

**WHAT HAPPENS TO DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL WHEN DADDY IS NOT AROUND:
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF HAVING AN ABSENTEE FATHER ON
FOUR MIDDLE-AGED, BLACK WOMEN'S LIFE CHOICES**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the lives of four middle-aged Black women, between the ages of 49 years old and 56 years old, who all grew to maturity without the benefit of a consistent relationship with a biological father. This research focuses on the influence of father absence on life choices these participants made during youth and as they matured to adulthood. There were two questions asked of these four middle-aged Black women that guided this study: 1) how does having an absentee father affect life choices? 2) how does one share a life story when one reflects on father absence? To address these questions, this study utilized qualitative research methods: a) two focus groups which included all four of the research participants, and b) a personal interview with each of the participants.

During the analysis stage of this study, four themes emerged: un-planned pregnancies, abandonment, mother betrayal, and resiliency. The participants generally engaged in early onset sexual activity and promiscuity. As a result, they experienced early pregnancies and abortions; early teen misbehavior and poor performance in school; low self-esteem and persistent feelings of abandonment; and lastly, latent resiliency. These results aligned with the previous research on the effects of father absenteeism on the decision making of young girls. Findings from this study, however, supported conducting more research on the effects of father absenteeism on the decision making of middle-aged, adult Black women. At this time in our sociocultural history, the absence of fathers from the lives of Black girls is increasing quickly and steadily; thus, it is imperative that further research be conducted. This is needed not only to refine knowledge of the effects of fatherlessness at various stages of the maturation process, but also how to best address the possible long-term ramifications of this phenomena for the Black community.

PREFACE

I preface this study for what must be the one-hundredth time in seemingly that many years. Because of this repeated but ultimately completed cycle, a question arises, namely, “what has been so difficult about simply compiling evidence and quickly completing this study?” The short answer is that unless it is painstakingly written, once a truth claim is shared it becomes easily open to misinterpretation, misjudgment, and, at worst, ridicule; the shorter answer is a fear of being understood. As Marianne Williamson argues: “[o]ur deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.... As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others (pp. 190-191). What I present below is my light held up for the benefit of others.

DEDICATION

To my mother Mrs. Susie Mae Jones Nelson: thank you for demonstrating strength, courage, and a passion for excellence; I am honored to be your daughter. To my father Mr. Robert Nelson: thank you for moving beyond your circumstances and taking as many with you as would go; you inspire me, daddy, and I am honored to be your daughter. For my courageous, beautifully gifted and kind children Amirah Saalihah, Luqman Ali, Rahsmir AbdunNur, and Nadir Abu Al-Kayr – *you are my air*. Many of my later life decisions were made based upon the fact that I believe that you *chose* me to be your mom and I have taken that charge seriously. There are several bits of advice that I wish to impart but this one, I believe, will be of better service to you: life may not always look the way you planned, but it can *always* be delicious – only *you* can decide. I am honored to be your mom!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A child is conceived when sperm from a male unites with an egg from a female and a zygote is formed (Kids' Health, 2015; Verywell Family, 2018). Reproductive science has developed various ways for this process to occur outside of human physical contact, but the most practiced and, arguably, the most pleasurable aspect of the natural phenomenon of procreation remains the interaction of a male with a female. Under the right conditions, sexual intercourse can lead to a child being conceived. The ideal scenario is that conception will occur within the loving, committed relationship between a mother and a father traditionally defined as marriage. These two people – by their willingness to procreate – have uttered an unspoken promise that they will attempt to rear their creation as a team with some goals in mind. According to Paul R. Amato (2005), “children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems, not only during childhood, but also in adulthood” (p.75). Despite its benefits, this ideal of family structure is hardly the reality; there is evidence that many in American society do not deem marriage as a necessary of procreation. For example, a whopping 55% of millennials between the ages of 28 years old to 34 years old choose to have their first child without a wedding (Valdez, 2017). In 2017, 24 million children in the United States were living with a single mother while 6.1 million African American children were living with a single mother. If proportion is considered, a staggering 65% of African American children were living with a single mother in 2017 (Kids Count, 2018). This lived actuality is as distant from ‘ideal’ as intuition dictates the moon is from earth.

For example, the single parent paradigm fosters children’s display of early social and behavioral problems that lead to significantly inadequate performance on cognitive achievement

assessments (Craigie, 2014). These children also tend to fall behind their peers in what is termed the ‘success sequence’: getting an education and a job before marriage and procreation (Valdez, 2017). This state of familial interaction also fosters an environment that encourages and supports the notion of lack seen as

children growing up in single-parent families typically do not have the same economic or human resources available as those growing up in two-parent families. Compared with children in married-couple families, children raised in single-parent households are more likely to drop out of school; to have or cause a teen pregnancy; and, to experience a divorce in adulthood (Kids Count Data Center, 2017).

Furthermore, girls who experience life without a father during early childhood are prone to diminished cognitive development and poor school performance; “inevitably [they] have weaker mathematical skills [than the norm] and usually find it difficult to adjust well with others” (Krohn, 2001).

In addition to the potential negative outcomes faced by girls living in female single-parent households mentioned above, they also face the perpetuation of a two-parented home ideal visible in every aspect of American culture. For example, this ideal is repeated in popular song and movies while information media advertisements utilize consistently the idea of the ideal family to promote every category of consumer good imaginable. The consistent bombardment of two-parented home representations depends on the assertion life experienced outside of this ideal is less valuable, less viable and, by default, wrong. This assertion serves to isolate and relegate whole segments of the American society to a substandard position. If that thus debased segment of our community is already considered to be “different from” and “less than,” the addition of another unmet standard only serves to denigrate and subjugate them

further. Consequently, for the African American community at large and African American women specifically, the internalization of and the generational perpetuation of this phenomenon is devastating.

Missing Father

A father missing from home is so pervasive in the African American community that it has become the norm. For a large percentage of African American families, children are born to and are reared by a female single parent. Roughly 65% of this community's children currently experience life in this manner. This percentage represents a nominal drop from the 72% figure found the 1999 census, but still represents a majority of African American children beginning life outside of what is considered a normative familial structure (Fields, 2003, p.6; Rodney, 1999, p.46). Studies chronicle the devastating effects of the single parent paradigm on the lives of African American boys and girls though few are geared specifically towards African American girls reared without the presence of a father or father figure in their lives (Bringle, 1982). African American boys in this cohort are "more likely to exhibit low self-esteem, field-dependent behavior, and hyper-masculinity" (Rodney, 1999, p. 46). African American girls reared without the consistent presence of a father or father figure tend to be more likely to have several sexual partners at a younger age as they are "vulnerable to low self-esteem and self-esteem dissatisfaction. This lowering of self-image and self-esteem may contribute to early initiation of sexual behaviors, putting these girls at risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases" (Doswell, 1998, p. 71). This type of situation illustrates the importance of the father/daughter relationship since, as Caitlin Marvaso states,

[f]athers provide their daughters with a masculine example. They teach their children about respect and boundaries and help put daughters at ease with other men

throughout their lives. ... If she didn't grow up with a proper example, [a daughter] will have less insight and ... be more likely to go for a man that will replicate the abandonment of her father (Meyers, 2018).

While the effects of a missing father on young girls have general application, for African American girls these effects are compounded by specific historical and racial challenges that present an even more devastating experience with abandonment. What are the implications of this status for the behavioral and mental attitudes of African American women? For African American women this early experience of a life lived without a consistent male influence can create a state of existence in their adult lives that Jonetta Rose Barras (2000) calls 'the fatherless woman syndrome.'

Problem Statement

Roughly 65% of African American children dwell in a home that is absent of a father (Fields, 2003; KidsCount, 2018). When the conversation is examined, the assumption is that the high incidence of single-parented births occurs among young African American girls; however, some of these children are also born to women who are considered, at least chronologically, to be adults. This research seeks to examine how the experience of being reared in a home without a father perpetuates itself and pervades the lived experiences and decisions of adult African American women.

Theoretical Base

The actions, thoughts, decisions, and overall life experiences of women who have lived without the presence of a father or father figure in their lives provide the bases upon which fatherless woman syndrome is defined. The term was coined by Jonetta Rose Barras to describe the ‘elephant in the room’ feeling that she experienced her entire life because of having an absentee father. Iyanla Vanzant describes it as “...the emptiness in that space...that feels broken and worthless” (Oprah.com, 2013). Fatherless women endure such an acute sense of an emptiness created by the lack of a father, that they will take nearly any measures to fill that void. The syndrome is evidenced in women through manifestations of various levels of addictions – be it sex, alcohol, drugs, food, or work. Sometimes the damage for these women is external, but all too often, the meltdown is internal, leading to depression, or worse, suicide (Barras, 2000, p. 6).

Fatherless Woman Syndrome

Jonetta Rose Barras developed the parameters of this syndrome to define and describe the chaos that she experienced in her life. According to Barras, “the key components of the syndrome are rooted in the feeling of being fundamentally unworthy and unlovable...[that] lead[s] to chronic rage, anger, and depression that are rooted in...fear of abandonment, rejection, or commitment” (Barras, 2000, p.6). There are many studies that demonstrate that fatherlessness has a devastatingly negative effect on a girl’s self-esteem (Craigie, 2014; Valdez 2017). In this circumstance, a fatherless girl’s confidence in her self-efficacy and value as a human being can be diminished if her father is absent from her life. This has negative impact on the fatherless girl academically, personally, physically, socially and, perhaps most damagingly of all, in interpersonal relationships. At base, a woman’s total sense of self is diminished when a healthy relationship with her father is not formed (Meyers, 2018).

Research Questions

There are two distinct questions that were explored and analyzed in this study:

1.) What are the beliefs of four Black women about how their absent fathers affected their life choices?

2.) How do four Black women share their stories of their life choices when they reflect on the absence of their father?

Significance of the Study

“When he left...it seemed to me that family, country, all of it was a lie” (Jago, 2006, p. 403) is the plaintiff cry of a participant in Barbra J. Jago’s autoethnographic exploration into the lives of six women experiencing life without fathers. This call is needed. The staggering percentage of African American children – 65% being reared in single-parented homes, indicates that there may be a number of African American women who experience long term effects of their own existence without a father. There are indications that the impact of this lived experience permeates every aspect of African American women’s lives even though they may be far removed from the situation because they have already reached the age of maturity. This phenomenon – the impact of fatherlessness on adult African American women – is the basis of this study; its aim is to investigate some of the far-reaching effects of having an absentee father on the lived experiences of African American women.

For example, girls and young women who have an unstable father figure or an absent father are more likely to experience at least one unplanned pregnancy; battle with low self-esteem or have poor self-conceptualization issues. These girls and young women also experience higher incidences of high school and/or college failure and dropouts, extreme levels of poverty, divorce, and in a number of cases, sexual promiscuity. According to Iyanla Vanzant

in the Oprah Winfrey Lifeclass series *Daddyless Daughters*, girls need a father to teach them how to relate and interact with men in a non-sexual manner. “It is the first relationship a daughter has with a man; and therefore, it is the relationship that teaches her how a woman should be treated by a man” (Vanzant, 2013). However, if the father leaves, the daughter that is left behind lacks a healthy model to emulate and often seeks to fill that void in a variety of unhealthy, emotionally and spiritually crippling ways (Vanzant, 2013). Dr. Steve Perry, a contributor and commentator on the same show supports the premise of the importance of daughters having a strong father figure in their live. He states, “[w]hat a father or very important father figure does for...young ladies... sets the standards by which a young girl can determine the appropriateness of relationships with boys” (Perry, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The relationship that African American females share with their fathers is just as important to their spiritual and intellectual growth as it is for African American males. There is a relationship between the absence of the father or father figure from the ‘home’ (both the physical and the spiritual dwelling of children’s souls) and children’s delinquent behavior, low intellectual functioning, and poor emotional health (Earl, 1978, p. 413). When compared with children who grow up in stable, two parented families, children born outside of marriage without the consistent influence of a father or father figure reach adulthood with less education earn less income, have lower occupational status; and are more likely to be idle (that is, not employed or not in school). In addition, they are more likely to have a nonmarital birth (among daughters), experience more troubled marriages, experience higher rates of divorce, and report more symptoms of depression (Amato, 2005, p. 78). However, what happens to these women in their

adult lives? Studies have indicated that father absenteeism adversely affects emotional growth and development, intellectual and social interactions, mental health and academic achievement.

This study analyzed the effect of father absenteeism in the lives of four African American women and the tangible effects on their life choices. The women who participated in this research were between the ages of 51 years old to 56 years old. The dynamic of paternal involvement ranges from no knowledge of the father to a physically present, but either mentally and/or spiritually abusive and/or spiritually and mentally absent and non-participatory in the paternal relationship.

This study examined the relationship between Black women and fathers in the context of the long-term effects that the relationship has on the decision-making processes that Black women utilized in their daily lives. This research focused on the relevance of this relationship in two ways: First, this is an increasingly multi-ethnic, multicultural society, in which there is a need for more in-depth self-awareness. Consequently, this study offered a unique opportunity for the participants to address issues that affect how they live, love, and thrive in American society based on their perceptions of their paternal relationship or lack thereof in relationships. Secondly, the number of single parented households led by single African American women is reaching pandemic proportions. According to a 2010 study, cited in the September 17, 2014 online publication of the *Huffington Post*, 72% of the children born in 2010 to African American women were born out of wedlock. While the data on fatherless children fluctuates depending upon census figures, there are several variances in numbers during the last 15 to 20 years. In the 2002 census the rate had decreased to 48% (Fields, 2003, p. 6). The number in 2017 was 67% and in 2018, that number was reduced again to 65%. At that rate, considering that African Americans only comprise roughly 14% of the American population, the high rate of non-dual

parental births, even though it fluctuates – is still clearly indicative of a crisis in the African American community as a whole (Kids Count Data Center). This is important, but this is not clear. The copious amount of documented research on the negative effects of children dwelling in and being reared in homes without a male presence certainly begs for a research-based intervention. The high incidence of promiscuity, teen pregnancy, limited academic success, and mental and spiritual disease in adulthood that ravages this sector of the population absolutely necessitates a research-based intervention. There are possibly unique ramifications when the absence of a father and/or an inorganic and unhealthy father/daughter relationship is juxtaposed with the subverted social, academic, and economic status that African American women maintain in the American society.

Definition of Study Terms

The following list of terms are included to ensure understanding of information pertained in this study:

Father – “A father is first biological. He takes care of the child that he helps to bring into this world...he sees to it that his children have what they need to stay healthy...he provides for their everyday needs” (Hamer, 1998, p.88). They are the teachers, bread winners and moral overseers...;[they] are responsible for the emotional and physical care of their children...” (Troilo, 2008, p. 218).

Fatherless – not having a father (Collins, 2014). Children living in a female headed household (Hamer, 1997, p. 565).

Absentee parent – a parent who either wanders in and out of the child’s life providing a disruptive, inconsistent presence; one who was an active part of their child’s life before abruptly ceasing contact; or a parent who has never been involved in the life of their child

(Luper, 2011). A parent who has abandoned his or her child and failed to maintain contact with that child (US Legal, 2014).

Forgiveness – Forgiveness is defined as the act of relinquishing resentment and embracing the need for restitution; the act of releasing and holding blameless one who has transgressed against you mentally, physically, emotionally or spiritually in the past. It is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness (The Greater Good, 2014).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – A mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event – either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as, uncontrollable thoughts about the event (Mayo Clinic, 2014).

Fatherless Woman Syndrome – is a condition in which a Black woman feels a deeply rooted sense of unworthiness due to the absenteeism of her father (Barras, 2000, p. 6).

Resiliency – describes the responses to both long term and short-term adversity. The ability to flourish despite such adverse conditions as poverty, racism, low family cohesion, family psychiatric illness, or alcoholism (Bosworth, 2002).

Vulnerability – “vulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat; it is understanding the necessity of both; it’s engaging; it’s being all in...daring to show up and be seen” (Brown, 2012).

Organization of the Study

The study has been actualized in a manuscript consisting of five chapters. Chapter one consists of an overview of the study. The parts of the study include a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, definition of terms, and the significance of the study. Chapter two is the review of literature that expounds upon the research or the lack of research already existing on the issues pertained in and surrounding the study. This chapter's content serves as a basis for inquiry and includes a discussion of the theoretical framework. Chapter three contains the research design, data collection strategies, and proposed analysis for the study. Chapter four presents the research and all the relevant information gathered during the research process. The final chapter, Chapter five, describes in detail the results, subsequent conclusions, and the support and/or rejection of the study suppositions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter offers a historical perspective on the fatherlessness phenomenon experienced by African American children in, general, and African American women specifically. The terms African American and Black are utilized interchangeably in accordance with the referenced literature and the manner in which research participants refer to themselves and other members of their ethnic group. This chapter is divided into three main sections: 1.) European slave trade and the African woman; 2.) Slavery in America and African women; and 3.) The residual effects of slavery on African American (also described as Black women) women.

Slavery in Europe and African Women

Slavery is an ancient ‘trade’ that was in existence in Europe long before the advent of chattel slavery that constituted the transatlantic slave trade. It was most prevalent within the conflict between the Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean; slaves were ‘spoils of war’ whose status as free people changed frequently as a result of the conflicts between these two religious groups located around the Black Sea (USI, 2011). There is a quantifiable difference between the slavery that resulted from the warring legions of Muslims and Christians and the slavery that became known as the transatlantic slave trade . That difference rests in the fact that, heretofore, slavery was the result of a ‘winner take all’ response to war conflict. After the transatlantic slave trade commenced, slavery became centered around the enslavement of Sub-Saharan Africans specifically for the purpose of capital building in the New World According to the Understanding Slavery Initiative,

On the eve of maritime expansion in the 15th century, European states were very different from their modern descendants. Largely monarchical and aristocratic, their governments ruled via traditional loyalties at home and through dynastic links abroad. The horizons of their rulers were greatly expanded during the course of the 15th and 16th centuries. At this juncture in time, it became apparent that global trade and conquest *outside* of Europe's traditional spheres of operation (i.e. within Europe itself and in the Mediterranean) could yield greater rewards than older trading systems. The wealth from such ventures would greatly enhance political power at home... The key player in this new structure was Portugal via its seaborne expansion along the West African coast. In the Americas, Europeans, led by Spain, successfully founded a string of new settlements; in time, however, these possessions were bolstered by Africans whose labor – *as slaves* – had been confirmed by the Portuguese and the Spaniards in the Atlantic and in Iberia itself (USI-themes, 2011, p.2).

As Portugal and Spain began actively colonizing areas in the Americas, they began to rid their home countries of vagrants, convicts, and undesirables by shipping them to the new settlements in America. Though the Europeans fought against one another and maintained centuries old rivalries, they agreed upon one premise: European prisoners of war would not be transported to the new settlements to work as slaves (USI, 2011). There were two main changes in the evolving relationship between Europeans and Africans that precipitated the transatlantic slave trade: 1.) European colonization of the New World precipitated the need for huge amounts of subsistence labor; and 2.) the development of high production agricultural economies in America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries greatly changed the face of the African slave trade and its aftermath (AARegistry.org, 2001).

Slavery in America and African Women

In November 1528, an African named Estevanico became the first African slave to land in what is now the United States of America; he was one of only four survivors of Pánfilo de Narváez's failed expedition to Florida. He and the other three took eight years to walk to the Spanish colony in Mexico. After their return in 1536, the group's leader, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, published an account of their journey through modern Texas and Mexico (1542) (Brycchancarey.com, 2013). Slavery became a thriving enterprise in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia when Africans landed there in order to work in the very lucrative production of tobacco as slaves. In the early 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more plentiful labor source than indentured servants (who were mostly poorer Europeans). After 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans ashore at the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia slavery spread throughout the American colonies. Though it is impossible to give accurate figures, some historians have estimated that 6 to 7 million slaves were imported to the New World during the 18th century alone, depriving the African continent of some of its healthiest and ablest men and women (History.com, 2009).

In the year 1641, slavery – or rather the profitable business of kidnapping African men, women and children to serve as chattel slaves – became legal in Massachusetts. In 1643, the New England Confederation of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven adopt fugitive slave laws. The introduction of the cotton gin in 1793 solidified the importance of slavery to the growing individual wealth and economy in the south and thus increased the slave population to well over 4,000,000 soon after. The cotton gin was patented by Eli Whitney in 1794; however, the original idea came from a slave known only as Sam. During the time of slavery, slaves were not allowed to hold patents in the United States, so Whitney is credited with

creating the device (Lienhard, 1997)). This invention aided the south in continuing to experience economic growth and affluence until the middle of the 19th century. The westward expansion in conjunction with a growing abolitionist movement in the north became the catalyst for change in the way that the country viewed slavery. A bitter controversy brewed between the northern and southern states that climaxed in a devastating civil war that lasted from 1861 to 1865. Though the Union victory freed the nation's 4 million slaves, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history, from the tumultuous years of Reconstruction (1865-77) to the civil rights movement that emerged in the 1960s, a century after emancipation (History.com, 2009).

Black Women in Slavery

A large number of Black women born several generations after the legal abolition of American slavery have experienced some of the most subversive, demoralizing and inhumane treatment in this country's short history. Black women have suffered as free labor and slave servants; "... whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, ... [they were] but little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves" (Rosenberg, 2001). Black women served as surrogate milkmaids to European children. Wet nurses claimed the benefits of breastfeeding for the offspring of European masters while denying or limiting those health advantages to their own slave infants; wet nursing required slave mothers to transfer to white offspring the nurturing and affection they should have been able to allocate to their own children (Seals, 2012). Furthermore, Black women served as a vessel for every foul and vile desire of slave owners. During the antebellum period, there was no human that wielded as much power as slave owners; they were free to treat their 'property' as they chose. For example, "[s]lave women were forced to comply with sexual advances by their

masters on a very regular basis. Consequences of resistance often came in the form of physical beatings; thus, an enormous number of slaves became concubines for these men. Most often the masters were already bound in matrimony, which caused tension and hatred between the slave and the mistress of the house” (Bowdoin.edu, 2014). In addition, the male slave owner was rarely chastised for this behavior while the Black female slave would receive severe punishment for being raped by her slaver. The following slave narrative excerpt demonstrates the precarious situation that the Black slave woman faced due to the salacious disposition of slave owners:

Maria was a thirteen-year-old house servant. One day, receiving no response to her call, the mistress began searching the house for her. Finally, she opened the parlor door, and there was the child with her master. The master ran out of the room, mounted his horse and rode off to escape, though well he knew that his wife’s full fury would fall upon the young head of his victim. The mistress beat the child and locked her up in a smokehouse. For two weeks the girl was constantly whipped. Some of the elderly servants attempted to plead with the mistress on Maria’s behalf, and even hinted that ‘it was mass’r that was to blame.’ The mistress’s reply was typical: ‘She’ll know better in the future. After I’ve done with her, she’ll never do the like again, through ignorance (Bowdoin.edu, 2014).

The quandary demonstrated by this excerpt is that the female Black slave was powerless to decrease the slave owner’s attention because she was, in effect, his property but was expected to somehow control the behavior of someone over whom she wielded no power.

There was no security for Black women. They were not allowed to marry as a rule and, if allowed to marry, their husbands were powerless to care for and protect them against the slave owner. The slave husband had little ability to prevent master-female slave sexual relations. Sometimes the relations would become so striking that the husband would release his anger on

the master in the form of violence (Bowdin.edu, 2014). When these slave women produced children – either for their husband or the slaver, they were subject to be, more often than not, sold to another slaveholder.

The long-range effects of the institution of slavery are clearly evidenced by the ways in which Black women and men experience life in this country today. They are consistently at the bottom of every aspect of the social and economic structure in this country. Their communities are disposed to dysfunctional family structures that exacerbate a problems in the areas of self-worth, self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-control. This is evidenced even today by the fact that Black women’s median annual income is roughly \$34,000 for those who work full time. Roughly 28% of employed Black women work in service occupations which represent the occupational group with the lowest wages while 80.6 % Black mothers are the breadwinners in their households (SOBW, 2017).

The continued dissolution of the family dynamic within the Black community generations after slavery further illustrates the long-term effects that slavery has had on the descendants of slaves. This devastation has persisted for generations and has reached a critical point. In the year 2012, Blacks – including those who are considered mixed race – comprised roughly about 14% of the American population (CDC, 2014). During that same time period, statistics further depict that 72% of all Black children were born in single parent homes lead by Black women while other community’s rates are lower percentages. The fluctuation in the Black community’s statistics – 72% rate in 2012 to 65% in 2017 eclipses that of most other groups; 17% of Asians, 29% of Whites, 53% of Hispanics and 66% of Native Americans were born to unwed mothers in 2008. The most recent year for which government figures are available, 2017, have similar fluctuations with 15% of Asians, 24% of Whites, 41% of Hispanics and 54%

Native Americans being born to unwed mothers. The rate for the overall rate of children born to unwed mothers in the United States was 41 % (NBC News.com, 2014; Kidscount.org).

This study explored the effect of Black women's perceptions of an absentee father on their life choices. The study amplified the decisions that Black women have made that can be directly linked to the influence of their perceptions with respect to their absentee father or father figure. What place in the history/present/future of a Black woman's life does the absentee Black father define and what will be the construct of the Black woman's decision-making processes based upon this definition?

Statistics of African American Women and Families: Female Headed Households

Slavery not only inhibited family formation but made the creation and sustainability of a stable, secure family life difficult if not impossible. A father might have one owner and his 'wife' and children might have a different owner on another plantation (Williams, 2014). Men and women who were slaves were considered property. There were no laws governing their right to enter into legal contracts – such as marriage because they were not considered human beings. This time posed many problems for slaves and their desires to construct stable family units and communities. Black women and Black men were property; they were owned by other human beings in the manner as a person would own a piece of land or a house. Since their status was that of property, they were subject to be sold at any time and were not allowed to form cohesive and stable relationships. There was not a paradigm that allowed for intact Black families to grow and prosper. A report authored by David P. Moynihan, entitled, *The Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action*, stated that "...the Black family in America has become a tangle of pathology" (Tolman, 2011). According to an article in the *Atlanta Black Star* (2014), there are at least six facets of Black life that are still adversely affected by slavery

today. The total disintegration of the Black family is the most devastating remnant of the institution of slavery to the Black community. The destruction of the family unit through the slaver's abusive sexual exploitation of Black women, evolved into a volatile moral code for Black people. As a consequence, in 2017, 65% percent of Black children are born to unmarried women in America (Kidscount.org). That number is an astonishing residual effect of slavery. The large numbers of children born to single mothers is clearly not the most inviolable model for a stable, secure future for Black people. There is a direct link between an absent father and an increased chance that a child will drop out of high school and have a criminal record (AtlantaBlackStar.com, 2014).

Familial and Societal impact of Female-headed Households

The prevalence of female-headed households has increased dramatically since the early part of the 20th century. According to Anastasia Snyder (2006) about half of all women will experience single motherhood at some point in their lifetime; and, a majority of all children will live in these single parented households lead by a mother or another female. The 21st century seems to shore up the statistics from the latter part of the previous century with 75% of Black women being the sole participatory parent and/or breadwinner in the United States (SOBW, 2017). A ramification of this dynamic is an increased propensity of poverty for the children living in these circumstances. The rise in poverty is apparent across ethnicities, but is most prevalent among African American, Hispanic and Native Americans (Snyder, 2004, pp. 127 – 149). The results of this increased modification in traditional familial structure are that more and more children will live in poverty and a growing number of families will potentially continue to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Issues of Triple Jeopardy: Racism, Classism, and Sexism

The increasing incidences of female-headed households has many contributing factors. Several of the factors, such as, unstable job opportunities for men, lack of quality education, familial history of poverty, and perpetuation of single parent households are germane to the discussion across ethnicities and races. These factors are particularly debilitating when combined with historically underrepresented groups: Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans. For Black women in particular,

[t]he idea of triple threat implies that Black females inherit three major entangled social realities that are assessed negatively by the larger society – being Black, being female, and being poor. Racism, sexism, and classism are pervasive systems of advantage that adversely impact those with the “wrong” race, social class, and gender. Overt racism, classism, or sexism refers to open or unconcealed attitudes and acts of oppression that subordinate those who fall into the categories of being Black, female, and poor ... the categories of race, class, and gender are themselves socially constructed (Knight, 2007, pp. 24, 25).

These additional factors ensure the continued perpetuation of familial distortion in this community wherein the proliferation of single parented Black girls and boys abound.

Psychological and Sociological issues related to absentee fathers and girls/women

The incidences of poverty in the Black community can be directly linked to the disintegration of the Black family. When children are raised in homes that differ from the traditional familial structure, they have a greater propensity to experience poverty in their lives. Combined with the fact that they are also members of historically underserved populations, the need for mother and father constructs/partnered or joint parenting constructs are far more crucial their well-being. According to Snyder (2006) and National Women’s Law Center (2017), Black and Hispanic female headed households are 2.4 and 1.7 times more likely to be poor, respectively, than their White counterparts. What are the ramifications of this familial structure on the future sustainability of the Black community at large and Black girls in particular? The fact that approximately 65% of African American families are headed by a single female – compared to only 24% of White families – is indicative of the state of crisis in the Black community on a broad scale. “Family disruptions may reduce formal social controls at the community level [and] low rates of participation in local politics, recreation, and educational activities” (Sampson, 1987, pp. 351, 352). Moreover, “[t]he institution of the family is decisive in determining not only if a person has the capacity to love another individual but in the larger social sense whether she/he is capable of loving her/his fellow human beings collectively. The whole of society rests on this foundation for stability, understanding and social peace” (Elwood, 2004, p. 5).

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

There are several important theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were evidenced in the data: 1) Attachment Theory, 2) Fatherless Woman Syndrome, 3) Battered Women Syndrome, 4) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and 5.) Resiliency Theory.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is one that was formulated in the early 1950's by a psychiatrist named John Bowlby, M.D., who expanded and clarified his theory while working with the World Health Organization. According to Dr. Bowlby, "...the study of the adverse effect on personality development experienced when there is inadequate maternal care during early childhood...is imperative" (Bowlby, 1982, p. 665). Dr. Bowlby further asserts that, "people brought up in unhappy or disrupted homes are more likely to have illegitimate children, to become teenage mothers or fathers, to make unhappy marriages and to divorce" (Bowlby, 1982, p. 675). There are several phenomena that define and differentiate attachment theory from attachment behavior: attachment behavior is defined as any behavior that results in a person attaining and/or maintaining a proximal relationship to a clearly defined individual who is perceived to better manage life.

Attachment theory is the umbrella for the following phenomena:

- Separation anxiety – anxiety about losing or being separated from someone.
- Mourning – response to a loss after it has occurred.
- Defensive processes – the manner in which a human reacts to external stimuli that is deemed, by that individual, to be painful (Bowlby, 1982, pp. 670 – 674).

Although this theory was developed and defined to analyze and discuss children's inherent need for a mother, the characteristics of the theory can be utilized to describe the process of need and

loss for a father. In his discussion of the theory's application, Dr. Bowlby does not differentiate on the basis of gender or ethnicity. In this study, however, gender and ethnicity are central to and form the foundation of this study.

Fatherless Woman Syndrome

The fatherless woman syndrome is a condition that is deeply rooted in and defined by the debilitating feeling of a constant state of unworthiness (Barras, 2000, p.6). The woman suffering from this syndrome experiences life from a place of fear— fear of not being loved, or worse still, fear of not being worthy of love; and if she receives love, there is the fear of not having the ability to maintain that love in her life. In her mind, she will eventually face abandonment. This feeling of unworthiness pervades every aspect of her life and will manifest itself in various ways: chronic rage, anger, depression, sexual promiscuity – addictions of any kind are symptoms that are linked to the insidious sense of unworthiness (Barras, 2000, p.6). These symptoms are comparable to the symptoms experienced by women who suffer from Battered Woman Syndrome – which is a subcategory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Battered Woman Syndrome

Battered Woman Syndrome – also known as BWS – is a term first constructed and utilized by psychologist Lenore Walker in the 1970s. It is utilized in an attempt to explain common experiences and behaviors of women who have been battered by their intimate partners. It has evolved from a term used to describe a broad range of emotions and actions displayed by the victim (learned helplessness) and the aggressor (cycle of violence). These behaviors are now described more broadly as behaviors that are ascribed to a mental health disorder describing symptoms experienced by an individual following traumatic exposure; namely, PTSD (VAWNET, 2009)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is experienced by people who have been exposed to extreme violence – either participated in and received it personally or witnessed an incident. I utilized Barras’ theory in conjunction with Bowlby’s theory in order to analyze and characterize the life experiences of the women who participated in this study and determined the associative and comparative value of defining the trauma of father absenteeism to the experiences that evolved into PTSD and BWS.

Resiliency Theory

Resiliency describes the ability of children to overcome adversity and become successful adults. It illustrates the flourishing of children despite the adverse conditions of poverty, racism and low familial cohesiveness; it is a study of strengths rather than problematic environments (Bosworth & Earthman, 2002, pp. 299 – 301). Resiliency has been viewed in the past as an anomaly; a phenomenon that is found in the most extreme cases that exemplify some deficit model. Studies have shown that resiliency is a skill and, like any other skill, it can be taught and learned; there is no special magic to typifying resiliency as it is a naturally occurring phenomenon in the evolution of human adaptation (Masten, 2001, pp. 227-228; Luthans, 2006, pp. 25; Maggio, 2006, pp. 42-44).

This chapter revealed and expounded upon the connection between the violent and subversive institution of slavery and the resulting father absenteeism that is pervasive in the modern African American community. The effects of this phenomenon on Black girls and their ability to experience life innocently and ideally are devastating and, for some, debilitating. The chapter also provided insight into the possible mental health maladies that can manifest as a result of moving through life without a participatory father or father figure.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The reason for embarking upon this research endeavor was to explore the ways in which middle-aged Black women above the age of forty express their lived reality without the direct contact and influence of their father and/or a father figure. There are two distinct questions that were explored and analyzed in the study: 1) how do four African American women share their life choices when their father was absent? 2) what are the beliefs of four African American women about how their absent fathers affected their life choices? All data were collected via personal interviews and focus groups comprised of four Black women chosen from a purposively selected sample of women. They were specifically chosen from a women's organization comprised of approximately thirty-five active participants; because of their close, personal relationship, they were delineated from the larger group and asked for their participation. The exploration and attestation of their lived experience is relevant because there is only a small and finite pool of information that explores this aspect of life for Black women.

This chapter is organized into six sections; the sections are: **a) *research design*** which describes where and how the participants were chosen; **b) *background*** which provides the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design; **c) *participant description*** that were chosen for the study; **d) *data collection – interview protocol*** which details the lens through which the data was interpreted; **e) *positionality*** which details where in this process I am as researcher; a complete description of the **f) *analysis process*** which details every step taken to derive the conclusions found at the cessation of this research; and finally, **g) *assumptions and delimitations*** which describes the inherent limitations and implied truths found within the study.

Research Design

Research design is the term used to describe the ‘entire’ research process. “[it] is the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing” (Creswell, 2007, p.5). Yin further states that research design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions (Yin, 2009).

The nature of the research questions directed the decision to utilize a qualitative research design. The two questions posed were: 1) How do four African American women share their life choices when their father was absent? 2) What are the beliefs of four African American women about how their absent fathers affected their life choices? Qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings’ experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach (Jackson, 2007). This area of research seeks answers to questions while systematically utilizing predefined sets of procedures to answer questions, collect evidence, produce findings that were not present at the outset of the study and, ultimately, to produce results that are applicable far beyond the scope of the study (Mack, 2005). Furthermore, “[q]ualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. ... [Q]ualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001, p.3; Creswell, 2007, p. 45). Qualitative inquiry affords the participants and the researcher opportunity to experience the research process in a natural and non-threatening environment. The setting is vitally important to the creation of a safe space for participants to tell their stories.

While the nature of the research questions drove the modality for the research, the nature of the participants required that more than one research method be utilized. For this study,

narrative inquiry and autoethnography processes were employed. Narrative inquiry was one of the processes chosen because it allows research participants to share their stories in authentic ways. This process is “the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences; such as life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, and memoirs” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 204). In addition, the researcher in a narrative inquiry seeks to:

[u]nderstand and re-present experiences through the stories that individual(s) live and tell; researchers collect field texts that document the individual’s story in his or her own words (e.g., interview transcripts, letters, journal entries, etc.). Also, the narrative researcher analyzes the participants’ stories by ‘re-storying’ them into a framework that makes sense; this often involves identifying themes or categories of information within a chronological sequence (Hoogland, 2009).

The analysis sought to provide a platform for the stories and voices of these women who had maneuvered their way through life without the love and support of their father. Some of the participants either never knew their father or experienced short and explosive, but always, sporadic interactions with their father.

Autoethnography is an approach that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research rather than hiding from these matters or assuming that they do not exist. This aspect of qualitative research expands and opens a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research. Autoethnography not only endeavors to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also by producing accessible texts, its positionality renders it uniquely able to make personal and social change for more people (Ellis, 2011).

Background

My interest in this subject stemmed from my evaluation and interpretation of the relationship I had with my father as a child and how the dynamics of that relationship paired with the deeply rooted trauma I experienced in my childhood that pervaded every decision of my life, especially as an adult. The four women with whom I spent the most time had at some point in our interactions spoken about the relationship, or the lack thereof, with their fathers. When I finally decided to move forward with the research, I then proposed that they work with me as participants in this study. Initially, the research was proposed to center around the relationship between Black women and their fathers; however, when I realized that the other women had experienced little to no contact with their fathers, the dynamic of the research morphed into what is presented now.

The first step of my journey to this research started five years ago – a year before I had firmly committed to moving forward with this particular topic. I began the process of convincing my chair. A young, Black female classmate in one of my research classes and I developed a friendship. Over the course of the semester, we discussed many topics: religion, the state of the world, politics – all of the general topics people discuss on the road to friendship. After one of our study sessions, we talked about our home lives--it was the first time that we had delved into such personal information. We had not discussed our personal lives prior to that time mainly because since she was considerably younger than me, I simply assumed that we would not have any similar experiences. I absolutely was floored by her revelations she had no connection with her father and that situation had devastated her greatly. She shared that she was able to clearly associate the choices she had made in her life with the feelings that she carried regarding the absenteeism of her father. Needless to say, that conversation confirmed for me that

there exists a critical need for a broad-based discussion on the relevance of a healthy relationship between fathers and daughters. I did not ask her participation in the research because she simply was not in the age range that I considered imperative to this research project. The women with whom I eventually shared this journey were already deeply involved in the women's organization of which I assumed the role as vice president and were age appropriate.

Participant Description

The voices, experiences, and memories gleaned from the four women regarding their life choices in adulthood lived without a father are absent from the plethora of educational research on the subject of the effects of fatherlessness on children. There is little research targeting the devastation experienced by a young Black girl navigating through life without her father or a viable father figure. The research that is available focuses mostly on generalities. Females who experience life without a father in their early childhood are simply more prone to experience a diminished cognitive development and poorer school performance than children who are not ensconced in an environment where they are deprived of the influence of a participatory father. Inevitably, these females exhibit weaker mathematical skills than children with two parents and they display difficulty adjusting with others (Krohn, 2001).

The participants were gained through purposive sampling because they formed a smaller, more tightly knitted subgroup of a larger women's organization. Purposive sampling is simply making the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities that the participant possesses. The researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who exhibit the willingness to provide information by virtue of their experience (Bernard, 2002, Lewis & Shepard, 2006; Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling occurs when the researcher selects participants for a study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research

problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). This type of sampling groups research participants according to predetermined guidelines that are relevant to a specific research question (Mack, 2005). The decision for choosing women in this age group was based solely on the fact that this particular age group usually has passed all of the traps of youth and young adulthood. If they have children, these children are grownup or nearly grownup; these women have lived through some major life choices and gained wisdom that is usually not associated with a younger group of women.

This small group of women were selected from a women's organization that was started in Houston, Texas in 2006. The women were guaranteed anonymity, so the name of the organization will not be revealed, and they have been given pseudonyms to shield their personal identities. The organization is a service organization that was initially started as an outlet for women to come together and discuss issues that were pertinent to life performed as females in this society. The organization was, and is still, an opportunity for women to feel loved and supported by an active and aware sisterhood of women from varying religious and ethnic histories. At its inception, the organization provided the participating women an outlet to express themselves openly and freely regarding issues that directly impact their lives; and the impact of decisions made – both directly and indirectly – on the lives of the collective known as our community.

The organization met each month during the regular school year of August to June. The time was implemented to coincide with the calendar year of the local school systems. During the summer months, the organization would take a hiatus from the strenuous campaigning six months out of the year on alternating months. The organization would offer symposiums on women's mental, physical, and spiritual health. Speakers and experts/practitioners from each of

these areas would present much needed information referencing the latest research and information available.

The group was comprised of professional women who were changing lives in their own unique ways. We had forged a powerful network by combining interest and expertise together to create an opportunity for women to learn more and grow together while promoting sisterhood and unity. In addition to our association via the organization, we had established a kinship outside of the organization and we were already deeply ensconced in each other's private lives. This association superficially seemed ideal; I mean, there was no need to establish trust between the researcher and the participants because that came naturally through our friendship. These women trusted each other for the same reason that they trusted me – they knew each other well and had built an elevated level of trust through natural association and time.

Data Collection and Interview Protocol

For a novice researcher, inherent challenges with research propositions often are missed. In the case of this study, the relationship between the researcher and the population pool could have proven problematic due to the friendship between the participants and the researcher. This relationship was explained in detail earlier in the process in order to alleviate any validity concerns that may have emerged during the course of the study.

The first step in the official process for embarking on this journey was to secure an Internal Review Board, hereafter the (IRB) approval letter. After securing permission from IRB, I was able to have the first official contact with the participants via telephone. I called each participant and explained the purpose and intent of the research that I desired to perform. I explained that the research was for partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. program in which I was enrolled at Texas A&M University and that this was the last step to the attainment

of my degree. I explained to each participant, via phone, that my interest in this topic stemmed from the in and out ‘ghost’ participation that I experienced with my father and how I believed it shaped my adult life. I wanted to know if other women my age with similar experiences could make the same connections that I had made. I assured them that they would be anonymous participants and that there would not be an identifying information or descriptions that could absolutely delineate them from the general population of women in the world with their general characteristics. I further explained that at the culmination of the research – which meant that I would have successfully defended the dissertation – all research materials and supporting documentation would reside with my committee chairwoman, in a locked cabinet and after completion of the study, the information would be destroyed. All this information that was presented to each participant had been written in script form in order that each participant would have the same information presented at the time of the formal request.

The first formal communication with the participants occurred via telephone because of our familiarity. I desired some way to separate our friendship from the support of the research project in which we were about to participate. The phone seemed to be the most formal because even though they knew me, the lack of physical proximity seemed to put enough distance between the participant and me to ensure that they were not overwhelmed nor unduly influenced by any my physical presence. Each was assured that they were not in any way required to participate in this process and, if at any time they became uncomfortable, they were welcomed to rescind their permission and they would not be required (nor solicited) to participate further. All of this was reiterated via the written contract that each participant signed acknowledging their willingness to participate in the process; the written agreement and the phone transcript are attached to this document in the appendix section (see Appendix A and B).

During the initial phone contact, each participant was informed that the research process would be a multi-fold process that involved two focus groups and a personal interview – each lasting approximately one (1) hour or less. The focus groups would last at least an hour to ensure that all of the study questions were addressed by each participant. The personal interviews could last an hour or less depending upon the amount of information gleaned during the personal interaction. These personal interviews offered the researcher the opportunity to better understand the responses of study participants.

I engaged in inquiry with the understanding that an interview question must be developed in a manner that affords the researcher the opportunity to gain as much relevant information as possible from participants (Gill, 2008, p 292). Furthermore, as Gill suggests, as a researcher I attempted “to listen attentively to what is being said, so that participants are able to recount their experiences as fully as possible, without any interruption that is unnecessary and detract from the interview process (p. 292). To elicit response after a posed question I recalled that “[t]he strategic use of silence, if utilized appropriately, can also be highly effective at getting respondents to contemplate their responses, talk more, elaborate or clarify particular issues” (Gill, 2008, pp. 292 - 293). Another important skill that had greatly increased the opportunity of gaining meaningful and rich information from research participants was the ability to dispose open and emotionally neutral body language; for example, nodding, smiling, showing interest, and making encouraging noises (ex., ‘mmmm’) during interviews and focus group session.

The participants were forewarned that after the personal interviews and focus groups had been completed, there might be need for further contact in order to clarify any ambiguity or to add ‘thick description’ to information previously proffered during the focus groups and/ personal interviews. ‘Thick description’ is described as a modality that establishes the significance of an

experience or a sequence of events for the person or persons involved. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meaning of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, 1989, p. 83; Ponterotto, 2006).

Interview Protocol

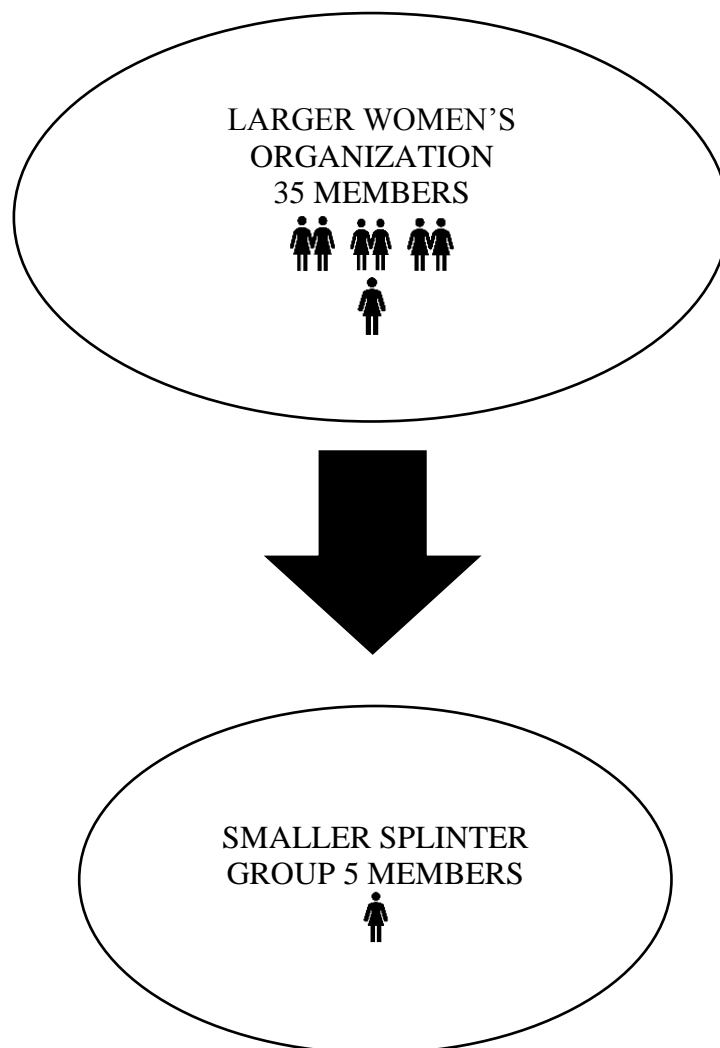
The interview protocol included eleven questions. They were:

- a. Opening question: Tell me about your relationship with your father?
- b. Why is a daughter's relationship with her father important in her life?
- c. How does the relationship that a girl/woman has with her father or a father figure fit on the list of important and necessary relationships for girls to experience in order that they develop into mentally, spiritually, and physically healthy individuals?
- d. How have the experiences that you shared with/without your father impacted your life?
- e. How has the absence of your father affected the decisions that you have made about relationships?
- f. How have your intimate relationships – male and/or female – mirrored the relationship you experienced with your father?
- g. If you did not/do not have a relationship with your father, how have your perceptions of what a father should be influenced the relationships discussed in the previous question?
- h. How has outside information that you have received about your father – positive or not – influenced your perceptions of your father?

Study Participants Selection Process

Study participants were members of a larger women's organization of approximately thirty-five (35) active members in which most of the women were potential candidates for the research process because most of the members were in their early forties or older. By natural selection, a smaller subset of five members from the larger organization splintered off and formed their own circle of influence. This smaller 'friendship' network became the group of women who participated in the research. There were four (4) distinct members together with the researcher.

Figure 3.1 Participant Selection Process



Generally, when a sample of people are needed for a study, a larger pool of potential participants is explored. Yet the potential volatile nature of this research content is the reason I chose to utilize purposive sampling with a group of potential participants with whom I had intimate interactions already. Conversations about relationships can be difficult. Conversations exploring parent absenteeism in children's lives can be devastating! This intimacy allowed the participants to respond to the proposal of research and participate in the study with an established level of trust and confidence in the credibility of the researcher and the proposed research despite the sensitivity of the subject topic.

Participant Selection Criteria

- 1.) The participants in this study were chosen from a small convenience group.
- 2.) The chosen participants were between the ages of forty-nine years and fifty-six years.
- 3.) The participants must have either experienced father absenteeism in their lives or experienced a challenging and/or volatile relationship with their father.
- 4.) The participants were required to participate in every aspect of the research process; participation required that they participated in the focus group and exhibited willingness to allow for a follow-up individual interview.
- 5.) The participant(s) agreed to allow the researcher to transcribe information from the focus group and the personal interviews for research purposes.
- 6.) All of the participants signed a confidentiality statement in order to participate.

At the time of the interviews, in February 2016, one of the participants had just turned fifty (50) years old and the other three were between the ages of fifty- three and fifty-five years old. Three of the women were from the same hometown and had actually attended the same high

school at different times but did not know each other before meeting in this organization. Their shared history was the impetus for those three getting to know each other better. The fourth participant was not from their hometown of Chicago, but related so well with the organization that, she, too, found a special camaraderie within the smaller group.

This group of women possessed an abundance of experience and stories to share with respect to their lives with an absentee father. There were four different scenarios that had various levels of interaction with a father or father figure. Brief descriptions of each participant are offered in this chapter to acquaint the reader with the personalities of each woman and the appropriateness of their inclusion in this study.

The stories of these women were at the same time tragic and uplifting! Even though they faced difficulties while navigating through their life circumstances, they have enjoyed personal and professional success – by the world’s standards and their own. They all either matriculated from college or certification programs, and they all have thriving careers that they enjoy. In addition to experiencing career success, two of the women have enjoyed at least two different thriving, highly successful careers. Table 3.1 illustrates the various occupations and educational accomplishments of each participant. The career fields of the participants vary greatly, but the thread that binds them together is the presence of a core strength and courage that each possess. The resiliency and tenacity that they have demonstrated in the face of some difficult life experiences was awe-inspiring and uplifting.

Table 3.1 Pregnancy, Marriage, and Father familiarity

NAME	PREGNANCY	MARRIAGE	TIME SPENT WITH FATHER
Bourgeois	One pregnancy One abortion hysterectomy No children	One marriage One divorce (unmarried at the time of research)	Father left the home when she was around 5 or 6 years old. Re-entered her life when she was an adult in her 20's
Cyber	Two pregnancies One abortion One child	One marriage One divorce (planning wedding at time of research)	Never met biological father – temporary exposure to stepfather until age 5 years old
Poet	Three pregnancies One abortion Two children	One marriage (married much later in life; still married at the time of research)	Present in her life until she was 12 years old then re-entered her life steadily at approximately 26 years old
GiGi	Two pregnancies One abortion One child	Two marriages Two divorces (unmarried at the time of research)	Father was murdered when she was in the 9 th or 10 th grade; reared in the home with a stepfather

Each individual participant is also gifted with a pseudonym for research purposes. Their individual traits and characteristics will be expounded upon in a later chapter. The use of pseudo identifiers is more than a technical procedure; the renaming of participants has psychological meaning to both the participants and the content and process of the research (Allen, 2015).

Cyber

The first participant – who for the purpose of anonymity will be known as Cyber – not only never met her father, had absolutely no idea who had fathered her. At the commencement of this research process, Cyber was 48 years old and a single mother of one adult daughter. The life that Cyber has carved out for herself is one based on the understanding that if she were going to make it in this life, she would have to discover the path for herself. After high school Cyber trotted off to college to pursue her education; at some point, she became pregnant and quit school. Cyber experienced a very different scenario than many young women face when met with an unplanned pregnancy, Cyber and her child's father lived together for a while and eventually got married under the direct pressure of a very religious and – according to her – excessively overbearing mother. The marriage was brief and not very satisfying. According to

Cyber, she loved her daughter's father and they had discussed getting married prior to the pregnancy, but she - nor he - was not prepared for marriage at that time. Cyber did want a husband at some time; she just did not desire to be married at that point. During the extensive writing period of this dissertation, Cyber married for the second time; she is now fifty-three years old. The pseudonym 'Cyber' was chosen for this participant based on the fact that she is an internet securities genius. Cyber never completed her college degree but spent the many years since college earning certifications as a specialist in providing strategies for companies to maintain technology security and works as an independent contractor. Cyber states that her childhood relationship with her mother was – an is at the time of this research – a very stressful and contentious one. Cyber's mother had fabricated an elaborate story about her father telling Cyber the man with whom she had spent her younger life and knew as her 'daddy' was actually her stepfather. Her mother's ex-husband desired very much to be the man in Cyber's life and to stand in the role of a father. In fact, so extensive was her mother's deception, that Cyber's mother never told her who fathered her and would not allow anyone in the family to speak of it! To this day Cyber has no idea who gave her life; to this day, that knowledge haunts her and causes her great pain and a sense of emptiness.

GiGi

The next participant – GiGi – is so named because of her absolute devotion to her grandchildren. One of the other participants has grandchildren for whom she cares deeply, but GiGi's grandbabies – and their mother GiGi's daughter – actually live with her; so they play a major role in her everyday existence. At the time of the study, GiGi was 54 years old and completing her studies to become an educator with a focus on early childhood education. Presently, she is working at an elementary school. GiGi's interaction with her father was limited

and she recounts that she actually only remembers seeing him a few times. Much the same as Cyber's mother, GiGi's mother was not supportive of her building and maintaining a relationship with her father. GiGi's mother had married a wonderful man – as described by GiGi – who took over the role of father for her and her mother was not interested in causing any disturbance within the household. GiGi recounts several instances where her mother's actions could be construed as interference because of a complete blockage of the attempts of GiGi's biological father's family to build a relationship with GiGi. She does, however, remember meeting him several times and was able to describe his physical features and how much she resembles him. GiGi vividly remembers her father as a tall, handsome man with high cheekbones and huge round eyes, and says she is the proverbial 'spitting' image of him. Yet, that is all that she will have of her father. Unfortunately for them both, her father was murdered when she was in the 9th grade. Later she was informed that his death was a murder-for-profit scheme allegedly committed by his estranged female companion. GiGi was raised in the home with a stepfather who was very active in her life and actually treated her as if she were his biological child. GiGi was asked to participate in this study because she expressed that her life experiences inspired within her the same feelings of isolation and emptiness that the participants without a relationship with any father figure experienced. I will further discuss the dynamics of GiGi's life later in Chapter four.

Bourgeois

The third participant – Bourgeois – was given her pseudonym as a result of the group's teasing. This name was inspired purely out of the camaraderie of the group teasing her about her attitude towards the masses of people – she is 'stuck up!' In other words, Bourgeois is highly educated and does not suffer people who display a lack of social class or basic intelligence.

Bourgeois works as a project manager for a major company and is in a leadership position within the company. Even with this superficial description in place, Bourgeois is perhaps the most loving and ‘big hearted’ sister in the group. When Bourgeois loves, she loves deeply and there are no limits on the manner in which she will express that love when needed. Bourgeois had a relationship with her biological father early in life. At one point in her life, her father and her mother were married for roughly 5 or 6 years. Her parents divorced when she was a young girl and in later years, she began to have memories that indicated that she had been abused by her father in ways that she was unprepared to face. I will discuss the effects of this realization as in chapter 4. Bourgeois’ mother remarried and this man took on the role of a father; however, he was physically abusive to Bourgeois’ mother, so she does not give him much credit for being a father figure. There were two children born to Bourgeois’ mother and her biological father – she and her brother; her mother had another son with the man that she remarried.

Poet

The final participant is Poet. Poet’s alias aptly describes her and how she performs in the world. Poet is roughly 4’11” tall and a very spiritual person and expresses her deepest thoughts and emotions through the writing and performance of poetry. Poet went to college as an adult and attained her degree. Prior to enrolling in college, she had worked in the medical research field for many years. Earning her bachelor’s degree propelled her further financially. At the time of this research, she was ready to retire – at base, ready to leave her job and start her life over. Poet readily states that she experienced a loving relationship with her father in her early years; he was fun loving, smart, took care of the family: The family consisted of Poet, her sister, and her stay-at-home mother. By the time Poet was twelve years old, however, her parents’

marriage and her lovingly idyllic relationship with her father had dissolved. At some point between the years of almost hero status in Poet's life, her father had managed to become a fall down drunk and destroy their family. In addition, she states that she cannot pinpoint when everything between her parents went sour. One day they were happy – the next day he was absent from their lives and everything went to hell. Her mother had to reenter the work force in order to maintain their family; the two children – Poet and her sister – were very often left home alone. Poet states that she knows that during the early times when her dad was present, she had been a good kid, been smart in school, and participated in all types of activities. When her dad left, she became trouble for her mother. Poet's grades plummeted, and she began to act out in ways that led to her experimenting with smoking weed, sexual promiscuity and other dalliances that were all foreign to her before her family dynamics changed so drastically. Poet's life will be further explored in Chapter 4 as well. These women provided rich stories about their experiences in life that were directly correlated with either interacting with their father on some level, or not having any interaction at all.

Positionality

Positionality – according to Lincoln (1995) – “recognizes [that] texts are always partially incomplete; socially, culturally, historically, and sexually located, and can therefore, never represent any truths except those truths that exhibit the same characteristics” (Lincoln 1995). This junction in the research has been a hard ‘pill to swallow’— so to speak. I have not been prepared to articulate in writing my reasoning for embarking upon this research. The act of capturing the lived experiences of women who had various experiences with their father was very different from writing about my own. I mean, once a work is written, there can be no

retraction or softening of the effect; once completed, the information must allow the proverbial ‘falling chips’ to do so at their own rhythm.

My relationship with my father has been multifaceted as is the case with most relationships, but the unfolding of our interactions has been experienced in a myriad of emotions. There are many instances of interaction that will be discussed in this research, but the confrontation that comes to mind at this moment is the verbal and spiritual lashing I received in the twelfth grade from my father when he received my report card and I had a failing grade in my pre-calculus class. As I detail this experience in my mind to commit to paper, I am able to literally feel the knots in my stomach and the quickly palpitating heart that were present at that time. I can ‘see’ myself in my room as a young girl desperately searching for a reason to live. As would be the case several times over the course of my life, my dad told me of the great disappointment he felt at having me for a daughter. He audibly mused at how dumb I was and that the depth of ineptness that I possessed could only have come from my mother’s side of the family because he and his siblings were very smart. Each comment was like a 10-ton brick connecting with my spirit and I shrank more and more with each attack. My spirit began to shrivel up and collapse as a rotted pit with miniscule remnants of fruit still attached. Of course, he reasoned, I would never amount to anything in life and would simply be a great source of embarrassment for him. Who can ever make it in life with the grades that I had? I would never amount to anything except a reminder that he had left his other gifted children to settle with my mom and me.

I literally felt as though I was standing on the outside of the room watching myself being dismembered limb by limb. I remember thinking that if “my own daddy doesn’t want me, what is there left for me? Why stay around to continue to disappoint the one person for whom I had

experienced so much trauma?” After his tirade, I went into his and my mother’s bedroom and retrieved his gun. My father had a small arsenal of weapons, firearms specifically, that I can remember: a .357 Magnum, a double-barreled shot gun, and, I believe, some sort of rifle. I may be mistaken about the rifle, but he taught my grandmother to shoot with his Magnum and he injured his shoulder practicing with the shotgun because of the kickback. Both of these experiences I witnessed personally which served to acquaint me with the power of these weapons. As I sat at my desk looking at this gun all night, I kept attempting to convince myself that there was some good reason that I needed to stay here, to stay alive. All I could come up with was that my mother would be so embarrassed if people knew that *her* daughter had committed suicide. I mean, since her husband had been so careless and callous with her heart and their marriage over the years, I really could not see adding to her suffering. I wasn’t concerned that she may have actually loved me to a great degree and would miss her only child. I just didn’t want her to be embarrassed!

I am absolutely incredulous when I reflect on the flimsy rationale I embraced to stay alive. I remember telling Jesus that if he could just help me not to blow my brains out until sunrise, I would find a way to keep moving. I intuitively understood that if I could just get through the night, I would be alright. I remember looking at the top of the shaded window all night until, finally, the light of day peaked through. I had made it! I was safe – at least until the next time! The absolute feeling of loneliness, unworthiness, and abandonment had pervaded my being for so many years of my life, I have difficulty remembering when I felt any other way. These feelings were mirrored by the other women who participated in this research. There is one major difference: These women – for the most part – did not experience a consistent relationship with their fathers. One of the participants has never known who fathered her nor why he did not

participate in her life. Interacting with these women on a personal basis and hearing their stories of isolation and the deep, almost overwhelming feeling of unworthiness that pervaded the lived experiences of all of our lives absolutely inspired this research.

Analysis Process

The first step in the analysis process occurred long before any information was gathered. It began with the realization that a closely knitted group of friends experienced the same or very similar emotional trauma in their childhood and early teen years. All of these experiences and traumas seemed to stem from the same source: the lack of a loving relationship with their biological fathers. Of course, when pursuing research from a qualitative viewpoint, the analysis can be quite complicated and involved even within the subtleties of its propositions. After all of the focus groups and personal interviews were completed, the information had to be logged using transcription technology. There was constant comparison of the recordings to transcriptions to verify that the information on the page was consistent with the information on the recordings.

Many, many hours were spent rewinding the recordings and reviewing each line of text to ensure accuracy of translation. After assuring that the translations were accurate, countless hours were then spent massaging the data utilizing Grounded Theory, a method of qualitative research that allows researchers – irrespective of their experiential background – to perform qualitative research efficiently and effectively because these methods help in structuring and organizing data-gathering and analysis (Charmaz, 1996). The differentiable characteristics of Grounded Theory as an effective qualitative tool are: 1) simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis phases of research; 2) the creation of analytic codes and categories developed from data rather than from preconceived hypotheses; 3) the development of middle-range theories to explain behavior and processes; 4) memo-making, that is writing analytic notes to explicate and

fill out categories, the crucial intermediate step between coding data and writing first drafts of papers; 5) theoretical sampling, that is, sampling for theory construction (and not for representativeness of a given population) meant to check and refine the analyst's emerging conceptual categories; and 6) delay of the literature review (Charmaz, pg. 28, 1996).

After reviewing the proffered information in the research, constant reevaluation of procedure and data were necessary to ensure that there were no false allusions to preconceived theories or hypotheses guiding the research. The information gathering processes had to allow – and ensure – that the participants were being encouraged and supported to reveal their own truths from their own ways of being. The focus groups and personal interviews were scripted with questions that seemed to be the most natural questions based on the subject of the study, but the process allowed for the emergence of questions and directions that were not proposed prior to the research process. For example, when one of the participants revealed that she had experienced what is socially deemed as inappropriate touching from her father – an occurrence that she had previously never remembered – the breadth of questioning naturally expanded to explore the idea of suppressed memories and the associated emotions. As the analysis progressed, the process of reviewing the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups utilizing line by line coding techniques yielded preliminary categories. These categories were highlighted by writing short words in the margins of the transcript and consist review of the information gathered from the audio recordings.

As the analysis progressed, another strategy found under the umbrella of grounded theory was utilized; that method was the process of memo-writing. “Memo writing consist of taking your categories apart by breaking them into their components. Define your category as carefully

as possible. That means you identify its properties or characteristics, look for its underlying assumptions and show how and when the category develops and changes (Charmaz, pg. 43). Memo writing allows the researcher to write freely and contemplate ideas and make connectives without commitment. The analysis also required that the constant comparative method be utilized in order to better make comparisons between categories and then between concepts (Charmaz, p.44). For example, when the experience of all of the study participants involved having an abortion, that category was then put under the broader category of not desiring to raise children in the same fatherless experience to which they themselves were exposed.

Repeatedly, the transcripts were read and reread in conjunction with listening to the audio recordings to further generate categories. The observational information gathered from these processes was written in the margins of the transcript and in a separate notebook to allow the researcher to see patterns and condense information and categories. The information proffered in this study was at times overwhelming, but constant feedback and clarification from the participants aided greatly in the classification, interpretation, and understanding of information gathered. While the participants were not overly eager to delve into the reading and deciphering of information, they did very much desire to provide accurate and affective information. Thus, the participants were willing to review information at any time requested during this process. The importance of member checking with the participants was two-fold: 1) it provides a method of 'quality control' in the qualitative process because it allows the participants to ensure the validity and accuracy of their information offered during the research process. This can have a therapeutic effect because it allows the participant to feel as if their story has been told and no longer holds power over them, thus simulating the benefits of a group therapy by normalizing the phenomenon experienced (Harper&Cole, 2012); and, 2) it allows the participants to revisit

projected meanings and interpretations by the researcher to ascertain whether the projections accurately elucidate their feelings about the experiences that they have shared.

All of the data that are presented in this study were analyzed personally and without the aid of any qualitative research technology tools. The recordings of the focus groups and personal interviews were reviewed many, many times over the course of many hours and compared with notes and transcripts to ensure that information was consistent and fluid. Revisions were constantly occurring due to the continuous massaging of the data until the completion of the study. During each phase of the data exploration – initial reading of transcripts, coding and classifying, and later reviewing of the actual paper – the assistance of a peer reviewer was enlisted in order to ensure that any exegesis of the data was sound and that the emerging themes were actually manifesting via the massaging of the data and not derived from preconceived notions of the researcher. The person with whom the coding and themes were discussed is a well published, qualitative researcher that is a member of the Texas A&M University system.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Participants shared honest information about their experiences with respect to living under the auspices of an absentee father. The participants in this study have varied experiences with their fathers; some have had – and still have – a generally loving father/daughter relationship, but experienced disruptions during their lives that severed or greatly damaged the relationship. One of the participants has never had a relationship with her father, but does know him and other members of his family. One participant has never met her father; this participant has actually been misled several times over the course of her life regarding the identity of her birth father. These women exhibited classically defined symptoms of the Fatherless Woman Syndrome as described and defined by Jonetta Rose Barras.

Summary of Chapter

These women were chosen specifically because of the nature of their father/daughter relationship and the experiences that they had with their fathers – or lack thereof; since the majority of the relationships were non-existent or volatile, the assumptions regarding their individual life experiences are in line with the research on the life experience of women that do not have the presence of a male role model figure. The participants were members of a small, tightly knitted circle of friends; some members of the circle have been friends since high school, spanning thirty-plus years, while the time that the entire group of women as a whole have interacted spans roughly six to seven years. All members belonged to a small non-profit organization that served as the initial bases for communication. Over approximately seven years, the affiliation and service with the non-profit served as the foundation for a strong and loving friendship/sisterhood to take root and develop. Information about the participants and their relationship with their fathers was gathered via qualitative research methodologies; they participated in at least two focus groups and each member had an opportunity to clarify information in a personal session with the researcher.

This study assumed that each participant would offer honest, open, and accurate descriptions of their lives and experiences as fatherless daughters; they would answer questions without exaggeration or embellishments; and, they would absolutely honor each participants' right to release, express, and heal in a safe place – free of judgment and imputation. Also, as the researcher, I adhered to the agreement set forth before the commencement of the focus group and interview processes; I transcribed the participants statement exactly as they are offered – without inserting any personal thoughts or comments. I did not do anything that diminished – in any way – the impact of the participants testimonies regarding their lived experiences. All information

gathered during this process was kept confidential – to the extent previously agreed upon – outside of the confines of this study and its subsequent review and publishing in accordance with the requirements of the doctoral program Texas A&M University.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The impetus for this study was the exploration of the life choices of middle-aged Black women who navigated through their life experience without a father and/or a father figure. The research questions were:

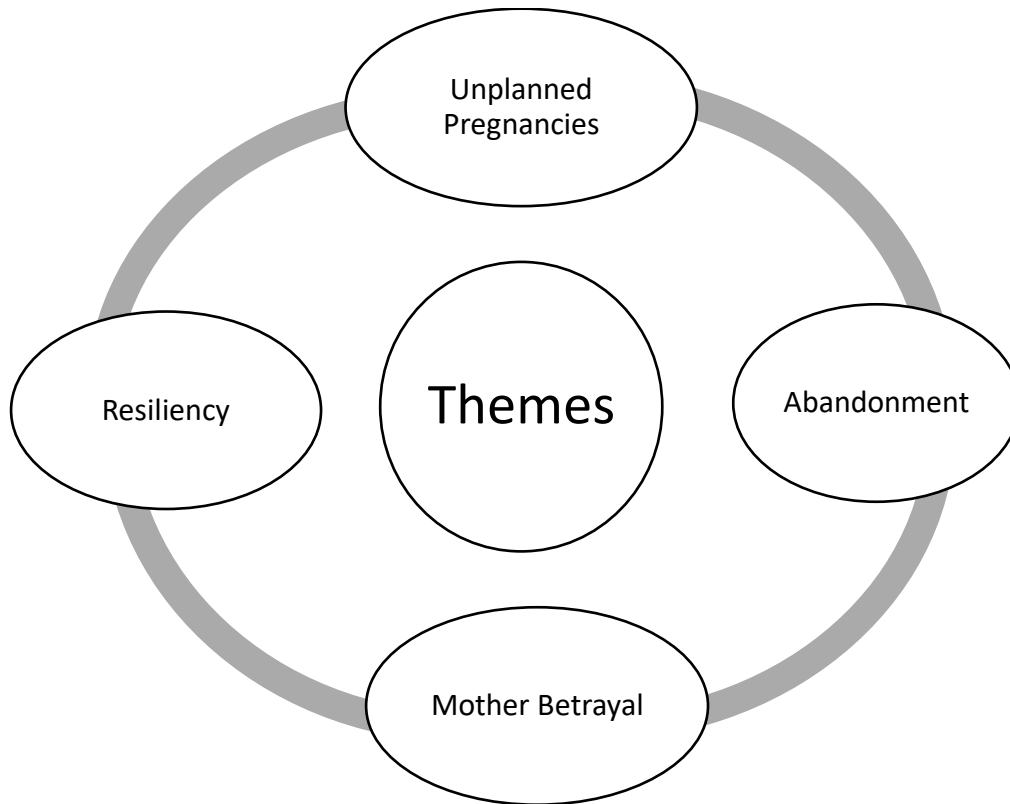
- 1.) What are the beliefs of four Black women about how their absentee fathers affected their life choices?
- 2.) How do four Black women share their stories of their life choices when they reflect on the absence of their father?

Themes

All four of the participants experienced a myriad of emotions regarding the absence of their father from their lives in their youth and as they matured into adulthood. Two of the four had experienced a tumultuous relationship with their fathers in their young life and which included many disruptions in their interactions over a significant span of time beginning at an early age. The other two women had scant to no interaction with their fathers and had encountered mixed emotions of sadness and acceptance of this absence. One of the last two participants has never known her father; further, she has absolutely no idea who fathered her and to her utter chagrin, has no familial resource to question. Grandfather, great grandfather, mother — all of her extended family with whom she had a relationship are all deceased.

The overarching themes of the study were: (1) unplanned pregnancies, (2) abandonment, (3) mother betrayal and (4) resiliency. All of the participants were represented in some measure by these four themes as depicted in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Themes



Theme 1 – Unplanned Pregnancies

The U.S. has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing in the industrialized world—and the highest rates in the U.S. are found among low-income black adolescents (Franklin, p. 339, 1998; Guttmacher.org, 2019). All of the participants were faced with the decision to become a mother far sooner than they desired and/or anticipated. Each of the participants became pregnant in their teens and had an abortion. One participant became pregnant again the following year and because of the trauma associated with the first abortion, decided to keep her baby and became a young mother. The following excerpts from the research are the participants’ reflections on what it meant to become pregnant at such a young age and how the process of getting an abortion affected them.

“I had an abortion at 16 years old. I didn’t even think about it; I wasn’t ready to have a baby outside of marriage. I worked, so I didn’t even have to ask anyone for help, per se; I took my boyfriend and my best friend with me! I borrowed some money from my Christmas club and took those two with me and had it done. I cried hard...I remember that. All I knew is that I wasn’t ready to take a baby home to my mother. I mean she told my brothers that if they didn’t have anything – a rubber – that they better put some saran wrap on it, so I knew that bringing a baby home was out of the question” (GIGI, FG1).

“I had an abortion...not too many people know about it. I won’t say that it is a big regret, but it is a decision that I had to make. I had literally forgotten about it until you (GIGI) shared it; I had just put it out of my mind. I shouldn’t have, but I had just moved out of my mother’s house not three (3) months earlier. Thank God that I had just graduated from college” (Bourgeois, FG1).

“I had a child at 18...previous to that, I had been pregnant at 16 years old. The father of the baby was 17 years old and quite a bit more mature than I was at the time. I won’t really go into detail, but suffice it to say that he knew some things sexually that were well out of my league. I was a very young girl and I knew that I wasn’t ready to have a baby! I had told my uncle that I was pregnant, and he was so worried that something would happen to me that he told my mother; needless to say, she was outraged! Our relationship changed for the worse when she found out that I was pregnant. Our relationship has never recovered – we have never recovered. Her disappointment has propelled her to do some truly unforgiveable things in my life. I wanted an abortion, but I was so far along that I had to go into the hospital. The experience was so traumatic...I have not been able to get past it. All that I can really remember

is that they induced my labor and I know that I expelled a blob of something that I think was alive. I didn't see it, but I can't forget it" (Poet, FG1).

"I was 18 or 19 in college – pregnant and I knew that I wasn't ready to do it! I knew that my ex-boyfriend wasn't ready either because he was going through his own situation. I knew that the way that I had grown up, I knew that I didn't want my child growing up like that. I wasn't mature enough to raise a child, and who knows? I might have had more after that! I just didn't want to be this breeder walking around...and so I did it" (Cyber, FG1).

Theme 2 – Abandonment

One quarter of the families in the United States live in single parent homes. In the Black American community, the numbers are even greater: Six out of every ten Black families are raised in single parent homes. Women who have grown up in single parented homes (headed by females) are more likely to establish single parented homes as an experience for their own children (Wilson, pp. 9-10, 2002; Prospect.org 2019). It would be irresponsible not to indicate that there is a plethora of reasons for this phenomenon; however, for the purpose of this research, the focus is on the purposeful exodus of the father from the home.

Each of the participants offered that they believed that a father was definitely a necessity to a stable and loving childhood. At some point in their lives, all of the women interacted with their 'father' or a father figure and the relationship did not last. When those male figures were no longer prevalent in their existence, each experienced a deep sense of loss and grief.

"As a child, the most important relationship in my life was my relationship with my dad! My dad was my hero; I thought that he could do everything! But when he left the house, everything changed. I started having sex at 14 years old, sneaking boys in the house, going over their house. I was terrible! I was looking for my dad in other

people – other men; my behavior became promiscuous. When my father was there, I was afraid of him, so I was in control, but once he left the house, I began to smoke, drink, and have sex and everything else because mom was working. When I was child, my dad was a superhero; he was my family’s protector and a guide for my sister and me. He was the example of what a man and a father should be! He could fix anything. There was nothing that he couldn’t do; he was like Superman – if it was broke...he could fix it! I loved the ground that he walked on. I also had a little fear of him. I was sixteen years old when I had my abortion; I wasn’t ready for a child and the boy I was messing with wasn’t someone that I wanted to have a baby with. If my father had been around, I wouldn’t been having sex and messing around in school and messing up in school” (Poet, PI, FG1).

“I never really knew my father. Actually, I only have one picture of him...he was a tall good looking, light brown skinned man with a flat face and high cheekbones like an Indian and curly wavy hair. My mom was this really short, very dark-skinned lady – she was all of about 4’11” tall. In my head, I imagine them together and she was 19 when she had me; she had just graduated from high school. I never spent much time with my biological father, and I didn’t think about it much until my siblings said that I didn’t have a father, because my siblings and I have different parents. What I remember best about my dad is that he used to let me ride his dog, well really it was my grandmother’s dog. My father was murdered when I was in about the 9th or 10th grade. I remember that I cried, and I was so sad! But what I now know is that I felt abandoned – even though it was not his fault, I took his death personally! He left me...” (GIGI, PI).

“If he walked up on me in the street, I couldn’t tell you yes or no...! Not only do I not know him, I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHO HE IS! I don’t know his name; I don’t even know for

sure that he exists...! My mother won't talk about him...the man that I thought was my father – my stepdad – turned out not to be my father. He got with my mom when she was pregnant with me and the story goes that he used to dress me up and carry me around as his daughter. He really loved my mother and people (his family) asked how he could marry a woman that was pregnant with another man's baby! She broke his heart. My mom cheated on him (my stepfather) and he was devastated. That defined how he treated women from then on. He started drinking and left her; he told his mom one day that he was leaving for Chicago. He left and never returned until around 2000. I was around three or four years old when he left. Over the years, it seemed that he wanted to play a larger role in our lives but was too hurt by my mother's affair. I believe that he knew who my biological father was but would never tell me. I didn't have a relationship with a man, so I didn't know how to relate to a man" (Cyber, PI, FG1).

“My father moved to California...that was it! He left and my mother chose not to follow. I was about eight or nine years old. The truth is that he abused my mother and that was her opportunity to leave the marriage. I didn't remember that he had abused me until I was married – a grown woman! It came up again for me while participating in this process! When he moved without us, that was it for us. He always paid child support and that was something that my mom never told us...I don't know why. I really didn't miss him until I was an adult; he wasn't an integral part of my life. I needed him while I was attempting to complete my final year of college. I was working a full-time job and going to school full time; all of this was done without a car...in a Chicago winter! I would awaken early in the morning and go to school and then go to work; I didn't get home most nights until after 11:00 p.m. and then had to get right back up the next day for school and work. I was so tired riding the bus...in the winter time in Chicago...working a full-time job and going to school! I almost quit – I just couldn't make it

anymore. I wrote my father a letter – per his instructions to my mother – and told him my situation and asked him to buy me a car. He told me no and that was that! My mother bought me the car and I didn't drop out of college. I didn't speak to him after that time for many years. I mean...I really needed him then and he wasn't there for me" (Bourgeois, FG1, PI).

Theme 3 – Mother Betrayal

The betrayal of a child by a parent can be a most devastating experience. Parents are supposed to provide for the needs of their children while they grow. Surely, those needs are the basics of food, clothing and shelter; however, there is a deeper need for emotional and spiritual support. The latter needs of the human experience may appear abstract, but they are the precepts upon which each person's psychological health is based. What happens when those tenets of life are – not simply unmet, but willfully denied? In the case when a parent actively performs some action that belies their role, the betrayal is more deeply felt. 'When a parent...violates a fundamental ethic of human relationships, victims may need to remain unaware of the trauma not to reduce suffering but rather to promote survival' (Freyd, p. 307, 1997). Each of these women categorized an event or events perpetrated by their mother as a level of betrayal.

"One of the most important decisions I made was confronting my mother; it didn't do a whole lot for me, but I felt better for a little while. I got the best night's sleep after that confrontation! It didn't change the way she believed because she thought that she made me a better woman because of the way she raised us...of course I didn't agree. I don't even know who my biological father is because she won't tell me and no one else in the family will tell me. And the stepfather that wanted to be there for us could not because of the actions taken by my mother. If she had just been the woman that she could have been for him...perhaps my story would have been a little different" (Cyber, FGI, PI).

“My birth father gave me a red bike – that’s all that I can remember about him being there. I don’t know if it was all his doing or my mom’s doing...that she kept us apart. I remember that my grandmother [dad’s mom] was going to pick me up to take me to him because he was sick or something and my mother stayed out all day. I don’t know if I missed him. We had such busy lives. We were always doing something or going someplace. It was some of those times I was supposed to go with him [my biological], my mother made sure that I was out all day. I know for sure one time because when we came back, my grandmother was sitting on the stairs waiting...she and my mother had words, but it was so long ago, I don’t remember” (GiGi, PI).

“Something I have not told many people and I was reminded of it here today is that my father physically abused me – and I was about four or five years old – he didn’t penetrate me but he did touch me inappropriately! I didn’t even remember that it happened until I was about thirty years old and married; I was having sex with my husband and it came up during that experience! What I remember most is that my mother used to get me after and clean me up and give me a bath...when he was finished. I don’t know what that was about...I don’t remember if she said anything, but I know that she was abused by my dad, too. My mom didn’t work, so my mom depended on him...when he decided to move California, we just didn’t go” (Bourgeois, FG1).

“My mom was a “stay at home mom,” when dad left, she had to go to work to support us – my sister and me! We went from always having someone around to not having anyone. That’s when things started to happen...I would have boys coming over my house; I went over to little boys’ houses having sex. It was my mom that made me have the abortion, she was so angry with

me! Till this day, our relationship has never been the same; she is disrespectful and cruel to me and to my children” (Poet, FG1, PI).

Theme 4 – Resiliency

There are numerous ways to describe the ability of someone to bounce back and thrive in the face of adversity; one of the new go-to terms and paradigm expanders is the word grit. Grit is defined as the perseverance and passion for long term goals (Duckworth, p. 1087, 2007). Furthermore, “what matters most in a child’s development...is whether we are able to help her develop...persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence” (Tough, p. 15, 2012). There is no magic involved in simply putting one foot in front of the other and moving forward with life. ‘Resilience is the “ability to ‘bounce back’ or reintegrate after difficult life experiences” (Buzzanell, 2010 p. 1). Resilient individuals adapt to the changing needs of their situation and use positive emotions to find meaning and return to normalcy after stressful experiences’ (Hortsman, 2015, p 1147). The women at the center of this research each embody these traits and naturally exhibit the propensity to thrive and accomplish the goal of a life well lived.

“I have learned that you cannot hold onto things and survive...I gotta just accept it and just move forward with my life; you can’t hold on to stuff because it will just take you down. I had more in my life to look forward to than to sit back and be sad for myself or be angry. I never questioned my father about his abusing me because it never crossed my mind to do so; I never thought about it. By the time that my father and I reconciled, he was ill with diabetes and cancer and our time was limited” (Bourgeois, FG2).

“I was a Seventh Day Adventist. I was going to be dis-fellowshipped from the church because I had committed an open sin; it was obvious that I had been sinning because I was

pregnant. The woman or girl was dis-fellowshipped, but not the boys or men. After that I didn't care anymore...I was through with it! I have worked on myself since that time and have moved forward. That's why I don't ascribe any significance to religion...They rally against abortion and call that a sin, but then won't help the babies when they arrive" (Cyber, FG2).

"I have spent my life doing whatever needed to be done so that I could be good enough! Whether I wanted to be good enough for my dad (stepfather), husbands, jobs – token jobs, I had to overachieve; I had to be perfect! The question that was always in the back of my mind was "why aren't I good enough?" My struggle had always been with myself...from six years old – I am not good enough! I have worked on myself metaphysically and that is why I know what my triggers are and that stemmed from me not having a dad of my own and attempting to fit in with my stepfather and HIS children. As an adult, I don't have any regrets stemming from my life choices; I am living well...I am doing good. I know that things are always working out for me" (GiGi, PI).

"Because of my dad's behavior (he became an alcoholic and a womanizer) as a young girl, it changed how I looked at him and men as an adult woman; he shattered the image that I had of him! I was having sex, smoking and drinking at 14 years old because my father left the house when I was 12 years old. After I got shot around 26 years old, I began to get my life on track; my dad had stopped drinking at this point in time, and he came to get me and my children to stay with him. I finally moved out of my father's house at age 32 and have moved forward on my own since that time. At this point, I am strictly longing for peace in my life...no matter what happens, I will be okay with it" (Poet, PI).

The research describing the lives of young girls that move through life without the benefit of a consistently participatory father is bleak. Although life has challenged these four women in

multifarious ways, they still managed to evolve into well balanced, steady and confident women. The research yielded the anticipated overarching themes of unplanned pregnancies, abandonment, mother betrayal and resiliency as the lived experience of these women, but also a level of acceptance and resolution with the events of their lives and the journey that they are and have been undertaking that was not mentioned in any of the previous research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The motivation for embarking upon this journey and performing this research was based upon the fact that five middle-aged Black women – four of whom became the focus of this study – found resonance with each other while working together for a small non-profit organization. This resonance inspired them to form a closely-knit friendship. The many hours that these women spent dialoging and bonding yielded the recognition of commonalities in life challenges/experiences and the observed similarity of battle scars. In other words, a truly ‘soul stirring’ bond of kinship and sisterhood emerged based upon the parallel events of their lives. They found a common basis for their relatedness to be early interactions – or the lack thereof – with their father. The research questions guiding this study were: 1.) what are the beliefs of four Black women about how their absent fathers affected their live; and 2.) how do four Black women share their stories of their life choices when they reflect on the absence of their father? This chapter provides an overview of the results of the study, implications of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research on this subject.

Themes related to research questions

What are the beliefs of four Black women about how their absentee father affected their lives? Three of the four themes emerged within the context of this question, namely, unplanned pregnancies, abandonment and mother betrayal. The women who participated in this research faced a number of challenging and seeming insurmountable obstacles as a consequence of the lack of paternal interaction in their lives. These experiences elicited various emotions that resulted in drastic actions and reactions that had a profound and lasting effect on their lives.

Unplanned pregnancies

All of the participants – four out of four – experienced at least one unplanned pregnancy that resulted in an abortion. The advent of the early experience of teen pregnancy coincides with the research that asserts that Black girls who are reared in an environment that is absent of a father or a consistent male figure are more likely to experience poor performance in school; exhibit vulnerable to low self-esteem and/or self-dissatisfaction; more likely to have several sexual partners early; likely to have an early pregnancy (Doswell, 1998) and experience divorce in adulthood. The women who participated in this study experienced all of these aforementioned possibilities across the board. Three out of four of the participants have gone through at least one divorce; one of the three divorcees had two divorces. The fourth participant did not marry until in her mid-forties but has experienced a turbulent relationship with her husband during their ten plus years of marriage and they have contemplated divorce several times. The participant that married later also recounted many instances where she was rebellious and performing poorly in school and at home; she also exhibited a high level of sexual promiscuity and drug use in her early years typifying many of the assertions offered in the research.

In the case of three of the participants, they were able to experience having a child or children after the abortion in their youth. One of the participants became pregnant the next year after her abortion and decided to continue that pregnancy through to birth; however, one participant never experienced pregnancy nor childbirth due to unrelated health issues that resulted in a hysterectomy. This participant desired to have children and although she did not regret her decision to have an abortion, there was a longing in her voice that revealed a knowing that the experience of motherhood in the traditional way was no longer an option for her; it is a pain that heretofore, she had been unwilling to address.

Two of the participants that became pregnant at the age of sixteen years old. One was able to directly connect her behavior to the absence of her father from her life and lamented that when her father left the home, she became promiscuous and out of control. The other participant who became pregnant at 16 years old had not thought about it because she did have a stepfather in her life. However, during this process, she began to see connections between some of her actions and her feelings regarding the absence of her biological father from her life.

The last participant explains that she was simply not equipped to have a child. At the time of her pregnancy, she was not mature enough and the father of the baby was going through something traumatic himself. He has since chosen to live his life as an openly gay male. She said that he was in a state of confusion and she knew that he was in a battle with himself; but she was too young and naïve to know how to handle his bewilderment regarding his sexual preferences. Because she had not had a stable male influence in her life, she had never known a man and did not know how to deal with a man. Fathers provide their daughters with a masculine example, so if she does not grow up with a proper example, she will have less insight and she will be more likely to go for a man that will replicate the abandonment of her father (Meyers, 2018). The only thing that she was certain of was that she did not want her child to live the life that she had lived in her early childhood; she did not want to be the kind of mother that her mother displayed nor raise a child without a father.

Abandonment

A strong sentiment that pervaded each of the participants' experience was the feeling of abandonment. Even though they were unable to translate their feelings into an understanding that they could articulate in their youth, during this process – the focus groups and the personal interviews – they became aware that the deeply rooted feelings of loss were really attributable to

feelings of abandonment by their father. The feeling of abandonment had at its core a lingering sense of simply not being ‘good enough’! One of the women was surprised by the realization that she felt abandoned after her father’s death. Her father was actually murdered when she was in the 9th or 10th grade, and therefore, had no choice about his lack of participation in her life. For this participant, the assertion seemed a bit ridiculous because the act of being murdered was not something that she could perceive of her dad’s willing participation. She states that while she grew up in the household with a stepfather, she was still imbued with feelings of unworthiness even with a male presence in her life. This participant stated that she has spent many years confronting her feelings of unworthiness, ‘why wasn’t she good enough to have her father?’ A woman’s total sense of self is diminished when a healthy relationship with her father is not formed (Meyers, 2018). Journalist Jonetta Rose Barras (2002) named this phenomenon *The Fatherless Woman Syndrome*. The characteristic of a woman deeply situated in this experience is one who is defined by the debilitating feeling of a constant state of unworthiness. This feeling of unworthiness will manifest itself in various ways: Chronic rage, anger, depression, sexual promiscuity – addictions of any kind (Barras, 2000, p.6).

One of the participant’s father sexually abused her when she around the age of four or five years old, a fact that she remembered for the first time when she was in her 30s and married. Since the time of her first realizations with respect to the abuse, she had not really remembered or faced it again until becoming engaged in this research process. The participant recounts a critical time in her life when she faced great hardship working a full-time job and attending school full-time. During this time, she was having such a difficult experience that she considered dropping out of college. In the midst of experiencing these challenges, she reached out to her father and asked his assistance in purchasing a car so that she was not forced to stand

at the bus stop late at night. He refused without any plausible explanation, offered only that he thought it best if she attempted to get the car on her own. When she needed him most, he refused to help her. She did not have any communications with him for many years after that incident.

Another participant felt that her father was so integrated into the fabric of the family, that her life was totally derailed when he left. He is depicted as a hero in her young eyes and there was nothing that he was unable to accomplish in her mind. When alcohol became more important to him than the stability of her family, her view of him changed. He went from being her hero to becoming her absentee father. She can clearly connect her early childhood challenges to the absence of her father in her life; early sexual exploration at 14 years old; drugs and poor school performance; first pregnancy and abortion at 16 years of age and a subsequent pregnancy the next year which resulted in the birth of her first child. She states that if he had not left her family, there is no way that she would have had the opportunity to be exposed to all that she experienced. Fatherlessness has a devastating effect on a girl's self-esteem; her confidence in her self-efficacy and value as a human being can be diminished if her father is absent from her life (Meyers, 2018). This participant asserts without doubt that she would have waited to have a child; she would have gone to college after high school; she would have had a totally different adult life than the one in which she is participating now.

The last participant has no idea who fathered her. When she says that statement out loud, even she is incredulous that that is her truth. She states that her mother will not tell her *anything* about her biological father and has forbade the rest of the family from telling her. She had limited interaction with her stepfather who married her mother when she was pregnant with her. He cared for her as his own and was her *daddy* until she was around four or five years old. At

that time, he found out that her mother cheated on him and he left the family. When he met her mother, she was pregnant with her (she is the eldest), when he left them, there were four children. He proclaimed that he was so destroyed by her mother's betrayal that he could not live with her anymore; consequently he moved to Chicago and they did not see him again until around 2000. People who are brought up in unhappy or disrupted homes are more likely to become teenage mothers, to make unhappy marriages and to divorce (Bowlby, 1982). Of course, when her stepfather left the home, he did not support his family and they were very poor. Her mother worked, but she could not make ends meet; there were times when they were unsecured and without food. She states that if it had not been for her grandfather and great grandfather, they would not have survived. Her family was able to survive because those two men would make sure that they had food. When she was faced with her own divorce as an adult, the feelings of abandonment that she endured as a child resurfaced; she experienced a great deal of angst because she wanted her daughter to know life with a participating father – something that she herself had never experienced.

Mother Betrayal

When children are forced to experience life in a single parented home, the pressure to raise a mentally and physically healthy child who is well adjusted and thriving is left on the shoulders of the remaining parent. In far too many cases, that responsibility rest solely with the mother or some other female relative. In the case of Black children and the Black familial structure, with percentages as high as 66% to 72% of all Black children being raised in a female headed household, fatherlessness is almost normative. The pressures of raising children without the support – mental, physical and, especially, financial remuneration – can exact a toll so great that the remaining parent (mother) succumbs to feelings of anxiety, depression and anger. Any

of these emotions can manifest into behavioral anomalies from the mother that can be interpreted as betrayal by the child.

All participants expressed a deeply rooted feeling that their mother had betrayed them in some manner although only two were willing to express, openly, a disdain for the behavior that their mother displayed. One of these two participant's mother exhibited such violent and verbally abusive behavior upon discovering her pregnancy, that their relationship is still in a state of disrepair. The other two participants were able to elucidate on the questionable actions taken by their mother but were seemingly unwilling to attach an emotive response.

One of the two participants who was willing to voice clear displeasure about her mother's behavior stated that, "one of the most important decisions I made as an adult was to confront my mother... I got the best night's sleep after that confrontation." During the course of the study, this participant further expounded on the damage that her mother's behavior engendered.

The first and, for this participant, the most heinous of her mother's actions is keeping the identity of her biological father a secret. Her mother's influence over her family was ubiquitous – no one would even discuss her father with her; they certainly would never divulge his name or any information about him. Now, she laments, everyone who may have had some idea about his identity or anything about his side of the family has transitioned. This participant further explains that her mother was so wrapped in the church that she made life hard for them; they were active Seventh Day Adventists. They were not allowed to celebrate any holidays – not even to recognize their birthdays – and they were not allowed to even discuss sex much less take birth control pills. When she became pregnant as a teenager, her mother paraded her before the church elders and members and supported their determination to have her excommunicated; she was supposed to expiate her sins by leaving the church community. The only support she had

was from some of the other women in the church who protested that it was unfair to excommunicate her from the church and nothing be required of the boy for whom she became pregnant. This participant also holds a deep resentment towards her mother because her mother cheated on her stepfather and thus further ensured that she would not have a father figure in her life. She mourns the loss of her stepfather because he wanted to be there for her and her siblings. Her stepfather greatly desired to play a role in her and her siblings (he is her siblings' biological father) life, but – in her opinion – her mom's treacherous act of marital betrayal eliminated the possibility of a participatory father.

The other participant who articulates with clarity her mother's betrayal promulgates the story of her abortion as the catalyst to the disintegration of her relationship with her mother. When this participant discovered that she was pregnant, she was pretty far along in the pregnancy. She does not recall the exact length of time that she carried the baby, but it was far past the allowance of a "regular" abortion. She recounts the story with such a palpable sense of pain and terror. She had only told the young man for whom she was pregnant – he was 17 years old and she was 16 years old – and her uncle of her condition. The uncle was so afraid for her wellbeing that he told her mother. Her mother was *livid* to say the least. This is when their relationship took a nose dive into an abyss. Forty years later, their relationship is still in a state of disrepair. Once her mother found out that she was pregnant, this participant had no choice but to have an abortion. She stated that she did want the abortion because the young man was not someone with whom she wished to share a child. As is recounted in the section on unplanned pregnancies, the ordeal was traumatic; but what is even more traumatic is the dissolution of her relationship with her mother. After the discovery of her pregnancy, her mother became violently verbally abusive – she was nasty to her daughter before and after the abortion. The next year, at

age 16 years old, this participant once again became pregnant; because of the trauma she experienced during her first pregnancy, she decided to keep the baby. Her mother has belittled and maligned her character and the characters of her children since their inception and birth; the children are well into their 30's nearly 40 years old and her mother still disrespects them all.

The last two participants offer stories regarding their mother's actions but stop short of utilizing abject verbiage to characterize the effects; they tell the stories and leave the analysis and interpretation to the observer. Recounting for perhaps only the second time what happened to her as a small girl, the first participant had a memory resurface during the course of this study that she had suppressed. When she was approximately four or five years old, her father molested her; she was unable to associate a numerical count to the assaults; she only remembers that "every time" it happened, her mother would give her a bath. Her father was very abusive to her mother and she rationalized her mother's actions to perhaps those of fear. When questioned about the memory, she was asked if she confronted her mother or she confronted her father. The answer to both questions was no; it never occurred to her to question either of them about the memory. The first time that the memory surfaced, she was in an intimate moment with her then husband; she states that she was in her 30's at the time of the flashback and it took some time to absorb what she was remembering. She also learned that her father sent child support to her mother for their care, but her mother never mentioned the fact that he did assist her financially. Her mother had the child support checks sent to her grandmother's house; thus she and her siblings never knew of his assistance. The only way she found out is that her aunts, her mother's siblings, told her that her dad had always supported the family. When questioned about her lack of questioning, she said that her mother was always a very private person and it just never occurred to her to confront her mother about anything.

The last participant also discussed ways in which her mother undermined her, but never seemed willing to categorize the actions as harmful or even questionable. This participant lived a great deal of her life in the home with a stepfather. She says that he was a good man and, for all intents and purposes, he was her father. However, there was a great deal of conflict within her about her relationship with her stepfather; he was kind to her but she still wondered why there was a lack of a relationship with her biological father. She provided detailed accounts of several instances where her mother denied her an opportunity to spend time with her biological father. She describes their life as being very “busy” and that her mother always had something for them to do or some place to go. Therefore, any time her biological father’s family wanted to spend time with her, they were always too busy. This participant often articulated strong feelings of not being good enough; she discovered that those feelings were deeply rooted in her internalizing the lack of relationship with her biological father. He was murdered when she was in the 9th or 10th grade, thus eliminating any opportunity for resolution and connection. She has worked diligently in her adult life to find peace with the death of her father and to resolve her feelings of self-lack.

Resiliency

The four women that participated in this research project are true exemplars of resiliency. Each has defiantly confronted their personal opposition and challenges whether they were environmental or internal. All have reflected on their lives and decisions with courage and humility; crying when they needed to and laughing when crying just didn’t seem to ease the suffering. According to Dr. Mark J. Maggio (2006), there are several defining characteristics of resilient people: 1) the ability to manage strong feelings and impulses; 2) the ability to communicate skillfully and solve problems; 3) the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps

to carry them out; and 4) possess positive self-image and confidence in personal strengths and abilities. There is one more characteristic belongs on the list: the willingness to be vulnerable. For “[v]ulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat; it is understanding the necessity of both; it’s engaging. It’s being all in...daring to show up and be seen” (Brown, 2012).

There are many substantive instances where each of these women demonstrated a remarkable resilience. Each of them has contemplated the events of their lives and discovered a level of courage, strength, and self-efficacy that can only be revealed through the living of life. They have validated some of the previous research on female children of absentee fathers by the choices and behaviors that were displayed during youth. They have also moved beyond the inherent projections of earlier research by becoming highly successful and self-aware women.

For example, Bourgeois recounts the story of her efforts to pursue her undergraduate degree while working a full-time job as a major challenge – both physically and mentally – that she faced. Simultaneously she attended school full-time and worked full-time to support herself and help alleviate some of the financial burden on her mother. The hardships were many and the support light; her mother struggled to care for the family on her own and her father, who was not active in her life at that time, refused to support her. She states that although she was at ‘the “end of her rope’ on several occasions, especially while going to school and working in the frigid Chicago winters, she knew that she had to dig deep and find the strength to complete her undergraduate studies. Bourgeois is the only one of the participants who did not ever have a child; the realization that she would not have the opportunity to be a mother in the traditional way still haunted her. Her mother died and Bourgeois underwent major surgery all within the span of 30 days. She recounts that she was preparing to have emergency surgery but her ‘spirit’ would not allow her to do so; something kept telling her to not have the surgery even though her

health was a disparate situation. She remembers that her physician was vehemently opposed to that decision. As fate would have it, her mother died not long after the scheduled surgery date. If she had proceeded with the surgery at the scheduled time, she would have missed her mother's funeral services. Bourgeois had an abortion at 19 years of age; she got married and endured a bitter divorce in her thirties; she experienced sexual abuse by her father; and she lost her beautiful mother. Still, she has managed to define and experience an excellent life according to her. When she was questioned about her tenacity – her unwillingness to not succumb to despair – she replied that in life “you gotta just do what you gotta do!” She has known disappointment and loss and, yet, she has managed live without blame and to be open enough to love anyway.

Cyber made her entrance into the world in the arms of a man who was prepared to love her and be a father to her. He experienced some disappointment in the relationship with her mother and then he exited her life. The loss became more acute when no other man ever filled that role; she did not know her biological father – she had no name or any other identifying information – and her step father was beyond her reach. Without the additional support of a second parent, her family suffered greatly. In fact, she stated that many times there was not enough food for her family; her mother had to care for four children alone. There were several occurrences that posed great challenges for her mentally and experientially. She became pregnant as a teen and was then brought before the congregation of her church to be excommunicated. The young man with whom she copulated was not humiliated in this way; in fact, his participation was not publicly addressed at all. She chose to have an abortion and was very clear that the decision was born from her understanding of herself and her preparation for being a parent; her greatest fear was the potential of being the kind of mother that her mother had been to her and her siblings. The fact that she and her mother are still estranged in this present

moment is indicative of the continuing familial strain. Cyber eventually got married and had a daughter. The marriage did not last and Cyber attributes its failure to the fact that they simply were not ready to get married; she was pregnant and succumbed to familial (mother) pressure to marry. She states that they were living together already and that they loved each other, but they were not ready to marry; if they had followed their own intentions, they may have had a different outcome. She has faced open heart surgery; she had to rear her daughter on her own while attending school and resolve in her own mind that she will never know her biological father nor any family connected to him. Cyber is one of the top experts in her field and enjoys a fulfilling career affords her the opportunity to combine her love of traveling around the world with her work.

GiGi has had several successful careers and at this point is happiest with her role as the grandmother to her ‘babies’ and the part she plays in shaping their lives. The nomenclature ‘GiGi’ was so apropos because even in my role as the researcher, I was impressed by the level of adoration she possessed and displayed regarding her grandchildren. GiGi’s biological father was murdered when she was in the 9th or 10th grade; she remembers feeling abandoned by her father even though she understood that it was not in his control. She recounts instances when her mother thwarted her efforts to build a relationship with her father and his family by missing assigned pickup dates and times. Even though her interaction with her father was limited, she has a vivid memory of the way he looked and during the course of the research and commented frequently on how much her daughter reminds her of her father. GiGi, like the first two participants, had an abortion when she was a teen. She relays the story that she was 16 years old and all she knew was that she was not taking a baby home to her mother. She took the child’s father and her best friend to the abortion clinic with her; they had no idea where they were going

or why she insisted on their company until they arrived at the clinic. She made them understand that she was resolute in her decision and that the abortion was not up for discussion. When the abortion was complete, her two companions held her until her sobs subsided and then they all moved on with their lives. There is no doubt for her that she made the best decision for herself, but sometimes she still thinks about the little baby boy she left in an abortion clinic so many years ago; she paid for it herself and, thus, GiGi's mother and stepfather never knew about the tough choice that their young daughter had to make. GiGi survived the horror of her father's murder; she survived the trauma of an abortion at sixteen; she thrived through two divorces and rearing her daughter on her own. She has worked consistently on building her self-esteem and elevating her understanding that her sense of self-worth has nothing to do with any outer experience of her life only the strength of her confidence in the Universe to never make a mistake. GiGi has known pain and uses the memory of the tough times to remind herself to celebrate life every moment of every day. As she audibly reminds herself and the rest of the world, "...the Universe is always working things out for me!"

Poet is the little 'force to be reckoned with!' Poet was the first to be open and willing to let the raw sores be exposed; she made it easier for the others to be open about their experiences by her willingness to be so. Her story was different in that she had experienced a beautiful love relationship with her father until she was around 12 years old. As she stated, she believed that her father could do anything, fix anything. He was fun, loving, and smart; his family was the most important aspect of his life and he took loving care of them. When she was 12 years old her world changed; her father began to drink heavily and, subsequently, her parents divorced. After her father left the home, her life began to spiral out of control. Her mother went from being a stay home mom to having to work in order to support the household. Poet said that she

began using drugs and alcohol to deal with the emptiness in her heart. She became promiscuous – engaging in sexual activity at fourteen years old. She, like the other three participants, had an abortion. She was sixteen years old and she had waited so long to tell anyone about her pregnancy, that when she went in for the procedure, she had to have a partial birth abortion. It was such a traumatic event that the pain is still evident in her voice when she speaks of it. During all of this trauma, her father was still attached to his new passion: Drinking. As a young girl, Poet was exposed to some things that she may not have experienced if her father had still been active in her life. Poet has had a traumatizing abortion; experienced teen pregnancy and birth – rearing two children on her own; she has been shot and lived in some bad places. Yet with all of this challenging history, she managed to graduate from college and married her high school sweetheart. She writes poetry that exposes the dark shadows of the soul and offers a thoroughfare to healing through love, patience, forgiveness and acceptance. Poet is the power behind the women’s organization that introduced to us to each other and created the pathway for this research to manifest.

All of these participants have known joy and sorrow; they have lived! They have nursed doubt and uncertainty about themselves and their futures but managed to forge ahead anyway. What is perhaps most inspiring about these ladies is their willingness to come to the table and leave ‘it’ all there!

Implications of the Study

This study demonstrates that there is a need for open and honest dialogue within the Black community referencing the devastating effects of fatherlessness on all children, but especially on Black women and girls. The implication is not that women are more important than men, but that since women are *generally* the ones who have the role of rearing successive

generations, a study of how Black women process and make decisions about life without a father is a necessity. When Black girls grow up without a father or a consistent male figure *in the home* to model affective interactions between male and female, there is a deficit in the ability to communicate with the opposite sex effectively that is too great to ignore. Even in the face of the changing dynamics of community life – for example, the LGBTIQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual) ways of performing – the ability to witness healthy interactions between males and females is still of paramount importance to the evolution and growth of our community as a whole.

There must be a study on the affective paradigm of Black children – women especially – evolving in a space that is defined by LGBTIQA performance and fatherlessness; to look at only one aspect of Black life maturation is inadequate at best and irresponsible at worst. In this study, the effects of fatherlessness posed devastating consequences – at least temporarily for these four women. There is a need for healthy relationships across the board in the Black community; there is a need for this community to openly admit that a problem exists and be willing to address it through counseling and therapy in an effort to determine a solution or solutions. This absolutely means being open to scrutiny and evaluation, and as a community, being *vulnerable*.

There is also a strong need for counseling to address the known and yet undiscovered issues of fatherlessness in the Black community – fatherless Black girls especially. The issues that emerged in this study – unplanned pregnancies, abandonment, mother betrayal – are a known and relevant place to start and to encourage further explorations. The feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy that surfaced due to a lack of father participation in this small study implies that a larger more comprehensive look at this phenomenon is not only necessary, but paramount to this community's healing. The best place to start is with abandonment; this is

the canopy over all the other issues. The foundation for all of the other issues is the abandonment of the child/family. Abandonment by a parent, but in this study, by a dad is a loss that is distinct from all other loss because it is indicative of a choice: My father chose to leave because I was not good enough.

Limitations of the Study

These women were already friends and had established a feeling of sisterhood among themselves; their experiences were of interest to me as the researcher because I was privy to their private pains through our sisterhood. This small group is certainly not representative of all Black women who mature in a household without their father or a consistent male figure. The mere fact that they are highly educated Black women with prominent careers renders them a unique and select representative from the diaspora of women who are Black and fatherless.

There were two limitations in this study: 1) the fact that the participants and the researcher were and are friends; 2) and the working definition of fatherlessness. It is absolutely plausible to live in a home with a father and experience the same feelings of abandonment as those who do not have a physical male presence in the home. In fact, that ‘feeling’ was the reason that I began expressing interest in fatherlessness at the outset. All of the feelings of ‘not enough-ness,’ unworthiness, loss self-esteem that were expressed by my sisters, I experienced and, yet, my father has never been away from home more than three months at a time (he worked as a construction worker in another state during the summer months while I was maturing). There is also the possibility of Black girls who do not have a father or father figure in their lives and do not experience any negative feelings or deficits. In this study, however, all four of these participants experienced either an extended period of time without a father or – as in the case of one of the women – no father knowledge at all.

Lastly, these results may indicate participant bias because these women were willing to share their information openly and freely based on a deep and immutable level of trust in each other and in the researcher. These specialized circumstances would not be available to all of those who matured in an environment devoid of a father or male figure. This study does serve as an indication of the need to look more deeply into the effects of this phenomenon on the Black community.

Summary

This research had two goals: To explore the ways in which middle-aged Black women expressed beliefs about their lives without a father and the effect of— if any — the lack of a father had on their decisions. These four women experienced some turbulence in their youth, but all matured into highly successful, educated, and socially conscientious adults that are well able to form loving and abiding relationships. What needs to be explored at this juncture are the terms successful, educated and socially conscientious when used as identifiers for Black women.

When I wrote that statement, it was meant to provide for the reader a sense that these women had not only survived but thrived in a manner that — at least according to the deficit research presented earlier in this paper — they were not supposed to do. The definition for *successful* when referring to these women is rooted in the idea that they attended college and are now working in professional jobs. In hindsight, this definition is too narrow in scope to adequately address the forward movement and progression of Black women and, perhaps, more than a little elitist. Am I really implying that the Black women who do not complete college are not successful? For Black women, any definition that asserts itself in the mainstream population needs to be modified and expanded to address the myriad of ways in which we perform in this society. For this assertion, this addition to the definition of success will be what is proffered:

These women kept putting their feet to the floor and ‘kept it moving’! Educated is another term that really requires revisiting. The idea of gaining a college education as the only criteria for being labeled as educated is ludicrous. What about the women who read self-help books or teach themselves through free online webinars and workshops to become masterful agents of their personal evolution? Is their scholarship less valid because they have never stepped inside of a ‘brick and mortar’ college? These allowances can be used for all women – for those that spew *inclusion* as a mode of suppressing the growth of Black self-love. The relevance of re-evaluating to this extent is because Black women have not been afforded the luxury of personal excavation on a public platform! Black women have been ‘holding our breath’ creating a façade of invincibility in hopes of controlling the abject misery that oozes from the severely mutilated depths of our souls with one goal: to ensure that the White folks who sought to strip every vestige of humanity from us did not have the luxury of saying that they took our souls as well! Finally, in the context of lives well lived, the descriptive ‘socially conscientious Black women’ can have a myriad of meanings. In this conversation, it means Black women who have found the courage to face their pain and use it to serve the healing of their personal lives and the lives of those with whom they interact.

The research is abundant and comprehensive with respect to the notion that a father is needed in a young girl’s early years, but how that transitions to a need in adulthood aligned with this study of middle-aged women’s life choices did not emerge. There is definitely more research needed on the actual effects of fatherlessness on young Black girls; now there are generalities that are attributed mostly to Black girls that fit a deficit model of existence. But all Black girls who mature through life without a father are not poor, uneducated and broken. There are some fatherless Black girls who reside with highly educated mothers and have other familial

connections that are well equipped to provide for their physical, educational, emotional and psychological needs. A comparative study on the effects of fatherlessness between these two sectors of the community will provide a wealth of viable and useful information. The proverbial gold mine is the possible information procured from an in-depth study on the effects of fatherlessness on adult women at different stages of adulthood across the diaspora of Black women.

Lastly, we as a community must begin to address the taboo issues. What are the ramifications of life within the parameters of the new household where the performances are encompassed within the LBGTIQA community? Will the conversation about fatherlessness be the same when both partners are women or men? What does this new paradigm mean for our community as it exists now and as it evolves into the future? Does fatherlessness play a role in the development of these new familial paradigms? We, as a community, do not have the luxury of not addressing these questions right along with the questions of poverty, racism, sexism, and all of the 'isms' that negatively affect our growth and development.

Recommendations

There is a great deal of research that has been completed regarding the effects of an absentee father on boys, however, not nearly as much focus on the effects of fatherlessness on girls even less for women. This study inspired a number of ideas for further research on this subject:

- 1.) Use the results of this study to design a survey that would reach a larger population of women in an effort to quantify these findings and therefore, have a way to generalize the results.

2.) Open the study up to include Black women in different age groups and create a comparative of how, and if, the effects of fatherlessness changes within the different age ranges; for example, women between 20 to 30 years old, 30 to 40 years old and then 40 to 50 years old.

3.) At what age does the effect of fatherlessness wane? At what age do the women determine that the trajectory of their lives is no longer defined by their earlier circumstances? What is the catalyst for change in the behavior of the research participants?

4.) Complete a comparative study on the different behaviors of women who were provided some form counseling in their youth and the women who did not receive counseling, either at all or received it, much later in their maturation.

5.) As mentioned in the body of this document, create a study to discern how the evolving definition of 'fatherhood' as defined by the LGBTQIA community is affecting the Black community as a unit and Black girls in particular. Also, what are the ramifications of this expansion and redefining of roles for our future?

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APPENDIX A

DIVISION OF RESEARCH



DATE: December 07, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Patricia Larke
TAMU - College Of Education & Human Dev - Teaching, Learning And Culture

FROM: Dr. James Fluckey
Chair, TAMU IRB

SUBJECT: Expedited Approval

Study Number: IRB2015-0657D

Title: What happens to daddy's little girl when daddy is not around?
Exploring four, middle-aged, Black women's life choices with an absentee father.

Date of

Determination:

Approval Date: 12/07/2015

Continuing Review Due: 11/01/2016

Expiration Date: 12/01/2016

Documents Reviewed and Approved:

Only IRB-stamped approved versions of study materials (e.g., consent forms, recruitment materials, and questionnaires) can be distributed to human participants. Please log into iRIS to download the stamped, approved version of all study materials. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the iRIS Support Team at 979.845.4969 or the IRB liaison assigned to your area.

Submission Components			
Study Document			
Title	Version Number	Version Date	Outcome
Interview Protocol IRB-12-07-15	Version 1.0	12/07/2015	Approved
Recruitment-IRB12-07-15	Version 1.0	12/07/2015	Approved
Study Consent Form			
Title	Version Number	Version Date	Outcome
Research Consent Form	Version 1.0	12/07/2015	Approved

Document of Consent: Written consent in accordance with 45 CF 46.116/ 21 CFR 50.27

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
1186 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-1186
Tel. 979.458.1467 Fax. 979.862.3176
<http://rcb.tamu.edu>

Waiver of Consent:

- Comments:**
- This study has been approved for 6 participants.
 - Research is to be conducted according to the study application approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
 - Any future correspondence should include the IRB study number and the study title.
-

Investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The study must be renewed by the expiration date in order to continue with the research. A Continuing Review application along with required documents must be submitted by the continuing review deadline. Failure to do so may result in processing delays, study expiration, and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research study (including data collection and analysis), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-compliance:** Potential non-compliance, including deviations from protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol and/or study documents must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form or information sheet, the IRB stamped approved version must be used. Please log into iRIS to download the stamped approved version of the consenting instruments. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the iRIS Support Team at 979.845.4969 or the IRB liaison assigned to your area. Human participants are to receive a copy of the consent document, if appropriate.
7. **Post Approval Monitoring:** Expedited and full board studies may be subject to post approval monitoring. During the life of the study, please review and document study progress using the PI self-assessment found on the RCB website as a method of preparation for the potential review. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate study records and making them available for post approval monitoring. Investigators are encouraged to request a pre-initiation site visit with the Post Approval Monitor. These visits are designed to help ensure that all necessary documents are approved and in order prior to initiating the study and to help investigators maintain compliance.
8. **Recruitment:** All approved recruitment materials will be stamped electronically by the HRPP staff and available for download from iRIS. These IRB-stamped approved documents from iRIS must be used for recruitment. For materials that are distributed to potential participants electronically and for which you can only feasibly use the approved text rather than the stamped document, the study's IRB Study Number, approval date, and expiration dates must be included in the following format: TAMU IRB#20XX-XXXX Approved: XX/XX/XXXX Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the FERPA administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.
10. **Food:** Any use of food in the conduct of human research must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 24.01.01.M4.02.
11. **Payments:** Any use of payments to human research participants must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 21.01.99.M0.03.
12. **Records Retention:** Federal Regulations require records be retained for at least 3 years. Records of a study that collects protected health information are required to be retained for at least 6 years. Some sponsors require extended records retention. Texas A&M University rule 15.99.03.M1.03 Responsible Stewardship of Research Data requires that research records be retained on Texas A&M property.

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

**Research Study Title: What happens to daddy's little girl when daddy is not around?
Exploring four middle-aged, Black women's life choices with an absentee father.**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM:

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide participants information that may affect the decision to or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying the impact of fatherlessness on African American women – specifically how the absentee father affects the decisions that African American women make as a result of their fatherlessness.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two (2) focus groups and a personal interview. All of the interaction lie within the scope of the research will be audio recorded.

Only your interview and focus participation will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of your participation include, but are not limited to, expanding the knowledge base and understanding of the immediate and long term effects of the absence of a father from a girl's life.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide at any point during the process to refuse to participate further. Your information will then be destroyed immediately and no further processing will occur.

Will I be compensated?

There is no compensation associated with participation in this study. The only reward will be the knowledge that you have assisted in the expansion of the breadth of knowledge in this critical area.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential, meaning that, only the primary researchers will know about your identifications and responses. Others including Texas A&M personnel, faculty and support staff will not have access to your private information outside the scope of which is required by the Texas A&M University Teaching Learning and Culture department and the Texas A&M Internal Review Board.

The study records will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Dr. Patricia Larke, and the chairperson of the department will have access to the records after the cessation of the research process.

If you choose to participate in the focus group and interview sessions of this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Dr. Patricia Larke, and the acting department chairperson will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for three years and then erased.



**Research Study Title: What happens to daddy's little girl when daddy is not around?
Exploring four middle-aged, Black women's life choices with an absentee father.**

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Patricia Larke via email: plarke@tamu.edu or phone: (979) 845-8384; Dorothy A. Muhammad via email: resugenius@tamu.edu or phone: 713.291.6586.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ I do not want to be audio recorded (audio recording is an essential aspect of the research; If you do not wish to be audio recorded, then you are not under any obligation to participate.)

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____



APPENDIX C

Research Study Title: What happens to daddy's little girl when daddy is not around?
Exploring four, middle-aged, Black women's life choices with an absentee father.

A. **Focus group I:**

1. What do you consider the three most important decisions that you have made in your life? Is there a reason for the order listed?
2. What do you consider the most important relationship(s) in a child's life? Are those same relationship important in an adult's life?
3. Did you have a relationship with your parents or a parental figure as a child?

B. **Personal interview questions:**

1. How would you define the word father?
2. Do you consider the relationship between a father and daughter important?
3. Do you or have you had a relationship with your father?
 - a.) If you have had a relationship with your father, how would you describe it?
 - b.) If you have not had a relationship with your father, how would you describe your life without your father?
4. Do you perceive a connection between your relationship with your father and any of your decisions?
5. Have you made any decisions that you would do over? Any regrets? Why or why not?

C. **Focus group II – follow-up:**

1. Do you still agree with the list of most important relationships that you gave in the first focus group?
2. Has this process inspired you to think differently about any of your relationships?
3. Have you learned anything about yourself during this process?



IRB NUMBER: IRB2015-0657D
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/07/2015
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 12/01/2016