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The Essential Experience of Adolescents Being Raised by Single Parent Fathers: A Phenomenological Study

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THE ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE OF ADOLESCENTS BEING RAISED BY
SINGLE PARENT FATHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE OF ADOLESCENTS BEING RAISED BY A SINGLE-PARENT FATHER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Martina L. Study

Barry University, 2007

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father. This study was concerned with the experience from the perspective of the participants, and the phenomenological method of interviewing was utilized to investigate and gain a better understanding of the meaning and experience of being raised by a single-parent father from the perception of the adolescent experiencing the phenomenon at first hand.

Method

A qualitative approach was used embracing phenomenologically based interviewing as a method of inquiry. Six adolescents from single-father families participated in the study.

Major Findings

Eight major themes emerged from the data. They are as follows: Focus on Education, Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Relationships with Peers and Friends,

Connection to a Female Support Person, Trust, Personal Growth, Setting Meaningful Goals, Different Roles of the Father, and Satisfaction with Self.

Findings offered insight as to how adolescents perceive being raised by a single father. Overwhelmingly, all the participants projected very loving and trusting feelings towards their fathers. During the personal interviews some of the participants revealed that they looked at their fathers for support and it was provided unconditionally. Overall, for this group of participants, being raised by a single-parent father has been a positive and nurturing experience.

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I would like to voice my heartfelt gratitude to all the participants who so willingly shared their experience about being raised by a single-parent father. They so kindly and generously opened their hearts and overwhelmed me with their trust and enthusiasm to contribute to this study.

As always, I owe a debt of gratitude to my best friend Patricia Weinstein who assisted me in so many ways with this research. Her never-ending support, encouragement, creative vision, and feedback have been invaluable.

Finally, to my much loved family: to my husband Bryan, who I love and cherish, whose encouragement and support helped me achieve goals that I had only previously dreamed of; and to my two amazing children and their never ending support and encouragement and unconditional love.

DEDICATION

This dissertation and its research findings are dedicated to my amazing family. I am thankful to my son Andreas and my daughter Arielle-Christine who have enriched my life and opened up a world for me that I never even dared to imagine. This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband Bryan, “who is everything I thought he was - and more”.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Family environment and parenting are generally held as the most important influences on the development of adolescents and children. Unfortunately, the American family is experiencing profound changes and can no longer be solely characterized by the traditional two parent structure. Today, being raised by a single parent is not uncommon, as the number of single-parent families in the United States has increased from 19.5 million to 26.5 million between 1980 and 2001 (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2004).

Statistics indicate that only 50 percent of children will be living with both biological parents when they reach adulthood (Meurer & Meurer, 1996). In 2002 the United States Census Bureau found that 69% of children in the United States lived in a two parent family, 23% lived with a single-parent mother, 5% lived with a single-parent father, and the remaining 3% lived in a household without father or mother present. Compounding these troubling statistics is the fact that single parent and broken families contribute to low self-esteem, negative relationships with parents, poor academic performance, and behavioral problems in adolescents (Meurer & Meurer, 1996). These findings, as well as preconceived notions regarding instability, disorganization, and deviance in single-parent families have biased present knowledge and labeled the single-parent family with a negative connotation (Moriarty & Wagner, 2004).

Despite the increase in the number of single parent father families in recent years, society as yet fails to recognize households headed by single fathers as valid family

structures (Kalman, 2003). Likewise, existing research has focused more on single parent mothers than single-parent fathers. The limited data on single fathers raising adolescents makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions that can be applied in practice. The lack of knowledge regarding this increasing phenomenon indicates the need for future studies that will lead to theory development.

One of the goals of this study is to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single parent father. This knowledge perhaps will provide insight into the world of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father as it is experienced by the adolescents first hand. By exploring these “nontraditional” single father families, a greater knowledge of family dynamics will evolve and hopefully assist family therapists, parents, and educators in providing optimum care to the family as a whole (Moriarty & Wagner, 2004).

Over the past few decades, researchers have investigated numerous aspects of single parenthood. Single parents have been assessed, interviewed, surveyed, and questioned. Researchers have compared and contrasted children raised by traditional two parent families to single-parent families with diverse results. The existing research agrees with the findings of resilience studies that family structure and parenting matter, but they are not the only influences. Children grow up in a variety of settings such as schools, friendship/peer groups, and youth groups that play an integral part in healthy development (Barber & Olson, 1997). However, the story of the lived experiences of the adolescents who live in single-parent families is largely unexplored. Their world is full of meaning, which we as yet do not completely understand. Even less understood is the

experience of the adolescent being raised by a single-parent father. The aim of this study is to examine the lived experience of adolescents living in single parent households headed by fathers and begin the process of theory development in this as yet largely unexplored area of family development from the perspective of the adolescent who is experiencing it first hand.

Background

Historically, the traditional nuclear family was formed on the basis of a mother, father, children, kinship, economics, responsibility and community ties (Moriarty & Wagner, 2004). Over time, a shift from the traditional nuclear family to more diverse families has been made due to the increased number of single-parent families. According to Field and Casper (2001), between 1990 and 2001 the number of single-parent families climbed drastically from 9.7 million to 12 million families. Since the function of the family has changed over time so has the definition of this phenomenon. Bomar (2004) defined a family as “two or more persons who are linked together by intimate association, resources, values, and consider themselves to be a family” (p. 9). The most important thing is to be aware of is that every family is unique and consists of whomever the members embrace in their family.

The United States Census Bureau (2002) defines the two parent family as children living with a parent who is living currently with his or her spouse. In a two parent family the parents do not necessarily have a biological relationship with the children – the parent could be a step parent or an adoptive parent.

During the last decades the composition of the American family has changed, seemingly penetrating the boundaries of the traditional nuclear family and resulting in

much more diverse representations of families (Emmers-Sommer, Rhea, Triplett, O'Neal, 2003). Bumpass and Raley (1995) make a distinction between single-parent households and single-parent families. According to them, single-parent households consist of children and one responsible adult as the main resource living with them. In comparison, single-parent families perhaps have a live in partner, other adult 'live ins', or parent and grandparents.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2002), a single parent family is a parent who is presently living without a spouse. Single parents may be divorced, widowed, never been married, or married but not living with the spouse at the current time (separated). In the context of the report of the United States Census Report, if an additional unmarried parent is present, the child is still identified as living with a single parent (cohabitation: unmarried partners of a household).

Single fatherhood almost doubled in the U.S. population during the last ten years, and according to the United States Census Bureau (2002), the number of children living with single fathers between the ages six and seventeen continues to increase (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003). Young (2002) states that only 15% of fathers receive the desired custody arrangement following divorce in contrast to women who obtain two thirds the desired custody arrangements. In a study investigating the experience of single fatherhood, Emmers-Sommer, Rhea, Triplett, O'Neal (2003) offered insight into the single-fatherhood experience first hand. Fathers reported the difficulty of fulfilling two roles (breadwinner and nurturer), the frustration with the court systems, and assumptions made by society. Data of this investigation revealed that many single fathers worked hard to support their children, communicated to their children that they were valued and loved,

were involved in their children's lives, and found their roles as single fathers rewarding.

Theoretical Framework

Bowen's Family Systems Theory has been embraced for this study as a theoretical framework because it is a very rich approach that offers techniques and interventions that can be applied to dysfunctional as well as functional families. Bowen so eloquently conceptualized the family as an emotional unit made up of interrelated elements, a group of components of interlocking relationships with regular interactions (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

A family household headed by a single parent father is a complex structure with challenges and developmental milestones for both parent and child. Erikson's stages of development offer insight into the development of children and adolescents and Erikson's theory is also presented as a theoretical framework for this study. Each of Erikson's eight stages is clearly articulated and leads parents, teachers, and therapists to a better understanding of how personality slowly progresses through each of the stages. A thorough understanding of Erikson's developmental stages, particularly stage five (identity versus role confusion), offers insight in this most important and difficult challenges of the adolescent period of development (Lloyd, Blake & Te'Neil 2002).

Statement of the Problem

During the last decade the single fatherhood phenomenon has almost doubled in the United States, and according to the United States Census Bureau (2002), a comparison of the 1990 and the 2000 census suggests that the number of single fathers with children between the age of six and seventeen is increasing. The research has thus far primarily focused on single-mother households and not single-father households,

which still remain somewhat unnoticed in our society. There is extremely limited research involving the experience of single fatherhood and how adolescents experience the phenomenon of being raised by a single father. The lack of literature indicates the need of additional studies in the field of single fatherhood to validate previous findings and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Purpose, Rationale, and Design of the Study

The number of single-father families in the United States has increased drastically, but these families are somewhat overlooked in our society. Most of the published studies focus on single mother parents, but paying attention to the changing demographics in our society, it is equally important to examine the phenomenon of single- father parenting, and in addition to understand how this phenomenon is perceived by adolescents. The primary goal of this qualitative study is to provide a rich description of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father.

A qualitative approach will be used for this study because the nature of the idea being explored, the experience of adolescents being raised by a single parent father, does not offer concrete variables that can be obtained from a quantitative study. This study is concerned with the experience from the perspective of the participants, and the phenomenological method of interviewing will be utilized to investigate and gain a better understanding of the meaning and experience of being raised by a single-parent father from the perception of an adolescent experiencing the phenomenon first hand. A current literature review revealed very little research involving the role of single fathers raising adolescents. It is the hope of this researcher that this study will contribute to the field by adding to the existing literature, and provide beginning knowledge on the

meaning and experience of adolescents being raised by a single father and hopefully lead to future theory development.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions not yet explored in the existing literature. The proposed research questions are as follows:

1. What is the essential experience of adolescents raised by a single father?
2. What themes underlie the experience of adolescents raised by a single father?
3. What are the structural meanings of the experience of the adolescent being raised by a single-parent father?

Definitions

Two Parent Family: Children living with a parent who is living currently with his or her spouse. A biological relationship with the children is not necessary. (United States Census Bureau, 2002).

Single Father Families: A father who is presently living without a spouse due to divorce, widowhood, or arranged custody through the court or by the parents (United States Census Bureau, 2002).

Organization of the Study

The intent of Chapter I has been to present an overview, background, theoretical framework, and purpose of the study. In addition, the concept of two-parent families and single-parent families has been explored in detail. Chapter II reviews related literature in order to provide the reader with a better perspective of the subject area investigated in this study. Chapter III includes the methodology, participants, procedures, and method of data analysis. The results of this investigation will be reported in Chapter

IV, and conclusions, implications and recommendations for further studies will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Research abounds on the experience of children living in households headed by single parents. However, most research on single-parent households examines those headed by single mothers rather than single fathers. A comparison of the 1990 and 2000 census data shows that the number of single fathers with children between the age of six and seventeen increased substantially (United States Census Bureau, 2002). Despite the growing population of single fathers, a review of literature reveals limited research involving the experience of single fatherhood and how adolescents experience the phenomenon of being raised by a single father.

The majority of studies that do investigate single fathers direct their attention on the effects of their absenteeism on their children (Hilton, Desrochers & Devall, 2001). However, some limited research exists on various aspects of the single-father household from both the parental and adolescent perspective including delinquency, risky behaviors, communication and emotional intimacy, African American single-parent fathers, parental roles and challenges, and gender.

Delinquency

Research indicates that adolescents from divorced families are more likely to engage in delinquent and antisocial behaviors than children from two-parent families (Dornbush et al., 1985, Kalter, Riemer, Brickman & Chen, 1985, Peterson & Zill, 1983, Zill, 1978). These findings correlate with the decreased parental supervision frequently found in single-parent homes (Dornbush et al., 1985). Adolescents with less supervision

are more inclined to look for different socializing agents and involvement with an antisocial peer group which predisposes them to engage in deviant behavior (Steinberg, 1987). Hetherington (1991) states that in about a third of children of divorced families the parent/child relationship entangles and becomes more complicated. This is evidenced predominantly in adolescent males, and researchers suggest that a supportive relationship with an adult male role model could ameliorate this problem.

A study by Roback (2003) suggests that children raised by single parents have more than double the risk of delinquency by the time they reach adolescence than adolescents raised by two-parent families. Roback (2003) adds that similar findings were discovered by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (1994). Thirteen percent of children in the juvenile justice system were found to be from two parent households while 33% came from single-parent families.

Risky Behaviors

Swedish researchers investigated overall and cause-specific mortality and risk of hospital admission in 816,729 children ages 6-18 whom they identified with the assistance of the Swedish National Registers (Weitoft, Hijern, & Rosen, 2003). They found significant differences in mortality, morbidity, and injury between children raised in traditional two-parent households as compared to those raised by single parents. Children in single-parent households had increased risk for injury, psychiatric disease, addictions, and suicide attempts.

Blum (2000) surveyed 90,000 adolescents from middle and high schools and then interviewed a sample of 20,000 students and their parents. Results revealed the importance of the role of the parents in relation to their adolescents' health. The most

common predictors of adolescent behavior – family income, family structure, and ethnicity – had little to do with adolescents' health. Rather, the presence of a positive parent-family relationship was the primary protective factor to adolescent's health.

Communication and Emotional Intimacy

Emmers-Sommer et al., (2003) examined the communication practices between single-parent fathers and their children and the essence of the experience of being a single-parent father. The ten single-parent fathers offered insight into the happiness and challenges they experienced while raising their children. These single-parent fathers revealed love for their children and valued the relationship they had with their children. In addition, the single fathers reported dissatisfaction with the court system and clearly stated their concerns about the negative conceptualization and connotation of single-father parents in today's society.

Guttman and Rosenberg (2003) investigated the levels of emotional intimacy of single-parent families and the ways they related to the children's academic and social functioning. Their findings indicated that children living with their mothers after divorce perceived their relationship less intimate than those children raised in a two parent household. Findings also indicated that children of divorced parents felt significantly more removed from their fathers than children of complete families, but did not have significantly different levels of emotional intimacy or relationships with their siblings as compared to children of two parent families. Additionally, the children of single-parent families scored lower on all adjustment measures.

African American Single-Parent Fathers

Coles (2001) investigated how African American single-parent fathers “were Doing,” and found that the fathers saw parenting as a positive experience. Single-parent fathers were to a small degree less joyful and more frustrated raising girls than fathers raising sons, which suggests that the gender of the child may affect parental satisfaction. In addition, the fathers’ social activities with family and friends increased, balancing their suffering dating lives.

Coles (2001) also focused on the parenting roles and goals of African American single-father families with special attention to the phenomenon of the parenting experience. Results indicated that the participants in this study placed high importance on nurturing, teaching and providing, and less importance on the role of disciplinarian and authority figure. The fathers in this study described their roles as single-parent father to be multi-faceted and adaptive to their child’s needs. The single-parent fathers, particularly those of daughters, placed less weight on being their “friends” because they believed it to be difficult to relate to their daughters as friends.

In a recent study of single fathers and mothers, forty low-income African American men were interviewed about their experience as single fathers. The fathers described in detail the complexity of being a single parent and how the welfare system limited their parental role of economic provider (Heath, 1999). Participants expressed how they stayed involved with their children despite attempts by the welfare system to marginalize them. Some of the single fathers were able to provide stable homes, where in contrast, single mothers receiving welfare checks, were not able to do so.

Parental Concerns and Challenges

Single fathers experience a wide range of emotions and personal challenges. Research indicates that marital separation or divorce arouses feelings of anger, failure, and decreased self-esteem that may contribute to the interpersonal stress single fathers experience raising their children. This is compounded by the fact that the single father has to secure his competency as a parent (Pichitino, 1983). A study involving 128 single fathers concluded that these single fathers felt they failed their children and feared that their children preferred to live with their mother (Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978). Keshet and Rosenthal suggest that feelings of insecurity in single fathers following divorce or separation are likely to be replaced by high motivation to be a successful parent. In addition, their research indicates that single fathers view the challenge of raising children by themselves as one of growth and personal satisfaction.

According to Atkin and Ruben (1976) the biggest problem for single fathers is that they feel that they do not have enough time to spend with their children. A similar study also found that a lack of time was a common problem (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). The same group of fathers also described their relationship with their children as close and affectionate.

De Maris and Greif (1982) examined factors that influenced quality parenting in single-father households. Their findings suggested that there were fewer problems when fathers were parenting pre-adolescent daughters as compared to parenting any other group. Chng, Gray, (1983) and Weinberg (1985) suggested that single-parent fathers had fewer resources available to them than single-parent mothers and also felt stigmatized and isolated. The fathers faced the additional challenge of needing to explain to their

daughters matters relating to their changing bodies and menstruation. If this responsibility is not addressed or is too difficult for the single-parent father, questions adolescent daughters have about menstruation have to be postponed until a female role model is available.

In a study investigating the experience of single fatherhood, (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003) offered insight into the single-fatherhood experience first hand. Some fathers reported the difficulty of fulfilling two roles (breadwinner and nurturer), the frustration with the court system (legal battles) and assumptions made by society. They disclosed that they want credit for their efforts instead of negative perceptions towards single father parenting. Data of this investigation revealed that many single fathers work hard to support their children, communicate to their children that they are valued and loved, are involved in their children's lives and find their roles as single fathers rewarding.

Gender

In a study investigating adolescent girls, single fathers, and menarche, results indicated that adolescent daughters are not comfortable discussing menarche with their single-parent fathers (Kalman, 2003). The daughters described it as "unthinkable" to discuss menarche with their single-parent fathers. In addition, the adolescent girls believed that their single-fathers lacked credibility in female issues like menarche. The researchers suggested that single-parent fathers be educated about menstruation in order to provide the support adolescent girls need when they reach menarche.

Theoretical Framework

The family household headed by a single father is a complex structure with challenges and developmental milestones for both parent and child. As such, research and concept development requires a solid theoretical framework upon which to base an investigation of this not yet fully explored phenomenon. Family Systems Theory and Erikson's Stages of Development are the leading theoretical models explored in this chapter.

Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory, also known as naturalistic systems theory, emerged from the view of the human family as one type of natural system. Bowen's (1975) extraordinary modern theory is not fundamentally about families, but about life or the "human phenomenon". Today Bowen's theory is considered as a theoretical basis for some of the more effective ways to help and heal troubled families and has attracted many family therapists over the last decades (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

In the beginning of his career at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Bowen assigned individual therapists to each family member. Realizing immediately how this technique separated families instead of connecting them, he started treating the whole family as a unit and became one of the pioneers of family therapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). It is interesting to note that Bowen moved from focusing on the patient with the "disease" to the whole family as a result of working on the impact of a mother-child symbiosis in the development of schizophrenia. Initially he worked with mother and child together, but soon had the complete families with schizophrenic children together in the research wards at NIMH. During this time he learned that the

emotional attachment between mother and child was more intense than previously anticipated. This led to his conceptualization of the family as an emotional unit made up of interrelated elements, a group of components of interlocking relationships with regular interactions (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). If any change occurs in a family member's emotional functioning (e.g., depression, grief), it will in turn affect the emotional functioning of other family members as well, since family members are interdependent to one another (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

Family Systems Theory relates to the Composition Law, which states that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. When this law is applied to the family, it suggests that the family as a whole is greater than its individual family elements (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The combined quality of a family contains images, themes, and elements, which cannot be broken down and ascribed to individual family members. It is possible to have unique behaviors and characteristics in the system, which no individual element owns until they are placed in an interactional context (Morgaine, 2001).

Bowen regards the family as an emotional system, expanding over several generations, consisting of the nuclear family, the extended family, and everyone residing in the household (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). He defined eight interlocking concepts which are fused together by the chronic anxiety present in life and nature (Friedman, 1991). According to Bowen, chronic anxiety is passed on from generation to generation and is incapable of being avoided when families have conflicts in relation to issues such as togetherness or individuation. Bowen's Family System Theory is a very rich approach that has been adopted by many therapists, and has been applied to dysfunctional as well as functional families (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Figure 1 presents Bowen's

Family System Theory graphically.

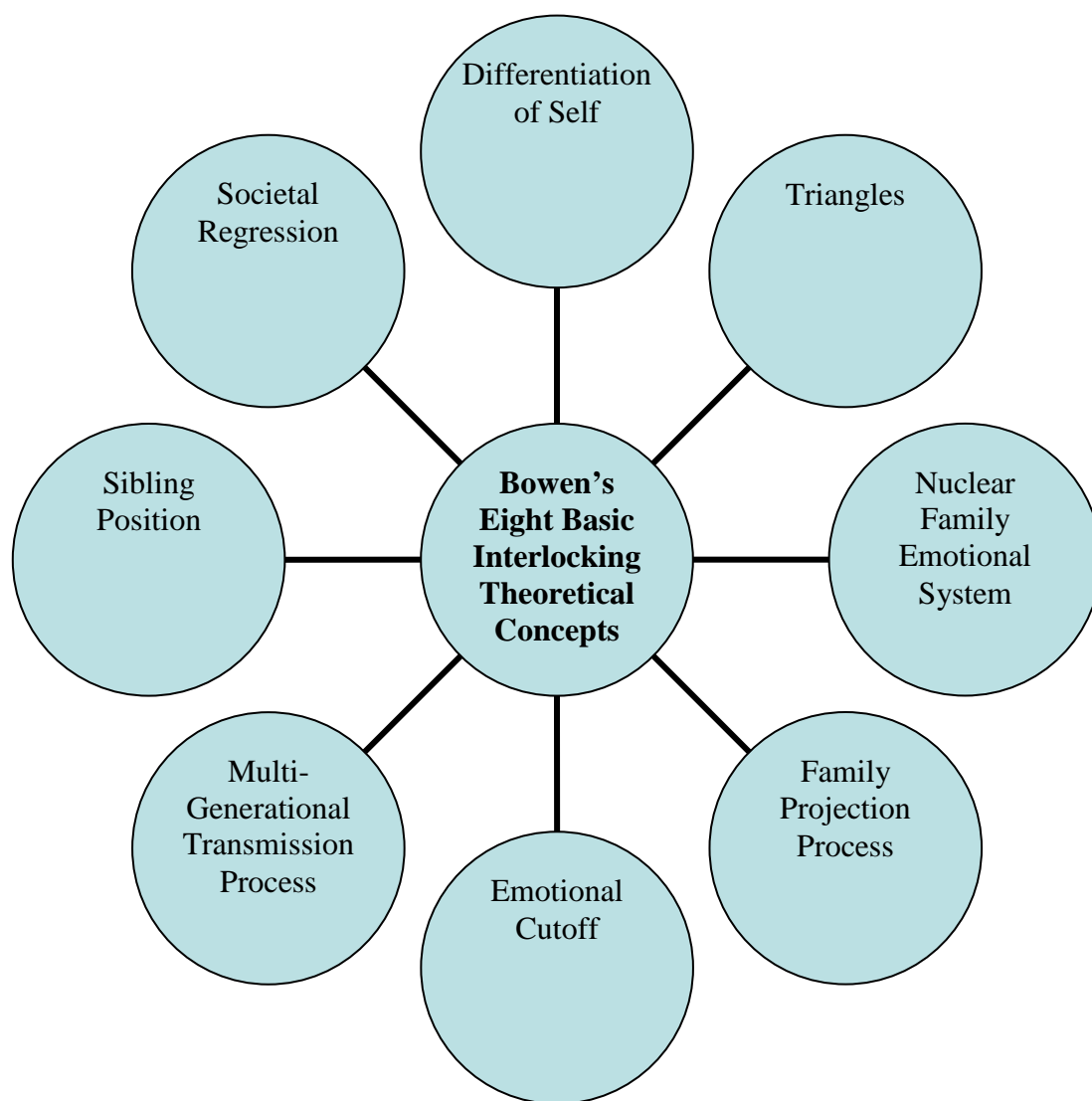


Figure 1. Eight Basic Concepts of Bowen's Family System Theory

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of self is one of Bowen's eight interlocking theoretical concepts, which he describes as the separation of an individual's intellectual and emotional functioning. A consequence of this separation is that one's behavior is not driven by his or her feelings (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Differentiated individuals are self-sufficient, flexible, and not caught up in emotional entanglements (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). The ultimate goal of self-differentiation is a healthy balance between feelings and cognition.

Bowen introduced the term undifferentiated family ego mass, which he explained as an extremely intense symbiotic relationship within a family, such as between mother and daughter. In an intense bond, the emotional closeness can be so strong that mother and daughter know each others feelings and thoughts. This closeness may lead a member of the relationship to hinder a sense of self due to the emotional closeness (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Triangles

According to Bowen, if a two-person system experiences stress it will seek out another family member and include him/her into the system in order to gain stability and decrease anxiety. The triangle is the "molecule" of a family's emotional system, and if the stability of a dyad is threatened due to internal or external stress, the dyad will reach out and engage another person to resolve the anxiety and stress (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Bowen (1975) describes a two-person system as unstable and explains that the triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. He further argues that more people can become included in the system if a three-person triangle's stress and

tension increases. He refers to this system as interlocking triangles.

Kerr (1981) explains four outcomes of triangulations and points out that triangulation does not reduce stress and anxiety in all situations. For example, the addition of a third person, such as through birth or adoption, can destabilize a dyad. The removal of a third person, as when a child goes off to college, can destabilize a harmonious twosome. On the other hand, the addition of a third person can add stability to a troublesome dyad. And last but not least, an unstable dyadic system can be stabilized by removal of a third person, such as a mother-in-law who constantly takes sides with her son (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Nuclear Family Emotional System

One of the key concepts in Bowen's theory is the nuclear family emotional system. The nuclear family emotional system is an unsuccessful way for a fused family to cope with stress and disharmony. This method of coping can lead to marital conflict or psychological impairment in children. There is a correlation between the family's fusion and the likelihood of instability and anxiety, which leads to fighting and dysfunction in a spouse (Kerr, 1981). Bowen states that the nuclear family system is often originated by married couples with equal differentiation levels since it is very common for the individuals to choose a mate with similar levels of differentiation (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Bowen contends that family members, extended family members (alive or dead), and other people living in the household are a vital part of the nuclear family system. Patterns from past generations commonly will be repeated over and over again in future generations (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Family Projection Process

Bowen refers to the family projection process as a situation where parents transmit their emotional problems to a child. The parents' low level of differentiation is transmitted onto the most vulnerable child, which is most often the handicapped child (physically, mentally, or psychologically) in the family system (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). According to Bowen, this family projection process follows a pattern. For example, the mother focuses on the child because she is afraid that there might be something wrong with the child, and therefore increases the attention on the child, excessively protects the child, and treats the child as if he/she was impaired. This in turn agrees with the mother's concern and the child will be treated as if he/she was impaired. Usually the child with the problem is given more attention compared to the child without one. This in turn makes the child without the problem less involved in the family projection process and therefore more mature, less needy, more goal directed, and having a more sophisticated ability to differentiate between thinking and feeling. Naturally both parents are involved in the family projection process, and most commonly the father takes the role as the third leg of the triangle since it is the mother who is more emotionally involved with the child (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Emotional Cutoff

Bowen explains emotional cutoff, one of his eight concepts, as an escape from unresolved emotional ties from one's family of origin. Family members who attempt to cut off emotionally typically withdraw themselves from the family by either moving away or severing existing family ties. Emotional cutoff occurs most commonly when children reach adulthood, and frequently happens in families who experience an elevated

level of anxiety and emotional dependence (Bowen, 1978). It should be noted that withdrawing from the family of origin, separation, and/or refraining from talking to parents, does not guarantee that one has differentiated (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Multigenerational Transmission Process

Another important concept of Bowen's theory is the multigenerational transmission process. This concept can be predicted if an individual with low levels of differentiations chooses a mate who is the least well differentiated member in the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). According to Bowen, it is fairly common that people with low levels of differentiation seek mates that are equally undifferentiated. Assuming that this process continues and carries over from generation to generation and moves in the direction toward a lower level of differentiation, emotional problems and other severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia can result (Papero, 1990). If unresolved emotional attachments are ignored, the multigenerational transmission process will continue and travel from generation to generation (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Sibling Position

Tomain (1976) hypothesized that children gradually acquire certain fixed personality characteristics based on the position of birth order. He further asserts that birth order not only influences personality but also interaction with future spouses. Bowen adopted Tomain's ten basic sibling's profile, such as older brother, younger brother, older sister, younger sister, twins, and only child. Bowen suggests that the first born should marry a second born child and the youngest born child should marry a first born child in order to have a good marriage. For example, if two youngest children chose each other as mates, they might feel overwhelmed with the responsibility that marriage

brings. On the other hand, the marriage of two older children might be extremely competitive (Kerr, 1981). Bowen believes that the concept of sibling position assists the therapist in analyzing the part a child plays in the family's emotional process and the family patterns that will be passed on from generation to generation (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Societal Regression

Societal regression is the last one of Bowen's eight concepts that shape family functioning. He believed that society responds emotionally under external pressure and stress, similar to families. Society cannot handle situational stress under conditions of chronic stress; the society's functional level of differentiation is decreased, and this leads to social regression. A preferable response is for society to implement rational solutions, which lead to greater individuation instead of acting on the basis of feelings and opting for a quick fix or short term solution (Becvar & Becvar, 2000)

To Bowen, in a perfect family all members are capable of emotional intimacy without losing autonomy. In addition, all members of a perfect family have gained a high level of self differentiation. In this ideal family, all members, including children and adults, are self reliant and succeed or fail based on their own efforts. They are balanced, able to adapt to change, connected across several generations, and parents bring their children up without pressuring them to develop images of their own projections (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

In Bowen's view, optional functioning depends on a person's level of differentiation and intellectual functioning. He saw disorders as a direct result of emotional fusions and an increase in the stress or anxiety levels of the individual. Bowen

realized that even highly differentiated individuals under some circumstances of chronic stress can experience symptoms or abnormalcy and dysfunction, but believed that a highly differentiated individual will recover quickly due to the availability of more sophisticated coping mechanisms (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Bowenian therapy is governed by two basic goals: to lower anxiety, and self differentiation, which must be self motivated (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). Bowen developed the family genogram as a tool to aid in investigating the family in its intergenerational context. The genogram can be compared to a three-generation map in which each partner's family is laid out and can be used to gather information and examine families, thereby helping to decode patterns and relationships (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

The core of Bowen's theory is the concept of the differentiation of self, that is, the ability to separate feelings and thinking. Generally, Bowenian therapists work with couples and families in a calm, careful de-triangulated way with a focus on lowering anxiety, resolving symptoms, and increasing each individual's self-differentiation level (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996).

Erikson's Stages of Development

Erik Erikson, a Freudian ego-psychologist, started his career in Europe as an artist, and later became a psychoanalyst, earning a certificate from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. After leaving Europe he continued as a professor at Harvard Medical School, Yale, and Berkley (Boerre, 1997). Erikson is highly recognized for his famous studies of modern life among the Lakota and Yurok, but he is most famous for his work in elaborating and expanding Freud's theory of stages.

According to Erikson, development is ruled by the epigenetic principle. Humans develop through predetermined unfolding of our personalities in eight stages (he expanded Freud's five psychosexual stages of development to eight stages of development), and progress through each stage is partially determined by the success of the previous stage. A virtue or psychological strength is gained if a stage is mastered well. At each stage a developmental task must be mastered in order to ensure a healthy personality. Continuum is the measurement for a successful outcome of each developmental task (Jensen, 1996).

Figure 2 presents Erikson's Eight Stages of Development.

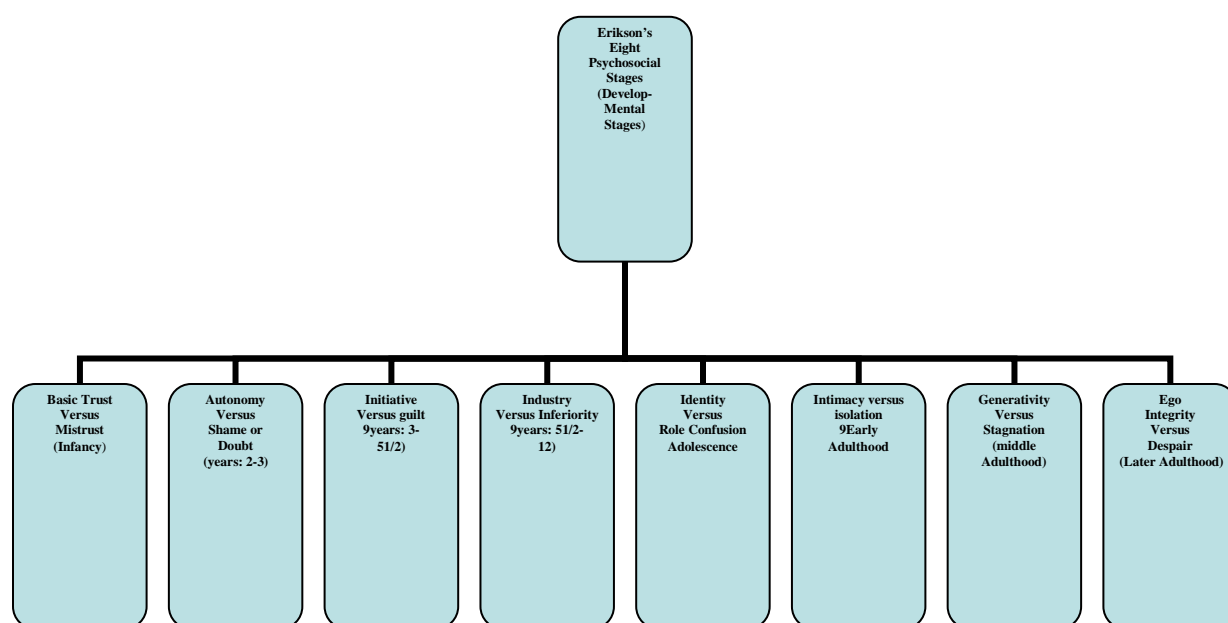


Figure 2. Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

Stage One

Erik Erikson (1968) elaborated on Freud's theory of stages by expanding Freud's genital stage into adolescence and three stages of adulthood (Boerre, 1995).

Stage one, basic trust versus mistrust, is the cornerstone for the development of a healthy personality. A supportive, loving, nurturing environment during the first years of

life ensures that the child develops basic trust. If children are raised in a chaotic and critical environment, a sense of mistrust will arise (Jensen, 1996).

Stage Two

If children reach age two, they become aware that they have a mind of their own. If parents are patient, cooperative, and encouraging, the children develop a sense of autonomy. In contrast, if children are overprotected and not allowed enough freedom, they might develop a sense of shame and doubt, which leaves a child feeling incompetent in the eyes of others (Vander Zanden, 1993).

Stage Three

The next task is that of achieving a sense of initiative that normally occurs between ages four and five years. During this stage a child's repertoire of motor and mental ability expands. If children are allowed to run, roughhouse, and bike ride, they will develop a sense of initiative. Children at this stage are also preoccupied with building, collecting, creating, and engaging in real tasks on their own from start to completion (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1996). If parents withhold those activities from their children, the children tend to become passive recipients to whatever the environment brings. In addition, during this stage a child's conscience begins to develop, helping them to distinguish right from wrong (Jensen, 1996).

Stage Four

Between the ages 6 and 11 children need to gain a sense of industry in order to feel competent, particularly when competing with their peers. This can be achieved by earning recognition for their accomplishments through praise by parents and teachers. According to Erikson, children whose efforts are ignored will end up with feelings of

inferiority (Erikson, 1963).

Stage Five

Erikson is most commonly associated with the familiar concept of identity formation that occurs in stage five at about ages 12-18 years and refers to how one fits into society. According to Erikson, stage five, identity versus role-confusion, is the most important and difficult challenge of the adolescent period of development (Lloyd, Blake & Te'Neil, 2002). However, this model presumes that progression and resolution of earlier stage-salient tasks, such as trust, autonomy, and initiative, have occurred and therefore contribute to the development of a strong healthy identity (Lloyd, Blake & Te'Neil, 2002). This stage is also referred to as adolescent's active search for their role, contemplation of personal strengths and weaknesses, and simultaneous synthesis of past, present, and future life experiences (Waterman, 1998).

Good adult role models who provide open lines for communication will contribute to the development of a healthy, strong identity, which is emerging during adolescence. Certain accomplishments recognized by society help adolescents distinguish adult from child. For example, educational achievements or earning a drivers license clearly distinguish between the powerless/irresponsible time of childhood and the powerful/responsible time of adulthood (Boerre, 1997). If the adolescent successfully negotiates stage five during adolescence, he or she will develop a strong concept of identity and be able to fulfill work goals, develop intimate relationships, and contribute to society in a meaningful way (Lloyd, Blake, & Te'Neil 2002).

According to Erikson, at the same time as children enter adolescence they must successfully develop a sense of identity during this fifth stage in order to become wholly

integrated individuals (Erikson, 1987). He posits that a sense of identity, which has to be achieved during adolescence, is a much broader concept than learning about the self as experienced during the early years of childhood. A healthy sense of identity embraces a number of factors, which include: a good sense of self-definition, similar to the self-concept; an existence of commitment to beliefs, goals, and values; activities geared in the direction towards commitment; taking into account alternative identities; the development of a personal uniqueness; and last but not least, a sense of self-acceptance (Erikson, 1968). Figure 3 presents this stage graphically.

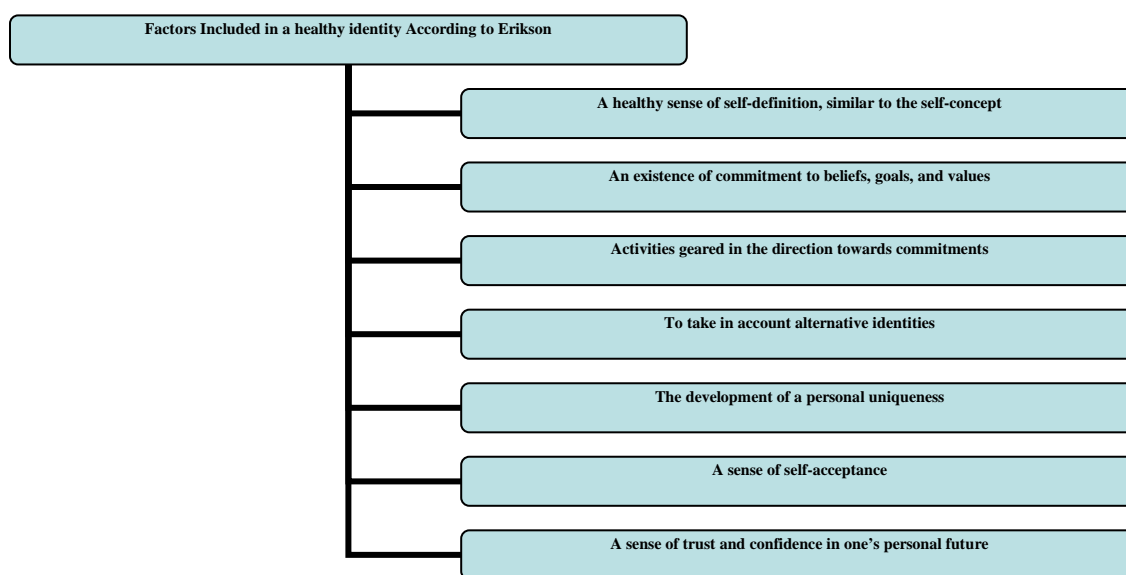


Figure 3. Erikson's Factors Essential to Developing an Identity

Stage Six

According to Erikson, the sixth stage, intimacy versus isolation is viewed as the capacity to establish strong friendships, make contact with other people, and care for another person.

Stage Seven

The next stage, generativity versus stagnation, requires the individual to reach out to other people and develop concerns about the welfare of society. Generativity embraces selflessness, whereas stagnation represents individuals who are overly concerned about their own well-being and preoccupied with material belongings (Vander Zanden, 1996).

Stage Eight

In later adulthood, individuals tend to look back and receive their lives. If a life was well spent, the individual will feel a sense of satisfaction with his or her accomplishments. Others might feel despair if they are not satisfied with their achievements and realize there is not enough time left for alternative ways to seek integrity (Erikson, 1963).

Summary

One of the goals of this study is to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single parent-father. The limited data on single fathers raising adolescents makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions that can be applied in practice. The lack of knowledge regarding this increasing phenomenon indicates the need for future studies that will lead to theory development. This study perhaps will provide insight into the world of an adolescent being raised by a single father as it is experienced by the adolescent first hand. By exploring these “nontraditional” single father families, a greater knowledge of family dynamics will evolve and may assist family therapists and family practitioners, parents, and educators in providing optimum care to the family as a whole (Moriarty & Wagner, 2004).

A family household headed by a single-parent father is a complex structure with challenges and developmental milestones for both parent and child. The intent of Chapter II is to provide the theoretical framework for how adolescents experience being raised by a single parent-father. Bowen's family systems Theory and Erikson's stages of Development have been presented as the theoretical foundations for a research study which is described in detail in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III introduces the rationale and methodology that will be applied for this investigation. Further, Chapter III will discuss the participants, procedures, and method of data analysis.

Rationale of Approach

A qualitative research approach was embraced for this study because it is believed to be the best fitting research design to understand and comprehend the essence of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single father parent. This researcher believed that the targeted population of this study was more receptive to qualitative research since the study was conducted in the participant's natural setting. Qualitative research presented an opportunity to focus on the whole of the lived experience instead its parts, and illuminated the "essence" of the experience through meaningful conversations instead of quantitative measurements such as questionnaires, surveys or observations (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method developed by the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the principle founder of phenomenology (Cresswell, 1998). Phenomenology seeks to explore the phenomena as human experience and aims to disclose the nature of structure as expressed through meaning, thus providing a deeper, fuller understanding of ourselves and the people around us (Moustakas, 1994). In this type of study, the researcher systematically arranges the experience to reveal a central meaning of the essence of the phenomenon. Open-ended

semi-structured interviews are frequently used as tools to uncover the participant's view of his or her world and gather phenomenological data (Smith, 1998). Interviewing as a method of inquiry was chosen because it appears to be the most reliable method for the individual to convey meaning through language (Seidman, 1998). In addition, a phenomenological design appeared to be appropriate because it described the meaning of the lived experiences by several participants about the phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998).

Participants

The goal of this phenomenological research was to discover and describe the phenomenon of being an adolescent living with a single father. Criterion sampling was used because it was necessary that all participants have considerable experience with the same phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998). The population for this study were six adolescents and their fathers who lived in Central Florida, male and female, between the ages 12 and 18 that have lived with a single-parent father for at least the past two years.

Procedures

The participants in this study were volunteers. Snowball and network sampling techniques were employed for recruitment of the participants. Snowball sampling utilized direct referrals to the investigator by study participants of other people who are felt to meet the criteria for the research. Networking with other colleagues allowed this researcher to expand the sample pool of adolescents who meet the criteria for this study. The researcher's colleagues were given a Research Study Flyer (Appendix H) that described the nature of the study, study requirements, and contact information for the researcher. If the colleague knew of an appropriate single-father family, he/she

contacted the father and provided the father with the Research Study Flyer.

When the father of a potential participant contacted the researcher, he participated in a brief telephone conversation to determine if he met the inclusion criteria. The parent of the prospective participant was given a general description of the research and the time and commitment required for participation.

The researcher set up a convenient time and place to meet with the potential participants at the Family Enrichment Center at Barry University, Orlando, or a location that is safe and convenient for the volunteer participants. Participants and their parents were told about the nature of their participation, the aims of the study, all data collection methodologies, the time required, potential risks, and measures to insure their anonymity. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and were told that they may withdraw from the study at any time without detriment to them. The fathers of the adolescents complete an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), a Parent Consent Form (Appendix E) and the adolescent completed an Assent Form (Appendix F). The investigator obtained those written forms from all participants without coercion prior beginning the interview. Information was provided on how the participants can obtain a summary of the findings of the study. Although the participants in this study did not face physical risk, they might be made vulnerable by what they disclose (Seidman, 1998). This researcher had extensive experience working with adolescents as a guidance counselor and employed the proper techniques to allay their fears and concerns. They were given contact information for the researcher and were told they can call the researcher at any time. The prospective participants then completed Demographic Information Forms (Appendices B and C) so that the researcher may obtain some general

information about the volunteers.

Confidentiality

All participants were informed that their participation in voluntary and that their information will be kept confidential. All participant-identifying information was coded. For example all single fathers participating in this study were be assigned a number and all adolescent participants were assigned a letter of the alphabet. All data was kept locked up in a file cabinet in the office of the investigator. The signed consent forms were also kept in a locked file cabinet separate from the participant-identifying information data. Participants were informed that the findings will be used as group data with no personal information reported and used only for the purpose of this study. After completion of the study, the audiotapes will be destroyed. The forms and transcriptions will be kept for a period of five years in accordance with state and university laws and procedures, and will be destroyed (shredded) after the expiration of such time.

Interview Process

This study embraced in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing as a method of inquiry. The focus was on the participants' experience of being raised by a single-parent father. Interviewing allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the topic under study than then more conventional methods like questionnaires and surveys (Seideman, 1998). The goal of the researcher was to understand the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father and the meaning they make of this experience (Seideman, 1998). The in-depth interviews were informal and interactive like social conversations in a natural setting. A semi-structured, open-ended interview

format, similar to a friendly conversation, was used to develop rapport and gather data. Before beginning with the interviews this researcher exercised purposeful self-reflection in order to set aside personal understandings and biases which could interfere with the interviewing process. By using open-ended unstructured questions, the researcher sought to have the adolescents being raised by a single parent father reconstruct their experience within the study's topic (Seidman, 1998). The interviews consisted of 11 questions (Appendix A) that guided the conversations in a meaningful direction. Each participant was asked the same questions. The audio taping process was clearly explained to the adolescent participants and their single parent fathers. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length. This investigator utilized some open-ended questions because they are unique in the way they secure the conditions to be investigated while at the same time allowed the participants to take any directions they want (Seidman, 1998). To establish rapport and create harmony the interviews started with a social conversation (Moustakas, 1994). The investigator set aside all preconceived notions (epoche) to ensure that the collected data was not influenced by personal bias.

Analysis of Data

After transcribing the data the researcher horizontalized the data by regarding the statements from the interviews and organized them into relevant statements. All statements relevant to the adolescents being raised by a single-parent father were treated with equal worth (Moustakas, 1994). Following horizontalizing of the data, the researcher listed the meaning units. The meaning units were clustered into themes and used to develop a textural description of the experience. Next, the researcher

integrated structural descriptions into meanings and the essence of the phenomenon of being raised by a single-parent father (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and validity this investigator employed two different methods. First, reliability of the data was verified by asking the participants to review the transcribed interviews to ensure accurate interpretation. This researcher was the only one transcribing the interviews and will review the transcriptions with the participants to check for accuracy. Secondly, this investigator employed a peer debriefer who had extensive experience in working with adolescents and who will sign a Confidentiality Agreement Form (Appendix G). This peer debriefer read the transcribed interviews and reviewed them for meaning. In addition, this researcher exercised purposeful self-reflection in order to set aside personal understandings and biases that could have interfered with the interviewing process and data analysis.

Summary

A qualitative approach was used for this investigation because the aim of this study was to examine the lived experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father from the perspective of the adolescents who is experiencing it first hand. Through the use of a phenomenological methodology it was hoped that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of how adolescents experience being raised by a single father.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father. Chapter IV presents the analysis of the data collected from participants' interviews about their experience of being raised by a single-parent father. The first part consists of an overview of each participant's demographic information and the second part discusses the eight themes that emerged from the data. The eight themes are as follows: Focus on Education, Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Relationships with Peers and Friends, Connection to a Female Support Person, Trust, Personal Growth, Setting Meaningful Goals, Different Roles of the Father, and Satisfaction with Self.

Textural Description of the Single-parent Fathers

The single-parent fathers ranged in age from 40-56. Four of the single-parent fathers were Caucasian and one was Asian. Three of the single-parent fathers were divorced and two were widowed. Two of the single-parent fathers were Ph.D. candidates, one had some college and two had no information available. Two of the single-parent fathers were working on their dissertations at the time of the research. One participant was retired, one participant was self employed, and three participants were employed full time. The number of custodial children ranged from one to three. The number of years being a single-parent father ranged from four to seven years. Table 1 presents the single-parent fathers demographic characteristics.

Table 1

Single-parent Fathers Demographics

Single-Parent Fathers	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Education	Work Status	Number of Custodial Children	Number of Years being Single
A	55	Caucasian	Divorced	Ph. D. Candidate	Retired	3	7
B	55	Caucasian	Divorced	N/A	Employed Full Time	2	5
C	50	Caucasian	Widowed	Some College	Employed Full Time	3	7
D	56	Caucasian	Divorced	N/A	Self Employed	1	4 1/2
E	55	Caucasian	Divorced	Ph. D. Candidate	Retired	3	7
F	40	Asian	Widowed	Ph. D. Candidate	Employed Full Time	2	4

Textural Description of the Adolescents

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a Caucasian female college bound high school student who participated in extra curricular activities at her school and clearly enjoyed it. The participant stated that her goal was to go to college after high school and peruse the career of a crime scene investigator. The participant reported that her parents were divorced and she has been living with her single-parent father and two siblings for seven years. The participant said that her mother lived close by and she visited her when she was in town. The participant said that her father cared about her and is always there when she needs him. She credited her independence and being responsible to her father since it was he who provided motivation to work hard in school, encouraged her to stay focused

on set goals, and insisted on her doing her jobs around the house such as babysitting younger her siblings. The participant had an active social life and socialized with her friends at school and talked to them frequently on the phone.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a Caucasian female who has been living with her father for five years following a court order. The participant reported that she had no contact with her mother. The participant was an IB (International Baccalaureate) student in high school, taking rigorous academic courses. She said her goal was to earn a college scholarship and major in journalism. The participant mentioned that she participated in extracurricular activities at school by being a part of the choral program. She stated that singing is her passion and that she was thankful that she could participate in this program. This participant's most frequent response was that she had a really strong bond with her father, that he helped her with whatever she needed, that he will help her with whatever she wanted to accomplish, and loves her unconditionally. The participant revealed that she had a close relationship with her godmother and when she had teenage problems she could go to her. She mentioned that she had a lot of friends and enjoyed going to the movies or parties with them.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was a Caucasian male whose mother passed away suddenly due to a brain aneurysm when he was in sixth grade. The participant stated that from this time on his father took care of everything including his mother's responsibilities like staying on top of his school work. The participant was the youngest and only male of three children. The participant worked after school and on weekends. During the personal interview the

participant acknowledged that his father was his strongest support and that he was always there for him. Statements like: “he is the best,” “I have a good relationship with him,” “I appreciate my dad,” and “family is very important to me,” were common responses during his interview. The participant explained that he had a lot of friends and liked skateboarding and video gaming.

Participant 4

Participant 4, a Caucasian female, has been living with her single-parent father for four and a half years since her parents divorced. This participant stated that she had contact with her mother and she lived in the same town. The participant had a close relationship with her grandmother who lived close by. The participant graduated from high school and is starting college as a freshman focusing on a major in mathematics. Her father provided her great support for her to grow and to achieve her academic goals. The participant mentioned that she was very determined to succeed in school and denoted a lot of time to study and prepare for exams. The participant said that she felt loved and had a great admiration for her father. She explained that she was very athletic and devotes a lot of time to sports. The participant mentioned that she had a lot of friends who were students and socialized with them frequently, and talked to them on the phone or online.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a Caucasian male adolescent who has been living with his single-parent father for seven years since his parents divorced. The participant’s mother had a house in the neighborhood and he had contact with her on a regular basis. The participant had an older sister and a younger sister. The participant stated that he was a straight “A” student and was proud of his academic achievements. The participant

mentioned that he credited his academic achievement to his father since it was he who provided support and motivated him to do well by being involved with his school and helping when questions arose. The participant stated that he had a lot of chores and he had to help out around the house to which he attributed his sense of independence and responsibility. The participant mentioned that he had a lot of friends and he played with them everyday. He participates in an after school accelerated science program and enjoys skateboarding with his friends.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was a female Asian who has been living with her single-parent father for four years since her mother passed away unexpectedly. The participant explained that she had a younger sister and her grandmother lived with them for two years after her mothers passing. The participant mentioned that she had a lot of friends at school, liked school, and was proud of her achievements. She stated that art was her favorite subject and she took music classes outside school. Her goals were to become a scientist or a musician. This participant stated that her father was very involved with her school and supported her by being available whenever she needed help. The participant commented that she had responsibilities, chores, and had to help out around the house. She stated that her father took the role of a father and a mother and she felt loved and trusted him with everything. Table 2 presents the adolescents' demographic information.

Table 2

Adolescents' Demographics

Adolescent	Grade in School	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of Siblings Living in Household	Years Living with Father	Marital Status of Father
Participant A	High School	Female	Other	2	7	Divorced
Participant B	High School	Female	Caucasian	1	5	Divorced
Participant C	High School	Female	Caucasian	2	7	Widowed
Participant D	College Freshman	Female	Caucasian	0	4 1/2	Divorced
Participant E	Middle School	Female	Other	2	7	Divorced
Participant F	Middle School	Female	Asian	1	4	Widowed

Structural Description of the Findings

A qualitative research approach has been embraced for this study because it is believed to be the best fitting research design to understand and comprehend the essence of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-father parent. The phenomenological interview consisted of eleven open-ended semi-structured questions. The investigator set aside all preconceived notions (epoche) to ensure that the data was not influenced by personal bias. The final result was a general description of the phenomenon, as it was experienced by the adolescents at first hand.

Data Analysis

Consistent with phenomenological theory, data obtained during the six interviews were collected and transcribed. After transcribing the data, the researcher horizontalized the data by regarding the statements from the interviews and organizing them into

relevant statements. All statements relevant to the adolescents being raised by a single-parent father were treated with equal worth (Moustakas, 1994). Following horizontalizing of the data, the researcher listed the meaning units. The meaning units were clustered into themes and used to develop a textural description of the experience. Next, the researcher integrated structural descriptions into meanings and the essence of the phenomenon of being raised by a single-parent father (Moustakas, 1994). Effort and creative thought led to eight different segments of data also referred to as themes (Shank, 2002). The analytic process is presented visually in Figure 4.

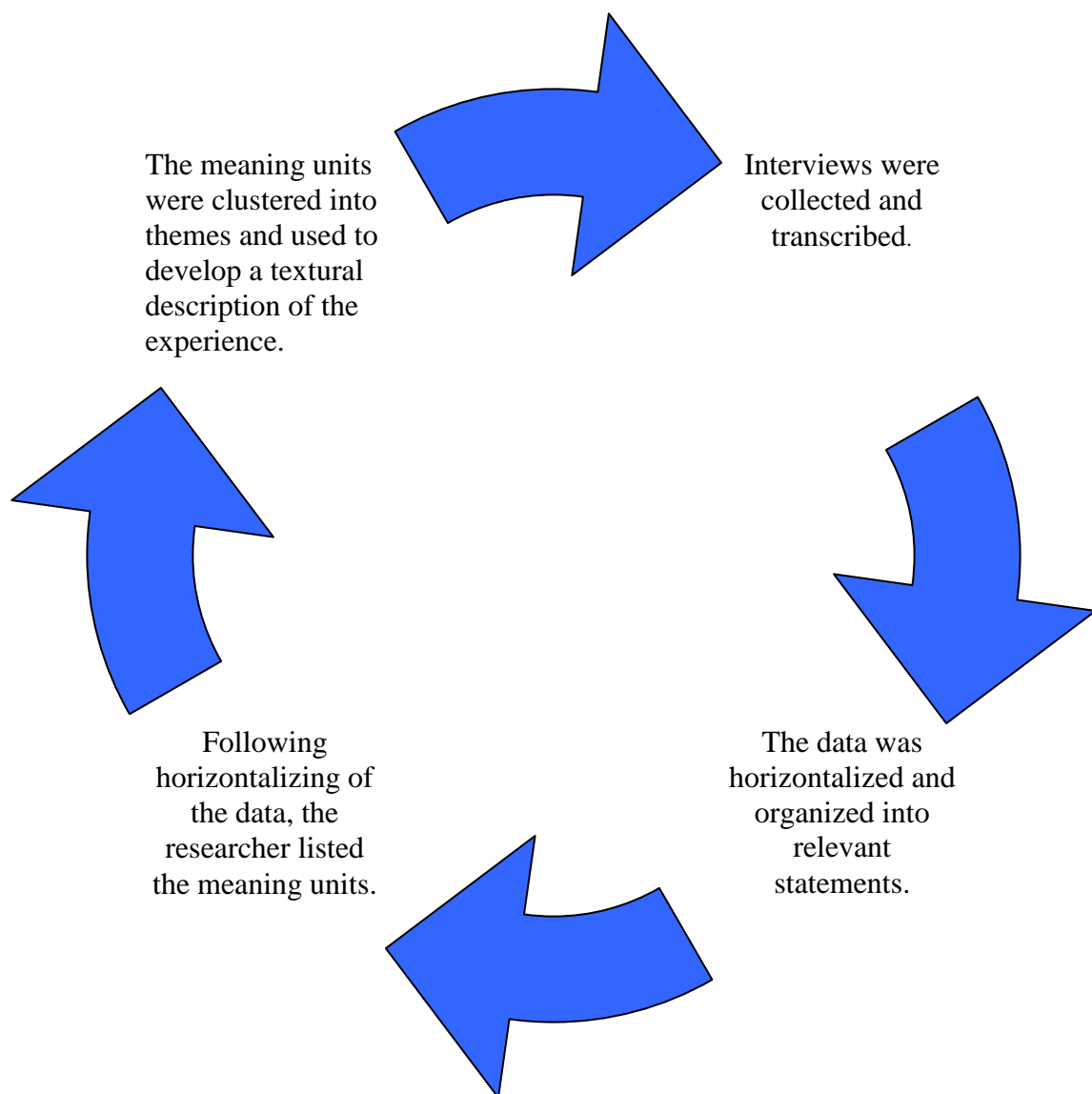


Figure 4. The Qualitative Data Analysis Process

General Themes

To gain insight into how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father, a qualitative analysis of semi-structured open-ended interviews was conducted. The following themes are the result of determination and endless search for answers. It was a process of piecing data together like puzzle pieces, making the unknown obvious,

and recognize the important from the less important (Shank, 2003). This coding process resulted in eight general themes: focus on education, social live (valuing interpersonal connections with friends and peers), connection to an adult female role model, trust, personal growth, setting meaningful goals, different roles of the father (nurturer authority figure/discipline), and satisfaction with self. Figure 5 presents the general themes graphically.

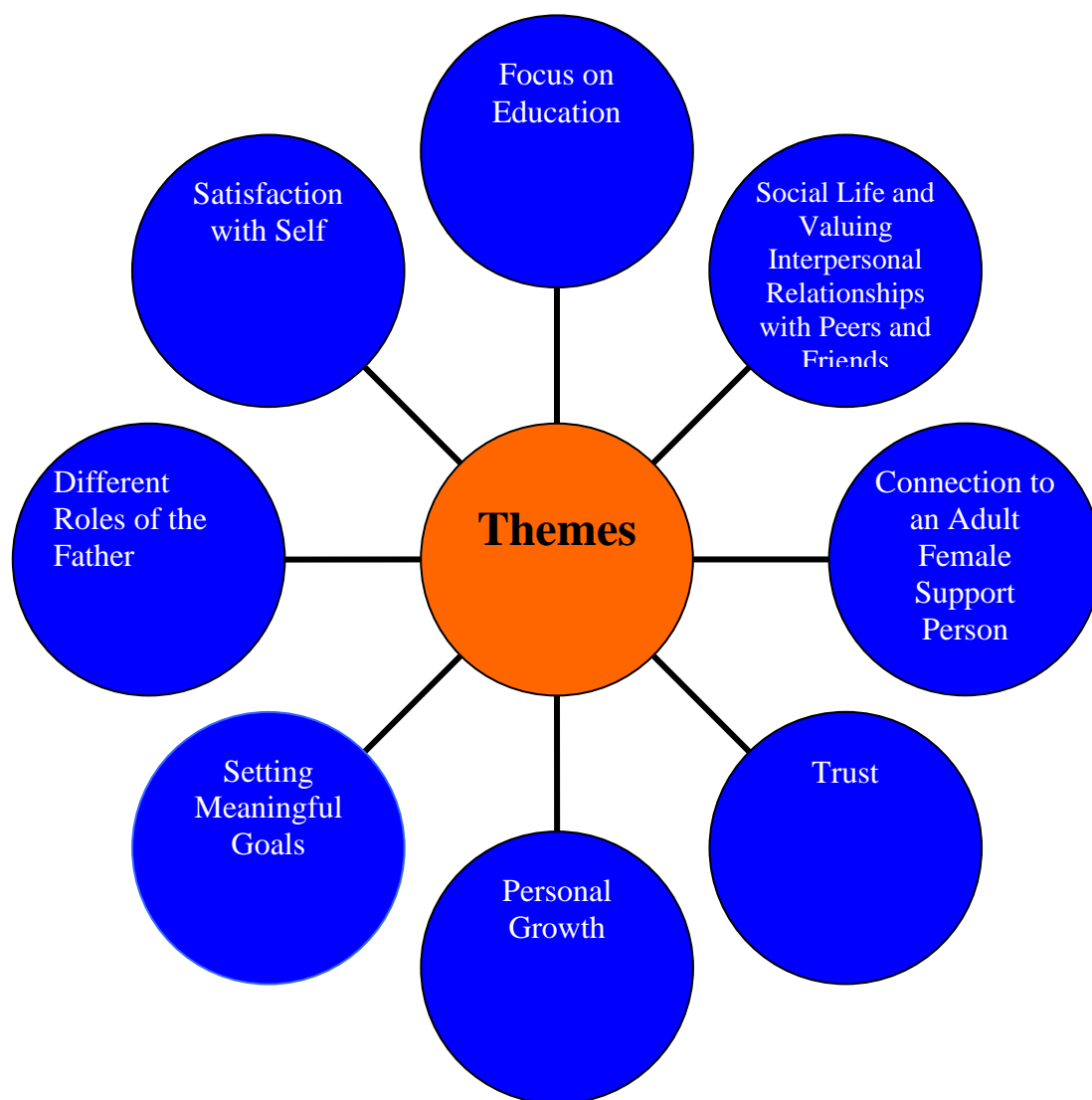


Figure 5. General Themes that Emerged from the Data

Focus on Education.

The theme Focus on Education refers to the special attention single father families denoted to education. Table 3 displays statements made by the participants relating to this theme.

Table 3

Statements Relating to Focus on Education

Participant 1: “My dad is very “strict” with school. I am doing OK in my classes. I am not an all “A” student but he wants me to do better. He is way more “strict” about school than mom. He tells me to study all the time. Once I did not give him my progress report card and he went to school to talk to my counselor to get my grades. My dad wants me to do really well in school. I guess this is because he cares about me.”

Participant 2: “Academics are pretty important to him. He is always into education, education, education. So on the last report card I got all B’s and A’s and he said, “why did you not get all A’s?” He shows up for everything, he buys the dresses for chorus; he buys the school supplies, the backpack, he cares; he helps me with whatever I need; he will help me with whatever I want to accomplish.”

Participant 3: “My mom all of a sudden died when I was I sixth grade. And up to this time mom took care of everything concerning school. From then on my dad took care of everything. He is always there for me, and made sure that I was doing well in school.”

Participant 4: “One of my biggest milestones was my high school graduation. I studied very hard for it and I am very proud of myself. Another big accomplishment was my university admission. My dad is very proud of me and he is always there for me when I need him. He always supports me in my efforts to reach my goals. He puts a strong emphasis on education and supports me in every step of the way.”

Participant 5: “I am a straight “A” student. I like math and science the best. My dad is very strict about school. He wants us to do our best. He also helps us a lot and is very supportive; he always helps when I have questions.”

Participant 6: “I like school. I won several reading awards. My dad is involved with school. He goes to all the meetings and helps us with our school work. Music and science are my favorite subjects. I have music classes after school.

Summary: Focus on Education Theme

In the relation to education a number of participants expressed that education is very important to their fathers. Several described that their fathers had high expectations of them concerning academic school work. For example one participant expressed “He puts a strong emphasis on education and supports me in every step of the way.” All participants were involved in some type of activity after school, for example a sport, academic enrichment, or music. All adolescent participants reflected that their father supported them in reaching their academic and extra curricular goals. For example one participant explained “He shows up for everything, he buys the dresses for chorus; he buys

the school supplies, the backpack, he cares; he helps me with whatever I need; he will help me with whatever I want to accomplish.” Another participant revealed “He also helps us a lot and is very supportive; he always helps when I have questions.” Overwhelmingly, all participants conveyed in their interviews that their fathers’ focus on education benefited them, either by motivating or encouraging them to do well in school. During the interviews all participants acknowledged that their fathers’ emphasis on education and full support contributed to their academic success.

Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Connections with Peers and Friends

The theme Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Connections with Peers and Friends addresses the relations the participants had with their peers and how they value them. Table 4 displays statements made by the participants relating to this theme.

Table 4

Statements Relating to Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Connections

Participant 1: “I like school because I have a lot of friends there. I am very social; I talk a lot with my friends on the phone and hang out with them. Oh – I do not talk to my dad or my mom about boys; I talk to my friends about boys.”

Participant 2: “I have a lot of friends, I go to some parties and I like to go to movies. I think I am close to about five of them, I also have a bond with them; they help me. I hang out with my friends; talk with them on the computer and on the phone. I am very talkative; I talk on the phone a lot. Kelly (pseudo name) is my best friend, we can talk about everything. When I have boy problems I go to Kelly.”

Participant 3: “I have a lot of friends; I always had a lot of friends. But some are really close friends I can trust. We like skate boarding and video gaming like all kids my age do.”

Participant 4: “I have three good friend; my best friends. They are all students like me. We are good friends we play sports together like volleyball and more. I trust my friends; I can talk to them about everything including boys.”

Participant 5: “I have a lot of friends; I play with them every day. They are good friends and we go to the same school.”

Participant 6: I have a lot of friends. Most of my friends are from school. I also get along very well with my sister.

Summary: Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Connections Theme

Relations with other adolescents and peers were described as important by all participants. Unanimously, all participants described themselves as very social, and having a lot of friends. All participants described that they communicate frequently with their friends by “hanging out” with them, going to homecoming with them, skateboarding with their peers, or talking to them on the cell-phone or online. For example one participant explains “I do Kung Fu after school, I am in chorus, and I also like to get into soccer. I have a lot of friends at the karate school, my dad teaches there. I like extra curricular activities because I am there with my friends.” Two other adolescents also mentioned that they play sports wit their

friends and enjoy participating in extracurricular activities at school. All female adolescents stated that they do have close friends (best friends) to whom they can talk about boys or other adolescent concerns. When asked with whom they talk about boys these participants declared that they confide in their close friends. For example two female participants explained “Oh – I do not talk to my dad or my mom about boys; I talk to my friends about boys. I trust my friends; I can talk to them about everything including boys.”

Connection to an Adult Female Support Person

The theme Connection to a Female Support Person refers to the special relationship the participants had with a female role model. Most of the participants declared their mothers as female role models. Table 5 displays statements made by the participants relating to this theme.

Table 5

Statements Relating to Connection to a Female Support Person

Participant 1: “I have two homecoming dresses. I went to homecoming with my friends. Dad gave me money to buy my homecoming dress and shoes. I went shopping with my mom. My dad said the dress can not be cut too low. I got a really pretty black dress (she described in detail) and really nice shoes, I like them a lot. And guess what, dad really liked the dress (big smile on her face). I had fun at homecoming with my friends.”

Participant 2: “My greatest mother figure is my godmother Tina (pseudonym), who’s been around me since I was a baby, so she also is a safe person, she is the motherly figure I have in my life. When I have teenage problems or have a quarrel with my dad I go to my godmother. I have a good bond with her, she helps me. I was never taught how to put on make-up or how

to use a pad. For stuff like that I go to my godmother. When I first got my period I was nine, I freaked out.”

Participant 3: “My best friends’ mothers are always here for me. They talk to me and offer me support.”

Participant 4: “I have my mother and my grandmother to take me shopping for my graduation dress and stuff like that.”

Participant 5: “My mom bought a house in the neighborhood and when she is in town we spent time together.”

Participant 6: “I have my grandmother; she stayed with us for a while.”

Summary: Connection to an Adult Female Support Person Theme

A relationship with a female role-model who can be trusted and is caring was described as important. All adolescent participants expressed that they valued the relationships they have with a “motherly figure.” One participant explained “My greatest mother figure is my godmother Tina (pseudonym), who’s been around me since I was a baby, so she also is a safe person, she is the motherly figure I have in my life. When I have teenage problems or have a quarrel with my dad I go to my godmother. I have a good bond with her, she helps me.” A couple of adolescents in this study whose parents are divorced appeared to have such a relationship with her biological mother. One stated that even though she does not live with

her mother she talks almost every day with her on her cell-phone. The same adolescents stated that when they to shop for homecoming or prom dresses they rely on their mothers who live close by in the same town. A male adolescent participant described that his best friend's mother is always there for him to talk to him and offer support, and that he could talk to her.

Trust

The theme Trust refers to the person the adolescents perceived they can trust, a person they feel comfortable to talk to. Table 6 displays statements made by the participants relating to this theme.

Table 6

Statements Relating to Trust

Participant 1: "He cares about me. I can rely on him."

Participant 2: "Most of time, when I have a problem I go to my dad. He is the person I trust. When I first got my period I was nine, I was freaked out, like what is this. Then my dad got me to the doctor, "my daughter is bleeding." "Where, she will tell you." With women problems, that is very interesting, he listens. Most guys don't like to hear about periods, they just go "ouch". But he is the only person there, so he can't turn away and shutter about it. He has been there, I went to the doctor and he was really supportive of my needs for women things. There is only one person; there is really no other person. There is no need for that. It is just one person, I do everything with him and he loves me unconditionally."

Participant 3: "From the day on my mom unexpectedly died my dad took care of everything including all what my mom did before, like checking on school work and all that stuff. He is the "best"; he is always there for me. I have a good relationship with him. Sometimes we" kid" around, but he is serious when he needs to be. He means everything to me."

"My dad is always there for me, he is the most important aspect in my life. I trust him, he is my strongest support, and I can talk to him about everything. He sis the best, he is always there for me."

Participant 4: "My dad is always there for me. My dad and I have a great relationship; he is always there for me." The person I trust most is my dad; he is always there for me. I know that."

Participant 5: "He is always there for us and helps us." "He always helps when I have questions." The person I confide I in my mom, she is not as strict and serious as dad. The person to trust is my dad. He is always here for me when I need him."

Participant 6: "I depend on my dad; he is always her for us, my sister and me."

Summary: Trust Theme

Overwhelmingly, the adolescents in this study revealed that their father is person they the can trust, a person they feel comfortable to talk to. A general sense of cherishing and adoration for their fathers appeared as some of them explained: “My dad is always there for me, he is the most important aspect in my life.” During the personal interviews some of the participants revealed that they look at their dad for support and it is provided unconditionally, for example, “he is always there for us and helps us; he always helps when I have questions.” Additionally the adolescents’ responses revealed affection, respect, and dependability. For example: “I trust him, he is my strongest support, and I can talk to him about everything. He sis the best, he is always there for me.”

Personal Growth

The theme Personal Growth addresses how the participants perceived being raised by a single-parent father has shaped them who they are. Table 7 displays statements made by the participants relating to the theme.

Table 7

Personal Growth

Participant 1: “I guess helping my dad taking care of my brother and sister has made me more responsible, maybe living with a single-parent father made me more independent.”

Participant 2: “I think it shaped me by making me a stronger person and helping me deal with crisis and tough situations. The closeness me and my dad have also gave me a pretty good idea how guys think, because my dad and I are so open with each other. We have

such a strong bond. I learned to like sports a lot, because he is a basketball junkie ... I learned to be more considered towards other people and situations and other things because there is that kind of different culture, not culture but different lifestyle when living with one parent, we have situations, it just shaped me into a better person. Being raised by a single dad made me who I am today; a strong person.”

Participant 3: “Living with a single dad made me more responsible and independent. I can take care of myself. I have good peer relationships. I appreciate my dad and family is very important to me.”

Participant 4: “I am independent and responsible; I take care of myself, I do a lot of things myself. I make my own breakfast, do my own laundry, and help out around the house. I also work during the holiday.”

Participant 5: “I think I am more responsible and independent than other kids who live with their mom and dad. I have lot of chores; I do my laundry, clean my room and help out around the house. I also take care of my mom’s pool and pick up her mail when she is out of town.”

Participant 6: “I help out around the house; I help my dad. I have chores and do my schoolwork. I am responsible. I also help my sister.”

Summary: Personal Growth

Overwhelmingly, all the adolescent participants in this study indicated that being raised by a single father has shaped them who they are, all participants described being raised by a single father is directly connected to being responsible adolescents. One participant was particularly thoughtful: “I think it shaped me by making me a stronger person and helping me deal with crisis and tough situations.” Three of the adolescent participants stated that they contribute to the family by helping taking care of younger siblings by babysitting in the evenings, helping siblings get ready for school, and helping siblings with their homework. One adolescent stated that she helps take care of her two younger siblings while her dad goes to class some evenings. They also expressed that they get along well with their siblings and one participant described her affection for her sister: “Sheila (pseudonym), my little sister, and I have a pretty good bond; I mean siblings will fight, but we are pretty close. I help Sheila get ready for school in the morning. I also help her with her homework and take her to karate class after school.” One male adolescent who is the youngest of three siblings, shared that they all worked together helped out around the house. His older sisters help with the cooking and laundry. He stated that when he got older he got a job and worked after school and during the holidays. Also another participant, an eighteen year old student who has been living with her dad since she was eleven, indicated that she does a lot of things herself. She gets up in the morning by herself, makes breakfast, cooks and does the grocery shopping. Also during school holidays she has a job.

Setting Meaningful Goals

The theme Setting Meaningful Goals refers to the participant goals for the future. Table 8 represents statements made by the participants related to the theme.

Table 8

Statements relating to Setting Meaningful Goals

Participant 1: “I am not all” A” student, my dad wants me to do better in school. I guess I can do better. I want to be a crime scene investigator when I grow up. That stuff really interests me, I really like it. I know I have to go to college to do that, so I will have to so well in school.”

Participant 2: “I love writing; I want to get a scholarship to an Ivey League. I plan to have a 4.0 GPA. My grades were just like A’s and B’s, I kind of slacked of, I just got tired and lazy. Now I am back on school, school, and school... I also want to be in the high school chorus, I like singing... And I want to eat healthier just because my dad does not know how to cook; so we go out to eat a lot. So not all the food I eat is a 100% healthy. So my friend Gloria (pseudonym) and I try to eat healthy, a diet with no chocolate, all healthy, likes salads..... I also want to achieve black belt in karate, I am yellow right now...”

Participant 3: “My goal is to own land and property.”

Participant 4: “One of my goals was to go to college. My biggest accomplishment is my University admission. I want to be a sports therapist, and my plan is to graduate from the university with a Ph.D.”

Participant 5: “I am a straight “A” student and want to continue to do well in school. next year I will play a sport at school.”

Summary: Setting Meaningful Goals Theme

When asking the participants about their goals, the participants gave a great deal of thought to their answer. All six participants expressed pride in their accomplishments and have clearly stated goals for the future. For example, one participant who is accepted at a university stated, “I want to be a sports therapist, and my plan is to graduate from the university with a Ph.D.” During the personal interviews, each participant defined his/her goals and in particular one adolescent explained in detail her academic and personal goals as follows: “I love writing; I want to get a scholarship to an Ivey League. I plan to have a 4.0 GPA. I want to eat healthier just because my dad does not know how to cook; so we go out to eat a lot. So not all the food I eat is a 100% healthy. So my friend Gloria (pseudonym) and I try to eat healthy, a diet with no chocolate, all healthy, likes salads... I also want to achieve black belt in karate, I am a yellow belt right now.”

Different Roles of the Father

The theme Different Roles of the Father shows how the adolescents perceive their father in different roles. Table 9 represents statement made by the participants related to the theme.

Table 9

Statements Relating to Different Roles of the Father

Participant 1: "If I need something I can go to my dad. He gave me money to buy my homecoming dress and shoes. He helps me with my school work if I need some help."

Participant 2: "My dad's shops, he cooks, takes on both, a fatherly and a motherly role. And he will bring home clothes. His clothes are like in the sixties, the ones he grew up in. My style is Hollister and American eagle. He is not at all that great a cook. He tries to make pasta with marinara sauce, that's about it. We eat out a lot. My dad teaches Kung Fu at my karate school. In this environment his role is completely different, he is an authority figure, and he is my teacher."

Participant 3: "My dad took over everything, including all what my mom did before, like checking up on school work and all that stuff. I have a good relationship with him; sometimes we "kid" around, but he is serious when he needs to be. I appreciate everything he does. He means everything to me."

Participant 4: "My dad and I have a good relationship. He supports me in my efforts to reach my goals. He takes care of everything, his business and me."

Participant 5: "He is involved with my school. My dad helps me with my school work. He teaches me a lot. He always helps me when I have questions."

Participant 6: "Since my mom is not with us any more my dad is like both; he is my mom and my dad."

Summary: Different Roles of the Father Theme

The six adolescents revealed that their father's role was not only being a dad but they also fulfilled the roles of a nurturer, authority figure, and role model. They all agreed that they feel that they are loved and cared for. For example one participant explains: "Dad took care of everything including what his mom did he is always there for me. Sometimes we kid around, but he is serious when he needs to be." One particular participant indicated that being raised by her dad made her a stronger person and helped her deal with crisis and situations. One participant states: "I learned to like sports a lot, because he is a basketball junkie. We watch a lot and I go to a lot of games with him. I learned to be more considered towards other people and situations. I don't think I am missing out on anything. I have a pretty good life. I know my dad loves me unconditionally." Another participant revealed: "My dad is like both; he is my mom and my dad."

Satisfaction with Self

Statement of participants related to the theme Satisfaction with Self are presented in Table 10.

Statements Relating to Satisfaction with Self

Participant 1: "I am very social; I have a lot of friends. I take extracurricular classes. What I do is I help with the stage set up for the drama class. I like it much better than drama. We get to set up the stage, lighting and all that; it really is a lot of fun."

Participant 2: “I am starting ninth grade in high school and I have been accepted into the IB program (International Baccalaureate). I want to major in journalism, but I also like physics and chemistry.”

Participant 3: “I am a very responsible and independent person. I can take care of myself. I have a lot of good friends. I have good peer relationships.”

Participant 4: “I have set my goals and I am determined and hard working to reach them. I am proud of myself, and yes my dad is proud of me as well.”

Participant 5: “I was second on the Oration Contest. I am a straight “A” student. I have a lot of friends. I am proud of myself, and I know dad is proud of me too.”

Summary: Satisfaction with Self Theme

In regard of their perception of themselves, almost all adolescent participants had a generally positive regard of themselves. One participant who is graduating from high school and has been accepted at a university indicated: “I am proud of myself. I have set my goals and I am determined and hard working to reach them.” Academic achievements were frequently mentioned, academic success appears to be a highly regarded value among the participants. Additionally having a lot of friends and being very social has been mentioned quite often as well. Close friends and peer relationships appear to be very important to the adolescent participants. For example one participant explained: “I have a lot of good friends. I have good peer relationships.”

Summary

Chapter IV contains the data gathered in the interviews. The primary goal of this study was to provide a rich description of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father. The emerging themes were Focus on Education, Social Life and Valuing Interpersonal Connections, Connection to a Female Support Person, Trust, Personal Growth, Setting Meaningful Goals, Different Roles of the Father, and Satisfaction with Self.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes a restatement of the background and rationale, and a restatement of the methodology used for this investigation. In addition, the findings of Chapter IV are discussed and followed by the conclusions obtained from the findings. This chapter also discusses the limitations and the implication of this study.

Restatement of Background and Rationale

The number of single-father families in the United States has increased drastically, but these families are somewhat overlooked in our society. Most of the published studies focus on single-mother parents, but paying attention to the changing demographics in our society, it is equally important to examine the phenomenon of single-father parenting, and in addition to understand how this phenomenon is perceived by adolescents. The primary goal of this qualitative study is to provide a rich description of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father.

A qualitative approach was used for this study because the nature of the idea being explored, the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father, does not offer concrete variables that can be obtained from a quantitative study. This study is concerned with the experience from the perspective of the participants, and the phenomenological method of interviewing was utilized to investigate and gain a better understanding of the meaning and experience of being raised by a single-parent father from the perception of an adolescent experiencing the phenomenon first hand. A current literature review revealed very little published research involving the role of single

fathers raising adolescents. It is the hope of this researcher that this study will contribute to the field by adding to the existing literature, and provide beginning knowledge on the meaning and experience of adolescents being raised by a single father and hopefully lead to future theory development.

Restatement of Methodology

A qualitative research approach was embraced for this study because it is believed to be the best fitting research design to understand and comprehend the essence of the experience of adolescents being raised by a single-father parent. This researcher believed that the targeted population of this study would more receptive to qualitative research since this type of study is conducted in the participant's natural setting. Qualitative research presents an opportunity to focus on the whole of the lived experience instead its parts, and illuminate the "essence" of the experience through meaningful conversations instead of quantitative measurements such as questionnaires, surveys or observations (Moustakas, 1994).

The participants in this study were volunteers. The adolescents were diverse in regard to gender, age, and lengths of time living with a single-father parent. Snowball and network sampling techniques were employed for recruitment of the participants. Networking with other colleagues allowed this researcher to expand the sample pool of adolescents who meet the criteria for this study. The researcher's colleagues were given a Research Study Flyer (Appendix H) that described the nature of the study, the study requirements, and contact information for the researcher. The parents of the prospective participants were given a general description of the research and the time and commitment required for participation.

The researcher set up a convenient time and place and met with the potential participants at the Family Enrichment Center at Barry University, Orlando, or a location that was safe and convenient for the volunteer participants. Participants and their parents were told about the nature of their participation, the aims of the study, all data collection methodologies, the time required, potential risks, and the measures used to insure their anonymity. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and were told that they may withdraw from the study at any time without detriment to them. The fathers of the adolescents completed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), a Parent Consent Form (Appendix E) and the adolescent completed an Assent Form (Appendix F). The investigator obtained those written forms from all participants without coercion prior beginning the interviews. Information was provided on how the participants could obtain a summary of the findings of the study. This researcher had extensive experience working with adolescents as a guidance counselor and employed the proper techniques to allay their fears and concerns. They were given contact information for the researcher and were told they could call the researcher at any time. The prospective participants completed Demographic Information Forms (Appendices B and C) so that the researcher could obtain some general information about the volunteers.

This investigator chose the phenomenological approach because it seeks to explore a phenomena as human experience and aims to disclose the nature and structure as expressed through meaning, thus providing a deeper, fuller understanding of ourselves and the people around us (Moustakas, 1994). In this type of study, the researcher systematically arranges the experience to reveal a central meaning of the essence of the phenomenon. Open-ended semi-structured interviews are used as tools to uncover the

participants' view of his or her world and gather phenomenological data (Smith, 1998). Interviewing as a method of inquiry was chosen because it appeared to be the most reliable method for the individual to convey meaning through language (Seideman, 1998). In addition, a phenomenological design appeared to be appropriate because it describes the meaning of the lived experiences by several participants about the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

Meaning of Findings

In this study, eight major themes emerged from the results of the interviews: focus on education, social life (valuing interpersonal connections with friends and peers), connection to an adult female role model, trust, personal growth, setting meaningful goals, different roles of the father (nurturer authority figure/discipline), and satisfaction with self. It can be said that the participant shared many of the same perceptions about being raised by a single-father parent. Overwhelmingly, it appears that most important aspect perceived by the adolescents about their single fathers was trust. All the participants projected very loving and trusting feelings towards their fathers. Several participants stated that their father is a person they can trust, a person they feel comfortable to talk to. A general sense of cherishing and adoration appeared as some of them talked about their fathers. During the personal interviews some of the participants revealed that they looked at their fathers for support and it is provided unconditionally. Statements like "he is the best, he is always there for me," were most common amongst the participants.

All the participants perceived that their fathers placed a great deal of importance on their school work and academic achievements. All participants were involved in some type of activity after school, for example a sport, academic enrichment, or music. All adolescent participants reflected that their father supported them in reaching their

academic and extra curricular goals. Overwhelmingly, all participants conveyed in their interviews that their fathers' focus on education benefited them, either by motivating or encouraging them to do well in school. During the interviews all participants acknowledged that their fathers' emphasis on education and full support contributed to their academic success.

Not only did all the participants have a lot of friends, but socializing appeared to be an important aspect of their lives. Relationships with other adolescents and peers were described as important by all participants. Unanimously, all participants described themselves as very social, and having a lot of friends.

It did appear that the adolescent thought it to be valuable to have a relationship with a female role-model who can be trusted and is caring. All adolescent participants expressed that they valued the relationships they have with a "motherly figure." A couple of adolescents in this study whose parents were divorced appeared to have such a relationship with their biological mother, others with their grandmother, godmother, or family friend.

Each participant validated the importance of having meaningful goals. When asking the participants about their goals, the participants gave a great deal of thought to their answer. All six participants expressed pride in their accomplishment and have clearly stated goals for the future. Overwhelmingly, all the adolescent participants in this study perceived that being raised by a single father has shaped them to be who they are, and all participants described being raised by a single father as being directly connected to being responsible adolescents. During the personal interviews several of the older participants revealed that they had a job and worked after school and during the holidays. Others indicated that they had chores and helped out around the house. The data also revealed that the participants perceived that their father's role was not only being a dad but they also fulfilled the roles of a nurturer, authority

figure, and role model. They all agreed that they feel that they are loved and cared for. Statements like “he is both, my father and my mother,” were very common among the participants. The participants appeared to be very appreciative toward their fathers, which in turn led them to be more considerate towards other people and situations.

In summary, all the participants had a generally positive regard of themselves, and they were proud of themselves and their achievements. Academic achievements were frequently mentioned and academic success appears to be a highly regarded value among the participants. Additionally having a lot of friends and being very social was mentioned quite often. Close friends and peer relationships appear to be very important to the adolescent participants. All participants communicated the importance of responsibility and knowledge and appeared to be aware that being raised by a single-parent father shaped them into who they were - responsible adolescents with meaningful goals and a bright future ahead of them.

Findings in Relations to Theory

Bowen suggests that in a perfect family all members are capable of emotional intimacy without losing autonomy. In addition, all members of a perfect family have gained a high level of self differentiation. In this ideal family, all members, including children and adults are self reliant and succeed or fail based on their own efforts. They are balanced, able to adapt to change, connected across several generations, and parents bring their children up without pressuring them to develop images of their own projections (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

The findings in this study suggest that the participants came very close to being an ideal family according to Bowen. Results indicated that all the participants perceived that they were self-reliant, they knew how to take care of themselves and most of them were self motivated with a focus on their goals. The participants appeared to have adapted to change well, they had a generally positive regard of themselves, and were proud of themselves and

their achievements. Having a lot of friends and being very social were mentioned quite often as well. Close friends and peer relationships appear to be very important to the adolescent participants. All those findings indicated that the participants came very close to being self-differentiated. Figure 6 presents graphically Bowen's Differentiation of Self as perceived by the participants.

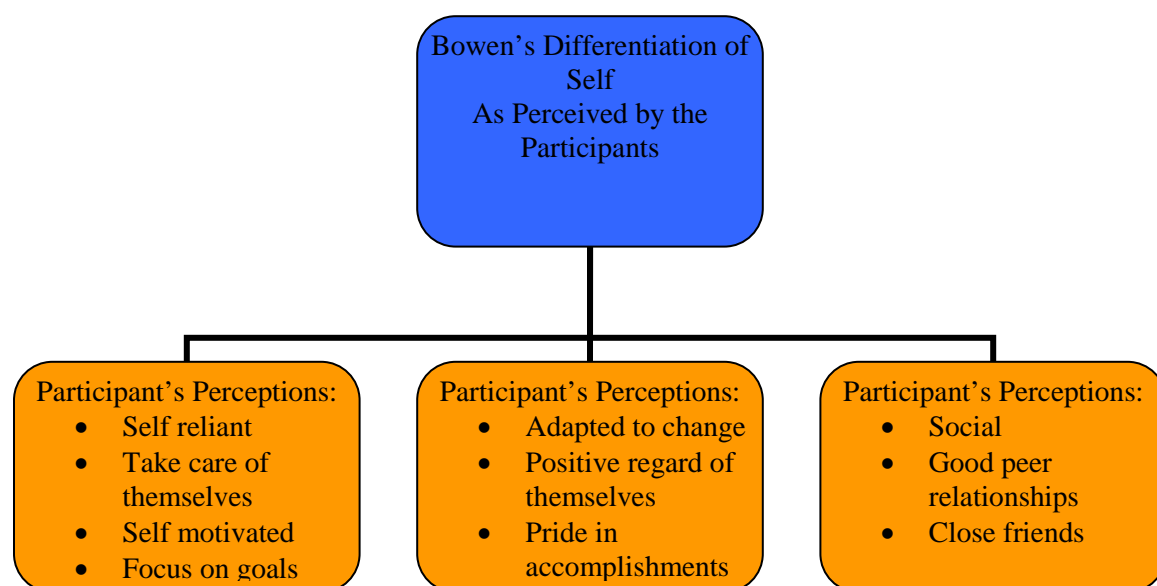


Figure 6: Bowen's Differentiation of Self as Perceived by the Participants.

Erik Erikson stage five, Identity versus Role Confusion, also referred to as adolescent's active search for role, includes constructs such as contemplation of personal strengths and weaknesses, and simultaneous synthesis of past, present, and future life experiences (Waterman, 1998). According to Erikson, good adult role models who provide open lines for communication will contribute to the development of a healthy, strong identity, which is merging through adolescents. For example educational achievements clearly

distinguish between the powerless/ irresponsible time of childhood and the powerful/responsible time of adulthood (Boerre, 1995).

The participants' fathers encouragement and support enabled them to achieve some of their educational goals which perhaps will lead to the development a healthy identity. According to Erikson, a healthy identity embraces a number of factors, which include: a good sense of self definition, an existence of commitment to beliefs, goals and values; activities geared towards commitment (Erikson, 1968). In this study the participants perceived that being raised by a single father has shaped them to be who they are. All participants described that being raised by a single father was directly connected to being responsible adolescents, and all participants conveyed in their interviews that their fathers' focus on education benefited them, either by motivating or encouraging them to do well in school. During the interviews all participants acknowledged that their fathers' emphasis on education and full support contributed to their academic success.

Relations with other adolescents and peers were described as important by all participants. Unanimously, all participants described themselves as very social, and having a lot of friends. Another important aspect perceived by the adolescents about their single-fathers was trust. All the participants projected very loving and trusting feelings towards their fathers. Several participants stated that that their father is person they the can trust, a person they feel comfortable to talk to. This also related to Erik Erikson's model which presumes that tasks such trust, autonomy, and initiative, have occurred and therefore contribute to the development of a healthy identity (Waterman, 1998). Figure 7 presents Erik Erikson's Stage Five, development of a healthy identity as experienced by the participants graphically.

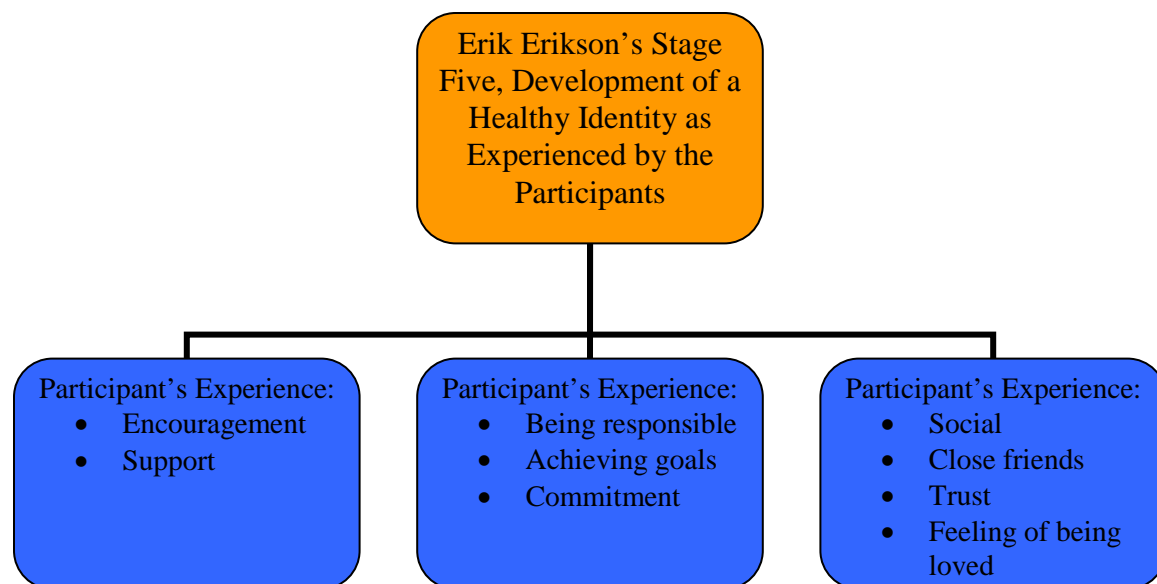


Figure 7: Erik Erikson's Stage Five Development of a Healthy Identity as Experienced by the Participants

Findings in Relation to Related Research

The findings in this study are consistent with the results of Coles (2001) study which focused on the parenting roles and goals of African American single-father families with special attention to the phenomenon of the parenting experience. Results of his study indicated that the participants placed high importance on nurturing, teaching and providing, and less importance on the role of the disciplinarian and authority figure. The fathers in Cole's study described their roles as single-parent fathers to be multi-faceted and adaptive to their child's needs. In a study investigating the experience of single fatherhood, Emmerson-Sommer et al., (2003) offered insight into the single-fatherhood experience. Data of this investigation revealed that many single fathers work hard to support their children, communicate to their children that they are loved and valued, are involved in their children's lives and find their roles as single fathers rewarding. However, delinquency and risky behavior were never revealed in the current study by any of the participants raised by a

single-parent father which does not correlate with the findings of the related literature which indicates that adolescents from divorced families are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than children raised from two-parent families (Dornbush et al., 1985, Kalter, Riemer, Brickman & Chen, 1985, Peterson & Zill, 1983, Zill, 1978).

Recommendation for Future Research

Additional research of adolescents being raised by single parent fathers is necessary to enhance a better understanding of this phenomenon experienced by adolescents at first hand. Even though the adolescents' experiences in this research are valuable, more research would be necessary to lead to theory development. It would have been beneficial for this study to interview more adolescents from more diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Research needs to continue to investigate single-father families for assurance whether the conclusions of this study are comparable with a larger population.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included several factors that are known to the phenomenological method. Although the adolescents' experiences in this qualitative research are unquestionably valuable, one limitation of this study is the small sample size which prohibits generalization beyond this group. More research with a larger sample of would give us a greater insight of the essential experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father. It should be kept in mind that the small sample is not surprising because in today's society two parent families and single mother families outweigh single father family structures (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2003). An additional limitation is that the recruitment method for this research was snowballing and networking, it might be that participants who knew and referred each other perhaps shared similar outlooks.

Recommendation for Treatment Providers

Hopefully this study provides a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father. The findings of this study can be used by parents, therapist, teachers, or anyone who is providing direct care to those families. This study provides parents and educators with a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father at first hand. Understanding how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father can be beneficial for practice in working with those diverse families and provide certain parameters for those in treatment.

Summary

Surprisingly without exception, all the adolescents enjoyed being part of this study. Without exception the adolescents talked about their experience of being raised by a single-father parent with acclamations of joy and admiration for their fathers. All the participants projected very loving and trusting feelings towards their fathers. Several participants stated that their father is person they can trust, a person they feel comfortable to talk to. A general sense of cherishing and adoration appeared as some of them talked about their fathers. During the personal interviews some of the participants revealed that they looked at their fathers for support and it is provided unconditionally. Overall, for this group of participants, being raised by a single-parent father has been a positive and nurturing experience.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-structured/Open-Ended Interview Protocol

The following questions will be used by the interviewer to direct the conversation in a meaningful direction.

1. Tell me a little bit about you from the beginning?
2. Can you tell me about some important personal experience related to what you are saying?
3. How would you describe some important aspects of your life such as education, milestones, relationships, goals?
4. Describe a typical day in your life, from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed.
5. Explain to me what it means to be raised by a single father. What is the experience like for you?
6. What do you believe is the most important aspect that helps families like yours to be able “hang in there” and make their family work?
7. How do you see your family in comparison to families who have a mother and a father in the home?
8. How does having only a father at home affect you on your daily basis?
9. Describe your relationship with your father. How is it similar or different to friends you know who have two parents at home?
10. Describe your community of peers, your best friends.
11. Who is the person you can trust, a person you feel comfortable talking to, a person you can confide in?

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please complete this demographic survey so that the researcher may obtain some general information about you. Please circle the response or fill in the blanks.

1. Age: _____
2. Ethnicity:
 - African American
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic
 - Asian
 - Other: _____
3. Education:
 - Less than high school
 - High school graduate
 - Some college
 - Undergraduate college degree
 - Graduate degree
4. Work status:
 - Self employed full time
 - Self employed part time
 - Employed full time
 - Employed part time
 - Retired
 - Other: _____
5. Marital Status:
 - Single (never been married)
 - Separated
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
 - Other: _____
6. How many years since separation, divorce, widowhood _____
7. What other adult lives in the household? _____
8. Gender and age of children living in the household? _____

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please complete this demographic survey so that the researcher may obtain some general information about you.

Please circle the response or fill in the blanks where appropriate.

1. Age: _____
2. Gender:
 - Female
 - Male
3. Ethnicity:
 - African American
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic
 - Asian
 - Other: _____
4. Number of siblings: _____
5. Grade in school: _____
6. How many years have you lived with your single parent father? _____
7. Are your parents:
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Widowed
 - Never been married
 - Other: _____



APPENDIX D

Barry University Informed Consent Form

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is The Essential Experience of Adolescents Being Raised by a Single Parent Father: A Phenomenological Study. The research is being conducted by Martina L. Study, a Ph.D. student in the Counseling Department at the Adrian Dominican School of Education at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of counseling. The aim of the research is to understand the lived experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father.

In accordance with this aim, and if you decide to participate in this research study, the following procedures will be used:

- Participation in a brief telephone interview to screen for appropriateness of participation in the research study (less than ten minutes).
- Completion of Informed Consent forms for you and your child and completion of a Demographic Information form (twenty minutes).

I anticipate the number of participants to be six adolescents and their single-parent fathers. Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects whatsoever. Additionally, should you chose to withdraw your data (transcribed interview) prior to the conclusion of the study your request will be honored and the transcript returned to you in a timely manner.

The risks of involvement in this study are minimal, and are not expected to exceed that ordinarily experience during routine psychological assessments. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father and may assist family therapists and family practitioners, parents, and educators in providing optimum care to the family as a whole.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by Florida law. Any published results of the research will refer to participant averages only and no names or other identifying information will be used in the study. The Demographic Data Sheets and the key codes will be kept in locked files in this investigator's office. The signed Informed Consent Form will be kept separate from the Demographic Data Sheet and Interview Forms. All raw data, including Demographic Data Sheets will be destroyed after five (5) years in accordance with Florida laws and university policies and procedures.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the

study, you may contact me, Martina L. Study, at (407) 629-5764, The Barry University Chair person, Dr. Eeltink, at (321) 235-8401, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Mrs. Nildy Polanco, at (305)899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Martina L. Study and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher

Date



APPENDIX E

Barry University Parent Consent Form

Your child's participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is The Essential Experience of Adolescents Being Raised by a Single Parent Father: A Phenomenological. The research is being conducted by Martina L. Study, a Ph.D. student in the Counseling Department at the Adrian Dominican School of Education of Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of counseling. The aim of the research is to understand the lived experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father.

In accordance with this aim, and if you allow your child, who must be between the ages of 12 and 18, to participate in this research study, the following procedures will be used:

- Participation in a brief telephone interview to screen for appropriateness of participation in the research study (less than ten minutes).
- Completion of an Assent form by your child and completion of a Demographic Information form (twenty minutes).
- Completion of an in-depth audio taped individual interview concerning your child's experience of being raised by a single-parent father at a private setting convenient for you and your child. The interview will consist of answering 11 open ended questions (60 minutes)
- Completion of a review of the transcripts of the actual interview to ensure accuracy (20 minutes).

I anticipate the number of participants to be six adolescents and their single-parent fathers. If more than one child in the family would like to participate then one child will be randomly selected. Your child's consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should he/she decline to participate or should choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects whatsoever. Additionally, should he/she chose to withdraw his/her data (transcribed interview) prior to the conclusion of the study his/her request will be honored and the transcript returned to you in a timely manner.

The risks of involvement in this study are minimal, and are not expected to exceed that ordinarily experience during routine psychological assessments. Although there are no direct benefits to your child, his/her participation in this study may help to attain a better understanding of how adolescents perceive being raised by a single-parent father and may assist family therapists and family practitioners, parents, and educators providing optimum care to the family as a whole.

As a research participant, information he/she provides will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by Florida law. Any published results of the research will refer to participant averages only and no names or other identifying information will be used in the study. Interview Question Forms, Demographic Data Sheets, transcripts, audio tapes, and the key codes will be kept in locked files in this investigator's office. After completion of the data collection, the audiotapes will be destroyed. The signed Informed Consent Form will be kept separate from the Demographic Data Sheet and Interview Forms. All raw data, including Demographic Data will be destroyed after five (5) years in accordance with Florida laws and university policies and procedures. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

For purposes of verification and reliability, a peer debriefer who is a doctoral student at a local university will review the research findings, which will include access to the transcripts, analyses, and computerized database. That person will offer their interpretations of the data and such interpretations will be compared to the findings of the principal investigator. This individual will sign a confidentiality agreement to assure the protection of the client.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your child's participation in the study, you may contact me, Martina L. Study at (407) 629-5764, the Barry University Chair person, Dr. Eeltink, at (321) 235-8401, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Mrs. Nildy Polanco, at (305)899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to allow your child to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Martina L. Study and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent for my child to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher

Date



APPENDIX F

Barry University**ASSENT FORM INVOLVING MINORS**

We are doing a research study that includes children such as you. We have explained the study to you, and we need to know whether you are willing to participate. Please sign your name below so that we can be certain whether you want to be in the study or not. Thank you.

____ I am willing

____ I am not willing

to participate in the research study which has been explained to me by

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Child

Date

Signature of Parent

Date

APPENDIX G

Confidentiality Agreement

As a member of the research team investigating The Essential Experience of Adolescents Being Raised by a Single Parent Father: A Phenomenological, I understand that I will have access to confidential information about study participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my obligation to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study participants are completely confidential.
- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
- I understand that all information about study participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information unless specifically authorized to do so by office protocol or by a supervisor acting in response to applicable protocol or court order, or public health or clinical need.
- I understand that I am not to read information and records concerning study participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.
- I understand that a breach of confidentiality may be grounds for disciplinary action, and may include termination of employment.
- I agree to notify my supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

Signature	Date	Printed Name
Signature	Date	Printed Name



APPENDIX H

Research Study Flyer

A doctoral candidate at Barry University in the Adrian Dominican School of Education is investigating the Essential Experience of Adolescents Being Raised by a Single-Parent Father, and is looking for volunteers to participate in this research study.

If you are a single-parent father raising adolescents, and both of you are interested in participating in a study investigating the essential experience of adolescents being raised by a single-parent father please call (407) 629-5764 to participate or for more information.

Research Study Requirements:

- Completion of an Assent Form by the adolescent and Informed Consent Form and Parent Consent Form by the single-parent father.
- Completion of a Demographic Information Form.
- Participation in a 60 minutes interview (adolescents) and one 20 minutes follow-up session to review the interview transcript for accuracy.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Male and female adolescents who are living with a single-parent father for more than two years.
- Adolescents must be between the ages 12 and 18 years.
- The maximum number of participants is six adolescents and their single-parent fathers and the first 12 participants to respond will be chosen for the study.
- The study selection will cease as soon after 6 different adolescents from 6 different single-father parent families have been chosen.
- If more than one child in the family would like to participate then one child will be randomly selected.

Selection of Participants:

- Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and the confidentiality of the participants will be carefully protected.
- After completion of the data collection, the audiotapes will be destroyed. The forms and transcriptions will be kept for a period of five years in accordance with state and university laws and procedures, and will be destroyed (shredded) after the expiration of such time.
- The participants will be made aware that risks involved in participating are minimal, but should they experience any emotional distress they will be referred to the Barry University Family Enrichment Center at Orlando where they can receive one counseling session for free. This researcher has no therapeutic relationship or work related relationship with the volunteers and therefore cannot and will not counsel the volunteers.

