

through the separation-individuation process given that the father was not viewed as a presence in his life; therefore, paternal functions necessary for development were missing. From the two participant case study results, Jones concluded that physically absent fathers as opposed to physically present but psychologically absent fathers had an effect on a child's progression through the separation-individuation phase. As a result, Jones recommended that as family structures change, clinicians must focus on newly adopted non-traditional family formations by addressing the negative effects sustained by children (i.e., loss of a father, absent father, and parental separation or divorce). Due to the fact that Jones study consisted of only two participants there is a need to further investigate if there is a difference in physical and psychological absence in relation to the child's progression through the separation-individuation phase.

In an earlier study conducted by Jones et al. (2003), the impact of absent fathers on separation-individuation was assessed to determine if a sample of 50 middle class White male children, some of whom who were raised by their biological mothers, differed from those who were raised in intact homes. The authors hypothesized that the boys who resided with only their biological mothers would experience difficulty in navigating through the separation-individuation process. After the researchers determined that the instruments used to measure appropriateness were valid and reliable, participants were administered the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA) and the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI). As a result, boys who resided with their biological mothers were found to show no difference in the separation-individuation manifestations; therefore, the researchers concluded that father absence does not have an impact on separation-individuation. When Jones et al.'s study was compared to previous

research; the results were inconsistent, which may have been due, in part, to the fact that all participants were White middle class males, thus leaving minimal variability among other research samples. For example, Jones et al. did not provide any insight into minority children's experiences involving separation-individuation or the impact they may have endured that was attributed to absent fathers. Due to the lack of available research, the experience of separation-individuation may thus be different when assessing minority participants.

Shields (2003) sought to understand the influence of father absence through the use of quantitative measures. Specifically, 97 male participants ranging in age from 18 to 23 were evaluated in order to measure the perceptions they held regarding their fathers and their ability to demonstrate levels of separation-individuation as measured by two instruments. The Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA) was used to measure individuation and interpersonal connectedness, and the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) was used in order that participants could rate maternal and paternal behaviors separately, namely in terms of each father's warmth and care as well as his encouragement. Shields found that encouragement of autonomy and father presence affected certain aspects of separation-individuation. In particular, Shields noted that encouragement of autonomy was a greater predictor of separation-individuation for both present and absent father groups. The fathers' effectiveness in enhancing separation-individuation for late adolescents appeared to be affected more by their presence when encouraging autonomy than by their existence as an object of warmth. Although Shields found that successful separation-individuation was affected by a father's presence, there was a lack of diversity among the population tested. For example, the majority of

participants was Caucasian and resided in households with a median income greater than \$50,000. In addition, Shields' correlational results did not constitute a causal relationship between the variables.

Summary. In sum, an examination in relation to the importance of a father's presence was discussed in this section. Taken from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, several researchers maintained that absent fathers do have an impact on the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phases of a child's development (Jones, 2007; Williamson, 2004; Wineburgh, 2000). In addition, researchers have postulated that fathers can influence their child's navigation through separation-individuation periods (Jones, 2008; Jones et al., 2003; Shields, 2003). Case study analysis conducted by Jones (2007, 2008) indicated that the absence of the father during the separation-individuation stage had an adverse effect on the child's progression that may cause difficulties in later life.

Utilizing quantitative measures, Shields (2003) found that a father's presence as a non-intrusive object that encourages appropriate autonomy for his adolescent was a predictor of separation-individuation. In direct contrast, Jones et al. (2003) used a multivariate analysis of variance and determined that there was no detrimental effect due to father absence during separation-individuation. Therefore, the findings regarding father absence and separation-individuation were inconsistent that may be in part due to the populations analyzed, the research design used to assess the concept, and the varying perspectives involving literature related to psychoanalysis.

Paternal Involvement

Historically, researchers have found that the transition into parenthood for a father requires that he be committed to his family and child, and in most instances, be perceived

as the primary provider (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Palkovitz & Palm, 2009). Thus, the transition into fatherhood is a critical move in a man's development and contribution to his family through involvement and physical support (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009; Palkovitz & Sussman, 1988). Although a father's role has typically been associated with being the main source of income, the relationship fostered between the father and child is vital to the child's development (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009). For example, research related to fatherhood has been delineated into two branches: (a) fatherhood as fertility status, and (b) fatherhood as a behavior and identity (Pleck, 2007). Pleck further indicated that the body of research centering on fatherhood as a behavior or identity focuses on what men do and experience as fathers. In other words, fatherly involvement includes quality time spent with the child and activities engaged in together in addition to demonstrating warmth, support, and monitoring. Understanding paternal influence from theoretical perspectives and models may better explain the importance of a father's role (Cabrera et al., 2007a; Palkovitz, 2007; Pleck, 2007).

Theoretical perspectives. Although the current literature pertaining to fathering is inundated with empirical studies, there is not a comprehensive integrative theory for researchers to utilize (Cabrera et al., 2007a). Due to the lack of a comprehensive theory, researchers have conducted a patchwork approach to research or selectively addressed variables and constructs to be analyzed in their studies (Palkovitz, 2007). In particular, Pleck (2007) reviewed and provided critiques for four existing theories that are essential to conceptualizing the dynamics of paternal influences: (a) *attachment theory*, (b) *social capital theory*, (c) *Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory*, (d) *essential father theory*. Pleck

extracted important elements of each theory to formulate an integrated approach to understanding the importance of fathers.

Attachment theory. In traditional attachment theory, an infant is provided with the security needed to explore the world, and is further assisted in the development of a positive internal working model that promotes cognitive development, skill acquisition, and emotional development (Bretherton, 1985). Given that paternal and maternal behaviors are similar in predicting secure attachment (Main & Weston, 1981), paternal involvement may advance the child's development in that it promotes secure infant attachment to the father (Pleck, 2007). Pleck's critique for the use of attachment theory in conceptualizing father involvement rests upon the stance that the theory is restricted to the early childhood years and does not include paternal involvement during late adolescence. In addition, attachment theory is narrow in scope as well as in its acceptance within developmental science (Pleck, 2007; Vaughn & Bost, 1999).

Social capital theory. Coleman (1988) described three forms of capital made available by parents that facilitate optimal development; financial capital, family social capital, and community social capital. Financial capital is granted through material resources provided to the child. Family social capital is provided by parental behaviors that enhance the child's development and is dependent upon the parents' level of education (Pleck, 2007). Similarly, community social capital is the manner in which parents provide for their children in the context of the larger world. Pleck's critique stated that although parents provide social capital in distinct manners, it is necessary to specify how the various forms of social capital influence development.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological perspective on human development includes a distinction made between the different systems or levels as they relate to the child's development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels consist of microsystems (relationships the child has with parents, teachers, peers, and adults), mesosystems (relationships between microsystem partners), exosystems (relationships that the child's microsystem partners are a part of, but the child is not), macrosystems (societal constraints that influence the other systems), and chronosystems (developmental change in a child's lifespan within these systems). Bronfenbrenner's notion of exactly what happens within the microsystem relationship promotes development. Later, Bronfenbrenner (1994) emphasized that it is a child's reciprocal interaction with microsystem partners (referred to as the proximal process) that becomes more complex over time and aids in his or her development. Through the proximal process, development becomes a relational event that is not solely internal to the individual. In other words, fathers function as a partner in the child's microsystem where he or she can experience the healthy proximal process. According to Pleck (2007), the father serves as this unique member of the child's microsystem because his personality and interactions with the child differ from those of the mother. Essentially, the proximal process concept provides an understanding of the parental influence frequently supplied by the father. For example, as fathers engage in more rough and tumble play than mothers, they assist the child in developing emotional regulation (Parke, 2002).

Essential father theory. The essential father theory is based upon the idea that the father makes a specific and essential contribution to the child's development (Pleck, 2007). However, essential father theory understanding does not focus on previous views

related to male gender role identity (Silverstein & Auberbach, 1999). Rather, the focus on child development is based upon the father's unique role in promoting appropriate gender role identity for both male and female children. In other words, essential father theory centers more on adult outcomes and does not specify a particular process of paternal influence. In addition, Pleck (2007) indicated that empirical support for the essential father theory is weak, and current research does not support the theory with respect to the range of outcomes across a child's lifespan.

Integrated ecological-parental capital theory. Due to the numerous critiques and dissatisfaction with the previous four theories, Pleck (2007) formulated an integrative theory based upon components of Bronfenbrenner's proximal process and social capital theory. Accordingly, Pleck asserted that these two concepts provide the best foundation for developing a future theory on exactly how fathering either does or does not promote development. Five key components of Pleck's integrative theory include: (a) parents' (father and mother) contribution of capital to their children; (b) parents' earning potential in terms of providing material capital; (c) parents' occupational effect on fostering community social capital; (d) the variation in which parents foster family social capital; and (e) the variation of family social capital due to the family's context. Although there are varying theoretical perspectives to utilize when assessing fathering (Bretherton, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Pleck, 2007; Silverstein & Auberbach, 1999), minimal information has been presented to address the fathering activities of minority men.

Models. Research pertaining to a father's importance is not a new concept. For example, Lamb et al. (1987) established a model that measured father involvement in terms of his interaction with the child, his availability to the child, and his responsibility

to the child. In addition, Palkovitz (2002) understood paternal involvement through three overlapping domains: (a) cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) behavioral. And recently, Cabrera et al. (2007a) developed a heuristic model in which variables are identified that predict father involvement, interact to predict involvement, and influence father characteristics. In an attempt to further the work concerning the development of a heuristic model, Palkovitz (2007) provided an alternative view of father-child relationships from a meta-analytic perspective. Essentially, each model has benefits that may be used in the understanding of paternal involvement; however, there are also concerns regarding the ability to apply the constructs across racial and socioeconomic groups.

Lamb's model. Lamb (2000) described the father-child interaction as a one-on-one engagement that includes caretaking activities such as feeding, dressing, and playing with the child. Availability pertains to the father and child being in each other's presence which allows person-to-person interaction to occur; however, the father's availability and direct interaction with the child are not mutually exclusive. For example, Lamb described the father's responsibility as one in which the child's needs are met and their resources are provided. Basically, focus is primarily on the father's caretaking role (i.e., making preparations when the child is sick or in need) and is not based solely on his provider role. Lamb's model formation originated from research conducted with adult, Caucasian, middle class fathers; therefore, Lamb's model may not be applicable to fathers of a different ethnic background or socioeconomic status.

Palkovitz's model. Palkovitz (1997, 2002) built upon Lamb et al.'s (1987) formulated model by including parenting functions across cognitive, affective, and

behavioral domains. The cognitive domain includes activities such as reasoning, planning, and evaluating; the affective domain consists of emotions, feelings, and demonstrating parental affection; and behavioral activities reflect observational interaction. In addition, Palkovitz considered paternal involvement to be demonstrated by time invested, degree of involvement, directness, proximity, and observation of abilities. Finally, Palkovitz (2002) postulated that fathers could become involved with their children through 15 distinct manners (i.e., communicating, teaching, monitoring, engaging in thought processes, providing, showing affection, protecting, supporting emotionally, running errands, caregiving, engaging in child-related maintenance, sharing interests, being available, planning, and sharing activities).

Cabrera et al.'s heuristic model. Due to the lack of a model that addressed paternal involvement, Cabrera et al. (2007a) attempted to fill this void by establishing a dimensional heuristic model. From a developmental perspective, the researchers specified paternal involvement arbitrators and predictors of father involvement to child outcomes. The model is considered to be *causal* in that attention is given to factors that influence a father's family relationships and functioning. For example, cultural, biological, and the father's rearing history are considered in addition to his demographic characteristics (i.e., employment status, age, educational level, parenting style, relationship to the mother, and connections to other individuals who serve as an influence to the paternal level of involvement). Further, the child's characteristics such as gender, age, and temperament also affect the level and type of father involvement.

In addition, the impact of father involvement on children ranges from simple direct effects to complex moderated effects. Thus, paternal involvement influences the

child based upon reciprocal actions between the father and child and upon the child's understanding of what the father does both in and outside of the home. Through the model, Cabrera et al. (2007a) indicated the importance of knowing what fathers do within their families and the factors that determine the manner in which they are involved with their child. Finally, Cabrera and colleagues extended the understating of paternal involvement beyond considering how the father is available to, engaged with, and responsible for his child.

Meta-analytic view. Although Palkovitz (2007) recognized and commended Cabrera et al.'s (2007a) efforts in establishing a heuristic model, he disclosed how the model could be enhanced. For example, Palkovitz challenged the purpose of understanding the developmental aspects of the father-child relationship proposed by Cabrera et al., (2007a) yet felt that formulating a model which encompasses all factors from a developmental perspective is a challenging and complex task. Further, Palkovitz believed that there are paternal involvement factors which matter regardless of the child's age, the context of fathering, and moderating aspects. As a result, Palkovitz suggested that considerations pertaining to the father's affective climate, behavioral style, and relational synchrony should be carefully planned when conceptualizing and measuring components of the father-child relationship. Therefore, Palkovitz believed that rather than focusing primarily on paternal involvement, attention should be focused on the father-child relationship.

Fathering. According to Mormon and Floyd (2006), the manner in which researchers have understood fathering has historical roots that have changed from viewing the father as a moral leader and provider, examining how he operates in terms of

his involvement, assessing his role in comparison to the child's mother, and understanding the activities that he joins in response to his child's needs. Despite the development of perspectives related to the understanding of fathering, conclusions continue to remain ambiguous concerning the aspects that constitute good fathering. According to Canfield (1996), good fathering consists of paternal involvement, awareness, nurturance, understanding, mentoring, and consistency. In addition, Kimmel (1997) and Phillips (1992) described good fathering as qualities that consist of the need for commitment, communication, guidance, care, love, and being a positive role model. Although the concept of good fathering is diverse and complex, common themes exist within the literature that form a generalized impression (Canfield, 1996; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Kimmel, 1997; Mormon & Floyd, 2006; Phillips, 1992).

In an effort to bring clarity to the understanding of fathering, Mormon and Floyd (2006) conducted two studies concerning the nature of fatherhood and the behavioral and psychological characteristics that define a good father. First, open-ended questions were used to survey 374 fathers who provided their thoughts concerning attributes which they felt were important to being a good father. In analyzing their responses, the researchers found that the surveyed men listed 20 different categories. As a result, the most consistent qualities noted among the fathers were love, availability, and role modeling which addressed the relational and emotional components of fathering responsibilities.

In Mormon and Floyd's (2006) second study, further understanding of good fathering was redirected given that none of the 374 participants in the initial study made reference to their father-daughter relationship. Thus, this lack of information prompted Mormon and Floyd to assess good fathering by utilizing father-son pairs. This shift in

focus was due to the significant effect that fathers tend to have on the development of their sons' lives, and to provide insight from the sons' perspective of good fathering. As a sequel to the first survey, 99 father-son pairs also completed open-ended questions regarding their perception of good fathering. Consistent with study number one, valuable fatherhood characteristics among the father-son duos included love, availability, and serving as a good role model. In brief, these traits describe good fathering skills as well as the manner in which the father connects and cares for his son through practicing positive fathering roles on a continuous basis.

Previous researchers have suggested that attention to the needs of children represents the primary factor for understanding and encouraging good fathering (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). Hence, the term generative fathering has been used to describe fatherhood that responds readily and consistently to the child's developmental needs over time (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005). To further understand generative fathering, Brotherson et al. assessed the manner in which 16 fathers described the efforts involved in connecting with their children. Their reported narratives resulted in five primary themes: (a) personal involvement in shared activities; (b) expression of support and care; (c) interaction at birth; (d) exchange of time and affection; and (e) participation in spiritual activities. Brotherson et al. (2005) suggested there is a need for an interpersonal tie between father and child.

In a study conducted by Shears (2007), participants comprised of low-income families representing African American, European American, and Latino fathers were asked how frequently they were engaged in various fathering activities (e.g., physical play, cognitive and/or caregiving activities, social activities, etc.). Shears noted that

African American fathers reported participating in care giving and cognitive activities more than their European and Latino counterparts; whereas, both African American and Latino fathers reported more involvement in social skills activities than did European American fathers. However, there was no significant difference found in physical play among the racial groups that lead Shears to conclude that fathering activities vary across race and ethnicity.

In a similar study, Toth and Xu (1999) found notable fathering differences among fathers from diverse racial and ethnic groups. For example, the researchers indicated that African American fathers were more likely to supervise their children's activities and be more authoritative than their European American counterparts. Toth and Xu also found that Latino fathers were more prone to interact with, spend time with, and monitor their children than were European American fathers. As noted by Shears (2007), both fatherhood and fathering activities have value even when they do not represent traditional standards of fathering.

Factors. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine factors that influence paternal involvement (Castillo, Welch, & Sarver 2011; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Lamb, 2009). From their population, Shannon et al. (2009) found that the fathers who resided with and were romantically involved with the mother of their children were more likely to be a part of their children's lives over time than non-resident fathers who were not romantically involved with the mother. In addition, Castillo et al. (2011) found that a father's residency status, age, educational level, and income were factors that negatively affected his involvement with his children.

Employment status (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010) and engagement in delinquency (Wiemann, Argurcia, Rickert, Bernson, & Volk, 2006) among young fathers have been found to influence their fathering responsibilities. For example, Wiemann et al. found that young fathers who had been involved in gangs, experienced incarceration or engaged in drug use were less likely to provide support for their child. Similarly, Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, and Khurana (2009) found that young fathers were more likely to become absent fathers and less likely to participate in fathering roles. Wiemann and colleagues emphasized that it is imperative for programs to be established that counteract the lack of involvement from young absent fathers. Despite the negative factors that predispose a father to relinquish the relationship with his children, Rienks, Wadsworth, Markman, Einhorn, and Etter (2011) determined involvement can be enhanced when fathers learn and practice proper communication, coping, problem solving, and parenting skills.

Father's Absence

Although a father's presence in his child's life is important as noted by Bakersville (2004), Wineburgh (2000) indicated that a countless number of families are headed by single female parents. In particular, Wilson (2011) found that in some single parent, female headed households, a level of resiliency existed among Black mothers who raised successful sons in the midst of their father's absence; thus, individuals can, in fact, manage success regardless of being reared in an absent father home. Although some children and mothers are able to rise above a father's absence, there still remains a need to understand the reasons behind this dilemma. Black (2008), for example, concluded that Black fathers tend to share five common characteristics that may influence their

decision to become absent: (a) lack of education and skills to gain employment; (b) an inability to create a stable home environment; (c) infidelity within relationships; (d) misconstrued perceptions and beliefs pertaining to fathering; and (e) emotional distress. Regardless of the factors that influence a father's decision to become absent, the child is the one who remains affected (Shields, 2003). As discussed earlier, many young adolescents who participated in Shields' study characterized their father as being more of a ghost than a real person; in other words, his psychological presence was known, but there was no knowledge of his physical presence. Finally, the participants acknowledged that they struggled consistently with emotional pain, feelings of anger, and grief due to abandonment from their fathers.

Defining Father Absence

East et al. (2006) described an absent father as one who is not present, is deceased, or is missing from his child's life due to varied circumstances. Black (2008) further described an absent father as a man who has had no physical interaction with his child or provided them with any form of financial assistance for 12 consecutive months or more. Thus, understanding the rationale or motivation that lead one to becoming an absent father may help to provide a stronger explanation concerning the issue.

According to Corcoran (2005), three common situations often influence a father's decision to maintain non-residential status: (a) factors associated with the dissolution of a marriage; (b) a break up after a long-term or short-term relationship; and (c) fatherhood based upon a casual sexual encounter. In her qualitative research, focus groups were comprised of 40 male participants in which the dynamics of becoming a father, identification with the fathering role, and the father's continued relationship with the

mother and his child were discussed.

Corcoran's (2005) participants were categorized in terms of their role as an estranged father, a committed father, or an activist father. Estranged fathers were defined as those who failed to maintain meaningful contact with their child after the relationship with the mother ended. They were relatively immature when conception occurred, and the end of the relationship with the mother also meant the end of a relationship with the child. Consequently, some of the estranged fathers expressed feelings of sadness and bitterness concerning the lack of contact with their child.

Participants who were categorized as committed fathers were, to an extent, active in viewing their role as a supplement or support to the primary mother's role. Although the committed fathers identified with their role as a father, contact with their children varied from fathers who shared parental duties versus those who made occasional visits. Finally, activist fathers consisted primarily of divorcees who identified their role as one of co-parent. By understanding the need for both parents in the home, they felt that their role involved more than financial support.

In Corcoran's (2005) research, commitment to the fathering role varied by age and relationship status. As reported, younger participants were likely to become absent fathers given that their children were conceived in a casual sexual encounter, they lacked a positive role model in their own lives, and they were unable to provide for their children. Young fathers were also less likely to maintain a commitment to the fathering role due to their uncertainty regarding their child's paternity and lack of knowledge thereof. In addition, single fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to share a continuous and structured relationship with their children. In contrast, previously

married fathers were more likely to undertake the committed or activist role by demonstrating more involvement in the lives of their children. According to Corcoran, the father's decision to become absent was apparently mediated by his relationship with the child's mother as well the conceptualization of his fathering role.

Characteristics of Father Absence

Although myriad factors may predispose a man to become an absent father, Black (2008) disclosed several developmental characteristics present in African American absent fathers. Specifically, Black used the collective case study approach as a means to better understand their common life experiences, perceptions and beliefs, and emotional characteristics. In order to accurately focus on developmental characteristics, six African American absent fathers were interviewed and asked to answer questions related to four stages of their lives: (a) the early years; (b) becoming a young man; (c) adulthood; and (d) present circumstances. Essentially, all six participants had developed a shame-based identity rather than one of autonomy during their early years and a feeling of inferiority versus a sense of industry and success upon becoming a young man. As they approached adulthood, their romantic relationships were marred by isolation rather than intimacy. Overall, the absent fathers indicated that their present circumstances were stagnate, opposed to the productivity needed for their transition into fatherhood. Black's findings were intended to assist individuals in understanding and perhaps relating to certain factors that contribute to father absenteeism in the African American community.

Developmental characteristics. In Black's (2008) research, African American absent fathers were faced with negativity and hardship within their developmental processes. For instance, a majority of the participants described the early years of their

life as being far from the best. In particular, many experienced unstable home environments and poor examples of fathering from their biological fathers or father figures. During the process of becoming a young man, most noted their involvement in deviant behaviors, namely criminal activity or drug use. In addition, becoming a young man was synonymous with fatherhood and was the point at which they chose to alienate themselves from their children's lives. The adulthood years were similar to the participants' early years, namely living unstable home lives and continuing to exhibit negative behaviors. Essentially, the repetitive patterns in their lives influenced their decision to remain absent fathers. Many of the men attributed their absence to their financial deficiencies and their volatile relationships with the child's mother. All six of the absent fathers described their present circumstances as their life not being where they would like for it to be.

Common life experiences. Black (2008) conceptualized the African American absent fathers' common life experiences using the following four categories: (a) family history, (b) school, (c) relationships, and (d) career/work history. Their family history consisted primarily of a strong independent maternal presence and father absence. For example, the participants' mothers were responsible for the home, children, and everything related to household functioning, whereas their fathers were absent, uninvolved, and irresponsible. Another common thread among the six participants was their minimal level of education; only one, for example, reported attending college. The remaining five acknowledged dropping out of school during their teenage years.

The relational patterns of the absent father participants were also similar to one another. Essentially, participants noted that sexual activity at an early age was a

commonality. In addition to early sexual activity, two participants mentioned engaging in sexual activity with much older women who also influenced them to take part in drug use. All of the participants' relationships were marred by infidelity and the men sought relationships with women who were primarily strong and financially independent similar to the women in their families. Because the men sought strong independent partners, five participants reported that they were always supported by and dependent upon the women in their lives. On the other hand, these dependent participants admitted to having career and work histories speckled with bouts of unemployment and job instability due to their lack of skills and educational level. Only one participant reported a successful work history.

Perceptions and beliefs. In addition to the participants' common life experiences discussed, Black (2008) disclosed their perceptions and beliefs about being a man. The main perception held by all participants was that men do not talk about their feelings. Basically, they believed that men should be strong and head of the household even though none of them were in contact with their families. In addition, they felt that a man's role is to provide for his family, and a financially incapable man should not be around his children. The participants' main purpose was to provide for themselves first, in part because they had no experience in providing for others. Similar to their belief regarding financial stability, the men stated that they must first be spiritually stable and demonstrate appropriate behaviors before they could attend church or approach God with their concerns. Although they all felt inadequate concerning their spiritual connection, they relied upon a spiritual base to find meaning in their life struggles.

Emotional characteristics. The common emotional characteristics expressed by Black's (2008) participants included their inability to convey emotions, shame, public esteem versus self-esteem, and isolation and avoidance as a response to emotional pain. When the men experienced trials and tribulations, their emotions went primarily unrecognized. Thus, each participant described how they internalized their emotions because they were unable to share their true feelings with others. All participants expressed a sense of shame and embarrassment, especially in reference to supporting their children or when asked about their child with whom they had no contact. The degree to which others viewed the participants was important since negative experiences appeared to impact their self-esteem. In other words, they were more concerned about how others viewed them thus creating false realities about themselves in order to circumvent their feelings of inadequacy or pain. All six participants described isolating themselves to avoid the emotional pain of their absence.

Black's (2008) research extended the body of literature pertaining to absent fathers by focusing upon their developmental characteristics. Although the developmental characteristics of African American fathers were discovered, there has been no other study to date in which the researcher strives to understand the experiences of absent fathers from their perspective. Although Black's results added to the literature, study participants were similar in ethnicity; therefore, the outcomes were limited only to the experiences held by African American absent fathers. Given the lack of variability in participants, Black's research results may therefore not be transferable to other populations. However, trustworthiness and validity were acknowledged pertaining to how the study was established and procedures in analyzing the data to purport themes

were disclosed. To guarantee trustworthiness and validity Black maintained a methodological log, conducted multiple interview sessions, thick descriptions, peer viewing and debriefing. In addition, the participants participated in member checks. Although utilizing collective case analysis allowed for the discovery of absent fathers' lived experiences to be reported from the essence of their experiences, the results did not account for their rationale in becoming an absent father. Finally, by focusing on African American males, information on this marginalized group was reported; in doing so, however, the author failed to include other marginalized groups or majority members' experiences of becoming an absent father.

Understanding Father Absence

In order to establish how adolescents conceptualize their experiences of having been raised in absent father households, Stokes (2003) conducted phenomenological research. Specifically, he examined the lived experiences of 10 participants (eight men; two women) who were enrolled in an alternative educational program as a result of their volatile behaviors and lack of respect for authority figures. The following two grand tour questions guided Stokes' research: "(a) how has it been growing up without having contact with your father? and (b) what stories about your dad have you heard?" (Stokes, 2003, p. 38). In addition, participants answered open-ended follow-up questions regarding how growing up in an absent father environment influenced their lives.

After an exploration pertaining to the participants' experiences and how they developed an understanding of the absent father syndrome, three themes emerged: (a) the father/dad component; (b) the personal component; and (c) the family component. First, the father was seen as a central figure within the father/dad component. For example,

some participants stated that they either had no knowledge of their father, or the knowledge available reflected primarily on their dad's incarceration and/or drug/alcohol abuse. Only two participants recognized a connection between their inclination to engage in volatile behaviors and their father's incarceration.

Within the personal component, participants expressed anguish when questioned about their absent father since he was rarely mentioned by the family; therefore, they had little or no knowledge of him. The lack of discussion left the participants with no frame of reference in which to understand their emotions with regard to their father's absence. Although the absent father was not a topic of family conversation, participants were, however, sometimes preoccupied with a sense of his psychological presence. In addition, they expressed concerns pertaining to their father's absence in terms of *what if* and *why* questions. According to Stokes (2003), merely thinking about the absent father insinuated feelings of hurt and anger. Finally, a majority of the adolescents felt rejected by their fathers' own choice to alienate himself from their lives. In short, the participants tended to become angered when any comparisons made about their absent fathers inferred negative connotations.

Finally, the family component reflected on the participants' lack of knowledge concerning their absent father due to the mutual avoidance among family members to start up a conversation dealing with him. On the rare occasion that he was mentioned, however, the discussion centered on either his physical appearance or negative statements related to his not providing child support. Because the participants were unable to express their feelings to the family regarding their fathers, Stokes (2003) found that the majority created defense mechanisms in order to deal with his absence (e.g., trying not

think about him; catching themselves when thoughts of him occurred so as not to become overly preoccupied with his absence, etc.). As a result of the inability to effectively process their father's absence, the adolescents therefore demonstrated their confusion through volatile behaviors.

In noting the adolescents' knowledge concerning father absence, Stokes (2003) described necessary procedures taken in carrying out his research by emphasizing issues concerned with credibility and trustworthiness. Despite that his information was presented in replicable manner, the study could be enhanced by selecting a sample of participants who are not enrolled in an alternative educational program or a residential facility and by recruiting more females. Thus, reaching a better understanding of father absence might be conceptualized differently by adolescents who do not share histories of violence.

In order to adequately address father absence, it is vital to understand what it means to be an absent father as well as the common characteristics shared by his counterparts. In a study conducted by Corcoran (2005), numerous factors were found that drive fathers to become estranged from their children, the majority of which their rationale is based upon the relationship with their child's mother. Nevertheless, there is a need to move beyond focusing on the *relationship* between the mother and absent father by placing stronger emphasis directed toward the absent father's *characteristics* (Black, 2008). Further, Black noted that when focusing on individual characteristics, developmental factors may arise that influence a father's decision to become and remain absent in the lives of his children. Programs established to meet the needs of absent fathers may therefore be instrumental in assisting these men on developing positive ways

in which they can become more involved with their children and get through their past emotional pains. According to Black, absent fathers are greatly affected by emotional pain, yet the focus of research has consistently been on the negative impacts they have placed on their child (Burns, 2008; Cabrera, et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; East et al., 2006; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara et al., 2005; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003; Seutter & Rovers, 2004; Ward, 2008).

Impact of a Father's Absence

In an effort to better understand the impact of father absence, research has been conducted across the lifespan of men who were also raised without having a father present in their lives. Numerous researchers have thus centered their attention around the absent father's negative impact created on his offspring, some of which include the child's *well-being* (East et al., 2006), *gender role identification* (Mandara et al., 2005; Seutter & Rovers, 2004), *educational outcomes* (Cabrera, et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; Ward, 2008), and *offspring behaviors* (Burns, 2008; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003).

Well-being

In a study conducted by Senior (2010), a father's absence was found to have an impact on the well-being of children who are unfortunately placed at a higher risk of developing forms of mental diseases that may include personality disorders (Gulati & Singh, 1987), depressive disorders (Wineburgh, 2000), and eating disorders (Miller, 1997). Similarly, East et al. (2006) conducted a review of literature associated with the

social and psychological well-being of adolescents reared in fatherless homes in which researchers concurred that higher antisocial (Pfiffner, McBurnett, & Rathouz, 2001) and behavioral problems (Govind & Stein, 2004) were more likely to exist. In addition, positive paternal involvement tends to protect against psychological maladjustment and distress (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). In brief, East et al. (2006) maintained that the fathering role and a father's love positively influence a child's well-being in terms of his or her self-concept and development of personal values, and may also serve as a factor in preventing maladaptive behaviors.

Gender Role Identification

From a historical standpoint, Bieber et al. (1962) believed that homosexuality resulted from a disruption in the relationship between father and son. Similarly, Nicolosi (1991) held that a dynamic driving force associated with male homosexual desires resulted in either the failure of a father-son relationship or a child's rejection to developing a relationship with his father or father figure. On the other hand, Alexander (1997) suggested that males' early relationships with their fathers may not have been unfulfilling but rather quite the opposite, namely the relationship that boys longed for with their fathers was never received.

In a study conducted by Seutter and Rovers (2004), participants who identified themselves as being homosexual were found to be more emotionally detached from their fathers than were heterosexual participants. For example, participants were administered Bray and Harvey's (1992), *Personal authority in the family system questionnaire college version* (PAFS-QVC), which was used to collect data related to sexual orientation and intergenerational intimacy and intimidation. Although the homosexual participants

scored significantly lower on the level of intimacy with their fathers, the results of Seutter and Rovers' study indicated a connection between sexual orientation and disruption of the family structure; however, there was no all-inclusive evidence to indicate a correlation.

In other studies associated with gender related identification, Stevens, Golombok, Beveridge, and the ALSPAC Study Team (2002) found no differences between gender role development among boys or girls who were reared in father-present versus father-absent families. Contrarily, Mandara et al. (2005) suggested that boys who were raised in primarily absent-father homes tended to be more passive and exhibited more feminine and fewer masculine traits than boys who were reared in father-present homes. In an attempt to determine the impact that father absence had on gender role development, 106 15-year-old African American boys and girls attending various high schools in Southern California completed questionnaires based on their perceptions of gender role development, self-esteem, and family functioning. Utilizing the Family Environment Scale (FES), Mandara and colleagues assessed the family's general organization and structure. In addition, the participants' self-esteem was gauged by the Multi-Dimensional Self-Esteem Inventory (MDSEI) in which parents who participated completed questionnaires related only to demographic information. As a result, the researchers found that boys from father-present homes exhibited higher levels of masculinity than did boys from father-absent homes. Despite that both groups demonstrated the desire to be masculine, boys from father-absent families still perceived themselves as showing lower levels of masculinity.

Using Cohen's (1998) *d* measure representing an effect size of .35, there was a

small to moderate difference between father-absent and father-present boys (Mandara et al., 2005). In addition, girls from father-present households wished to be more feminine than girls from father-absent households. In relation to family income, girls from lower economic backgrounds living in absent father homes had higher perceptions of their own level of masculinity than girls from higher economic families consisting of both absent-father and father-present homes. Finally, both male and female adolescents from father-present homes tended to have more traditional gender role development than adolescents from father-absent homes. Therefore, it is important to understand what factors influence his decision to leave as his presence affects his child's gender role development.

Educational Outcomes

Previous researchers (Cabrera et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008) suggested that the level of commitment a father devotes to his child affects their educational development. For example, Cabrera et al. (2007b) found that a father's commitment in terms of being sensitive and supportive positively influenced his child's cognition, language, and educational development during the early years. In another study, Downer et al. (2008) reviewed 291 relevant articles that focused on father involvement in relation to early childhood learning. Out of those articles, only nine were found to be directly related to father absence and academic development which centered on the child's cognitive abilities, educational attainment, language abilities, and school readiness. By further controlling for maternal involvement, the researchers found within the most rigorous studies that the father made a distinctive contribution to the child's language abilities. In particular, the types of fathering activities that significantly impacted academic outcomes and competence in a positive direction included a father's presence,

warmth, responsibility, parenting satisfaction, nurturance, financial contribution, and use of language.

In order to expand one's understanding in reference to how father absence affects a child's educational outcomes, Ward (2008) used archival data to assess the educational achievement differences between father-absent and father-present groups. Archival data were obtained from the Adolescent Health data set, a longitudinal study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill pertaining to behaviors and outcomes during adolescence and young adulthood. The father-absent group consisted of adolescents whose fathers were absent due to either dissolution of the relationship with the adolescent's mother or death, whereas the father-present group consisted of adolescents whose biological fathers were alive and resided in their homes. After an analysis of independent-sample *t* tests, Ward found that children living in two-parent households had significantly higher levels of academic achievement than children who resided in any form of an absent father household. Thus, Ward concluded that the presence of a father can positively impact educational outcomes.

Offspring Behaviors

If the absence of a father impacts the child's well-being and educational outcomes, what effect, if any, does this phenomenon have on his child's behaviors? As such, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the specific impact that absent fathers have in relation to their children's deviant behaviors (Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003). Simply stated, researchers have focused on youths' deviant behaviors and criminality as a direct result of father absence. In addition, an adolescent's sexual

conduct is influenced in which the father's absence essentially becomes a mediating factor that affects his child's sexual behaviors (Burns, 2008; Hendricks et al., 2005; Mendle et al., 2009).

Deviant behaviors. Rodney and Mupier (1999) examined the differences between boys' behaviors depending upon whether a father was present or absent from their lives. An analysis consisting of 433 African American boys' behaviors were assessed utilizing the Children's Structured Assessment for the Genetics of Alcoholism (C-SAGA). Rodney and Mupier chose six C-SAGA subscales for their analysis: (a) alcohol, (b) conduct disorder, (c) discipline, (d) parents' time spent with the child, (e) adults as role models, and (f) peer relationships and sibling networks. The majority of subscales measured by Cronbach's alpha had sufficient coefficients: alcohol .81; conduct disorder .80; parents' time spent with child .80; adults as role models .85; and peer and sibling network .70; in addition to discipline with a Cronbach's alpha score of .68 or lower than any of the other measured subscales. According to Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (2002), Cronbach's alpha coefficients (commonly referred to as a coefficient of internal consistency) are used to estimate the reliability of scores on a test instrument (Cronbach, 1951; Hogan, Benjamin, & Brezinski, 2000). Further, Nunnally (1978) asserted that a Cronbach alpha score of .7 is an acceptable reliability coefficient.

The behavioral differences of African American boys with fathers present versus those without fathers present were gathered through chi square analysis (Rodney & Mupier, 1999). Interpretations of findings suggested a statistical significant difference between the two groups as measured by the subscales. For example, the boys without fathers present were characterized by the following behaviors in comparison to boys with

fathers present: (a) held back a grade in school more (46% versus 24%); (b) suspended from school more often (74% versus 54%); (c) cut class or skipped school more often (36% versus 23%), (d) ran away from home more often (5% versus 0.9%), and (e) had been in trouble with the police more often (41% versus 28%). Thus, father absence appeared to have some effect on the maladaptive behaviors of African American boys. The authors studied a marginalized group, but from a multicultural perspective, it is unclear if the results would be consistent in other ethnicities.

In another study involving deviant behaviors, Mandara and Murray (2006) researched illegal drug use among father- absent male and female African American adolescents. In order to evaluate various aspects pertaining to their individual and family lives, surveys were completed in which questions regarding the adolescents' personal as well as their friends' use of illegal drugs were asked. In addition, participants' mothers responded to questions in reference to socioeconomic status, parental monitoring, academic expectations, father's absence, and neighborhood drugs and crime.

Mandara and Murray's (2006) findings revealed that father absence was not a factor concerning illegal drug usage among the female participants. Specifically, the girls' and their friends' use of drugs explained 36% of the variance. Although, results of the correlation indicated that father absence had a significant effect on the girls' parental monitoring and socioeconomic status even though their drug use was negatively correlated with parental monitoring but positively related to their friends' drug use.

Conversely, father absence was the main predictor associated with African American male participants' illegal drug use which explained 45% of the variance followed by their ages. In addition, father absence affected the boys' exposure to crime,

less parental monitoring, and their family's socioeconomic status. Given that the results from Mandara and Murray's (2006) study were quantitative, perhaps the use of qualitative inquiry may have provided more insight into the participants' experiences.

Finally, the source of the maladaptive behaviors among adolescents may possibly be engrained in the family experience. For example, Jackmon (2006) examined the relationship between father absence and externalized behaviors consisting of 125 male and female adolescents. Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, Jackmon found no statistical significant relationship between gender and externalized behaviors. With respect to a father's absence and externalized behaviors, an independent sample *t* test also yielded no statistical significance. On the other hand, regression analysis showed statistical significance in the father's length of absence and the participants' externalized behaviors. As a result, Jackmon recommended that programs and interventions be designed to promote healthy relationships between absent fathers and their child. In addition, future studies should be conducted that focus on the absent father's experiences given that there is a paucity of literature pertaining to the topic.

Criminality. Harper and McLanahan (2004) measured the likelihood of youth incarceration related to father absence by using an age-based event-history analysis. Specifically, they were able to track the life course of adolescents who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey for Youth (NLSY79) by converting survey data from year-based data to age-based data. In conducting logistic analysis, Harper and McLanahan found that youth from father absent families had a higher likelihood of becoming incarcerated. In addition to incarceration rates, youth from father absent families were more likely to experience other socioeconomic disadvantages, namely low household

incomes and family instability. Even when the researchers controlled for other listed factors, father absent adolescents reported higher levels of serious delinquency.

In another study involving criminal behavior, Schwartz (2003) assessed the conditions in which father absence impacted male and female volatile offending behaviors in various communities. Utilizing longitudinal hierarchical linear modeling techniques, Schwartz found that the effect of father absence had a greater influence on their child's rates of violence than on their low socioeconomic status. Apparently, there is a connection between father absence and violent acts committed by his child.

In direct contrast to issues pointed out by previous researchers concerning father absence and adolescent delinquency, Eastin (2003) found that delinquent activity among adolescents was not affected by either the absence or the presence of a father figure in the home. For example, 200 adolescent participants gathered from the Texas Youth Commission and a local school district was compared to those with present fathers versus those with absent fathers. In addition to providing demographic information, participants completed a delinquency check list (DCL) which assessed their antisocial or delinquent behaviors. Cluster analysis resulted in four factors: (a) delinquent role, (b) drug usage, (c) parental defiance, and (d) assault behavior with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .95, .92, .78, and .88, respectively. As stated by Nunnally (1978), Cronbach alpha coefficients of .7 or higher are deemed reliable. Using multivariate analyses, Eastin noted that delinquent males scored three times higher on the DCL across the four clusters in comparison to non-delinquent males. Although scores on the instrument indicated higher levels of delinquent activity in terms of father absence, delinquent male adolescents did not differ in a statistically significant manner from non-delinquent male adolescents.

Sexual conduct. In a study related to sexual behaviors among adolescents, Mendle et al. (2009) compared youth who were raised in households with both biological parents present to those who were raised without the presence of a biological father. Utilizing data obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY79), Mendle and colleagues measured sexual conduct among youth according to four independent variables: (a) father absent, (b) age at first sexual intercourse, (c) genetic relatedness, and (d) demographic information. Results revealed that participants from the father absent group as opposed to the father present group reported an earlier age at first having sexual intercourse that significantly increased the rates of teenage pregnancy. Accordingly, Mendle et al. found that father absence during early childhood could possibly result in a detrimental experience that determines whether an individual's future mating and childbearing will be oriented toward a pattern of quality versus quantity. In addition, the researchers reported effect size comparisons of the total sample, females, and males using Cohen's (1998) *d* where the total sample represented a medium effect size (.58), girls represented a small to medium effect size (.33), and boys represented a large effect size (.89). Finally, the quality and level of paternal care and involvement were thought to influence pubertal maturation and sexual behavior. In addition, early sexual activity rates were the highest among adolescents raised in low socioeconomic absent-father households.

In a descriptive phenomenological study designed to better understand the lived experiences of adolescent females regarding their sexual activities in relation to father absence, Burns (2008) interviewed 10 mothers from rural as well as urban areas. In particular, they were asked three broad open-ended questions surrounding the events that

took place in their teen's life at the time she became sexually active and the people and relationships that were found to be important to her around this period of time. Three themes emerged that described how the mothers would (a) envision the perfect father to fill the absent-father void, (b) obtain their desire to connect with an adult male figure who would provide stability and support, and (c) determine how living without a father gave their teen mothers misconceptions about men.

Summary. As determined through an exhaustive review of the literature, numerous researchers have indicated that a father's absence can result in negative influences in various aspects of his child's life (e.g., educational outcomes, psychosocial development, maladaptive behaviors, sexual activity, etc.). Although much emphasis has been placed on the adverse impact that absent fathers have on their offspring, there remains a void in research designed to determine and understand the *why* and *what* factors that lead men to become and remain estranged from their children as well as information that delineates how they contend with their father absence label.

Chapter Summary

Previous literature has focused primarily on the impact that a father's absence has on his children (Burns, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; East et al., 2006; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara et al., 2005; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003; Seutter & Rovers, 2004; Ward, 2008). In addition, researchers have stressed how vital a father's presence is in the early developmental stages of his children (Jones, 2007; Shields, 2003). Due to the results found in this review of the literature, there is a need to understand the dynamics of fathering activities (Palkovitz,

2007; Pleck 2007) and methods of paternal involvement (Cabrera et al., 2007a; Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002, 2007). For example, the need to understand the absent father is important because his absence creates detrimental effects on his offspring; thus, father absence is necessary to explore from the father's perspective to circumvent the occurrence and negative impact that this phenomenon creates on too many of today's children.

In my study, an understanding of the absent father is discussed in terms of the following topics: (a) discovering his childhood family structure; (b) detailing events that internally influenced his decision to become absent; (c) exploring the rationale that allowed him to remain missing, and (d) disclosing the emotional impact he has endured due to his chosen absence. In addition to understanding the present father and his role, factors that influenced the absent father are equally important (Castillo et al., 2011; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; Shannon et al., 2009). Therefore, if these factors are discovered, support can be provided to potential absent fathers and methods can be established that may encourage fathers to remain in the lives of their children despite the dissolution of their relationship with the children's mother.

As established in this literature review, there are numerous reasons as to why a father chooses to become absent, and there is further information available regarding the impact of father absence; however, only minimal research is assessable that centers directly around the issue from an absent father's perspective the primary reason needed for additional research. Although Black (2008) noted the developmental characteristics pertaining to father absence, there still remains paucity in the literature. Thus, expanded research is needed in order to understand an absent father's personal experiences from his

point of view. By focusing strictly on absent fathers, my proposed research can partially fill that void. For example, by utilizing a phenomenological approach, absent fathers will be allowed to reveal their rationale and stories from their own perspectives. Further, information gained from my study will permit researchers to formulate programs, preventive measures, and models of reconnection in an effort to keep fathers active and present in the lives of their children as suggested by Reinks et al. (2011) and Wiemann et al. (2006).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Chapter III will consist of the following components: (a) rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology, (b) selection of participants, (c) informed consent, (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection, (f) data analysis, (g) credibility, and (h) summary.

The purpose of my study was to examine the lived experiences of absent fathers. My desire was to understand their rationale for becoming absent. In a phenomenological investigation, Moustakas (1994) contended that the researcher should have a personal connection with the experience. This study was personal for me because I have no knowledge of my biological father beyond his full name. Growing up without my father created numerous questions for me. I wondered, “Why and how he could leave me?” “Does he ever think about me?” “Did he really not want me as his son?” Although answers to my questions were never received I came to accept the fact that I will never know my father. Due to my personal experience, I remained conscientious of my feelings and thoughts throughout the research process to maintain an unbiased perspective. First, my reasoning for selecting a qualitative methodology is explained followed by a description of measures taken to select appropriate participants. Second, the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions are presented. Third, the procedures used to collect and analyze data are described. Fourth, validation techniques used to enhance the trustworthiness of my study are presented. Lastly, I was granted permission from Sam Houston State University’s (SHSU’s) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study.

Phenomenology

Pioneered by Edmund Husserl (1931), phenomenology is the study of human consciousness from the first person perspective, the science of describing what is perceived, sensed, and known by an individual's immediate awareness (Kockelmans, 1967). Transcendental phenomenology is carried out by studying the appearance of things just as they appear in our consciousness, it is used to examine the lived experiences of participants and give voice to a culture that is not understood (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, transcendental phenomenological approach is the best method for my study because I am focused directly on the absent father's experiences from his point of view to discover the meaning of the experience. In addition, using a phenomenological approach allows the participants to give voice to the experience of being an absent father, a group not heavily researched from their perspective.

According to Moustakas (1994), awareness, knowledge, and understanding of an experience are derived from human research that is guided by epoch, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essence. These are key concepts essential for conducting phenomenological research. In particular, the *epoché process* requires the researcher to allow all thoughts regarding the phenomenon of study to come forth so that those thoughts may be set aside. The researcher refrains from casting judgment and eliminating all previous knowledge in order to become completely open and naïve to the experience being investigated.

To conduct the *epoché* process, found a quiet place to meditate and address my knowledge, experience, and/or biases with absent fathers. Reflective-meditation allows

preconceived notions to enter and freely leave the consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).

Once I reached an internal sense of closure regarding my thoughts I was able to freshly understand and approach the phenomenon. The epoché process predisposes a researcher to become more receptive. Epoché should be conducted with dedication and determination, as it can alter how we perceive the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental *phenomenological reduction* requires the researcher to describe the textural language of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The focus is on the qualities of the experience so that meaning of the experience can be discovered. Husserl (1931) stated, “the method of phenomenological reduction takes on the character of graded prereflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aimed at explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon” (p. 114). The process of phenomenological reduction is to bracket all statements given by participants, overlapping or repetitive statements are eliminated leaving relevant statements that are clustered into horizons. Horizons are the conditions of the phenomenon that gives it distinctive character (Moustakas, 1994). My process of carrying out phenomenological reduction required me to review transcriptions of each participant interview; bracketing information presented and reflecting on statements made by participants to establish horizons. Textural descriptions of the phenomenon are developed from the phenomenological reduction process (Moustakas, 1994).

After the phenomenological reduction process, Moustakas (1994) outlined the next task to be *imaginative variation*, which allows the researcher to seek possible meanings through imagination, frames of reference, polarities, and divergent perspectives. The researcher is tasked with determining possible structural meanings that

underscore the textural meaning, establish themes that account for the phenomenon while considering thoughts and feelings that structure the phenomenon. From the structural descriptions of the participants, the researcher is able to reveal how the experience came to be what it is.

The last step of the phenomenological research process is the *synthesis of meaning and essence*; this is achieved by integrating the textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement which gives essence of the phenomenon experienced (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of a phenomenon is that which is common or universal to the experience (Husserl, 1931). For my study, I reviewed the textural and structural descriptions reported from the absent fathers to arrive at the essence of the experience. Descriptions were examined from varying angles and perspectives until the essence of the phenomenon was achieved through intuition and reflection of what had been expressed. Essences are not exhaustive, the integration of the textural and structural descriptions represent the essence at that particular time from the view point of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

The core aspects of transcendental phenomenology were embodied in my proposed study. Phenomenal qualities and material properties were illuminated through vivid and accurate descriptions experienced by the absent father. Questions used to determine the meaning of an absent father's experiences were carefully constructed and deliberate to reveal the rich, layered textures and meanings of the phenomenon.

The phenomenological method of human research is the optimal mode of inquiry when seeking to understand what an experience means to the person who experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology best fits the scope and sequence of my study

because I am focusing on the perspective of absent fathers to explain what the experience of being an absent father means to them. By focusing my research on their perspective, I was able to explore their lived experiences, to accurately report the meaning of the cultural phenomenon. As a result of my transcendental phenomenological approach to understanding absent fathers, insight was gained regarding their thought processes and new information was added to the body of literature pertaining to experiences of absent fathers.

Selection of Participants

Men who have fathered children but are no longer or have never been active in their lives represented the population investigated. Study participants consisted of men ages 30 to 52 years old who reside in a large metropolitan area located in Southeast Texas. In order to focus first and foremost on participants who are absent fathers, I used criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Creswell (2007), criterion sampling is well suited for a phenomenology study since all participants represent individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. For my research, all participants met the requirement of being an absent father. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique was used to recruit additional individuals from current participants' extended networks who meet the same eligibility criteria. In qualitative research, Creswell suggested that a general guideline is to study a few individuals to collect extensive details about each individual.

When conducting qualitative research, results are not generalized; therefore, a small number of participants is appropriate (Polkinghorne, 2005). Dukes (1984) also recommended that the number of participants in a phenomenology should range between

3 to 10 participants. Using the sampling techniques mentioned above, 7 participants were recruited and saturation of the data was achieved.

In order to obtain participants, I posted the study flyer in public places located in a large southeastern Texas City frequented by men (i.e., religious and civic organizations, community centers, businesses, recreational facilities). I worked directly with a contact person at each potential location to seek permission from the organization to post the flyer on their bulletin board. Once permission was granted, the flyer was posted with my contact information (phone and email) so that interested individuals may directly contact me in a discreet and confidential manner. Participants were compensated with a \$40.00 Visa gift card.

Informed Consent

Prior to conducting my study, I obtained approval from Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). In adhering to ethical standards of research practice, participants read and completed an informed consent document prior to participation. I also verbally explain the informed consent with participants. The informed consent document specified the scope and sequence, goals, objectives, and purpose of my study as well as confidentiality safeguards, contact information for the researcher and SHSU's IRB office. Informed consents were completed at a private office space where confidentiality could be guaranteed. In order to assure participants anonymity, each participant selected a pseudonym to be used throughout the study. I obtained written permission from participants to audio record all interviews and follow up interviews. Participants were advised that information obtained through audio recordings will be transcribed and audio tapes as well as transcriptions will

be safely locked in a secured file cabinet within the office of the principal investigator. Furthermore, participants were made aware that audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept for a period of 3 years following the completion of dissertation defense.

In the event that participants encountered an emotional risk, all participants received referrals to three counseling services within their locality. Additionally, all participants were informed that their participation in my research study was completely voluntary and they had the option to withdraw at any time without consequences. Three years following the completion of the dissertation process, all information obtained (i.e., informed consent documentation, demographic questionnaire, audio recordings, and transcriptions) will be destroyed to protect the participants' anonymity.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in my research: a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) and a semi-structured interview protocol. The demographic questionnaire consisted of 11 variables (participants' age, race, educational level, employment, military experience, marital status, income, religious affiliation, age when first child was born, total number of children, and number of children if any that you have provided for). In addition, there were three open-ended questions on the demographic questionnaire that required a written response from participants.

Moustakas (1994) contended that within a phenomenological study the method for data collection is an interview. Moustakas (1994) explained that "the phenomenological interview is an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114). Although interviews are often unstructured, the researcher typically has an underlying understanding of what aspect of the phenomenon

will be uncovered (Polkinghorne, 2005). The interview typically begins with a social conversation to create a relaxed environment for participants (Moustakas, 1994). During the interview there was a reciprocal exchange between researcher and participant. The researcher tracks the conversation, noting aspects of the experience being explored (Polkinghorne, 2005).

The research question stems from an interest in a particular problem or topic (Moustakas, 1994). Research questions determine what the researcher seeks to understand (Maxwell, 2005). Focusing specifically on the experience of being an absent father, my research questions are:

1. From a father's perspective, what is his rationale for being absent from his children's life?
2. What are the characteristics of an absent father's lived experiences that allowed him to remain absent from his children's life?
3. What are some of the feelings that absent fathers experience due to their absence?

Grand tour questions, descriptive in nature, allow the researcher to elicit verbal descriptions of a cultural phenomenon from participants (Spradley, 1979). Grand tour, open-ended, and semi-structured interview questions were formed based on the review of literature (Black, 2008; Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner, & Williams, 1999; Corcoran 2005). Participants were asked these questions during the semi-structured interview to determine the perceptions they have regarding being an absent father. The following questions were used during semi-structured interview:

1. How would you define being a father?

2. How did you become separated from your child?
3. If given the opportunity to do it all over again, what would be different?

Data Collection

After receiving approval from SHSU's IRB, I solicited participants from locations that men patronize. I visited various religious and civic organizations, community centers, businesses, and recreational facilities to recruit participants. I used personal written invitations and made direct contact with referrals made by others. I was also able to post flyers at a local church in the city where I was able to detail the scope and sequence of my study and include my contact information so that interested parties could contact me directly, preserving their anonymity.

After participants were obtained, each completed the written informed consent that described the scope and sequence of my study and selected a pseudonym. Next, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants which allowed for natural social communication. By conducting these interviews, I was able to observe and record nonverbal behaviors as well as verbal responses. The face-to-face interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes per participant. Face to face interviews were audio recorded for accuracy during the transcription process. Interviews are the most widely used approach in gathering qualitative data (Polkinghorne, 2005). The goal of the interview is to gain a concise description of the individual's experience and analyze the data into themes to report the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews helped to answer the following research questions:

1. From a father's perspective, what is his rationale for being absent from his children's life?

2. What are the characteristics of an absent father's lived experiences that allowed him to remain absent from his children's life?
3. What are some of the feelings that absent fathers experience due to their absence?

Data Analysis

Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method was used in order to identify the themes. For example, the SCK method describes the manner in which the researcher gathers the essence of participants' experiences. Moustakas outlined specific steps to be followed prior to conducting SCK method of analysis. When conducting transcendental phenomenology, the researcher first and foremost attempts to set aside any personal biases or preconceived notions that he or she has with the phenomenon being studied. For me to set aside personal biases, I had to fully address my own feelings and perceptions regarding my own absent father. I sought counseling from a licensed professional counselor. In seeking counseling I was able to revisit painful memories and feelings and journal my thoughts. By journaling my experience and feelings, I was able reflect on my own experience of having an absent father. The counseling and reflection process allowed me to clear my mind of any biases or preconceived notions I had regarding absent fathers or the impact their absence has on their children. Upon addressing those feelings, I arrived at what Moustakas's (1994) described as epoché.

After epoché was achieved and the interviews had been transcribed, the process of phenomenological reduction began. Phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to describe the general features of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The procedures

of phenomenal analysis consist of reflecting on content of the interview, analyzing transcription statements, and notating significant statements related to the phenomenon as horizons (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then analyzes each participant's transcript verbatim by completing the following steps: (a) each statement is considered for the description's significance; (b) record all statements relevant to the phenomenon; (c) list nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements since these represent the horizons of the experience; (d) cluster horizons into themes; (e) synthesize themes into textures of the experience. For my study I reviewed transcribed interviews, notated all significant statements that are related to the participant's perception of being an absent father. Irrelevant statements were discarded, leaving the horizons of the phenomenon which were clustered into meaning units. The meaning units represented the textural description of the phenomenon.

After textural descriptions of the experience are obtained Moustakas (1994) identified the next step as the imaginative variation process. The imaginative variation process involves describing the essential structures of the phenomenon. The structural descriptions detail the factors that account for what has been experienced. Imaginative variation process calls for the researcher to reflect, use their imagination, approach the phenomenon from varying perspectives knowing that there are countless possibilities to be examined. To build structural descriptions of being an absent father for each participant, I reflected on the structure behind the textural descriptions made by them.

Moustakas' (1994) final step in his modification of the SCK method is to combine textural and structural descriptions of the experience to report the meaning or essence of the experience. Husserl (1931) stated that the essence of an experience is "that which is

common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is” (p. 43). The synthesis of textural and structural descriptions from each participant yielded the essence of the experience for that participant. After textural and structural descriptions were developed for all participants, a composite was integrated into a universal description of the experience. The data analysis process was concluded with the essence that emerged from participants. In reporting the essence of the experience of being an absent father, I described in detail participants’ perceptions of what the experience of being an absent father entails for them and how they conceptualize the phenomenon. Upon completion of the data analysis process, research participants participated in follow up interviews where member checking occurred to increase the credibility of interview data interpretations. Audio recordings, transcriptions, and analysis will be kept in a secured file cabinet for the period of three years following the completion of the dissertation process. All information will be destroyed after the three-year time frame has elapsed.

Credibility

According to Maxwell (2005), credibility threats to validity exist in qualitative studies that Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) categorized as being either external or internal threats to validity. Simply defined, internal credibility is the truth value or consistency of the interpretations and conclusions held by the group being studied, whereas external credibility is the transferability of the findings and conclusions across other populations. Internal and external credibility threats can occur during three stages: (a) research design/data collection, (b) data analysis, and (c) data interpretation.

In order to address threats to credibility, Onwuegbuzie and Leech’s (2007)

Qualitative Legitimation Model was used; however, not all validation strategies were applied given that not all threats to validity are pertinent to every qualitative study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Therefore, threats to validity that I addressed included researcher bias, reactivity, and observational bias. In addressing these threats, five validation strategies were employed in order to increase legitimation of my study: (a) bracketing, (b) member checking, (c) rich and thick descriptions, (d) triangulation, and (e) debriefing.

Bracketing

Onwuegbuzie (2003) described researcher bias as a threat to internal and external credibility that occurs when personal biases or a priori assumptions are unable to be bracketed. Due to the fact that the researcher represents the instrument in collecting data, researcher bias is difficult to control. For example, the researcher's bias can influence the participants' behaviors, affect study procedures, or taint data collection. Therefore, I used bracketing techniques to counteract any researcher bias within my study.

As defined by Gearing (2004), bracketing is the process in which the researcher suspends biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences in order to observe and describe the phenomenon. Specifically, I used ideal or philosophical bracketing, setting aside as many external and internal uncertain beliefs as possible regarding absent fathers. Tufford and Newman (2010) recommended keeping a reflexive journal and writing memos. I maintained a reflexive journal at the onset of my study as a way to explore my rationale for undertaking this particular research, recognize assumptions and biases regarding absent fathers, and acknowledging my personal experiences of living without my father. In order for me to address additional biases or assumptions that may arise,

memo notes were taken and reviewed throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Gearing (2004) recommended that in conducting ideal bracketing the researcher focuses on the bracketed data after the essence and structure of the phenomenon is understood. Therefore, I reviewed bracketing information written in the reflexive journal and memo notes. The methods of conducting bracketing may vary, but increased reflexivity is gained if the bracketing process is carried out in an honest, careful, and thoughtful manner (Gearing, 2004).

Member Checking

Onwuegbuzie (2003) referred to reactivity as the numerous aspects of conducting a study that affect participants' reactions in terms of altering their responses. Two forms of reactivity are the Hawthorne effect and novelty stimuli. These occur when participants sense that they are receiving special accommodations or experiencing novel stimuli within the course of the study. Reactivity makes it difficult for the researcher to gain an accurate naturalistic observation. Essentially, reactivity is a threat to internal and external credibility (Onwuegbuzie, 2003) that can be addressed through member checking.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checking as requesting feedback from study participants regarding data that were collected. They suggested that member checking should occur continuously throughout the research process; therefore, I asked participants to take part in member checking as a way for them to assess interview transcriptions and review the reported theme summaries. Participants reviewed the transcriptions for their interview for accuracy. According to Maxwell (1996), member checking eliminates any misrepresentation or misinterpretation of participants "voices." Finally, Lincoln and Guba considered member checking to be the most critical technique

in establishing credibility.

Rich and Thick Descriptions

Another threat to internal credibility within a qualitative study is observational bias. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) described observational bias as insufficient sampling of behaviors or words. Thus, observational bias can occur during the research design/data collection stage as well as during the data analysis stage. In addressing observational bias, rich and thick descriptions are used to increase credibility. According to Becker (1970), examples include verbatim interview transcripts, descriptive observations, and comprehensive note-taking pertaining to specific events and behaviors. Hence, rich and thick data descriptions should be thoroughly comprehensive to increase the likelihood of establishing meaning (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

To increase transferability, I will explain the procedures involved in conducting my study. Additionally, participants' responses are included in the results section to address trustworthiness as well as increase interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that persistent observations and prolonged engagement with participants tend to increase credibility. Persistent participant observation afforded me the opportunity to identify and focus upon mutual characteristics shared by absent fathers. Prolonged engagement with the absent fathers allowed their *voices* to be heard. As a result of using these validation techniques, I have obtained extensive knowledge concerning their experiences that will inform the reader if the information gleaned from my study can be transferred to other contexts due to shared characteristics (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Triangulation

The triangulation process is achieved when the researcher employs several methods or sources to obtain data (Linda & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I used the demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, field note observations, expertise from professionals in the field to meet the criteria of triangulation of the data. I consulted with my dissertation chair, Dr. Henriksen who served as a point of contact regarding the research process. I also worked with another colleague, Dr. Angie Wilson who has published research regarding the impact of absent fathers. The triangulation process was important to my study given that more sources examined equates to the increased likelihood of obtaining an adequate representation of the phenomenon (Newman & Benz, 1988).

Debriefing

Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2008) contended that there are several forms of debriefing that can be conducted at the conclusion of a study. I used peer debriefing, debriefing of participants and debriefing the researcher. Peer debriefing involves using an outside source to evaluate the research process (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). Therefore, I employed two professional colleagues to serve as my devil's advocate, who were charged with keeping the research process *honest* by questioning aspects involving procedures, interpretations, and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both individuals used in the peer debriefing process hold doctorate degrees in the field of counseling and are knowledgeable in conducting qualitative research.

Debriefing the participants requires the researcher to conduct interviews with participants to explain goals, objectives and outcomes of the study, as well as address any

questions or concerns of participants (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). I conducted debriefing interviews with participants to notify participants of findings and address any potential conflicts that may have occurred during the research process. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) indicated that debriefing the participants can be used to demonstrate respect and appreciation the researcher has for the participant's valuable contributions to the study.

Lastly, I participated in what Onwuegbuzie et al. (2008) described as debriefing the researcher. This process calls for the researcher to be interviewed at a private location by an unbiased individual who does not have a stake in the research using an audio recording device or video recorder. The interviewer should possess interviewing skills and should have knowledge of the qualitative process and the research topic. In order to complete the debriefing process, I enlisted a counseling professional who has knowledge of how to conduct a qualitative study and has worked with absent fathers.

Summary

In Chapter III, I stated my rationale for conducting a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, described my prospective participants, and outlined the selection process used. In addition, I discussed the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I reported credibility measures taken, namely bracketing, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, triangulation, and debriefing.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Transcendental phenomenology is used to examine the lived experiences of participants and give a voice to a culture that is misunderstood (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of my study was to examine the lived experiences of absent fathers. Through an examination of seven absent father's perspectives on being an absent father, insights were gained that included a rationale for father absence, and factors that influenced father absence. Chapter IV includes (a) qualitative procedure overview, (b) demographics, (c) participant descriptions, (d) emerged themes, and (e) a summary.

I used two instruments to collect qualitative information from study participants first, a demographic questionnaire with three open-ended questions and secondly, a semi-structured interview protocol. Upon completion of each semi-structured interview I transcribed participant's statements verbatim in an effort to capture all statements related to the experience of being an absent father.

I analyzed the data using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method to identify the themes. For example, data was analyzed for significant phrases regarding the experience of being an absent father. Significant phrases were grouped and developed into descriptions of the experience. Descriptions of the experience represent the emerged themes. I completed the data analysis by hand; no qualitative software was used.

Demographics

As the first step of the semi-structured interview, I asked participants to complete the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire contained 11 variables

(participants' age, race, educational level, employment, military experience, marital status, income, religious affiliation, age when first child was born, total number of children, and number of children, if any, that you have provided for). Additionally, there were three open-ended questions that required a written response. The open-ended questions were about the composition of the absent father's household growing up, males in the absent father's life who served as an example of what it means to be a man, and any feelings the absent father experienced growing up with or without a father in his household.

Seven absent fathers met the eligibility criteria for participation in my study. Others expressed interest in the study, but did not meet the criterion of length of absence for participation in the study. Saturation of the data was reached with the seven absent fathers. As shown in Table 1, participants ranged in age from 30 to 52. Table 2 details the participant's ethnic orientation, six participants identified as African American and one participant identified as Latino. The participant's relationship status is shown in Table 3. Of the seven participants, five identified as single and two were married. Six of the participants identified having a religious affiliation (three Christian, three Baptist) one participant identified as agnostic (see Table 4).

Table 1

Age of Absent Fathers

Age	Number	Participant #
30	1	5
42	2	6, 7
49	1	3
51	1	4
52	2	1, 2

Table 2

Ethnic Orientation of Absent Fathers

Ethnicity	Number	Participant #
African American	6	1,2,4,5,6,7
Latino	1	3

Table 3

Relationship Status of Absent Fathers

Relationship Status	Number	Participant #
Married	2	1,6
Single	5	2,3,4,5,7

Table 4

Religious Affiliation of Absent Fathers

Religious Affiliation	Number	Participant #
Christian	3	1,2,3
Baptist	3	4,6,7
Agnostic	1	5

Concerning their education, the participants' highest level of education ranged from ninth grade to a master's degree. One participant stated that he dropped out of high school in the ninth grade, three participants obtained high school diplomas, two participants disclosed that they received high school diplomas and had at least two years of college, and one participant has a master's degree in education and is pursuing a doctoral degree (see Table 5). As depicted in Table 6, three participants were employed,

four were unemployed, and two participants had military experience. Participant's annual household income ranged from \$0 per year to \$50,000 per year shown in Table 7.

Table 5

Educational Attainment of Absent Fathers

Highest Level of Education	Number	Participant #
9 th grade	1	3
High School Diploma	5	2,4,5,6,7
Some College	2	2,7
Master's Degree	1	1

Table 6

Employment Status/Military Experience of Absent Fathers

Employment Status	Number	Participant #
Unemployed	4	2,3,4,5
Employed	3	1,6,7
Military Experience	2	1,5

Table 7

Annual Household Income of Absent Fathers

Annual Income	Number	Participant #
\$0	4	2,3,4,5
\$20,000 - \$30,000	1	6
\$30,001 - \$40,000	1	1
\$40,001 - \$50,000	1	7

The total number of children of each participant is listed in Table 8. Participants' total number of children ranged from one child to seven children. In addition to the total number of children, participants were asked to list the number of children that he has provided for in the past that were not his biological children. Four participants indicated they had never provided for any other children. Three participants stated they had provided for children that were not their biological children. This information is listed in Table 9. Demographic information listed in Table 10 pertains to the age the participants were when their first child was born. Participant descriptions are included in the following section.

Table 8

Number of Biological Children of Absent Fathers

Number of Children	Number	Participant #
1	2	5,7
2	1	3
3	2	1,4
4	1	2
7	1	6

Table 9

Number of Non-biological Children Absent Fathers have provided for

Number of Children	Number	Participant #
0	4	2,3,5,7
2	1	4
4	1	6
8	1	1

Table 10

Absent Father's Age when first child was born

Age	Number	Participant #
19	1	5
20	1	3
21	1	1
27	2	4,7
30	1	6
42	1	2

Participant Descriptions

Participant #1: Charles

Charles is a 52-year-old married African American male. Charles identified as being a Christian. He has a master's degree in education and is pursuing a doctorate in counselor education. Currently, he is employed and his annual household income does not exceed \$40,000. He has an honorable discharge from the United States Air Force. Charles has three biological children; he had his first child at the age of 21, second child at the age of 25, and third child at the age of 26. Charles' absence from his children began when they were adolescents. He has been absent from their lives for over 20 years. Charles disclosed that since his absence he has not provided any emotional or financial support to his three biological children, but he has provided emotional and financial

support to eight other children. When asked about the composition of his household growing up, Charles stated, “My mother and father divorced when I was seven, being the oldest I had become highly responsible for my younger brothers by cooking and protecting them. My mother remarried when I was 13.”

Participant #2: Priest

Priest is a 52-year-old single African American male. Priest identified as being a Christian. He has some college experience, but is currently unemployed and homeless. Priest has a total of four children with three women, he had his first child when he was 42-years-old. Priest stated that he has provided emotional and financial support for all of his children in the past, but has not been able to provide for them in any capacity for the last several years. He has not provided for any other children. Priest has been absent from his children’s lives for the past four years. When asked about the composition of his household, Priest explained “My mother had a full-time job and my father was a drug dealer. They both provided for my brothers, my sister, and I in they own way.”

Participant #3: Montana

Montana is a 49-year-old single Latino American male. Montana identified as being a Christian. He dropped out of high school in ninth grade and is currently unemployed and homeless. Montana was recently released from the Texas Department of Corrections. Montana has two children whom he has never provided for emotionally or financially. He has been absent from his children’s lives for over 27 years. He has not provided for any other children. Montana had his first child at the age of 20-years-old. He described the composition of his household growing up as single parent household, “my mother, my sister and me, that’s all that was there.”

Participant #4: George

George is a 51-year-old single African American male. George identified as Baptist. He has a high school diploma, but is currently unemployed and homeless. George has a total of five children (three biological children and two stepsons). George was 27-years-old when his first child was born. His two oldest children are adults. George explained that he was the custodial parent to his two oldest children until he lost custody. He has been absent from their lives for 22 years. Since his absence, he has not provided support for them, emotionally or financially.

George explained that a few years after losing custody of his oldest children he fell in love with a woman who had two sons, whom he provided for emotionally and financially. George was 37 when his youngest biological child was born. George has been absent from his youngest child's life for 12 years and has not provided any emotional or financial support since his absence. When asked about the composition of his household, George described his early life as "Hard, I am the youngest of 11 kids, my mother was a single mother and struggling, we barely got to eat at times. My mother passed away when I six, my sister and brother took care of me."

Participant #5: Howard

Howard is 30-year-old single African American male. Howard identified as Agnostic. He has a high school diploma, but is currently unemployed and homeless. He has some military experience, but his time in the armed forces was short lived, he received a dishonorable discharge. Howard has one child, whom he had when he was 19-years-old. He indicated that he has provided emotional and financial support for his child in the past, but currently does not provide any emotional or financial support to his child.

He has never provided for any other children. Howard has been absent from his child's life for the past seven years. When asked about the composition of his household growing up, Howard explained, "I grew up in a single parent house with my younger sister. My mother eventually married my stepfather and had my little brother. They divorced a little after my brother was born, then I was the man of the house again."

Participant #6: Wallace

Wallace is a 42-year-old married African American male. Wallace identified as Baptist. He has a high school diploma, is currently employed with an annual household income that does not exceed \$30,000. Wallace has a total of seven children (three biological children and four stepchildren). Wallace had his first child when he was 30-years-old. He does not provide emotional or financial support to his oldest biological child, but does provide emotional and financial support to his two youngest biological children as well as his three of his stepchildren. Wallace has been absent from his oldest child's life for the past 18 months. When asked about the composition of his household growing up, Wallace pointed out, "It was kind of difficult growing up without a dad, it was just me and my mother. I was basically teaching myself how to do things until my stepdad came into my life."

Participant #7: Jeff

Jeff is a 42-year-old single African American male. Jeff identified as Baptist. He has some college experience and is currently employed; his annual household income does not exceed \$50,000. Jeff has one child, whom he had when he was 27-years-old. He disclosed that he has provided emotional and financial support for his child in the past, but currently does not provide any emotional or financial support to his child. He has

never provided for any other children. Howard has been absent from his child's life for the past 13 years. When asked about the composition of his household growing up, Jeff explained, "I grew up with my mom and my sister until my mom married my stepdad. When he came into the picture everything was better."

Emerged Themes

The themes that the absent fathers identified are categorized as perspectives, rationale, or factors. Perspective themes identified by the absent fathers detail their particular point of view regarding their absence from their children's lives. Themes regarding the absent fathers identified reasoning for being separated and maintaining the separation is discussed under the section titled rationale. Lastly, themes categorized as factors detail contributing factors identified by the absent fathers that led to their absence.

Perspectives

The following themes represent the perspectives of the absent fathers: (a) comprehension without application, (b) child consciousness, and (c) remorseful reaction.

Comprehension without application. All seven of the absent fathers were able to clearly conceptualize what being a father means to them. Additionally, six out of seven participating absent fathers identified a male figure in their life that served as an example of what it means to be a father. Although definitions of fatherhood were formulated and examples were present for the majority of the absent fathers, participants understood the role of father, but did not readily apply the knowledge.

Several of the absent fathers conceptualized fatherhood as providing for your children. Charles disclosed that fatherhood was more so about providing support, "As a father I am a provider before I am anything else. In my day it was more important for a

man to make money and provide than it was for him to have a relationship with his kids.” Charles explained that his maternal grandfather served as an example of fatherhood, “He taught me what hard work looks like, and he was well respected in the community and was very wise. I was allowed to spend the summer vacations and school holidays with him.” George described a father as someone that provided, “a father takes care of his kids and his wife, he provides, has stable employment, and is loving and caring. When asked who served as an example of fatherhood, George explained, “My oldest brother, I watched him take care of his family, he struggled to make good for his wife, his kids, and me.” Howard identified fatherhood as being accountable to your children, “if it’s something that they need you provide, you can always be counted on, really just being accountable. That’s when you thinking as a man.” He stated that his stepfather served as an example of fatherhood, “He was a cool dude for the most part and a hard worker. I eventually found out he was doing dope. I looked up to him as a hard worker, but not the negative stuff he was doing.”

Three of the absent fathers understood fatherhood as a sense of responsibility. Priest detailed, “A father is a man who runs to the responsibility, he embraces it, it’s not a challenge to him, it’s a gift. You don’t make excuses for your responsibilities you just do them; you meet them no matter what.” Priest ideas of what fatherhood were formulated by his biological father and his step-father, “my father taught me what not to do and my step-father taught me what to do to survive in life.” Although Priest grew up with his father in his life, he felt like his father was never around. Priest stated, “It’s like my father wasn’t there because he was never around. He was always gone on a drug run and when he was there all that I can remember was the beatings he gave us.” Wallace echoed some

of the same sentiments, “being a daddy is taking care of my responsibilities, buying clothes and all that, providing your kids with the necessities.” Wallace’s stepdad served as his example of fatherhood, “My stepdad taught me that family was important. He talked and listened to my feelings; as a result of this I try to instill the same qualities with my kids.” Montana was unable to identify any male figure in life that served as an example of fatherhood. Although he did not have an example, Montana defined fatherhood as, “being responsible, being a man to your kids; take care of them, work, and give them good advice.”

Jeff identified fatherhood as being responsible to your child as well as demonstrating fathering activities that will impart something into their kids. Jeff explained, “A father protects, guides, and teaches his kids and it’s not just the big things but the little nuggets, like teaching them to tie their shoes. It’s also about creating memories and taking care of them.” His stepfather served as an example of fatherhood for him, “He showed me how to work and take care of my responsibilities.”

Child consciousness. With regards to thought preoccupation with their children, the absent fathers all indicated they never forgot about their children and that they have thought about their children over the past years. All of the absent fathers disclosed they have endured emotional pain as a result of their absence. When discussing them thinking about their children two of the participants became choked up and needed time to experience the emotions evoked. Priest explained:

I think about them every day, when I saw your last name Taylor on the flyer I almost fell over it reminded me of my daughter’s name. I have withdrawals all the time because I love my children dearly [begins to sob] give me a moment. And

these last four years have been real rough for me. I'm missing them like crazy.

Not being able to see them or talk to them. Man it's hard.

Montana began to cry when reflecting on how much he thinks about his children.

Montana stated, "I think about them every day man, it's bad. I get lonely and sad sometimes thinking about them, sometimes I think and just cry, just cry. It's hard they take a piece of your heart." Charles also disclosed:

Over the years I thought about my children daily, that part never left me although I wasn't there I am still their parent. I still want to know what's going on in their lives. On the outside I was fine, but on the inside it just crumbled me. I could watch television and see a dad with his daughter and I would just burst into tears."

George explained, "All I know is thinking about them it hurt tremendously. I don't know how I handled it or how I am supposed to handle it, it's just very painful." Jeff stated:

I never forget her birthdays. I use to call on her on birthdays all the time. I use to try to send her something on her birthdays and Christmas. I always remembered. I may not be there, but I'll never forget.

Wallace described a sense of resilience when asked about how he deals with thought preoccupation of his child:

I think about her, but I just deal with it though. I try to act like the thoughts are not even happening. I just pray on it and hope and I know one day God is going to bring her back to me.

Howard stated that he thinks about his child, but expressed disappointment in his self,

"Coming here I checked the date and realized my daughter's birthday is coming up. It

made me mad that it almost slipped my mind. I actually forgot about it coming up which pisses me off.”

Remorseful reaction. All participants expressed the desire to do things differently in respect to their children. Some expressed the idea of making the relationship with their children’s mother work. Jeff stated, “I would’ve tried harder with her mother, fought harder to make us a whole family unit. I don’t know if it would have worked, but at least I could have said I gave it everything I had. I tried.” Howard shared a similar statement, “There are definitely different decisions I would have made, stayed together, staying with her and trying to tough it out. Charles explained, “I would still want the same girls, but I would have done more to connect with their mother and give her what she needed from me as a husband. I wouldn’t have left California for sure.”

Other absent fathers indicated that they would have made positive choices for themselves which would have been beneficial for their children. Montana disclosed, “I would do everything different; no gangs or drugs. I would be a Christian, be good to my kids and their mother. I would be a nice person, thinking more positive than negative.” Priest explained how he would be a better version of himself, “I would overpower them with love. I would be a saved father. I would be the best rearing father I could be to my kids. I would do more stuff with them like the movies and stuff.”

Two absent fathers identified how they would have fought harder for their parental rights. Wallace stated, “I would have made sure I had custodial rights before I just made the decision to leave my daughter with her mom.” George mentioned, “Now if I could have done anything right, I would have never let my oldest kids go to the system. I would have fought for them.” Additionally, George described how he wished he could

impart something into his son's life, "I would love to give my son something, not money or stuff I wish I could give him something that I haven't been able to give him the last four years. I would give him more of me."

All of the absent fathers conceptualized an understanding of what it means to be a father. The role of father was modeled for the majority of the absent fathers, yet they were absent still. Even when thoughts of their children flooded their heads they remained absent. Although the thought preoccupation did not cause any of the absent fathers to reach out to their child, all still expressed remorse for not being a continuous presence in the lives of their children.

Rationale

The following themes represent the rationale that absent fathers identified: (d) initial separation rationalization, (e) extended absence justification, and (f) fraction of a man.

Initial separation rationalization. Each absent father identified a reason for his absence. The rationale for absence is unique to each individual. Although the responses are unique, the commonality amongst all absent fathers was that they rationalized their absence. Several participants explained that their absence began once the relationship with their children's mother ended. Charles detailed:

I was mainly absent due to the divorce from their mother. And years later she remarried, this part is debatable depending on who you ask, but a condition that her new husband set was she would not deal with me or anybody in my family. And so that's how it was. Later on I accepted a promotion in another state so that only exacerbated the absence on my part. And even though I was doing well on

the outside, in terms of career moves a lot of cool things happened during this time, but on the inside the absence of me being able to be with my girls killed me. Jeff stated, "Our relationship was broken, and it basically broke down because I was unfaithful. I was too selfish and caught up in trying to, trying to get things done my way. It had to be my way or no way." Similarly, Howard concluded that breakdown of his relationship with his child's mother perpetuated his absence.

We broke up like right after she was born. After we broke up she moved back to St. Louis because we were living in Springfield, Missouri together. Well actually it started in Springfield when she wouldn't let me come over to see the baby. She would say that I could see her and then change her mind. She was playing games with me. But her moving to St. Louis actually led to us being through with each other and me and my daughter being separated. But as far as the distance between us, that's a long time like a three-hour drive and I worked every day. I was literally working every day; like it was required we had to work like seven days a week because they needed us at work.

For other participants the relationship was not the initial cause of the separation from their children. For these participants their separation was caused by their own actions, choices they made, or circumstances beyond their control. Montana explained:

I became separated from my kid because went to prison, but while I was in the County jail she came to visit me and she brought my kids too, they were one years old and eight months old. On the visit she told me she ain't going to wait for me too long, it's too many years to wait. It was eight years. I mean, we were young

and I understand her so, I got pissed off and I told her, "Go for it, man." And she started crying. I mean, I knew what was going to happen.

George justified his absence from his youngest child by describing the circumstances that led to his absence:

His mother was acting crazy, being verbally and physically abusive towards her oldest son. She was talking crazy to him and she punched him in the back. My reaction was to push her, but after I pushed, her reaction was to get up and do more to him. I didn't have the intention on beating her up, but man she needed to be beat up because that was the worst thing to me, was to see a kid being abused. I hated that, man I hated it. After that happened I had to leave I couldn't sit around her no more.

George was originally granted custody of his oldest children but became separated from them. George explained his absence from his oldest children through the following statements:

Well, what happened was, it has hard living with them two by myself. I worked two jobs. They were already disturbed, they had ADHD, well my daughter did, and they would not allow anyone to watch them. They purposely, my daughter was the ringmaster behind this and she set my son up to go crazy every time they got a babysitter. They wanted dad there, they didn't want anybody else watching them, but they didn't understand I had to work. I was mad at them for that. So I quit my job and went on assistance from the State, but I couldn't handle my kids. I couldn't get a better grip on my kids. I gave up hope and started using drugs. The Department of Children and Families gave me a surprise visit. She told me

I'm not fit to raise my kids. I said what, so no black male is fit to raise their kids? You want to take my kids and ask me about their mother so you can give them back to their mother who is abusing drugs too. I told my lawyer, well, I would like to make a voluntary commitment and I can come back and get my kids. A month goes by and I get a letter saying we no longer do voluntary commitments; we have the right to legally take your kids from you. They said I gave them up on purpose. But I think their case towards me was to get my parental rights taken and get me away from my kids.

Priest described an awakening from God he experienced that prompted his separation from his children:

In my last relationship I was going through, my feelings were numb. I was just going through the perpetual motion. Before I recognized I was going through the motion I had two more children. I knew my children were a blessing. I love my children and they love me. But during her pregnancy with our youngest I woke up and that's when I became the person I am now. I promise that's when I embraced who I am now. I knew I had my oldest while I was married but my youngest three I had outside of marriage. They were all made from love, but the youngest three weren't made in a covenant of marriage. God spoke to me one day; he told me I made you for more than just this, he was telling me to stop and I stopped. I just snapped out of it I knew I was made for more. And ever since that day I started rushing to the ministry. I ran to it and I've been spreading the gospel ever since.

Wallace stated that his separation from his child was beyond his control. As he explained the circumstances that caused his separation he became emotional. His emotional display

began with a shaky tone in his voice, but as he continued the shakiness in his tone diminished and he became angry about the cause of his separation from his daughter. He explained:

My daughter was molested by her step brother, my wife's son. He's the reason I can't see my daughter. I would like to get my visitation back. I use to have her the first, third, and fifth weekend in the month. Everything was working out fine, and then we found out that my stepson had molested my daughter and it created tension, a bunch of tension. And as a result of that my daughter hasn't been able to come back to my house. I understand her pain from the molestation and why she is like she is now. But I don't understand why I can't see her. He's in jail now and there is nothing for her to fear now. He's not even in the picture anymore; he's gone for ten years. And when he gets out, he can't come be around any of the kids, he can't even come to our house period. He's no threat. And I really don't want to talk too much on that issue.

Extended absence justification. Just as all participants had varying reasons for their initial separation, their explanations for their continued absence varied. A commonality amongst all participations was the belief that their extended absence was justifiable. Wallace disclosed:

I have other kids to worry about. I got three other young ones under her that I have to worry about. I'm not about to be out of their life trying to fight for one.

When my daughter gets old enough she can make her own decision.

Some absent fathers felt that their children were better off without them. Montana stated:

Another man is raising my kids. He is providing for them; school clothes, food, I mean everything. They grew up with him; he's been taking care of them all their life. I know him he's cool, but I feel jealous that I can't provide for them. They stepdad do everything for them, they don't need me.

Jeff felt as if his presence in his daughter's life would have hindered her growth potential.

He feels that his absence from her life made her a better person. He explained:

I was making mistakes in my life and I didn't want the negativity to affect my daughter growing up. I didn't want her to be miserable because I was miserable. I think if a child sees that they can feed off of what their parents are feeling. I know because that's what happened to me as a child. I don't want my daughter to have that happen to her. So, it wasn't a question of did I love her or did I care about her, it was more of I don't want you to get caught up in the same trap or be miserable like I'm feeling because it could have affected her mood. She has a remarkable, outgoing, open spirit, and I think that's because of me, when I was going through what I was going through not being there to dampen her spirit is the reason why. I feel kind of like to a certain extent I did the right thing being gone. If she had been around me when I was going through the stuff I was going through, man it was some really dark days. I battled depression; I fought that and went through a lot of emotional things. It broke me down. If she had been around me I might've killed myself.

Other absent fathers shifted the blame for their absence. Their absence was justified because it was not their fault; someone else was responsible for their continued absence. George excused his absence because of his inner turmoil stemming from his childhood.

Additionally, he felt that his youngest son's mother should have done more to keep him connected to his son. George indicated:

God, man, all I knew all my life was misery, so I took to the streets, I took to drugs. The drugs contributed to me remaining absent. I grew up very disturbed, very depressed, so I went into a state of depression and that brought back the drugs and that kept me down for four years. When I got up off my feet, my eyes opened up and I'm looking for my son drastically, and then it hit me. I said wait a minute, I gave her my numbers. Why didn't she call me when she had all these numbers? She did not try to contact me at all; she just failed to get in contact with me. She had the number to Search and she had the number to Compass, where I had my voicemail set up. I had no phone calls or nothing for four years. She did not contact me and she still has not contacted me. I found her on Facebook but I haven't reached out to her. She should have brought my son to me. She chose not to contact me because she still thinks I owe her 12 years of child support and she's right I do, but I'll never put that money down.

Howard shared similar sentiments regarding who was to blame for his continued absence. He blamed his child's mother for his absence. He angrily discussed the circumstances:

It's a money thing with her. All she wants is money from me. While in the military I was sending her money for our daughter. I sent her over \$2,500.00. Once I got discharged she put me on child support. See her mom worked for the child support office. I asked her what about the \$2,500.00 I gave you, she's like oh those were just gifts. When I had a good job, she wasn't really doing shit. She was staying in St. Louis working at Applebee's, and I'm paying her like \$550.00 a

month and she's staying with her mom. And I'm just thinking about it from a money standpoint. What are you doing with the money? I got pissed and stopped paying her, now I'm behind like \$5,000.00 in child support. It all came to head and it led to drug abuse. The drug abuse affected my job performance and that led to me getting laid off. If she had taken me off child support none of this would have happened. People give black men a bad stigma in society saying, you know, they don't want to be fathers. They do, but the way the system is set up, it's set up for them not to be fathers. I don't know why black women go and put black men on child support. Now you have the government chasing after us, in order to avoid jail we have to keep a job. Let's see if you get a gift again, you won't get any help from me. I feel messed up thinking like that cause I know I have to take care of my kid, but it's like fuck this bitch. I don't mean to hurt my kid but I'm trying to hurt her mother.

Charles maintained that his prolonged absence was due to the lack of finances required to fight for his right to see his children. He indicated:

The legalities that I had to go through just in order to see them were extremely expensive and beyond my income level, because it required me hiring an attorney in Texas to go to California to argue the case and then I would have had to pay for the attorney's travel expenses. I just didn't have the money to cover all of that. And then it was a lot of turmoil with my children's mother because if I called I had to deal with their mom and she tended to always have some type of agenda and that wasn't cool to me. At the time I just didn't know how to handle that.

Priest believes that his continued absence is orchestrated by God's divine purpose for his life. He stated:

God has placed me here. I am in Texas because I am preaching the gospel and I'm speaking on the New World Order. We are now at the end of the world age and because we are at the end there is a demand for the whole truth. God told me I was surgically placed right here where I am now, and use it for His honor and His glory, and tell them. He told me to start a church, so I started a church here on the internet. Although my kids are in Oklahoma I know I'm in the place I'm supposed to be.

Fraction of a man. Five out of seven of the absent fathers explained that they needed time to be a complete man for their children before they could re-enter their lives. They felt like they weren't in a position as men to be fathers. The inadequacy they felt as men weighed heavily on their decision to remain absent. George explained, "I don't want to see my son right now he will look down on me as a father, any child would." Howard expressed similar sentiments, "Right now I am just trying to get back on my feet. I am trying to get back to the person I once was first. I'm in Houston because there are opportunities here for me to be better." Jeff also expressed how he needed to heal first before being in his daughter's life. He stated, "I really had to pull myself out of the depression first. I wasn't right in the head to be around her. I needed to get right first. Additionally, Priest also explained how he needed to be in a better position first:

I got to be in a better position to be a better father. My mother always told me that you can't be a great father unless you're in a position to be. I would never even had considered moving here, but my move here was for the betterment of my kids

point blank. Houston has the best medical in the state, hell in the world, and I know that everything is just going like this for now and I'm going to be better. Once I'm better I'm going to pick up where I left off, but I'm going to be way better for all of my kids in Oklahoma.

Charles described how he came to view himself as half of a man:

I became homeless, I lost my business, I lost everything I had. It took me back to a real basic level of what is important. Life really put me on a journey; going through it was a fight. I had to deal with me first I was working on me first before I could be with them. It was like out of sight out of mind. I didn't dwell on the emotional aspect of being absent, I more so focused on coming back to being a whole person.

Two of the absent fathers did not identify with being an incomplete man.

Conversely, these men did not make a connection between their perception of themselves and their absence from their children. These participants were more defensive and angry regarding the separation from their children. Wallace angrily explained:

Ya'll have one side of the story and ya'll making me like I'm a, like you said, absent father. And that's what I have always strived not be a deadbeat dad. I don't want to be measured by the consensus scale how ya'll view dads. And so ya'll don't know how we feel.

Montana, filled with anger exclaimed:

My kids came to visit me one time when I was in prison! My mom brought them to me! After the visit my mom, my nieces, everybody was like they don't love you man. They don't even like you man. They don't write and they don't call. I

thought about it too and I just say fuck them. And this last time I was in prison I was thinking about everything. And I decided to come to Houston and forget about everybody, but my mom. I'll get my mom and the rest just fuck them.

Although the rationales are different for each absent father, the commonality amongst all is that they were able to rationalize their absence as well felt that their extended absence was justifiable. Some of the men refused to take responsibility for their absence and shifted the blame. The feeling of inadequacy for some of the absent fathers was so strong it influenced their decision to remain absent.

Factors

The following themes represent the factors that absent fathers identified: (g) father hunger, (h) unsustainable relationships, and (i) self-inflicted demise.

Father hunger. All absent fathers identified a desire for a relationship with their biological father. Although six absent fathers identified a male figure in their life that served as an example of what it means to be a father, all men expressed how they wanted to know more about their biological father. The men shared the thoughts and emotions that they experienced growing up without their biological father active in their lives. Four participants had no relationship with their biological fathers. These men have never seen their fathers in person nor do they have any information about them. These men expressed feelings of anger, hurt, and pain regarding the absence of their biological fathers. When asked to describe his feelings regarding growing up without his biological father, Wallace stated:

I was just confused. I didn't understand why he wasn't there. I never got an explanation from anybody so I guess that's what made it so hard for me growing

up. As life went on the void I felt for my dad left and I tried not to make the mistakes my dad made.

George shared feelings of pain he endured thinking about his father, "I hated growing up without my father. I hated it! I hated it! I hurt for years; I didn't stop crying for my father until I was 23. I always wondered why my father wasn't there." Montana explained how he continuously searched for information about his father:

I asked for him all the time. When I was 12 I asked my mom about him and she just ignored me. But my grandmother told me about him and showed me pictures of him. I went home and told my mom what my grandmother did and she got pissed. She called my grandmother and they started arguing. So I waited until I was about 14 and I asked my mom about him again. She told me don't ask about him all you need to know is that I don't want you to grow up like him. I was thinking oh man something is up with this. When I turned 16, I went to her room and she's got a lot of picture albums with of all of the family in it. Well she had this big one, a big blue one, and I opened it, it was beautiful, man. I opened it and I'm looking through it, so I see some gangsters there, so I saw my dad there and I know it's him because it looks like me. He looked very nice, he's like half Spaniard. After I saw it I said, "Oh that's why." I got freaked out because I saw her standing there with my dad, and they had like 20 or 30 gangsters around them. I'm talking like mafia dudes, top coats and everything. I told her what I saw and I want to know more about him and she never told me. Never, never said anything about it.

Howard shared his feelings of resentment and anger for his biological father because he had no one to understand him as he was growing into manhood:

I have a lot of resentment, because I was born in Louisville and I know that's where he's from, and being young, I used to watch my sister, she was born in Louisville too, but she had a different dad and she would actually go to Louisville with her family on her dad's side for the summer, and I would be stuck in Alabama with just me and my mom, watching that happen that hurt. Another thing that bothered me the most, growing up I hated hearing about people talk about, oh, you should be playing for the football team, or you're a big kid, you should be doing this or doing that. I was growing up with two females; my older sister and my mom I didn't have anybody that understood. No one to understand me from my perspective I could never get them to understand certain things I was doing. In their opinion, I just wasn't doing this or I wasn't doing this right. I didn't have that male figure there to be like, well, he's actually not doing too bad. I needed somebody in my corner, if only I had somebody to go to bat for me. My mom tried to get my grandfather to help with me, but he was too old.

Three participants had knowledge of their biological father but did not have the relationship with him that they desired. Charles stated, "Initially I convinced myself that I did not need him, there was anger in my heart for him. I had a general relationship with him, but not a close one like I wanted." Priest described his conceptualization of his father:

My father hustled more than he kept a job. He was dope man and it like he was never there. I think it's more torture knowing that you father and mother are

married, but your father just isn't there. That's a different kind of fatherless home. And you want to be like your father every little wants to be like his dad, well at least I did.

Jeff expressed similar circumstances with his father:

When I was younger I would see my dad. My mom owned a café and when he was there I would spend a couple of hours with him, kind of in and out, it was never a stable thing. As I got older I understood that he had another wife with kids. He got kids all over though. But I understood a little bit better why he was in and out; he had too much other stuff going on. But I never understood why he just gave up on me. I guess it was all too difficult for him to deal with.

Additionally, Jeff identified a parallel between his biological father's absence and his replication of the same behavior:

This is one of my biggest regrets in life. I always said I wasn't going to be like my dad, just give up on my kids. And I ended up doing the same thing for different reasons, but I can honestly say I didn't understand until I had my daughter. After my situation, being absent, now I understand why left. I even told my dad growing up I didn't like you I didn't care for you because I couldn't understand why you just gave up on. I said, now that I have one of my own, it's easy to just say, I don't want to deal with this anymore and you just go on.

Unsustainable relationships. All of the absent fathers described their relationships with their children's mother as being based on sexual gratification. Sex was the focal point of their relationships. None of the absent fathers identified that their relationships were built on trust or mutual respect for one another. When asked to

describe his relationship with his child's mother Wallace explained, "She was my sister friend and we started out just having fun. We had the best sex, but we weren't in a relationship, then all of sudden she ended up pregnant and we had to figure something out." Similar descriptions were given by Jeff, "Our relationship was a fling thing only, but she thought it was deeper. I already had a main girlfriend; my daughter's mother was just my fun on the side, trying to have my cake and eat it too. George recalled his relationship with his children's mother:

With my oldest kids mother it was a booty thing. She had a nice little shape on her. I wasn't paying attention to her mindset or nothing about her, just her body and she was working. She made money and even gave me money that was after we had sex. When I found out she was pregnant I didn't mind having kids with her because I benefited too. I had never really had anybody do for me so it felt good to be taken care of by someone. It felt special, but I didn't love her. To be honest, she was just something for me to do and that's the God honest truth.

George also described his relationship with his youngest child's mother in the same manner:

It was a sex thing between us at first, and then we became boyfriend and girlfriend. When I found out she was pregnant with my son I felt like it was time to the right thing. I decided to go ahead and put her in my life. I tried to hold onto her, show her love so she could give me love back that was my theory at least.

Priest shared that his relationships with his children's mothers were based on a sexual attraction first:

Let me just put it out there all of my children's mothers are ten or more years younger than me. I started late. I was married to my oldest mother, but it wasn't a real marriage. I was still holding on to my gang banging ways. I was running the streets. She was a beautiful woman I was more attracted to her because of the sex I wasn't trying to be married to her for real. My second child's mother is a total knockout. I mean she had a nice body; big booty and nice tits, but we never gave our relationship a chance. We both had trust issues. Although she was fine as all get out as a man I couldn't take the chance of her getting over on me. My last kids' mother was a preacher's daughter. I sure hate to put it this way because I have a lot of love and respect for her, but it was just a sex thing. In my head I never saw it growing into anything other than sex.

Three of the absent fathers expressed youth as an additional factor that affected the relationships with their children's mothers. Charles stated, "I don't like to use youth as an excuse, but we were 19 when we got married, there were things we just didn't know, both of us grew up without our fathers, we didn't know what we were doing." Howard expressed similar sentiments regarding his relationship with his child's mother, "Well it was a high school thing. I wouldn't even say high school sweethearts, just like a high school fling. I think that's what got us here, neither one of us knew what our relationship was." Montana described how his relationship with his children's mother began:

We were together when we were teenagers. I was 16 and she was 15. I was passing through the apartments with my friends and she saw me. She told one of

her home girls to see what was up with me. I came over to talk to her, that's when we met and we had sex that very first day.

Self-inflicted demise. All of the absent fathers noted that their lives were affected by negative events. The men described that the negativity they experienced was at times self-inflicted. The absent fathers described how bad decisions, incarcerations, and substance use led to their demise. All of the men believed that the negativity experienced perpetuated their absence. Priest considered his self-inflicted demise as means to get back at his biological father:

Different people gangbang for different reasons, and my reason was to rebel against my dad. It was strictly to rebel against him for not teaching me the right things to do in life. I made up in my mind that I was going to do what I wanted to and there was nothing anybody could say or do to detour my thought process. I called myself getting back at him. I was showing him the most negative part of himself through me because I'm the one named after him. The sad part is my plan backfired, he liked the fact that I was growing up to be just like him. Funny thing is it made me his favorite.

Others noted that their self-inflicted demise resulted in incarcerations. Montana lived the majority of his adult life incarcerated, he explained:

All I know is jail. I've always been in and out of jail. I'm a four-time loser. I went to prison, and I came out. I stayed like two weeks, I did an armed robbery and they gave me 13 years, so I went back to prison. I came out like around 2000 and I stayed out like six years. Then I got busted in 2006 for retaliation on a police officer, so they gave me two years in 2006. In 2008 I came out and then I got in a

fight and was charged with assault with a deadly weapon and two counts of assault with bodily injury. So because of the deadly weapon and the two assaults, they gave me five years total. They wanted to habitualize me 25 to 99 years that would have been life for me I'm 49 years old. I just got lucky, I just barely got out. I've been in Houston for two weeks. I don't know where to start in the free world, what to do. It looks different.

Wallace indicated how being incarcerated affected his life, "I was living young and wild. I was selling drugs living the fast life and it eventually caught up with. I did seven years in the penitentiary. The time I spent locked up took away from my life." Jeff shared a similar story about how his choices led to jail:

I made a really stupid decision; I stole money from my job. At it didn't make sense for me to steal from my job because I was making money already, I was making good money. I still don't know why I took the money, but taking the money was the worst thing to happen to me. I went to jail and was locked up for 3 years then I got paroled, but the damage was already done. I wasn't able to find a job which put me into a depression and the depression led me to be suicidal. I took years for me to recover from that.

The remaining participants did not experience incarcerations, but they did explain how they played a part in their own demise. These absent fathers disclosed how substance use impacted their life. George explained:

I just didn't know how to deal with what was going on in my house and in my life period. I eventually lost my kids and lost everything else. I was moving from shelter to shelter. While on the streets I found drugs and I used them to ease the

pain. I thought that the drugs would ease my pain but after the high was gone I was still left to deal with myself. I think the drugs made it worse.

Charles also spoke of a downward spiral his life took as a result of substance use, “My drinking and drug use really put me on a serious tailspin. I literally lost myself and some years of my life because the drugs were my medicine. I was just trying to numb everything.” Howard minimized his substance use, but definitely made the connection between his drug use and his demise. Howard stated, “I never used crack because that’s bad, but going through the issues I faced in life led to my drug use. You need a vice to handle life some of the time, that’s not an excuse that’s true.”

All of the absent fathers identified factors that led to and/or influenced their decision to be absent. For these absent fathers, one of the contributing factors to their sustained absence was the relationship dynamics with the child’s mother. For six out of seven of the participants, once the relationship with the mother ended so did their responsibility to their child. Although all of the absent fathers understood what it felt like to desire to have a relationship with a father who isn’t present, these men still choose to be and remain absent. Additionally, negativity experienced in their lives influenced their prolonged absence.

Summary

The interviews with absent fathers were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol allowed me to explore the phenomenon of what it means to be an absent father from the participant’s perspective. To analyze the statements given by participants during the interview, I employed Moustakas’s (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method. Each participant’s voice was

heard by analyzing verbatim transcription of their statements regarding the phenomenon.

As a result of the data analysis process three categories of themes were reported. The themes of my research capture the essence of what it means to be an absent father.

In Chapter V, a discussion of the findings is presented. Implications and recommendations for practice when working with absent fathers are reported.

Interventions for counselors and suggestions for further researcher are presented.

Conclusions are drawn to address each research question.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

In the previous chapter, the presentation and analysis of data were reported. Chapter V consists of a summary, discussion of findings, implications for practitioners, recommendations for future research, and conclusions. Explaining the phenomenon of absent fathers' perspectives, rationales, and factors were presented in an effort to provide an understanding of the population, to present suggestions for further research, and to provide information for individuals in the helping profession that may assist absent fathers or those impacted by absent father homes.

Researchers have indicated how important a father's presence is for his children in their early developmental years (Eliezer et al., 2012; Jones, 2007, 2008; Jones et al., 2003; Mahler et al., 1975; Shields, 2003; Target & Fonagy, 2002; Williamson, 2004), while others have reported how children are impacted by growing up in a absent father household (Burns, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; East et al., 2006; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mandara et al., 2005; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003; Seutter & Rovers, 2004; Ward, 2008). Although there is extensive information about the effects of father absence, there is paucity in the research literature regarding the absent father's perspective. Few studies have been conducted from the absent father's viewpoint. Black (2008) described the developmental characteristics and factors that contribute to father absenteeism in the African American community. Understanding the perspective of a father in terms of his interactions or lack thereof with

his children will add to the current body of literature (Cabrera, et al., 2007a). There was a need to give voice to this population.

The purpose of my study was to examine the lived experiences of absent fathers. Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was used to gain insight and to report the essence of the phenomenon. Nine themes emerged as a result of data analysis employing Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) Method.

The foundation of my study was taken from research literature related to the importance of a father's presence, defining father absence, and examining the impact father absence has on children. When a father is present, his children can be positively impacted. Researchers have found that his presence is needed during the early stages of a child's development and throughout their childhood (Eliezer et al., 2012; Jones, 2008; Jones et al., 2003; Leibman & Abell, 2000; Shields, 2003). His presence and what he does in terms of fathering activities is vital to his child's growth and development (Brotherson, et al., 2005; Cabrera et al., 2007a; Palkovitz, 2007; Pleck, 2007).

Research literature on fathering activities, theoretical perspectives, and models were assessed to help define what it means to be a father (Cabrera et al., 2007a; Lamb, 2000; Mormon & Floyd, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002, 2007; Pleck, 2007). Although there is no comprehensive theory on fathering, information used gave perspectives of what a father does when he is present and behaviors demonstrated by fathers (Cabrera et al., 2007a). Participants were aware and able to clearly define their concept of being a father and what fathering activities consisted of from their perspectives. Surprisingly, their awareness did not influence them to remain present.

A father's absence can have a negative impact on his children's educational outcomes, behaviors, and their well-being (Burns, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2007b; Downer et al., 2008; East et al., 2006; Eastin, 2003; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2005; Jackmon, 2006; Mandara et al., 2005; Mandara & Murray, 2006; Mendle et al., 2009; Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Schwartz, 2003; Seutter & Rovers, 2004; Ward, 2008). As a researcher, this information helped me to become more cognizant when formulating my research questions. I wanted my questions capture the absent fathers' reflective feelings and their perspectives.

Inspiration for my study was taken from Black's (2008) study, utilizing a collective case study approach to report the developmental characteristics of absent fathers; she assessed their early years, becoming a young man, adulthood, and present circumstances. This study helped me to focus specifically on furthering the understanding of why men choose to become absent fathers and maintain their absence. As a result, I searched for studies that focused primarily on the absent father. My search did not yield studies that addressed the *construct* of actually being an absent father. By directly assessing absent fathers' perspectives, rationales, and factors that influenced their decisions to become absent, I hope to have filled the gap in current literature.

My study was conducted to give insight on the lived experiences of absent fathers and to give voice to a population that has been written about extensively, but not thoroughly studied to understand their rationale for their absence. It is my hope that by conducting this study from the perspective of the absent father that more research will be done that will shed light on the father's experience of being absent. Counselors, mental health practitioners, social workers, and educators may benefit from gaining knowledge

about the experience of being an absent father and a better understanding of the rationale of absent fathers. In addition, those working with absent fathers may have more knowledge to assist their clients addressing any feelings associated with their absence.

Research questions used in my study were influenced by the research literature and the integrated theoretical framework. Tenets of ambiguous loss theory were applied. Ambiguous loss theory is a resiliency based theory exposing how a family responds when a loved one is physically or psychologically absent and circumstances surrounding the absence are unclear to them. As a result, family members may develop boundary ambiguity by being preoccupied in thought regarding the absence of the loved one, creating disequilibrium in the family unit (Boss, 1999). Research questions were also guided by transcendental phenomenological approach focused on understanding the lived experiences of absent fathers in relation to the following research questions: (a) From a father's perspective, what is his rationale for being absent from his children's life?; (b) What are the characteristics of an absent father's lived experiences that allowed him to remain absent from his children's life?; and (c) What are some of the feelings that absent fathers experience due to their absence?

To answer my research questions, I interviewed seven absent fathers from a large metropolitan area located in southeast Texas. To obtain information about their lived experiences of being an absent father, I used two instruments: a demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. In order to identify themes and report the essence of being an absent father, I used Moustakas's (1994) modification of the SCK Method.

Using the SCK Method for data analysis in Chapter IV, I analyzed each

participant's verbatim transcript. I examined all statements for significance and made record of the textural and structural descriptions. The synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions allowed for nine themes to emerge that were universal to all seven absent fathers. The nine themes serve as the basis for my discussion of the qualitative data obtained. Participants conducted member checks, where they were able to examine the verbatim transcriptions of their interview to guarantee the validity of their statements. Although I employed Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) validation strategies to address threats to credibility, results of my study are not generalizable to a large population of absent fathers due to population validity. However, results may be transferable to other absent fathers on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion of Findings

Black's (2008) study on the developmental characteristics of absent fathers served as influence for further exploration and expansion on the topic of being an absent father. My goal was to fill a gap in the literature by detailing the perspective of the absent father from his lens using a phenomenological approach. By gaining a firsthand account from the absent father about his lived experiences, nine themes emerged from data analysis.

The nine themes were divided into three categories: (a) perspective themes, (b) rationale themes, and (c) factor themes. Themes addressed the three research questions listed in the following section.

Research Question One

From a father's perspective, what is his rationale for being absent from his children's life?

The following three themes captured the essence of the absent father's rationale for his absence: (a) *initial separation rationalization*, (b) *extended absence justification*, and (c) *fraction of a man*.

All seven participants were able to articulate a rationalization for their absence. Although each response was unique, there were some categorical similarities in the absent fathers' *initial separation*. For some when the relationship with their children's mother ended their connection with their child was severed as well. This finding is consistent with the research literature (Castillo et al, 2011, Shannon et al., 2009). For some of the participants when the romantic relationship ended and their residency status changed, they no longer were a part of their children's lives. Two of the participants expressed statements consistent with the literature. One participant stated:

I was mainly absent due to the divorce from their mother. Later on I got a promotion in another state so that only exacerbated the absence on my part. And even though I was doing well on the outside, in terms of career moves, a lot of cool things happened during this time, but on the inside the absence of me not being able to be with my girls killed me.

Another participant shared this story:

We broke up like right after she was born. We were living in Springfield, Missouri together, but her moving to St. Louis actually led to us being through with each other and me and my daughter being separated. But as far as the distance between us, that's a long time, like a three-hour drive, and I worked every day. I was literally working every day; like it was required; we had to work like seven days a week because they needed us at work.

Other participants *rationalized their separation* by explaining that the root cause of their separation was due to poor choices they made in life. One in particular stated, "I went to prison...she came to visit and she brought my kids too. She told me she ain't going to wait for me; it's too many years. I got pissed off and I told her, Go for it, man." Wiemann et al. (2006) found that delinquency among young fathers is a factor for their absence.

Just as all participants identified rationalizations for their absence, they also *justified their extended absence* by concluding that their children were better off without them, shifting the blame for their absence. "I was making mistakes in life and I didn't want the negativity to affect my daughter growing up...I feel kind of like to a certain extent I did the right thing by being gone. If she had been around me, I might've killed myself." This participant believed his *extended absence was justified* because he experienced emotional turmoil and chose to stay away; he also believed his absence had a positive impact on his daughter as well as himself. Another participant *justified his extended absence* because his children had a stepfather to take care of his responsibility. He explained, "Another man is raising my kids. He is providing for them school clothes, food, I mean everything. They stepdad do everything for them; they don't need me."

Several participants *justified their extended absence* by explaining how the mother and the child support system were to blame for their absence. One participant shared his justification:

She did not try to contact me at all...I gave her my numbers. I had no phone calls or nothing for four years. She should have brought my son to me. She chose not to contact me because she still thinks I owe her 12 years of child support and she's right I do, but I'll never put that money down.

Another participant expressed his disdain for the child support system:

It's a money thing with her. All she wants is money from me...I got pissed and stopped paying her, now I'm behind like \$5,000.00 in child support...If she had taken me off child support, none of this would have happened...the way the system is set up...I don't know why black women go and put black men on child support. Now you have the government chasing after us. In order to avoid jail we have to keep a job. I feel messed up thinking like that cause I know I have to take care of my kid. I don't mean to hurt my kid but I'm trying to hurt her mother.

For these participants their relationship with their child was affected by their financial obligation to the child's mother through the child support system; initiating and establishing a relationship between the father and their children was not the focus. These men expressed feelings of anger towards the mother for acquiring mandated financial assistance.

In addition to justifying and excusing their absence, five of the participants felt that they needed to be complete men before re-entering their children's life. They felt as if they were a *fraction of man*. Not being able to provide for or take care of their children made them feel inadequate as fathers. One participant explained:

I got to be in a better position to be a better father. My mother always told me you can't be a great father unless you're in position to be...once I'm better, I'm going to pick up where I left off, but I'm going to be better for all of my kids.

This finding is consistent with Black (2008) who found that men feel that their role is to provide for his family, and that a financially incapable man should not be around his children. Another participant specifically stated, "I don't want to see my son right now;

he will look down on me as a father; any child would.” Several of the fathers detailed how their presence is not needed if they are not able to operate in their defined role of fatherhood.

Although most participants were able to rationalize that their absence was partially due to the inadequacy they felt as men, there were two outliers who were defensive regarding their absence. One of the participants felt that he was being viewed through a skewed lens. He stated, “Ya’ll have one side of the story...I have always strived not to be a deadbeat dad. I don’t want to be measured....how ya’ll view dads. Ya’ll don’t know how we feel.” The other participant explained how he felt that his kids did not love him, so in turn he would not be concerned about them. He stated:

My kids came to visit me one time when I was in prison! After the visit, my mom, nieces, everybody was like they don’t love you man. They don’t even like you man....I decided to come to Houston and forget about everybody, but my mom...the rest just fuck them.

These participants did not recognize how their inability to provide affected their ability to connect, establish, and maintain a relationship with their children. The rationales for absence expressed by the absent fathers are consistent with previous literature. A new aspect found in my study was although, they were absent the participants desired to be respected and revered as men in the eyes of their children. The feelings of inadequacy as a man were a direct deterrent to their involvement. Additionally, it is my belief that the men rationalized, justified, and shifted the blame of their absence from themselves as a coping mechanism in order to cope with the fact that they are in fact absent from the lives of their children.

Research Question Two

What are the characteristics of an absent father's lived experiences that allow him to remain absent from his children's life?

The following three themes captured the essence of the factors in an absent father's life that influence his absence: (a) *father hunger*, (b) *unsustainable relationships*, and (c) *self-inflicted demise*.

All participants exhibited *father hunger*. Each wanted to have a close relationship with their father and know more about him as a man, but none of the participants experienced the type of relationship with their biological father that they desired. The participants expressed a range of feelings to describe how they felt they were affected by their biological father's absence. One participant explained his hurt, "I hated it! I hated it! And it hurt for years. I didn't stop crying for my father until I was 23." Others did not understand why their biological father was absent. "I was confused. I didn't understand why he wasn't there. I never got an explanation; that's what made it hard." Participants also expressed resentment and anger about growing up without their fathers. "I needed someone in my corner. I grew up with all women in the house that was hard man! I resented him for leaving me." The *father hunger* theme is consistent with Stokes (2003) who found that feelings of confusion and anger are experienced when a father is absent. The participants did not experience fathering activities nor did they get their need for a connection with their father met. In turn they replicated their fathers' behaviors by becoming and remaining absent from their children's lives.

Only one participant identified the parallelism between his absence and the absence he experienced as a child. He expressed an understanding of his father's decision to become absent.

I can honestly say I didn't understand until I had my daughter. I understood a little better why he was in and out and just gave up on me because he had too much other stuff going on. It was too difficult for him to deal with, and that's the one thing I regret about my situation. I promised myself I wouldn't do my kid the way my dad did me. And I ended up doing it anyway for different reasons, but still basically the same... it's easy to just, I don't want to deal with this anymore and you just go on.

Another factor of the absence father's lived experiences that influenced his absence was the relationship dynamics between him and his children's mother. All participants had *unsustainable relationships*. The relationships from the participant's perspective were largely based on sexual gratification. One participant explained his first time meeting the mother of his children, "She told one of her homegirls to see what's up with me. I came over to talk to her; that's when we met and we had sex the very first day." Most participants were more motivated by sexual encounters with their children's mother rather than developing a deeper connection with her. Relationships based on casual sexual encounters are more likely to end with the father becoming absent (Corcoran, 2005).

In addition, most of the participants attributed their absence to being young in love, but not really understanding the foundations of a relationship. One participant described his relationship with his child's mother, "It was just like a high school

fling...that's what got us here. Neither one of us knew what our relationship was.”

Another participant echoed similar statements, “I don't like to use youth as an excuse, but there were a lot of things that neither of us knew because we both grew up without our biological fathers.” Young fathers are more likely to become absent and less likely to embrace fathering activities (Wilkinson, et al. 2009).

Self-inflicted demise was another factor of the absent fathers' lived experiences that influenced their absence. All participants were able to describe how negative events in their life affected them and their involvement with their children. For a majority of participants, the negativity experienced was due in part to choices or decisions they had made. The participants' *self-inflicted demise* consisted of poor decision making, incarcerations, and substance abuse. The absent fathers' concluded that their involvement in negative behavior only exacerbated their absence.

Research Question Three

What are some of the feelings that absent fathers experience due to their absence?

The following three themes captured the essence of the feelings absent fathers experience as a result of being absent: (a) *comprehension without application*, (b) *child consciousness*, and (c) *remorseful reaction*.

All participants were able to identify and formulate their own definition of what it means to be a father. Although they had clear determinations of fathering activities, participants did not readily embrace their role. Participants had *comprehension without application*. The participants identified that being a father entailed being responsible for and to your children, providing support to your children, and taking care of your children. One participant exclaimed, “A father is a person who runs to the responsibility, embraces

it; it's not a challenge to him, it's a gift...you don't make excuses for your responsibilities, you just do them no matter what." Another participant stated, "In one word, accountable...like if something's needed you can always be called on and you always provide for them. That's when you are thinking as a man." The participants were very clear in explaining how a father should perform and duties he should employ within his role as a father.

Six out of seven of the participants identified a male role model in his life that served as an example of what it means to be a father. One participant stated that he had no examples of manhood; his household was composed of all women. The participants who identified role models explained how they were taught manhood, responsibility, and understanding how important a father's role is to his family. These participants had a clear understanding of what it means to be father. One participant explained, "My brother was my hero. That's who I looked up to. He cared for his woman, raised his kids. Another participant echoed similar statements, "My grandfather taught me what hard work looks like; he was well respected, he wise. I was allowed to spend summer vacations and school holidays with him." Wilson (2011) found that when individuals experience father absence, they are more likely to identify a role model to align with to learn more about being a man. But even with identified role models and experiencing fathering activities firsthand, participants were still absent and maintained their absences.

Although the participants chose to be absent and remain absent, that did not prevent them from thinking or being concerned about their children. All participants explained how they had some type of thought preoccupation of their children during their absence. When a family member is physically or psychologically absent, family members

are often preoccupied in thought regarding their absence (Boss, 1999). The participants explained how they experienced *child consciousness*. They thought about their children often explaining that the holidays and their birthdays were especially hard times for them. Several of the participants spoke of the emotional pain that they have endured as a result of their absence. "I think about them every day...I have withdrawals all the time because I love my children dearly...these last four years have been rough for me." Another participant stated, "I think about them...it's bad. I get lonely and sad sometimes thinking about them; sometimes I think and just cry. It's hard. They take a piece of your heart."

When ambiguous loss is experienced, families demonstrate resilient factors to help them cope with their loss (Boss, 2006). Two of the participants took a more resilient approach when dealing with their ambiguous losses. These participants explained how they dealt with the thought preoccupation of their children. "I deal with it. I try to act like the thoughts are not even happening. I just pray on it and hope...one day God is going to bring her back to me," one participant described. Another participant stated, "I'm still their parent, although I'm not there. I still have a desire to know what they're doing and how life is going; that part never left me." Boss (1999) explained that when individuals experience ambiguous loss, they attempt to keep the past alive or completely abandon the thoughts of the absent loved one. These participants demonstrated a sense of hope and a desire to maintain their position as father even in their absence.

All participants expressed feelings of regret, wishing they would have done more or things differently to remain present in the lives of their children. Participants expressed *remorseful reactions* to their absence. Two participants discussed how they would have fought more to maintain their parental rights. In the words of one participant, "Now if I

could have done anything right, I would have never let my older kids go. I would have fought for them. I would have done what my lawyer told me to do; take my kids and run.”

Some explained how they wished they would have made the relationship with their children’s mother work. “I would’ve tried harder with her mother. I don’t know if it would have worked out, but I think I could have at least given it everything I had. Then I could say to my child I tried,” said one participant. Similar statements were made by another participant; he recognized that his children’s mother needed more from him. He stated, “I would have done more to connect with their mother. There were some things she needed and I didn’t know how to give it to her.”

Others expressed how they wished they would have made better choices for themselves and their children. Participants were cognizant of how their negative life choices contributed to their absence. One participant explained, “I would do everything different; no gangs or drugs. I would be a Christian...a nice person, thinking more positive than negative.” All expressed how if they had the opportunity to do it again, they would have chosen to stay present in the lives of their children. Surprisingly, one participant while reflecting on his present nonexistent relationship with his children stated, “I decided to come to Houston and forget about everybody, but my mom.”

Essence of Study Outcomes

The themes that emerged through data analysis captured the essence of the phenomenon of an absent father’s rationale for being and remaining absent. First, absent fathers who experienced growing up without their father are likely to repeat the same behavior by becoming and remaining absent. Although they may have experienced father

absence themselves, the participants were aware of what it means to be a father and fathering activities that are required of a father to cultivate a meaningful father/child relationship. These individuals have received love and affection from a role model or individual who served as an example of what it means to be a father. Although absent fathers may have experienced fathering activities and have an understanding of the role that did not equate to them readily embracing the opportunity to be present in the lives of their own children.

Secondly, absent fathers will justify their initial separation and excuse their continued absence. Absent fathers are able to formulate a myriad of reasons they deemed to be justifiable for their absence. There were several common factors about the lived experiences of absent fathers that influenced their decision to be absent. The relationship with the child's mother was a basis for absence. When there is not a strong relationship foundation between mother and father, men might become absent and maintain their absence. In addition, how an absent father views himself affects his decision to remain involved. When an absent father considers himself unable to provide for his child, he will remove himself from their presence. Another factor that influences absence is an absent father's involvement in negative activities. When an absent father engages in illegal activities that may have a negative impact on his life, his ability to be present in his children's life is directly affected.

Lastly, absent fathers do have a desire to be a part of their children's life even after a period of sustained absence. Although they are not present, absent fathers still feel that they hold a parental position in the lives of their children. Even in their absence, they still think about their children and remember special occasions such as birthdays and

holidays. Additionally, absent fathers do regret their decision to become absent and feel remorseful for their actions. For some absent fathers, their negative self-concepts and negative self-talk prevent them from taking the initiative to become a part of their children's lives.

Implications

Although findings from my study are consistent with previous research, my study is unique in the fact that information presented is directly from the perspective of the absent fathers. I found only one other study that is from the perspective of the absent father, but my study expands upon the literature by the addressing the questions, Why did you leave? and What allowed you to remain absent? The study has implications for individuals who are interested in understanding the perspectives of absent fathers and for practitioners who will work with that population. Additionally, those working with children and families affected by father absence can benefit from learning the varying rationales for absence and understand that some absent fathers do desire to reconnect.

The results of my transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) highlight implications for practitioners working with absent fathers. Majority of the men in my study felt like a fraction of man: inadequate and ill-equipped to be a part of their children's lives. Absent fathers need assistance in understanding and processing their feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy as a father during individual therapy. Therapy sessions geared towards challenging absent fathers' negative self-talk and irrational beliefs would be beneficial in assisting them in gaining new self-concepts. Helping absent fathers to understand and address cognitive distortions may be beneficial in altering their thinking, thus affecting their feelings and behaviors.

Psychoeducation courses in parenting may assist fathers in understanding the importance of their role as a father. My study informs practitioners that some absent fathers think about their children, are remorseful, and desire to have a relationship with their children. In these cases absent fathers should be affirmed in their desires to reconnect and should be assisted in removing barriers to their presence. Parenting courses may also teach them how to be involved fathers.

A determining component of absenteeism found in my study was the relationship the father has with his child's mothers. Majority of the participants relationships with their child's mother were based on sexual attraction and gratification and not initiated with a firm foundation. Practitioners should examine the absent fathers patterns of forming relationships and educate men on the importance of seeking more in an interpersonal relationships and valuing their relationship beyond a casual encounter.

Results from my study indicate some absent fathers are aware of what it means to be a father and how a father should operate in context. Researchers (Cabrera et al., 2007a; Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002; Pleck, 2007) emphasized the importance of viewing the father as more than a financial provider. Practitioners should encourage absent fathers to engage in fathering activities with their children. Their availability to and responsibility for their children should be stressed as well as engagement in caretaking activities (Lamb, 2000). Palkovitz (2002) explained that fathers can become involved with their children by engaging in any of the following activities: communicating, teaching, monitoring, engaging in thought processes, providing, showing affection, protecting, supporting emotionally, running errands, caregiving, engaging in child-related maintenance, sharing interests, being available, planning, and sharing activities. Absent

fathers must be made aware of the various activities they can readily do to be active in the lives of their children. Fathering activities may vary across races (Shears, 2007) but good fathering consists of love, availability, and serving as a good role model (Canfield, 1996; Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Kimmel, 1997; Phillips, 1992; Mormon & Floyd, 2006).

The purpose of my study was to examine the lived experiences of absent fathers. Overall, the information gained from my study is intended to assist practitioners in understanding more about the thought process and perspective of an absent father. There are numerous reasons and justifications for absence as presented in my study. A deeper understanding of the man and circumstances that influenced his decision may assist practitioners in gaining a more accepting view of absent fathers. It is essential to remove personal biases and judgments about absent fathers prior to building a therapeutic relationship. The practitioner must view the absent father through empathetic lens and accept him with unconditional positive regard.

As found in my study, some absent fathers are reluctant to own the title of absent fathers. Changing the terminology from absent father or *distant father* may be helpful in establishing a working alliance with the absent father. Practitioners should be mindful of labeling and stereotyping absent fathers as this may make them resistant to interventions and the therapeutic process. Demonstration of acceptance on behalf of the practitioner could be paramount in evoking change in the behavior of absent fathers. Society's view of an absent father is negative and men who are absent are very much aware of the stigma they carry therefore if they feel accepted, understood, and respected as a man and/or *distant father* they may be more willing to engage in therapy. Participants identified

themselves as fathers and expressed how they think about their children even in the midst of their absent. This contradicts the belief that all absent fathers desert their children and don't think about them. For those absent fathers who experience thought preoccupation, practitioners should work closely with them to assess their motivation to reconnect with their children.

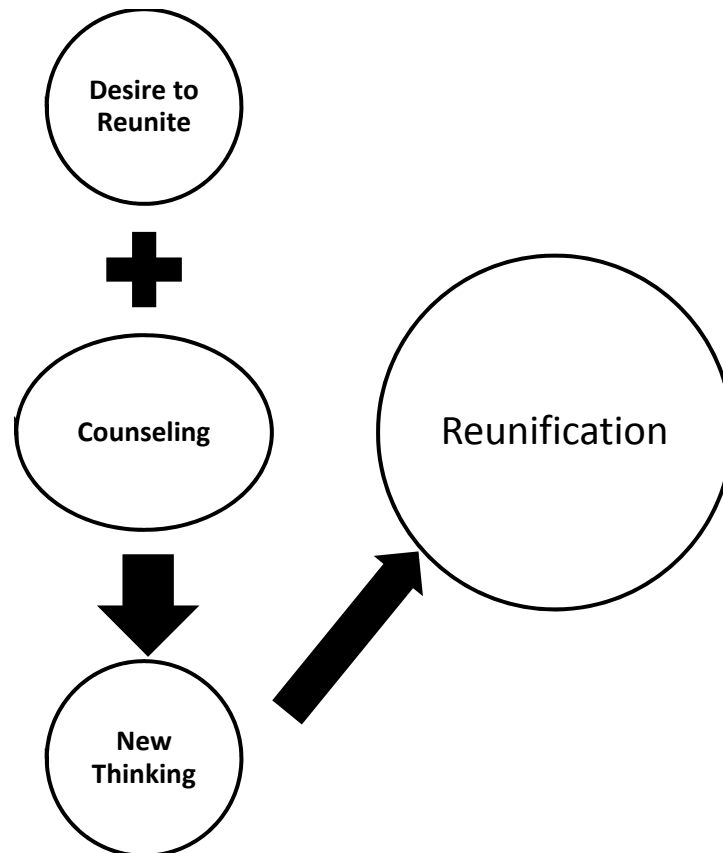


Figure 1. The Model of Reunification for Absent fathers. A model to be implemented by practitioner's when working with absent fathers.

The Model of Reunification for Absent Fathers could be effective in assisting absent fathers in becoming more active in the lives of their children. Practitioners' ability to remove their personal biases, build a rapport, establish a working alliance, as well as execution of interventions will be critical factors of effectiveness. When implementing the model, practitioners should assess the absent fathers' motivation to reconnect and

remain cognizant of the social and cultural factors that affect them. Overall, there is no fail proof approach to inspiring absent fathers to become present, but given the ramifications of their absence, practitioners should explore the process of reunification when it is safe to do so. The absent father and child must be emotionally ready to reconnect.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results from my study exposed the perspectives of absent fathers, but more research on the topic from this area should be explored. As previously stated, when searching I was only able to locate one study, Black (2008), examining the phenomenon from the perspective of the absent father. More research on absent fathers will give voice to a marginalized population, provide an understanding of the phenomenon, and fill a void in literature. It is further recommended that the participant pool be expanded in order to gain more of the essence of what it means to be an absent father. Conducting studies with a younger generation of absent fathers may yield different results as their period of absence may not be as extended as participants in my study. Future researchers could extend the research of absent parents by examining the lived experiences of an absent mother. Doing so may advance the understanding of what it means to be an absent parent from both the father's and mother's perspectives. This may also allow for comparative studies between absent fathers and absent mothers.

Secondly, research on the phenomenon may be enhanced by utilizing a mixed methods approach. Coupling qualitative and quantitative measures could further the understanding of being an absent father. I suggest that selected quantitative instruments assess absent fathers' identification with the role of father, their level of motivation to be

present in the lives of their children, and stressors that prevent involvement.

Organizations such as The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network and the National Fatherhood Initiative conduct research to assess nonresident fathers and their involvement with fatherhood programs that inspire reunification.

Lastly, I would suggest that future researchers continue to focus on intervention and techniques to inspire absent fathers to become active fathers. Findings from my study suggest that absent fathers do have thought preoccupation about their children and do have the desire to be a father but may lack the skill set to do so. I believe that a model of reunification would be helpful. Applying concepts from Boss's (1999) theory of ambiguous loss, the Model of Reunification for Absent Fathers (Figure 1) may be helpful for those who desire to assist absent fathers in becoming more involved with their children. The process entails the following: when an absent father has elevated levels of boundary ambiguity (thought preoccupation of child and the desire to see or be with the child), he may have an increased motivation to reunite. An absent father with an increased motivation to reunite should receive psychotherapy and counseling interventions that address the negative emotions, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs that he has and teach him proper parenting techniques. With a new skill set and self-acceptance, absent fathers may have an increased motivation to reunite with their children and become active parents.

Conclusion

The National Fatherhood Initiative (2011) explained how the father factor (*absence*) affects poverty, child health, incarceration, crime, teen pregnancy, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and education. A father's absence contributes to the father factor

that plagues society; his absence adversely affects his children and disrupts the family unit. In order to address the social issues, the absent father must be at the center of the discussion and research.

More research from the absent father's perspective is needed for a more concise depiction of the phenomenon and factors that impede involvement with his children.

Findings from my study suggest that absent fathers develop justifications for their decision to become and remain absent. Although he is absent, a father may still have thought preoccupation of his children and desire to be a presence in their lives.

Practitioners should work closely with those absent fathers that desire to reunite with their children. Implementation of the Model of Reunification for Absent Fathers could serve as a guide for practitioners. Techniques and interventions should be focused on assisting absent fathers in developing a new perspective of themselves and their role as a father. Fathering programs must teach them how to become more involved and assist in removing barriers to involvement. Helping professionals must initiate the process of reuniting absent fathers with their children. A father's presence is essential to the well-being and healthy development of his children and the family unit.

Conducting this form of qualitative research had a significant impact on me as a researcher, practitioner, father, and a child of an absent father. I was able to gain an understanding of factors that impede to process for absent fathers to remain present in the lives of their children. I have more insight into how and why a father chooses to leave. This information gave the child inside of me some sense of closure regarding my own absent father. I may never truly understand his perspective on leaving, but as a father

myself I know the important role I play in the lives of my sons. As a practitioner I hope to inspire absent fathers who wish to reunite with their children to do so when appropriate.

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VITA

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EDUCATION

Master of Education in Counselor Education at Texas Southern University,
August 2004 – August 2007

Bachelor of Arts (May 2004) in Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University,
Huntsville, Texas

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Counselor Education, Sam Houston State University, January 2014 – May 2015. Responsibilities include: preparing lectures, teaching undergraduate courses, administering assessments.

PUBLICATIONS

Wilson, A. D. and Taylor, L.K. (2013). An international study abroad experience in a counselor education doctoral cohort. *Journal for International Counselor Education*, 5(1), 14-31.

Taylor, L. K., Wiesner III, V. V., and Henriksen, R. (2010). I learned from watching you! Experiences of the male substance abuser. *Graduate Research Journal*, 3, 1-16.

PRESENTATIONS AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

Taylor, L. K. Male substance abusers perception of childhood. 31st Annual Christian Counselors of Texas Conference, San Antonio, Texas 2013.

Taylor, L. K. Sexual compulsivity among special populations. 56th Annual Professional Growth Conference of the Texas Counseling Association, Galveston, Texas 2012.

Wilson, A. D., and Taylor, L. K. Study abroad experience in a counselor education cohort: Diversifying your experience. 55th Annual Professional Growth Conference of the Texas Counseling Association, Fort Worth, Texas 2011.

Wilson, A. D., and Taylor, L. K. Study abroad experience in a counselor education cohort. Mid-Winter Conference of the Texas Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, Austin, Texas 2011.

Taylor, L. K., and Wilson, A. D. Yin and yang: Integrating theory and supervision. Mid-Winter Conference of the Texas Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, Austin, Texas, 2011.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Most Outstanding Poster Presentation, Texas Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, 2011

International Study Abroad Scholarship, Department of Counselor Education, Sam Houston State University, 2010

Spring Creek Counseling Association Scholarship, 2010

Ronald E. McNair Scholar Doctoral Studies Preparation Program, Sam Houston State University, 2004

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Chi Sigma Iota

Texas Counseling Association

Texas School Counselor Association

Texas Association of Counselor Education & Supervision

Association for Play Therapy

Christian Counselors of Texas Association

Spring Creek Counseling Association