Finding The Two-Way Street: Women from Mother-Present/Father-Absent Homes and Their Ability to Make Close Female Friendships

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Finding The Two-Way Street: Women from Mother-Present/Father-Absent Homes and Their Ability to Make Close Female Friendships

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This heuristic study involving seven coresearchers, which included the author, explores the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes and their ability to form and maintain close female friendships. The heuristic research model was chosen to provide the opportunity to conduct research in a very personalized, collaborative way with my coresearchers. From our first meeting through the creative synthesis, it was vital to use a research model that honored the exploration of feelings with all their associated meanings. Little was found in the literature that paired father absence and women’s ability to form close female friendships. The author wanted to discover if other women from mother-present/father-absent homes had challenges forming and maintaining close female friendships.

Some of the coresearchers’ experiences (our ability to form and maintain close female friendships, the effects from our fathers’ absence, and the meaning we ascribed to these experiences) were substantiated by the literature, while others were not. Some information could not be examined because it could not be located in the literature. Six core essence themes (which contained 44 dominant themes) including: the satisfaction of close female friendships, obstacles faced in making close female friends, mother’s
influence also needs consideration, yearning for Daddy, and father behaving badly are explored in detail.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

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I am greatly indebted to the many people who have helped and influenced me in my effort to obtain a doctoral degree. Pursuing such a degree and writing this dissertation have been very challenging and rewarding process. I attribute my success to the encouragement of all the supportive people in my life.

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I also want to thank my mother, Karen Matthews, for the sacrifices she has made for me, and the love she has given me throughout my life. I would never have gotten this far in my education without the values you instilled in me and the encouragement you gave me. It is hard to imagine meeting the challenges of raising two children alone. I am so grateful for your support. I would also like to thank my brother, Robert Matthews, who stood by me during this process and assisted me with computer issues. I also want to thank my Uncle T.J. who stepped in for his brother to be a father figure to me after I began college. I am so appreciative of your love and support. Additionally, I would like to thank my dear friends, Paula, Maia, Christina, Rabecca, Shelly, Naomi, Mariana and Cynthia who gave me so much encouragement and support when I needed it.

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This dissertation has provided me with tremendous knowledge and insight into myself and my relationships with my female friends, husband, daughter, mother, and father. I feel relieved to have given up the dream of that ideal father/daughter
relationship ever coming to fruition because it weighted me down psychologically and spiritually. Holding on to the dream kept me in the past. Now that I have made closure, I feel free to let him go and focus on the people present in my life that love, support, and are here for me. I can live in the present and appreciate all the benefits that come from having supportive family and female friends. This learning process has been gratifying to me and my family, as they have witnessed and shared in my growth. It has provided me the realization and opportunity for internal evaluation and an even greater appreciation to family life. The heuristic inquiry methodology encouraged personal appraisal and growth and the mutual sharing of experiences with women who have had analogous personal challenges. I am very thankful for the bravery, openness, and honesty of these coresearchers because, without them, this dissertation could not have taken place.

I look forward to sharing my knowledge and experiences with counselors, counselor educators, and counseling students to assist them in understanding the complexities of emotion women face after a father absence, and the healing that occurs from finding supportive female friends. I hope this study will encourage further investigation into the impact of father absence on young women and how the love and support of a close female friend can help repair much of the damage. Perhaps if young women were able to make close female friendships earlier on, many of the mental health issues and problematic behaviors experienced after a father absence could be truncated.
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Chapter One

Autobiographical Roots

When I was five years old, my father sat me down with a look of seriousness to tell me that he and my mother were getting a divorce and that he would be moving away. I remember thinking he was joking because I had never seen this look before. But soon after, he was gone and I did not see him much anymore. My mother had to raise my brother and me alone. She told me, when I was an adult, that she had felt certain he would always remain an active part of our lives, but his contact with us diminished quickly after the divorce until he was completely out of my life. His departure impacted me greatly.

I grew up feeling abandoned by my father. This definitely seemed to affect my self-esteem. Somehow, I thought that if my father did not want me, I was not loveable. Growing up in a small Appalachian town proved challenging because few children in my school had divorced parents. This made me feel even more alienated and depressed. I had difficulty making friends, especially female friends. As I grew older, I focused my attention on boys. It truly was a miracle I did not become a pregnant teen.

In college, I continued to have difficulty making female friends and seriously wondered what was wrong with me. When I began my masters program at age 25, I finally made my first very close female friend. I wondered why it took so long. Until I reached my thirties, I had never considered any possible connection between my challenges in making female friends and my father leaving. But, once I started to think about these issues, I could not stop. I became engrossed in issues of father absence and
female friendship and decided to make it the topic of my dissertation. Early on, it seemed clear that I should use a heuristic research design.

**Rationale for Heuristic Research**

The heuristic model of qualitative research methodology was chosen because it “draws explicitly on the intense personal experiences of the researcher” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). In light of my intense personal experiences, this was the best fit for my study. Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that encourages the researcher to find meaning through self-exploration and examination of others’ descriptions of analogous challenges. Qualitative research emphasizes personal meaning, description, and interpretation of the experience rather than relying on measurement and scientific calculation. “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). Therefore, the entire experience remains the focus. Immersing oneself into another’s world can be of great value (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic research not only requires studying others’ experiences, but also carries the implication that the researcher has shared in the same process. This was an ideal research design because I wanted to speak with other women from mother-present/father-absent homes and discuss issues of father absence and their experiences with female friendships. In heuristic research, the researcher is fueled by a desire for discovery of his or her experiences and those of coresearchers. “Heuristics emphasizes connectedness and relationship” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39).
Many aspects of the lives of women from father-absent homes have been researched. These aspects include: socioeconomic status (Cronk, Slutske, Madden, Bucholz, & Heath, 2004; Kalil & Ryan, 2010; McLanahan & Teitler, 1998), teen pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003; McLanahan & Teitler; Secunda, 1992), ability to finish high school (McLanahan & Teitler), ability to attend and graduate from college (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), predictors of separation anxiety disorder (Cronk et al.), mental health issues (Amato & Keith, 1991; Eley & Stevenson, 2000; Hetherington, 1993; Kendler, Neale, Kessler, Heath, & Eaves, 1992; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Strohschein, 2005) gender role characteristics (Harris, Gold, & Henderson, 1991; Kalter, Riemer, Brickman, & Chen, 1985; Price-Bonham & Skeen, 1982; Soh, 1993), identity achievement (Sartor & Youniss, 2002), amount of supervision (McLanahan, Astone, & Marks, 1988), interpersonal trust (King, 2002), developmental issues (Grimm-Wassil; Kalter et al.; Lohr, Legg, Mendell, & Reimer, 1989; Mott, 1994; Pruett & Pruett, 1998), behavioral issues (Carlson, 2006; Kalter et al.), social competence (Amato & Keith; Main; Mott; Parke et al., 2004), and marital success (Koestner et al.; Popenoe, 1996; Secunda). Additionally, research has been conducted on young heterosexual women from father-absent homes and their experiences in intimate relationships with men (Appleton, 1981; Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993; Clark & Kanoy, 1998; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Popenoe; Regnerus & Luchies, 2006; Secunda; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989).
A resident father’s influence on his children’s peer relationships has also been researched (Parke et al., 2004). The limited amount of research found on father absence and peer relationships focused mainly on the effects of absence on sons rather than daughters (Parke et al.). Despite all the available data, I was unable to find any previous research addressing the question of how women from mother-present/father-absent homes develop close friendships with other women.

There is also a paucity of research on the dynamics of friendship among young women, particularly those of college age (Martinez Aleman, 1997). Some examples of female friendship research include the fragility of girls’ same-sex friendships (Benenson & Christakos, 2003), internalized distress (depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal) in peer groups (Hogue & Steinberg, 1995), self-concept paired with body weight and pubertal development (O’Dea & Abraham, 1999), sex differences in children’s play (Lever, 1978), friendship patterns between older African-American women and Caucasian women (Lewittes, 1988), the benefits of female friendship (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Berzoff, 1989; Fraad, 2011; Josselson, 1996; Martinez Aleman, 1997; Paul, 2004; Porter Benson, 2007; Secunda, 1992; Wilson, 2000), whether friendship can reduce loneliness (Stevens, 2001), the effect of peer counseling on quality of life following diagnosis of breast cancer (Giese-Davis et al., 2006), higher values placed upon friendship (Aukett, Richie, & Mill, 1988; O’Dea & Abraham), and how professional women working in student affairs view friendship with other women sharing their profession (Wilson). Additionally, the benefits of cross-sexual female friendships have
been studied (Galupo & St. John, 2001), as well as the effects of friendship on peer group entry (Zarbatany, van Brunschot, Meadows, & Pepper, 1996).

Although female friendships have been examined from various angles, no study has been found pairing them with father absence. Female friendships have a very positive influence on the way girls and young women develop (Johnson, 1996; Wilson, 2000), as does having a loving, affectionate father in a young girl’s home (Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992). No research has been found that explores whether the absence of one affects the other.

Father absence matters because it affects girls emotionally and economically (McLanahan & Teitler, 1998) and is associated with socioeconomic disadvantage (Cronk, et al., 2004; Kalil & Ryan, 2010; McLanahan & Teitler). Also, some young women who grow up without a father in the home have been found to have psychological issues (Amato & Keith, 1991; Eley & Stevenson, 2000; Hetherington, 1993; Kendler, Neale, Kessler, Heath, & Eaves, 1992; Koestner et al., 1990; Strohschein, 2005). This is an important issue which as been studied from many viewpoints, but no studies have been found with it in relation to female friendship development. This presents an overlooked opportunity for information that could be very beneficial to the helping professions.

Research on attachment provides theoretical validation that children feel a deep sense of bereavement and pain after object loss that creates negative implications for their future development (Pruett & Pruett, 1998). Carlson (2006) stated, “Insofar as the father-child relationship is important for children’s development, fathers’ detachment represents a significant loss for children” (p. 139). The earlier the absence the stronger the effect on
the child’s behavior and emotions (Hetherington, 1972; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993) with the first six years representing the most critical period (Draper & Harpending, 1982). Pruett and Pruett added, “A continuous relationship between father and child may preserve the attachment bonds formed in the pre-divorce family, maintaining the father’s place as a significant psychologic parent to his child” (p. 401). Moreover, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) theorized, “children rely on their fathers for guidance and support in areas of intimacy and their emotional availability may be essential to the process of healthy development” (p. 124). This is particularly relevant considering that fifty percent of children have no more communication with their fathers ten years after a parental dissolution (King & Heard, 1999; Seltzer, 1991) and feel unsure about how the family members should relate to each other.

Children who experience father abandonment because of divorce or separation question how to relate to family and sometimes have trouble trusting others in adulthood, especially after learning it is not always wise to trust (Amato, 2000). Gamble and Roberts (2005) noted that difficult relations with key caregivers allow kids to create harmful internal working models of themselves and others. “If we had a responsive, available attachment figure early in life, we are more likely to expect others to be available, predictable, and responsive to us in adulthood” (Josselson, 1996, p. 48).

Conversely, if we were abandoned, “rejected or disappointed in our attachment needs, we are likely to try to avoid attachments, to screen out awareness of attachment issues, and to try to rely only on ourselves” (Josselson, p. 48). This could affect how a young woman makes friends with other women. Josselson explained:
So much of what is lumped as “peer involvement” is in reality exploration into what one can expect from others outside the family in terms of loyalty, reliability, and affection. Adolescents try to discover which of their friends can be counted on, and in what way. Who will be “there” when needed for company or comfort? In many ways, adolescents use their friends as well as their families as secure bases from which to explore. (p. 49)

Girls from father-absent homes who cannot adequately form and maintain female friendships face certain challenges. Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982) found that women usually define their identity in the context of relationships to others. Josselson (1996) echoed this by stating that women’s identity develops from understanding who they are in relation to others. Through the intimate bond of female friendship, women can gain valuable insight and self-confidence, as well as the ability to change and grow (Johnson, 1996). Likewise, O’Dea and Abraham (1999) found women had an increase in self-esteem related to close friendships. Because of all these remunerations, it is understandable that the quality of interpersonal and social relationships creates a young woman’s identity (Newman & Newman, 1995). Women develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1987). Furthermore, a woman’s identity becomes organized around making and maintaining relationships and affiliations. For many, the possibility of trouble with a friend is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship, but also as a loss of self (Miller).

Essentially, a critical part of a woman’s identity comes from knowing who she is in relation to others (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996). Chodorow noted
that “growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others” (p. 169). With this in mind, a woman who had difficulty in making female friendships throughout her life may experience different challenges in forming her identity than other women who had stable, close female friendships. Therefore, fostering close friendships with other females can confer many personal and psychological advantages upon women (Galupo & St. John, 2001; Gilligan; Johnson, 1996; Josselson; Miller, 1987; Newman & Newman, 1995; Paul, 2004; Wilson, 2000).

What are the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes regarding the development of close relationships with other females? Interpersonal trust in adult children of divorced or separated parents is a phenomenon to consider. King (2002) found that parental divorce at an early age had a negative effect on a child’s ability to trust others. Bowlby (1988) argued that a child’s attachment to each parent creates a sense of safety or insecurity and later establishes the foundation for intimate relationships in adulthood. If a child loses a parent to divorce in preschool or earlier years there could be detrimental effects on his or her development, particularly in the area of trust (Emery, 1999).

Diekmann and Engelhardt (1999) found that adults from divorced families were more likely to get divorced, though the researchers could not determine the cause. This might be because parents in marriages characterized by a lack of openness, affection, and support may fail to model the interpersonal skills required to promote intimacy for their children (Doyle, Brendgen, Markiewicz, & Kamkar, 2003). Also, father absence has been shown to affect girls’ sexual behaviors (Ellis et al., 2003; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Main,
Children from divorced families have been found to experience more mental health issues than children from intact families (Strohschein, 2005). Main noted that when a father is absent, girls often withdraw from social contact, suffer from reduced self-esteem, and become promiscuous. Clearly, fathers have a great deal of influence on their daughters’ development (Griswold, 1998; Popenoe, 1996; Regnerus & Luchies; Secunda; Sinclair & Nelson, 1998).

Although fathers affect their daughters’ development in many ways, mothers can also affect daughters’ relationships to their fathers (Secunda, 1992). Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee, and Escalante (2004) found that, out of 194 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 17 (106 girls and 88 boys), daughters were more likely to agree with the mother’s negative talk (for example, anger and complaints) regarding the girls’ father. This could cause “psychological distress” (p. 54) for the adolescent girl because it could exacerbate negative feelings and further disengage her from her father (Koerner et al.). If a young woman embodies the negativity of her mother toward her father and distances herself emotionally from her father, the chance of having a healthy, satisfying relationship with him is highly compromised (Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992). Koerner et al. conducted this study on adolescents who were Caucasian (66%) or Mexican American (26%) and lived at least half-time with their single mothers. The annual household income was less than $40,000 for 71% of the people studied. It was noted that adolescents living in families with “acute financial concerns might have been underrepresented in the study” (p. 55), not every adolescent responded to the open-ended
questions, and some responses lacked important information. The researchers were unable to probe for additional responses from the adolescents since the questionnaires had been mailed back to them. It would be useful to conduct a longitudinal study that follows families over several years to determine the longer lasting effects as these adolescents grow into adults.

Research suggests that girls with affectionate fathers with whom they have a positive relationship are more likely to develop positive friendships (Koestner et al., 1990). Strohschein (2005) studied 2,819 Canadian children ages 4 through 7, and suggested that “children of divorce exhibit significantly more mental health problems…than children whose parents remain married” (p. 1297). Additionally, Hetherington (1993) argued that children from divorced families are often not as emotionally or socially well-adjusted as children from non-divorced families.

Considering that the maintenance of a friendship sometimes requires well-developed social and emotional ability (Wright, 1984), it may be more difficult for young girls to develop positive, satisfying relationships with other girls without this emotional bond and strong relationship with the father. This is important to consider because having healthy, positive friendships with other females has been shown to be instrumental in the development of a woman’s self-concept (Aries & Johnson, 1983), intellectual value, life possibilities (Martinez Aleman, 1997), and inner security and self-discovery (Aries & Johnson, Berzoff, 1989; Shulman, Elicker, & Sroufe, 1994). But is there a connection between father absence and the ability of women to form and maintain close female friendships? And, if so, what is it?
Research suggests that girls from father-absent homes withdraw from social relationships (Main, 1991) and, without a supportive affiliation with their father, are unlikely to develop close relationships with adult males (Popenoe, 1996). The experiences of women regarding their ability to form and maintain close reciprocal relationships with other women, and the meanings they ascribe to these experiences were not readily found in the literature, but could provide much information that could be useful to the counseling profession.

**Statement of the Problem**

Although researchers have noted changes in women who had absent fathers due to divorce or separation, there is a scarcity of research on women’s ability to form close friendships with other women. I have been unable to find much literature on how father absence may have influenced a woman’s ability to form close friendships with other women. Wilson (2000) noted that the literature in higher education involving the research of women has not examined their close friendships, but stated that there would be many benefits to researching this.

Miller (1987) affirmed that studying women’s lives and relationships adds to a vast understanding of growth-enhancing interpersonal relations and a more complete sagacity concerning the entire human experience. Wilson (2000) noted that by studying female friendships, much could be learned about interdependence and interpersonal relationships, as well as intimacy. These concepts are integral components to all healthy relationships, and essential elements worthy of further exploration (Gilligan, 1982; Wilson). As counselors, a crucial component in working with those in need involves
empowering people to find their own solutions to their problems and become self-actualized (Rogers, 1951). If women are unable to develop close relationships with other women, there may be negative ramifications regarding identity development, self-confidence, insight, and the development of intimacy, personal growth, and self-actualization.

Hearing the experiences of these women could provide the counseling profession a better understanding of the importance of female friendship and how father absence might affect these relationships. This knowledge could result in the provision of more refined pedagogical strategies for counseling students by counselor educators, and more effective treatment approaches when counseling girls and women from mother-present/father-absent homes.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry is to describe the experiences that women from mother-present/father-absent homes have had with forming and maintaining close friendships with other females. Since little, if anything, is known about the relationship between these phenomena, this study explores the potential relationship between a father not being present due to divorce or separation and the adult daughter’s experience in forming and maintaining close female friendships. As a result, the phenomenon written as a research question is: “What are the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes (due to divorce or separation) regarding the development of close friendships with other females?”
Significance

Research that expands the understanding of the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes and their ability to form close female friendships will benefit students, educators, and researchers within the profession of counselor education by providing a heuristic research design describing the women’s reports of their experiences. This inquiry is significant for many reasons. First, it may help increase understanding of women based on the experiences of women, not men. Erikson (1968) has been criticized for relying on samples of White, middle-class males for his theories and models (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The literature supports the need to hear more about the female experience (Miller, 1987). Erikson (1968) and Freud (1920) viewed male individuation as verification of psychological health, and considered female relational dissimilarities as psychological dearth (Gilligan, 1982). “Among the most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate in women’s own terms the experience of their adult life” (Gilligan, p. 173). Second, this research expands the literature in higher education where women have been a focus of research, but their close friendships have often been overlooked (Wilson, 2000). Practitioners in the field of counseling could benefit from a greater understanding of the complexity of women’s lives and friendships.

Hearing the women’s experiences could also expand the knowledge of counselors when treating girls whose families are divorcing. Amato (2000) argued that, “as long as nearly half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, there will be an enduring need to understand and monitor the implications of marital dissolution” (p. 1283).
Blankenhor (1996) called fatherlessness “the most harmful demographic trend of this generation” (p. 1). Moreover, counselors could encourage fathers who are considering divorce to retain greater contact with their children since father bonding before a divorce has been suggested to lead to fewer problems for children at a later time (Bray, 1999; Spruijt, de Goede, & Vandervalk, 2004). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also found children whose non-custodial fathers visited less frequently had very low self-esteem.

Knowledge in this area could help counselors treat the mental health problems and behaviors often seen in young women from father-absent homes such as anxiety, depression, antisocial behaviors (Strohschein, 2005), promiscuity (Main, 1991; McLanahan & Teitler, 1998), teen pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003; McLanahan & Teitler), and lack of trust (Emery, 1999; King, 2002). Additionally, some studies found daughters whose fathers were absent due to divorce were more physically aggressive toward both male and female peers (Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Heckel, 1963). Conflict resolution skills have been found to be less developed in young girls (as compared to boys of the same age), possibly explaining the problems they have in maintaining their friendships (Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Goodwin, 1990; Lever, 1978). Mental health counselors and counselor educators could further promote the positive benefits of female camaraderie with other girls and teach additional friendship development and conflict resolution skills.
Scope

This study focused on the experiences of daughters whose fathers had been in their life past infancy (after their first birthday), left after the divorce or separation, and thereafter maintained little contact. I used purposeful intensity sampling to find information-rich cases for study. Intensity sampling is a category of purposeful sampling that focuses on cases rich in information that manifests the phenomenon. Further, the sample size was small. A large sample size was not appropriate for this type of methodology and did not conform to the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). This study cannot be generalized to a particular population because each coresearcher reported on her own personal experiences. Another limitation of the study was the difficulty in finding participants since I used such narrow criteria.

This study did not explore issues regarding young women who have experienced father absence due to death, employment, mental illness, substance abuse, or neglect. Only women from mother-present/father-absent homes due to divorce or separation who have had little contact with their fathers following the divorce or separation were interviewed in this study. The women chosen for this study did not have other father figures in their lives growing up. Father absence by death is usually not associated with identical emotional or reproductive results found with father absence due to divorce or separation (Agid et al., 1999; Draper & Harpending, 1982). MacCallum and Golombok (2004) suggested that being without a resident father from the time the daughter is an infant does not seem to present any negative consequences. Furthermore, this study did not explore lesbian parentage. Research suggests that children raised by lesbian parents
fare equally as well developmentally as children from heterosexual parents (Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008). This study also did not examine the potential ramifications women from father-absent homes face if they have had difficulty in making friends with other females.

Some of the studies presented in this paper are dated. This presented a limitation in regards to the available literature. Many of the studies need to be replicated to remain current, and to determine if the findings remain relevant.

**Summary**

Chapter One provides an introduction to the researcher’s interest in the dissertation topic, an overview of heuristic methodology, the role of attachment, effects of father absence on girls, and the benefits of female friendships. Chapter Two reviews the literature and examines what research has been conducted about father absence and female friendship development. Issues of trust and attachment theory are also discussed. Chapter Three provides an overview of the history of the researcher’s passion for the subject, and introduces the methodology of this research endeavor, including how the subjects were located, and limitations the study encountered. Chapter Four examines the conversations with the coresearchers, which includes cross-case analysis, narratives about each of the coresearchers, and a composite profile of the woman from a mother-present/father-absent home and her experiences in making female friends. Chapter Five summarizes the main ideas, discusses what the research has suggested about the core essence themes, and suggests recommendations for future research.
**Definition of Terms**

Experience: As defined by the researcher, the woman has personally lived through an event. Experience is a highly personal phenomenon. It embodies all of the individual’s feelings, thoughts, and awareness. These all meld into the totality of the experience. The term “experience” in this manuscript involves living through the event of father absence and the process of making female friends.

Absent father: As defined by the researcher, fathers who have had no more than one face-to-face contact with their daughter since the divorce or separation in any given six-month time frame. This absence is due to divorce or separation rather than death, employment, mental illness, substance abuse, or neglect. The father has basically abandoned his daughter.

Adult daughters of divorced or separated parents: As defined by the researcher, refers to a woman 35 or older whose biological parents were once married and became divorced or separated prior to the daughter’s 10th birthday. This study will examine adult daughters who were raised by their mothers from a young age (10 or under) and who had no more than one face-to-face contact every six months with their fathers following divorce or separation.

Mother-present: The biological mother and main caregiver for the daughter in this study. Since an infant initially shapes the relationship between itself and its mother (Bowlby, 1988), and the researcher used a heuristic design and was raised by her biological mother, she sought coresearchers who had also been raised by their biological mothers.
Friend: “A person whom one knows well and is fond of; intimate associate; close acquaintance” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2008, p. 567). Intimacy is a crucial element in the relationship with a best friend (Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). As defined by the researcher, it is the ability to share one’s genuine and vulnerable self in a relationship with another, and to have the other share her genuine self reciprocally. The researcher examined friendship between two adult females.

Heuristic research: a form of phenomenological inquiry that encourages the researcher to find meaning through self-exploration and examination of others’ descriptions of analogous challenges. “It draws explicitly on the intense personal experiences of the researcher” (Patton, 2002, p. 234).
Chapter Two

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding the effects of father absence upon women’s emotional, cognitive, and psychological development. In addition, it explored female friendship development and its effects on women’s emotional, cognitive, and psychological development.

Review of the Literature

Since no specific qualitative studies were found linking father absence with female friendship development in the literature (databases of Academic Search Premier, ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Ohiolink, ProQuest, and PsycINFO), areas of research that bear relevance and areas deserving further attention will be discussed (King, 2002; Popenoe, 1996). The gathering of information relating to the research question, “What are the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes (due to divorce or separation) regarding the development of close relationships with other females?” started with a computer search in which the descriptors father, daughter, absence, divorce, separation, and female friendships were used. The databases named above were searched, as well as Dissertation Abstracts. Any study offering data regarding females growing up in a mother-present/father-absent home or female friendship development was examined. Only studies relating to the effects on daughters reared in father-absent homes due to divorce or separation were included in my search. The majority of the studies located were quantitative investigations (Amato & Booth, 2001; Bowker, 2004; Defranc & Mahalik, 2002; King, 2002; MacCallum & Golombok;
Areas of research discussed include issues of trust, attachment theory, the importance of fathers and how they affect success and goal achievement, mental health, and the stability of a young woman’s intimate heterosexual relationships. The impact of father absence due to divorce or separation is examined, and how these factors affect socioeconomic status, developmental issues, mental health, behavior, and a woman’s intimate heterosexual relationships. In addition, the importance and benefits of female friendships in women’s lives is explored.

**The Issue of Trust**

Trust is important when forming relationships (Mitchell, 1990). Persons who lack trust in others have been found to be less content in relationships, frequently have a negative view of self, are more isolated, and less satisfied with life overall (Mitchell). The parent-child relationship forms the earliest foundation for developing a child’s sense of trust. When parents divorce, trust is inhibited in children (King, 2002). A child’s relationship with his or her parents provides the foundation of a child’s working idea of relationships, including expectations for others, which carries into adulthood (Bowlby, 1988). Therefore, children who experience a father absence due to divorce or poor parental interpersonal behavior could have difficulty trusting others in adulthood, especially after learning through bitter experience that it is not always prudent to trust (Amato, 2000). Trust could definitely be a concern for children, considering that “never
before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers” (Blankenhorn, 1996, p. 1).

According to McLanahan and Teitler (1999), in addition to feelings of uncertainty during a divorce, the children’s trust has been seriously compromised. “Changes following divorce may negatively impact children’s other relationships that further increase apprehension regarding the permanence of relationships” (King, 2002, p. 643). King found that parental divorce at an early age had a negative effect on the ability to trust others. King used a 17-year longitudinal examination of marital unsteadiness (Booth, Amato, Jonson, & Edwards, 1998) to explore the issues of trust. The children had to be at least 19 years old for the study and a resident of his or her parent’s home. One limitation was that, of the 646 offspring interviewed, most were White; therefore diversity in race was not examined. Overall, King found “the impact of parental divorce is limited to trust in fathers,” especially ones who do not have a close relationship with their daughters or sons as they grow (p. 654).

Emery (1999) suggested that if a child loses a parent to divorce or separation in preschool or earlier years, there could be detrimental effects on his or her development, predominantly in the area of trust. Separation or loss during early childhood can be particularly damaging and traumatizing to a child (Bowlby, 1988; Covell & Turnbull, 1982; Noppe, 2000). This proposes that early parental divorce or separation could impede the development of trust more so than a divorce or separation later in a child’s life. This lack of trust might also impact a child’s ability to form and maintain relationships, including friendships. King (2002) noted, however, that a child’s personal
experiences with adults could improve the aptitude for trust and minimize past negative relationship experiences.

Difficulty with trusting others is but one possible implication for children experiencing a father absence due to divorce or separation. If a child has a negative working model of attachment, opportunities arise for increased psychological distress, which may have implications for interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1980; Shulman et al., 1994). As the child grows into an adolescent, his or her ability to attach is thought to influence his or her expectations and actions in interpersonal relationships later in life (Bowlby, 1988; Shulman et al.). During preadolescence an interest in same-sex friendship becomes more important, as does a willingness to disclose personal information with the expectation that secrets will be kept (Sullivan, 1953; Tesch, 1983). Early adolescence is an exploratory and experimental period in which the ego ideal and ego identity form (Marcia, 1983). Parental support is crucial for this identity to develop (Marcia). Although the opinion of peers greatly influences an adolescent, parents actively guide and form the choices of friends and activities (Mounts, 2000). Secure parent and adolescent attachment relationships hold tremendous importance for interpersonal relationships and have also been associated with academic and emotional adjustment in college (Rice, Fitzgerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995).

In the past it was commonly believed that successful adolescent identity development involved a separation from one’s caregivers (Erikson, 1968). More recently, however, the focus has shifted to attachment relationships with caregivers (Gillian, 1982). Identity can be more easily developed if one feels secure in his or her
attachments (Marcia, 1983). Identity formation is similar to attachment theory in that a child’s ideas of security, exploration, and formation are influenced by relationships with the parents and that behavior is directed by one’s self-concept (Benson, 1992). Research suggests that it is more important for women than men to experience emotional connectedness and share beliefs and attitudes with both parents (Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Females who were emotionally attached to both parents were more likely to be academically autonomous; however, for men, attachment to parents was not related to college student development (Schultheiss & Blustein). Rice and Whaley (1994) also found attachment to mother and father to hold more relevance for women than men in the areas of academic, interpersonal, emotional health, and well-being. Moreover, Secunda (1992) noted that having an attachment to the father is important for an adolescent daughter’s development because of his “otherness,” which puts a healthy wedge between mother and child, to be a haven from real or imagined maternal injustice of excessive hovering” (p. 7).

**The Role of Attachment**

To begin to understand how these issues initially take shape, one must first consider how attachments and relationships are formed. Bowlby’s (1973, 1980, 1982) theory of attachment is often referenced when describing relationship formation. However, nowhere in Bowlby’s (1973, 1980, 1982) pervasive three-volume work on the nature of human attachment, separation, and loss is the father seriously considered in the parental role. In fact, the word father is not listed in Bowlby’s (1973, 1980, 1982) indexes. Yet, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) argued that the bond between father and child
(as compared to mother and child) is “equally important, if not more important, in providing the child with security, attachment, and love” (p. 124). Perlesz (2004) noted that “there is no evidence that mothers are more ‘natural’ caregivers than fathers” (p. 8).

One heuristic construction for studying the parent-child relationship has been attachment theory, which concentrates on the connection between a child and his or her caregivers, how this bond is cognitively embodied for the child, and the consequence the association has in supporting vigorous development throughout the lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989). Research suggests that babies create an understanding of their world through their relationships (Noppe, 2000). A child’s secure attachment to a parent establishes a sense of security or insecurity, which lays the foundation for close relationships in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988). According to attachment theory, the infant seeks closeness with a responsible caregiver for security and comfort (Bowlby, 1988). Having a secure base in which a caregiver is physically and emotionally responsive to the infant’s needs allows him or her to develop a feeling of identity (Bretherton, 1991). Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982) noted that one’s working model of self characterizes one’s sense of self; one’s working representation of others symbolizes one’s overall beliefs about the reliability of others. Josselson (1996) stated, “attachment is our sense of emotional belongingness” (p. 45).

The main premise of attachment theory is that the security of the early child-parent connection is reflected in the child’s interpersonal relationships across his or her lifespan (Schneider, et al., 2001). Bowlby (1988) noted that an infant initially shapes the relationship between itself and its mother. The mother’s role is to respond empathically
with full cooperation to all the infant’s needs (Bowlby, 1988). This directs the infant to become more or less cooperative depending on how the mother reacts to the baby’s cues (Ainsworth, 1967). When the caregiver provides consistent care to the infant, the infant becomes securely attached, paving the way to mental health by establishing a dependable sense of safety, security, and comfort (Bowlby, 1980). Likewise, “repeated unavailability of particular attachment figures tells us that we cannot count on them anymore; they may offer us things in the relationship, but not the security of predictable responsiveness, which is the foundation of attachment” (Josselson, 1996, p. 44). Involvement, warmth, and limit setting frequently characterize parenting associated with secure attachment (Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995).

When a father abandons his daughter after a divorce or separation by ceasing all contact, this could affect how she views the dependability of others, including friends because “how the child has come to expect to be treated in terms of responsiveness and availability shapes his adjustment to school as well as his approach to other social relationships” (Josselson, 1996, p. 47). Secure connection to parents is suggested to be important to the value of same-sex friendships in middle childhood (Kerns, Klepac, & Cole, 1996). Additionally, in a three-year longitudinal study consisting of 56 families with a 4 or 5-year-old child, it was suggested that a child’s peer relationships were more like the marital union than to the parent-child relationship (Katz & Gottman, 1994). Some limitations in this study were that teachers rated the observations rather than the researchers, and most of the families (94.6%) were White.
Securely attached adolescents are more likely to be “competent and venturesome in the struggle for identity” (Josselson, 1996, p. 49). When something threatens the continuation of attachment relationships, “exploration ceases and attention is riveted on the restoration of the attachment bond” (Josselson, p. 55). Secure attachment to parents is an important aspect in the mental health of the adolescent (Essau, 2004). When a child loses an attachment figure to divorce or separation and the caregiver is no longer actively present in his or her life, he or she is “likely to feel torn apart” (Josselson, p. 57). “The sense of abandonment in loss is intense, and it may be a long time before the bereaved person shows any sign of wanting to explore or seek outward” (Josselson, p. 57). In addition, “the loss of a parent from the household is accompanied by an additional increase in child anxiety/depression” (Strohschein, 2005, p. 1297). Strohschein noted limitations in the research that allowed for the perspective on the child’s mental health and the family dynamics to be based on only one parent, which could be different from the child’s or other family members. Also, the results pertaining to the psychological effects of divorce are not generalizable beyond middle childhood.

Attachment is considered an innate function (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1973; 1982) that evolved in primates through the process of natural selection (Bowlby, 1982). Noppe (2000) noted, “human infants are biologically predisposed to monitor and seek proximity to adult caregivers for their survival” (p. 516). Josselson (1996) stated that attachment is an active process used to reduce anxiety. Previously it was believed that an infant became attached to the mother because the mother provided food, which the infant associated with the satisfaction of needs (Freud, 1920). Additionally, a baby that cried
too frequently was deemed overly attached (Freud). However, Bowlby (1988) believed that a child’s attachment behaviors depended upon the repertoire it had with the caregiver. Initially, the child would innately engage the caregiver with behaviors such as smiling, crying, looking, and clinging (Bowlby, 1988). Later, other behaviors such as signaling and following evolve as means to attach to the caregiver. The caregiver need not instruct the child to perform these behaviors because the child learns through the interaction with the caregiver (Bowlby, 1988).

The development of these attachment behaviors is characterized in four stages (Bowlby, 1988). Pre-attachment occurs from birth to six weeks. An infant is able to recognize a mother’s smell and voice, but responds positively to cues regardless of who provides them. During the attachment-in-the-making phase, which occurs between the ages of two to seven months, the infant can begin to distinguish the caregiver from other adults and responds differently to the caretaker versus a stranger (Bowlby, 1988; Secunda, 1992). Female babies tend to become attached to their fathers earlier than male babies because fathers hold their infant daughters more closely, and treat them “as though they might break” (Secunda, p.10). Although Lamb (2010) indicated that, in two-parent families, children attach to both parents at approximately the same time during the child’s first year of life. The infant may calm more quickly in the caregiver’s embrace, and may smile or create sounds when the caregiver is near. The infant develops expectations about the caregiver and how he or she will respond to the baby’s cues. Since there is no object permanence, a term coined by Jean Piaget that involves the notion that even though an object is out of sight, it still exists (Singer & Revenson, 1996) during this
phase, the infant does not get distressed when the caregiver is separated from the baby (Bowlby, 1988).

During clear-cut attachment (Bowlby, 1988), the seven to twenty-four month old child will explore its environment but requires the mother or primary caregiver to be nearby to provide comfort if the child becomes upset or frightened. This is often referred to as “refueling” (Abelin, 1975, p. 295). Separation from the caregiver creates much distress during this phase. Although male and female babies are attached to their mothers earlier than to their fathers, by eight months of age “they notice and need their fathers just as much as their mothers” (Secunda, 1992, p. 7). After the age of two years, a goal-corrected partnership develops (Bowlby, 1988). In other words, negotiation and a new type of reciprocity characterize the partnership between caregiver and child. The child is less distressed when separated from the caregiver.

This attachment process includes similar characteristics identified in intimacy, including feeling connected to an individual who provides safety, reliability, and responsiveness to one’s needs (Bowlby, 1988). Intimacy is experienced when there is a sense of mutuality and when one can be vulnerable and sensitive to the other’s needs, can reveal his or her true self, and have the ability to be physically close (Erikson, 1963). Intimacy is also defined as the capacity to involve oneself in a committed, close relationship (Erikson). Since the development of intimacy is present in many influential theories of development and attachment, this connotes the extreme importance of this aspect of healthy development.
Bowlby (1980) contended that there are variations in the value of attachment resulting from the quality of initial nurturing and responsiveness of a principal caregiver. These first connections with caregivers become the underpinning of the internal working models of self and others. Josselson (1996) stated, “the sense of a secure base seems to be necessary for exploration and self-development” (p. 51). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) substantiated the connection between quality of care and attachment security through numerous laboratory assessments of the infant-caregiver relationship at 12 and 18 months. The mother-child classifications included secure, anxious-resistant, and anxious-avoidant. The infants were left momentarily and then the mothers returned. Upon return the mothers could easily soothe the secure-attached infants. The anxious-resistant infant could not be settled and the anxious-avoidant infant refused contact with his or her mother. “Insecurely attached individuals are likely to believe that they are unworthy of care and that others are unavailable and unpredictable” (Gamble & Roberts, 2005, p. 123).

Shulman et al. (1994) studied 32 preadolescents during a 4-week summer camp and found that secure-attached children had stronger skills in relating to peers compared to anxious-attached children. Besides having higher social skills, these children were more competent at establishing close relationships with their peers. Shulman et al. suggested that these relationship models would usually continue into the development of relationships with the opposite sex during adolescence, but did not acknowledge how the relational patterns might affect same-sex friendships. Troy and Sroufe (1987) found that children who were anxious-resistant as infants demonstrated lower levels of competence
with playmates in nursery school. Children with avoidant attachment histories became aggressive or distant with their peers.

In a study involving 244 adolescents, aged 12 through 14, enrolled in the 7th and 8th grade in a public school in Canada, “security of attachment to father was associated significantly with fewer symptoms of depression and shared associations between security with mother, self-esteem, and academic grades.” (Doyle et al., 2003, p. 332). This study noted some limitations, including adolescent self-report, the failure of the cross-sectional design to allow for causality, and that the use of a single-item measure of attachment security might explain the weak associations found with respect to attachment security. Other points to consider are that two-thirds (66%) of the adolescents came from two-parent homes, and the majority of the respondents described themselves as English-Canadian.

Covell and Turnbull (1982) examined 89 male university students from father-absent homes and 84 male university students from father-present homes and found that the students whose fathers died or abandoned them prior to the age of 5 scored significantly lower on the subgroups measuring self-esteem, self-confidence, and social interaction than the students whose fathers died or abandoned them after the age of 5. This study, however, was conducted with males rather than females, and included fathers who had died. Still, this study may suggest that father absence prior to a male child’s fifth birthday may have lasting negative effects on the son’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Social interaction was also affected, but the researchers did not believe there would be deleterious effects in regards to this or other attachment issues.
Thirty-eight percent of White children and seventy-four percent of African-American children experience divorce before their sixteenth birthday (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Following a divorce, eighty-four percent of children live with their mother in a one-parent home (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). The absence of a mother following a divorce can lead to problems (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1965; Kalman, 2003). Kalman interviewed 16 girls ages ten to eighteen living apart from their mothers. Thirteen of these girls were Caucasian, one was African American, and two were Asian American. The girls were interviewed about their feelings associated with the beginning of their menstrual period. The girls reported feeling embarrassed discussing menstruation with their fathers, as well as having to find other females to ask, or not asking anyone. This is a significant developmental milestone for a young girl, and not having a caregiver to discuss this experience with could be very upsetting and stressful. One limitation presented in this study involved the retrospective, self-reporting aspect of the interviews. The study should be repeated with more girls as they reach menarche, and with a more culturally diverse sample.

There appears to be little information in the literature regarding studies conducted in the United States involving girls from mother-absent homes. The majority of the research involves father absence. However, one study examined depression in motherless children (Aral, Gursory, & Dizman, 2006). This study, which took place in Turkey, included a sample of 150 randomly chosen children (68 boys and 82 girls) living with their mothers and fathers, and 150 children (68 boys and 82 girls) identified by teachers and school counselors, who did not live with their mothers (because of divorce,
abandonment, or the mother’s death). All children were between 10 and 12 years of age, chosen from 39 different public elementary schools, and represented low, middle, and high socio-economic levels. Depression was indicated by hopelessness, crying, irritability, low self-esteem, academic difficulties, sleep problems, aggressiveness, and difficulty concentrating. Differences in depression scores were examined by gender, socioeconomic level, the age of separation, and the circumstances regarding having no mother. The Children’s Depression Inventory was used. The researchers found the mean depression score of the children without mothers was higher than that of the children living with both their parents. Aral et al. postulated that children living without mothers were at greater risk of depression than children residing with both parents. Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth (1967) studied the effects of maternal deprivation for many years, but not specifically in girls. Bowlby and Ainsworth (1965) found children deprived of a mother often had “nervous disorders and instability of character” (p. 14), as well as a lack of empathy for others, academic difficulties, unstable, shallow relationships, and a tendency to steal and lie.

**Abandonment**

I am defining an absent father as a father who has had no more than one face-to-face contact with his daughter since the divorce or separation in any given six-month timeframe. This absence is due to divorce or separation rather than death, employment, mental illness, substance abuse, or neglect. The implication is that the father has abandoned his daughter. Abandonment can be thought of as a distinctive, very particular type of emotional abuse, affecting the composition of the child’s being because its
development demands a continuous tie with a caregiver (van der Kolk, 1987). Chernus (2008) stated:

Loss of contact, even more so than abuse by a parent who is overly, albeit pathologically, involved with the child, deprives the child of those mirroring and idealizing functions that are crucial to his or her feeling safe and valued. (p. 454)

Abuse can sometimes lead to trauma. Chernus (2005) noted that trauma does not necessarily refer to an external event itself, but to its individual meaning to the person. Aral et al. (2006) noted that children who experience abandonment may feel worthless and this could decrease confidence. This lack of confidence could impede a child’s ability to approach a playmate for friendship. Also, many children who have had disruptions of their attachment to their caregivers through separation overreact to aggravations and have difficulty managing anxiety (van der Kolk, 1987). van der Kolk found that many children who are separated from their caregiver make few attempts at socialization and are uncomfortable playing with other children. This could affect a child’s ability to form close friendships.

Recovery from trauma is predicted by our ability to use self-objects to heal in the form of sensitive, caring people and individually significant events in life (Chernus, 2008). A self-object refers to parents or any significant object in the child’s life (Cashdan, 1988), which could include friends. Self-object responses, such as criticism or praise for example, are absorbed by the child and experienced as a feeling of failure or pride (Cashdan). Individuals who possess a strong sense of self will likely have sufficient
ability to use an assortment of self-objects to heal from the influence of trauma. (Chernus).

**Development**

Development is defined as “the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9). Bronfenbrenner elaborated by describing development as “a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment” p. 3). This is reminiscent of what Chernus (2005) noted about trauma; that it does not necessarily refer to the actual incident, but to its inner and personal meaning to the particular being. Bronfenbrenner described the ecological environment as being “like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). The innermost level is the setting that contains the growing person, such as the home. The next level involves the interconnections occurring within the setting. The third level of the ecological environment theorizes that the individual’s development is overwhelmingly affected by events that occur in places in which the person is not at hand. Therefore, the way a child develops depends on many factors that occur in the home, at school, with friends, and with family, and how he or she adapts to these changes. Adaptation, defined as “the continuous process of using the environment to learn, and leaning to adjust to changes in the environment” is “the most important principle of human functioning” according to Piaget (Singer & Revenson, 1996, p. 15).

All of the women interviewed for my dissertation experienced a father absence from divorce or separation during or before Piaget’s concrete operational stage (Singer &
Revenson, 1996) and Erikson’s stage of industry versus inferiority. I believe that women who had the divorce or separation experience during or before these stages may have experienced some social challenges that would provide them with richer detail to their friendship stories. Since my parents divorced before I reached the concrete operations, formal operations, and the industry versus inferiority stages, I thought it best to find other women who experienced a father absence during the same stages of development.

According to Piaget’s stages of development, the sensory-motor stage occurs at birth through age two (Singer & Revenson, 1996). A child’s understanding of the world involves perceptions and objects in which she has direct contact. Object permanence is developed near the end of this stage allowing the child to understand that even though an object cannot be seen, it still exists. For example, if her father leaves the room, she understands that he still exists and will return.

The preoperational stage is from age two through seven. During this stage, the child sees the world through her own egocentric point of view. The child is very curious, develops language, and takes great interest in the people and objects around her. Play is instrumental in the development of intelligence (Singer & Revenson, 1996).

The stage of concrete operations occurs from ages seven through eleven. Mental operations, or actions performed in the mind, begin at this stage. The main characteristic of concrete operational thought is its reversibility. The child learns that if something can be added, it can also be subtracted. Operations are described as “concrete” because they are applied to objects that are physically present (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Children can classify objects by color, shape, size, and recognize hierarchies of classes, and
mentally arrange objects in terms of size and weight. The most important acquisition of this stage is conservation, which Piaget defined as “the ability to see that objects or quantities remain the same despite a change in their physical appearance” (Singer & Revenson, p. 24). Children in this stage are focused on the here and now.

Piaget’s last stage of child development is formal operations, which occurs from ages eleven through sixteen. I wanted to interview women whose parents had divorced or separated prior to this stage because, according to Piaget, the child has not yet developed the ability to abstractly problem-solve. A child at the formal operations stage can now think about the future, the abstract, and the hypothetical (Singer & Revenson, 1996). Abstract thought and deductive reasoning characterize the beginning of adolescence. The child can now systematically consider many solutions to a problem using abstract thinking, moral judgment, and an inner value system.

Additionally, according to Erikson’s theory of development, at around age ten years the child goes through the stage of industry versus inferiority. During this stage, children begin to manage new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of expertise, while failure results in feelings of incompetence. “The danger at this stage is the development of a sense of inadequacy and inferiority” (Erikson, 1980, p. 91). Children frequently blame themselves for their parent’s divorce, which could potentially make them feel they have failed (Johnston, Roseby, & Kuehnle, 2009). Also, after a parent leaves the home, the child sometimes has trouble in school (Pruett & Pruett, 1998), which can sometimes lead to feelings of failure and depression (Shochet, Homel, Cockshaw & Montgomery, 2008).
The Importance of Fathers

Fathers strongly influence their daughters’ lives (Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992; Silverstein, 2002). In most cases, the first and most consistent male figure in a young girl’s life is her father, and he helps shape her ideas of what men represent (Hammer, 1982; Secunda). Popenoe also contended, “Fathers are the first and most important men in the lives of girls” (p. 159). This is especially noteworthy considering that fifty percent of children lose all contact with their fathers after approximately ten years following a parental separation (King & Heard, 1999; Seltzer, 1991) and that families with sons are less likely to divorce than those with daughters (Secunda). Also, noncustodial fathers make a greater effort to stay in touch with sons than with daughters (Mitchell, Booth, & King, 2009; Secunda; Starrels, 1994) and fathers spend extra time and are more involved with sons than with daughters (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Lamb, Hwang, Broberg, Bookstein, Hult, & Frodi, 1988; Mitchell et al., 2009).

Spruijt et al. (2004) studied 164 young people (65 boys and 99 girls with an average age of 17.9 years) with divorced parents and found that father bonding before divorce leads to fewer problems at a later time such as suicidal thoughts, stress, depressive feelings, and “bad mental health” (p. 83). The young people were interviewed three times over a period of many years, which calls into question how this may have affected the young people’s recollections. Also, the researchers never defined “bad mental health” (p. 83). However, Mitchell et al. (2009) also found lower internalizing problems for daughters than for sons when the daughter felt emotionally close to the nonresident father. Higher levels of well-being were associated with
increased nonresident contact with both daughters and sons (Mitchell et al.). Silverstein (2002) also suggested that frequent involvement from the father has positive consequences (both direct and indirect) for children and families. And although “fathers play an important role in the development of family bonds” (DeFranc & Mahalik, 2002, p. 57), usually the amount of contact between fathers and their children after a divorce diminishes significantly as time goes by (King & Heard, 1999; Seltzer, 1991; Spruijt et al., 2004). Clark and Kanoy (1998) studied 96 college females (66 with married parents and 25 with divorced parents) about father intimacy, and suggested that females with divorced versus married parents encountered less closeness with their fathers. One reason for this could be the diminished contact the father has with his daughter over time.

Generally adolescents are more emotionally distant from their fathers than from their mothers, while daughters are more isolated from their fathers than their sons (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). These factors help explain why many women say that they do not know their fathers (Secunda, 1992). This absence could affect a daughter in many ways, since the father plays a critical role that can have far reaching impact (Secunda). Unfortunately, “of all the pairings in the family, father/daughter is the least understood, least studied by social scientists, and lowest on the agenda even of ‘sensitive’ American fathers” (Secunda, p. xv). Others agree that the least studied family dyad is the father-daughter relationship (Draper & Harpending, 1982; Persons, 1989) and that research on the effects of fatherlessness has mostly centered on boys (Cheyne, 1988; Murray & Sandqvist, 1990). There has been more of a focus on the relationship between mother and child than to the father and child relationship (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996).
Research suggests that high-quality father involvement benefits a child’s development and well-being (Lamb, 2010). Fathers strongly influence the way their daughters view the outside world, the opposite sex, and themselves (Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Soth, Levy, Wilson, & Gimse, 1987). This could include how daughters view other females in regards to the potential of becoming friends. According to Grimm-Wassil (1994), fathers foster their daughters’ independence, link them to the world of work, are more authoritative in discipline, demand more at every stage of development, and allow them to feel a general sense of comfort with men throughout their lives. Soth et al. (1987) noted that the father’s specific function is to bestow a “reality-based relief from the stresses inherent in separation from the mother” (p. 108). Kalter et al. (1985) hypothesized that the father helps the daughter psychologically detach from the mother to strengthen her individuality. Secunda (1992) agreed and posited that fathers are “a haven from mother, a court of appeal, a source of perspective” (p. 28). This seemed to follow the findings of MacCallum and Golombok (2004). The researchers studied 25 lesbian mother families and 38 families headed by a single, heterosexual mother, and compared them with 38 two-parent heterosexual families and found mothers raising their child without a father reported “more severe disputes” with their child than did mothers in father-present homes (p. 1407). The researchers noted limitations including that the sample is highly educated and affluent, unlike groups of fatherless families in other studies (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), and the samples of lesbian mothers and single heterosexual mothers are “relatively small” (p. 1416).
Secunda (1992) listed many of the unique contributions a father can make to his daughter. A father provides a man’s opinion and source of emotional and intellectual perspective that is different from the mother’s, a man’s history and experience of his successes and failures, a man’s chemistry, his genes interconnecting with hers, a man’s body, giving her the first feel of an affectionate man’s physical touch, one man’s attention, a chance to rehearse what love with a man could be like, one man’s validation, a chance to test her beliefs, one man’s adaptability, and one man’s willingness to learn from his victories and downfalls in life. These learning experiences provide many life lessons for a daughter. “Without a father’s dependable involvement a woman is in some way forever incomplete” (p. 29). Karen (1994) also noted many contributions, and stated that fathers:

Usually provide a higher level of stimulation, are often seen by children as more exciting playmates, and their (on-average) somewhat lesser degree of intimacy with the child and greater resistance to coddling makes them more of a stepping-stone to the outside world where the child will have to relate to people who are not in perfect sympathy and attunement with him. (p. 199)

Griffin (1998) noted that the depth and strength of a woman’s character depends on the stability of her father. Likewise, a father who is a grounded individual affects a daughter’s ability to make sound decisions for the future (Popenoe, 1996). Secunda (1992) interviewed 150 women ages eighteen to seventy of varying socioeconomic status, and 75 fathers of daughters ranging in age from thirty-eight to seventy-two, and found that “the lucky women I interviewed who experienced in childhood their fathers’ strength
and affirmation and tenderness were able, as adults, to feel good about themselves as whole human beings” (p. xxiv). It should be noted that some of the people interviewed were friends with Secunda, which could have affected their responses. Overall, effective fathering increases a child’s chances for developing self-esteem (Scheffler & Naus, 1999), social competence and moral strength (Popenoe). Having a father in the home can provide many opportunities for girls’ growth and development in a wide range of areas. These areas will be examined separately.

**Success/goal achievement.**

A girl’s aspiration to be successful in fulfilling her goals is influenced by her father (Griffin, 1998; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Popenoe, 1996). Daughters gain a confident foundation through knowing their fathers’ guiding principles and beliefs (Griffin, 1998). Having a solid, confident foundation enhances a woman’s ability to achieve her aspirations in life. Fathers also help develop their daughters’ ability to achieve goals and be assertive (Popenoe). Popenoe contended that father involvement has been associated with better verbal skills, enhanced problem solving abilities, and improved academic achievement. Murray and Sandqvist (1990) found that children living with two parents demonstrated more success in school than children living with only one parent, but could not determine the reasons. One possible reason could be that it is more difficult for one parent to attend to the household tasks in addition to the child-rearing responsibilities, than it is for two (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, two parents can divide up the household and child-rearing duties more easily.
Mental health.

The presence or absence of a father in the home may have some effect on a daughter’s mental state. Fewer adjustment problems were found in a sample of 162 children from single-parent families and stepfamilies in the United Kingdom who had frequent and regular contact (even if only by telephone) with nonresident fathers (Dunn, Cheng, O’Conner, & Bridges, 2004). A limitation reported in this study was that the nonresident fathers lived nearby and had frequent contact with their children, and that all the children in the sample resided in “a stable community” (p. 563). These findings would not generalize to children in other kinds of communities or cultures. Also, a limitation that calls into question the validity of the results is that the children reported on their relationships with their parents and caregivers, and it was presumed that the older children were more likely to better articulate and express their feelings compared to the younger children in the study.

Koestner et al. (1990) studied children from 1951 through 1986 to determine whether adult empathic concern was associated with parental behavior in early childhood, and suggested that children fortunate enough to have affectionate fathers were more likely to possess strong mental health. Amato (1994) noted that young adults who are emotionally close to their father are often more happy and report feeling very satisfied with life. Likewise, Fish and Biller (1973) and Scheffler and Naus (1999) found that nurturing fathers increased girls’ level of self-acceptance and personal and social adjustment. This may be explained by Popenoe (1996), who suggested that having a loving father demonstrates to his daughter that she is worthy of love. Possessing such
knowledge could assist in the formation of self-acceptance and self-esteem. Secunda (1992) reported that if daughters perceive their fathers as disapproving they may conclude that their fathers are “either unpleasable or unloving—or that they themselves are unpleasing and unlovable” (p. 17). Another consideration is, “the sexual attraction between father and daughter can be a source of self-confidence or shame and guilt” (Karen, 1994, p. 200). Additionally, fathers provide male role models to acclimate daughters to the male-female relationship, while providing physical and emotional security (Popenoe). This sense of security may be the reason daughters from intact families tend to have lower rates of unwed childbearing (Popenoe).

Koestner et al. (1990) studied parental behavior in early childhood paired with empathy in adults over the course of a twenty-six year period and suggested that the most important childhood influence was paternal involvement in childcare. The most empathic adults had fathers who spent alone time, more than two times weekly, rearing the child (giving baths, cooking meals, etc). This factor provided a greater percentage of adult outcomes than the three maternal predictors combined (tolerance of dependent behavior, inhibition of child’s aggression, and satisfaction with the role of mother). A limitation reported in this study noted that all parent ratings were from only the mothers’ self-reports, which does not take into account the fathers’ perspectives. Studies that question only one parent may not be valid or reliable. Also, the parenting behaviors only accounted for the child up to the age of five years. Similar patterns of behavior might not yield the same results with children older than five. Additionally, the mothers sampled
were from the 1950s baby-boom generation; therefore, the results need to be considered within this culture.

**Stability of relationships.**

Having a father in the home may have some consequences on a girl’s friendships, as well as intimate, heterosexual relationships throughout life. Parental strategies such as providing supervision, giving advice, and establishing play rules significantly increases the competence of young children in regards to social relationships (Parke et al., 2004). One study found that children who felt secure and attached with their fathers were capable of coping, and that coping was linked with how well the children regulated their behavior with peers (Contreras & Kerns, 2000). A similar finding linked secure attachments with fathers, but not mothers, with positive interactions with friends among preschool-age children (Youngblade, Park, & Belsky, 1993). A father’s acceptance of his children’s anger and sadness at 5 years of age was linked to their social skills with peers three years later at age 8 (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). From the varying range of affect that fathers display, to the impulsive character of their playful exchanges with their children, fathers teach children about emotion in the framework of relationships (Parke & Brott, 1999).

Fathers are also instrumental in helping daughters learn to interact with males, a task usually beginning in adolescence (Secunda, 1992). Furthermore, daughters learn about heterosexual trust and intimacy from their fathers (Popenoe, 1996). Katz and van der Kloet (2010) studied 144 female undergraduates and their fathers and found that the attentiveness by the father encouraged daughters' ability to refuse unwanted sex. A
responsive father also forecasted the self-esteem of daughters', which could explain the daughters' increased sexual assertiveness. The results suggest that positive paternal relationships maintain daughters' sexual agency. One limitation, however, was that the subjects had to use retrospective self-reported data.

Karen (1994) stated that the ways a father expresses his love and value for his daughter would affect how she feels valuable and lovable, particularly in relationships with other male figures. One study of children from 1951 through 1986 revealed that children with affectionate fathers were more likely to become happily married, mentally healthy, and have positive friendships (Koestner et al., 1990). Moreover, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found that students who felt closely attached to their fathers experienced greater intimacy than students who felt less of an attachment. Girls with fathers in the home, as compared to those whose fathers were absent, tended to have more socially appropriate relationships with boys their age and lacked the drive to become promiscuous (Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Popenoe, 1996). Considering this, it is not surprising that “the greatest impact on a woman’s romantic choices and her ability to feel comfortable in her own sexual skin is how her father treated her in childhood” (Secunda, 1992, p. 27).

The Impact of Father Absence Due to Divorce or Separation

Fathers play very influential roles in their daughters’ lives (Griswold, 1998; Popenoe, 1996; Secunda; Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). Therefore, there are many consequences when a father is absent from a daughter’s life. Research suggests that residing away from one’s birth father is often linked with larger risks of unfavorable results for children and adolescents, regardless of ethnicity, schooling, or the remarriage
of the mother (Amato, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Also, fathers that live apart from their children often spend little time and do not preserve contact with their children (Lerman & Sorenson, 2000). Krohn and Bogan (2001) defined an absent father as one who does not interact with his child regularly and therefore does not significantly contribute to his child’s development. However, according to Pruett and Pruett (1998), the father does play a considerable role in the child’s growth. “Fathers…play a unique, irreplaceable role in their child’s life, regardless of whether they are involved regularly or on a minimal basis” (p. 393). The role of the father is so critical that his emotional availability, guidance, and support with intimacy issues may be “essential to the process of healthy development” for his children (Sinclair & Nelson, p. 124).

**Economic issues.**

Another consideration is that, after a divorce or separation, a woman’s household income is drastically reduced. Women’s standard of living now decreases between 29 percent and 36 percent (Bennetts, 2008; Grall, 2009, Hamilton, 2004). This change in socioeconomic status can have a profound impact on a family. Fraad (2011) noted, “Women with children are much worse off. Alimony payments are rarely granted and full child support payments are often not delivered in full” (p. 203). Kalil and Ryan (2010) referred to this type of family as the “fragile family” (p. 40). The fragile family is more impoverished and endures more hardship than married parents (Kalil & Ryan).
**Developmental issues.**

Girls from father-absent homes often experience developmental problems (Grimm-Wassil, 1994). For example, females lacking fathers and/or father figures more frequently demonstrated decreased cognitive development and inadequate school performance (Grimm-Wassil; Pruett & Pruett, 1998). One study, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, sampled mothers and children who were between the ages of 5 and 9 when assessed (Mott, 1994). Over 6,000 children and their mothers substantiated that children in father-absent homes were at higher risk for school and peer problems (Mott). However, Kalter et al. (1985) found that parental marital status was not associated with the level of cognitive development or academic achievement in any of the three groups of girls and women from different developmental stages.

**Mental health issues.**

The mental health of boys and girls from father-absent homes is affected to a greater extent than children from intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991; Shook & Jurich, 1992; Strohschein, 2005). Mental health problems found in children from father-absent homes included anxiety, depression, (Eley & Stevenson, 2000; Kendler et al., 1992), antisocial behaviors (Strohschein), low self-esteem (Amato & Keith; Griffin, 1998; Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Hetherington, 1972; Kalter et al., 1985; Wallerstein, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), borderline personality disorder (Soth et al. 1987), eating disorders (Jones, Leung, & Harris, 2006) and separation anxiety disorder (Cronk et al., 2004). On average, children from divorced families are less well-adjusted, both emotionally and socially, than children from nondivorced families (Hetherington, 1993).
Also, young women who grew up without a father in the home usually experienced some psychological effects, including a delay in emotional development (Lohr et al., 1989). Secunda (1992) noted that girls whose fathers were absent “suppress their true selves” (p. 40). Kalter et al. also found that self-esteem proved weaker among girls from divorced homes than from intact homes. Perhaps this is because research suggests father absence (from divorce or separation) is perceived by daughters as a “lack of acceptance” (Boss, 1986, p. 851). Cronk et al. studied how paternal absence might affect the development of mother-reported separation anxiety disorder on 1,887 female twin pairs and found father absence to have a significant influence in the risk of separation anxiety disorder. One limitation found in the research by Cronk et al. is that the researchers did not separate daughters from father-absent homes due to divorce from daughters from father-absent homes due to death when examining separation anxiety. Research has shown critical differences between these two groups (Hetherington, 1972; Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992; Simon, 2002). Cronk et al. also asked biological mothers to recall events over the past twenty years and consider their daughter’s level of adjustment. It is questionable how accurately a person could recall events after such a time lapse. The majority of the sample studied (86%) was White; the remaining 14% were African-American.

Prophylactic behaviors.

Grimm-Wassil (1994) found that females who grew up without father figures frequently became promiscuous and excessively needy of male attention. Draper and Harpending (1982) referred to this as a daughter’s “fast and early” strategy (p. 264). McLanahan et al. (1988) found that children in single-mother homes often received less
attention and supervision from adults. This lack of supervision could provide more opportunities for risky sexual behavior. Gallagher (2000) referred to daughters who unconsciously look for their fathers in their romantic partners as having “father hunger” (p. 165). Some adolescent girls express this father hunger by becoming “boy crazy” (Secunda, 1992, p. 39). Gabardi and Rosen (1991) suggested that female students from divorced families had a greater number of sexual partners than female students from intact families. This may explain why adolescent girls in father-absent homes were found to be more likely to become teen mothers than girls in two-parent families (McLanahan & Teitler, 1998). Moreover, father absence doubled the risk for teen pregnancy for Whites and Hispanics compared to African-Americans (McLanahan & Teitler). Similar findings were reported in a longitudinal study by Ellis et al. (2003) that followed girls from the age of five to eighteen. Ellis et al. studied 242 girls from the United States and 520 from New Zealand from father absent homes and found an elevated risk correlation for early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. The reasons for this elevated risk, however, were not explained. Comings, Muhleman, Johnson, and MacMurray (2002) studied 164 non-Hispanic White females ranging from 46 to 72 years of age who had not had any contact with their fathers beyond the age of seven. Genetic testing found that the androgen receptor gene might have been passed from father to daughter that causes early onset of sexual behavior and disruptive relationships. Sinclair and Nelson (1998) speculated that students who described having numerous sexual partners are:

- searching for a sense of belongingness with significant others to alleviate feelings of loss caused by the parental divorce. Accelerated sexual patterns may also
reflect students’ longing for partnership. When attempts to feel coupled fail, the students may repeat the pattern. (p. 125)

Carlson (2006) used data on biological fathers’ relationships with their children from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth \((N = 2,733)\) to determine if father absence affects adolescents’ behavioral problems. The study found that “adolescents whose mothers divorced and remained single, those born outside marriage and their mother remained unmarried...had the greatest behavioral problems...than their counterparts with married biological parents” (Carlson, p. 150). It was also suggested that father involvement was associated with fewer behavioral problems. One of the limitations of the research noted that children with behavioral problems might repel fathers, and good behaviors attract more father involvement. Also, the link between father involvement and adolescent behavior might be overemphasized if certain aspects, such as a father’s mental health, are not included.

Children adjust better to divorce if there is a high quality father and child relationship prior to the divorce (Bray, 1999; Spruijt et al. 2004). Closer, more affectionate relationships with children and nonresident fathers were associated with more positive relationships between children and their mothers (Dunn et al., 2004). Also, conflict with nonresident fathers correlated with child-mother and child-stepfather conflict (Dunn et al.). This follows similar findings (Kalter et al., 1985) noting that adolescent girls from divorced homes reported participating in more acting-out, rebellious behaviors than their peers from intact homes.
Stability of relationships.

Studies show that girls from father-absent homes often experience problems in their intimate relationships with men (Appleton, 1981; Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993; Clark & Kanoy, 1998; Gabardi & Rosen, 1991; Koestner et al., 1990; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992). Girls from father-absent homes who had little contact with their fathers, particularly during adolescence, had difficulty as adults maintaining romantic relationships with men (Krohn & Bogan, 2001). Popenoe claimed that a daughter without a supportive relationship with her father is unlikely to develop close relationships to any adult males. Appleton noted that adult daughters from divorced homes “tend to hold too tightly to their men or remain safely distant, but are unable to achieve comfortable closeness” (p. 153). Appleton based his findings of females who grew up in fatherless homes on clinical observations of women in therapy, therefore the findings could not be generalized to the broad public. Another study suggested that adult daughters from divorced homes were much more likely to experience strife within wedlock and had a higher likelihood of divorce than peers from intact families (Kulka & Weingarten). This may be partially explained by Sinclair and Nelson (1998) who studied 300 college students and found that students from divorced families held more erroneous relationship beliefs regarding the avoidance of disagreement in relationships than students from intact families. Furthermore, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) described a sleeper effect that girls experience at the time of the parents’ divorce. This involves the awakening of intense feelings years later that may not have been expressed earlier in their development. Therefore, women from father-absent homes
often experience immense anxiety while in a relationship with a man because their development has stalled due to fears of abandonment and dishonesty (Secunda; Wallerstein & Corbin).

Amato and Booth (2001) drew on a longitudinal study of 297 parents and their married progeny and found that parents’ marital problems were negatively related to the offspring’s marital happiness and positively related to offspring’s marital disharmony. However, the data were collected retrospectively, which could make it difficult for respondents to remember accurately. The researchers used self-report rather than observation, and the sample disproportionately represents early marrying offspring. Another limitation is that the data were collected from only one parent (rather than both mother and father) and one offspring (rather than all siblings) in this study of 297 parents and their married children. Young adults from divorced families were found to have problems with long-term commitment and intimacy (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995; Hepworth & Ryder, 1984). Sinclair and Nelson (1998) speculated that students who reported less attachment to their fathers experienced less intimacy and held more dysfunctional relationship beliefs because their fathers were unavailable to demonstrate healthy intimate behaviors. Although women from father-absent homes may say they want a loving, affectionate man in their lives romantically, they tend to reject him when they find him, because “love becomes equated with distance and loss” (Secunda, 1992, p. 1).

Father absence also affects a girl’s feelings of security with others. “Fathers are major but often–unrecognized members of the family who play a central role in
children’s socialization” (Parke et al., 2004, p. 307). When a father is absent and not available to help his children with socialization, problems sometimes arise (Mott, 1994; Parke et al.). King (2002) found that parental divorce at an early age had a negative effect on trust with others. If there was a close relationship with both parents, then the trust issue became insignificant. This is important because establishing relationships takes a certain amount of trust (King).

Parke et al. (2004) found father absence linked with deficiencies in peer relationships. For example, Mott (1994) found that White girls from father-absent homes had more difficulty getting along with other children than White girls from father-present homes. Moreover, Main (1991) found that girls from father-absent homes often withdrew from social contact. Likewise, Amato and Keith (1991) reviewed ninety-two studies and found that children from divorced families had lower social competence than children whose parents were married to each other. Bolgar et al. (1995) found that children of divorce reported being more controlling in their relationships than children whose parents had not divorced.

Having difficulty with developing close friendships could be problematic, especially since intimacy is considered to be the cornerstone of a healthy individual (Newman & Newman, 1995). Cacioppo & Patrick (2008) posited that social connection is a crucial element of mental health. Also, Maslow (1987) believed a sense of belonging and love to be such fundamental elements that these qualities held a place on the Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs attempts to explain how a person’s basic innate needs may have evolved over time, and how one must satiate each need. A
pyramid consisting of five levels often represents Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The four lower levels are associated with physiological needs, while the higher level of growth denotes the fulfillment of psychological needs. He hypothesized that he physiological needs must be satiated first. Once the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied, one can work to gratify the higher order needs of personal development. He rated the need for belonging and love in family and friendships second to physiological needs (water, air, shelter, and safety) in his Hierarchy of Needs. It must be taken into consideration that this Hierarchy of Needs is based on Maslow’s personal hypothesis, not on research.

**Female Friendships**

**Female identity development.**

Authors such as Erikson (1968) and Freud (1920) expressed bias in their view of individuation as evidence of psychological health, and considered female relational dissimilarities as psychological deficiencies (Gilligan, 1982). Erikson depicted a different developmental trajectory for boys and girls in adolescence. For boys, identity was complete at the end of adolescence; for girls, identity could only be achieved through the marriage to men and having children to fulfill their inner longing. Gilligan disagreed, finding that women defined themselves in the context of the human relationship, not solely of wife and mother, but through relationships of intimacy and care. Gilligan found identity and intimacy fused in women’s development. Newman and Newman (1995) posited the quality of interpersonal and social relationships create a young woman’s identity. Josselson (1996) agreed, stating that a woman’s identity develops from
understanding who she is in relation to others. Chodorow (1978) stated, “the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate.” (p. 169). Gilbert and Scher (1999) also noted that, for girls and women, gender role socialization is focused on interpersonal connection and relatedness; for boys and men, there are expectations of self-sufficiency and disconnection. Although identity formation was originally thought to be based on an adolescent’s ability to successfully detach from his or her caregiver (Erikson, 1968), more recent research suggests identity formation is more influenced by attachment relationships with caregivers (Samuolis et al., 2001).

Jones (1997) interviewed 10 college-aged women from diverse backgrounds and found the search for identity for the women was “informed by their relationships to themselves, others in general, family, race, gender, culture, and a growing number of experiences and situations” (p. 383). All women, when asked to describe themselves, described a relationship representing their identity in connection with their role (present friend, future wife, or past paramour) (Gilligan, 1982). Women spoke of the process of attachment that maintains the human community (Gilligan). This feeling of connectedness is essentially who they are. Since maintaining supportive and intimate friendships with other girls is essential to healthy adolescent female development (Gilligan; Josselson, 1996), if a young woman has difficulty making female friends, she may not have a strong sense of self. One limitation found in the research by Jones is that the researcher only interviewed self-identified volunteers who were college-aged women in a specific location.
It is believed that an intimate relationship between a father and his daughter can help build the foundation for healthy relationships in the daughter’s life (Koestner et al., 1990; Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992). This includes children’s peer relationships, which are critical for children’s short- and long-term adjustment (Parker & Asher, 1987). “Friendship is an important part of normal social functioning” (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2003, p. 509). Developing healthy, positive friendships with other women has been instrumental in how women develop their self-concept (Josselson, 1996), intellectual value, life possibilities (Berzoff, 1989; Martinez Aleman, 1997) self-discovery (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Berzoff; Shulman et al., 1994), and many other attributes that will be discussed. Josselson described some benefits that come from female friendships:

Psychological growth in connection involves finding more interesting and challenging ways of being with others, knowing them better (and simultaneously knowing oneself better), discovering more precise and meaningful forms of feeling known and validated as oneself, increasing moments of mutuality and bonds of trust, maintaining connection over time and distance, and grappling with the dilemmas of caring for another. (p. 210)

**Inner security and comfort.**

Friendship delivers many rewards (Paul, 2004) and is considered to have a “central role in adaptation” (Shulman et al., 1994, p. 341). Cognitive and emotional needs are fulfilled through female friendship. When women friends communicate with each other, they exchange a great deal of ideas and information. Information exchange
provides friends with feelings of security and satisfies cognitive needs to help women assess themselves (Martinez Aleman, 1997), as well as test ideas that could be criticized in a larger group (Shulman et al.). Through conversing with each other, the “central feature of women’s friendships,” (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 354) women friends “develop a sense of inner security and self-esteem” (Aries & Johnson, p. 355). Wilson (2000) assented, noting that friendships are a source of personal validation. Galupo and St. John (2001) interviewed 20 women aged 19-25, (10 heterosexual, 5 lesbian, and 5 bisexual) and many participants disclosed that the disclosure of the sexual orientation identity increased their closeness and trust within the friendship. Additionally, the lesbian and bisexual women noted an increase in self-acceptance and self-esteem after maintaining a friendship with the heterosexual women.

“Talking to another woman about a problem is like falling into a bed of pillows” (Paul, 2004, p. 111). Paul noted that boyfriends and husbands are frequently unable to provide the empathic ear needed, and instead tend to search for advice to help fix the problem. Fraad (2011) posited, “Women, both married and single, usually count on other women to emotionally sustain them” (p. 203). Josselson (1996) noted that friends serve as sounding boards for important decisions that are being contemplated. Women often seek other women when stressed because women provide greater comfort (Paul). The most consistently reported benefits of friendship include having someone to talk to and having someone there when needed (Rawlins, 1992). Close friends often provide emotional support that contributes to a satisfying relationship (Shulman et al., 1994). Even girls consistently report more intimacy in their friendships than boys (Buhrmester &
Furman, 1987). Additionally, female friendship can help counteract the lack of a father’s involvement with his daughter through the comfort provided (Secunda, 1992).

**Stress reduction.**

“Females are hardwired to turn to other women in times of stress” (Paul, 2004, p. 111). Paul believed that, hundreds of thousands of years ago, women who turned to their social group for protection were more likely to survive, as were their children. This is a primordial survival mechanism ingrained in women’s genes (Paul). Seeking the comfort of a female friend is vital to coping with stress and may explain why women on average live six years longer than men (Taylor, 2002). Lewittes (1988), who studied friendship patterns between older African-American and Caucasian women, also found friendship to be the primary source for critical support in coping with life changes. Paul noted that providing support makes one feel as if she is important and a vital part of another’s life. Moreover, friendship eases distress by sustaining a sense of continuity and providing emotional and active support (Stevens & van Tilburg, 2000). Wilson (2000) purposefully sampled 14 female student affairs professionals from the U.S. who ranged in age from 27 to 45. This qualitative study, designed to explore and define women’s experiences in close friendships, found close friends to be an essential support source and an aid to solving problems (Wilson).

Stress reduction emerged as a finding in a study in which men and women were required to spontaneously speak in front of a supportive woman or man (Glynn, Christenfeld, & Gerin, 1999). Blood pressure and heart rates were supervised constantly before and during the impromptu speeches. Glynn et al. discovered that an audience of
sympathetic females lowered cardiovascular stress rates in the male and female speech givers, while a supportive male audience did not. Although this study does not involve friendship, the fact that supportive females influenced stress reduction in both men and women indicates how strongly the biological sex of females affects the feelings of stress.

Reducing loneliness.

Stevens (2001) studied 40 older women in the Netherlands who participated in an educational program on friendship enrichment aiming to promote well-being and diminish loneliness. The program’s goal focused on empowering women to refine their needs in friendship, evaluate their current social network, set and achieve goals in friendship, and reduce loneliness. Stevens found that, a year after the program had been completed, the majority of women succeeded in developing new friendships, or recovering accessible ones, and dramatically lowering their loneliness. This is important because loneliness has been associated with depression, aggression, negativity, alienation, timidity, low positive affect and social withdrawal (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999). Loneliness is also associated with acute disorders including depression, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorder (Ernst & Cacioppo). After reviewing the developmental, clinical, personality, social, and counseling psychology literature on loneliness, Ernst and Cacioppo found that persistent feelings of loneliness appeared connected to early attachment and childhood processes. Individuals who were chronically lonely were more likely to be withdrawn socially, untrusting, demonstrate negative affectivity, feel a lack of control over successes and failures, and be displeased
with their relationships as compared to non-lonely individuals. Having female friends, however, has been suggested to reduce loneliness (Stevens).

**Increased well-being.**

Giese-Davis et al. (2006) observed women who had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer over a 6-month period who were paired with cancer-surviving peer counselors. Significant improvement was observed in the women who had been diagnosed with cancer in regards to emotional well-being, trauma symptoms, cancer self-efficacy, and the desire to obtain breast cancer resource information. Giese-Davis et al., found that peer navigation may have halted the decline in the quality of life typically found in the first year of life of women diagnosed with breast cancer. Likewise, Wilson (2000) found that close friends were found to enhance and empower women’s lives. Friendship clearly contributes to psychological growth and feelings of well-being (Berzoff, 1989; Stevens & van Tilburg, 2000).

**Increased self-esteem.**

Friendships with other girls impact a girl’s self-esteem (O’Dea & Abraham, 1999). O’Dea and Abraham examined the effects of gender, puberty, and body weight on the self-concept of 462 young Australian students and found that girls had a more positive self-concept when they reported having close friendships. Likewise, Aries and Johnson (1983) found that women friends described their relationships as interdependent, supportive, and free from criticism, and that these relationships prompted self-growth and discovery. Martinez Aleman (1997) affirmed, stating, “acceptance, trust, and love are also met through friendship” (p. 125). Friendship provides ego support (Wright, 1984)
and increases self-esteem (Aries & Johnson; Shulman et al., 1994). Therefore, there are immense advantages for women to have friendships with other women (Aries & Johnson; Berzoff, 1989; Galupo & St. John, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Johnson, 1996; Josselson, 1996; Martinez Aleman; Newman & Newman, 1995; O’Dea & Abraham; Paul, 2004; Secunda, 1992; Shulman et al.; Wilson, 2000; Wright, 1984).

**Higher value on friendship.**

Friendships are very important to girls (Gilligan, 1982). This may be due to the fact that girls experience greater intimacy in their friendships than boys (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987) as early as age six (Bigelow, 1977), or perhaps because girls and women report so many benefits from friendship (Gilligan; O’Dea & Abraham, 1999; Paul, 2004; Wilson, 2000). Porter Benson (2007) noted that women befriend and support each other on an intimate level in a way that few men can. O’Dea and Abraham found that girls valued friendships more than boys and had an increase in self-esteem related to close friendships. Urberg, Degirmencioglu, Tolson, and Halliday-Scher (1995) studied 6th to 12th grade students in three different school systems and found that girls were more integrated into school social networks than male students, were more likely to have a best friend, be a part of a clique, and participate more actively in school networks. Aukett et al. (1988) studied the same-sex and opposite-sex friendship patterns of men and women students in two psychology classes at a university in New Zealand and found that women placed a higher value on their friendships than men, and reported more intimate and emotional ties with their same-sex friendships than men. Talking about personal concerns and having emotional exchanges dominated the women’s same-sex friendship
activities (Aukett et al.). Likewise, Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2003) gave the Friendship Questionnaire to 27 male and 49 female volunteers in the United Kingdom and found that women were more likely to get pleasure from supportive friendships, to enjoy people, seek interaction with others, and consider friendship important. In studying girls’ friendships, Gilligan found, as did Lever (1978), that girls develop friendships through connections with each other. Lever, after studying the sex differences in recess play of 181 fifth-grade, White, middle-class children ages ten and eleven, found that, if a conflict arose while a group of girls were playing a game, they would prefer quitting the game rather than risk losing the friendship.

**Problems with female friendship.**

Benenson and Christakos (2003) studied 60 females and 60 males in Canada between the ages of 10 and 15 years and found that female same-sex friendships were shorter in duration than male same-sex friendships, and that females tended to intentionally hurt the friendship more so than males. Females also had a greater number of prior friendships that had ended than males had. However, the majority of the subjects were White and from working-class to lower-middle-class backgrounds, so the results may not be generalized to the greater population. Some female friendships were found to have been fleeting due to frequent conflicts that sometimes became violent (Kon & Losenkov, 1978). Grimm-Wassil (1994) found that daughters whose fathers were absent due to divorce were more physically aggressive to both male and female peers. Conflict resolution skills seemed to be less developed in young girls, possibly explaining the problems they had in maintaining their friendships (Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Goodwin,
Other research argued that female friendships ended more quickly than male friendships due to the social organization of the friendships (Markovits, Benenson, & Dolenszky, 2001). Male friendships are more often a part of a larger group, whereas female friendships more likely occur in isolation (Benenson, 1990; Markovits et al.). Conflict is sometimes more difficult to resolve between two people when they are alone as opposed to when they are members of a larger group (Benenson, Nicholson, Waite, Roy, & Simpson, 2001).

Bowker (2004) examined 174 7th graders and found that half of the reciprocated best friendships remained stable across the school year. A noteworthy finding in this study suggested that girls who used negative strategies in response to friendship conflict (yelling at someone, or trying to get revenge) tended to have more stable friendships. Girls who were more confrontational or assertive were able to resolve conflicts better than using a more compromising, passive strategy. In unbalanced relationships, however, friendship stability may not be so healthy for the passive strategy user (Bowker). A limitation reported in this study was that there was no evidence that children use the same coping strategies to deal with all peer conflicts.

Hogue and Steinberg (1995) studied 6,000 14-18-year-olds and suggested that adolescents tend to choose friends with similar levels of internalized distress (depression, anxiety, somatization, and social withdrawal). This sample was derived from a longitudinal study of high school students from varying socioeconomic levels, ethnicities, family structures, and communities. Hogue and Steinberg suggested that adolescents who have internalized distress have friends, and the friendships are no less stable than those of
other teenagers. This study is of limited generalizability because African American and Hispanic adolescents and adolescents from lower socioeconomic strata are not fully represented. Additionally, the depression scale used in the study is a modification of an adult measure of internalized distress that has not been normed on an adolescent population.

Scope of the Research

One limitation of the research is the lack of women’s personalized experiences in their own words in regards to father absence combined with female friendship. Virtually no research was found pairing these two phenomena. The research found on father absence and peer relationships focused mainly on the implications absence had on sons rather than daughters (Parke et al., 2004). Also, when reviewing quantitative studies that gathered psychological test data, the actual real-life experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the individuals that were studied were not noted. Another limitation of the reviewed research regarding perspectives on family life and the mental health of children is that the data are based on the opinion of only one parent, usually the biological mother. The parent’s perspective may be significantly different from the perspectives of the child or other family members, such as the nonresident biological father. Many studies do not include the perspective of the nonresident father. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) stated, “There is no excuse for the studies of divorce involving only maternal or child reports, using tiny nonrepresentative samples of convenience, that proliferate in our journals” (p. 137).
Much research has been conducted on the experiences of sons from father-absent homes, rather than daughters (Cochran & Bo, 1989; Covell & Turnbull, 1982; Defranc & Mahalik, 2002; Hetherington, 1966; Lindahl & Malik, 1999; Murray & Sandqvist, 1990; Ross & Taylor, 1989; Wilson, 1999). Additionally, Amato and Keith (1991), in their meta-analysis of ninety-two studies comparing the well-being of children whose parents had divorced with those of children whose parents remained married, found that the differences between groups of children, based on the effect sizes, were small. Appleton’s (1981) work only included women in counseling; therefore the findings could not be generalized to the general public. Although one report stated that families with a daughter are more likely to divorce (Secunda, 1992), another study that covered 18 countries refuted that claim (Diekmann & Schmidheiny, 2004). Samuolis et al. (2001) sampled 100 freshmen (40 males and 60 females), of whom 83.2% were White, 73.5% were Catholic, and 61% of their mothers and fathers had a college degree or higher. Over 70% of the parents of those sampled were still married. This sample is not representative of the general population. There were also a limited number of people of color and of other religious affiliations. More information needs to be gathered about women from father-absent homes in non-treatment situations (Cheyne, 1988). Few studies have included people of color (Amato, 2000). King (1994) noted that most of the studies examining father involvement use all-White samples, and the few studies that have data for minorities do not examine whether the effects of father involvement differ for Whites and African Americans (or other minorities).
Some research has suggested that parental absence does not negatively affect a child as much as conflict between parents and financial hardship (Amato, 2000; Parke et al., 2004). Additionally, although fathers are considered important, Perlesz (2004) found no research-based credibility to suggest a home headed by a father is the best social or familial arrangement to ensure a child’s emotional, social, physical, and economic success. “It is the presence of a caring, loving, responsible, nurturing, low conflict, non-abusive, responsive parent” (Perlesz, p. 18). It has also been suggested that mothers and fathers are not essential in a child’s life, and that children benefit from stable, consistent parenting regardless of the sex of the person parenting (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). However, Silverstein and Auerbach seemed to contradict their findings because of the suggestion that proactive efforts be made for social and emotional connections between fathers and their children.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature, issues of trust, and detailed the elements of attachment theory. Chapter two also discussed abandonment, the stages of development, and reviewed the literature regarding the importance of fathers. Literature regarding female friendships and the impact of father absence was also reviewed in detail. Lastly, limitations of the research were also reviewed.
Chapter Three

I begin this chapter by describing my personal interest and experience with the research topic and why I decided to pursue this study. Personal exploration is a core element of heuristic research. So, I will tell my story before explaining heuristic research and the constructs of this study.

Researcher as Instrument

I grew up in a small town in the Midwest as one of the few children in school whose parents had divorced. This left me feeling alienated and different from my peers and it affected my friendships. I felt abandoned and rejected by my father and wondered if I was unlovable or defective in some way. It did not make sense that the man who helped create me would show so little interest in his own flesh and blood. The confusion and pain I experienced from that was dwarfed by the fact that he had such little contact with me after the divorce. Although he would say he loved me at the end of our brief and sporadic phone conversations, it did not seem to hold much substance. I wondered if he truly meant it or felt obligated to say it, the way I parroted the words back, like I thought I should. When the phone hit the receiver, I would cry for a long time, questioning the meaning of love, my father’s actions and words, as well as my ability to be a loveable girl.

The early memories I had of my father are not pleasant. He seemed to enjoy scaring my older brother and me by putting us in dangerous situations during the rare occasions we were in his sole care. I recall many arguments between my parents about his behavior. My first memories involve the panic and fear I experienced when with him.
It was truly a godsend that my parents divorced when I was five. He comes to mind when I read poems such as *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath (1981). “The book in the face, the brute, brute heart of a brute like you…bit my pretty red heart in two” (Plath, p. 223).

As I reached puberty, I needed to feel wanted and loved by the opposite sex. I searched for the acceptance and love I had never been given by my father in any boy who showed interest. I became so focused on boys that I had a difficult time making friends with girls. In fact, when around other girls, I felt foreign in my skin. I rejected everything feminine. To attract boys, I perfected my femininity, but when it came to girls, I simply did not know how to act. I could not use my feminine charm on them. I could not even have male friends without manipulating our friendship into that of something more physically intimate. Since I could not use my “power” on women, they became my competition, my enemy. The few females I did spend time with were social misfits in some way or another. In other words, they were not competition. But neither were they close friends. We fought often and betrayed each other regularly. We never kept each other’s secrets. I never had a trusted, close female friend until a year into my masters program in counseling, at age 25.

I first began to view women as more of a “we” rather than a “they” after taking some Women’s Studies courses during my undergraduate years. Still, friends I made “dumped” on me constantly. I was their counselor. It was never a “two-way street.” I never felt safe enough to be vulnerable. I did not feel they could be trusted with my deepest thoughts and feelings. When I tried to open up to them, somehow the focus
returned to my meeting their needs. At some level, however, it satiated my need to be
needed.

I began to realize that I had difficulty in making meaningful, close relationships
with women, and that the men I was attracted to were as emotionally distant and aloof as
my own father. Men were a challenge because, subconsciously, I believed that if I could
win them over, somehow this yearning to be wanted would be quieted. It was only until
my late twenties that I finally realized these were the men to avoid. But I had not
questioned my insatiable drive to seduce boys my age until I was in college. And
growing up, even through college, the contact with my father solely consisted of his
sending me a birthday card in July and a Christmas card. I rarely got a phone call and
saw him only a few times. At 9 years of age, the visitation ceased (each lasted a week or
less each summer from ages 6-9). He told me when I was 9 that he would stop
acknowledging me as his daughter if I did not begin mailing a birthday card to my
stepmother each January. Terrified I would lose him, I was obliged to play this
superficial game, and did so until 2007. I did not see him again until I was 16 when he
stopped by for 15 minutes to congratulate my brother on his high school graduation. I
saw him again when I turned 25 when my boyfriend drove us to visit a friend several
states away (who happened to live near my father). I contacted my father and we had
lunch, and he expected me to spend the night with him and my stepmother. I did, and it
went fairly well. I had the opportunity to visit with my half brother then, too, whom I
had not seen since he was a toddler. Then I did not see my father again until I was 30 and
in town for a conference. We had dinner and he tried to get me to join his pyramid
scheme. It was depressing and I felt used. Yet I continued playing the conditional love
game with my father until, in 2007, he decided that his family was “dead” to him.

In 2007 my father told his brother that, since he believed that the family never
fully accepted his wife (the woman he married 3 days after divorcing my mother), they
were all now officially “dead” to him and should never contact him again. When I tried
to mail the requisite birthday card to my stepmother as I had been instructed so many
years ago, the letter returned, unopened, with “return to sender” scribbled in my father’s
chicken-scratch handwriting across the envelope. I no longer received birthday or
Christmas cards from him, and as far as I know, he does not know that I have remarried.
He is also unaware that he is now a grandfather. (I gave birth to a daughter in October
2009). I do not believe that I need to attempt to contact him to tell him this news because
not knowing should be a consequence of his choice to avoid contact with his family.
Besides, what kind of grandfather would he be to my daughter, since he was never much
of a father to me?

Now I’m a 40-year-old remarried woman and mother in a doctoral program in
Counselor Education. I have some close friendships with other women now as well, but
wonder why that took so long. I began to ponder what had prevented me from having
close female friendships, and what fueled the superficial game with my father. Did I
really think he would finally recognize my accomplishments and desire a meaningful
relationship? Although my head said “No,” there remained a part of me that wondered if
maybe someday he might want a real relationship with his only daughter, and now
granddaughter. There is another part of me that does not want him involved because of his glaring lack of parenting, love, and support over the years.

Though I have worked through these issues in counseling, there is some sadness that remains. Anais Nin (1966) wrote, “The first defeat, the first loss is the one which stamps itself upon the soul” (p. 99). While the loss of my father definitely imprinted on my soul, I no longer feel burdened by the experience. I am extremely fortunate to have a supportive, tender, devoted husband, a healthy, vibrant daughter, loyal friends, and a caring, dedicated mother. But I feel I have missed an important childhood experience: a healthy father and daughter relationship. I often wondered how my teen years would have been different had I had a loving, attentive father in my life. Would I have had more close friendships with other women? I also wondered if other women also experienced similar feelings and experiences and how these perceptions have affected them in adulthood.

**Heuristic Methodology**

This personal struggle contained the elements of a classical heuristic study to illuminate the essence of being a daughter from a mother-present/father-absent home who has had challenges in making close female friends. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) stated:

Heuristics encourages the researcher to go wide open and to pursue an original path that has its origins within the self and that discovers its direction and meaning within the self. It does not aim to produce experts who learn the rules
and mechanics of science; rather, it guides human beings in the process of asking questions about phenomena that disturb and challenge their own existence. (p. 53)

I have decided to choose the heuristic research model to provide the opportunity to conduct research in a very personalized, collaborative way with my selected coresearchers. From the initial engagement upon our first meeting through the creative synthesis at the end of the disclosures and insights, it was imperative to use a research model that allowed and honored the exploration of feelings with all their associated meanings. Using this type of inquiry is considered to be valid (Noddings & Witherell, 1991). Noddings and Witherell described narratives, storytelling, and dialogue as “forms of educational research and criticism” (p. 67). Heuristic research also provided the genuine essence of the experiences shared through a method of personal value and meaning. Although I initially contemplated only using a phenomenological design to be objective and separate from the information collected, I believe that my experiences could benefit others. I also believe that a dispassionate approach is impossible. Finally, I chose to examine my personal challenges with this experience with complete passion and commitment.

The role of the researcher is a fundamental component in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and the main instrument for data collection and analysis (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Patton, 2002). I have been immersed in the struggle to win my father’s love and approval, as well as my desire to develop close female friendships since adolescence. Since becoming engrossed with the topic of father absence and female
friendships over the past several years, a heuristic study design seemed the most appropriate form of research for me. My desire to learn the experiences of others drove my research. Having a passionate drive to find a solution or examine a highly personal experience is an important aspect to heuristic research (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Patton). Heuristic research begins with a profound problem. Douglass and Moustakas stated:

The power of heuristic inquiry lies in its potential for disclosing truth. Through exhaustive self-search, dialogues with others, and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective musings and developing into a systematic and definitive exposition. (p. 40)

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) describe heuristics as “a passionate and discerning involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self” (p. 40). Self-experience is suggested to be the most instrumental aspect in the pursuit of heuristic research (Douglass & Moustakas). Maslow (1987) echoed this by stating that there is no substitute for experience. After reviewing an article about father absence, one author’s sentiment resonated with me: “Maybe if I could talk to other women who had been through similar experiences, I would find narrative models for my own story and through those models discover some comfort and peace” (Jago, 2006, p. 402).

I participated in this study as a coresearcher, as this added more depth and encouraged the coresearchers to share their experiences. Jourard (1968) stressed the
value of self-disclosure as it facilitates disclosure from others. Moustakas (1990) contended that self-reflection, self-disclosure, and self-exploration develop the research question. Within this process I sifted through my experiences to find what is essential while altering and enlightening myself. “Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic research” (Moustakas, p. 13).

Acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher is key to the process throughout the study, and heuristic methodology uses the researcher’s disclosure of her experiences throughout the interview. Subjectivity is believed to be a necessity for research (Moustakas, 1990; Rogers, 1951). Considering that “meaning-making and emotion are part of the phenomenon” of qualitative research, it is understandable that objectivity could lead to a kind of detachment that prevents one from being open to what is being studied (Patton, 2002, p. 48). Rogers noted that, “Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience” (p. 223). He continued by explaining that when he is aware of his personal experience and can use his subjective experience, he can be realistic and constructive.

Moustakas (1990) reported that in heuristic research the interviewer must have had a profound encounter with what is being studied. There must be an autobiographical component. Moustakas expanded on heuristic research by stating:

It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit to endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo
the personal transformation that exist as a possibility in every heuristic journey.

(p. 14)

**Stages of Heuristic Research**

Moustakas (1990) noted that there are six phases of heuristic research that guide the process: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. In the beginning, the researcher is driven by an intense, passionate concern. The goal of the initial engagement is to expound a strong interest that motivates the researcher, inviting self-dialogue and self-exploration. “One’s own self discoveries, awareness, and understandings are the initial steps of the process” (Moustakas, p. 16). This encountering of the question becomes more compelling as the researcher contemplates it over time.

**Initial engagement.**

There had been many times in my life when I had contemplated my relationship with my father, but it was not until graduate school that I began to wonder how the father absence I experienced growing up may have affected my ability to make female friends. I did not have many close female friendships until I had almost finished my masters program; this always puzzled me. I got the feeling that women were either intimidated or put off by me, but I was not sure, and I never understood why that would be. It was during my graduate studies in Community Counseling that I began reflecting on how my father’s absence affected my relationships with others. I had many conversations with myself about this, and wrote many journal entries about the subject due to the power of the emotions I was feeling. Journaling was a technique I have used since I was about 10
years old. There was a lot of indwelling and reflection happening during my graduate studies in the counseling program. Some professors in the graduate counseling program encouraged a lot of self-introspection, but I took it further with personal journaling and indwelling.

**Immersion.**

When I decided to fully examine the difficulties I had with making female friends and how growing up without a fully present, loving father may have contributed to this problem, I was then entering into the second phase of heuristic inquiry: immersion. In this stage, my entire being was centered in the experience. “He or she becomes totally involved in the world of the experience, questioning, mediating, dialoging, daydreaming, and indwelling” (Patton, 2002, p. 486). To achieve this, I immersed myself by attempting to “live the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). This process took approximately 12 months. Watching “chick flicks” created unusual dreams of female friends either rejecting my friendship or enjoying my companionship. I also spent a lot of time observing young girls and women talking and walking around with each other, and with their fathers. I started talking with my female friends about how they made friends and any challenges they experienced, as a kind of pilot study. I was surprised to find that some of these friends also came from father-absent homes and shared similar experiences with having difficulty making female friends.

This immersion process prompted me to journal, reflect, contemplate, and dialogue with others about the meaning of friendship with other women and the impact of father absence. I watched every movie in a certain local, private university library that
dealt with fathers and daughters, and divorce issues. It was very time consuming and emotionally exhausting. Many movies brought forth great emotion and reflection. I also listened to songs that dealt with friendship and the subject of father and daughter relationships, found and read the lyrics, and contemplated the meanings. After much observation of fathers and daughters, and watching approximately thirty movies, I participated in focused indwelling. This indwelling allowed great reflection that I used to write in my personal journal. Additionally, the extensive literature review of the research provided substantial immersion. Tremendous amounts of data were gathered throughout this immersion process.

**Incubation.**

The next phase of research, incubation (Moustakas, 1990), provided a welcome respite from the saturation of father/daughter and friendship thoughts, questions, and reflections. The incubation process is a time in which the researcher breaks from the intense reflection, detaching from the involvement of the question. Growth continues to take place, however. “The period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities” (Moustakas, p. 28). In order to detach from the question, I avoided movies and books that involved female friendships or father-daughter relationships. When I went out, I also stopped observing fathers playing with their children. But I was also pregnant for the first time, and this distracted me from thinking about my dissertation. The incubation period provided such relief that it was difficult to return to the work. It was not easy thinking about my struggles making female friends, and my father who decided not to have any more contact with his family.
Illumination.

After the birth of my daughter, I was ready to begin working on the research again. This began the illumination process, the next phase of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). “Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness” (Moustakas, p. 30). The new awareness involved the fact that my baby was a girl. My husband and I decided to not learn the gender of our child until she was born; when we found that she was a girl, I began to think of her development and the role her father would play. It was the first time I had thought of my husband taking on the role of father and the impact he would have on our daughter. Father’s Day would no longer be a cheerless passing holiday, but a joyous celebration with my husband instead. It was amazing to think of my husband as a father. It was something he had wanted to become for a very long time, and I knew he would be naturally loving and supportive in this role, and he is. Amelia is so fortunate to have such a dedicated, affectionate, and present Daddy.

Explication.

Explication, the penultimate phase (Moustakas, 1990), provides the researcher increased interpretation as more enlightenment takes place through continued thought and dialogue. “In explication a more complete apprehension of the key ingredients is discovered” (Moustakas, p. 31). Through indwelling I explored themes of loneliness, confusion, sadness, jealousy, envy, doubt, disappointment, and anger in my experiences
with my father and the challenges faced with making female friends. Indwelling and explication assisted my appreciation of my experiences. I reviewed some of my old journals from when I was 10, which discussed fights I had with friends, and the longing I had for my father. I found a drawing I made in my journal when I was a little girl of a heart with a slide coming out of the side with tears flowing down. It filled me with sadness to recall my concern that it might be possible to cry out all of my tears to where I would have no more left.

**Creative synthesis.**

After completing the five phases of heuristic research, I was ready to collaborate with my coresearchers in order to collect all the themes for the last phase: the creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Self-searching and intuition are important components of the creative synthesis (Moustakas), and this ignited my passion for the question. Moustakas noted that the researcher must not be restricted by the data alone, but allow the inquiry to develop more fully “in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized” (p. 32). This was a very subjective and introspective process, allowing me to delve deeply into all my emotions with the phenomena. Diligently working through each of the phases of heuristic research (Moustakas) assisted me in beginning to understand the far-reaching aspects of the questions I wanted to answer. However, it was only after I participated in the collaboration process with my coresearchers that I could reach creative synthesis. Creative synthesis is “the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns, and relationship” (Patton, 2002, p. 487). The creative
synthesis occurred while writing the coresearcher narratives and the composite portrait. It consisted of a self-reflective narrative and a closure letter to my father that I mailed to his office (Appendix E).

**Design**

This heuristic inquiry utilizes an informal conversational interview approach to describe the experiences that women from mother-present/father-absent homes have had with forming and maintaining close, reciprocal friendships with other females. With this type of data collection, general questions were formulated prior to the interview. According to Moustakas (1990), heuristic inquiry involves self-introspection and increased awareness through investigating and analyzing human phenomena. Through the process of writing this dissertation, I increased my self-knowledge and had it be a meaningful and relevant experience to us coresearchers. Moustakas stated that there must be an autobiographical connection to the material: “The heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense, and full way” (p. 14).

Within qualitative research, it is imperative to establish sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested three methods: the use of literature, professional experience, and personal experience. The use of literature as an analytic tool can be utilized to supply a “rich source of events to stimulate thinking about properties and for asking conceptual questions” (p. 47). Upon reviewing the literature, I pondered the findings of the various studies, which led me to formulate questions for us coresearchers. Also, in heuristic interviewing, the information collected is dependent upon the researcher’s capacity to be empathic, open, calming, and flexible (Moustakas, 1990). My professional counseling
background enhanced my ability to be empathic, establish sensitivity, and help the coresearchers feel relaxed in order to open up. However, I did not provide counseling. My role was that of researcher, not counselor. I did not work with coresearchers in order to resolve any unfinished business; closure that has not been accomplished (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951/1994). My role as researcher was simply to hear the coresearchers’ stories and share my own; to work in a collaborative effort to explore the experiences.

I practiced Epoche to become aware of any assumptions I may have had while interviewing the coresearchers. I achieved this by being in the present moment at all times, taking deep breaths, and focusing completely on each coresearcher. “Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Patton, 2002, p. 484). In other words, Epoche is a way of letting go of preconceived biases: neutrality. I employed Epoche techniques including meditation and journal writing of my thoughts and reactions to the articles and books I had been reading on father abandonment and female friendships. Using the Epoche allowed me to have a fresh vision without imposing meaning prematurely. It allowed me to use all of my senses to discover structural and textural essential elements pertaining to the statement of the essences of the experience. This helped me remain subjective during the interviews with the coresearchers. I was then ready to immerse myself in the experiences of my coresearchers.

Using my personal experiences also helped establish sensitivity. Causality or generalizability to a larger population than the coresearchers was not established.
Information-rich cases were studied. I engaged in focused participation throughout the interview process.

One of my responsibilities as a researcher was to maintain ethical principles throughout the research process (Creswell, 1998). The protection of confidentiality and rights of coresearchers was of principal importance. The proposed investigation was submitted to Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board prior to information collection. Additionally, participants received an Informed Consent Form explaining the goals and protocol for participating in the research (Appendix C). The participants confirmed their understanding of the information in the form by signing it prior to any data collection.

Sample

This sample was composed of seven women who were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences growing up with an absent father in regards to female friendships. I included myself as one of the coresearchers. The coresearchers “must share an intensity of experience with the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). I gathered sufficient information from this number of women to identify common patterns and examine diverse experiences. This provided confirmation through redundancy and saturation. If saturation had not been achieved with seven participants, then I would have interviewed more women until shared patterns and themes emerged. However, Patton stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 24). By way of explanation, there is no specific regulation in the qualitative literature that stipulates the least amount of people needed for a research endeavor. These women were at least 35
years old and voluntarily participated. Two female professors at a public university I know personally allowed me to gain entry to their undergraduate classes to ask for volunteers. I was available to answer any questions the students may have had at that time. I drafted a description of my study with my contact information and distributed it to the undergraduate Family Studies classes (Appendix A). I encouraged the students to contact me within a few days via phone or email if they had additional questions or were interested in participating. They were told that there would be no monetary compensation. Also, I posted flyers (Appendix B) in three academic buildings explaining my study that included my phone number and email address. I utilized purposeful intensity sampling to find information-rich cases that shared the phenomena I was studying (Maxwell, 1996). I sought participants through word-of-mouth, Craigslist, and posted requests on women-only Yahoo groups listserves, and two Meetup.com women-only groups of which I am a member.

The units of analysis in this study are the stories of the adult daughters from divorce or separation who have had little or no contact with their fathers following the divorce or separation and their experiences with female friends. The coresearchers’ parents would have divorced or separated prior to their tenth birthday. The reason I have chosen the age of ten years is that, according to Erikson’s theory of development, this is the stage of industry versus inferiority. This is the time that children begin to manage novel interpersonal and scholastic challenges. Success causes feelings of proficiency, while failure creates a sense of inadequacy. “The danger at this stage is the development of a sense of inadequacy and inferiority” (Erikson, 1980, p. 91). Children sometimes blame
themselves for their parent’s divorce, which could possibly make them feel they have failed (Johnston et al., 2009). Also, after a parent leaves the home, sometimes the child has difficulty in school (Pruett & Pruett, 1998), which can lead to feelings of failure and depression (Shochet et al., 2008). Erikson noted that this is “socially a most decisive stage: since industry involves doing things beside and with others, a first sense of a division of labor and of equality of opportunity develops at this time” (p. 93). Aral et al. (2006) noted that the school age period (between ages 6 and 12) encompasses a time when children discover their independence, successes, and individual characteristics. Stress can have a significant effect in this period (Vail, 2005). When a child begins to feel that “the background of his parents” rather than his will to learn could decide his or her social value, harm could come to their sense of identity (Erikson). I believe that choosing women who had the divorce or separation experience during or before Piaget’s concrete operational stage and Erikson’s industry versus inferiority stage may have experienced some social challenges that would provide them with more depth to their friendship stories. Also, since my parents divorced before I reached Piaget’s concrete operations and formal operations stages, and Erikson’s stage of industry versus inferiority, I thought it best to find other women who had experienced a father absence during the same developmental stages.

Purposeful intensity sampling helped me select six English-speaking women who provided the information necessary to answer the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through purposeful intensity sampling, I sought “a sample of sufficient intensity to elucidate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Intensity sampling is a
technique in which the participants to be studied are deliberately chosen. Patton stated, “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230).

**Pilot Study**

Participation in this study was voluntary, which was stated clearly in the consent form found in Appendix C. Two women were found for the pilot study through gaining access to undergraduate Family Studies classes and spending approximately five minutes explaining the study and distributing a summary of the study (Appendix A) along with researcher contact information. The initial interview protocol was piloted with two students who were under the age of 25 years. The pilot study resulted in revisions to the content and sequencing of the initial interview protocol. The content and sequencing of the original interview protocol appeared this way:

What motivated you to become interested in this study?

How old were you when your parents divorced or separated?

How old are you now?

What was your relationship like with your father before the divorce or separation?

How has your relationship with your father changed since then?

When did you first realize your father was not there?

How did you learn about that reality?

How did your mother interpret the divorce or separation for you?

Do you believe that growing up without a father influenced your life?
How often did you see or hear from your father after the divorce or separation?

What have your relationships been like with female peers growing up and currently?

What has your experience been with trusting others?

Talk about a time when something changed with your female friendships.

Discuss the degree of ease or difficulty you’ve experienced making female friends over the years.

Describe the most meaningful relationship you’ve had with a female friend.

What kept the relationship going over this period?

Talk about your female friendships when you were younger and how they compare to your friendships with women now.

Talk about any challenges you’ve had with a female friend, if they were resolved and if so, how they were resolved.

Talk about the level of satisfaction you have with your current female friends.

Since the main inquiry of this dissertation involved female friendships, the questions regarding this subject were placed before the questions about father absence.

I deleted the question that asked the coresearchers to talk about a time when something changed with their female friendships because I thought it might be too leading. I added more questions including “What value do you see in having a female, versus a male, friend?” to get an idea about male relationships, “What was your relationship like with your parents?” to get an understanding about the relationship with mother. I also added, “Did you feel abandoned by your father?” since that had not been addressed. I thought it
would be interesting to see if the coresearchers learned anything from the discussion or had any additional comments, so I included questions to address these points. I also added that a coresearcher’s parents could have separated in addition to having divorced to include a wider pool of coresearchers. Increasing the age of the coresearchers from 18 years to 35 years or older was made because both women interviewed for the pilot study had disclosed that they had not given a great deal of thought to the issues brought up in the interview. By increasing the ages of the coresearchers to 35 years, I was hoping to find women who had had more time to thoughtfully and thoroughly consider father absence and female friendships over the years.

**Instrument**

One of the instruments of this study is the researcher. I was a coresearcher in this process and shared my story with other coresearchers, and asked them to share their stories with me. Sharing my story with the coresearcher in the beginning of the interview seemed to put the coresearcher more at ease, and encouraged them to also be vulnerable and disclose their story. Another instrument for this study consisted of an interview guide, which was developed by the researcher (Appendix D). The interview guide includes demographic questions, open-ended questions pertaining to the daughter’s relationship with her father, and open-ended questions related to her relationships with female friends. Open-ended questions allow the respondent to describe what is salient to her and permits richer detail, rather than using closed questions during the interview (Patton, 2002). The researcher clearly stated to all participants that their answers were confidential, that participation was voluntary, and that they could discontinue the
interviews at any time. They signed an informed consent (Appendix C) to document their understanding of these factors and were given a copy for their records. Additionally, there was a form explaining the study to the coresearchers modeled after a form used by Moustakas which is in Appendix A.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through face-to-face interviews, which were audiotaped for verbatim transcription. The shortest interview lasted one hour and the longest interview lasted over three hours. The average interview lasted approximately two hours. I started the interview process by disclosing some of my personal story and interest in the subject. As the coresearchers answered the questions from the interview guide, I shared more of my story as well. It felt like an equal sharing experience. I completed all transcription in order to more fully immerse myself in the coresearchers’ stories. The transcriptions were typed on my computer; I am the only person who knows the password. I also have a firewall installed. Each interview was coded with the names of different flowers. I chose flowers because I wanted each woman who shared very moving, beautiful stories of friendship and longing to be represented by a living, natural, and pleasant symbol, rather than a number. No names were attached to any of the papers except the consent form. The consent forms and audiotapes were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home and will be destroyed by being shredded, along with the recordings, which will be erased, approximately two years after the completion of my PhD (June 2012). The two pilot interviews took place at the George E. Hill Center for Research and Counseling in McCracken Hall at Ohio University. The other interviews took place at a
local library study room. Each participant was given a consent form to sign before the
interview began. In the consent form, the participant was informed that the interview
would be digitally recorded and responses kept confidential. The letter informed
participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could
discontinue the interview or refuse to answer any question at any time. They had to sign
the form before any interviews took place. They were given a copy for their records.
After I transcribed our discussions, I sent the transcript to each coresearcher and asked
her to verify it for accuracy and to add anything she may have forgotten. No
coresearchers had any changes to make to the original transcripts.

Data Analysis

This is an exploratory, qualitative heuristic study designed to understand the
relationship between the ability to form and maintain close female friendships, and
perceived loss of a father due to divorce or separation. After interviews were conducted
and transcription had been completed, I listened to all of the digital tapes many times and
checked the transcriptions I had typed for accuracy. Inductive analysis was performed.
Inductive analysis allows the important dimensions to emerge from patterns discovered in
the stories being researched. Unlike the hypothetical-deductive approach of certain
designs that specify research hypotheses before the data is collected, inductive analysis
uncovers patterns and themes after data collection without presupposing the themes in
advance (Patton, 2002). Themes are shared patterns of the essences in the experiences of
the women I interviewed. The responses given by each participant underwent cross-case
analysis in order for themes and patterns to be uncovered. Each woman’s story was
transcribed before other women’s stories were combined thematically. Themes were pulled from the written transcriptions and listed on a larger paper to create a master list of themes. I placed each theme on individual file cards and grouped and regrouped these cards to eliminate any themes that seemed repetitious. I distilled the information until I obtained the essential 44 emergent core themes. After substantial immersion, indwelling and incubation, I distilled the themes further to 6 core essence themes. In order to achieve creative synthesis, I wrote narratives about each of the seven coresearchers, and compiled a composite profile of a woman from a mother-present/father-absent home and her experience in making close female friends.

After involving myself in the data so deeply, I put aside the material to allow it to settle within me for further focus. This is known as incubation in the heuristic process. The information often came to mind while driving, walking, and relaxing. I immersed myself in the material by focusing on it, putting it aside, reflecting on it, and then returning to it. This pattern of saturation, rest and distance, allowed a more perceptive awareness of the material to develop. Patton (2002) recommended the qualitative evaluator become completely immersed in the material, then withdraw and have distance, to be followed by new experiences of immersion and discovery. This process included much indwelling as I lived with the data and reflected upon the intimate world of us coresearchers. The indwelling facilitated the emergence of illumination that allowed me to better comprehend the coresearchers’ descriptions with lucidity. I also made the decision to write a letter and mail it to my father as a closure for myself, and part of the creative synthesis.
Summary

In summary, chapter three described my personal experience and interest with the research topic and why I decided to write this dissertation. Heuristic research and the constructs of the study were also discussed in detail.
Chapter Four

In this chapter I present the research findings by introducing the coresearchers through individual narrative portraits of their experiences. Additionally, I completed a composite portrait of a woman from a mother-present/father-absent home and her experience with forming close female friendships. Common themes are illustrated and, at the end of the chapter, a creative synthesis of my personal experience of father absence and the ability to form close female friendships is included to further explicate my passionate exploration which was conducted throughout this dissertation with coresearchers. This is in the form of a short narrative, and there is a closure letter to my father that I mailed to his office in Appendix E that is also part of the creative synthesis. In order to summarize the themes and feelings of the women included in this study, individual portraits captured the experience of a father leaving a daughter’s life and how this experience may have affected the daughter’s ability to make close female friends as reported by each coresearcher.

Pilot interviews

I had already conducted two interviews with women who were younger than 35 years of age before I did this research, and had discovered that these women had not given the depth of thought and reflection about female friendship and father absence I was hoping for to allow a rich, detailed discussion. After consulting with others, it was decided to use these as pilot interviews. Patton (2002) noted that we cannot accurately observe thoughts and feelings or inspect situations that previously occurred in our coresearcher’s development. Therefore, conducting the pilot interviews allowed me to
enter into the participant’s world and catch her perceptions and feelings as she described her experience of being raised in a mother-present/father absent home and the ability to form close female friendships. Through this pilot interview experience, I was able to sharpen my techniques and refine my questions. Each coresearcher had been given the fictitious name of a flower to ensure anonymity. I chose floral names because each coresearcher openly shared very personal experiences with me, and seemed to blossom during the discussion. Each coresearcher was unique, beautiful, and vibrant, like a lovely flower.

**Rose**

Twenty-year-old Rose met with me in a private study room at a local library. She had seen the flyer I had posted and responded initially by phone. She was very open and personable, and we had a very interesting conversation about father absence and female friendships. I remember thinking she looked very thin and was probably a size 0.

Rose’s parents separated on her first birthday, but divorced when she was approximately three years old. Her father then moved from West Virginia to Florida, remarried, and had two boys with his new wife. Rose reported that she no longer has any contact with her father after having two “negative” and “unpleasant” visits with him when she was nine and fourteen-years-old. She had wanted to give her father “a second chance” when she was fourteen by paying him a visit after he “reached out” and suggested she come down for a fishing trip with him and his boys. She said she was “hopeful” that things would be different this time and that he had “changed.” But she stated that he was very “standoffish” and “held me there against my will” when she
wanted to return home to her mother. It was at this time that she decided to “cut off all contact with him.”

She said she began to realize when she was 9 that her father was not there after spending the night at friends’ houses and noticing “their father’s roles” in the home. Her mother explained the divorce by telling Rose about her father’s “alcohol problem.” She stated that their relationship also got “physical” at times, and Rose stated she was “grateful” they divorced. She said she noticed his aggression and alcoholism when she visited him when she was 9 and 14. She said he made no contact with her in between those visits. Rose said her father’s new wife was “an example of a battered wife” and that her stepmother and “power-hungry” father had little “interaction” with each other. This seemed to bother Rose quite a bit.

Growing up without a father influenced her life in many ways. She said she became a perfectionist “so people would want to be around me,” but that this led to “eating problems.” She said she was very “self-conscious” and “faulted” herself for many things. But she also became “extremely independent.” She said that her mother and grandmother were big influences on her and encouraged her to do things for herself. She recalls her mother saying, “We don’t need a man to do it! We can do it ourselves!” She also remembers being in the 6th grade and writing a paper about her future. She wrote that she planned to “get a career first, get my own car, get my own place, adopt a child, and then get married!” Rose noted that many of her friends from high school already have been married and had children and that she did not want that kind of future.
In elementary school Rose had “lots and lots of friends, was really social, and had people over all the time.” In junior high, she had a group of girls with whom she “stuck together.” She stated that she went through a “wild streak” and began drinking quite a bit, but that her mother helped her “settle down” and go back to her “old self.” In high school Rose found that many girls, from all cliques and groups, would often come to her with their problems. She said they would tell her everything because they knew she could keep secrets. She said their problems interested her, but that she did not feel safe telling them her problems. She said she was “friends with everyone, but not good friends with anyone.” She described herself as “the girl who was nice to talk to, but didn’t have a close friend to confide in.”

Making friends has been more difficult for Rose now that she is older. She says it takes more effort to stay in touch and meet people, especially people her age. Rose attends a local community college where her classmates are much older. When she was younger her friendships were based on “simple things and common interests,” but now her friendships are “more adult and detailed.” She expressed chagrin over the number of friendships she has now and their lack of “depth.” Although her boyfriend is currently her primary outlet for friendship, she stated that she wants a close female friend so she does not have to worry about “relationship junk” or have it “become sexual.” Talking with females makes Rose feel more comfortable than talking with males, and she believes females are more supportive and comforting.

Her most meaningful relationship with a female friend was in high school. She described her friend as “a real support for me.” She said they were “always close and able
to talk, and always there for each other.” She said, “We were like therapy for each other.” Rose recalled, “We were an outlet for each other and talked about each other’s problems often.” But now her friend is in “party-mode” and Rose is more focused on her studies. Her friend has accused her of not being there for her because of the time Rose spends with her boyfriend, but Rose contends that she just is not interested in going to bars anymore. She wants to focus on college, and believes she has abandoned her friend in some ways, but that she and her friend are changing too much. She expressed some sadness about losing this once close friend, but stated that she hopes to make closer female friends who are more “like-minded” soon.

Some of my questions made Rose consider aspects of her life she had never previously reflected upon. For example, Rose noted that she “morphed into whatever the girls, my group of friends were into.” She said this became a huge problem when she first entered college because she found a group of women who had eating disorders. “We fueled off each other. It was terrible. We exercised all the time. We eventually had to go home or to the hospital.” When I mentioned morphing into whatever interests my boyfriend had, she said she also had not thought about that, but agreed that she did that too. She stated that once when she was a Democrat she dated a Republican and began “thinking more Republican.” She said that she is more “into who she is now” and does not “morph” for guys anymore.

**Lily**

Twenty-year-old Lily was the second coresearcher I interviewed. She and I met at the George E. Hill Center for Research and Counseling in McCracken Hall at Ohio
University. She wore her hair in a ponytail and seemed fairly relaxed. She lived nearby in a dormitory and had seen a flyer I had posted in one of the academic buildings. She was eager to help with my research, and talked openly about her experiences with father absence and her difficulty making female friends. She, like Rose, had not given some of my questions much contemplation prior to this discussion.

Lily was six years old when her parents divorced. She, like many other women I spoke with, had a father who did not contribute much financially to the family, even while he was in the home. Her mother disclosed this issue to her and said that her father said he was working and would leave each day, but “not bring back any income to prove it.” She said she remembered a time when he was supposed to be watching her and had some drinking buddies over, and they gave her alcohol. Her mother came home and his friends hid in the basement and she had to keep it a secret. She said she never hated her father or thought badly of him when she was younger, and added that she mostly did not understand what was going on.

Like many of the women I talked with, Lily had a father that remarried and started a new family almost immediately. She has never met her stepsiblings or stepmother. The last time she saw her father she was 10 years old. Her mother had heard that Lily’s father had moved back in with his mother after the divorce and, since they had not heard from him in a long time, decided to pay him a surprise visit. Lily remembers her mother knocking on the door, but no one coming to answer. She said her mother saw someone in the house when she peeked in, and Lily noticed someone peer through the drapes, but no one answered the door, and that was the last time they ever tried to contact him.
Lily stated that she always felt like she was “his little girl” because she was the first-born. She had another younger brother and sister, and said she felt like he really cared about her and her siblings. She said she remembers a time when she was 8 years old and he took her and her siblings to the mall and bought them some inflatable toys. She said he was afraid he might get arrested because he had a warrant and was not supposed to be out of the county. Lily stated that she never got any birthday or Christmas cards from her father. She described feeling “astonished” that her father had visitation rights, but decided not to see his three kids anymore. She said she had a difficult time making sense of that when she was a teenager. She had heard through one of her father’s cousins that he moved to Montana, but she is not sure if that is true. Lily doubts she would be able to recognize her father if she saw him on the street.

She stated that she remembers when she was six years old he simply did not return home. Things became very difficult at that point because Lily recalls that her mother, who was in school at the time, had to take a second job to make ends meet. Her mother had to have the court track him down for child support payments, and Lily stated that she thinks he still owes her mother “quite a lot of money.” She said it was uncomfortable at school at times when people would ask about her father because she did not know what to say, and would just try to talk about her mother instead. The divorce was hard on Lily who cried frequently whenever her mother talked to her about Lily’s father. Her mother paired her up with a counselor to help with the changes, and her mother encouraged her by saying, “We can get through this by taking it one day at a time.” Lily said she dealt with the divorce by “putting up a big wall and blocking things
out.” She said that she never knew after her 10th birthday that she would never see or hear from him again.

Lily considers her mother “my hero.” She said that growing up without a father made her more independent, but that her mother encouraged her success. Even though her mother could not always be there for her, she knew her mother loved her, and this made her “grow up fast” because she had to take care of herself. She said she could actually thank her father for her independence because, with her mother being gone a lot, she had to care for her two siblings and herself. She said she strives to make her mother proud of her and that although she has “gotten into trouble at times” she feels good about earning a scholarship that pays for her college expenses. Lily recalls that she was very promiscuous with boys growing up and had lots of guilt regarding this. She also thought she was the only one who had guilty thoughts about her promiscuity.

Girls “frightened” Lily when she was growing up because she thought they were “so much better” than her. She said she has never been able to keep a female friend for more than a year. She described herself as quiet in high school and one who moved around a lot. She said that, although she had a lot of friends, she was no one’s “best friend.” She could not trust the girls in her school because they could not keep her secrets. She often found that female friends would “unload” on her but that she could not trust to “unload” her problems on them. She always had more guy than girl friends and described guys as “easier to get along with and more reliable.” She often confided in boyfriends and noted that having a female friend “takes too much effort.” But Lily would
like to have more female friends. She said she has a fear that she will not have enough friends to one day “fill out a wedding party.”

Since she has started college though, Lily has made a good female friend that she hopes will last a long time. She described this friendship as the most meaningful, longest lasting female friendship she has ever had because they do not hold grudges. She also stated that they do not blame each other or have arguments. She plans to room with this friend next year, and hopes that they grow even closer. This is the first female friend with whom she can be herself. She added, “I don’t feel like I have to dress up my attitude to be around her” and that it is “very relaxed and flowing.” At the close of the discussion Lily expressed relief that she was not alone in her feelings about father absence and female friendships.

Coresearchers

It was much more difficult than I imagined to find women 35 years and older who were willing to spend time talking with me about father absence and female friendships. But over a period of eight months women answered my ads or heard about me through friends I made in various women’s groups. These women had definitely given much more thought and reflection on their life without a father, how it affected them, and how female friendships had enriched their lives. I was grateful for my committee’s suggestion to find older women with whom to share my research. I have included myself in this list of coresearchers and given myself the name Petunia. Only in the individual portrait do I refer to myself as Petunia.
Daisy

Daisy is a 66-year-old woman who invited me to her Victorian-style home to do the interview. She was very welcoming and seemed comfortable sharing openly. Her best friend was coming for the weekend, and they were interested in speaking with me about father absence and female friendship. Most of Daisy’s interview was done without her friend present. Daisy grew up in a neighborhood where everyone looked out for each other. All of the neighborhood children played together and formed life-long friendships. But Daisy did not like that the neighborhood mothers knew her every move, so she chose to have a different experience for her own children because “I wanted my neighbors to be my neighbors, and my friends to be my friends.” Many of the kids from her childhood neighborhood are still friends with her to this day.

Daisy has found that, the older she gets, the harder it is to make close female friends. She thinks it is because her standards keep changing and she expects more from her friends now. She stated, “I don’t think anyone is as nice and giving as I am” and noted that not everyone can give as much as she can, but that is acceptable as long as the friendship is not “one-way.” She stated a friendship must be one in which she is getting as much back as what she is putting in. “It has to be a two-way street. It has to be caring for caring. It’s probably not a relationship you would want to have if it isn’t that way.” She said that over the years, her standards changed for what she looks for in a friend. I wondered if it was harder for Daisy to make friends now since she had such high standards and expected so much from her friends.
Most of her friends have been with her for over 25 years. Daisy insists on “loyalty” from her friends. She described a close friend as someone who is “there for you no matter what.” She said she should be able to call them for anything and that they are there to help celebrate and comfort in all of her life experiences. During our discussion, we talked about how some friends have hurt our feelings by “flaking out” on us by cancelling at the last minute with no excuse that was acceptable to us.

Daisy described her most meaningful friendship as her one friend that has come through for her during her best and worst times. “She can find the humor in the worst circumstances.” She likened her relationship with her friend with that of being a sister. They have traveled many parts of the world together and are very close. She said that some people, including her daughter, had wondered if they had a lesbian relationship. She could not believe anyone would think that, just because they are so close. Daisy and her friend have had many arguments over the years, but were able to work out their differences because their friendship meant so much to each of them. Although it was difficult to confront her friend on a particular issue, she felt she had to in order to preserve the friendship.

Daisy, who has been divorced twice and recently got out of a 22-year long relationship, stated: “I just can’t find one reason for them (men) to exist on the planet!” Her experience with men, including her father, is that they do not provide or help in any way. She said she could not think of any man for which she has respect. She was skeptical about the qualities I had discussed in regards to my husband, and added, “Just give it a couple of years.” Her parents divorced when she was 10 years old after she
overheard her mother yelling at him about his affair, and this absolutely “devastated” her. She said she loved her father so much as a child, and that she was “the apple of his eye.” She described herself as “Daddy’s girl and his little princess.” She described her father as “The superstar. It was like when he entered the room, all of the air in the room left. He was just bigger than life all the time.” She remarked that her mother was jealous of the attention he gave her, and that she never liked her mother. Her mother “never had an opinion of her own, was very quiet, and always in his shadow.” After the divorce, her mother became very depressed and would spend days in her room, refusing to come out. Daisy was left to care for her two-year-old sister. Child support payments did not come in regularly, and she said she went from “a princess to a pauper instantly.”

When her parents were divorcing Daisy’s father asked if he could take Daisy but her mother refused. She knew it was the one thing he loved, and Daisy said her mother did not want him to have anything he wanted. Daisy saw very little of her father after that. She said he would show up hours late for dates, or not show at all. “It was just heartbreaking.” She said they once went to Disneyland, but left shortly after arriving because her father did not like the long lines. “It was terrible!” And she recalled other times when he would have her and her sister out very late to dinner with friends, and he would spend all kinds of money on dinner, and she would think, “We have holes in our shoes and you’re spending all this money on your friends instead of us?” At the age of 13, Daisy wrote a letter to her father telling him how angry she was, and he broke things off with her. She said she got a lot of hate from her mother “that handed down.” She did not see him again until her mother’s funeral, when she was 23. She did not mend their
relationship until she was in her thirties, when she found out he was dying. Daisy said she and her father were very close when he died because she drove hours to see him every weekend and care for him. Although Daisy was able to reconcile with her father, it seems that she gives no other man the benefit of the doubt.

Growing up without a father influenced Daisy’s choices in men. She said she did not have very reliable husbands, and none of her relationships ever worked out satisfactorily. She said she was subconsciously looking for another man to love her and adore her the way her father did. This made me wonder if she had the same expectations for men as she did her female friends, and that it would also be nearly impossible for any man to fill the legendary shoes of her father. But she was miserable at home and, in order to get away from her mother, she got married at 16 and had her first child at 17. Daisy stressed that our conversation should be more focused on her dislike for her mother and how that influenced her life, rather than the absence of her father. She said she had a very rough time growing up with a mother who was clinically depressed.

**Delphinium**

Delphinium, a 62-year-old woman with a resounding laugh and gregarious manner, did not have many girlfriends growing up and mainly played with her male cousins. The first girlfriend she had was in the 4th grade, but she said she mainly liked the girl’s brothers. She could not remember the names of any of her girlfriends as a child, except the one in 4th grade. After she married her husband did not let her go out, and therefore, the only women she came into contact with were the spouses of her husband’s friends. But none of these women were close with her. After Delphinium’s daughter
turned 2, she befriended a woman in her apartment complex that “depended on me for everything.” Her husband “let up on some of the reins” and let her get out and do things with this woman. Delphinium finally got “a little freedom and saw what it was like for a while.” This friendship lasted 14 years, but once when Delphinium was no longer useful to her and when Delphinium needed help, “She wasn’t there.” Delphinium happily reported that she has one best friend now that she can call and “talk to about anything.” She noted, “If she hadn’t come into my life at that time, I would have been lost, really lost.” She met her because their daughters were friends and played softball together. Delphinium recalled not liking this friend at first because she was so outspoken. Being unwilling to speak up for herself, it shocked her to see someone so assertive. But her friend helped her to speak up, trust others, and be “more open.” At one point, Delphinium was trying to decide whether to stay with her husband, and her best friend took her away for a weekend. She said, “I thought I’d died and gone to Heaven!” She said she had no idea that “women could actually do stuff on their own.” This friendship has lasted 25 years so far. “Companionship, camaraderie and love” keeps the relationship going. Delphinium said the relationship “keeps just growing from what it was into a different aspect the older we get.” Delphinium finds it easier to make friends now that she is “more open,” and has other friends that she enjoys, but only one person whom she can call “when in trouble.” The friendships in the past were “very shallow” and did not have the “deepness” that her current friendship has now. She and her best friend have had some arguments in the past, but have been able to work them out. Overall, Delphinium reported being very happy
with her current female friends. She said that girlfriends “understand you much better than a man would and know where you are coming from.”

Delphinium was 5 years old when her parents divorced. Like many of us coresearchers, her father had cheated on her mother, remarried, and started a new family immediately. She said that he had already impregnated the other woman before he remarried. She remembers her mother frequently having to chase him down for child support. He was a bus driver and she would get on his bus and yell at him for money while Delphinium stayed in the car. She also remembers that her father and stepmother pushed her to visit with their baby often, something she disliked very much. She was very close to her mother, and recalls having much anger toward her father. She noted that he had a very nice house and seemed to be providing well for his new family, but had not taken good care of her or her mother financially.

Before the divorce, she was very close to her father and thought he was “everything.” She said her father thought she was “everything” too. She was disappointed to discover later that he “ran around a lot.” But her mother “adored him till the day she died” and “put up with him.” Her mother married 7 times and Delphinium described the men her mother chose as “weak.” None of her mother’s marriages lasted long even though her mother desperately wanted someone to love her. This saddened Delphinium greatly, especially after hearing her father’s promises of “I’ll always be around” but learning “he was never around.” Therefore, at the age of 10, she decided to have nothing more to do with him. It was the last time she ever saw him. But her mother persisted in trying to get them together. By the age of 15, Delphinium told her mother she
did not think he was a good person and to stop trying to get them together. She said her stepmother called after she heard about Delphinium having a baby, and told her that her father would love to meet the baby. Delphinium told her that he should call her, but he never did. When he died, and her stepmother called to see if she wanted to attend his funeral, Delphinium replied: “Well, don’t wait for me. I won’t be coming.” She said he never made the effort to contact her himself, and this really disappointed her.

Growing up without a father fueled Delphinium’s disrespect for men. She said, “I think they are useless.” This was a definite commonality she shared with her best friend Daisy. She stated her marriage of 30 years was “not intimate” and believed that “the things you read about that are all a legend.” What I think she meant by this was that there are romance novels that glorify marriage, and she does not believe marriage can be that wonderful. Seeing her mother yearning for love and marrying repeatedly “turned me off to it.” She had thought, “you were supposed to get married and have children, raise your children, and that was your life.” She said that since she had such an “uprooted childhood,” she decided never to divorce, and to raise all her kids in the same school. “Ya know, the storybook type thing.” So she began dating men who she said were just like her father at age 13, married young, had a baby at 17, and remained married despite being very unhappy for many years.

Alyssum

Alyssum met with me outside of a library near her home, and we talked while sitting on a bench with the sun shining down on us. Alyssum is a 35-year-old woman with thick, curly, red hair and a reserved demeanor. It was harder to get her to open up
than the rest of the coresearchers. She said she had completed a thesis and understood how difficult it was to get assistance, and that is why she wanted to help. Later, when I needed clarification after reviewing the transcriptions from our time together, she was very prompt in answering my questions, further elaborating on issues we had discussed.

She reported that she had always had a difficult time making friends and had never felt like she ever had enough. She only had one or two friends at a time, and had difficulty making friends “even before my Dad left.” She said that, since she is no longer in school, making friends is now more challenging. She even left one city to move to another because of her difficulties. She said she just could not make “any close relationships there.” Alyssum has many acquaintances and two “good girlfriends,” but they live far away. Her closest friend is someone who, “I can tell depressing, awful things to and she is still my friend. She doesn’t get turned off by that, and the same thing with her. We are really honest with each other.” She added, “I can tell her things I can’t tell anyone else.” She later commented that her friend has “way more emotional problems than me.”

Alyssum defined a friend as “someone you can be honest with and you don’t have to put on a happy smiley face all the time.” A good friend is “concerned about your life and is always willing to spend time to talk with you, and obviously it has to be the same way to them.” She said it is also important to feel comfortable and “be yourself.” Having fun, feeling safe, and being vulnerable with a friend is also critical to Alyssum. Good friends “feel like family in a way.” She reported not having any male friends currently. The problem with male friends is, “I always end up wanting to sleep with them. Either I
do or they do.” There is no sexual tension between her and her female friends, like there is with male friends. She also noted that women are more understanding and talk about their emotions more often. “They understand what we have to go through being a girl.”

Being picked on at school made it particularly challenging for Alyssum to make friends. She disclosed a belief that having depression and bipolar disorder have interfered with her ability to make friends. She questioned, “Who wants to be friends with someone who is depressed?” Alyssum blamed her father for some of her mental health issues stating, “because even when he was there, he was never really there.” She said that even today, she still does not feel she is a priority to him.

Alyssum’s parents divorced when she was 10 years old. She said she was always close with her mother, but her relationship with her father was “distant.” She said she remembers her mother encouraging him to do things with her, but since Alyssum was not interested in sports, her father’s favorite pastime, he was not interested in playing with her. Her older brother played sports and her father always had time for him. Alyssum vividly remembered a time she was trying to talk to her father while he was watching a football game, and how he later asked a question demonstrating he had not listened to anything she had said. “And to this day I can’t stand football. I couldn’t be with anyone who is into sports!” Her father planted himself in front of the television nightly after he returned home from work, and that was how he spent his time with his family.

After the divorce, Alyssum’s father eventually remarried and had a new family. She stated she is jealous of his kids because “they are doing so well and I’m not.” She does not have much to talk about with her father and only visits him once every few
years, but that when they do talk, he often brags about the accomplishments of his other children. This makes Alyssum feel unloved. Once, on his 80th birthday, they both got drunk and he admitted “to feeling horrible about not being around and that he’d cry about it,” but his behavior did not change after that disclosure. She described her father as “a big old wuss who let his new wife take over.” She recalled her mother interpreting the divorce by saying, “she already had two children and didn’t need three.” Alyssum said she has a tendency to date men who are like her father; passive, overly devoted, and loyal to the point that she thinks, “Get off!”

Alyssum said she could have used “his influence” when she was a teenager because of her promiscuity. She attributed her promiscuous behaviors to his not being there. She thinks she would have made more informed choices in boyfriends had her father been around. But she reported still being promiscuous. After the divorce, she said she did not see or hear from him for years, aside from an occasional birthday card. “I was pissed off at him.” She said she definitely felt abandoned by her father and added, “he kind of bailed and got a new family. He didn’t really deal with us. He really didn’t have a clue how to deal with me, so he just didn’t.”

Iris

Iris is a 44-year-old expressive woman with big, blue eyes, and a one-year-old daughter who recently started walking. She wanted to help me with my research because she has always been interested in “absent fathers, single women, and single-parent households.” Every Christmas she “adopts” a family and specifically requests a single-
mother home “because I saw how my mother struggled.” She commented that she would probably cry during our discussion, but that she would be okay.

Iris attributed her friend-making abilities to her being an only child. She said she had a very close friend in grade school, but lost contact with her. She also had a close friend in high school, and another very good friend in college. She said it is easy for her to make friends with women, but has always had difficulty with getting along with women in work relationships. However, she mentioned that it has been more difficult making friends in Los Angeles than in Chicago. She speculated it might be because people live further away from each other in Los Angeles than in Chicago. Her most meaningful female friendship was with a girl she met in grade school, but with whom she has since lost contact. She has been trying to find her on Facebook because she “loved her to death.” But she said all of her friendships have been meaningful.

A good friend, according to Iris, is “someone you can talk to, who will not spill your secrets, and knows what to share. She is someone who is there for you and who you can count on.” She said her closest friends “helped shape me.” She said it helped that her closest friend’s mother and her mother were friends, and that kept their relationship going. At one point, her best friend started to become very promiscuous, and that scared Iris because she was a “good girl,” but commented that she “eventually caught up with her and started hanging out more because we had that in common.” Initially this difference almost broke up the friendship, but Iris decided that “she was my best friend and was still who she was.” In her twenties, Iris reported jumping from one boyfriend to the next.
Being a new mother has placed time constraints on Iris’ ability to spend time with friends, despite that her best friend lives in her guesthouse. “My husband and child are my priorities now whereas before, my friends were my priority.” She makes an effort to keep in touch with her best female friend by celebrating holidays together on a date other than the actual holiday. Iris also belongs to a group of other mothers and participates with her daughter weekly in that. Iris and I met through one of these “Mommy” groups.

Iris did not feel a close bonding experience with female friends until a few years ago. She described feeling “a certain something” from female versus male friends because a female friend is “someone who is you.” She said she feels a closer bond now with female friends, but does not feel that kind of bonding with male friends, but could not explain why.

After Iris’ parents divorced when she was four years old and, subsequently watching her mom struggle, she never believed she would marry or have children. She recalled that she was not close with either of them, but did love and admire her mother. She said she felt thankful that she gave birth to a daughter so she could “re-do” the mother-daughter connection, since she did not have that with her own mother. She and her mother (who died last year) fought daily and she often wondered, “Is it me?” Since she was an only child, Iris could not “bounce things off of” anyone to find out if there was something wrong with her. But this question stayed in Iris’ mind often because her mother was “critical and controlling.” All of Iris’ mistakes were pointed out to her. She said her mother was pessimistic and that these traits carried over to Iris eventually. Iris
made a conscious choice to stop being critical of her husband once she realized how much she was like her mother, and how badly she wanted to be different from her.

All of her life, Iris said she “imagined this type of relationship” with her father; a relationship in which he truly cared for her and never let her down. She “romanticized” her father and always thought of herself as “Daddy’s girl or Daddy’s Princess,” but later realized this was all a fantasy. Eventually, she “gave up the dream” and decided, “You’re not worth it. You’re not worth my time. Get out of my life.” She said he would occasionally call to see how she was doing, but it was only when he “felt like it.” Tired of this kind of treatment, she ceased contact with him for twelve years. Then one day he mailed her a birthday card with $100 for her newborn, and she decided to forgive him. She said she realized he would never be “what I wanted or imagined as a father or grandfather, just someone who happens to be my father.”

As she gave examples of how her father let her down on two particularly important occasions, she wept. She said that even though she has “worked through it” she still goes back to the time she was eight years old, sick in the hospital, and waiting in vain for her father to keep his promise to visit. She said it was on the last occasion, when she was thirty years old, that she gave up the dream of having the ideal relationship with her father. It had been the only time she had ever “reached out to him” with a request to visit her mother in the hospital, but he never showed up, despite his promise that he would. She described her father as “a coward” and said she would always be disappointed and angry that he would never “man up” and say, “I screwed up and would
like to have a meaningful relationship with my daughter.” This was the dream Iris held onto for thirty years.

Now that Iris has a daughter of her own and sees her husband as such a devoted father, she cannot comprehend how any parent could “walk out” on their child. Her father never paid child support, but her mother always allowed him to visit whenever he wanted, which was not often. She said she just cannot understand abandoning a child and that she would never abandon her daughter.

Having an absent father prompted Iris to consider never marrying or having children. She also spends a lot of time trying to help single mothers. She believes not having a solid father figure influenced her to be promiscuous and date “bad guys.” She said her whole life she felt abandoned by her father.

**Poppy**

Poppy is an attractive 41-year-old woman who is the sole breadwinner for her husband, who is currently a student, and has 2-year-old son. She is a reserved, slender looking woman with dark rimmed glasses and long brown hair. Poppy is very thoughtful in her responses during the interview, pausing to give each question much consideration. She was also the only coresearcher who challenged me on some of my responses.

Growing up Poppy did not have many friends, but did have two close friends in her teen years and has two close friends now. Since she has married and had a son she has found it difficult to devote time to her friends. She reported having difficulty making friends growing up because she never felt like she measured up to the wealthy girls in her private school. Poppy said her friends now are close and described a good friend as
“someone you love like a sister, someone you can trust, who knows you, gets you, understands you.” She added that a friend is someone “who won’t judge you, so you can be weak and say whatever you need to say.”

It was difficult for her to pinpoint her most meaningful relationship with a female friend because “they have all been meaningful, but at different stages.” The friendships she has now she believes will be life-long because they are very close, talk frequently, and “are there for every event and milestone.” Her friends have taught her to be more assertive and how to take care of herself. “Respect and love and frequent contact” kept the relationships going. She described her current relationships as “two-way” and added that the relationships “are more equal, now it is more sharing” whereas before, she was always “piggybacking on friends for entertainment and knowledge.” One of her closest friends became very angry with her once when Poppy cancelled a camping trip because her boyfriend was not going. They did not speak for two years, but Poppy reached out by sending her a card and they worked things out. Poppy also said she is often tired and has a lot of things to do with her husband and son, and this prevents her from spending as much time with female friends as she would like. She noted that her husband and son are her priority now, over her female friends. She has no male friends, but believes female friends are much better because “they understand the issues you’re going through.” She does not see a need for a male friend other than her husband, who she describes as her “best friend.”

Poppy’s parents divorced when she was three years old. Her father was never a part of her life in any way. She said she often “fantasized about him and wanted him.”
Her mother worked full-time when she was growing up, so she never felt like anyone was there to “scoop” her up. Growing up without her father left her feeling unprotected and “insecure.” She said this caused her to always fear that her boyfriends would leave her, and now that something “terrible will happen to my child.” “Deep searching and therapy” helped Poppy regain a sense of security that she needed in her twenties. She also majored in psychology in college, which she found helpful.

Her father remarried immediately after the divorce and had two more children. She said she had heard that he used to carry a picture of her in his wallet, but this did not move her. She said when she and her mother were about to relocate, she knew he had heard about it, but did not visit to say goodbye. The last she saw him, he gave her some toys and told her he was leaving and that he probably would never see her again. She heard that he has since died. Poppy said she always had wanted to meet him because they looked so much alike and because “I wanted to have a Daddy,” but now he “isn’t important.” She said she remembers asking about him often and wanting and missing him. She said she wanted him to be a part of her life when she was growing up. But because he “is a stranger and wouldn’t be able to recognize me on the street” she gave up the dream of meeting or having a relationship with him. She said he never helped her mother financially and “didn’t reach out at all.” She used to look at his picture and “get romantic,” but would then think “What did you do for us?” and stop caring.

Now that Poppy is a mother, she says she tries to “tone it down a bit” when arguing with her husband because she wants her son to “have both parents that love and respect each other and to grow up with love and respect.” Poppy challenged me as to
why I would forgive my father if he wanted to start having a relationship with my
daughter and me. It was strange because I could not give a reason as to why I would
allow him back in my life. She said that she “isn’t very forgiving” but did not understand
why I would “let a stranger” into my home. This definitely sent me into a great deal of
contemplation, and I have since given up “the dream” of having my father beg for my
forgiveness and become the father I always dreamed and wanted. I even wrote him a
farewell letter as a closure for myself.

Poppy’s mother interpreted the divorce by disclosing her father’s infidelity, but
never said anything bad about him. Poppy said she definitely felt abandoned by her
father. She disclosed that growing up with an absent father left her with much insecurity.
She said she often believed she “wasn’t good enough” or “didn’t deserve” a boyfriend’s
love. She reported having an abusive boyfriend in her twenties. She also noted that she
always needed to have a “Plan B,” so she frequently cheated on her boyfriends to make
sure she had “someone waiting in the wings.” She later disclosed she had been sexually
abused by an uncle, and believed that had her father been around this never would have
happened. At the end of the interview, she stated that it felt strange to talk about her “old
self” because she believes she has grown and changed in so many positive ways since her
younger days.

Violet

Violet is a very skinny 44-year-old woman who answered my ad on Craigslist.
She had long, dark hair, and a cackling kind of laugh one gets from smoking for much of
one’s life. She had a lot to say about everything I asked, and our interview lasted over
three hours. She articulated very clearly and passionately. She said she was motivated to be in my study because she suspected she would be different from the rest of the women I interviewed, and in some ways she was.

Violet said that growing up she disliked females. She was often jealous of them and would sometimes beat them up or “go out to bleed them.” Once she even pulled the braid out of a girl’s hair. She said she did not respect women and grew up in poverty. Single mothers ran most of the households. Violet recalls feeling the need to prove that she was tough and should not be picked on because she was so thin. People teased her and said she was emaciated looking because her mother was on welfare. “I had such a complex to overcome.” She said her perspective on women changed when she was about 13 years old, after her four closest friends moved away and she spent the summer alone. Violet said she started thinking about her life, and questioned why she was so often violent to other girls, as well as adult women. The decision to start being kind to others changed her life. “I didn’t want to be such an angry person anymore. There were a lot of people I had to make amends to.” Violet recalls being “in awe” of older women then and viewing them as “powerful and intelligent.”

She said she met one of her best friends when she was thirteen. Her friend was seven and Violet babysat her often. She said she was impressed with how well her little friend could articulate. She became her “soulmate.” Her friend had heroin-addicted parents and had to overcome a lot. Violet respects her friend because of this. She met another close friend who she speaks to daily when she was very young. It was difficult making friends initially because “it always started with animosity.” Violet’s closest
friends speak with her daily and she described her relationship with her closest friend as “magical.” She noted that they touch each other often in a loving way and have taught each other many things.

She described a good friend as someone who is “compassionate, knows my needs, wants to take care of some of those needs, respects me.” She said it is a privilege to have a friend ask her for advice. Despite her close relationship with her best friend she still described her as “selfish.” She said if she did not tell her friend to stop and listen to her problems it would be very one-sided. Her friend will listen to her but only after Violet has told her to do so. She said she is “the most self-absorbed person I’ve ever known,” but added that her friend recognizes this and tries to work on it. She has taught her friend to think of others and her friend has taught her “how to love,” since Violet came from a family where no one said, “I love you.” The closest thing to love was, “Sleep tight. Don’t let the bedbugs bite” from her mother each night.

One of her biggest upsets with a female friend happened when a twelve-year-long friendship ended abruptly after a vacation they took together. She said her friend got upset with her over a guy and they never spoke again. Violet tried in vain to reconnect but her friend refused. She said it is “still heartbreaking to this day because we got along so well.” She also spoke of having several friends with lots of psychological, chemical dependency, or legal problems that she tries to help. “Mediator” is the term she used to describe her role with her friends and family.

Female friends offer something that male friends cannot, according to Violet. She posited that women could understand her perspective and share her feelings. She said,
“Women work off of emotions.” She said that it is an “immediate” emotional connection with a woman, whereas with a male friend she has to work her way to the “emotional stuff.” She and her friends “reinforce each other all the time” and “praise” each other.

Violet’s parents divorced before she was born. She did not see her father until she was four years old. She remembers confronting him about having two wives at the time since he had remarried without divorcing her mother. Violet’s mother struggled financially since no child support came in, and at the age of nine she recalled demanding he send money to her mother. Her mother scolded her never to do that again and told her she had made a “conscious decision” not to have him in their lives. Although her father came to visit on occasion, it was mostly to see Violet’s mother, rather than the children. Feelings of anger and abandonment filled the young Violet and she refused to “give him anything emotionally,” but never felt hate for him. She said that she felt like she was a “special” girl and a “gift,” and was angry that he did not know her or recognize how “full of life” she was. She stated that she was very attached to him though because she always heard how much she was like her father. But things changed after she spent more time with him at the age of 25. She said she really got to know him and confronted him on his abandoning her and her family. It was then that she forgave her father and became much closer to him.

Despite Violet’s mother having to work two jobs, she made time to play and talk with Violet regularly. Violet said her mother “imparted great morals and values” and described her as a “quality mother.” Her mother had four children by Violet’s father, and
she worked most of the day and night to support her family. Violet respected her mother’s hard work, but felt sad that she had to struggle so much.

Not having a father in the home influenced Violet in that she “tried to be the star child to impress my mother” and later had troubled relationships and marriages. She said since her older sister got pregnant at 13, she did not pursue boys very much at a young age. Having no father in the home left Violet feeling she had no “sense of security” and was not able to make good decisions when it came to relationships. From these relationships she had two daughters, one of whom is blind. She said that she is very close with them and one daughter still lives with her. Violet had been laid off from a job months prior and has been struggling financially. She had met me for this discussion after she completed a job interview, and expressed a lot of hope and optimism that she might get the job.

Petunia (Me)

Petunia is an outgoing, passionate 39-year-old woman with a daughter under the age of two. Her parents divorced when she was five. Her father cheated on her mother, quickly remarried, and started a new family. Initially he would see her every summer and give her an occasional phone call, but the contact eventually shrunk to two cards a year, with all contact ending in 2007. Petunia stated that for most of her life she dreamed of having a special relationship with her father, but now realizes that he would have to be a completely different person for that to happen. She, like so many other coresearchers, has “given up the dream.” He “is not a good person, and even if he wanted back in my life now, I wouldn’t feel comfortable with him being around my daughter. He is a
stranger to me.” He also broke many promises and never made any effort to see her as she grew. He never celebrated any of her life’s milestones. All of the visits she had with him were from her flying or driving to see him. She described him as “arrogant, reckless, self-absorbed, holier-than-thou, and short-tempered.” He cut the relationship off with her and her entire family in 2007, and she recently decided to write him a letter saying goodbye to him as a closure for herself.

Another common theme shared by so many of the women coresearchers involved promiscuity. Petunia noted, “It was a miracle I didn’t get pregnant in high school.” She went from one boyfriend to the next, and the majority of these young men were not kind. She was often cheated on or emotionally or physically abused. She said that growing up without a father left her feeling like she had “no security.” She often felt “unlovable” and became very depressed. To help combat this, Petunia read many self-help books about father absence and increasing self-esteem and began to see a counselor on a regular basis. Later she chose counseling as her profession “in hopes of helping other young women combat depression and low self-esteem.”

Petunia was always close with her mother growing up, but almost “too close.” “My mother wanted to know everything about me, including all secrets. I often felt like she was trying to live vicariously through me.” Her mother often spoke badly of her father and she felt that her hate and anger for her father were definitely “handed down.” This contributed to Petunia’s low self-esteem and depressive feelings. Although her father was forced to pay child support, her mother struggled financially and incurred massive credit card debt.
Petunia stated that making friends growing up was a challenge and that not all friends she did make could be trusted with secrets. Although she had many female acquaintances, she did not feel emotionally close with any. She noticed that all the friends she’d had typically had numerous problems. As she got older, she found many women unloaded their problems on her, but when she wanted to disclose a problem they were not interested. She liked helping others and feeling needed, but later termed this a “one-way street” kind of relationship. It was only in her mid-twenties that she finally met a woman with whom she could feel vulnerable and divulge secrets. She said she now only allows relationships in her life that are “a two-way street.”

Making friends is not as difficult as it used to be, but Petunia finds little time for friends now that she has a husband, young daughter, and another child on the way. She also described her husband as her best friend. She tried some “Mommy groups” and made acquaintances, but most of her closest, longest-lasting friendships are with women who live out of state. Her best female friendship has lasted fifteen years and she regards this woman like a sister. “She is the first woman I was ever able to feel safe enough to cry to.” Even though they live far from each other, they make it a point to call, write, and visit regularly to keep the ties strong.

Composite Portrait

The composite portrait summarizes the common experiences illuminated by us coresearchers. I returned to the original data, summaries, and notes taken to once again immerse myself in the essence of each woman’s experiences. After completing the individual narratives, I sent them to the coresearchers to check for accuracy and see if
anything needed revised or added. After getting approval from the coresearchers on the narratives, I reviewed the narratives and transcripts thoroughly for common themes to develop the composite portrait.  

The experience of having a father abandon a daughter can sometimes create challenges for the young woman as she grows and develops. The woman I spoke with and shared my experiences with also had some difficulty in making close female friends growing up. It may have been easy to make a female acquaintance, but getting close to another female did not usually happen until high school or college. But these close female friendships have continued to this day. Although the best female friends often live miles apart, she makes an effort to call and send cards regularly to keep the relationship going. She has at least one best friend, even if this friend lives in a different state.  

The friends made growing up were often very needy or had emotional or psychological problems. She enjoyed being able to help her friends, however. She was able to teach her friends many things and, in turn, learn valuable skills as well. Her best friend is more than a friend and is regarded as family, “like a sister.” She is mostly satisfied with the number of close female friends currently, which is fortunate, because she finds it “harder to make close female friends nowadays.” If she has any male friends, they are not as close. Female friends are preferred because “they know you; they get you.” Female friends also are more emotional and “can understand where you are coming from because they are you.”
The woman I spoke with shared that, as a child, she adored her father and often “romanticized” him. She dreamed of an ideal father/daughter relationship in which he would spend time with her regularly, keep his promises, shower her with love, make her feel special and secure, remember her milestones, apologize for mistakes, and make every effort to see her. But after he cheated on her mother and immediately left to start a new family, his visits became more sporadic, promises were often broken, milestones were passed and forgotten, and she never received any apologies. Despite not having many memories of her father she grew up feeling “a lack of security” and became promiscuous. She said she was always searching for someone to love her and ended up dating many “bad guys.” To help her overcome some of these problematic behaviors she sought counseling or read many self-help books dealing with father abandonment, depression, and ways to increase self-esteem.

Her mother struggled financially since her father never paid child support, but she never spoke badly of him. But this did not stop her from becoming very angry with him for abandoning her as a child. She stated that, because of her father, she never thought she would ever marry or have children. Despite this, she did marry, but eventually divorced before remarrying again. She also had a child to whom she is completely devoted. She noted several times that she cannot imagine “abandoning her child” like her father abandoned her and that she wants to create a different experience for her child.

After speaking with all of the coresearchers, transcribing the interviews, reading, and reviewing the transcripts, and contacting them for clarification, I allowed time for reflection and incubation. Through the richness of these discussions, the extensive
literary search, my personal experiences, and the heuristic practice of self-dialogue and immersion, common themes emerged as I explored the individual experiences in detail. I found individual themes for each coresearcher, and uncovered themes shared by all us coresearchers.

**Emerging Themes**

I found 44 emerging themes, which distilled to 6 core essence themes, but only included themes mentioned by at least four of the seven coresearchers for the composite portrait. Therefore, the composite portrait included 28 themes, and all core essence themes. Here are the core essence themes with the emerging themes under each core theme. The core essence themes are then illustrated with coresearchers’ experiences and feelings.

**Core Essence Themes**

**The satisfaction of close female friends:** This core essence theme embraces the themes of taught and learned from friends, are prolific card senders, have at least one close female friend, close female friends are like family, and are mostly satisfied with close female friends.

**Obstacles faced in making close female friends:** This core essence theme incorporated the themes of friends having significant problems, difficulty making friends growing up, friends live far away, harder to make close female friends now, little time for friends since having a baby, gives more than gets back from friends, and husband is best friend.
Mother’s influence also needs consideration: This core essence theme includes not liking mother, having to care for depressed mother, mother wanted the father back, hate handed down, and mother never spoke badly about father.

Yearning for Daddy: This core essence theme involved adoring father, fantasizing about the ideal father/daughter relationship, being Daddy’s princess, and forgiving father.

Father behaving badly: This core essence theme combined the themes father cheated, father started new family immediately, no child support provided, mother struggled financially, broken promises, no apologies, and passive father.

Negative feelings and behaviors connected with father absence: This core essence theme consists of: Angry at father, feeling of abandonment, cannot imagine abandoning child, having been married and divorced at least once, thinking she would never have children, dating “bad” guys, promiscuity, sought therapy and/or read self help books, no feeling of security, low self-esteem, depression, no respect for men, married late, married early, and not believing in love.

Core Essence Themes in Detail

The Satisfaction of Close Female Friends:

Friends are like family.

All the coresearchers described their best female friendships to be as close to them as an actual family member, mainly a sister. Additionally, Poppy described a good friend as a “soul sister” and “someone you love like a sister.” Violet described her best female friend as her “soul mate.” Alyssum stated, “They feel like family in a way.” Iris
stated of her friend, “She has been through all this stuff with me, I mean, we go way back, kind of like a sister.”

**Teaching and learning from friends.**

All coresearchers shared the theme of teaching and learning from friends. Delphinium credited her ability to leave her controlling husband of thirty years to her friendship with Daisy who was very outspoken and assertive:

She opened me up to different aspects of life that I’d never even thought about it. I mean, I was closed off to ya know, you had to be the right kind of person, you had to clean your house, you had to have everything perfect all the time. You had to take care of everything. I took care of everything. And I never left my husband at night. I would never spend a night away from home or anything. And ya know, it was just like, she took me away for a weekend, and I thought I’d died and gone to Heaven! I didn’t have to do anything? She took care of everything. And I thought, my God! Women can actually do stuff on their own? They don’t have to depend on. And it wasn’t that I couldn’t do it, cause I always did it. Anytime we went on trips I always planned everything, I did everything, but I knew he was going to be there, ya know? But for me to go out and be on my own? I would never have tried that.

She elaborated on how her friendship with Daisy strengthened her character:

She opened me up to not being so afraid of everything because I was always so held back and not able to open myself up. So it has become a lot easier for me to let people in, where I wouldn’t.
Iris said her friends “helped shape me.” Poppy described an enormous change in confidence because of her best friend:

I learned to be strong in my twenties from her because I used to be very, very shy and very, very reserved and kind of to myself. I learned how to be outspoken, and to defend myself, and now I’m very much, what I need comes first, not selfish, but meaning I take care of my stuff first. It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks.

Poppy added:

In my twenties, I had a lot to learn. I was coming out of a lot of insecurities and kind of not knowing myself well. I piggybacked on friends for entertainment and knowledge, but now it is more equal, now it is more sharing. It is both ways, it’s two-way, not like in my twenties when it was one-way. In my twenties it was, I looked to them for strength. It’s not like that at all now.

Violet’s best friend grew up with heroin-addicted parents and said that her friend told her:

If you weren’t in my life, I wouldn’t have achieved this. It is because of you I articulate, not because of my parents. Because you were in my life for so long, and you used all those big words, and I’d say, ‘What does that mean, what you just said?’ and we talk about it all the time and she says, ‘That was the beginning of my education.’

But Violet also learned from her friend:

She was very loving. She came from a very loving household. She knew how to demonstrate love. I didn’t come from a household that demonstrated love. All we
heard was, “Night night. Don’t let the bedbugs bite.” That to us meant, “I love you.” Her friend came from a household where her Dad, everytime she would walk out the door would say, “I love you. I love you more than words can say.” And her thing was, “I love you all the way to the sky.” We’d come back from somewhere and he’d say, “Who were you guys talking to out there?” He wanted to make sure we weren’t getting involved with the druggies in our neighborhood. He’d say, “You’re both loving individuals.” He’d tell her how special she was, and then tell me how special I was. He said our presence would “bring a light into the house” and that he “couldn’t wait” for us to get home so he could be with us. He made you feel like you were of love. So she taught me how to love like that, verbally, and physically. She’ll just twirl my hair sometimes. And I’ll take care of her hangnails. I don’t do this with everybody. My family, we hug each other, but there is no frilly playing with hair. Or I’ll paint her toenails because we are watching a movie and her feet are there. That isn’t the tendency we have in our family.

She later added that her friendship with her best friend caused her to become more affectionate:

It has definitely opened my heart over the years. I think she helped me love my children the way I wanted to love them. I’m very hands-on with them. I still want to hug my 15-year-old. I want to feel her breasts on me. I want to get good hugs.
Violet also described teaching her friends:

And I try to give her good advice. I remind her that one friend is selfish, that we all know that about her, and I encourage her to talk to her assertively about it. It will never be resolved; your feelings will continue to be hurt, unless you communicate your feelings with her. You have to discuss it with her, and now she calls to vent to me less.

**Prolific card senders.**

Four coresearchers shared the theme of sending lots of letters to keep in touch. I always thought that my card sending habits must be a bit unusual because people frequently commented on how thoughtful I was to always remember their birthdays, anniversaries, and other important milestones and holidays. I discovered that many other coresearchers also are major card senders. My father said he would only remain in my life if I would remember my stepmother’s birthday and if I did not, he would forget me as his daughter. So it is likely that is another reason why I am such a prolific card sender to this day. I have all my cards organized and I am always looking for specials on cards. My husband thinks it is crazy how many cards I have. It used to really bother me how few cards I would receive from others. But now there is Facebook and people can easily tell you happy birthday, and I have used that more too. It is cheap, easy, and quick. So, now, for the people who never acknowledge my birthday, I just send them a happy birthday on Facebook. I save the postage. Not everyone can be so thoughtful or place as much importance on this habit. Now, I only send cards to the people who really mean a lot to me. Daisy was the most prolific card sender I have ever met. She stated:
I send cards to every friend and their children for every occasion. So, Christmas, New Years, Thanksgiving, Easter, St. Patrick’s Day, Valentine’s Day, ya know? And usually with the little kids I send stickers or $5 or $10. I do that with all my friends.

Daisy noted how she kept in touch with her father:

By the time he died we were pretty close with him, I mean not like, we didn’t see a lot of him, but we talked to him on the phone and sent cards, and we sent money, which when I was younger I hated that. I wanted him to go out, well, it was stupid, I realized that, but I wanted him to go out and buy me something.

Poppy used card sending to resolve a conflict with a very close female friend:

I heard she was getting married, so I sent her a card congratulating her on her marriage, and she sent me an email saying thank you and I basically said that I wasn’t even sure exactly why we fought, but I made the effort to reach out to her and she was kind of shaky about it. We met for lunch and it wasn’t the best lunch, but she invited me to the wedding and we got close again.

Iris communicated with her father through the mail, and eventually told him she was forgiving him by sending him a card. Iris stated that one way she kept in touch with a close female friend was by remembering her friend’s mother. “I knew her mom and would always send her a Christmas card, and she knew my mom and would see her different places. That always helped. I was always on her mind.”
One current close friend.

All seven coresearchers shared the theme of having at least one very close female friend currently. Daisy stated:

But ‘C’ has come through for me the most out of all my friends and she cheers me up in a way that, even in the worst of circumstances, can find the humor in it. She doesn’t tell jokes or anything, but can see humor in the day or the catastrophe or whatever. And I, um, she is just an all around trustworthy friend and we travel together and do different things together, so she would probably be my best friend. Now my sister, we have a very unique situation. I think of my sister as my best friend as well, but she would be above ‘C’ if she wasn’t my sister. We are very close.

Delphinium stated of Daisy:

I have one really good friend, because it is a two-way street. I do have a lot of acquaintances at work, but not like, if I was in trouble, I’d only call one person. She calls me when she is in trouble; I call her when I’m in trouble. My other friends, I have a good time with them; we go out together, they tell me their problems and I listen to them, but as far as if I needed something or needed a really good friend, I call my best friend. My daughter has a friend that is like a daughter to me. She would be there, but it is because I raised her. But as far as real friends, I just have one main friend. I do have work friends and going out friends, but as far as telling them something that I wouldn’t want told, or something that was really meaningful, it would be my one best friend.
Alyssum said:

I would say she is the closest person to me because I can tell her depressing, awful things and she is still my friend. She doesn’t get turned off by that, and the same thing with her. And she and I are really honest with each other. If she asks me, “Am I being really out of line?” I can say, “Yeah, you are.” She takes that just fine, so, that is probably the person I would say is the closest, even though we don’t live that close. We don’t even talk that often. She is just somebody I can talk to like I can’t talk to anybody else. I can tell her things I can’t tell anyone else.

Iris noted that her closest female friend is from high school. “We are very close. Our moms were close, so that was meaningful. They helped shape me.” Poppy discussed two close female friends:

One of them is more sarcastic and critical, but not to a point that I feel she is judging me, it is just that we have very different ideas about things. I believe in God; she is an atheist. That is a big thing for us. She is more factual and I’m more emotional. And I have another friend, and we are all close, but those two are meaningful because they are always there for every event, for every milestone. I speak to them every couple of days. The girlfriend that is in San Francisco I speak to her every 3 or 4 days. The girlfriend that lives here I see every couple of weeks. So we are pretty, I feel that these relationships will probably last me for the rest of my life.
Violet stated that her best friend is someone she used to babysit:

She is my soul mate and I’m hers. We discuss everything. We have a loving relationship. Not only is it expressed, but we touch each other all the time. Our children love each other. We have a really wonderful relationship. I think about not having it in my life, and I think “Wow. Everybody deserves to have this in their life.”

I agree with Violet in this regard, and used to feel sorry for myself that it took so long to find a close female friend. But I am thankful I have a very close friend that I talk to at least monthly and see a few times a year.

**Satisfaction with friends.**

All coresearchers expressed satisfaction with their current female friends, however two wished for more. Alyssum stated:

Well I’m happy with the girlfriends I have, but I’d like to have more of a crew, a group to do things with. I really have three people I can call up and do things with and if those three people are busy, then I’m kind of on my own. It would be nice to be closer with them too, and we are getting there slowly. Since I’ve moved back I’ve been trying to rebuild these relationships that had a little bit of a relationship with before. I’ve been trying really hard because I have all this free time and I really want to spend it with people and do stuff. I’m just trying to rebuild that. I’m moderately satisfied with my friendships. I’m making progress.
Delphinium excitedly stated:

I like all my female friends! I really have a good satisfaction with them because I have a lot of them as far as the ones where I live. I have people that I used to go to Curves with, I have a group where we go out every so often, I have people at my school that are retired and/or are still working there, we go out a lot, and they are a group that are very close with me, not to the extent that L and I are, but very close as far as being able to talk to them and everything, but not with real problem problems, but I’m good. I’m really good.

But Daisy stated having some dissatisfaction with Delphinium:

‘C’ and I have gone through all kinds of battles with money. She is a kind of parent to her daughter and I am a certain kind of parent to my daughters, and they aren’t even close, our parenting methods. So we have had differences about that. You know, just being thoughtful. I will think to do something, and it won’t even occur to her. For example, we went to Sea World and I took pictures and she took pictures. I got mine developed for her as well, but she didn’t give me her copies. So it is like a petty little thing, but it does hurt my feelings. I mean, she knew I was doing it for her, so why didn’t she do it for me?

Poppy said she is mostly satisfied with her female friendships, but would like some things to change:

I don’t have time to sit and analyze that part of my relationship anymore because I am so, so tired. I wish the one friend of mine who just had her second baby lived
here so I could socialize with her and that our kids could be together. The other girlfriend who lives here, I love her dearly. She doesn’t have any kids. That is exhausting sometimes and makes an effort to be with us, but it is a level of understanding she doesn’t have that makes it difficult. For example, she called me yesterday and asked me if I wanted to have dinner. I can’t do last minute things. I have to plan things out. But she has been so understanding.

She added:

I think if I had to wish on a star, I would have loved to have seen her get married and have a kid so we would have more similarities. I feel like she isn’t doing enough to make these things a reality. She acts like she wants these things but when she is talking about dating, I’m talking about marriage, which is totally different. I wish she had more commonality with me. I wish she had a baby and a husband and we could all go out to dinner together.

Violet described sometimes feeling needy around her friends:

I have a lot of satisfaction with my current friends. There are times when I get a bit jealous of a friend spending more time with another friend, but then I ask, “Uh, how old are you? Five?” I’m able to talk myself into being an adult again. I have to realize she isn’t doing it intentionally. I have one friend that I’m thinking of that we say we love each other on the phone and give each other hugs. But there is a little circle between the three of us, and this one friend always feels left out. I have been mostly satisfied with my female friends, but am sorry they live far away and are seen so infrequently. I, like Alyssum, would like to have “more of a crew,” especially
closer to home. I also can relate to the jealousy Violet described, especially when one of my closest childless female friends goes away on an all-female trip and I cannot go.

**Obstacles Faced in Making Close Female Friends**

**Friends living far away.**

Six of the seven coresearchers mentioned that their closest female friends lived in another state, several hours away. This was upsetting, but they noted that keeping in touch with them is a high priority. Daisy, Poppy, Iris, and I send lots of cards, letters, and emails to our best friends to keep the relationship going. My best friend and I used to write each other postcards every week or two after meeting in Germany in 1996. We continued corresponding until we started visiting regularly. Poppy also calls her best friend “every three or four days.” Violet talks to her best friend almost daily. Alyssum drives to see her friends a few times a year, and Delphinium drives to see her best friend Daisy monthly. Being that so many of us established these relationships later in our development, we have made maintaining these relationships a top priority.

**Friends with significant problems.**

All coresearchers shared the theme of having female friends with serious problems, but wanting to help them out. Growing up, I felt like a magnet for people with problems. I eventually went into the profession of counseling since it became so natural to listen to others’ problems. Many of my friends had been sexually or emotionally abused, or in abusive relationships. I could not understand why I always attracted women who were so needy to “unload” on me all the time. It left me feeling needed, however, and I enjoyed helping others. I eventually found these relationships far too one-sided and
started cutting these unhealthy relationships out of my life. Delphinium stated that one of her first female friends became close with her because she started helping her so much. “She depended on me for everything.” Unfortunately, however, when it was Delphinium’s turn to need help “she wasn’t there.” Daisy disclosed that her best friend:

is one of those people who spends a lot of money. I call it impulse buying. She never has any money, but she buys. So that just drives me crazy. In the beginning I had some money, so we would travel and I would pay for her way and then she would buy herself outlandish gifts for herself and everyone and I was paying for the trip! And that became a serious issue, very, very serious.

Alyssum stated that she and her best friend “share similar neuroses, but she is a lot worse than I am.” Poppy noted that she has been having problems with one of her closest female friends because:

she is a mother of two, but behaves like an 18-year-old girl. And that is just not…it is really important for her to travel and she is clubbing all the time and is in her 40s, well, she is 41, she is my age.

Violet’s best friend grew up with heroin-addicted parents. She has another friend that she is starting to “pull back from” because “she is with a bad man and she has lost her kids and her house. And I know she is doing drugs. She lost everything.” Violet also mentioned another female friend of hers whose “kids were out of control. Her son actually injured my legally blind daughter by stabbing her with a pencil in her mouth!” I have to admit that hearing I was not alone in making such one-sided friendships made me feel less aberrant. It comforted me in a strange way to know other people had been
used as a counselor without having the favor returned. I had always wondered if there was something wrong with me because I could not make “normal” friends who could be my friend in return.

**Difficulty making friends growing up.**

Six of us coresearchers noted having difficulty making close female friends growing up. Delphinium disclosed:

I didn’t have a lot of peers growing up when I was young. I got along with my boy cousins great. I don’t think I had any. Like I said we moved a lot, so I never went to a school for a full year ever. So I never made girlfriends in school. I do remember one in 3rd or 4th grade named Gloria and I spent a lot of time with her, but she had brothers that I liked. That was the connection there. I never kept in contact with her when we moved to CA. I never had any girlfriends there either. When I was in sports I had one friend. We ran around together for a year or so. I can’t remember her name now. I never really had any girlfriends, then I got married. I didn’t have friends. It was just him. It was that way most of my life. We had some friends we hung around with and they had wives. They would be my friends, but nothing really close. I would never go out with them or call and just talk or anything. I didn’t have friends like that until my youngest daughter was 2.
Delphinium also stated that her early friendships:

were very shallow before. They never got to any degree of intenseness or anything. They were always very on the surface. Just people you’d talk to or might do something fun with, but never the deepness, the friendship that I have now.

Alyssum noted feeling badly about her difficulties making friends:

Well, I’ve always had problems with, I’ve always wanted to have more friends and have thought I’ve never had enough friends or whatever. I’ve always just had one or two friends at a time as a kid. Growing up, it’s been, even before my Dad left, it has always been an issue. I don’t know if I would relate it at all. It was always an issue for me on making good friends.

Iris noted that although it was easy for her to make female friends growing up: however, “I only recently started feeling that kind of bonding. No, I didn’t mean to imply I’ve always felt that way.”

Poppy described the challenges she has had in making close female friends, which was an issue shared with most of the coresearchers. Poppy stated that making close female friends:

has been difficult. I went to a private girl’s school, so I only had to deal with girls. I’ve always had an easier time making friends with boys. I always thought they were cooler. I always liked boys. So I had an easier time with boys. Girls were more challenging because they were more cliquey and they are stand-offish. The school that I went to, the girls were very wealthy. It was a private Jewish school,
with wealthy girls who had their own beach houses. One of the girl’s fathers was
the editor of Shape magazine, another owned a bank. It was very difficult to
measure up to that. I felt very, I came from a lower middle class family, so it was
very, very difficult.

Violet stated, “Growing up I really didn’t like females, like when I was five or six.” She
added:

I was a bully when I was very young. I’d go out to bleed them. I used to start
fights with girls. I fought a lot when I was young. I felt like I had to prove
myself. I once ripped a braid out of a girl’s hair.

I never felt I could be vulnerable with any of my female friends when I was younger
because I never felt close with them. I did not make my first close female friend until I
was 25.

**Harder making friends now.**

Four coresearchers shared the theme of having a harder time making close female
friendships now. Alyssum posited:

It’s just now when you’re older it is more difficult to make friends since we’re not
in school. I have a lot of acquaintances, but I don’t have a lot of friends. I don’t
know what that is. I’ve been working on that a lot over the last couple of years
and it’s kind of why I left Austin. I couldn’t seem to have any close relationships
there.
Iris, a Chicago native, noted that although she has one female friend who happens to be a lesbian:

The friends I have here just don’t compare to the ones I had in Chicago. There just isn’t that closeness. Maybe it’s because she is a lesbian that we don’t connect in all ways, I don’t know. But I’ve just never had the close friends I had in Chicago. Maybe it’s because my priorities have changed. I was younger then and didn’t have the responsibilities. Or maybe it is just the California thing. I don’t know. So I wouldn’t know unless I stayed in Chicago.

Iris speculated her reasons for having difficulties making friends:

I have found it to be more difficult to make friends out here in California then it was in Chicago. Maybe that is because people live further away from each other in California than in Chicago, but I have found it to be harder to connect with women here.

My sister-in-law had warned me of the difficulties in making close female friends in Los Angeles. So far, she has been right. Although I have female friends, there are no female friends in the area that I could call and cry to, which for me is the sign of a close friendship. Daisy also experienced difficulty in making close female friends currently. She noted:

As I grew older I found the older you get the harder it is to make friends. When I was a kid it was easy because you are in school together and live near each other. I worked for Warner Brothers for 20 years, and I have maybe only 3 good friends out of that. I have 2 or 3 good ones, but I could never make friends at work
easily. Most of the friends I have now have been my friends for 25 years or so. The ability to make friends got harder and harder as I got older. As you get older, your standards for who you want as a friend changes. Then you’re more picky. By then you’ve been screwed by a friend or stabbed in the back; you’ve got that wall up. And you start to talk to someone and you know their whole story. It makes a difference because you change your criteria of what you want in a friend. Not an acquaintance, but a friend.

**No time for friends since baby.**

Three of us have had little time for friends since having a baby. Iris stated, “But now that I have a baby, I have no time for friends. My husband and child are my priorities now whereas before, my friends were my priority.” Poppy and I stated the same feelings.

**Husband is best friend.**

Iris, Poppy, and I all cherish our husbands as our best friends. Iris noted, “We are so lucky! Especially when you think what our moms went through! He is my best friend!” I am constantly counting my blessings, especially when it comes to my husband. He is a dream come true. I never thought I would ever meet a man like my husband and I often say, “I won the man lottery!”
Gives more than gets back.

A belief that we give more to our friends than we get back was shared by three coresearchers. Daisy stated:

It sometimes is wonderful and other times I am disappointed. So sometimes what I have to do, and this is going to sound bad, but I don’t think anyone is as nice and giving as I am. I give a lot, I mean, I really give a lot to my friends and sometimes they fall a little short for me, and I get my feelings hurt. It is something like you described where they are really interested in their own lives and they will call me and say, “You just can’t imagine blah, blah, blah” and then when I need them, well, I start and then they have to get off the phone. Ya know, it seems like it is all about them, but then sometimes I have to remember it is all about me. And then I go, “Okay.” But I get disappointed. I do get disappointed.

I used to get extremely upset about how I remembered my friends’ special events and birthdays by sending cards, and how when my birthday came, I received few cards. Violet described her closest female friend as selfish and self-absorbed, and complained she has to remind her friend to listen to what she has to say. She stated she constantly has to teach her to think of others:

That is how my best friend is. She is a very selfish person. That is the first word I would use to describe this. Even her children know this. So I have to say, “Stop. Okay, now I want to talk about my day.” Because she won’t ask “How are you?” She will rattle on for a half hour and I’ll finally go, “Stop and take a breath, because now I need to vent to you. I need you to be the sounding board that I just
was for you. Because it is important, you are important, so I need for you to hear this.” There are moments of contention because I’m like “Errr! Put the brakes on!

It’s not all about you!”

**Mother’s Influence Also Needs Consideration**

**Mother never spoke badly.**

The theme of mother never speaking badly of father was shared by four coresearchers. Delphinium stated:

She tried to get he and I together for years. She wouldn’t push me to it, but she would never say a bad word about him. I said a lot of things because I didn’t like the man. He wasn’t a good person, but she always made him out to be a good person. Finally around when I was 14 or 15, I said, “Don’t do it anymore. I know what kind of person he was, so just don’t.”

Iris noted, “My mother didn’t say a lot about him. She didn’t want to turn me against him.” Poppy said her mother “didn’t talk about him much at all.”

**Not liking mother.**

Iris and Daisy both shared the theme of not liking their mother. Daisy disclosed that she hated her mother so much, she did whatever she could to get out of the house as early as possible. This ended up with her getting pregnant at 16. Iris also did not like her mother. “My mom fought so much. She died last year and I can’t stop thinking about how much we fought. I mean, I know you have fights, but we fought all the time. I mean, it was daily almost.” She also stated, “We never had that special mother/daughter connection. That is why I am so glad to have had a daughter so I can re-do it.”
Caring for depressed mother.

Iris and Daisy had the theme of having to care for their depressed mother in common. Daisy disclosed:

And my mother took it so badly that she was what they called clinically depressed, and they would have put her in a hospital at that time, but nobody knew anything about that at that time, so at ten, I took over taking care of the family. And my mother would spend, ya know, days in her room, not wanting to come out.

She stated that her sister was only two then, “So it all fell on me when I was ten.” She later reiterated, “My mother became super depressed and wasn’t functioning. I had to take over the house. She would have been locked away.” Iris disclosed:

I think I was also looking for “Mommy” too because I had to grow up really fast. I don’t remember a time when I didn’t have to take care of my Mom. I never got to be a child. If my father had been there, I could have been more of a carefree child.

Mother wanted father back.

Daisy, Delphinium, and Iris’s mothers all pined away for their daughter’s father to return. Delphinium stated:

But my mother adored him and she put up with him. She loved him till the day she died. I think that was her first love. She wanted to try to have someone love her. She was married 7 times.
Iris stated, “My Mom always held a candle for him though and wanted him to come back. I couldn’t believe she wouldn’t give up on him. She regretted their relationship not working out to the end of her life.”

**Hate handed down.**

Hate handed down was a theme shared by two co-researchers. Daisy stated that after her mother became “functional” she “hated my Dad.” She noted:

At one point when I was 13, I wrote a big hate letter to him myself. I got a lot of hate from my mother that handed down. As you get older you realize maybe it wasn’t exactly like she told you. Perhaps if she was a better wife or had been different perhaps it would have been different.

I also noted that my mother shared her bitterness and anger with my brother and me. I began to feel much resentment at an early age for my father, and later realized she did not need to tell me so many details. It was inappropriate.

**Yearning for Daddy**

**Adoring father.**

We all mentioned adoring our fathers as children. Daisy cherished her time with her father when she was little:

My Dad and I would even have my little potty chair, when I was little, little, and we used to sit in there and talk. And I’d say, “Ya know what Daddy?” And he’d say, “No. What?” And it was just, anything I wanted to talk about he would just take all the time in the world to just be with me. He spanked me once, upon my mother’s urging because I crossed the road without looking. It was a dangerous
situation. And she said, “When your father gets home he is going to spank you. And he did. And after that he told her, “Don’t ever put me in that situation again. I will never lay a hand on that child again.” Ya know? And stuff. We went horseback riding. I had a pony. We would go horseback riding together and we would sing songs.

She spoke highly of her father and romanticized him by saying:

You had to know my Dad. He was John Doe Superstar. It was like when he entered the room, all of the air in the room left. So he was just bigger than life all the time. And their friends at the time were like Robert Mitchum’s sister and they knew a lot of people in show business and stuff and even went on some late night talk show back then and ran with kind of a hootsie tootsie crowd. And my Dad was just, he was very beautiful and a very handsome man; very charismatic. People just flocked to him.

My father was also very charismatic and handsome. His family really looked up to him and always told stories of his adventures. He was treated like “a big deal.” He was very arrogant, now that I think about it, but when I was little, I was drawn to his self-confidence. Delphinium stated, “Well my mother said I adored him and that I thought he was everything and he thought I was everything. She has pictures of us being close.” Iris stated, “I thought my Dad was the greatest. My Dad was the best.”
Fantasizing the ideal father/daughter relationship.

Fantasizing the ideal father/daughter relationship was a theme shared by five coresearchers. Iris disclosed:

You see, I was always trying to have a relationship with him. I had always imagined this type of relationship I would have with him and then that was when I realized, “You’re just not worth it, you aren’t worth my time. Stop calling when you just feel like it or feel the need. Just get out of my life.”

Poppy stated, “I always fantasized about him and wanted him.” My fantasy was that my father would one day realize the mistake he made and desire to rekindle our relationship. I held onto this dream until after I had my conversations with my coresearchers. Poppy challenged my reason to want him to return to my life, and I was unable to answer her. This sent me into deep contemplation and created a significant change within me.

Daddy’s princess.

Both Daisy and Iris shared the theme of being “Daddy’s Princess.” Daisy stated that she and her father were extremely close when she was young. “I was the apple of his eye. I was a Daddy’s girl. I was his little princess. I was a real princess. I mean, we are talking about, anything my heart desired I would get from him; very close.” Iris said:

I always used to think I was “Daddy’s girl” or his princess, or at least want that, and I thought I was, but when I see my daughter and how my husband is with her, I realize what a “Daddy’s girl” really is and how lucky she is.
Forgiving father.

Violet, Daisy, and Iris all reconciled later with their fathers. Daisy made amends with her father because of her sister:

My sister did something called, back then it was called EST, now it’s a forum through Landmark Education. And when she was working with EST she realized that we had to mend this breach with our father even though he wasn’t the father we wanted, that he was still our father. Ya know? So we had to mend this. And she was the first to kind of take over and try to get back into the relationship and I was much more stubborn, but finally she made arrangements for a meeting for all of us to get together. And we were kind of cordial after that.

Daisy said this happened when she was 35 years old. “When he died we were very close. Again, that was me, because he was dying, and he lived in Palm Springs and every weekend I would go down there and take care of him.” She went on to say:

So my sister gave him the means to kind of come back to our family. So by the time he died we were pretty close with him, I mean not like, we didn’t see a lot of him, but we talked to him on the phone and sent cards, and we sent money.”

Iris described her process with forgiving her father:

I stopped talking with him for 12 years. I just recently started talking with him again. He sent a card on my birthday and sent my daughter $100. So, he was trying. He is always trying. But again, the critical part of me, I had to say, he made an effort. So I had to say, “Why not?” You see, I was always trying to have a relationship with him. I had always imagined this type of relationship I would
have with him and then that was when I realized, “You’re just not worth it, you aren’t worth my time. Stop calling when you just feel like it or feel the need. Just get out of my life.” I was fine with it. I never regretted it. I knew if he died, I would be like, “Oh well.” Because I made the decision. So when he made an effort, I just decided that he is who he is, and why hold a grudge? He’ll never be the father or grandfather I wanted or imagined. If he talks to me, fine. He will never be what I want as a father or grandfather.

**Father Behaving Badly**

**Father cheated and started new family.**

The themes of father cheated on mother and father started a new family almost immediately are two separate themes, but so closely intertwined that I put them together. Perhaps the most surprising discovery for me was learning that of the seven coresearchers, six had fathers who cheated on their mothers. Five of us had fathers who started new families right away. My father had been having an affair and after divorcing my mother, remarried an astonishing three days later! Within two years, my father and stepmother had my half-brother. Violet’s father came to her home with his new wife and had not yet divorced her mother. Violet asked, “How can he have a wife when he is married to you, Mom?” She stated, “He was a polygamist. I didn’t know that when I was young, but he did finally get a divorce. I just knew you couldn’t be married to two people at once.” Violet disclosed that he fathered two boys soon after his divorce was officially final from her mother. Poppy noted that her father “got remarried right away and had two kids.” Iris also noted that her father remarried after cheating on her mother and
getting another woman pregnant. He married five times. Daisy overheard her mother and father fighting about his affair, and she knew that meant trouble. Although her father cheated on her mother, he did not remarry and have children right away:

I was in on the divorce before it all came out. My father had a mistress at our house when we were on vacation with my mother. He was playing it up out here while we were in New York. So I knew what was coming before he knew what was coming. I was so much a part of the action because I was 10. I was very precocious. I knew what was going on all the time.

Delphinium did not understand what was happening with her parents’ marriage, but stated:

He got married right away. He divorced my mother and his new wife was already pregnant with their first child. They had a child right away, but when I’d go over to their house, he’d make a big deal about me going over to see the baby. I was about six then. I didn’t want to have anything to do with it. I didn’t really understand what was going on at that time.

Alyssum stated, “He kind of bailed and got a new family.”

No child support provided and mother struggled financially.

The separate themes of father not paying child support and mother struggling financially were so closely linked that I put them together. Out of the seven coresearchers, I was surprised that only one had a father who paid child support. This happened to be my father, but my mother told me it was taken out of his paycheck by his
employer and he had no other option. Otherwise, she stated that he probably would have stopped paying. Daisy said:

But he didn’t support us when we were little. He didn’t send child support on a regular basis. He didn’t do anything for us. I had shoes with cardboard in the bottom because my Mom couldn’t buy us shoes. I mean, I went from a princess to a pauper in like no time, like, instantly.

She also remarked how upsetting it was to occasionally be taken to her father’s dinner parties. She would think, “We have holes in our shoes and you’re spending all this money on your friends instead of us?” She continued by saying, “We could have lived for weeks and weeks and weeks on one of those bills. That would have been groceries for us!” Delphinium noted:

He was a bus driver and I remember my mother following him on his route to try to get money from him because he didn’t pay child support or anything like that. So, he would occasionally pick me up and take me over to his nice new house he bought for his new wife and kid, and I would go over and visit on occasions on the weekends.

Alyssum stated that her mother said she felt she had three children to support and take care of, rather than two, so she divorced Alyssum’s father. But he never paid any child support. Iris’ father never paid child support either, and because of this, she “adopts” single-mother households at Christmas to help them out financially. She stated she watched her mother struggle, and hates to think of the other mothers still having a hard time making ends meet. When Poppy’s father left, he never saw or spoke to her or her
family again, therefore, there was no child support. Violet was so angry at seeing her mother struggling and working several jobs, that she called her father and demanded money. “You abandoned everyone over here! You’re living your life and my Mom has no money! She is constantly struggling! She has four children and you have 2, and two adults working! Send my Mom some Goddamned money!” This got Violet into trouble with her mother, and she was told never to ask for money again. Violet stated she felt responsible for her father sending her and her siblings new bikes after that, but no other help ever came.

**No apology from father.**

All of us coresearchers noted never receiving an apology from our fathers. For many years, I had hoped one day my father would come to his senses, beg for my forgiveness saying he was wrong to abandon me, and ask if we could start over. But that never happened, and never will. Daisy said when she was in her thirties, she made amends with her father, but he never apologized to her or her sister:

Yeah, I think he realized, at some point he realized what a bad thing he had done to my sister and I. And at some point he wanted to make it up, but he just didn’t know how. Ya know? He just didn’t know how to do it.

Alyssum noted that she and her father had an intimate conversation once when he turned 80. “We’d both been drinking and we had this one really good conversation where he admitted to feeling horrible about not being around and that he’d cry about it and this and that, but he didn’t change his behavior.” Iris stated, “He didn’t say, “I’m sorry I didn’t
talk to you all these years. I’m sorry I let you down.” Nothing like that. Nothing to admit he did something wrong. It was always that way.”

**Broken promises.**

Six of us shared the theme of experiencing broken promises from our fathers. Since Poppy had no contact with her father after the divorce, she did not experience any broken promises; she was just completely abandoned. Delphinium stated she remembered her father “sitting at the hospital in a chair and saying, “I’ll always be around.” But he was never around.” Daisy recalled some unhappy times with her father after the divorce.

He would set up dates to pick us up and take us places and he would often show up hours and hours and hours late, and my mother wouldn’t let us go out and play because she didn’t want us to get dirty or anything, so we would sit in the house, looking out the window, waiting for my Dad to show up, and it was just heartbreaking. And when we did go out with him, he didn’t do child appropriate things. One time he did take us to Disneyland, and we only stayed about an hour and a half because he didn’t like the lines and the crowds, ya know? And you know what it is like for a child to go to Disneyland! This was right when Disneyland had just opened and it was like the Holy Grail of children’s places! Oh my God! I mean, it was just devastating! It was terrible! It was terrible. And then he would have these big dinners, dinners with my Dad, and this never changed, were like three hours. So he would have these big, loud dinners with all
of his friends, and then R and I. It would be way past my sister’s bedtime, and
she’d just be crying and upset, ya know?

Similarly, Iris described equally vivid and difficult memories of her father’s poor
parenting behaviors:

He wouldn’t call and say he wasn’t coming. That is what you are supposed to do
and say you are really sorry. He’d just make promises and not keep them, and I
realized at that time that this is who he was. He was telling me, “Yeah, I’ll go see
your Mom. Yeah. I’ll go.” And then he never showed up.

**Passive fathers.**

Alyssum and Iris both complained that their fathers were passive. Alyssum stated
she was very disappointed in her father after he disclosed he felt badly about not being
around for her because he “didn’t change his behavior. He is just a big old wuss. I have
an evil stepmother and he just let her take over.” Iris also complained of her father’s
passivity. “He never wanted me to be mad at him. He was never the disciplinarian.” Iris
elaborated on her father’s passivity:

He would reach out to me every so often like that, but never to acknowledge that
he did wrong. But even if he didn’t know what he did wrong, he could ask and
apologize. He is just a coward. He can’t man up and say, “I screwed up and would
like to have a meaningful relationship with my daughter.”
Negative Feelings and Behaviors Connected with Father Absence

Feelings of abandonment.

All seven of us discussed feelings abandoned. Violet was emphatic when asked if she ever felt abandoned:

Definitely. That is why I was so angry, because I felt abandoned. My Dad came out every once in a while, but mostly to see my Mom. And they would spend all night laughing and talking on the couch…But I watched my mom struggle, so by nine, I was very angry at him. I felt he had abandoned us. He didn’t help us. He didn’t know us. What really infuriated me was that I felt like I was special and he didn’t know me. Here I was, this child he has given all these gifts to, but you don’t know, and can’t tell me one thing about myself that is a gift.

She elaborated:

I definitely felt abandoned when I had to watch my Mom struggle so hard and here she is working two jobs and gone from 8 AM till 9 at night. It was hard for her too because she wanted to be there.

Alyssum also felt abandoned:

Yeah, totally. Yeah, my Mom divorced him, but he kind of bailed and got a new family. He didn’t really deal with us. He really wasn’t there when he was there, but after the divorce, then he really didn’t have a clue how to deal with me, so he just didn’t.
Iris was tearful when she recalled a memory of when she was eight years old and waiting for her father to visit her in the hospital. He never came and she was devastated. “Oh yeah, that day in the hospital I felt abandoned. I felt that way my whole life.” Iris also talked about when her father broke a promise to visit her sick mother in the hospital:

I realized it was that way my entire life. He was never there for me. I just never realized it before. I was so mad at him that I decided I would never speak to him again. I mean, this was about my mother’s health! I just thought, “I’m done with him.”

I too, felt abandoned as a child, because, quite honestly, I was. I never felt like I could call my father if I ever needed anything because his new wife would be listening in on the phone. It could never be a conversation with just my father and me, so I felt I could not call. He almost never called me, so I felt we had no connection after a while. He also never attended any milestone celebration or school function that was important to me.

**Few memories of father.**

Five of us coresearchers shared the theme of having few memories of our father. Delphinium stated, “There is a lot of my childhood that isn’t there anymore. My own memories are almost non-existent. People tell me things that happened, but I don’t have many of my own memories.” I told her I had a similar experience and said that my brother and I do not know if it is the brain’s way to protect itself, but we do not remember much either. Iris’ parents divorced when she was 4, so she said she does not have many memories of her father before the divorce. Poppy stated that because her parents divorced when she was 3, “My father, I didn’t know him well at all. He wasn’t a part of my life.”
Angry with father.

All of us mentioned feeling very angry with our fathers. Daisy stated: He would have a roll of $100 bills in his pocket, and we were starving. I had hardly any clothes and we were just dirt poor. I resented him for that for a really, really long time. It was very, very hard. I was old enough to know, “Wait a minute! That money could be going to us!”

Alyssum stated that after the divorce, she did not see or hear from her father for years. “Sometimes he would send a birthday card, but I didn’t talk to him. I was pissed off at him.” Iris noted, “I always thought he was the better parent until I got older and then I realized, “Uh, you sucked as far as parenting!”” She told a story about how her depressed mother was considering having electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), but Iris was in California and her mother and father (who were divorced) both lived in Illinois:

So I asked my father (they had an amicable relationship, so it wasn’t like I was asking him to do something for someone who hated his guts) I called him and said, “Will you please go and visit her in the hospital because no one has visited her and she is depressed and considering ECT and just tell her to wait until I get there tomorrow.” Well, he never showed. He never called me. He lied that he would go, and then he never went and didn’t tell me he wasn’t going. So when I got to the hospital, I asked Mom if she saw him and she said no, she hadn’t seen him in a long time, and I was like, “Mother fucker!” I couldn’t believe it! I mean I had never asked him for anything my whole life! I had never reached out to him
before, (and now I’m gonna start to cry), it was the first time I ever reached out to him, and he let me down!

Violet was angry and resentful at her father because, “A million other people would have loved to have had me in their house. I was fun. I was full of life and excitement and vitality and here you were going, “I don’t want anything to do with you.””

**No feeling of security.**

Four of us coresearchers mentioned that by not having a father we had no feeling of security. Poppy explained:

I never had the protected feeling of having a father, or being a “Daddy’s girl” or being scooped up or protected, and I think in my teens I was always terrified of boyfriends leaving. I didn’t fear my husband leaving so much, but I have this terrible fear of something happening to my child. I think it comes from that type of fear; the fear that someone would leave and I’d have to do something to hold onto them. I think it affected me that I didn’t have that sense of security. I had to get my own self-confidence through my twenties through deep searching and therapy.

**Seeking therapy and/or reading self-help books.**

The theme of seeking therapy and/or reading self-help books was shared by five coresearchers. Poppy noted, “I am pretty tough and I got a lot of therapy which helped me deal with issues.” She stated that she was a psychology major in school. Alyssum became a social worker, like her mother, after reading lots of self-help books, and I went
into the profession of counseling after reading numerous self-help books and undergoing years of counseling.

**Married and divorced at least once.**

Having been married and divorced at least once was a theme shared by six coresearchers. Daisy noted, “I’ve been married twice and was in a long-term relationship. If I see a movie with a romance, I am sobbing and sobbing.” Delphinium stated she thought she was supposed to get married and have children:

and raise your children and that was your life. That is what I thought you were supposed to do. I never had that. My mother never had that. And so that is what I decided I was supposed to do. But then I realized how stupid I was.

Iris, like me, had been married twice.

**The belief of never having children.**

The theme of thinking we would never give birth to a child was shared by four coresearchers. Iris stated:

I never thought I’d ever have a child, or even get married. I never wanted my kids to grow up like I did, so I never wanted an absent father. I didn’t want to repeat the cycle. I wasn’t happy about it. I thought maybe I would adopt.

I too shared these same feelings and had considered adopting, if ever having children at all.
**Never abandoning child.**

The theme of not being able to imagine abandoning a child was shared by six coresearchers. Iris stated she once asked her husband:

> Can you imagine walking out on this?” And he said, “No!” I could imagine him walking out on me, but not to our daughter. And his father walked out on him and his siblings. We just don’t understand how a person can do that.

For me, the full impact of how deplorable it was for my father to abandon me did not sink in until after I had my daughter. I just love her so much, and I cannot imagine a parent abandoning their child. Poppy agreed. “How could you? How could you leave your child behind?” She later reiterated, “I can’t imagine how a parent can leave their child behind by choice. That is what I don’t understand either; by choice!”

**Dating “bad” guys.**

Dating “bad” guys was a theme shared by all of us. I told the coresearchers about how the men I dated were emotionally abusive and often cheated on me. Most men I dated did not participate equally in the relationship. I provided emotionally and financially for my first husband for five years and, when our marriage was dissolved, he never paid the $7,000 he owed me. Iris stated, “I was a magnet for bad guys.” Poppy stated that she was involved in an abusive relationship when she was in her mid-twenties. The surprising thing is, so many of the men we dated shared many character traits of our fathers. I always felt like I needed to fill a void, but did not realize until years later that these men were so similar to my father: emotionally unavailable, arrogant, and dishonest.
Promiscuity.

The theme of promiscuity was shared by all of us. I disclosed I had lost my virginity at an early age and was always promiscuous. I was extremely lucky that I did not get pregnant. I went from boyfriend to boyfriend and was never single for long. There was always someone to take another’s place. Poppy shared a similar experience stating, “I always made sure I had a plan B. Someone waiting in the wings.” Delphinium noted she began dating men at age 13 and within three years, got pregnant, then married. Alyssum disclosed, “I get around too much. I feel like I’m too old to keep acting like that.” Iris stated, “I was also very promiscuous and “looking for Daddy.”

Marrying late.

Iris, Poppy, and I shared the theme of marrying late in life. Also, Alyssum is 35, has never married, and is currently single. Iris stated that she married in her late 30s and added, “I never thought I would marry. My mom had these problems, so I thought I would too.” I also had the same beliefs. She also noted, “I always saw my friends’ parents fighting. I didn’t think I’d ever meet any good guys.” I first married at the age of 32, rushing into the marriage out of fear of possibly never marrying. Looking back, I realize I made a huge mistake. I knew things were not working in the relationship, but I kept thinking, “At least this is better than my parents’ marriage, so I must be ahead of the game.” My second marriage happened when I turned 36. Poppy also married in her late thirties.
No respect for men.

The two oldest coresearchers, who happened to be best friends, shared the theme of having no respect for men. Delphinium stated that having the kind of father she had made her lose all respect for men. “I don’t have any respect for men actually because I think they are useless.” Daisy had the strongest feelings about this theme:

I just can’t find one reason for them to exist on the planet! There is just nothing they are good at. Other than sex, they are just not worth anything. So they don’t provide. Usually the man works and comes home and sits down and doesn’t do a God-blessed thing! The woman is doing dinner and cleaning up after dinner and they aren’t thoughtful and considerate like we are. They have no sensitivity like women have for each other. Even the male bonding process is like, “Hi there.” You know? “How about those Dodgers?” There is no depth at all. I think there is no communication. I don’t think they speak the same language; I really don’t. And I’ve had courses on this, so I know I’m right. But they hear things differently than we say them, or they just don’t hear. They really don’t hear what we say, so it is really hard to communicate with them and stuff, so the only thing that a male could bring into my life is someone who could screw in light bulbs and take out the trash, and things like that. Whereas my girlfriends have been with me through everything; divorces and sicknesses, bad health, and everything. I can’t think of one man on the planet anywhere that I can think highly of. It used to be Obama, but he is losing me. Ya know? I used to think he was going to do something and I really liked him a lot. But if you really look at the people in your life you admire,
who you think you respect, and maybe you’re not friends with them, but you respect them and what they have done with their life, or what path they have taken. There is not a man on that list anywhere.

**Not believing in love.**

The two oldest coresearchers shared the theme of not believing in love. After being married 30 years to a controlling husband, Delphinium stated about love, “I think it is a legend. I don’t believe it. I like it, but I don’t think it ever happens.” Daisy was skeptical when I talked about finding such a loving, supportive husband. She said, “But give it a couple of years.”

**Marrying early.**

The two oldest coresearchers shared the theme of marrying early in life. Daisy discussed how she ended up marrying so early. She said:

I was always seeking men. I was looking for that connection because I was so close with my Dad. It was in my brain. I thought you could only have that kind of connection with a boy, so I got pregnant when I was 16.

Delphinium disclosed, “I got pregnant and had my first baby at 17, got married, and stayed with him for 30 years.”

**Depression and low self-esteem.**

The two themes of feelings of depression and low self-esteem were put together since they were so closely related. Three coresearchers shared both themes. Not having my father around made me feel like at least one of my parents did not love me. I wondered if there might be something wrong with me or if I was unlovable. I later
became very depressed and suicidal. I did not like myself. Alyssum and Poppy also struggled with low self-esteem and depression. Alyssum continues to struggle with her depression and low self-esteem issues.

**Creative Synthesis**

Having the opportunity to talk so intimately with other women sharing similar experiences has been incredibly rewarding, eye opening, and life changing. We shared in each other’s feelings of loss, as well as joy and inspiration. One coresearcher challenged me on my “holding onto the dream” of my father and me reconciling and having the ideal father/daughter relationship. Her challenge changed me, allowing me to finally say goodbye to that dream. I wrote a letter and mailed it to my father as a closure to myself, and part of my creative synthesis. I realized he missed out on knowing his only daughter, and this can never be reclaimed. I realized I would not want him in my or my daughter’s life, especially considering who he is as a person. I do not like him or respect him. This process of sharing so deeply with so many other women made me feel less alien, especially in regards to the difficulty we shared in making close female friends growing up. I had thought perhaps I was an aberration, but now see others shared similar struggles. What a cathartic experience! These findings make me believe there truly may be a connection between father absence and abandonment and difficulty making close female friends. I hope this study might help others feel more normal. I also hope this project might inspire others to pursue this topic in more depth for future studies.
Summary

To summarize chapter four, the coresearchers were introduced through individual narrative portraits. A composite portrait of a woman from a mother-present/father-absent home and her experience with forming close female friendships was detailed. Common themes were illustrated, and a creative synthesis of my personal experience with father absence and the ability to form close female friendships was presented.
Chapter Five

This was a heuristic study involving seven coresearchers, which included me. This study was chosen because most of my life I had questions about why my father left and why it was so difficult to make close female friendships. The heuristic research model was chosen to provide the opportunity to conduct research in a very personalized, collaborative way with my coresearchers. From our first meeting through the creative synthesis, it was vital to use a research model that honored the exploration of feelings with all their associated meanings. Although finding coresearchers proved challenging, it was important to find women who had given the issues enough forethought. Sharing our feelings and experiences proved cathartic and inspiring, and I learned so much from the coresearchers about saying goodbye to the idealistic dream surrounding my father, and appreciating the value and importance of close female friendships.

Some of the experiences of us coresearchers regarding our ability to form and maintain close female friendships, the effects from our fathers’ absence, and the meaning we ascribed to these experiences were substantiated by the literature, while others were not. Some information could not be examined because it had not been located in the literature. The friend-related themes will first be elucidated.

The Satisfaction of Close Female Friends

Josselson (1996) noted that a woman’s identity develops from understanding who she is in relation to others. This feeling of relatedness is in essence who they are. Newman and Newman (1995) conjectured the quality of interpersonal and social relationships create a young woman’s identity. This was illustrated when Iris stated that
a close female friend is “someone who is you.” Most coresearchers likened their close female friends to a family member, mainly a sister. This could prove helpful since Secunda (1992) posited that female friendship could help compensate for the loss of a father’s involvement with his daughter through the comfort provided.

All coresearchers noted learning from their close female friends. Many reported learning to be assertive and independent, which would likely increase self-esteem. O’Dea and Abraham (1999) suggested that girls had a stronger self-concept when they reported having close friendships. Josselson (1996) noted that developing healthy, positive friendships with other women has been instrumental in how women develop their self-concept. All the women I spoke with reported teaching and learning from their close female friends, and many grew character strengths from these friendships.

**Obstacles Faced in Making Close Female Friends**

This was the core essence theme that most interested me in my study. I was not trying to say women from father absent homes could not make friends and that women with fathers present were more capable of making close female friendships. Women with fathers in their homes might still have difficulty making close female friendships. Six of us coresearchers disclosed having difficulty making close female friends growing up, which fell under this core essence theme. This might be explained by looking at attachment theory and studies located in the literature. “The central premise of attachment theory is that the security of the early child-parent bond is reflected in the child’s interpersonal relationships across the lifespan” (Schneider, et al., 2001, p. 86). Similarly, Josselson (1996) noted, “Repeated unavailability of particular attachment
figures tells us that we cannot count on them anymore; they may offer us things in the relationship, but not the security of predictable responsiveness, which is the foundation of attachment” (p. 44). Wright (1984) posited that girls without an emotional bond and strong relationship with the father might have more difficulty in developing positive, satisfying relationships with other girls since the maintenance of a friendship sometimes requires intense social and emotional ability. Also, secure attachment to parents has been suggested to be significant for the quality of same-gender peer relationships in middle childhood (Kerns et al., 1996). These are some considerations for the difficulties we had in making close female friendships growing up, although there are more.

Aral et al. (2006) stated that children who experience abandonment might feel worthless which could decrease confidence. Children who lack confidence might have difficulties approaching a playmate for friendship. I definitely lacked confidence growing up and believe this made friend making difficult. Van der Kolk (1987) speculated that many children who are estranged from their caregiver make little effort to socialize and are uncomfortable playing with other children, which could affect a child’s ability to form close friendships. It is suggested that children who felt secure and attached with their fathers are better at coping, and that coping was linked with how well the children regulated their behavior with peers (Contreras & Kerns, 2000). Additionally, Youngblade et al. (1993) linked secure attachments with fathers, but not mothers, with positive interactions with friends among preschool-age children. Parke et al. (2004) stated, “Fathers are major but often–unrecognized members of the family who play a central role in children’s socialization” (p. 307). Gottman et al. (1997) suggested that a
father’s acceptance of his children’s anger and sadness at 5 years of age was linked to their social competence with peers three years later at age 8. Likewise, Main (1991) proposed that girls from father-absent homes often retreated from social contact. Also, Amato and Keith (1991) suggested that children from divorced families had lower social competence than children whose parents were married. It has been suggested it is more important for women than men to experience emotional connectedness and share beliefs and attitudes with both parents (Samuolis et al., 2001; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Therefore, when a father abandons his daughter, this could affect how she views the reliability of others, including friends because “how the child has come to expect to be treated in terms of responsiveness and availability shapes his adjustment to school as well as his approach to other social relationships” (Josselson, 1996, p. 47).

Violet disclosed being violent with peers, which contributed to her difficulties in making friends. Her behavior might be clarified by Grimm-Wassil (1994) who suggested daughters whose fathers were absent due to divorce were more physically aggressive to both male and female peers. Therefore, a lack of social competence and a decrease in confidence might affect young women from father absent homes and their ability to make close female friends.

All coresearchers noted they had close female friends with significant problems, which went under this core essence theme. Knowing that others shared this experience made me feel less aberrant. I always thought I was a magnet for unhealthy, needy women. I felt so used attempting to counsel them on their various problems, but never got any help when I needed a shoulder to cry on. It was comforting to know I was not
alone with this experience. Hogue and Steinberg (1995) suggested that adolescents tended to pick friends with comparable levels of internalized distress (depression, anxiety, somatization, and social withdrawal). Hogue and Steinberg noted that youth who have internalized distress have friends, and the friendships are no less stable than those of other teenagers. This made me think there is truth to the old adage, “Birds of a feather flock together.”

Three coresearchers disclosed that their husbands were their best friends. This goes against what Popenoe (1996) said about daughters without supportive fathers being unlikely to develop close relationships to any males. The other four coresearchers were either divorced or never married. Paul (2004) noted, however, that boyfriends and husbands often cannot provide the empathic ear needed, but instead search for advice to help fix the problem. Daisy and Delphinium would agree with that, and Daisy disclosed believing men were not as emotionally available as women. However, at least three coresearchers, would disagree because their emotional needs were taken care of very well by their husbands. I would not call my husband my best friend if he could not care for my emotional needs. I feel very lucky to have such a supportive and understanding spouse.

**Mother’s Influence Also Needs Consideration**

Daisy and Iris both disclosed not liking their mothers. However, since their fathers had abandoned the coresearchers, this may have created dissonance with their mothers. Secunda (1992) stated that having an attachment to the father is important for an adolescent daughter’s development “because of his “otherness,” which puts a healthy
wedge between mother and child, to be a haven from real or imagined maternal injustice of excessive hovering” (p. 7). Likewise, closer, more demonstrative relationships with children and nonresident fathers were linked with more positive relationships between children and their mothers (Dunn et al., 2004). Therefore, for us coresearchers who did not have a positive relationship with our father, this might have affected our relationship with our mother.

Daisy and I noted that hate for our father was handed down from our mothers because of all the negative talk we often heard. Koerner et al. (2004) noted that daughters were more likely to agree with the mothers’ negative talk regarding their fathers. This could cause “psychological distress” (p. 54) for the adolescent girl because it could intensify negative feelings and further alienate her from her father (Koerner et al.). If a young woman personifies the negativity of her mother toward her father and distances herself emotionally from her father, the chance of having a healthy, satisfying relationship with him is highly compromised (Popenoe, 1996; Secunda, 1992). Daisy disclosed eventually writing a hate letter to her father, which ended all contact with him.

It seemed rather easy to agree with my mother’s negative talk about my father since he avoided attending any important celebrations I wanted him to attend, and was unavailable in so many ways.

**Father Behaving Badly**

This core essence theme included the dominant theme of father breaking promises. Many coresearchers discussed waiting in vain for their fathers to visit. The research confirms this lack of regular contact. Fifty percent of children lose all contact
with their fathers after roughly ten years following a parental separation (King & Heard, 1999; Seltzer, 1991). After a divorce, contact between fathers and their children lessens drastically over time (King & Heard; Seltzer; Spruijt et al., 2004). Likewise, nonresident fathers are often not involved and do not sustain close relationships with their children once they have moved out of the home (Lerman & Sorenson, 2000). This was as true for me as it was the rest of the coresearchers.

The dominant themes under this core essence theme included the lack of child support received and the mother struggling financially. It was stated that a woman’s standard of living diminishes between 29 percent and 36 percent (Bennetts, 2008; Grall, 2009, Hamilton, 2004). This abrupt change in socioeconomic status can have an overwhelming impact on a family. Many coresearchers reported feeling very resentful and angry with their father for not helping financially. They also disclosed having to go without their basic needs of food and clothing being met.Fraad (2011) noted that the women and children suffer because alimony is rarely contracted and child support payments are frequently not distributed fully. This often makes the single-mother family “fragile” in that they are more insolvent and endure more adversity as compared to married parents (Kalil & Ryan, 2010, p. 40). I was surprised that my father was the only one who paid regular child support, but he never gave my mother any other financial assistance for our school activities.

**Negative Feelings and Behaviors Connected With Father Loss**

Depression, a dominant theme under this core essence theme, profoundly affected three coresearchers: Poppy, Alyssum, and me. Strohschein (2005) stated, “the loss of a
parent from the household is accompanied by an additional increase in child anxiety/depression” (p. 1297). Chernus (2008) stated that “loss of contact” with a parent denies a child the “mirroring and idealizing functions” critical to his or her “feeling safe and valued” (p. 454). Likewise, Doyle et al. (2003) suggested, “security of attachment to father was associated significantly with fewer symptoms of depression and shared associations between security with mother, self-esteem, and academic grades” (p. 332). Additionally, Amato (1994) noted that young adults who are emotionally close with their father are often more happy and report feeling very satisfied with life. These are possible explanations for the depressive feelings the coresearchers experienced.

Ernst and Cacioppo (1999) discovered that chronic feelings of loneliness seemed to have correlations with early attachment and childhood processes. Chronically lonely individuals were more likely to be socially withdrawn, lacking in trust, demonstrate negative affectivity, feel a lack of control over success and failure, and discontented with their relationships as compared to nonlonely individuals. This is significant because loneliness has been attached to depression, hostility, pessimism, alienation, shyness, low positive affect, and social withdrawal (Ernst & Cacioppo), which could affect one’s ability to make friends. Therefore, if a young woman is depressed and lonely, she might withdraw from social contact, making it difficult for her to establish sound friendships, and possibly reinforcing her feelings of loneliness and depression. I recall feeling extremely lonely growing up, and then later very depressed. I believe my mental state affected my ability to have the confidence to approach others as potential friends.
According to Erikson’s theory of development, at around ten years of age, the child goes through the stage of industry versus inferiority. Children begin to manage new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of proficiency, while failure results in feelings of ineptitude. “The danger at this stage is the development of a sense of inadequacy and inferiority” (Erikson, 1980, p. 91). Children repeatedly blame themselves for their parents’ divorce, which could possibly lead to feelings of failure (Johnston et al., 2009). Also, after a parent leaves the home, the child sometimes has difficulty in school (Pruett & Pruett, 1998) which could lead to feelings of failure and depression (Shochet et al., 2008). These are other possibilities for the coresearchers’ depression.

Alyssum, Poppy, and I also shared the dominant theme of low self-esteem. Scheffler and Naus (1999) suggested that nurturing fathers increased girls’ level of self-acceptance and personal and social adjustment. This may be explained by Popenoe (1996) who reported that having a loving father demonstrates to his daughter that she is worthy of love. Possessing such awareness could assist in the development of self-acceptance and self-esteem. Secunda (1992) reported that, if daughters perceive their fathers as disapproving, they may deduce that their fathers are “either unpleasable or unloving-or that they themselves are unpleasing and unlovable” (p. 17). This was definitely something I wondered as a child. Kalter et al. (1985) also found that self-esteem proved less positive among girls from divorced homes than from intact homes. Perhaps this is because research suggests father absence (from divorce or separation) is perceived by daughters as a “lack of acceptance” (Boss, 1986, p. 851). Since maintaining
supportive and intimate friendships with other girls is essential to healthy adolescent female development (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996), if a young woman has difficulty making female friends, she may not have a strong sense of self. Developing healthy, positive friendships with other women has been instrumental in how women develop their self-identity (Josselson).

All coresearchers disclosed having been promiscuous at some point in their lives. The majority of girls with fathers in the home, as compared to those with nonresident fathers, tended to have more socially apposite relationships with boys their age and lacked the desire to become promiscuous (Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Popenoe, 1996). Grimm-Wassil suggested that females who grew up without father figures commonly become promiscuous and markedly needy of male attention. The coresearchers noted this. McLanahan et al. (1988) posited that children in single-mother homes often received less attention and supervision from adults. This lack of supervision could grant more prospects for risky sexual behavior. This was a factor in my own promiscuity. Gabardi and Rosen (1991) ascertained that female students from divorced families had a greater number of sexual partners than female students from intact families. This might explain why adolescent girls in father-absent homes were more likely to become teen mothers than girls in two-parent families (McLanahan & Teitler, 1998). Also, Comings et al. (2002) found through genetic testing that an androgen receptor gene might get passed from father to daughter that predisposes her to an early onset of sexual behavior and disruptive relationships.
Four coresearchers reported having no feelings of security after their fathers left. A child’s secure attachment to a parent establishes a sense of security or insecurity, which lays the foundation for close relationships in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988). Sinclair and Nelson (1998) argued that the bond between father and child (as compared to mother and child) is “equally important, if not more important, in providing the child with security, attachment, and love” (p. 124). These are some considerations for the lack of security feelings in the coresearchers. I also wondered if receiving less maternal supervision might have made the coresearchers feel less secure.

Six coresearchers had been married and divorced at least once. Diekmann and Engelhardt (1999) noted that adults from divorced families were more likely to get divorced. This might be because parents in marriages exemplified by a lack of affection and support may fail to model the skills necessary to endorse intimacy for their children (Doyle et al., 2003). Many coresearchers noted dating or marrying men who behaved much like their father, which ended up causing problems. Krohn and Bogan (2001) suggested that girls from father-absent homes who had insignificant contact with their fathers, particularly during adolescence, had trouble in adult life sustaining romantic relationships with men. Another study speculated that adult daughters from divorced homes were much more likely to experience discord within marriage and had a higher probability of divorce than peers from intact families (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979). This might be clarified by Sinclair and Nelson (1998) who found that students from divorced families held more erroneous relationship beliefs regarding the evasion of disputes in relationships than students from intact families. Students who reported less attachment to
their fathers were suggested to experience less intimacy and hold more dysfunctional relationship beliefs because their fathers were unavailable to demonstrate healthy intimate behaviors (Sinclair & Nelson). Secunda (1992) speculated that although women from father-absent homes may say they desire a loving man in their lives, they often discard him when they find him, because “love becomes equated with distance and loss” (p. xix). This was particularly true with Poppy who disclosed always having other men “waiting in the wings” in case the current relationship soured.

Many of us shared a theme of marrying late, but this was something I was unable to locate in the literature. Although in general people are marrying a little later in life, there were no studies I could locate that dealt with women from father absent homes and a trend to marry much later in life. This was an unexpected finding.

**Possible Future Studies**

After examining the literature and what the coresearchers disclosed, I began to wonder what created low self-esteem and difficulty making friends. When a father abandons a daughter, she might experience low self-esteem, which could then make it difficult for her to make friends, or because her father abandoned her, demonstrating that people might not be dependable, she might have difficulty making friends, which could lead to low self-esteem. But father abandonment might have no bearing on a woman’s ability to form close female friendships. There could be many other factors involved. Future studies could address this. Also, it was recommended by one coresearcher that this study be replicated with the focus on the mother/daughter relationship, because she, and another coresearcher, had mothers who experienced debilitating depression after the
divorce. Investigating personality characteristics of the parents and daughters of the families that do not have the reactions found in this study would be worth researching. Researching women who grew up with fathers present but still had difficulty making female friends could be another future study. Also exploring the past histories of a woman’s family to see if there are transgenerational patterns of disruptive relationships could be a worthwhile study.

Another qualitative study could be the process a daughter takes to forgive her father for the abandonment. Three coresearchers had reconciled with their fathers, and I was amazed they could forgive. I think I will always have resentment for my father for not being an active, loving father.

Studying men who decided to abandon their daughters and their decision-making process would be helpful to assist in developing intervention strategies for counseling professionals working with divorcing or separating couples. It would be helpful to replicate this study with women of color, since this study was limited to White women. It would be interesting to see if women from father absent homes have a tendency to marry later in life. There are also many ways to slightly change the criteria to create other studies. For example, my father was in the military, and one criterion could be father absence with fathers who served in the military. There also appeared to be age and generational differences within my study, therefore another future study could focus on a particular generation of women.
Implications

This study exploring experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes due to divorce or separation and their ability to make close female friendships provides numerous implications for counselors, counselor educators, and counseling students. Refined pedagogical methods for counseling students and more specific treatment approaches when counseling girls and women from mother-present/father-absent homes could be implemented based on these findings. Insight into women’s development is another area where this research could prove valuable. Studying women’s lives and relationships adds to an incalculable understanding of growth-enhancing interpersonal relations and a more comprehensive sagacity concerning the entire human experience, according to Miller (1987). Hearing the experiences of us coresearchers provides the counseling profession a better understanding of the importance of female friendship and how father absence affects these relationships. Research expanding the understanding of the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes and their ability to form close female friendship benefits students, educators, counselors, and researchers within the profession of counselor education by providing a heuristic research design describing the women’s reports of their experiences.

Wilson (2000) noted, by studying female friendships, much could be learned about interdependence and interpersonal relationships, as well as intimacy. These concepts are fundamental components to all healthy relationships, and key elements worthy of further exploration (Gilligan, 1982; Wilson). For counselors and counselor educators, awareness and education into the complexities of emotion that daughters face
after a father’s absence and the recognition of the benefits of close female ties as discussed in this project is important. The experience of having a father absent affected coresearchers’ self-esteem, mental health, future romantic relationships, and the ability to make close female friendships. Counseling, as well as the bond shared with a close female friend, helped many of us identify challenges and establish a sense of control and independence. This reinforces the effectiveness of seeking professional help and forming close female friendships.

This inquiry increased the understanding of women based on the experiences of women, not men. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) noted that Erikson (1968) had been disparaged for relying solely on samples of White, middle-class males for his theories and models. The literature supports the need to hear more about the female experience (Miller, 1987). Practitioners in the field of counseling could benefit from a greater appreciation of the complexity of women’s lives and friendships.

Hearing the coresearchers’ experiences expands the knowledge of counselors when treating girls whose families are divorcing. Counselors could encourage fathers who are considering divorce to maintain greater contact with their children since father bonding before a divorce has been suggested to lead to fewer problems for children at a later time (Bray, 1999; Spruijt et al., 2004). Most coresearchers reported wanting a continued relationship with both mother and father after the divorce or separation. Research discussed and presented within this study reinforces the significance of continued parental investment for the well-being of the children. For example, DeFranc and Mahalik (2002) noted, “Fathers are often on the periphery of psychological services
received by children” (p. 57), therefore it is recommended that both parents be included in family counseling sessions.

The coresearchers in this study reported experiencing depression, low self-esteem, teen pregnancy, promiscuity, and a lack of trust and security. These mental health problems and behaviors have been found in the literature regarding women from father-absent homes, and this study reinforces the literature’s findings. All coresearchers disclosed how close female friendships assisted in overcoming many of these issues. Knowing this, mental health counselors and counselor educators could further endorse the positive benefits of female camaraderie with other girls and teach further friendship development and conflict resolution skills. Roadblocks young women from father-absent homes faced in this study in regards to forming and preserving close female friendships such as having low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity, and depression from experiencing father abandonment can now be addressed and examined more carefully.

Scope of the Study

This study was not meant to show causation between women without fathers and a difficulty making female friends. This qualitative study was designed to explore only the experiences of the women included in this study. No attempt was made to generalize to a larger population. This study was confined to adult women over the age of thirty-five. There may be women under this age that share similar circumstances that may express different responses to their experiences. Since I only interviewed White women, more diverse samples are needed. Lastly, data were collected retrospectively, which might make it difficult for coresearchers to recall events accurately.
Summary

This study provided coresearchers the opportunity to share the impact of having a father absent due to divorce or separation. We discussed feeling abandoned by our fathers and how this affected our view of self and relationships with men. Consistent with many of the studies explored in the literature review, this project revealed the range of emotions women experience following the loss of a father when a divorce or separation occurs. Feelings and experiences about the impact forming and maintaining close female friendships had on the coresearchers’ view of self were also discussed. The many benefits of close female friendship were also consistent with the studies found in the literature review. Although no studies were found in the literature review that linked father absence with a difficulty in forming and maintaining female friendships, six coresearchers disclosed having difficulty making close female friends growing up. Many reported having feelings of depression, insecurity, and low self-esteem, which may have factored into this problem. Additional research might establish a more definitive link between these two phenomena.

Insights

Since Moustakas (1990) noted that heuristic research involves increased awareness, my paper would not be complete without my insights. After having the experience of talking with these different women about such personal issues, I gained the courage to let go of the dream of ever recovering the idealized father/daughter relationship. I was surprised this would be an outcome of these conversations, but after being challenged by a coresearcher, I gave the issue serious contemplation. I decided I
would not want the father who abandoned me in my or my daughter’s life. There is no way he could ever be the father I had hoped for, and I have no respect for him. I realized I felt a weight had been lifted, and also felt very strong.

This made me think about all the strengths the coresearchers gained from their close female friendships. Several of the coresearchers reported gaining self-confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness through their close female friendships. They seemed to grow stronger because of their friends, and picked friends who had the traits they wished to acquire. I found myself drawn to women who had strengths I wanted for myself too, but had never realized that until after talking with my coresearchers. It also seemed like most coresearchers made the closest female friends later in life and exerted great effort in keeping the relationships going through frequent phone calls and prolific card sending. It became apparent to me that I, as well as the other coresearchers, needed these women to remain in our lives. Although I feel very fortunate to have my husband as my best friend, having my best girlfriend Paula is extremely important too. Since we have known each other for over fifteen years, she often surprises me with her insights about who I am as a person. She never gave up on me throughout this dissertation process, even when I gave up on myself. She told me I was the kind of person who needed a deadline and was always one to get things done in the final hour. I had always thought of myself as a planner, not a procrastinator, so hearing this new perspective was very interesting.

Overall, this dissertation taught me how valuable my female friends are to me, and how crucial they are to the other coresearchers. I would not be the person I am today if it was not for my close female friends. I often felt unlovable as a young person, but
having the unconditional love from a female friend who does not ask for anything but friendship in return (the two-way street relationship), helped restore my sense of wellbeing, allowing me to believe I truly am worthwhile, fun, and deserving of love and companionship.
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Appendix A: Instructions to Research Participants

Thank you so much for your interest and cooperation with my dissertation research study on the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes and their ability to make close female friendships. I truly value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and am excited about the possibility of your participation. The purpose of this letter is to explain some of the things I have already discussed in your class and to secure your signature on the consent form.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one, known as heuristic research, through which I am seeking comprehensive descriptions of your experience. In this way I hope to answer the question: What are the experiences of women from mother-present/father-absent homes regarding the development of close relationships with other females?

The terms of my question, as I am using them, refer to father absence as: A father who has had no more than one face-to-face contact with his daughter since the divorce or separation in any given six month time frame. This absence is due to divorce or separation rather than death, employment, mental illness, substance abuse, or neglect. He has essentially abandoned his daughter.

Adult daughters of divorced or separated parents: As defined by the researcher, refers to a woman over the age of 35 whose biological parents were once married and became divorced or separated prior to the daughter’s 10th birthday. This study will examine adult daughters who were raised by their mothers from a young age (10 or
younger) and who had no more than one face-to-face contact every six months with their fathers following divorce or separation.

Through your participation as a coresearcher, I hope to understand the essence of the phenomenon as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific events in your life in which you experienced the phenomenon we are investigating. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you; your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience. You may also wish to share personal journals with me, or other ways in which you have recorded your experience, for example, in letters, poems, or artwork.

I value your participation and thank you for your commitment of time, energy, and effort. If you have any further questions before signing the release form or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, I can be reached at 740/541-0214 melissa.matthews2005@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Melissa A. Marote, M.Ed., P.C.C.
Appendix B: Flyer

ARE YOU A FEMALE RAISED by your mother, WITHOUT A FATHER due to DIVORCE or separation?
I want to hear about your FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS.

If you are 35 years or older and interested in participating in a significant doctoral research study, please call:
Melissa A. Marote, M.Ed., P.C.C. 740/541-0214

Or email Melissa.matthews2005@gmail.com
Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Finding the two-way street: Women from mother-present/father-absent homes and their ability to make close female friendships
Researcher: Melissa A. Marote, M.Ed., P.C.C.

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done because I want to learn more about women’s experiences growing up in a mother-present/father-absent home due to divorce or separation and their ability to make close female friendships. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to openly discuss your experiences with father absence and your ability to make close female friends. You should not participate in this study if talking about your father or friends would be too emotionally or psychologically upsetting. Your participation in the study will last approximately two hours.

Risks and Discomforts

Risks or discomforts that you might experience are any feelings or emotions that arise while discussing father absence or friendships. Should you wish to explore these issues with a counselor and are an Ohio University student, Hudson Health Center, located on the 3rd floor at 2 Health Center Drive in Athens, Ohio, offers free counseling. An appointment can be made by calling 740/593-1616.

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because father absence (due to divorce or separation) in connection with female friendship development has received little to no attention in the literature. The information gathered from the coresearchers could assist counselors, counselors-in-training, and counselor educators in their ability to help girls from father-absent homes. Individually, you may benefit by being able to openly discuss issues of father absence and friendship making.
Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by having the consent forms and digital tapes of the interview kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home.

Melissa A. Marote, M.Ed., P.C.C. will complete all transcriptions and is the only one who has the password to her firewall-protected computer. These forms will be shredded and the tapes erased approximately two years after the completion of my degree in June 2012. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Melissa Marote Melissa.matthews2005@gmail.com 740/541-0214 or Dr. Tracy Leinbaugh Leinbaug@ohio.edu 740/593-0846

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, 740/593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 35 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Signature________________________ Date____________________

Printed Name______________________

Version Date: [September 13, 2010]
Appendix D: Interview Guide

What motivated you to become interested in this study?

What have your relationships been like with female peers growing up and currently?

Discuss the degree of ease or difficulty you’ve experienced making female friends over the years.

Describe the most meaningful relationship you’ve had with a female friend.

What kept the relationship going over this period?

Talk about your female friendships when you were younger and how they compare to your friendships with women now.

Talk about any challenges you’ve had with a female friend, if they were resolved and if so, how they were resolved.

Talk about the level of satisfaction you have with your current female friends.

What value do you see in having a female, versus a male, friend?

How old were you when your parents divorced or separated?

What was your relationship like with your parents?

How old are you now?

What was your relationship like with your father before the divorce or separation?

How has your relationship with your father changed since then?

When did you first realize your father was not there?

How did you learn about that reality?

How did your mother interpret the divorce or separation for you?
Do you believe that growing up without a father influenced your life?

How often did you see or hear from your father after the divorce or separation?

Did you feel abandoned by your father?

What have you learned through this discussion?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix E: Closure Letter to Father

Dear Father and Sara,

Friday, June 10, 2011

Hello. I hope you are both happy and doing well. I’m not sure if you will read this, but I wanted to tell you some things you might not be aware of since you haven’t been in communication with your family or me since 2007. Regarding that, I just wanted you to know what I heard was that you didn’t want us to talk with you anymore and to consider you dead because we never accepted Sara as your wife and that you would be quitting your job, moving to Israel, and getting ready for the Rapture. I’m wondering if what I heard is true as to the reason for you no longer speaking with me. I know that you still have your job and never moved to Israel, so I was just wondering about the rest of the story.

I wanted to clear up some things you think you know about me. I have never been, nor ever will be a sex therapist. I am a mental health counselor. I am currently writing my dissertation to receive my PhD in Counselor Education. I’m writing my dissertation on father abandonment, since it is such a close subject for me. Also, the reason I got a dissolution from my marriage with Matt is because after being married for two years, he informed me he did not want to have children after all. Additionally, he kicked my cat once, and put three holes in my wall, door, and ceiling, and refused to work on his anger in counseling. I couldn’t continue living in the wake of such destructive anger.

I’m not sure you are aware of this, but your mother and her husband Winston, both recently had surgeries to remove cancer from their bodies. Grams was very sad that you didn’t call her on her 90th. Her dementia is getting worse too. T.J., Jo, Christine, Jack, and Grams all still talk about you with great fondness and melancholy. They miss you.

I wanted you to know how much I appreciated your apologizing to me for the times you left me alone with Sara. That meant a lot to me, especially the time when I was nine years old and she slapped me across the face and ran after me with a knife. I was thankful you realized you made a big mistake there. It takes a lot of courage to say you are sorry.

From what I have heard you and Sara consider yourselves to be very moral people, but cast stones at others frequently. I really don’t understand what I did wrong for you to cut me out of your life. When I was about 10 or 11 years old, I remember you telling me that as long as I remembered Sara’s birthday, you would always remember mine. The thought of losing your love terrified me as a little girl, so I always remembered Sara, Jimmy, Trey, and your birthdays every year, and yet, despite this agreement, you still cut all contact. It is incomprehensible to me, especially now that I am a mother, that a parent could completely forsake his child for no reason. You don’t know me, have never celebrated any of my milestones (my high school, college, or Masters degree graduation, either of my weddings, the birth of my child), and have never met your only
granddaughter, Amelia. You never met my husband or his family. And now I am currently pregnant again.

I wanted to get this off of my chest, because I never told you this before, but I had always fantasized that someday you would come to your senses and realize you made a mistake, and desire to have the kind of father/daughter relationship I always dreamed of. After interviewing 9 women about their similar experiences of a father leaving their lives, I have finally given up the dream. I realize now that this will never happen. You will never want to be a part of my life. You will never be the father I always wanted or dreamed of, and you will never be the grandfather I always wanted for Amelia and my baby-to-be. This saddens me, but in a way, it is a relief to finally have resolution. Perhaps cutting me out of your life was the best thing you could do, because at least it is something I can count on.

Sincerely,

Melissa