GROWING UP WITHOUT A FATHER:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FATHERLESSNESS
FOR YOUNG ADULT MEN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men who had been fatherless from infancy. Four men participated in the study. To be a part of the study, the young men had to be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and had to have been raised from before the age of three years without a father, step-father or father substitute. Participants were excluded from the study if they had any regular and significant contact with their fathers throughout their childhood and adolescence.

A phenomenological approach was used for the interviews and data collection. The researcher conducted two interviews with each participant over a five month period. Five common themes representing the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men emerged from the interviews. The lived experience of fatherlessness (1) creates a perception of the person who the father may have been, (2) creates a perception of how things would have been different if father had stayed, (3) develops self-reliance and sensitivity, (4) creates a perception of what fathering entails, and (5) impacts relationships with family members, other men and women. The descriptions of each theme illustrate how the experience of fatherlessness impacted internal and interpersonal systems.

The findings of this study describe how young adult men experience fatherlessness. Fatherlessness is a phenomenon which impacts both self and relationships with others. It is an interactive process which evolves over developmental stages throughout a lifetime. As young men gain understanding of themselves and their worlds, their feelings, thoughts, expectations and yearnings change, and the ways in which they interact with the world change as well. The findings of this study illuminate the lived experience of fatherlessness which serves to inform counselling research and practice in the area of fatherlessness for young adult men.
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CHAPTER I

THE SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The number of children being raised by single mothers has steadily increased over the past several years. The 1991 Census of Canada shows that in 1981, 5.9% of British Columbia families were headed by single mothers. In 1991, that figure had risen to 6.6%. Of these, the majority - 5.3% in 1981 and 5.5% in 1991 - were headed by women who had sometime been married and, presumably, became single parents through marital separation, divorce or the death of their husbands. The figures for mothers who never married almost doubled from 1981 (0.5%) to 1991 (1.2%).

As women have become freer to choose the lifestyles and family structures which best suit their needs, a population of children who have been fatherless from infancy has emerged.


However, it should be noted that such variables as the age of the child and of the mother at the time the father left the family, the level of conflict between the parents before and after the separation, the economic level of the single parent family, the increased stress and busy life-style of single parent families and the level of perceived social support which the child experiences all may influence whether or not any of these are exhibited and to what extent.
People whose fathers were lost to them in infancy have no memories of that father. "Because the parent was never known, the . . . child does not have the experience of being torn away from a parent who was loved and cherished" (Harris, 1995, p. 17). The experience of the child may be different from the experience of a child who loses a father at a later developmental stage.

The above variables have influenced the types of services offered to help young men deal with difficulties in their lives. However, seldom have the young men themselves been asked what their own internal experience is of their lives, or what would help them to cope better.

This chapter includes an overview of the purpose of the study, the limitations of the study, the definitions of frequently used terminology, the assumptions and the importance of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, "What is the lived experience for young adult men who have been fatherless from infancy?" Through phenomenological inquiry, a comprehensive understanding was gained of the meaning the adult men made of the significant life event of fatherlessness. Meaning refers to the feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings a person experiences as a result of living through an experience. From this inquiry, some possibilities of what might be the typical experience of fatherless young men were explored, which could provide useful information for counsellors and therapists.

It has been suggested in the literature that the same sex parent is very important for healthy development, particularly during the adolescent years (Harris, 1995; Kaplan, 1986; Osherson, 1992). Further to that, through interacting with his father, the son learns not only what it means to be a man, but what it means to be a father. Recent feminist literature disputes this claim, suggesting that parents, both male and female, who model for their sons strong, competent, capable, compassionate and caring beings help their sons develop these characteristics within themselves, and develop both psychological and intellectual wholeness (Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994).
By studying the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men, the ways in which their fatherlessness impacts their behaviours, feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings within the context of their internal worlds and their relationships with others was explored. The young men themselves spoke about the importance of their fatherlessness in their own development and how that impacted the way they experience themselves and their lives.

Limitations

This study was limited to young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who had been raised from infancy (before the age of three years) without fathers. It focussed on their own inner experience of their fatherlessness and the impact it had on them. It did not attempt to determine the value of raising boys without fathers.

Definition of Terms

Fatherlessness

Fatherlessness refers to the experience of growing up from infancy (before the age of three years) without a father, stepfather, or father substitute. Although the person may be aware of a father in the world, and may have even met his father, there was no regular and significant contact between them throughout childhood and adolescence.

Inner Experience

The inner experience refers to the explicit and implicit feelings, perceptions and beliefs, expectations and yearnings which individuals experience and which create the meaning they make about events. The implicit inner experience can be made explicit through process questions which access the levels of experience (Satir, Banmen, Gerber and Gomori, 1991).

Lived Experience

Lived experience refers to the use of phenomenological methodology in order to explore and comprehend how a person has made meaning of a significant life event (Van Manen, 1990).
Assumptions

The First Assumption: The first assumption is that what children learn from their parents is significant in determining how they experience and make meaning of themselves and their world.

The Second Assumption: The second assumption is that fathers have a role to play in their children's development which is unique and significantly different from the mother's role.

The Third Assumption: The third assumption is that people have an inner world consisting of their feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings which is often out of other people's awareness and sometimes out of the individual's conscious awareness. It is from this inner world that meaning is made of experiences.

The Fourth Assumption: The fourth assumption is that what people feel, perceive and expect in specific situations is learned, and the main place of learning is the family of origin.

The Fifth Assumption: The fifth assumption is that being fatherless in a society where most people have fathers, whether living with them or not, is significant to the fatherless child.

The Sixth Assumption: The sixth assumption is that there are positive and negative aspects to all experiences; thus, there are positive and negative aspects to the lived experience of fatherlessness.

The Seventh Assumption: The seventh assumption is that young adult men have access to and are willing to talk about their inner experience of fatherlessness.

Importance of the Study

According to family therapy literature, the life course events, or personal history, of an individual provide the learnings of patterns of experience and could be a determining factor in the pattern of subsequent life events (Satir, et al, 1991; Satir, 1967; Constantine, 1986). Therefore, how the young men experience their fatherlessness could set the pattern for how they experience themselves and their relationships into their adult lives. A greater understanding of this personal phenomena is directly applicable to therapy and counselling, as therapists enter with their clients into this internal world and help
their clients make new decisions based on new learnings.

The next chapter will review the literature in four main areas: constructive-developmental theory, the role of the father in child development, the impact of father loss through divorce, death, illegitimacy, and adoption, and the father myth.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As our society has become more accepting of families headed by single mothers over the past several years, the number of children who have been fatherless since infancy has increased. The studies of the impact on the children of being raised without a father has focussed mainly on issues which seem to be more prevalent among children from single parent families. There has recently been some focus on the impact of fathers in nuclear families and the role of fathers in child development. However, the internal experience of children raised without fathers and the impact of that experience on young adult men has been largely ignored.

This literature review will discuss four main areas. The first area is constructive-developmental theory which "attends to the development of the activity of meaning-construction" (Kegan, 1982, p. 4) at different stages of life. The second area is the role of fathers in child development and how the absence of father impacts development from the perspectives of developmental theory and family systems theory. The focus here will be on male development and the developmental stage of late adolescence and early adulthood. The third area is that of father loss through divorce, death, illegitimacy and adoptee experience and the impact of those experiences on adult lives. Some attention will be given to the developmental stages at which the children lost their fathers or experienced a significant incident about their father loss which led them to make meaning of themselves and their world, and helped them to learn to cope. The fourth area is that of the father myth. This includes the ways in which children internalize their absent fathers by inventing characteristics which they attribute to them. It also includes the creation of the myth of the self who would have been if the father had been a part of the person's life.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

Developmental theories are based on the idea that human beings evolve through a series of
predictable stages from infancy through their adult lives. Several developmental theories have described how individuals shape or form their identities through these stages of their lives. Many developmental theorists, including Erikson, Blos, Kohlberg, Loevinger, and Kegan, "provide descriptions of how the internal balancing and rebalancing of boundaries between self and other produce more differentiated subjective experiences of identity at various life stages" (Krager, 1989, p. 6). Thus, identity formation, at all of the life stages, involves "the emergence of this dynamic sense of self as a process imbedded in relationships" (Weinmann and Newcombe, 1990, p. 357).

Erikson's theory recognizes the importance of "the psychosocial nature of identity with the important role played by the community in recognizing, supporting, and thus helping to shape the adolescing ego" (Krager, 1989, p. 6). At each stage of development the individual must establish equilibrium between the self and the social world. According to Erikson, at each of the eight developmental stages the individual must successfully resolve a crisis in order to develop and move on to the next stage. How successfully he/she negotiates these stages predicts how his/her life will unfold (Corey, 1991).

Blos describes life stages in which the individual works at establishing an autonomous self by letting go of the internalized parent, which is, in fact, the "intrapsychic arrangement of that which has been considered self" (Krager, 1989, p. 7).

Kohlberg based his theory on the development of moral reasoning which provides "the framework to address the development of the personal construction of the social world" (Kegan, 1988, p.50) within the given domain of personality of morality, or "right and wrong". As an individual negotiates through Kohlberg's stages of life, his/her understanding of right and wrong moves from external motivations, such as avoidance of punishment, towards internal motivations, such as conscience or principle.

Constructive-developmental theory, as postulated by Robert Kegan (1982), encompasses the ideas that, as human beings evolve through different predictable stages, they are organizing their experiences in order to construct meaning. Kegan states, "there is ... no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception,
independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we are the meaning-making context" (p. 14). The constructive-developmental theory presents human development as a series of evolutionary activities "involving the creating of the object (a process of differentiation) as well as our relating to it (a process of integration)" (Kegan, 1982, p. 77). As we evolve through our lives, we organize the relationship of ourselves to our environment, moving from embeddedness in differentiation to embeddedness in integration. Balance is achieved when we have temporarily made sense of both. Kegan states, "Each qualitative change, hard won, is a response to the complexity of the world, a response in further recognition of how the world and I are yet again distinct - and thereby more related" (1982, p. 85).

This subject-object relationship gives us a sense of how the person constructs his / her subjective reality, or "truth". According to Kegan, there are two important aspects of subject-object relationships. "First, subject-object relations become; they are not static; their study is the study of a motion. Second, subject-object relations live in the world; they are not simply abstractions, but take form in actual human relations and social contexts" (1982, p. 114). Subject-object relationships, in constructive-developmental theory, provide us with a clear map for understanding how meaning is made of an experience.

How people experience their lives is largely determined by how they made meaning of their lives at different developmental stages, and how successfully they incorporated the dichotomous needs for differentiation (independence) and integration (connection). When critical incidents happen at specific predictable developmental stages, it influences how people create the meaning or truth about themselves and their environment related to that experience.

As people develop through their lives, their successful negotiation of the stages of development is also a result of the kind of relationship they have with their psychosocial environments. For children, the most powerful component of their social environments consists of their family of origin. The way that this psychosocial environment, or "culture of embeddedness" creates a balance between holding them and letting
them go plays a large role in their developmental evolution (Kegan, 1982, p. 116).

The holding of the child by the psychosocial environment refers to attachment of the child to the primary caregiver, usually the mother. Where attachment does not successfully take place, the relationship between primary caregiver and child is impaired and the child's development is adversely affected. A number of factors, including the primary caregiver's or child's physical or mental health, the primary caregiver's level of stress, the amount of time primary caregiver and child spend together and the primary caregiver's expectations of the child's behaviour can affect how successfully attachment occurs. The holding function provides nurturing and security through emotional connection while permitting the child to accept and keep certain aspects of him/herself which are becoming part of his/her identity.

The letting go of the child by the psychosocial environment allows the child to differentiate and individuate. It involves allowing the child to "reject" aspects of the family relationship while not rejecting the child or permitting the child to reject the family. As children reject certain aspects of their families, they also reject certain aspects of themselves which they are outgrowing. If they are being firmly held while they are being permitted to let go, they can do so knowing that they are secure and safe in their relationships with their families and with themselves.

Through this holding and letting go, people evolve through new constructions of themselves and of others (Kegan, 1982, p. 131).

The role of the parent who does not take the primary caretaking role, usually the father, is important in the holding function, according to constructive-developmental theory. According to family systems theory, there is a danger of the favoured parent becoming overly involved, or "ennmeshed" (Constantine, 1986; Satir et al, 1991). The unfavoured parent "represents the protection to the child against an overholding, an eventual support for that slowly emerging side which will ultimately let the child parent himself" (Kegan, 1982, p. 142). Thus, both parents have a role to play in supporting the child to become a wholly developed human being.
During late adolescence and early adulthood, the individual is letting go of the embeddedness of the imperial stage and moving toward the interpersonal stage of development. Where the teenager found a fused connection with the peer group, the young adult is becoming more independent, more sure of his/her unique identity and more ready to find connectedness in an intimate relationship with one person, usually of the opposite sex. He/she is also letting go of his/her dependence on his/her family of origin and become more willing to forge his/her own future as an individual. This is the time when young people often move away from home to work or go to university. At this time, the unfavoured parent may become even more important, as it is his/her job to help the young person separate from the family and stand on his/her own.

It is also a time when young people are beginning to develop the ability to distance themselves from their own experiences, enabling them to look back on their lives as well as looking forward to the future. They are now able to more subjectively conceptualize what was and analyse both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences. This makes this age group especially appropriate for studies involving the examination of personal internal experience.

The Role Of The Father In Child Development

While research indicates that fathers influence their children's development, it seems that there is no single role that fathers play in families, and the relative importance of fathers in families varies across cultures and different types of families (Lamb, 1997). Fathers influence their children in a variety of ways. Factors such as the type of emotional support they give the children, the type of emotional support they give their children's mothers, the types of and levels of expectations they have of their children, the kind of psychological and physical neglect which may be present in the family, the kind of financial support they provide for their families, and the ways in which they share the workload within the family, including household tasks and childcare, all have an impact on the development of children (Lamb, 1997; Crockett, et al, 1993).

Historically, before the turn of the century, fathers had little to do with their children except as
religious teachers and stern disciplinarians. The father's role had much to do with guiding his children's moral development, while all other parenting duties lay with the mother (Pleck and Plech in Lamb, 1997, p. 36). He might also teach his sons to work and to hunt and fish, spending days with them in meaningful activity (Louv, 1993).

With the industrial revolution and the emergence of the middle class, the father's role became much more passive and the mother took on more of the job of developing the child's character and disciplining the child. The father's role increasingly became one of the "fun" parent, the one who enjoyed activities with the children. He was also the family breadwinner and spent a great deal of time away from his family. However, he still retained some of the past role of providing moral guidance for his children as often portrayed in popular television programs such as "Father Knows Best". This moral guidance was more of an expectation in the broader sense, as the day to day guidance fell to the mother.

With the rise of the feminist movement in the 1970's, the father's role was once again altered. Fathers were expected to co-parent with their wives, accepting equal responsibility for all aspects of child-rearing. Not only were fathers expected to share the chores and physical work involved with maintaining a family, such as laundry, cooking, cleaning and child minding, but also to provide the nurturing, empathy, connectedness and guidance that has previously been the arena of motherhood. Feminists argued that, by providing a model of parenting that was non-stereotyped by gender, boys would become less gender-stereotyped and more nurturing, too. The problem with this argument, they now say, is that most men in our society were not raised in families where they were taught how to be open, nurturing, empathetic and emotionally connected and, as a result, are not able to provide this kind of parenting for their children (Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994).

Fathers today are sometimes confused about the expectations placed on them by society. They are, on one hand, asked to be masculine role models, which has traditionally entailed independence, competition and using logic at the expense of feelings; on the other hand, they are asked to provide the traditionally
feminine traits of nurturing, connectedness and emotional availability for their children. Biller and Kimpton (in Lamb, 1997, p. 157) have suggested that "a male who has had the opportunity to observe a nurturant father is better able to imitate constructive paternal behaviour and develop more positive personality characteristics". Conversely, they suggest that boys who have had fathers who were passive, ineffectual and unnurturing experience feelings of negative self-worth and have poor social adjustment (p. 157).

Myriam Meidzian (1991) discusses a longitudinal study of empathy by Koestner et al (1990) in which the researchers found that sons raised in families in which child rearing was shared by both mother and father or in which the father was the primary caretaker "reveal that the sons in these families are more empathic than boys raised in the traditional way... the single factor most highly linked to empathic concern was the level of paternal involvement in child care" (p. 82). These findings challenge the commonly held belief that nurturing, intimacy and empathy are feminine traits and only mothers or other significant females are capable of teaching them to their sons (Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994).

Positive paternal involvement with children has been significantly related to children's self-control, self-esteem, life skills, and social competence (Amato, 1987, in Lamb, 1997). Similarly, a longitudinal study of children between the ages of 5 and 18 assessing the association between positive paternal engagement and outcomes in children showed that both boys and girls demonstrated "lower frequency of externalizing and internalizing symptoms, and higher sociability" (Mosley & Thomson, 1995 in Lamb, 1997, p. 97). Paternal engagement has also been linked with WISC IQ and academic achievement (Gottfried, Gottfried and Bathurst, 1988, in Lamb 1997). Several other studies have supported these results (Koestner, Franz and Weinberger, 1990; Nugent, 1991; Snarey, 1993, Almeida & Galambos, 1991). Thus, it can be concluded that positive paternal engagement is associated with desirable outcomes in children, adolescents and young adults. However, what has not been determined is exactly what aspects of paternal engagement lead to these desirable outcomes.

There is empirical evidence to show that adolescents boys who have had absent fathers from early
childhood have low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965 in Lamb, 1997), poor cognitive performance (Crockett, et al, 1993), poor behavioural functioning (Crockett, et al, 1993), poor school performance (Downey, 1994; Mulkey, et al, 1992), higher incidents of depression, hypochondriasis, hysteria and assaultiveness than adolescents with intact families (Nelson and Valliant, 1993), and show "an increased likelihood of early sexual encounters with girls, higher likelihood of early marriage, and early onset of fatherhood" (McLanahan, 1983, in Grundmann, 1996, p. 417). Studies which have attempted to determine the role of economic status in determining the cause of poor school performance and behavioural difficulties have been largely inconclusive, as there have been several studies which show that, even with sufficient financial support, adolescent boys from single parent families experience more school difficulties than their peers from intact families (Mulkey, et al, 1992; Downey, 1994).

However, the many other aspects of single parenting which may affect the development of adolescent boys have not been subject to a great deal of study. When a family has two parental figures, each parent is supported by the other and decisions about the family are often made jointly. In a single parent household, one adult is responsible for all caretaking, nurturing, and decision making with no opportunity to be relieved of these duties for even a short period of time. This overwhelming responsibility and the stress it is likely to generate may, in turn, cause the children in the family to feel stress and react in ways which lower school and behavioural performance. A study by Downey (1994) of children from single parent families found that, regardless of economic resources available to the families, children living with a single parent appear to experience poorer school performance and behavioural difficulties not experienced by children from dual parent families. It is interesting to note that Downey's study included children who lived with both single mothers and single fathers, and the results were consistent with both. He concludes, "the lack of any parent, whether it is the mother or the father, appears to increase children's behavioural problems in school" (p. 144).

Family systems theory would suggest that some of the difficulties experienced by children from
single parent homes would be the result of the family system's response to the stress experienced by the single parent. This stress could include the day to day stress of childrearing and running a family without the support of a partner, but could also include the stress which may surround the circumstances in which the family became a single parent family. For example, unresolved grief after the death of the father, unresolved conflict from an unhappy separation or divorce, or the mother's ambivalence about men as a result of past hurtful experiences could all affect the functioning of the family and each individual member of the family. It is even possible for children to react to or experience symptoms as a result of precipitating past events or stressful situations which are out of their awareness, but which have not been finished for the mother (Satir et al, 1991).

**Father Loss**

**Divorce**

It has been estimated that more than forty percent of children in North America will see his or her parents divorce and grow up in a single parent family (Beal and Hockman, 1991). The breakup of a family through divorce is stressful and traumatic for all family members. While the intention of the parents in divorcing may be to improve the lives of at least one parent and the children, these children of divorce often feel "abandoned, isolated, responsible and fearful" according to Fassel (1991, p. 3) whose study included over 350 adults whose parents divorced before the children were eighteen years old. Often, the child's whole world changes as he / she is moved into a new home, has to contend with more frequent and longer stays in daycare, experiences a lowering of the family's standard of living, and experiences increased parental discord. Beal and Hochman (1991) state that as many as 40 percent of absent fathers have no contact with their children.

Longitudinal studies of children of divorce show that children's reactions to divorce vary with the age of the child at the time of the divorce. While Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) believe that preschool children are the least affected by divorce and experience the fewest number of ongoing problems as a result
Fassel (1991) and Beal and Hochman (1991) found evidence to dispute this claim. Preschoolers may not have specific memories of the divorce or even of the missing parent, and may not experience the stage of grieving the lost family, but they still seem to exhibit ongoing difficulties which may follow them into their adult lives and affect their adult relationships.

Very young preschool children, under the age of three and a half, may regress during the divorce process and beyond (Beal and Hochman, 1991). They express their anxiety through behaviours in which they appear fretful, bewildered, and / or aggressive. They may become very attention seeking and overly anxious when separated from their mothers.

As they get older, children of divorce may become confidants of their single parents, helping them make family decisions which are usually the sole responsibility of the adults in the family. They take on more responsibility and are expected to be more independent than children in dual parent families. It may seem that they "grow up faster" than their peers (Beal and Hochman, 1991). Learning to be responsible from an early age may serve these individuals when they become adults. It may also become a burden for them as they go through their adult lives either rejecting the support and nurturing of their intimate partners, or depending on their partners to fill the role that they wished their parents had been able to fill when they were young.

One issue common to adults who have experienced the divorce of their parents between the ages of infancy and five years includes fear of intimacy. Fassel (1991, p. 49) states, "they say they feel wary of making commitments and they carry fear inside them . . . about abandonment, humiliation, and rejection". She found that "they struggle with low self-worth, resentment, and lack of assertiveness" (p. 49). She found that men, in particular, feel estranged from their fathers and continue to yearn for communication with them.

**Father Death**

"The language that adults use to describe their experience of losing a parent in childhood is the
language of catastrophe, devastation, and emptiness" (Harris, 1995, p. 19). Young children, who are dependent on their parents for their physical and emotional needs and who experience their worlds largely through their relationships with their parents, have no conceptual framework in which to process and make meaning of their loss. If the loss occurs before they have acquired language competence, they do not even have the vocabulary to share their feelings, thoughts, fears with the adults still in their lives, which even further limits their processing abilities (Harris, 1995, p. 5).

As with the child whose parents divorce, the child who loses a parent to death often experiences a complete life change. The surviving parent, whose own grief may be overwhelming, is often unable to meet the needs of the grieving child. As a result the child may feel some sense of abandonment; in fact, in some cases, the parent's grief is so all consuming that he / she cannot cope well with parenting and the child is sent to live with grandparents or other relatives for a time after the death. Harris (1995, p. 6) states "... the new world order is marked by total discontinuity with what went before. Everything feels different even though certain external realities ... may look the same". She goes on to suggest that, after the early death of a parent, children experience terrifying insecurity and profound emptiness. "The loss felt inside seeps out and engulfs everything" (p. 6). Attig (1996) states "young children who lose a parent when they are testing the safety of independent forays into the world and the reliability of bonds with their parents predictably struggle with separation anxiety following the loss".

Adults who lost a parent when they were very young may feel, instead of loss, an absence. They are aware that there was a parent who was lost, but there are no memories of the loss or of the person. They must contend with what is sometimes referred to as "the absent memory". "The survivor is haunted by the story of a mother or father whose face does not appear in the family album" (Harris, 1995, p. 18).

This absence applies not only to the person of the lost parent, but also for his / her role. An adult man whose father died when he was very young experiences not only the absence of the father, but also of the role of father. This may affect his perceptions about his own fathering abilities in his adult life.
People who had a parent die when they are very young often describe going through childhood feeling different from other children who have both parents in their lives. They do not miss the absent parent, as they never knew them, but they still feel an emptiness and void where the internalized parent should be (Harris, 1995).

In an effort to fill this void, children who lost their parents very young may create an idealized parent whose "mythical existence" fulfills all of their unmet yearnings. The dead parent is created as having all of the positive qualities which the child longs for in his or her life. These children may also create "myths" about themselves: about their culpability in their parents' deaths and about who they might have been if only their parent had lived (Harris, 1995, p. 90). All of these internal creations stay with the individuals into adulthood helping to shape their lives and their identities.

Often, adults who lost a parent at a very young age, particularly if the parent was of the same sex, feel that they are missing a living example of how to live their lives. They have no model of how to be a man or how to be a woman. In Harris's study (1995), adults describe how they actively created themselves using media or stories to serve as guidelines for the creation of aspects of the self. Sometimes, a simple story of the lost parent serves as a guideline. For instance, if the child has heard that the parent valued honesty above all, the child may fashion him/herself into an honest person in order to "please" the parent who is no longer there. Eric Erikson, often referred to as "the father of identity theory", who never knew his biological father, is an example of a person who actively created himself, even to the extreme of creating a name which reflects this conscious creation, Eric, the son of Eric: the self-made man (Lifton, 1994).

Harris (1995) found that young adults who lost a parent at a very early age often feel that they are delayed in negotiating through developmental stages. They often feel ill prepared to leave home for college until much later than their peers. They require much more structure and stability in their lives than their peers. They also say that they are much more insecure about taking risks, so hold themselves back from
new experiences. Attig (1996) suggests that people who have experienced profound bereavement in early childhood experience developmental deficits in adulthood. He explains that the grieving process is complex and difficult for children who have limited emotional experience and cognitive abilities to understand the death, and whose grief may be misunderstood and discounted by adults around them. Because of this, their successful development through the childhood stages may be compromised.

Losing a parent at an early age may also affect people’s relationships. There are two common patterns among young adults who have lost a parent in early childhood. They often find it difficult to allow themselves to create close intimate relationships and avoid relationships in which they must make a commitment. Conversely, they may wish to commit to a partner at a young age and create a stable, long term intimate relationship, finally finding the love and nurturing which they have longed for throughout their childhoods. Whichever path they take, their intimate relationships seem to be a subtle "dance between love and loss" (Harris, p. 140). For some, the yearning for love takes precedence; for others, it is the fear of loss which dominates. There is, however, a profound impact on their relationships and on their sense of themselves within those relationships as a result of their early loss.

Adoption

In the traditionally closed adoption system, common in North America, the experience of loss is the common theme for all of the individuals directly involved in the adoption: the biological parents who wish that either the pregnancy had not occurred or that they could have raised the child themselves, the adoptive parents who would have decided to adopt only after exhausting all efforts to have their own biological child, and the adopted children who spend their lives wondering about who their "real" parents are, why they were given up, and what their lives would have been like had they been kept and raised by their biological mothers and fathers. Very often, these losses are not talked about openly and the grief is repressed (Lifton, 1994).

Brodzinsky and Schechter (1990, p. 6) state, "adoption involves loss, which, in turn, creates stress
for the child and thereby increases his or her vulnerability for emotional and behavioural problems."

Studies with clinical and non-clinical populations have indicated that adopted children may be more likely than their non-adopted peers to exhibit greater emotional vulnerability and behavioural symptoms. These include: acting out behaviours such as aggression, stealing, lying, oppositional behaviours, running away, and hyperactivity; low self-esteem; and learning difficulties (Brodzinsky and Schechter, 1990). Maughan and Pickles (1990), however, suggest that methodological problems with the studies put their findings into question and that adopted children may be no more at risk than their non-adopted peers. In their longitudinal study comparing adopted children, illegitimate children and children living with their biological parents, they found that by age 11 the adopted children were showing statistically significant behavioural difficulties, but, by the time the children were 16, these had subsided to the point that they were no longer significant and were, in fact, little different from the children living with their natural parents. However, at age 16, the adolescent adoptees did show higher rates of anxiety and emotional problems than the adolescents living with their natural parents.

It is widely recognized in adoption literature that the adoption experience creates difficulties for adoptees which follow them into adult life. The grief and loss associated with adoption must be dealt with throughout the developmental stages. "The issues of adoption have different meaning and impact to children as they develop, because their understanding and adjustment to adoption is influenced by their emerging cognitive capacity and their developing coping efforts" (Reitz and Watson, 1992, p. 6). Their success in adjusting to their adoptive family and coping with their grief and loss are greatly influenced by the ways in which the adoptive parents cope with their own adoption experience, how well attachment is developed between the adopted child and adoptive parents, and how well the adoptive parents deal with the children's worries and curiosities about their biological parents.

Although very young children may not understand the implications of adoption and may seem as secure in their adopted families as children are who are raised by their biological parents, by the time
children reach the elementary school years, they begin to view the adoption experience in a less positive light (Brodzinsky, 1990; Maughan and Pickles, 1990). "Not only do adopted children experience the loss of birthparents and the extended birth family as well as the loss of cultural and genealogical heritage, but for many adoptees there is a loss of a sense of permanence in, and connectedness to, their adoptive families, as well as a loss of self and social status" (Brodzinaky, 1990, p. 9).

Reitz and Watson (1992), in a study of adults who were adopted as children, found that, as small children, these individuals had wondered why they were not living with their birth parents. "As adults, they shared with us three main reasons that occurred to them: there was something wrong with them and their birth families did not want to keep them; there was something wrong with their birth parents and they could not keep them; or, they were kidnapped by their adoptive parents" (p. 8). The adults also shared with the researchers their childhood fantasies about who their missing parents might be. Adult adoptees also reported that "factors of adoption cause them continuing doubts about their adequacy in social roles" (p. 20).

As adolescents, adoptees often have a more difficult time with identity formation than their non-adopted peers (Reitz and Watson, 1992; Maughan and Pickles, 1990). This may be partially due to the incomplete or inaccurate information they have about their genetic make-up and their birth family history. They may also feel that they do not fully belong to their adopted family and they must also come to terms with their "abandonment" by their birth parents. However, studies of identity comparing non-clinical adoptees and non-adoptees showed no significant differences between the two groups (Norvell and Guy, 1977; Stein and Hoopes, 1985, in Brodzinsky, 1990). Brodzinsky (1990) suggests that the findings indicate that the quality of parenting and the level of attachment between adoptive parents and adoptees may be more important to adolescents' success in forming identity than whether or not they were adopted as young children. It may be, too, that they are successful in forming an identity, even though the identity which they choose is not the one preferred by their adoptive families.
As adolescence is often a time of confusion for young people intent on developing an identity, the added confusion which adoptees experience about their genetic, social and cultural backgrounds may lead them to accept an identity which conflicts with what their adoptive parents may wish for them. "Adoptees who receive the unconscious (and sometimes conscious) message from their adoptive parents that their birth parents don't quite measure up to their standards may find it easier, and more authentic, to take on the negative identity of those devalued birth parents than to meet the high expectations of the adoptive parents" (Lifton, 1994, p. 71).

A 1990 study by Peter Benson (in Lifton, 1994, p. 313), which studied 50,000 youth from the sixth to twelfth grade, "found that teenagers who were adopted in infancy are more at risk that non-adopted youth in the categories: sexually active, suicide, daily cigarette use, driving and drinking, group fighting, vandalism and trouble with the police".

As young adults, male adoptees may find that their perceived "abandonment" by their birth parents may impact their relationships with their female partners. According to Paton (1954, in Reitz and Watson, 1992), male adoptees "seem to take fewer risks and more readily opt to do without relationships". They may be less willing to risk trusting their female partners. Maughan and Pickles (1990) found that young adult male adoptees "had the highest overall probability of relationship breakdowns" (p. 57). Lifton (1994) describes adult male adoptees as either seeking their lost mother in relationships or avoiding intimate relationships because of fear of further abandonment.

Adult male adoptees also show a lack of stability in the job market. Maughan and Pickles study (1990) found that, "by age 23, male adoptees who had entered the labor force early had clearly experience some difficulties in arriving at a settled pattern of employment" (p. 56). These findings for male adoptees were quite significantly different than the findings for female adoptees, who seem to be more stable in both relationships and employment than their male counterparts (Maughan and Pickle, 1990).

Most of the adoption literature deals with the issues which adoptees have about their missing
biological mothers. Few studies focus on the relationship between adoptee and biological father. However, in interviews with adult men who had been adopted as children, Lifton (1994) found that they often talked of the yearning they had for their unknown father and of some sense they have of missing part of their male identity. The extent to which this yearning for connection with the missing biological father impacts the adult male adoptee is largely dependent on the quality of the relationship he had with his adoptive father. If it was a close relationship in which a healthy attachment was formed, his sense of a missing part of himself may be much less than if his adoptive father was detached and remote (Reitz and Watson, 1992).

**Illegitimacy**

The greatest increase in births among unmarried women in the United States since 1982 is among women between the ages of 18 and 44, with the greatest increase occurring among affluent, well-educated women; two-thirds of all births to unmarried mothers are to women over the age of 20 (Gringlas and Weinraub, 1995). The common perception is of unmarried teenagers having babies, and, while there are still a significant number of teenaged unmarried mothers, a new kind of family has emerged - families headed by "solo mothers". Because children born and raised by solo mothers have not experienced the grief and loss of the other populations of fatherless children who have experienced family dissolution, marital discord or family realignment, it has been assumed that they do not suffer the same stresses in their lives and may be better adjusted than other fatherless children.

A study of pre-school children of solo mothers by Weinraub and Wolf (in Gringlas and Weinraub, 1995, p. 32) showed that the children "did not show significant differences in measures of intelligence, aggression, readiness to learn moodiness, and compliance when compared with children from two-parent families".

However, a follow-up study by Gringlas and Weinraub (1995) of the same children (from solo mother families and two-parent families) seven years later showed that "there were important differences between the two groups on measures of behavior, social competence, and academic achievement (p. 45)."
The findings of greater social-emotional and academic problems for the children of solo mothers who had not experienced the grief and loss associated with other forms of fatherlessness is consistent with findings from divorce literature and studies of adolescent mothers. These findings were most significant for the sons of solo mothers.

Rose (1992) conducted a study comparing the perceptions of six year old children of solo mothers with those of six year old children of married mothers. The results of how the children viewed their fathers was not significantly different for the two groups. However, when the children were asked how they thought their fathers perceived them, the findings indicate that a significant number of children of solo mothers felt that their fathers, who they had never met, viewed them negatively compared to how the children of married mothers thought their fathers viewed them.

In Maughan and Pickles' (1990) study comparing adopted children, illegitimate children and children from two-parent families, the results consistently showed that at each age point of the study, ages 7, 11, 16 and 23, the illegitimate group showed "relatively high behavioral and adaptive problems" (p. 55).

The reasons why illegitimate children seem to be more vulnerable to social and behavioral difficulties are in question. There are several possibilities. First, the social stigma against illegitimacy, although much less severe today than in the past, may still be a relevant issue. Second, the mothers may, themselves, be less able to cope with the challenges of parenthood. Festinger (1971), who studied unwed mothers and their decisions to keep or surrender their children, suggests that "the more unstable mothers, or those with less favorable personality profiles, tend to keep their children" (p. 261). She further suggests that the decision to have and keep a child out of wedlock "may be the result of a host of emotional needs and conflicts" (p. 261). Third, solo mothers may find that the life stresses associated with single parenting influence their own psychological well being and impact on the adjustment of their children (Gringlas and Wirnraub, 1995).
The Father Myth

When children have lost their fathers at a young age, or have never known their fathers, they often create an internalized mythical father. This is a way for children to create meaning about their absent father. As children develop to the stage of being capable of having and experiencing their perceptions, rather than being embedded in them, they create scenarios which give meaning to their feelings, perceptions and expectations (Kegan, 1982). The creation of the father myth may have little basis in reality. A single comment by the mother or someone else who knew the father may be enough for the child to create a mythical father. In the absence of any information about the father at all, children often base their myths on their unfulfilled dreams and yearnings. Whether children create a positive or negative father myth depends, to a great extent, on how the child perceives that the father was viewed by the mother (Schnitzer, 1993).

The father myth which children create can be thought of as two-dimensional; it embodies a limited number of qualities and often lacks the balance of positive and negative which actual fathers present to their children. It also stays static through the lifetime of the child. "It does not undergo developmental transformations to which the image of the actual father, were he present, would be subjected" (Gill, 1991, p. 244).

This personal myth "then comes into existence, which is full of distortions and becomes the subject's psychic reality" (Gill, 1991, p. 244). It provides for the child "an idealized image of the parent who has been lost, the self that might have been, and the relationship these two would have shared" (Harris, 1995, p. 83). All three of these missing pieces can greatly impact the child, the man he is to become, and the relationships he develops in his life (Harris, 1995).

By idealizing the parent who has been lost, children are deprived of the opportunity to developmentally de-enmesh with that parent as adolescents do in order to create their own identities. They may find that it is difficult to develop intimate relationships in adulthood. They either can never find a
partner who is as perfect as the myth of the missing parent, or they can never trust an intimate relationship because of the negative picture they have of the missing parent (Lifton, 1994).

The loss of the "self that might have been" often finds children, and, later, their adult selves, creating images of an ideal self who would have existed if the parent had only been there while the children grew up. Because it is impossible to become this ideal self, it leaves individuals feeling incomplete, unworthy, unlucky, and doomed (Harris, 1995).

The loss of the relationship that individuals might have shared with their missing parents often leaves adults feeling as though they are travelling blindly through their lives, making up how to behave in situations about which they imagine their parents would have taught them and modelled for them. They sometimes talk about feeling that they would have had a very special relationship with the missing parents, so wonderful that all of their dreams and yearnings would be fulfilled. Not having had this experience, they become afraid of taking risks in many aspects of their lives. If they blame themselves for their parents' absence, they may feel unlovable and avoid intimacy (Harris, 1995).

**Summary**

In summary, there are indications that young men who have been fatherless from early childhood experience a number of impacts which affect their sense of themselves and how they relate to others. However, the literature does not discuss the critical incidents which lead to both the positive and negative aspects of being raised without a father, nor does it examine in any great detail the internal experience of young men concerning these positive and negative aspects.

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, "What is the lived experience for young adult men who have been fatherless from infancy?". The young adult men explored the importance of their fatherlessness in their own development and how that impacted the way they experienced themselves, their relationships and their lives.

The next chapter will describe the phenomenological methodology used in this study and its
application to the research question. The general description of phenomenological methodology will be presented, followed by a description of the study design, the procedures, and the validation process of investigator triangulation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intention of this study was to explore the lived experience of fatherlessness for young men who have grown up from infancy without a father. As indicated in the previous chapter, this topic has not previously been studied. This study required a method of data collection and analysis which was exploratory. In choosing the methodology for this study, three aspects came into consideration. The first was the purpose or major aim of the study. This was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the lived experience of young men who have been raised without fathers. The second was the opportunity to give these young men a "voice" about what fatherlessness means to them and what the positive and negative impacts of their fatherlessness have been. The third was to illuminate stories of the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men which might be informative to the therapeutic field in supporting and treating young fatherless men. This includes the strengths and resources they have attained through their circumstances and the possible issues they are dealing with in their adult lives which may need attention. It also includes addressing the issues which may affect the family in which the young man was raised and the possibility of offering support to single mothers who are raising their sons without a father.

Phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate research method which complements the theory and assumptions of this study because its purpose was to explore how a person has lived through and has made meaning of a specific phenomenon (Karlsson, 1993; Van Manen, 1990; Polkinghorne, in Valle & Falling, 1989; Giorgi, 1971).

This chapter will include a general description of phenomenological methodology. It will also provide a description of the study design, explain the procedure, and describe the validation process of investigator triangulation.
Phenomenology As Methodology

Phenomenological psychology is the study of experience. More specifically, it is the study of a person’s experience in everyday life (Giorgi, 1983). “Experience, as it is directly given, occurs at the meeting of person and world” (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 42). It’s emphasis is on discovery, description and meaning, rather than on prediction, control and measurement (Osbourne, 1990). “Phenomenology is, in its broad sense, a philosophy or theory of the unique” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7).

Phenomenological psychology has its basis in philosophy. The recognized founder of the phenomenological method is Husserl (1913/1931; Klein & Westcott, 1994; Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989). He initially developed the method of phenomenological psychology to find a basis for the principles of mathematics and logic. He found that rigorous reflection could uncover the necessary universal structures which lie behind particular mathematical and logical acts.

The method was adapted for the field of psychology. “Methods based on phenomenological principles ... function as general guidelines or outlines, and researchers are expected to develop plans of study especially suited to understanding the particular experiential phenomenon that is the object of their study” (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 44). It began to be used to “acknowledge the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge” (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 43). It focusses on the person’s experienced meaning rather than on descriptions of their behaviours or overt actions (Osbourne, 1990). It values and reflects the uniqueness of each human being. Through open-ended interviewing, “we gain in the coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides” (Weiss, 1994, p. 3).

The research methodology of phenomenological psychology consists of diverse techniques. Some of the types of phenomenological psychology include traditional, empirical and hermeneutic (Klein & Westcott, 1994).

In phenomenological research, one does not test one hypothesis. The method is characterized by an
attitude of openness to whatever makes up the phenomenon. The structure of the phenomenon is
discovered through a reflection on the phenomenon itself. “The implication of this view for research is that
experience is treated as primary, and any theoretical entities and processes which are employed to explain it
are constructed only after an initial descriptive inquiry” (Klein & Westcott, 1994, p. 137). Through
phenomenology, the researcher gains insight into the meaning that people make of an experience. As it is
the description of the unique and subjective meaning of the person which is being studied, it is not viewed
within the confines of classification or taxonomies (Giorgi, 1971).

Phenomenology is concerned with systematically uncovering and describing the underlying
structures and meanings of experience. Rather than focussing on the narrative facts or content of an
experience, it is attempting to describe the essence of the experience.

The investigation of conscious (or ‘lived’) structures involves
distinguishing those aspects of an experience that are invariant and
essential, making the experience show up as the kind it is - that is, as the
typical way in which a phenomenon presents itself in experience


Phenomenological research is closely tied with language. It is the language of a person which
describes the experience and it is within that language that the structures and meanings of the experience
are found. It is also language which the researcher uses to capture the experience of the phenomenon and
deepen its significance. “The richness and profundity of human reality is seen as closely related to the
structures and meanings of natural language” (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 45).

The understanding of the meaning of the experience is derived from a process of determining the
total meaning of the experience and the meaning of its separate parts. The total meaning of the experience
may be changed by the meaning of the separate parts, and the meaning of the separate parts may be
influenced by the total meaning of the experience. By writing and rewriting, the parts and the whole come
together to produce a valid unitary meaning, free of inner contradiction (Kvale, 1982).

Research Design

The research design includes the interview structure and the bracketed presuppositions.

The Interview Structure

The phenomenon being studied may be elicited by asking the person to write a description of the phenomenon or by interviewing the person. The interview is the most common method used for phenomenological research, as it provides the opportunity for exploration and expansion of the person’s conscious awareness of the experience. This leads to a profoundly rich understanding of the phenomenon.

The interview must be unstructured and open-ended, and time must be available for the person to explore the topic thoroughly. The researcher must remain open to new and unexpected components of the description (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989).

The lived experience is explored in terms of the meaning the person makes of it. The internal processes of the person’s feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings interact systemically to construct the meaning (Satir, Banmen, Gerber & Gomori, 1991). The interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the person being interviewed impacts the outcome of the interview. The interviewer uses active listening and experiential process questions to encourage the person to share the details of the experience and the meaning the person makes of it. In this way, the meaning and significance of the lived experience can be fully understood. As the interview progresses, the researcher has the opportunity to clarify any aspects of the person’s meaning which is not understood. The uniqueness of each person’s story is explored. The content of the interview is discussed in more detail in the data collection section.

Bracketed Presuppositions

Bracketed presuppositions refer to the process of self-reflection on the part of the researcher to articulate presuppositions and biases which the researcher may have prior to the study (Osbourne, 1990). This involves the suspension of judgement as to the existence or non-existence of the content of the
experience. There must be an openness to whatever meanings emerge by entering into the unique world of the person being interviewed. However, it is impossible for the researcher to totally suspend all presuppositions and be purely objective (Hycner, 1985; Kvale, 1983). By bracketing, the researcher consciously lists all of the presuppositions that are in his/her awareness. The researcher’s perspective is taken into account; thus, the knowledge which arises from the research is illuminated from a particular perspective. (Osbourne, 1990).

Bracketing occurs not only before the research begins, but continues throughout the data analysis process as well. The researcher’s feelings, perceptions and beliefs about the phenomenon are regularly examined and made explicit to reduce bias and distortion.

I have decided to discuss bracketing for this study in the first person to clarify my presuppositions, because many of these presuppositions come directly from my personal life.

I grew up with two parents who both lost their parents before the age of three years. Neither grew up with a step-father or father substitute. My father also lost his mother at the age of four years and was raised in a series of foster homes and institutions. Although neither of them talked about the loss of their father while I was growing up, I was aware on some level that it had some impact on them both. There seemed to be, for both of them, something “missing”. I was not sure if it was the loss of their fathers, the hardships they experienced growing up in poverty (my mother with a single mother during the Depression and my father in care facilities), their experiences as young parents trying to raise children without having had a model to help them know how to do it, or some other factor about which I was unaware. I was not even sure what the impact on them had been or how it played itself out in our family’s dynamics.

In my adult life, I have many roles to play. I am a mother, and raised my own children from their early childhoods until adulthood as a single mother. At that time, there was little literature on the impact of divorce on children, and I can remember wondering how the increase in the divorce rate would impact my children and the many children in our communities.
I also worked for many years in secondary schools as a teacher for special needs adolescents, mostly with learning disabilities and behaviour problems. Several male students lived with their mothers (and siblings) in homes which had never had a father. Many others lived with single mothers from divorced families. I was very aware that the quality of the relationship between parent and child had a greater impact on the child’s successful coping than the number of parents living in the home. Many of these adolescents were very capable people who took their responsibilities very seriously. I marvelled at the resilience they demonstrated in their own growth and development. However, I was still curious about how the absence of the father was internalized by the child, because I saw the importance that the father/child relationship had for many children, particularly boys.

I now work as a therapist with individuals, couples and families. In my practice, I have noticed that men who never knew their biological father sometimes worry about what they may have inherited from their fathers, particularly character traits which they dislike about themselves. I have observed that many of them are able to create fulfilling relationships in their lives, while others get “stuck” in relationship dynamics which do not bring them happiness. I decided to do this study to find out what contributes to the experience of fatherlessness so that I could use what I learned in my therapy practice.

As a student, I have studied several adolescent issues including divorce and suicide. I decided to focus on the subject of fatherlessness because much of the present research focusses on the behavioural outcomes of divorce and adoption, but does not examine closely the internal processes of making meaning of fatherlessness. I would like this study to provide a balanced view of fatherlessness. I believe that all experiences have both positive and negative aspects to them. I also believe that we learn and grow from our experiences. Growing up without a father may provide children with opportunities to develop internal resources and to learn skills which may be different from what children learn in other family structures.

As a woman, I believe that all people have equality of value and all people have a tremendous drive
towards positive growth. I believe that it is important for people to share their stories and the internal process of their stories of the impact of fatherlessness. I chose to study young adult men for two reasons. I wanted to get the perspective of men because I believe that the presence or absence of the same sex parent may have significance for people. I wanted to study young adults because this age group has great appeal to me. I find that young adults are beginning to reflect on the experiences in their lives and are discovering aspects of themselves with both excitement and pain. They are actively seeking to make meaning of themselves and their world and they bring a unique perspective and creativity to their interactions.

I believe that the lived experience of fatherless changes and evolves over time. At different stages of development, different issues become important. The relationship which the person develops with his mother and the rest of his family has a great deal to do with how he copes. The knowledge he is given about his father may impact how he deals with his father’s absence. I believe that, as the person develops throughout his life, he continues to gain understanding of himself, but that the lived experience of fatherlessness is on-going throughout his life.

Procedure

This section discusses the (1) selection of participants, (2) data collection, (3) data analysis, (4) time frame of the study, (5) ethical considerations, (6) reliability, and (7) validity.

Selection of participants

Four people participated in this study. All responded to an advertisement (see Appendix C) posted in local newspapers in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Each person first contacted the researcher by phone. The researcher determined whether the person was eligible for the study by asking several questions (see Appendix D), and, if the person met the criteria, an appointment was scheduled for the first interview.

The criteria for the participants included all of the following:

1) participants were limited to young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.
2) participants had been raised from infancy (before the age of three) without fathers.
3) participants had been raised without step-fathers or surrogate fathers.
4) participants had the ability and willingness to provide informed consent.
5) participants had the ability and willingness to conduct an interview in English.
6) participants had the ability and willingness to comply with study procedures (i.e. one interview of up to 90 minutes and a follow up interview of up to one hour).

The exclusion criteria are the following:

1) participants who had any regular and significant contact with their fathers through their childhood or adolescence.
2) participants with prior psychiatric diagnosis.
3) dementia of any etiology.

By the fourth interview, redundancy of information was observed and saturation of themes became evident. Saturation means that (1) no new or relevant data emerged with respect to a theme, (2) the theme development accounted for variations, and (3) the relationships between themes was well established (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The saturation of themes indicated that no further recruitment of men was necessary.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews. Two interviews were conducted with each person. The average length of time between the initial and second interview was five months.

Upon meeting with each participant, the first interview began with an introductory statement about the nature of the study.

Hello, X. Thank you for coming today. There has not been much research done on the experience of fatherlessness for young men, so I am doing exploratory research in this area. The purpose of this study is to
find out what the experience was like for young men who grew up
without a father, how that impacted them then, and how it affects them
today. My intention is to meet with individuals like you so that you can
tell me what your experiences were like when you were growing up
without a father. My goal is to come up with a comprehensive map of
what the impact of fatherlessness might be for boys and young men. My
hope is that other people can learn from your experience and maybe help
other boys and young men who are in similar situations. In order to do
that, I need your help, and I really appreciate your being here today to
give me a chance to talk to you about this study. I am looking forward to
working with you.

Time was taken to discuss the nature of the study with the participant, to answer any questions he
had and to establish rapport. The participant was presented with the consent form (Appendix E) explaining
the purpose of the study, the type of questions to be asked, confidentiality and his option to withdraw from
the study at any given time. The consent form was read through with the participant and clarified if there
were any questions. The form was signed when the person had all details and questions discussed and
clarified to his satisfaction.

Upon giving informed consent, the participant was asked to give demographic information about
his family in the form of a family map (Satir et al, 1991). The family map was intended to give some
indication of the family structure in which the participant grew up. It was intended to help the participant
to focus on the context of his family of origin. It also helped the participant to focus on his family’s
resources and his own personal learnings from his family of origin. Data from the family map were not
used in the present study.

The second part of the first interview consisted of eliciting from each participant the story of his
experience of fatherlessness. This part of the interview was tape-recorded with the participant’s consent. The second part of the interview began with the following question: "When you recall growing up in the family that you grew up in without a father there, what would you say that was like for you?" The response then led to other questions.

Although the researcher made a tentative list of possible questions, based on the literature review of young men who grew up without a father, which could be relevant to the lived experience of fatherlessness, these questions were not strictly followed. Often the family map stimulated the person to begin to tell the story of his lived experience of fatherlessness even before the first interview question, as stated above, was asked.

Further process questions from the levels of Satir’s (Satir et al, 1991) Personal Iceberg Metaphor were used to facilitate the interview process in exploring the inner world of the participant. Questions pertaining to the six levels of experience - behaviour, coping, feelings, perceptions, expectations, yearnings and the spiritual Self (Satir et al, 1991)- were asked to get a rich map of the impact of the lived experience of fatherlessness on the person (See Appendix F for examples). According to Satir, individuals may be consciously aware of only one or two levels of their experience, but it is the systemic interaction of all of the levels of experience which create the impact and influence behaviour. By exploring all of the levels of experience for the impact of fatherlessness, a comprehensive map of the inner world of the participants and the meaning they made of their fatherlessness became available. Questions were phrased in such a way that participants were encouraged to freely talk about what was pertinent and meaningful to their experience. After both positive and negative impacts were explored, some time was spent identifying the personal resources which emerged as a result of growing up without a father. The impact of the lived experience of fatherlessness on the man’s present life and his current relationships was also explored.

The average length of the first interview was approximately one hour. Because the interviews were designed to elicit the internal impacts of the lived experience of fatherlessness, some participants
experienced an emotional response to their stories. A list of counselling services in their specific communities was made available to them to help them deal with any issues arising from the interview process.

A second interview occurred an average of five months after the first interview and was used as a form of validation procedure. Each participant received a copy of his transcript from his first interview, his individual structure and the general structure from all of the participants of the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men. He also received a list of the five themes which had emerged from the data. The second interview was designed to encourage each participant to clarify any information which was ambiguous and to ensure that the individual structure and general structure accurately reflected the person’s own experience of fatherlessness. It allowed each participant to contribute towards the interpretation of data and share in the final structure (Osborne, 1990). Each participant was given the opportunity to check the themes to ensure that they encapsulated his personal experience of fatherlessness. It also gave him an opportunity to add meaning to the data if he wished to do so.

The second interview lasted approximately one hour. Each participant was asked to comment about the themes and about his involvement in the study. This interview was not audio-taped; rather, the researcher took notes throughout the discussion. Time was available at the end of the interview to thank the participant and have closure.

The interview format was used to allow each participant an opportunity to construct a narrative of his lived experience of fatherlessness. Narrative provides an integral structure in which people make meaning of their experience (Davidson, 1993). Each person was encouraged to talk about his experience in his own way and at his own pace. The researcher facilitated the process by demonstrating empathy, respect and acceptance towards the men. The researcher was conscious of her own verbal and non-verbal communication and attended to the verbal and non-verbal messages of the participants. Any discomfort was noted by the researcher and explored. Any presuppositions which the researcher had about the impact
of fatherlessness were noted and put aside, through bracketing, during the interviews and data analysis.

Five of the interviews were held in the researcher’s office and three of the interviews were held in participants’ homes. In all cases, the researcher sought to ensure that the person felt safe and that confidentiality was maintained.

Analysis of the data

The lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men has not been well developed in the literature to date. Phenomenology was the method chosen to explore the experience of fatherlessness because it allows for a deep and coherent understanding of the essence of the experience. The following format, developed by Karlsson (1993), was used for data analysis:

1. transcribe the interview from the audio-tape.
2. divide the transcript into meaning units. The transcript is read several times until the researcher develops an understanding of how the person has experienced fatherlessness. The researcher then breaks each of the person’s statements in the transcript into meaning units. Each meaning unit describes some aspect of the lived experience of fatherlessness as narrated by the young man (Karlsson, 1993). Example:

ka: What were some of the strengths and resources that you are aware of that growing up in the kind of family that you grew up in brought you?

ja: I think I have sort of an approach of “I take it as it comes.” You know, don’t wish, “Oh, I hope” - you know, at work, like - “Oh, I hope it’s slow, I hope it’s slow” or “I hope it’s busy”. I’m like, “Whatever”, you know.

This was divided into the following meaning units:

I have an approach towards my job to accept whatever happens. (001)
I don’t wish that conditions at work will be busy or slow. (002)
I am open to whatever happens. (003)
transform the meaning units. Each meaning unit is transformed and re-written to reflect the lived experience of fatherlessness for young men who have grown up from infancy without a father. The transformation of meaning units is a process by which the implicit meaning becomes explicit (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989). A comment is written following each transformed meaning unit. Example:

(001) **Transformed meaning unit:** J has developed an approach towards his job to accept whatever happens.

**comment:** The lived experience of fatherlessness may include flexibility about what could happen.

(002) **Transformed meaning unit:** J does not wish things at work to be a specific way.

**comment:** J does not have expectations about what could happen.

(003) **Transformed meaning unit:** J values his openness to possibilities.

**comment:** One of the valued resources for J is his flexibility and openness.

(4) write the individual structure: the person’s story is re-written based upon the transformed meaning units (Karlsson, 1993). These are grouped into clusters of themes. The story must be re-written to accurately discover and illuminate the meanings of the original text (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989). Example:

James also values his ability to be flexible. “I think I have sort of an approach of ‘I take it as it comes’.” He keeps his expectations of events open for new possibilities and accepts what comes. “Whatever happens, it happens; let it happen and then you’ll be OK.” He allows himself to change his expectations of himself so that he can stay calm. “I have a list of like ten things to do today and I’ve done two of them, so they can wait for another day.” (From James’s individual structure). An
example of an individual structure is found in Appendix H.

(5) write the general structure: After writing the individual structures, the researcher writes the general structure. The researcher becomes reimmersed in the original data and moves back and forth between the original data and the cluster of themes which has developed. By moving back and forth between the two and integrating them, an essential structural definition of the phenomenon of fatherlessness emerges (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989). The general structure is the result of this process.

Five common themes on the lived experience of fatherlessness for young men who grew up from infancy without a father emerged from this study. Example:

One of the five themes is: The lived experience of fatherlessness involves the development of internal resources.

A discussion of the themes, including internal resources, is found in Chapter IV.

**Time Frame Of The Study**

The study was conducted over a period of five months from the time of the initial interview to the time of the final interview. Each person met with the researcher two times. The first interviews were conducted in April, 1998. They were audio-taped after receiving permission from each person to do so. The final interviews were conducted in September, 1998, after the first interviews were transcribed, the meaning units delineated, the transformed meaning units written, the individual structures written, the general structure written and the themes extracted. Each man was given a copy of the transcript of his first interview, the individual structure, the general structure and the themes. They were each given an opportunity to read them, either alone or with the researcher, and to respond to them. The second interview was designed to ensure that the analysis of the data reflected the intended meaning of each of the men, to allow the participants to clarify or add to the story, and to ensure that the themes captured their unique experience of fatherlessness. The final interview was not audio-taped, but the researcher took notes throughout the discussion with each of the men.
Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to ensure that ethical considerations were taken into account in this study to protect the anonymity of the men involved. To ensure confidentiality, no identifying information about the men were revealed. Each person was asked if he would rather have a pseudonym or his real name used. All chose to use their real name. Confidentiality was discussed with each man when the first interview was scheduled, and again before the first interview began. The purpose of the study was discussed with each person before the first interview and any questions answered. Each person signed a consent form which explained the person’s rights of anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal from the study at any time (see Appendix E).

Reliability

Reliability, from a phenomenological researcher’s perspective, is based on “the observation that human perception is perspectival and contextual” (Osborne, 1990, p. 87). The focus is on meaning, rather than facts. The study of multiple perspectives can lead to “a unified description of a shared phenomenon” (Osborne, 1990, p. 87).

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men. Every effort was made to ensure that the perspective of the participants and his own meaningful language was preserved. The researcher sought to ensure that her understanding of what the person said accurately reflected the actual meaning of what the person intended to say. Clarification was achieved through asking participants to expand on and clarify specific points which seemed to be ambiguous or unclear. This was done during the first interview. During the second interview, the researcher had a list of questions for each participant which had arisen during the process of transforming meaning units. The participants were asked to clarify or add to their stories at that time and this further information was then included in their individual structures and the general structure. The participants were given the opportunity during the second interview to verify the analysis of their own stories and the
general structure.

During phenomenological research, the researcher is actively engaged in the data analysis. There is a danger of the researcher contaminating the data by becoming overly involved with the data and bringing to the data his/her own biases and presuppositions. This is avoided by using bracketing. Every effort was made to ensure that the data analysis process reflects the meanings of the participants and not of the researcher, while noting that the analysis of the data was influenced by the perspective of the researcher. This was made explicit.

When assessing reliability, one determines whether the results would be the same if the same procedures were replicated with other young men who were fatherless from infancy. Phenomenological methodology is a reliable mode of research if the context and intention, or the perspective, of the researcher is also replicated by following researchers. If a replicating study approaches the same experience from a divergent perspective, the data will be viewed slightly differently (Giorgi, 1975 in Hycner, 1983).

**Validity**

Validity in phenomenological research is determined by whether or not the findings can be trusted and used as the basis for actions and policy decisions (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989). Because phenomenological research does not depend on measuring instruments and statistical procedures, it is the process of the steps followed from the raw data, through the transformed meaning units, to the general description of the experience of fatherlessness for young men which allows the reader to determine if the general description is supported by and derived from the data. “The reader must be able to follow the thought processes that have led to the conclusions and to accept them as valid. In those cases where the phenomenon is one that the readers have experienced, the findings must also correspond to the readers’ own experiences of the phenomenon” (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 57).

A study has validity if (1) the researcher refrained from influencing the contents of the participant’s descriptions so that the descriptions no longer reflect the participant’s lived experience, (2) the transcription
is accurate and conveys the meaning of the narration of the participant, (3) the researcher has discussed alternatives to how the data has been discussed, (4) it is possible to go from the general structure to the original transcripts and to determine how the themes were derived, and (5) the general structure holds true for the experience in other situations (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989).

To the researcher’s knowledge, the questions were open and process oriented rather than content oriented (Satir et al., 1991), and did not influence the men in any particular area. The transcripts reflected the meaning of the participants during the interviews. The participants were encouraged to give feedback and clarify or add to the process so that it accurately reflected his intended meaning. Each man stated that the individual structure, general structure and themes accurately reflected his own experience.

Investigator Triangulation

An important validity check, according to Hycner (1985) is with the researcher. Hycner suggests having the data evaluated by independent observers. This was done in this study through investigator triangulation. Investigator triangulation refers to the process of having independent observers examine the data (Heppner et al., 1992). This allows the data to be examined free from the biases of the main researcher and to determine the validity and reliability of the data analysis.

In this study, two independent observers were asked to examine the raw data and the themes. Both of the independent observers were therapists working with young men. The first independent observer, Don, had a Masters of Arts degree in Psychology and had spent the last 15 years working with young men in the addictions field and for the past three years in private practice. The second independent observer, Wendy, was a graduate student completing her Masters of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology and had spent over 20 years working as a counsellor with adolescents and their families. At the time of the interview, she had spent 6 years working with adolescents and their families in a social service agency within the RCMP jurisdiction.
Each independent observer was asked to study one original transcript (after receiving permission from the men) from the first interview and the themes and sub-themes from the lived experience of fatherlessness. The transcripts used for validation were randomly chosen. The independent observers were asked to examine the transcripts and themes to determine whether the themes were an accurate reflection of the lived experience of fatherlessness. Each independent observer was interviewed separately by the researcher. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. See Appendix I for investigator triangulation questions.

Both independent observers agreed that the list of themes and sub-themes accurately reflected the men's stories of fatherlessness. "It was really obvious to me that the themes were very evident in the manuscript" (Don)

The ways that I think the themes and the manuscripts fit, all the themes - I actually divided up and took little parts that I saw and I could find things for all of them, so it really seemed to cover what was in the manuscript.

(Wendy).

The themes were also consistent with the ways in which the independent observers see their fatherless clients making meaning of their fatherlessness and themselves.

Wendy talked about the creation of the perception of the father as an incomplete picture. "It was there, but it wasn't really filled out. It wasn't coloured in, it was almost like a little black and white skeleton shell but no colour in it." Don spoke of a similar observation, "but it was like they were just sort of like discrete pieces that had already been developed or thought out."

Wendy noted that fatherless men develop a relationship with both parents: their mothers and their internalized fathers. "My fantasy is it's the mother and father and both pieces are important, at least to have some connection with both. He did. I mean he had an internal somewhere, a deep one, but it didn't sound very conscious." Don stressed the importance of the internalized father in the development of
internal resources. "Something he would want to value in himself, he would want to have that so he gave it to his father so that he could get it from there, because otherwise he didn't get it from anyplace."

Both independent observers wondered about the importance of fatherless men's relationships with their mothers and its impact on the level of acceptance the men felt for their fatherlessness. "I started to wonder about some of the object-relations stuff around attachment and what was mom's attachment to him as a young child" (Don) "So is it possible that the big piece is how grounded mother is, then? So if mother's still angry at father for leaving her, so it's whether that person has unresolved issues affects whether your child can cope with fatherlessness or not, maybe" (Wendy).

Don discussed the developmental aspect of the person's coping.

There's some real developmental stuff in there, too, because sometimes he seemed to be talking from like a thirteen or fourteen year perspective and sometimes he seemed to be talking much more adult than that. Just sort of jumped back and forth, and what I kind of picked up from the younger stuff was really around emotional attachment.

Both researchers addressed the openness the mothers had with their fatherless sons about their absent fathers. "It was kind of 'Who holds the secrets?' and apparently it seems to be her, so what choice does he have but to sort of create his own reality?" (Don)

So that could be something that will come out of the study, that the healthier we talk to our children about the other partner without making him bad or wrong or unfair, the easier it is for your child to adapt. Which is interesting information for people, because they might have to go about it in a different way (Wendy)

Both independent observers commented on the development of internal resources.

I love the development of internal resources because it was almost just
validating the fact that being fatherless was the way it was and it was OK.

It was coming from a healthy place so I thought that was a great thing

(Wendy)

I kind of linked (sensitivity) to his quest to find his roots and developing
that and being really kind of sensitive to that. Even his search for roots
was not just historical. I mean, it was much deeper than that, like he was
looking for some sort of spiritual root or connectedness (Don)

Both independent observers discussed the role that television played as a model for being male.

“He didn’t have a lot of concrete stuff around what dad would be like, you know, because there’s no
perception here other than TV” (Don) “That’s another thing I was struck by, his learning things off the TV.
You know, the fact that he would use the TV as a role model for male” (Wendy).

The independent observers discussed the impact of fatherlessness on relationships with other men
and with women.

I can see it (the impact of fatherlessness) in his perception of women a lot,
but his perception of other men is pretty vague for me. So it would be
interesting if that’s been thought out or if that’s just too tender for him.

(Don)

His friends seemed to be caring but he’s aware of that macho component
and it’s not something he missed, like he doesn’t envy. And he really
seemed to have empathy for women and understanding them so it seemed
that he gained from that. He had the sensitivity and the understanding and
he seemed to value that quality. (Wendy)

Other salient issues included spiritual development, abandonment issues, relationships with other
family members, definition of masculinity and gender roles, mother/son role definition, unresolved
yearnings, and same-sex partners as parents. Their comments on these issues were included in some of the discussion of implications for counselling research and practice in Chapter V. The independent observers confirmed that the themes seemed to accurately reflect the participants’ stories of fatherlessness, which enhanced the reliability and validity of this study.

The generalizability of this study of the lived experience for young adult men who have been fatherless from infancy has not been determined. This will be discussed further as an area for further research in Chapter V.

The next chapter will discuss the results of the study through a description of the participants, the emerging themes generated from the lived experience of fatherlessness and the general structure of the lived experience of fatherlessness.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experience of fatherlessness for young men who have been fatherless from infancy. Four men, ranging in age from 18 to 25, participated in the study. In order to be in the study, each man had to have been raised from before the age of three in a family without a father, stepfather, or father substitute, and was able to talk about his own internal experience of fatherlessness.

This section provides a description of the men, presents the emerging themes generated from the lived experience of fatherlessness, and discusses the general structure of the lived experience of fatherlessness.

Description of the Participants

The following gives a brief description of each of the men in the study. The description includes the name the person wanted to use in the study, the person's age at the time that the father left the family, the family in which the person was raised, the person's awareness of his father while growing up, and what the person is doing now. All of the men had fathers who had, at one time, had a relationship with their mothers and left that relationship. All of the men were given the opportunity to use a pseudonym in the study. None of them chose to do so, and all agreed to use their real name. The men are presented in alphabetical order.

Alex

Alex was eighteen at the time of the first interview. He was living with an aunt and uncle while attending high school.

Alex was born in a small city in British Columbia outside of the Lower Mainland. He lived for the first year and a half with his mother, father and older sister, who is one year older than he and has a
different father than he does. When he was under the age of two, his father and mother separated. Alex's father has continued to pay child support for Alex, but has had no contact with him since that time. Alex, his mother and sister moved to the Lower Mainland when he was quite little.

Alex grew up with his mother, his older sister and his younger sister, who is ten years younger than him. He has a good relationship with his mother and sisters. He was particularly close to his mother when he was a child, and he sees his mother and sisters as very close. He sometimes feels that things at home are too much focused on female interests. He envies his little sister who has an ongoing relationship with her father.

Alex was shown pictures of his father when he was a preschooler, but learned very little about him. When he was nine years old, he and his mother tried to contact his father, but were not successful. He learned that his father is married and has three other children, and he met an older half-brother. He has not tried to contact his father since that time.

At the time of the final interview, Alex was living with his mother and sisters once again and was starting his final year of high school. He still had no contact with his father, but was considering the possibility of doing so sometime in the near future. He was hoping to go to post-secondary school one day and was interested in taking courses in construction or mechanics.

Erik

Erik was nineteen at the time of the initial interview and living with his mother and younger brother, who is six years younger than him. He had completed high school and was working at odd jobs when he was able to find them. He had registered and been accepted in a computer course which was due to begin soon.

Erik grew up with his mother and brother in an urban area of the lower mainland. Neither his nor his brother's father have ever lived with them. He knows very little about his father, as his mother will not talk about him. He does not know if his father knew about him when he was born and has no idea of the
story of how his mother and father got together. As a pre-schooler, he was curious about his father, but his mother discouraged his curiosity by inventing his father's death.

When Erik was six years old his mother took him to meet his father. He was shocked to find him alive and felt betrayed by his mother. His distrust and anger towards his mother has continued into adulthood and has resulted in a conflictual relationship.

After his very short meeting with his father, he never saw or had contact with him again. He does not know his father's full name or how to contact him. During their visit, however, he did learn that his father was Irish and worked as a logger. He also learned that his father was a married man with three other children.

Erik has begun to explore his Irish heritage through a study of the Druid philosophy and religion. He has found a structure which helps him to make sense of his world in a positive way.

At the time of the final interview, Erik was still living with his mother and brother and still had a very conflictual relationship with both of them. He had no further information about his father and had no plans to attempt to contact him. He had finished one computer course and was hoping to register for a computer programming program at a local college. If successful, he would like to find a roommate and move away from home.

James

James was twenty-five at the time of the initial interview. He was sharing an apartment in a Lower Mainland city with a male roommate. He was working full-time.

James was an only child. He lived for the first two years of his life with his mother and father. His parents were together for a total of about five years before they decided that they would be happier apart.

James had no contact with his father after their separation. From the time he was a pre-schooler, his mother shared with him some of the information she knew about his father and showed him pictures of his father. James has a vague memory of being held by his father when he was an infant, but does not
remember missing him when he was gone.

James grew up with his mother and, for ten years of his childhood, her female partner. He has a very close relationship with his mother and maintains close contact with her as an adult. He also maintains a close relationship with her ex-partner.

When James was seventeen, he began to prepare himself to seek out and contact his father, but, before he could act, his father died. He remembers grieving the loss of the father he never knew and the loss of the opportunity to learn more about himself.

At the time of the final interview, James was still living with his roommate, but looking for a home to buy for himself. He maintains a very positive relationship with his mother. He feels responsible for her and is planning for the future when his mother, because of a medical condition, will require that he take on the role of caretaker. He is satisfied with his job and has no plans to change it at this time.

Richard

Richard was twenty-five at the time of the initial interview. He was living with his girlfriend in a suburban community in the Lower Mainland. He was working at more than one part time job.

Richard was born in a city in Britain. He lived for the first few months of his life with his father, mother, older sister who is nine years older than him, and older brother who is seven years older than him. When he was approximately six months old, his father left the family and moved to Canada with another woman. His parents subsequently divorced and his father re-married. He imagines that his parents corresponded every year or two during his childhood and that his father may have sent some support money for a few months after he arrived in Canada. However, he does not remember being told of their correspondence and the family received no financial support from his father that he can remember.

Richard had a close relationship with his mother, his sister who helped raise him and his maternal grandparents who took a very active role in the family. He became particularly close to his grandfather who was very supportive and encouraging, although Richard does not feel that he took on the role of a
father in his life.

When Richard was seven years old, his brother suffered an emotional crisis which resulted in Richard's father coming back to Britain to take him home to Canada with him. His brother never returned to live with the family. When Richard was nine years old, his paternal grandmother took him to Canada to meet his father, his step-mother, his older brother and his half-brother, who was a few years younger than Richard. He remembers feeling little emotion towards his father and step-mother, but feeling quite threatened by his half-brother.

When Richard was eleven years old, his mother placed him in foster care so that she could devote her time and energy towards improving her financial situation to better her and her child's lives. He felt traumatized by what he perceived as her abandonment and, after a few months, his maternal grandparents, with whom he spent weekends, agreed to have him live with them. He lived with them for about three years until he could live with his mother again.

Richard immigrated to Canada with his mother when he was sixteen years old. He is developing relationships with his father, older brother and half-brother. He has been able to connect quite well with his half-brother, but is not able to connect well with his father and brother. He still carries anger towards his father for his abandonment.

At the time of the final interview, Richard was still living in a suburban community in the Lower Mainland. He had separated from his girlfriend and was creating a home for himself in his own apartment. He still had a very distant relationship with his father and was hoping to orchestrate a meeting for his father, mother and himself to learn more about their story and what happened in his past. He still maintains a positive relationship with his mother. He is working on building his own company in partnership with another man, and hoping to be financially secure soon.

**Emerging Themes**

Following Karlsson's (1994) method for conducting phenomenological research, a thematic
description of the phenomenon of the lived experience of fatherlessness emerged through:

1. gathering data from audio-taped interviews,

2. transcribing the interviews,

3. breaking the transcript into meaning units,

4. transforming the meaning units, and

5. writing individual structures of each man's own experience of fatherlessness.

Each theme reflects some essential aspect of the lived experience of fatherlessness for all of these young men. They are:

**Theme 1:** The lived experience of fatherlessness creates a perception of the person who the father may have been. From information gathered from a variety of sources, he person invents aspects of his father’s personality, feelings, thoughts and expectations which he believes characterize the father he did not have.

**Theme 2:** The lived experience of fatherlessness creates a perception of how things would have been different if father had stayed. The person has a picture of how his life would have changed if he had grown up with his father’s influence.

**Theme 3:** The lived experience of fatherlessness develops internal resources. The person develops parts of himself which he learns to value and which serve him into his adult life.

   The lived experience of fatherlessness:

   - develops self-reliance.

   - develops sensitivity.

**Theme 4:** The lived experience of fatherlessness creates a perception of what fathering entails. Although he has not had a father to model for him what fathering is, the person has a clear picture of what elements make up a good father and a perception of what his own role as a father would be like.

**Theme 5:** The lived experience of fatherlessness impacts relationships with others. Growing up without a
father gives the person a unique outlook on relationships and affects the dynamics of those relationships.

The lived experience of fatherlessness:
- impacts relationships with family members.
- impacts relationships with other men.
- impacts relationships with women.

The General Structure Of The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness

For Young Men Who Have Grown Up From Infancy Without A Father

The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Creates A Perception Of The Person Who The Father May Have Been

When a person has grown up without a father he creates a perception of the person who he imagines his father may have been. Usually, he has little information about his father on which to base his perception. "He was Irish, he was a logger at the time." (Erik) "I know that he lived in (city)." (Alex) "Well, I know a little bit, you know, where he grew up and, you know, that sort of stuff like that. His family and stuff." (James) He takes from a variety of sources to invent the father who was not there. Sometimes this perception is based on some small piece of information about his father which he has received from his mother or some other person who knew his father. "He used to play the hot shot" (Richard) "She told me he hides behind women's skirts" (Alex). Sometimes it comes from having seen a picture of his father and "reading" the facial expressions and body language of the person in the picture. "Hm, he looks like a pretty nice guy" (Alex) "He resembled that picture of Jim Morrison on 'An American Flag' . . . with the beard and stuff" (Erik). Sometimes it comes from how he himself experiences his relationship with his mother and then imagining his father coping with her in a similar fashion. "Seeing as how much I'd argued with my mom and stuff, I can see he was probably like, man, they just couldn't get along" (Erik).

If the person's relationship with his mother is secure and loving, he is more likely to invent a father
who encompasses the possibility of both positive and negative qualities. "I think he could be a pretty nice guy, but on the other hand, he could be, like, one of those guys who just doesn't care" (Alex) "I think he might be kind of proud that, you know, I'm not an Arian Racehead or anything like that. Or he may be disappointed cause he may be one, you know, I don't know" (James). If the relationship with the mother is conflictual and distant, he is more likely to idealize his father and attribute only positive qualities to him.

To be quite honest, if I had more contact with my dad, and he ever challenged custody, I would have gone with him. Because, it was just like, when I did meet him, even though he seemed strict at the time, right, he also seemed like he'd explain things more clearly. Like, he'd say why he did something. He didn't do stuff - with a reason, it wasn't - and with her it never really had a reason, it seemed. So I don't know, it just seemed more natural with him.

(Erik)

Similarly, if his mother built a secure and stable life for herself and her children, he is more likely to accept his father's decision to stay out of his life. "I didn't really think much of it - that was his decision" (Alex) "It wasn't like I had this withdrawal and she had to fill a void. You know, it's just, the void was not there" (James). If his mother showed signs of distress about making a life for herself and her children, there is more of a likelihood that the son will experience anger at his father for abandoning them. "At times I blame him and at times I don't. It all depends on the mood of the day, really" (Erik) "See I wouldn't do, I couldn't do that, I couldn't - you see, he's a strange guy" (Richard).

The person has tried to create a story of his parents' relationship by examining the time period in which they were together and the social climate of that time, and by examining the place in which their relationship took place. "Sometimes I just wonder - makes me wonder because it was the '70's, because there was a huge lack of birth control and I always hear her talk about the 70's" (Erik) "I think pretty much
my mom was kind of playing the traditional role and they got married ... and you know they were, it was like a standard thing. They were involved, well both sides of the parents and my grandparents ... and, I don't know, I guess it was a pretty kind of standard kind of traditional kind of marriage" (Richard) "I think they were just two young people in (province) in the '60's, just growing up and stuff like that." (James).

He has also attempted to create a story of how his parents ended up living apart. His story might encompass problematic dynamics within the parental relationship. "I don't know why he didn't stick around, but it's probably him and my mom got into an argument or something" (Alex) "He was kind of there but I don't think he was all that involved ... He spent a lot of time at the pub with his friends ..." (Richard) "And they were together for about five years, and I think that they decided that that's not what they wanted to do." (James) It might suggest that their relationship was not a serious one. "I figure it was most likely that they might have took an affair or something" (Erik). It might include perceived weaknesses or faults on the part of the father himself. "Or he was scared of being a father at that time" (Alex) "I get the feeling that he was just kind of the way that he is now, he was very kind of distant" (Richard). It might suggest that he had other obligations which took precedence over the person and his mother. "I don't know why he didn't stick around but I've kind of pieced together that it was probably because of the other family" (Erik) "Could be just wrapped up in his job and his other family. He's got kids of his own, so, he has another family to take care of." (Alex).

The absent father is not perceived as a whole human being. Rather, the person invents aspects of his father which relate to his own needs and interests at a particular time in his life. Often these aspects mirror aspects of the son who identifies with what his father may have experienced. "... maybe even a little bit confused, you know, trying to grow up and trying to figure out" (James) "I don't know, he just seemed to be like the average guy trying to make it through" (Erik).

The person's father would have had physical similarities to him. "I look so, so identical to him it's unbelievable ... we have the same name, I stand the same way as him, you know, a lot of that kind of
physical thing, the way we move and whatever; we're really similar" (Richard) "He had my eyes and eyebrows, and kind of the way that his face is shaped" (Alex) "I think my appetite" (James). They also would have shared character traits. "Well, my traditional response is to run, probably in much the same way that my father took off" (Richard) "I guess, um, respectful and stuff like that" (Alex) "Maybe my sense of humour or ... some of my personality" (James).

When the person has not yet met his father, he imagines that his father would approve of the man he has become. "I think he might be kind of proud. I have, you know, a head on my shoulders, I have a job, I went to school" (James) "If he likes sports then that's another thing that he would like about me, cause I'm a sports fanatic" (Alex).

If he has met his father, it is more difficult to feel that the man who abandoned him approves of him. "It's annoying because, like, I want him to accept the fact that I'm a hard working, creative person who has a lot to offer the world and he doesn't." (Richard) "When I met him I was quite angry and spiteful, so I suppose I can understand that, looking back at how I behaved, why he didn't come to see if I had actually changed or matured or something" (Erik).

**The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Creates A Perception Of What Would Have Been Different If The Father Had Stayed.**

The person perceives that, if he had grown up with his father things would have been very different. However, he is not always clear about what those differences might be. "There's been so much that he could have been there for, it could have been totally different or it could have been totally the same" (Erik). "I think my, some of my experience would be different. That's kind of - it could be even a new thing, and even my personality, too" (Alex).

The relationship between father and son would have been an important one. "If he was around it would be an important relationship, just like me and my mom." (Alex) "I think just generally doing things, I don't think it really mattered what - but just spending time with someone, get another view point on
growing up" (James) "Just the small father/son bonding type of thing, you know" (Erik). If he was able to
grow up with his father, he would have avoided the pain that fatherlessness brought him. "I would have
someone for those father / son days which is a good thing" (Erik)

Sometimes, after meeting his father as an adult, the person finds discrepancies between the father
he wanted and the father he meets, and decides that he is relieved to have grown up without him. "I
wouldn't have wanted my father, if he was back then the way that I see him now. I'm kind of glad that I
didn't have that influence in my life." (Richard)

If the person has never known his father, he perceives that he and his father would have a good
relationship. "I'd have, like, a good relationship with him" (Alex) "I always get the feeling I would've
gotten along better with (father and his family) than I did with my own family" (Erik). If, as an adult, he
has connected with his father and become disillusioned with the discrepancies between the father he
imagined and wanted and the man he meets, he may become discouraged in trying to pursue a relationship
with his father. "I kind of feel like it's pointless cause I don't feel like he'll ever change" (Richard).

The person creates a perception of a relationship with a father who would understand him or who
would help him to understand himself better. "I might have understood more about my personality or had
someone around who understood me more" (Erik) "I think he would be kind of like being sort of a little
understanding," (James) "Just another male to be able to kind of relate to" (Richard).

The person perceive that his father would have taught him many things about life. He would have
taught him about the male culture and the dynamics of being a man, and nurtured his masculinity. "I think
I would have benefited from a real strong, caring male figure." (Richard) "I think it would have been nice
to have a masculine, male figure" (James). He would have taught him to have the qualitites which are
accepted as male in our society.

I find it very difficult to be kind of very solid and linear and strong and a
rock kind of thing. I think those are kind of male qualitites. But you see I
kind of feel like if I had that kind of influence then it would be natural to me now, and it would probably help me a lot in my life. It's almost like if I'd had . . . like a male influence there it would have balanced it out.

(Richard)

His father would have taught him about the changes he experienced during adolescence. "Like on T.V. you always see a dad shaving and the little boy standing next of him on a chair" (James) His father would also have taught him skills and offered advice to his son about future career plans. "Like trying to figure out a career and what to do ... it would be nice to have a second opinion." (James) "I mean if I had a dad around then I might have more experience in different stuff. Then, like, in the future I would have that experience to, like, get a job or something" (Alex).

The person's father would have taught him how to negotiate male / female relationships. "And I think maybe if I grew up and I had a father he could tell me when - you know, an example of when you phone and when . . . there's a time to keep a distance and when there's a time to go and sort of things like that." (James).

The person's father would have been a man who had interests in stereotypical masculine pursuits such as sports and would have shared that interest with his son. "And I think if there was a father in my life I'm sure that that might have been sort of like, 'Well, let's go play soccer' or 'Let's go do this', you know." (James) "Even to this day I don't really watch sports and stuff. When I do I think of the father aspect and stuff" (Erik) "Like going out to events more like monster trucks and stuff like that" (Alex).

He would have also shared his skills in mechanics and building. "I think that I would be doing more, like, manly things . . . carpentry, mechanics, stuff like that" (Alex) "You know, if you spend time with someone ... talking and just working over the car and being a little assistant with a father ... you sort of pick up a few things" (James) "And people know how to rebuild cars and stuff like that, the big kid type of dad." (Erik).
The Lived Experience of Fatherlessness Develops Internal Resources

As the person matures and is able to process the impact of fatherlessness, he becomes aware of some of the lasting effects of fatherlessness in his life. One of the lasting effects of the lived experience of fatherlessness is the development of internal resources which serve the men into their adult lives. An internal resource develops from an unconscious, often positive, intrapsychic response to interpersonal family dynamics and may be learned very early in a child's life (Satir, 1988). It comes from an inner source of strength and validation (Satir et al, 1991). The person values his internal resources and uses them to enrich his life.

Two of the internal resources which are common among young men who have been fatherless from infancy are self-reliance and sensitivity.

The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Develops Self Reliance.

During childhood, the person learns that he must rely on himself to take care of himself and to learn things which he cannot learn from his mother. "I had to be more self-reliant" (Eric) "I just take them on and try to figure them out." (James). This becomes an source of pride as the men explore and discover their abilities in a variety of different areas. "I did this all by myself" (James) "I've done a lot of things without my dad being there" (Alex). The ability to approach an unknown, analyse what is needed, and teach oneself how to do what is needed is a positive resource which the fatherless person has developed. "Believe in yourself, focus on your goals, choose one - basically, choose one, visualize something, choose something, visualize that you get it and then work to get it" (Erik)

Self-reliance does not seem to develop as a result of asking for help and not receiving it. It seems, rather, to come from the person's decision to learn things on his own. "Myself. I just didn't bother asking anybody" (Alex) "I just tried to do them on my own" (Eric).

The person often takes time alone to plan for his future. "Sort of maybe helps me make more decisions instead of consulting with people" (James). He does not have an expectation that others will help
him, although when he thinks about it, he may recognize that it might be helpful. "I didn't really wish it, but it would have been nice" (Alex). He may have learned to focus his attention in order to accomplish all of what he wants to do. "Focus on something, but at the same time, usually I had so much to do that I had to learn to split my focus to two, three, sometimes even four things at once" (Eric). He likes to think things through before making decisions. "I'm not a person that will make an impulsive decision or anything like that" (James).

The person often prefers to do things alone and in his own way rather than consult with or depend on others. "Sometimes I'll bounce things off and consult . . . but generally I just . . . do things my way" (James) His need to express his individuality may even cause him to reject others influence. "Cause I think I was always kind of rebellious and so I didn't like any kind of conformity" (Richard) "I just want to do what I want to do . . . and I've got an attitude 'Accept me or don't'" (Erik).

He derives a great deal of satisfaction out of his ability to succeed through his own individual expression. "And so that really is a very big part of my life because I really, I see the results of what I've made over the past few years . . . so it's really me that's being put into there and so that is a very important thing to me" (Richard). He has learned to go after what he wants. "I guess how to go after things, not just sit around and talk about doing them" (Alex). He knows that if he perseveres, he will usually succeed. "You can do whatever you want" (Richard) "If I try hard enough, I can actually do it" (Alex). "Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it, because there's no such thing as impossible, only improbable" (Erik). Through his own efforts, he can reach his goals. "I suppose your dreams can come true" (Richard).

**The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Develops Sensitivity**

The lived experience of fatherlessness fosters sensitivity in young men. This sensitivity manifests in two ways in young men who have grown up without a father. The first involves the ability of the person to be in touch with his own emotional world and connect with others at the emotional level. "I'm very sensitive to certain things. I pick them up right away" (Richard). The second involves emotional reactivity
in response to unmet expectations. Fatherless young men experience their emotions deeply. "I'm a very sensitive, emotional person" (Richard) "If a person bothered me I would be much more sensitive to the issue ..." (Erik)

Sometimes the person's mother taught him as a child to appreciate differences in people. "I think she taught me that everyone's different and it's O.K. to be different and that it doesn't matter if you have a mom or dad, black or white, that sort of stuff" (James) If she was also empathetic towards his feelings, he is generally sensitive to and accepting of other people's differences as when he is an adult. "I think I'm more open and understanding to lots of different ideas, cultures and backgrounds, that sort of stuff like that" (James). He values other people's experiences. "I'm pretty respectful" (Alex) He also values his own uniqueness and experiences. "You know, I'm a pretty O.K. person, I think" (James)

If the person's mother accepted and validated his emotional world, the person is likely to value the emotional worlds of others. "It just enables me to really look at my own feelings and talk to other people about their feelings" (Richard). He is also able to accept divergent opinions. "I can see more - a couple of sides and take on different opinions" (James).

When he was a child, the person often felt different from other children. "I think I remember being different from the rest of the kids, as a smaller kid being different, and people would ask me where my dad was and I would go, 'I don't live with him!'" (James). "...feeling different ... there would be events like for Father's Day ... so a bit more like the outcast ... because at that time there wasn't even one kid I can really remember that was also in that situation ... it was hard at the time" (Erik) "I think I said something like 'I don't even have a father' or something and he left me alone" (Richard).

When the person feels that his experience of an important issue has been discounted he reacts with deeply felt hurt. "We're talking like kind of, I don't know, mass trauma or something" (Richard) "It's like, oh, too hard to deal with" (Erik). He learns to cope with his hurt in a way that will protect him from further hurt. One of the ways to protect himself is to act out. "And for several years I was extremely
violent, like I would get into fights on a one to two time a day basis" (Erik) "I grew my hair, I started getting into really wild music, I started smoking, the standard kind of thing" (Richard).

Another way to protect himself is to withdraw inside himself when things feel too overwhelming. "It's like, you know, you try to kind of fit in, you get stuck and it disappoints you and frustrates you, it dejects you and so you go into your world again" (Richard) "She's given me some books and stuff, but sometimes it just goes in one ear and out the other and I think that's just sort of a 'hands up' thing" (James). He sometimes makes other people's feelings more important than his own. "I'm a bit of a victim, I think" (Richard)

As the person matures, he learns to change his expectations of himself and others so that he can be more flexible. "Whatever happens, it happens; let it happen and then you'll be O.K." (James) "Whenever, with me, especially things are more fluid, you know, just like water, it bends and shifts to fit the time and space needed, you know" (Erik) He has learned that he is not defined by his experiences. "I think I've probably matured enough to understand that if you are really interested in something, you can go and study ... and take that information and use it for what you want to do with it. You know, you're not confined by it" (Richard).

**The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Creates A Perception Of What Fathering Entails.**

Although he has not had a role model for fatherhood, the young man who has grown up without a father has developed a perception of what the role of fathering entails. He frames his perception of fathering in the picture he has of himself in a fathering role. He sees specific qualities which make up a good father. Some of these qualities are ones which he, himself, possesses. Others are qualities which he is struggling to develop. Because of this, he often has mixed feelings about whether or not he would like, someday, to have a child and take on the role of father. "I don't know if I'm going to have children" (Alex) "I feel very kind of iffy about having a family" (Richard). The qualities which he sees make up a good father include responsibility, commitment, caring, acceptance and flexibility. "I really started to believe
that as long as you give, you truly love the child for what he or she is, and realize that they are their own person, and allow them to become their own person, and support them, and try not to kind of like instill things in them that you are not even sure about yourself or stuff that you don't necessarily believe in, then I don't think that you can go wrong" (Richard).

The lived experience of fatherlessness places responsibility as an important quality of fathering. "Responsibility, definitely, money and time" (Alex) Without having had a model of a responsible father, the person finds the idea taking on the responsibility of a child somewhat intimidating. "I think that I would do a good job, but I'm not too sure, you know" (James) Part of the fear of the responsibility of fatherhood is about financial responsibility. "I would want to be financially stable and I'm not right now, although I am working to be and hopefully, you know, that will work out for me" (Richard).

Commitment is another quality which is important to fathering. "But if I do, I'd definitely stick around" (Alex) "But when you start holding them from day one and you grow up with them, then three and a half years later it's just, you know, it's part of your life" (James). He does not want his child to grow up without a father in his life.

He also sees a good father as caring for his child. "The fact that I'd make friends with my child, just not be the parent and tell them what to do and stuff. That's not how you make a friend, right" (Alex) "I could be fun and playful and stuff like that" (Erik)

The person also perceives that a good father accepts his child's uniqueness. He encourages his child to develop his or her interests. "Seeing what his interests, his or her interests would be and get them into something that he likes or she likes" (Alex) "I would try and be very, very supportive of what the kid wanted to do" (James). He also encourages his child to express his or her feelings freely. "Also talking about how, like feelings and problems and whatever ... just kind of be able to make the child feel like he can express himself anyway he feels the need to, you know" (Richard).

The person sees flexibility as an important quality for a good father. "I wouldn't be rigid like,
'Well, you can't do this just because', because everyone hates that and it just leads to challenge" (Erik) It is important that the person taking on the fathering role be open to learning about parenting. "I think the ones who say, 'Boy, we'll make good parents, I think they might be the bad parents ... I think they've sort of got their children's lives sort of reset out, like maybe trying to make up short falls from their own lives" (James) "I don't assume that I know how to raise a child well so I think that's actually a healthy thing because it's going to allow me to learn how to do that" (Richard).

For the person, part of being a flexible father is also being willing to listen to the child and explain himself clearly. "I'd be strict, but I'd explain why I was strict about things" (Erik) "Also talking about how, like feelings and problems and whatever, however, while trying to refrain from overdoing it" (Richard).

The lived experience of fatherlessness also leads the person to want to be a positive role model for his child. He wants to develop parts of himself which he feels are lacking or need attention before he becomes a father. "I think I would like to be much more confident in myself so that my child would actually see that in me and mimic that" (Richard). He also wants his child to learn the qualities which he is proud of in himself. "I think one of the things that I'd like my children to have is a good sense of humour and a good personality and to be well liked and sort of more like me ..." (James) "I'm creative in the sense that I understand what it means to materialize ... ideas and bring in kind of like things from inside of yourself, like, which is kind of - I personally believe that it's almost like a channelling of divine energy or something, so that's something that I would try to encourage" (James).

The lived experience of fatherlessness allows room for the person to invent the father he wishes he had. "If I was young, I'd like to have me as a father. The qualities I enjoy in myself, I'd like to pass those down" (James). He hopes that he would make a good father and that his children would enjoy a good life. "I think a kid of mine would probably have a good chance of having a good life, actually, but I could be wrong" (Richard) "People actually say I'd be a great dad, so I'm quite confident about that" (Erik) "I think
that I would do a good job, but I'm not too sure, you know" (James). If he decided not to become a father, he sees that he would miss out on a valuable relationship. "I'd have obviously one or two less friends, right- like little friends like this. I'd be obviously more lonely" (Alex).

**The Lived Experience Of Fatherlessness Impacts Relationships With Others**

The lived experience of fatherlessness incorporates both the interpersonal and intrapsychic processes. The interpersonal processes include interacting with a single, female parent and the siblings who compete for her attention, defining gender roles by interacting with role models, learning to interact with persons of the same sex, and learning to interact with persons of the opposite sex. The intrapersonal processes include learning how to cope in relationships, dealing with feelings, developing perceptions and beliefs, challenging expectations and attempting to fulfill universal yearnings for love, acceptance, belonging and creativity. It also includes a systemic interaction between the intrapsychic and interpersonal domains. This occurs as the person learns to connect with others in a meaningful way and learns to deal with conflict. The three areas which are significantly impacted are (1) relationships with family members, (2) relationships with other men, and (3) relationships with women.

**The Lived Experience of Fatherlessness Impacts Relationships With Family Members**

The relationship between the person and his mother is the most significant one in the lived experience of fatherlessness. When he is a child, the person depends on his mother for all of his needs. If their relationship is positive, he sometimes feels that they were able to develop a closeness that would not have been possible with two parents. "They had, like, two separate relationships and I just had one. I think I may have had a better relationship with my mom." (Alex). This closeness is characterized by an emotional connection in which the person feels accepted. "While I was growing up as well I felt very much like she was - we connect. We were on the same wavelength" (James).

The way in which his mother handled the absence of his father during his childhood impacts on the person's emotional world as an adult. Sometimes she was willing to share information and pictures of his
father with him. "My mom gave me a book ... and photo albums and stuff like that" (James) "She just
showed me pictures and stuff" (Alex). When she was forthcoming about his father, the person grew up
accepting his father's absence, maintaining a good relationship with his mother, and feeling good about
himself. As an adult, he feels good about the type of upbringing he received. "I believe I had a childhood
that grew up just the same as, basically the same as if I had a dad around" (Alex) "I have no regrets. I'm
generally happy with the way that she brought me up, you know" (James).

If the person's mother lied about his father or hid information about him, it creates a climate of
distrust between the person and his mother. "Ever since then I've had trouble, like, always believing her"
(Erik). If the person's father was spoken of negatively or if his mother was struggling to survive as a single
mother, he may have learned to cope by acting out or withdrawing. "It's like I remember sort of incidents
but it's almost like I don't really know what was really going on" (Richard). He sometimes had difficulty
understanding the decisions she made for herself and her family. "I know now that my mom was really
trying to do the best thing for all the crap she was trying to deal with. But at the same time, you know, I
still think she was kind of selfish" (Richard).

During adolescence, the mother/son relationship often grew more conflictual. "We had our
disagreements" (Alex) "I think we yelled a lot" (James) "Quite often arguing and stuff like that" (Erik).
The process of individuation is facilitated when the son moves out of his mother's home. "Well, now that
I've moved out it's been better" (Alex). It often gives the person and his mother an opportunity to
reconnect. "I said, 'I love you' to her for the first time in ... it's obvious, right that we love each other, but
we just never say it, and that's the first time I said it, like, in so many years" (Alex). However, the
individuation process can be difficult when mother and son have not broken their dependence on each other.
"It just makes me angry and stuff and when I do talk about leaving I get guilt tripped, you know, which
really bothers me" (Erik). He feels he has to create distance in order to let go. "I'm trying to find ways to
distance myself and get space" (Eric).
As he grows into an adult, the mother/son relationship shifts to a more interdependent one. They may begin to appreciate what each brings to their relationship. "It's kind of cool helping out my mom, and it's things I can gain experience of, right?" (Alex) "I think it's my sense of responsibility .... but I think for her life and stuff like that she's responsible ... and she's very stubborn and strong-willed" (James). He sometimes is able to understand the dynamics behind her behaviour and accept her as a person. "Because I know my mom, right, and she's very distant ... her parents ... were very offish as well, they never hugged or anything. There was kind of an emotional chill there and my mom's kind of a result of that, I think" (Richard). If he feels that she is not trustworthy, however, he may find it difficult to understand her actions. "It's just hard to figure out ... she's one of those people who keeps her feeling bottled up until it just explodes" (Eric). In this case, he may decide to keep his emotional distance from her. "So, basically, I've got the thing, you lie to me three times then you have to prove to me that something's true before I'll believe you. It's a smart approach" (Eric).

The mother may have depended on older children or extended family members to help raise her family. "It's weird because you see my sister raised me partially so it's almost like I have two mothers. She's like half sister, half mother" (Richard). Sometimes the person develops a close relationship with a family member who is able to provide some experience which is not available to the mother. "He was really kind of very, very skilled. I really respected him for that and he taught me a lot" (Richard).

**The Lived Experience of Fatherlessness Impacts Relationships With Other Men**

The lived experience of fatherlessness impacts the type of male friends the person chooses to have in his life and the way they interact with each other. The person chooses male friends who are similar in nature to him. "I think most of my male friends ... are a little similar to me - caring, quiet, stuff like that" (James) They often have similar values and beliefs and create similar relationships to him. "There's guys, my friends, that treat girls the exact same way as I'd treat them, like, nice and respectful" (Alex) They often have similar interests and enjoy task oriented activities together. "I think the people are sort of similar
to me in my interests" (James) "I deal well with other men that way" (Richard). Often his relationships
with male friends last for many years. "Especially two or three of them. I've known them for like twelve
years" (Alex).

Sometimes, the person feels that, without a male role model to emulate while growing up, he does
not understand male culture. He is unsure about the expectations of what it means to be male. "It's almost
like I wonder, like, there must be something" (Richard). He may see male interactions as focussing on the
intellect and problem solving at the expense of feelings and intuition. "It's all very kind of intellectual. It's
all about problem solving and stuff like that" (Richard). He avoids men who take on the traditional
"macho" male image. "I don't have any aggressive, super macho friends or anything like that" (James) "I
find it very difficult to be kind of very solid and linear and strong and a rock kind of thing" (Richard).

Because he feels that the male culture is somewhat alien, the person has learned to define himself
as a man using male role models to guide him. Often the media in the form of television, movies or books
has been the model. "And so you don't really have that many role models to choose from, so you've got to
just piece together stuff based on T.V." (Erik). Sometimes he chooses an adult male with whom he has a
relationship to be the role model. "He'll just help me out, like, if I'm having a problem or something, he'll
just tell me the best way to get out of it" (Alex). His male role model may be made up of a composite of
men who have taught him things in his life. "It must have happened through just interacting with other
men" (Richard).

There are still aspects of interacting with men which the person finds difficult. He is
uncomfortable in conflictual situations with other men. "I think I sort of place myself into sort of like, sort
of positions that, you know, I don't know how to relate sometimes with guys in that sort of situation, like in
arguing and in relationships and stuff like that" (James). He also lacks confidence in social interactions
where he is expected to join in with male "ritual" activities. "I don't have any drinking buddies or anything
like that" (Richard).
The person wants to have male friends in his life who accept him as he is. "It all depends on how their personality is and who they are and how they treat me and stuff like that" (Alex). He avoids men who he feels judge him. "I just want to do what I want to do .. and I've got an attitude, 'Accept me or don't'' (Erik).

**The Lived Experience of Fatherlessness Impacts Relationships With Women**

Because he has grown up with such a strong female influence, young fatherless men have learned much about female culture. They are often comfortable in relationships which focus on emotional intimacy, a common focus among women (Tannen, 1990). "I just sort of feel, I guess, you know, just hearing, being on the women's side growing up and stuff like that" (James)

I get on well with women. I've had a lot of women who have been my very close friends and we used to have long discussions about, usually about feeling related stuff, occasionally intellectual stuff, where it's talking about kind of deeper kind of human issues to do with feelings or life directions, that kind of thing (Richard).

He often relates to women more easily than he does to men. "I actually tend to get along quite well with them" (Erik). "I think I'm more open to listen to a woman's side of the story first, to take her side first, than to another, a guy's side" (James). Many of his friends are women. "I've had a lot of girl friends" (Alex).

The person's keen awareness of women and their feelings makes him very sensitive to female experiences. This is not always positive for him. "In some ways it's bad because it makes me very oversensitive and that almost like cripples me in some ways" (Richard). He worries about the women with whom he is in relationship and feels he needs to take care of them emotionally. "Because of my sensitivity I'm constantly worrying about how they're feeling" (Richard). He deals with conflict in an indirect way to avoid hurting them. "I think ... I do the snide remarks or something like that. I think that sort of avoids saying things directly and maybe avoiding a confrontation or hurting people's feelings" (James) "I guess I'm
experienced growing up with girls in my family. I just know how to get along with them and know how not to piss them off" (Alex). The person may also prefer that women avoid conflict in relation to him. "She has that thing that used to be around like in the '50's and '40's and stuff before feminism, where girls actually felt good when they were doing stuff to make the guys they cared for happy" (Erik).

The Common Story

Although the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men is quite different for each person, it would seem that there are certain internal experiences which are common for all. However, there are a variety of ways in which persons manifest these experiences and judge the quality of the experiences.

The person generally begins to become aware of his fatherlessness at an early age, usually around the age of five or six years old. Frequently, as a young child, the person knows that his circumstances are different from other children who have fathers or father substitutes in their lives, particularly if he lives in a community where there are few single mothers. Whether he is able to accept this in a positive manner or whether it causes pain for the person is influenced by the manner in which he learns of his father and the attitude towards and openness about his father which is displayed by his mother. Beginning in early childhood, the person thinks about his father and wonders what he is like.

If the person and his mother enjoy a close and active relationship, the person becomes aware during middle childhood that some activities which he and his mother share and which he enjoys are not activities which she would choose for herself. At some point, she begins to find ways to either stop the activities, or to encourage him to find other people with whom he can enjoy them. Usually, the person accepts his mother’s decision and tries to enter into the new arrangement with enthusiasm, but there is sometimes a regret that he can no longer have the experience or share it with her.

At least one relationship with an adult other than the person’s mother becomes important during childhood. Often the person develops a closeness to an adult with whom he shares common interests and activities. This other person might be a member of the extended family, a friend of his mother’s, or a
person from an organization such as Big Brothers. However, even though this other relationship is valued greatly by the person, he does not feel that it replaces his father or that the adult with whom he is in relationship takes on a father role. He is still aware that the absent father is very much missing from his life.

When the person becomes an adolescent, he sometimes wishes that he had a father with whom to discuss the many changes which come with approaching adulthood. He is often reluctant to discuss male issues with his mother and sometimes feels uncomfortable asking for advice from other men. For some issues which he is comfortable discussing with his mother, such as career options, he wishes he had another parent from whom he could get another opinion. He learns to rely on himself to find out information and make plans.

As the person attempts to define himself as an adult male, he looks for male role models to guide him. Often the media becomes a model; sometimes it is an adult male with whom he has a relationship. He usually appreciates the man he becomes, but sometimes feels that there are parts of him which have not had the opportunity to develop.

However, the person is also learning to trust himself. Building trust within himself comes when he stretches himself to do things which his mother has not been able to teach him. As he successfully accomplishes new tasks and learns new skills, he finds he can accomplish a great deal through planning and perseverance. He has a sense of his own efficacy and his confidence grows.

Finding a way to express his inner being is important for the person. This is usually done through a creative outlet such as an art form or sports activity. The person usually is aware of a part of himself which seeks the vitality of Life expression and the peace of connectedness with Self. For some persons, this taps into a spiritual element of themselves.

The person's relationship with his mother is very important to him. By looking back on his childhood and examining his relationship with his mother now, he is very aware of how her mothering has
impacted on his emotional world. He usually attributes his success or failure in coping with his fatherlessness to her ability to make him feel secure and loved. If he is secure in his relationship with her, he generally accepts his father’s decision to stay out of his life with little emotional pain. If she did not meet his emotional needs for security and love, he yearns for the father who might have been able to give him what he missed. The struggle for individuation is sometimes hard when there is only one parent from whom to separate, and is particularly difficult when the relationship between mother and son is intensely close or distant.

As the person enters young adulthood, he finds that his exposure to female culture through living with a single mother impacts the friends he chooses and his relationships with them. He relates well to women and often has very close women friends with whom he develops emotional intimacy. He chooses male friends who are sensitive and respectful of women and with whom he can share interests and activities. Often his relationships with friends last for many years.

The person has thought about contacting, or has attempted to contact, his absent father at some time in his life. Usually the person has a desire to make a good impression on his father. Often the person is reluctant to contact his father until he resolves some issue or develops some part of himself which he feels needs attention. He has many questions he would like his father to answer, the most important ones being, “Why didn’t you stay?” and “Why didn’t you ever try to contact me?”. There is seldom anger directed towards his father. If there is resentment towards his father, it is usually about what he perceives to be unfairness. This unfairness could be attached to his childhood poverty, his disappointment that his father did not include him in his life, his mother’s lack of openness about his father, or his mother’s pain about the dissolution of the parental relationship.

The person has considered his willingness to become a father himself some day and generally has some mixed feelings about the possibility. For him, fatherhood means responsibility and a lifetime commitment, both of which he sometimes finds intimidating concepts in relationships. He is unsure of
whether he would know how to be a good father and it is important to him that, if he chooses to become a father, he be a good one.

The person has developed strong beliefs about what makes a good father. He believes that a good father accepts and encourages the uniqueness of his children and supports them in developing their full potential. He listens to his children and explains himself fully to them. He allows his children to experience their own successes and failures. He models consistency, respect, caring and flexibility.

Before becoming a father, the person is determined to create the environment in which he would feel good about raising his child. He wants to be financially secure and emotionally stable. He wants to have a committed and long-term relationship with the child’s mother. Only when he is sure that all of these conditions are met is he willing to become a father. He does not want his child to ever experience growing up in a fatherless home as he did.

The person wants his professional life to reflect the way he interacts with the world. He is not driven by the need to gain wealth and material possessions. He prefers to work in a career that reflects his particular form of creative expression and chosen lifestyle. He wants to be able to enjoy his work time and will choose a career which allows him to do that. His ambitions reflect his need to put his unique mark on his world rather than a need to move up the ladder of career achievement. He wants to create a professional life in which he can take pride and receive recognition of some kind. He sets goals for himself and, while these goals may change, his desire to find self fulfillment through his work does not.

**Summary**

The lived experience of fatherlessness is an interactive, interdependent phenomenon. The themes are systemically related. Each theme is unique and highlights a specific aspect of the phenomenon of fatherlessness. All of the themes are connected to each other; the features of each theme impacts how the other themes are experienced.

Each theme encompasses an element of the interpersonal and intrapsychic experience of the men.
The interpersonal aspects include the ways in which the theme facilitates or hinders the men's relationships and the ways in which those relationships evolve as the person gains insight into and understanding of his unique family. The intrapsychic aspects include the ways in which the men make meaning of their experiences through feelings, perceptions, expectations and yearnings and how those aspects are changed by the relationships in which the person engages. Thus, the intrapsychic elements impact and change the interpersonal aspects and vice versa. The lived experience of fatherlessness is a process which evolves through the man's life. It is a complex process of self-discovery.
CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research study explored the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men who had been fatherless from infancy. Four men between the ages of 18 and 25 were interviewed about their experience of fatherlessness. The phenomenological analysis identified five common themes in the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men. The lived experience of fatherlessness: (1) creates a perception of the person who the father may have been, (2) creates a perception of how things would have been different if the father had stayed, (3) develops internal resources, specifically self reliance and sensitivity, (4) creates a perception of what fathering entails, and (5) impacts relationships with family members, other men and women.

The themes suggest that the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men who were raised without a father includes both intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics. The meaning they made of their fatherlessness impacted their intrapsychic world at the levels of feelings, perceptions, expectations, yearnings and their spiritual selves. It also impacted the significant relationships they had in their lives.

The lived experience of fatherlessness changes over developmental stages as men gain new understanding of themselves and their worlds. It is an ongoing process which evolves through a lifetime. All of the men were able to appreciate the positive resources which they gained as a result of growing up without a father. As well, they were able to appreciate their own struggles and longings associated with the father who was never there. In spite of the absence of their father in their lives, they were able to visualize themselves in a fathering role and conceptualize the ways in which they would ensure that their children would have a positive childhood. They all confirmed the importance that the role of the father plays in his child’s life.

This chapter will discuss the findings with respect to the literature on constructive-developmental
theory, the role of fathers in child development, father loss and the mythical father. The discussion will consider the similarities and the differences of the findings in the study to the literature which was presented in Chapter II. The implications of these findings to counselling and therapy will then be presented.

**Constructive-Developmental Theory**

The review of the literature in Chapter II discussed the theory of the evolution of human beings through predictable stages from infancy through adulthood. It described the process of internal balancing and rebalancing of boundaries between self and other through the life stages, producing both differentiation and integration. This leads to meaning making of experiences as the stages are negotiated and new identities formed.

As the men described the meaning they made of their fatherlessness through the stages of their lives, commonalities emerged. All of them described their very early childhoods as happy. They were not aware of their father's absence. This concurs with Kegan's (1982) description of the incorporative stage of development. During this stage, the children began to recognize that the environment was separate from them, but the environment was subject to the child's perception of it. As long as the holding environment, which at this stage is the primary caretaker, was secure, the child felt secure and he was not aware of how he was similar or different from other children.

The men were consistent in describing their emerging awareness of their state of fatherlessness at around the age of five or six, the time when the child is evolving out of the balance of the incorporate stage towards the impulsive stage of development (Kegan, 1989). The culture of embeddedness at this stage, which provides the holding environment, is the family triad of father, mother and child. At this stage, the children began to develop a sense of "what" they were as persons independent of others, but not yet "who" they were. They were recognizing their role of "child" in relation to the caretaker's role of "parent". They were also beginning to construct an "internalized father" who did not exist in their physical environments.

They were able to compare themselves to others and note their similarities and differences. The
meaning they made of their fatherlessness was that they were somehow different from other children who they saw interacting with two parents. It was at this stage of development that James described feeling “excluded” through his own feelings of being different.

The impulsive stage of development continued through the child’s elementary school years. During this time, the child was developing the ability to be self-sufficient. He was learning to take care of his own emotional needs. James described his reaction to his mother’s reluctance to join in with school family day activities. Although he was disappointed, he did not tell her. He joined her in an alternate activity, and took care of his own disappointment. Alex described how he, reluctantly at first, made the decision to accept his Big Brother into his life when his mother decided to withdraw from his sports activities. Eric described how he dealt with his anger at his mother’s betrayal and his father’s absence by fighting with other children who teased him. Richard described using his fatherlessness to elicit sympathy from a schoolyard bully to avoid being hurt.

All of the men discussed their perception of how things would have been different at this stage of development if their fathers had stayed. Alex and James described the sports activities they could have shared with their fathers. Erik talked of the father/child activities at school he would have enjoyed.

The next stage of development, the imperial stage, encompasses the time from late childhood through mid-adolescence (Kegan, 1989). The holding environment at this stage lies within embeddedness in the institutions of school and family and, more importantly, the peer group. During this stage, people place great importance on relationships with peers. They are learning about self by having aspects of self mirrored back by others. Eric described how, at this stage of development, his situation with his peers improved. He gained acceptance with his peer group when he discovered other adolescents who were also living without fathers. He decided to put his attention on these peer relationships and to distance himself from his family and the conflicts he experienced there. Richard described the close friends he developed during this stage. While leaving Britain to come to Canada at age 16, he was more upset about leaving his
friends than his grandparents who had helped to raise him.

The imperial stage provides the environment in which persons can let go of their dependence on their families of origin. When there is only one parent, it is often difficult to negotiate this letting go process. All of the men in the study described the increase in conflict with their mothers during the imperial stage of their lives. The process of individuation was sometimes a painful one as they tried to find the distance to become wholly developed persons.

It was during the imperial stage when the person was involved in the mirroring process with others that he sometimes began to notice that his mode of interacting was different from other males. He perceived male relationships to be based on cognition, often problem-solving, and task-related activities, the culture of status and independence described by Tannen (1990). He saw his discomfort with this type of interacting as a deficit in himself and sometimes felt unsure of what the social rules were for being a male. He began to actively seek out men with whom he could "learn" how to develop this aspect of himself.

The men were conscious, as well, of the understanding they seemed to have for their female friends. They described their familiarity with the female culture of intimacy and connectedness (Tannen, 1990) and their comfort discussing feelings and yearnings with their female friends.

At the time of the interview, the men were all entering into the interpersonal stage of development (Kegan, 1982). At this stage, a person has the capacity for mutuality in relationships and seeks relationships which are interdependent. James described how he and his mother were developing boundaries in their relationship in which each had responsibilities for self and other.

The person was finding psychological self-definition. As part of this stage of development, he was able to separate himself from and reflect on his experiences, to become both the "subject" and the "object". As the men reflected on their experiences of fatherlessness, all of them took time to not only tell the story, but also to analyse themselves and the impact of their experiences from a new perspective. They gained insight into themselves as the persons they were and are now.
An interpersonal partner with whom the person could share himself became important at this time. His relationships with parents and peers became less crucial. The men in the study were all in relationships with women partners at the time of the first interview. Although they were not all committed to their partners in a long-term relationship, they were able to discuss their desire to do so and their needs in such a relationship. They were, in essence, laying the groundwork for their relationships with partners which are yet to come. In this process, they reflected on their fathers' behaviour with their mothers. Often, their expectations of themselves in intimate relationships was described in opposition to what they perceived their fathers had done.

The process of exploring fathering and their feelings about becoming a father was similar. They juxtaposed themselves against their expectations of their fathers when describing the type of father they saw themselves as becoming. They also included many of the qualities of parenting which they valued from their mothers. Their descriptions of themselves as fathers encompassed their perception of how their own lives would be different if their fathers had stayed. They seemed to be inventing themselves as the father they would have wished for themselves.

**The Role Of The Father In Child Development**

The review of the literature in Chapter II discussed the role of the father in child development from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. The literature included descriptions of poor cognitive performance (Crockett, et al, 1993), poor behavioural functioning (Crockett, et al, 1993), poor school performance (Downey, 1994; Mulkey, et al, 1992), and higher incidents of depression, hypochondriasis, hysteria and assaultive ness (Nelson and Valiant, 1993) for adolescents who grew up in fatherless homes compared to adolescents with intact families. These findings are similar to the findings of Gringlas and Weinraub (1995) in their study of illegitimate children who were raised by solo mothers. The men in this study did not show a consistent pattern of these behaviours.

Three of the four men, James, Richard and Erik, had successfully completed high school when the
study began. Alex was entering his final year of high school at the time of the second interview and expected to graduate when the year was completed. Three of the men expressed their dislike of school. Richard described his difficulty with the culture of conformity in school and how he disliked the judgements the school placed on his creativity. Erik described his frustration when the school personnel placed great importance on Father's Day and father/child events. Alex was enrolled in an alternate-type of class in high school. However, in spite of their dislike of school, they still seemed able to function there.

All of the young men in the study were socially responsible. They all, except Alex who was still in high school, were working and supporting themselves; Erik was enrolled in a computer program. They all had plans for their futures. They took pride in their accomplishments. Even Richard, who fought against conformity, and continued to do so into adulthood to some extent, is financially and socially responsible and behaves appropriately.

Erik described his childhood pain and the violence that it triggered for him, which supports Nelson and Valliant's (1993) findings. However, he learned to manage his anger during adolescence and no longer exhibits violent acting out behaviours. None of the other men experienced violent episodes.

Self-esteem did not appear to be problematic for the men in the study. All of the men expressed their satisfaction with the men they had become. Erik was still struggling with some aspects of self-esteem associated with the teasing he received as a child, but was changing his perception of himself as he received positive feedback from peers.

Koestner's (1990, in Meidzian, 1991) study found a correlation between children's levels of empathy and the level of paternal involvement. Although none of the men in this study had paternal involvement, all of them had developed high levels of empathy. They were very comfortable with discussions of feelings and yearnings and were capable of intimate relationships with friends.

It would appear that the men in the study who felt a sense of security and love from their mothers, and whose mothers were open about their fathers, had little pain associated with their fatherlessness and
were accepting of their father’s absence. Men who felt that their mothers were secretive or dishonest about their fathers, and whose mothers did not provide an environment of security and love, felt the loss of their fathers in a painful way and yearned for connection with their fathers. This is similar to the findings by Reitz and Watson (1992) in their study of adoptive families. They found that three factors impacted the child’s adjustment to adoption: how well the adoptive parents adjusted to their own loss, how well attachment was developed between adoptive parent and adopted child, and how well adoptive parents dealt with their children’s worries and curiosities about their biological parents. It would seem that the same factors were at play with the men in the study in relation to their mothers.

Most of the studies of the impact of fatherlessness in the study of the literature focussed on the behavioural outcomes of fatherlessness. This study sought to focus on the internal experience of fatherlessness and the meaning the men made of their fatherlessness. There is room for further research into the different aspects of the lived experience of fatherlessness, such as the experience of conflict, the experience of intimacy, the experience of responsibility, the experience of relationships with other males, the experience of schooling, and the experience of models for learning to be male.

While research indicates that fathers influence their children’s development, it has not been determined exactly what the role is in child development and how paternal influence impacts development. It would seem that the men in this study were able to develop positive aspects of themselves in spite of being raised without their fathers. However, further research into the factors which parents bring to their relationships with their children and their influence on child development is needed.

**FATHER LOSS**

The impact of father loss through divorce, death, adoption and illegitimacy was discussed in Chapter II. Three of the four men in the study had lived with their fathers and mothers for a short while after their births. James lost his father at around the age of two years, Richard, at approximately six months of age, and Alex, at approximately eighteen months of age. Erik had never lived with his father.
Only James had a memory of his father from the time before he left, but felt no emotion attached to that memory. Eric had briefly met his father at the age of six years, but never saw his father again. Richard had met his father at the age of nine years for a brief visit and again at the age of thirteen for another visit, but his father lived in another country and did not have regular contact with him.

Beal and Hochman (1991) reported that very young children who lose their fathers through divorce may regress during the divorce process and beyond, appearing fretful, bewildered and/or aggressive or becoming attention seeking and exhibiting separation anxiety. Attig (1996) observed separation anxiety in very young children who lose a parent through death. Brodzinsky (1990) and Maughan and Pickles (1990) found that very young children who are adopted seem secure in the families into which they are adopted, similar to birth children. A study of pre-school children of solo mothers by Weinraub and Wolf (in Gringlas and Weinraub, 1995) found that the illegitimate children did not show any significant differences in acting out behaviours when compared with children from two-parent families.

All of the men in the study noted very happy early childhoods. None of them remembered feeling anxious about their fathers’ absence or experiencing feelings of loss or separation anxiety. Their memories of their early childhoods suggest that they felt secure and loved.

Erik, who briefly met and lost his father at the age of six years, did exhibit aggression and anxiety after that time. This confirms the findings of Beal and Hochman (1991), Brodzinsky and Schecter (1990), and Attig (1996) that parental loss can trigger these behaviours for children of school age. However, Erik’s anger at his mother for the betrayal he felt at finding out his father was alive when he had been told he was dead may have contributed to the feelings of loss he experienced and exacerbated the impact of the loss of his father.

Harris (1995) found that very young children whose parents have died often go through childhood feeling different from other children who have both parents. Three of the men in this study described similar experiences. Only Alex, who grew up in a community with many single parent families, did not feel
different from the other children with whom he interacted.

Harris (1995) also found that children who have a parent who has died often create a mythical, idealized parent. All of the men in this study created a perception of the father they did not know. Eric’s perceived father was idealized, in contrast to the mother he distrusted and did not understand. Richard’s perceived father was conceived in negative terms as the person who had caused great pain to his family. Both James and Alex perceived fathers who had the possibility of both positive and negative character traits.

Reitz and Watson (1992), in their study of adoption, found that adults who had been adopted wondered, as children, if there was something wrong with them and their birth families did not want them, if there was something wrong with their birth parents and they could not keep them, or if they had been kidnapped. Three of the men in the study had made meaning of their fathers’ absence in similar fashion. Richard perceived that there was something wrong with his father who had left him. Erik perceived the possibility that there was something wrong with him and his father did not want him. Alex saw two possibilities: that there might be something wrong with his father and that his father could not keep him because of other commitments. Only James had accepted his father’s decision with peace and did not wonder about his absence.

The finding that children of divorce take on more responsibility than children of dual parent families (Beal and Hochman, 1991) was not apparent with the men in this study. Although James took on a great deal of responsibility for himself and his mother, the other men in the study did not exhibit this type of behaviour. Richard described his fear of responsibility.

Beal and Hochman’s (1991) finding that children of divorce are expected to be more independent than other children was confirmed, however. The men all described how they learned to be self-reliant. All of them took pride in their ability to persevere and actualize their plans.

Harris (1995) found that adults who had a same-sex parent die when they were very young felt that
they were missing a model of how to live their lives. Lifton (1994) in her study of male adoptees found that they felt some sense of missing part of their male identity. Richard and James reported feeling confused about the expectations they felt from society about their role as men. All of the men in the study felt that there were aspects of male experience they had missed out on through their fathers’ absence. All of them were actively seeking ways to learn the things which they felt they had missed.

Reitz and Watson (1992) and Maughan and Pickles (1990) found that adopted adolescents had a more difficult time with identity formation that non-adopted adolescents, due in part to incomplete or inaccurate information they had about their genetic make-up and their birth family history. James and Alex expressed concern about their unknown genetic inheritance from their fathers. All of the men expressed their desire to know more about their fathers in the hope that they could learn more about themselves.

Harris (1995) also found that adults who had a parent who died often used the media as guidelines for creating the missing aspects of self. All of the men in the study described how they used television, movies and books as models to follow in the absence of a father.

Harris’s (1995) finding that adults whose parent had died were delayed in negotiating the developmental stages was not confirmed in this study. She noted that, after parental loss at an early age, persons left home later than their peers and felt more insecure about taking risks.

The men in the study left home to become independent at early ages. James lived on his own from the age of twenty. Richard was sixteen when he decided to come to Canada alone. Although his mother later decided to accompany him, he left her to spend several months travelling around North America on his own after they arrived. Alex moved away from home at the age of eighteen and, although he was again living with his mother and sisters at the time of the second interview, was planning to leave home again after high school graduation. Erik, at age nineteen, was planning to move away from home with a roommate. Only James had some reservations about taking risks and trying new ventures. The other three men had all experienced, or were planning to launch, ventures into the unknown.
Fassel (1991), in her study of adults who had been children of divorce, Harris (1995), in her study of adults whose parent had died, and Paton (1954, in Reitz and Watson, 1992) in his study of male adoptees, found that parental loss often resulted in fear of intimacy and commitment. These findings were confirmed in this study. The men in the study spoke of intimate partner relationships in idealized terms. They were reluctant to commit to an intimate relationship unless there were guarantees that the relationship would last. Richard described fear of commitment and his desire to "run" when he felt conflict in his partner relationship. James described how he could not spend extended periods of time in the company of his intimate partner without wanting to get away from her for a time. Alex expressed his doubt about the possibility that an intimate relationship could last over long-term. Erik expressed his desire for a relationship where there was no conflict and both parties were working towards his happiness.

Fassel (1991) in her study of adults whose parents divorced when they were children, also found that a common trait in relationships for that population was lack of assertiveness. Three of the men described their discomfort in conflictual situations and the strategies they used to address conflictual issues in an indirect, non-assertive manner.

The study of the experience of fatherlessness also incorporates the experience of growing up with a single mother. This study focussed on the meaning the young adult men made of their father and his absence and how that had impacted their lives and relationships. However, it did not explore to any great extent the ways in which the men's mothers influenced their experience. Further studies focussing on the relationship between mothers and their fatherless children would provide a more balanced view of the factors which influence the experience of fatherlessness.

The Mythical Father

Kegan (1982) notes that, as children develop to the stage of having and experiencing their perceptions, they create scenarios which give meaning to their feelings, perceptions and expectations. Children who have lost their fathers at an early age may create an internalized father which has little basis
Schnitzer (1993) noted that children created a positive or negative father myth depending on how the child perceived that the father was viewed by the mother. Both James and Alex described their mothers’ openness and acceptance of their fathers. They both had positive perceptions of their mothers and of their fathers. Richard described his mother’s struggle with single parenthood and with her own hurt at the betrayal of her husband who left her. Richard had a positive perception of his mother and a negative perception of his father, confirming this finding. However, Erik, who had a negative perception of his mother, created a positive perception of father to counter the experience of conflict he felt toward his mother.

The experience of the perceived fathers by the men in the study confirmed Gill’s (1991) finding that the father myth embodies a limited number of qualities and often lacks the balance of positive and negative attributes.

Harris’s (1995) description of the loss of a second part of the myth, “the self that might have been,” is also confirmed by the men in the study. The men all described how their lives would have been different if their fathers had stayed. They also described how they would have been personally different and what resources and skills they would have developed if they had had the opportunity to learn from their fathers. They all had developed the ability to be self-reliant and to “figure things out” for themselves which they often imagine their fathers would have taught them if they had stayed. They often took care of themselves without asking for support from others, even if that support would be forthcoming if they requested it.

The men in this study did not describe their perceptions of their fathers in terms of an idealized myth in the ways that the literature suggests (Gill, 1991; Harris, 1995). Rather, the perceptions of their fathers which they created had aspects of both positive and negative qualities. Sometimes, the perception of father appeared to have been created as a way of the men “mirroring” back to themselves aspects of
themselves which they valued. At other times, it appeared that the perception of father served as a way for
the men to illustrate their beliefs about morality. They could compare themselves to this perception of
father to confirm their own moral structure.

There is room for further research into the creation of the perceived father and its relationship to the perceived self.

Implications Of The Study For Counselling Research And Practice

This study has several implications for counselling research and practice. For young men who are
fatherless, the intrapsychic and interactive realms are systemically interactive. Counselling research could
explore more fully and define the relationship between the intrapsychic and interactive realms for fatherless
young men. Both the internal world of the client and his interpersonal relationships need to be addressed in
counselling. Clients need not only to grow and evolve, but also to develop positive relationships and
interactions with others.

Counselling research and practice might explore how fatherless men can improve relationships with
family members. Counselling research could look at the dynamics of a positive mother/son relationship and
how the mother/son roles change over developmental stages. During the individuation process, counsellors
might help fatherless adolescents to work through the guilt and fear that may be associated with separation
from their mothers, particularly if the mother/son relationship is very close. Fatherless men may be helped
to appreciate their mothers’ resilience in raising them alone.

The subject of attachment between single mothers and their fatherless sons and the development of
self-esteem is another area for study. Counselling research could examine the relationship between the
level of openness about the absent father and the positive adjustment of fatherless sons. A further area for
study could be the relationship between the mother’s unresolved issues with the absent father and the son’s
level of adjustment. The literature does not seem to include the mother/son relationship when formulating
the behavioural outcomes of fatherlessness.
The relationship that fatherless men have with other family members is another area for further exploration. The question of whether another person besides the father who takes on a co-parenting role with the mother provides the love and security necessary to assist boys in developing into well adjusted young men is another area for research. This could include the topic of boys being raised by lesbian couples. The implication for counselling might be that it is important for counsellors to broaden their definition of family to include a variety of possible relationships which may be beneficial to the children being raised in those families. Family therapy might include all of the significant adults in a child’s world, rather than just biological parents and siblings.

An area for further development in counselling research and practice is the area of fatherless men and their male relationships. Research might explore the types of friendships which fatherless men develop and the dynamics of those relationships. The meaning and significance of friendships with other males for fatherless men could also be explored in counselling research. Counsellors might help clients to develop relationships with other men by helping them explore their expectations and feelings about other men. Fatherless young men may also need help to explore and define what it means to be male and the ways in which they experience men interacting with each other. They might need to acknowledge and accept the skills they already have while learning new possibilities for interactive behaviours.

Counselling research and practice might also address the relationships fatherless men have with women friends. Again, the meaning and significance which they place on their relationships with female friends is an area to be studied. Fatherless men might also be helped through counselling to explore the relationships they have with women. They may need to learn to appreciate the sensitivity which they have developed.

The way in which fatherless men approach intimate relationships with partners in terms of commitment and responsibility is another area to be explored through counselling research and practice. The meaning fatherless men make of their intimate relationships and the expectations they have of
themselves and their partners is an area for further study. Counsellors may help fatherless men deal with fears about responsibility and commitment. They might also be helped to find a balance between connection and independence.

How fatherless men cope with conflict is another area for counselling research. Counselling research could look at the dynamics of how fatherless men address conflict and the ways that conflict is played out in relationships. The implication for counselling practice is that young fatherless men may need to learn how to become assertive and communicate directly. They may also need to work on the impact on their intrapsychic world of their decision to avoid conflict.

The relationship the fatherless man has to his internalized father is another area to be explored in counselling research and practice. Whether this internalized relationship is conflictual, resulting in anger, or accepting, resulting in peace is an area for study not addressed in the literature. It is also an area which counsellors may want to address with clients who need help to come to terms with their disappointments and resolve unfinished business with their perceived fathers. The role of the father is not taken over by other male role models in the fatherless man’s life. The role of the father is taken by the internalized father when the actual father is absent.

Another relationship which requires further research is the relationship between fatherless men and their own children. Counselling research could examine the qualities and characteristics fatherless men bring to the role of father and the ways in which they internalize the role of father. The hopes and fears of parenting and the expectations the men have of themselves and their children could also be studied. An implication for counselling practice would be to explore the yearnings that some clients have of developing a close father/child relationship with their own children and the possible fears and expectations that might interfere with that process.

In the intrapsychic realm, an implication for counselling considers the possibility that fatherlessness may not result in negative outcomes. Counsellors cannot assume that young men and boys
who are fatherless have unresolved grief, hurt and anger associated with their fatherlessness. These feelings may be present, but they are not always associated with the experience of fatherlessness. Nor should the assumption be made that the person will create an idealized father myth. Although the young adult men in this study did create a perception of the father, it was not always idealized. The invented father often exhibited aspects of the young adult man which he valued in himself. Therefore, the perception of father may actually be one way to assist the person in access his own strengths and resources. It is also an area for further study to further identify the ways in which fatherless men make meaning of their internalized father.

Another implication for counselling in the intrapsychic realm considers the many strengths and resources which have developed through growing up without a father. In counselling, it is important to help clients build their self-esteem and become empowered. Helping them access their internal resources provides the basis for change. Sometimes clients view a resource from a negative perspective. Counsellors who explore the perceived father and the possibilities of what could have been different if father had stayed have a good chance to find resources within their negative perceptions. For example, stubbornness can be reframed to become tenacity. This study found that self-reliance and sensitivity were two resources common among fatherless young men. Counselling research could further explore and define these and other internal resources. Learning about internal resources and how they are used may help to explain why some men find acceptance in their fatherlessness and other men find anger and pain.

The ways in which fatherless men express their creativity and find the peace of connectedness with self is another area for further research. This study found evidence to suggest that this may be a common experience for fatherless men. Counselling practice needs to develop ways to encourage the client's self-exploration and the development of the self. Creativity and self-connection may be associated with spiritual development, a topic often avoided in counselling practice.

A topic related to this study but not illustrated by it is the possibility that the fatherless adult may
take on the role of his absent father in his interdependent relationship with his mother. If there is some
subtle suggestion that the fatherless son take on the “male” role in the family to her “female” role, there
might be issues for the fatherless man related to his ability to fully develop himself. He may experience
difficulties in creating intimate relationships with women. This might be an area for further study.

The study of fatherlessness for adult men requires further exploration both in terms of research and
practice. In terms of research, this may include how specific populations of fatherless men, from divorce,
father death, adoption and illegitimacy, experience their fatherlessness. It might also include how
fatherlessness is experienced by men who lost their fathers at specific stages of development. It may be
that the experience of fatherlessness varies among different fatherless groups.

In counselling practice, fatherlessness involves working with the intrapsychic and interactive
simultaneously, as both realms are systemically intertwined. The issue of the absent father needs to be
addressed as a relationship which is significant for the client. There is also evidence that family counselling
may be beneficial to help fatherless men resolve relationship issues.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide a phenomenological description of what the lived
experience of fatherlessness is for young adult men who had been raised from infancy without a father. The
perspective of young adult men was the focus of this examination of the lived experience of fatherlessness.

The sample size for this study was small. It is important to reiterate that the study was intended to
illuminate the “worlds” of fatherless young men. The results are phenomenologically informative about the
lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men.

The study described the meaning that young adult men made of their fatherlessness when they had
been fatherless from infancy. This study described the ways that the men created a perception of their
absent fathers and of the ways that their lives would have been different if their fathers had stayed in their
lives. As well, the study identified internal resources of self-reliance and sensitivity which the young adult
men developed as a result of growing up in a fatherless family. The study described the perception that the young adult men developed of the role of father and how they saw themselves in a fathering role. It also explored how their fatherlessness impacted young adult men’s relationships with their families, with men and with women. It is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers to study other aspects of fatherlessness.

A further area of exploration may be to develop a theoretical framework for understanding fatherlessness.

This study presented a discussion of the themes which appeared to be the most general and which captured the essence of the descriptions of the lived experience of fatherlessness for young adult men. The rich description of each person’s experience was captured in the common story of the lived experience of fatherlessness. The results would suggest that the lived experience of fatherlessness is a life-long process which changes and evolves through a lifetime of developmental stages. The person develops internal resources and strengths which serve him in his life. Although the person may not ever meet his father, he compensates by creating an internalized father which serves to aid him in his own self-discovery. The lived experience of fatherlessness provides the person with opportunities to learn about himself and his relationships from a unique perspective.
REFERENCES


you wish you could have had? What happened on your inside when you experienced this?

8. What would you say are the positive internal resources you gained as a result of growing up in the type of family you had? What would others (family/friends) say your resources are? How did you use them when you were growing up? How do you use them today?

9. What do you know about your father? Did you ever wonder about your father? What did you think about your father when you were a child? What do you imagine he’s like? What would you say would be the things about your dad that you wish you knew about that you don’t? What are you curious about when you think of your father?

10. Do you think your life would have been different if your father had been in it? What would have been different for you?

11. Have you ever considered contacting your father? If you knew how to contact your father do you think you would? What would you want to say to him?

12. Has being raised in the family you grew up in without a father impacted your relationships with other people? In what way? How does that work for you? What do you think that is about?

13. Do you ever imagine yourself becoming a father? What kind of a father do you think you would be?

14. If you had any advice to give to other young men or boys growing up without a father, what would your advice be? Is that advice you followed for yourself?

15. What else is important about growing up without a father that you would like me to know? How has this been for you? What else would you like to say?

16. Further exploratory questions to find out the internal experience, using Satir’s Iceberg metaphor, will be asked throughout the interview. These might include questions such as:

   • "What happened on your inside when you experienced this?” (Feelings, perceptions, expectations or yearnings, depending on where the person takes it)
   • "How did you feel about that?” (Feelings)
   • "How did you see it?” (Perceptions)
   • "What did that mean to you?” (Perceptions)
   • "What did you believe was happening?” (Perceptions)
   • "What was the outcome of what happened?” (Content or any of the internal levels)
   • "What was meaningful about this experience?” (Perceptions or yearnings)
   • "How would you have liked it to be?” (Expectations)

   • "What would you have hoped he/she would do?” (Expectations)
   • "What do you think should have happened?” (Expectations)
   • "What would you have really wanted from him/her at that time?” (Yearnings)
   • "What were your hopes and wishes for yourself then?” (Yearnings)
   • "How do you feel right now remembering this?” (Feelings or Yearnings)
   • "How do you think it has contributed to making you who you are today?” (Self)
   • "What would you say you learned from that experience?” (Self)
   • "Is it still the same for you? In what way? How has it changed?” (Self)
   • “How do you see yourself differently as a result of that?” (Self)
APPENDIX G: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Before the second interview, each participant was given a copy of his transcript from the first interview, his individual structure, the common story and the five themes which emerged from the data. The second interview was designed to encourage each participant to clarify any information which was ambiguous and to ensure that the individual structure, the common story and the themes all accurately reflected the person’s own experience of fatherlessness.

The following questions are indicative of the type of questions asked in the second interview.

1. How do you feel about what I have written?
2. Does this interpretation make sense to you? Does it accurately reflect your own experience of fatherlessness?
3. Is there anything that you’ve read which you think is a misinterpretation of what you meant?
4. Is there anything that you feel is important that was omitted from what I have written?
5. How has it been for you to participate in this study? How has it affected you?
6. Is there anything else that you’ve thought about which you would like to include at this point, or anything that we haven’t talked about that you feel is important?
7. What do you think would be helpful to other boys and men who don’t have a father in their lives?
8. Is there anything else you’d like to say about your participation in this study?
APPENDIX H: INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURE

The Lived Experience of Fatherlessness: James's story

The lived experience of fatherlessness includes life as a child, the relationship with the Self, the relationship with the mother, the relationship with others, the absent father, thoughts about fatherhood, and thoughts of the future. Each area will be separately explored.

Life as a Child

James lived for the first two years of his life with his mother and father. His parents were together for a total of about five years before they decided that they would be happier apart. "And they were together, I think, for about five years, I think, and I think that they decided that that's not what they wanted to do." He has a sense that, when they lived together, they were not living the truth of their own inner beings. "Like, you know, trying to live a lie and pretend to be someone who they're not supposed to be and stuff like that."

Childhood: Ages 1 - 5

James had no contact with his father after their separation. "You see I never, you know, my father was never there." His mother has shared with him some of the information she knew about his father. "Well, I know a little bit, you know, where he grew up and ... his family and stuff." When James was a small child, his mother also showed him photographs of his father. "Because I remember seeing old pictures, you know, of when I was very young and then, like, the side burns coming down to here and classic, classic 50's or 60's pictures..."

James has a vague memory of being held by his father before he knew how to talk. "I do remember being held by Dad and stuff like that ... and I was very, very young and I don't remember speaking at the time, so I must have been quite young." He has no emotions attached to the memories of being held by his father.

Like, I remember when I was a little older, not going to sleep in a strange bed. You know, my mom would have to rub my back and try to calm me down. I don't feel that same sense, that nurturing. I think it was just sort of being held.

He does not remember missing him after he was gone. "It wasn't like I had this withdrawal and she had to fill a void. You know, it's just, the void was not there."

Most of James's upbringing was in the company of women. "Just because of my mom's circle of friends, she didn't meet any guys and stuff like that." He would have liked more male influence while growing up. "I think it would have been nice to have a masculine, male figure." He sometimes compared himself to other children of single parents who had some kind of male influence in their lives and he found his situation difficult. "It was kind of hard for me, and I know other kids and stuff like that, they've grown up and their moms have boyfriends, you know."

His mother spent time teaching him to appreciate and accept differences between people. "I think she taught me that everyone's different and it's O.K. to be different and that it doesn't matter if you have a mom or dad, black or white, that sort of stuff. You know, they're people." He grew up accepting her chosen lifestyle as a gay person. "I don't think I took too much notice." However, he was reluctant to share it with other children who might not understand. "I used to, when I was young, lie, 'Oh, no, no, you can't come over to my house.'"

James remembers, at about the age of five or six, feeling the impact of not having a father in a
world where most families had one. "I think I remember being different from the rest of the kids, as a smaller kid being different, and people would ask me where my dad was, and I would go, 'I don't live with him.'" When he observed other children with their parents, he had a sense that he was missing out on something that others had. "You know, seeing children playing with their parents and stuff like that, I think I kind of felt excluded." He does not remember one specific event which illustrates this; rather, an overall feeling of being different. "I don't think there was like one specific event - sort of maybe smaller ones just sort of built up." His mother made him little books to help him deal with these issues. "My mom gave me a book - she makes these little books, like booklets ... and photo albums and stuff like that" She also made him aware of other children who lived in non-traditional families. "I think she pointed out one of my friends that lives with her grandmother, and that's O.K. and pointed to other people and that's O.K. You know, and explained that, 'You still play with them and that's O.K., so they must be neat people if you like to play with them'."

**Childhood: Ages 6 - 13**

James remembers himself, for the most part, as an agreeable, happy child. "I was nice, quiet, good natured kid... well liked, good sense of humour." He has a sense now, in retrospect, that his mother may have sometimes found single parenting difficult. "I think it might have been hard for her ... I think maybe she saw some of the things that maybe I was missing." He suspects that she couldn't always provide the kind of support she thought he needed. "I think she was disappointed that she couldn't provide that sort of support and comfort... emotional support." As a result, James sometimes felt disappointed about missing out on some experiences that were not always available to him. "Going to like the family picnic at school or something like that, you know, with all the moms and dads and there's just my mom. Sometimes she didn't want to do those type of things, cause she couldn't relate to those type of people and it was 'Let's just go do something else.'" It was sometimes hard for him. "I think it was a little difficult." However, he did not share his disappointment with her, but went along with what she wanted. "Mom says it, you do it."

James remembers when he was in elementary school wondering if another child who shared his birthdate might be related to him. "There was a little girl with the same birthdate and I wondered if she was my twin." He explains that this was related to his awareness of a part of him that was unknown. "I think it had more to do with not knowing about that other part of my life."

**Adolescence: Ages 14 - 18**

When James reached adolescence, he found ways to learn about becoming a man. "I was in school and through friends and a book and my mom and ... I just picked it up myself." His mother provided him with the information she thought he'd need. "She gave me that book Our Bodies Ourselves for teenagers, ... so it had practically everything in it... But she did, you know, take a talk and stuff like that." His mother suggested that James talk to her father about male issues. "'There's your grandfather if you want to ask questions' and that sort of thing." However, he did not feel comfortable asking his grandfather for help. "I didn't really want to do that ... it's not something I think I would have felt comfortable asking."

When he was five years old, his mother's partner moved in with them and the three of them lived together until James was 15 years old. "They were together for like ten years." She became a very important person in his life. "She was a big part of my life." After she and his mother separated, James went through a grieving time very similar to what children experience when their parents divorce. "You know, the same sort of thing that any kid goes through after a divorce. There was never a sense that I'm going to go live with (her), it was just, it was hard." After she moved away, he spent time at her new home with her, much as children of divorce visit their non-custodial parent. "I would go over and stay the night and she taught me to drive and that sort of thing." He remembers his mother's pain at the time of the break. "I didn't, you know, - seeing my mom going through hurt and anger, you know, the break up things." He sometimes felt in the middle of the two women he loved. "And then always getting questions and stuff, 'Did you do, did you do this?'." When he was twenty, his mother moved out and left him alone in
the house. "Most kids move out, but she left me the place."

When James was seventeen or eighteen years old, he began to explore the idea of contacting his father. "And I was just, just starting ... toying with the idea." He did not feel ready to actually seek out his father and was prepared to wait until he felt brave enough to look for him. "And I knew it would probably take awhile, maybe a year, before I could finally get enough courage and then, you know, do the hunting down." Before he was ready to do that, he learned that his father had died, "...but about three months later he died." He remembers feeling grief at his loss and feeling very disappointed. "And I do remember crying because it was a loss that I didn't know and ... I think that was more of disappointment." He had not only lost the man, but also the chance to know something more about himself. "If I could see him walking down the street or something like that, together, if he did something and I do that, well maybe that says, 'Oh, maybe that's where I get that from'; you know, that sort of self-discovery or something like that."

**Relationship with Self**

James still sees himself as a work in progress. "I don't know if I know who I am yet." However, he feels very good about the adult he has become. "I have, you know, a head on my shoulders, I have a job, I went to school ... things looked pretty good for me." He takes pride in having attained success in his life through his own efforts. "I did all this by myself." He would advise other boys growing up fatherless to stay positive and accept the good things in their lives. "I think, not to be ashamed of who your family is and to accept what you have and make the best out of it."

James is very appreciative of the internal resources he learned while growing up. "You know, I'm a pretty O.K. person, I think." He sees himself as a person who can accept other people's differences and understand others' points of view. "I think I'm a lot more open and understanding to lots of different ideas, cultures and backgrounds that that sort of stuff like that." As a result, he has a diverse group of friends who he values for their personhood rather than their roles. "I have a lot of friends who are multicultural and ... I take friends for who they are, not where they're from and what they do and that sort of stuff." He is able to listen to and understand divergent viewpoints. "I can see more - a couple of sides and take on different opinions..."

James takes pride in his ability to take on and learn new things on his own. "I just sort of take them on and try to figure them out." Without a man in his life to teach him how to do tasks which many men learn, he has had to learn how to do them by himself.

You know, I never had someone in my life who worked on cars or anything like that who spent time - you know, if you spend time with someone ... talking and just working over the car and being a little assistant with a father ... you sort of pick up a few things. But I try to figure out myself.

James values his time alone which he uses to make plans for his future, "like with my alone time, to think about things that I want to do." He prefers to think things through by himself rather than ask others for advice. "Sort of maybe helps me make more decisions instead of consulting with people." He likes to structure his life and think things through before making decisions. "I'm not a person that will make an impulsive decision or anything like that." He prefers to work on his own rather than with a group of people. "I don't take on big projects with different people..." However, even though he prefers making decision alone, when he is working through something important he is open to the input of people who care about him. "Sometimes I'll bounce things off and consult ... but generally I just .. do things my way." If their advice fits for him, he is willing to be influenced by them. "Sometimes I am easily influenced, but other times, you know, I can just sort of decide on what I want to do."

He also uses time alone to unwind. "But I do like ... a good stretch of time to myself just watching TV or just doing errands and just being by myself generally. I generally feel more relaxed afterwards." He
finds that, when he gives up his time alone to do what others want to do, his tension rises. "Recently I had like three Saturday and Sundays off in a row and that's rare in the ... business, and I never felt relaxed after Monday, because all my friends were around and so I had to go see them, I had to do this." He uses his time alone to rest and catch up with errands. "I sort of just sleep in, sort of do errands, I go at my own pace."

James also values his ability to be flexible. "I think I have sort of an approach of 'I take it as it comes'." He keeps his expectations of events open for new possibilities and accepts what comes. "Whatever happens, it happens; let it happen and then you'll be O.K." He allows himself to change his expectations of himself so that he can stay calm. "I have a list of like ten things to do today and I've done two of them, so they can wait for another day."

James has learned to deal with anger in an indirect way to avoid conflict. "I think... I do the snide remarks or something like that. I think that sort of avoids saying things directly and maybe avoiding a confrontation or hurting people's feelings." He remembers anger being openly expressed when he was growing up. "I think we yelled a lot." When James shows anger, his friends know that he is very upset because he rarely loses his temper.

"Very rarely, but not like yelling and screaming. But maybe a very nasty remark or something like that, and that maybe comes out once a year, and it's - my friends know that for me to get mad it must be something really bad, I think."

James sees himself as very even tempered and easy-going. "I'm usually pretty happy." He uses humour to diffuse conflictual situations. "You can always get a smile out of someone ... it's easier to smile than it is to be angry at someone." He attributes his good sense of humour to the influence of television and uncles who taught him to enjoy practical jokes, "I think watching T.V. and I used to have uncles who were practical jokers and so I think like that."

James has chosen a career which involves a great deal of stress during busy times. His flexibility and acceptance serve him on the job. "I take it one day at a time at work and try not to worry about what happens next month." He feels that his positive attitude and hard work are recognized by his employers. "They know that I'm there for awhile and they know I do a good job." His fellow employees rely on him to take on leadership in the workplace, "... because everybody comes to me for this ... because I sort of take on the responsibility."

**Relationship with Mother**

James is very appreciative of his mother and the way he was raised. "I have no regrets ... I'm generally happy the way that she brought me up, you know." He continues to have a close relationship with her, although they live some distance apart. "Because we do talk, you know, three and four times a week."

His mother has a physically handicapping condition which will continue to degenerate with time and James feels the responsibility of caring for her. "And I find it very hard sometimes that there's not another person there to help her ... you know that's a lot of responsibility on me." He knows that, as her condition deteriorates, he will be called upon to give her more intensive care. "I think it is going to be me and no one else." She has attempted to teach him about her condition, but he sometimes has difficulty accepting what will happen. "She's given me some books and she's told me what that means and stuff, but sometimes it just goes in one ear and out the other and I think that's just sort of a hands up thing."

He now tries to keep boundaries around the privacy each has and the expectations of what he does for her in anticipation of his future role as her caretaker. "... I think we both know that we have to ... point out boundaries until ... cause I know that she's going to need more help later on, so I'd rather put more help later on in helping her."

He does odd jobs and errands for her on a regular basis. "And she writes down these lists of things
that I need to do and then I'll come down about every two weeks and do them ..." He also takes her to her
doctor appointments. "She's got to go to the doctor and ... I'll drive her ..." It seems that he is acting more
on his own sense of responsibility than on any expectations or dependence she has placed on him. "I think
it's my sense of responsibility ... but I think for her life and stuff like that she's responsible ... and she's very
stubborn and strong willed." Because he wants to help care for her, he has had to plan his life around
staying in the lower mainland, even when opportunities to travel arise which he would like to pursue. "Last
year I got offered a job in Guam ... I just knew I just couldn't leave."

Relationships with Others

Relationship with Mom's Former Partner

James continues to maintain a close relationship with the woman who lived with him and his
mother for ten years. "You know, she's still part of my life and stuff like that. And her family has
accepted me and stuff like that." He appreciates her presence in his life. "She's number two on the speed
dial, so ... it's someone I'm proud of, you know."

James is glad that his mother and her ex-partner are able to continue to have a close friendship.
"They're still real good friends." His regular contact with her reflects his feelings about their parent /
child relationship. "And, you know, I go there for Christmas, and I stopped by to raid the fridge, you
know, just the other night." Through their closeness, they share many family memories.

Just recently we were cleaning out my mom's closet and (she) was down
there helping my mom and ... we saw this old shaker. And I remember the
little shaker from my kid - like I remember how we used to put the cheese
powder on. So, you know, we do have our memories as like a family and
stuff like that and now we're, I think, really close still.

He likes the affection he receives from her and the other women who have taken on "mom" roles with him
throughout his childhood. "I have like four moms. I have to hide on Valentine's Day."

Relationships with Men

James chooses male friends who are similar in character to him. "I think most of my male friends
... are a little similar to me - caring, quiet, stuff like that. I don't have any aggressive, super macho friends
..." They also often have similar interests to his. "I think these people are sort of similar to me in my
interests ..." He avoids men who take on a traditional macho image. "I don't have any aggressive, super
macho friends or anything like that." He feels that men like himself who are sensitive and caring are
becoming more common and that the macho image is becoming more and more a creation of the media and
more rare in society. "I think there's more and more people like me. I think that heavy macho thing is just
around TV these days, the odd one around."

However, he finds conflict with men to be difficult and he is not always sure how to behave. "I
think I sort of place myself into sort of like, sort of positions that, you know - I don't know how to relate
sometimes with guys in that sort of situation, like in arguing and in relationships and stuff like that."

Relationships with Women

Because he grew up surrounded by women, James feels he understands women better than men. "I
think I'm more open to listen to a woman's side of the story first, to take her side first than to another, a
guy's side." He often sides with his women friends during an argument, regardless of the topic. "If I hear
that there's an argument or something like that I'd sort of, you know, even before I hear what's happening,
you know - it could have been something totally opposite that I don't know, but sometimes I've already
sided with the women."

In James' relationship with his girlfriend, he finds that he is learning to negotiate around each of
their needs.

But I think in any relationship you try to work together and try to find the
common things. Like, I can't spend four days with my girlfriend straight. I like to say, 'O.K., I need to go do something else. I have to either be alone or go do something with my friends, but I've seen enough of you right now.

He finds it a challenge to address these kind of issues. "And, you know, the first time you have to sort of talk about that, it's hard."

James' has many close women friends. One is the single mom of an infant son to whom James has become very attached. He finds himself giving his friend advice to include her ex-partner in their child's upbringing. "And she keeps telling me that she doesn't want him to see her son anymore. I'm like, 'Well does her son ... want to see the father?' And I really stuck it to her on that one." He also is aware of being an influential adult male in the child's life. "So maybe having another influence like a really good uncle or something like that." His relationship with this little boy is very important to him. "So I am someone special in his life." He takes his chosen responsibility very seriously and provides opportunities for the two of them to interact. "I talk to (the child) all the time; now he's at the talking stage so we talk about things and stuff like that."

The Absent Father

Perceptions of Father

James’s description of how he imagines his father was at his age is similar to how he sees himself now. "I think he would be kind of like being sort of a little understanding, maybe even a little bit confused. You know, trying to grow up and trying to figure out." He imagines his father was in his early twenties when he was born and may have been living up to the expectations of others. "People don't know what they want at that age, they're just sort of told that's what you have to do. You know, get out of school, get married, have kids."

He imagines that he has inherited some of his own characteristics from his father. "I think my appetite ... maybe my sense of humour or ... some of my personality." He recently saw a picture of his father at about age forty and it brought up questions about himself and his genetic heritage.

Like, will I go bald ... and I remember hearing something in the news about people who were adopted ... about the health issues, like, what happens to them later? Do they have to worry about different things cause they're in different families? So I think I maybe was a little concerned about that, I think. Like what sort of history of cancers and that sort of thing.

If he had been able to contact his father, he imagines that his father would be proud of the man he has become. "I think he might be kind of proud that I'm not an Aryan racehead or anything like that." He concedes, however, that it is possible that his father could feel quite the opposite. "Or he may be disappointed cause he may be one, you know, I don't know." He also imagines that his father would be shocked to find that his son is a man after such a long separation. "Well, that was a long time ago, 'There's a man standing in front of me.' I think that would be very shocking."

If Father had Stayed

Although James is happy with how he was raised by his mother, he still feels that his father could have contributed to his life. "I think just generally doing things - I don't think it really mattered what - but just spending time with someone, get another view point on growing up." He would have particularly appreciated his father's input around issues such as planning for his career. "Like trying to figure out a career and what to do ... it would be nice to have a second opinion."

He feels that a father could have provided opportunities for him to experience different activities which did not interest his mother. "And I think if there was a father in my life I'm sure that that might have
been sort of like, 'Well, let's go play soccer' or 'Let's go do this', you know." Because he did not have that kind of influence, he is not interested in the sports activities which other men seem to enjoy. "I could always watch a hockey game but it just doesn't interest me, and that sort of stuff, 'Can we go and join a team' or something like that doesn't." He somehow feels that he missed out on something which others had.

Having a father to talk to might have made the transition through puberty easier. "I think about, you know, puberty and ... the changes and stuff like that. It would've been helpful." He picked up other information that he felt needed to know, but had not learned, from the media. "Or you see things on TV, you know, 'Oh, should I be trying that? Maybe I'll try that.', like on TV you always see a dad shaving and the little boy standing next to him on a chair." He sometimes still feels that he has not learned what he needs to know. "And I've learned how to do it myself and I still like, way down here, I haven't figured it out. The dangers of shaving, I don't think I'll ever learn."

He wishes that he had learned from a father about how to navigate through male / female relationships. "And I think maybe if I grew up and I had a father he could tell me when - you know, an example of when you phone and when ... there's a time to keep a distance and when there's a time to go and that sort of thing like that." He is learning from experience things that he feels a father could have told him. "And how you need your time apart and how you need your time together and that sort of stuff. And it's sometimes a little difficult and stuff like that."

**Contacting Father**

When James thought of contacting his father, he felt it might be a way of learning more about himself. "I think, maybe, that was maybe something to discover about me, something that was, maybe, missing from my life." He felt no anger towards his father and did not plan to confront him about his absence. "I know I wasn't angry, I didn't want to hunt him down and find out, 'Why did you do this? Why did you do that?'." He was more interested in learning about the other half of his heritage and his own missing pieces.

I think it was more, you know, to see who I was and what came of me, because I knew my mother very well. If I could, you know, see him walking down the street or something like that, together, if he did something and I do that, well, maybe that says 'Oh, maybe that's where I get that from', you know. That sort of self-discovery.

If he had been able to contact his father, he would have liked to have told him about how well he has done in his life, "... about my job and things like what I've done for school, who my friends are." He would like to have been able to boast to him about how well he has done. And I was getting on with my life, and maybe there might have been, something to say is that, 'Look, I did all this myself. Not with you.' But I don't think that that would be in a negative way. I would want to put it in a positive way of saying, 'I did all this by myself'.

James feels no anger towards his father now and does not feel the need to challenge his father's decision to stay out of his life. "I don't know if I would put anger or anything like, 'This is who I am. Too bad you couldn't enjoy it.' I don't think I could say that." However, he feels that, if they had gotten a chance to know each other well, some resentment may have surfaced eventually. "But I think it would take awhile to sort of come to the top and if he'd been reintroduced to my life ... maybe a classic like 'Well, I couldn't do this because you weren't here. ... you weren't here in my life.'"

**Thoughts about Fatherhood**

James and his friend who is a single mother have discussed how James would be as a father. "She said, 'You know, you'd make a very good father' and I'm like, 'Well, I think I would but I'm really scared.'" He used to reject the idea of becoming a father. "I sort of put a hand up to the kids and said, 'No, no, no', I
don't need it." Since developing a close relationship with a small child, he has reconsidered. "But when you start holding them from day one and you grow up with them, then three and a half years later it's just, you know, it's part of your life."

He finds the idea of raising a child intimidating. "I think that I would do a good job, but I'm not too sure, you know. You'd have to ask my kid twenty-five years later." He believes that parents need to be flexible in raising their children and not impose their own needs on their children. "I think the ones who say, 'Boy, we'll make good parents, I think they might be the bad parents ... I think they've sort of got their children's lives sort of reset out, like maybe trying to make up short falls from their own lives..." However, he would like his own children to use him as their model for developing their characters. "I think one of the things that I'd like my children to have is a good sense of humour and a good personality and to be well liked and sort of more like me ..." He would like himself to become the father he wishes he had. "If I was young, I'd like to have me as a father. The qualities I enjoy in myself, I'd like to pass those down."

However, he would like his children to be able to develop their own individuality. "Like I don't want another me exactly like me, I want someone different but you know somethings good and somethings bad." Thoughts about the Future

James' immediate future plans are concerned with creating a home for himself. "I'm trying to save for a condominium." He finds himself planning around this future home. "I think that's why that's high on my priority list is because I'm buying stuff now ... I think sort of moving into a new place, have all fresh stuff instead of ten different types of glasses for a dinner party or something like that."

James does not have aspirations to become self-employed, but is quite content to continue to work for others. "I'm not one of those people who want to open my own (business) ... that's something I don't want to do." He does not have plans for his career future at this time. "I just take it one day at a time at work and try not to worry about what happens next month." He is attracted to the idea of working in other parts of the world. "But I just wanted to work somewhere warm and sunny." However, he has decided to stay in the lower mainland for the time being. "I really felt attachments to Vancouver, my friends and especially my mom is a part of that."

James envisions his future in terms of caring for his mother as her infirmary becomes more pressing. "But I know she'll need more support so ... I tossed the idea of 'Well, why don't we buy a house and you can live in the basement?'. So I think, maybe, I am planning for that." He is very committed to keeping his family intact and prefers to consider homecare rather than having her live in an institution. "I've never thought about a home or hospital or that sort of thing, but just a house or something like that that we could, you know, live together as a family and, you know, cooking, and stuff like that ... or definitely that home care thing, but just being closer."
APPENDIX I: INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you think the manuscript and the themes of the lived experience of fatherlessness were connected to each other?

2. In what ways do you think they were not connected?

3. Was there anything in the transcripts that may have been omitted in the themes?

4. What was your impression of the themes which emerged from the data?

5. How do these themes relate to your own experience of doing therapy with young adult men who have been fatherless from infancy?

6. Any other questions, comments or suggestions?