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Jana Rosenbaum
Daddy's Little Girl Lost:
Daughters' Reflect on the
Effects of Father-Daughter
Cut-Off

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to better understand the dynamics occurring in the father-daughter relationship and consequently the effects on daughters when there is a cut-off between this dyad post-divorce. Much of the current research and literature available on the topics of father loss and divorce have been on father-child cut-off without a specific focus on the father-daughter relationship. Therefore, this study was designed to specifically focus on the effects of cut-off experienced by daughters.

An in-depth qualitative interview was conducted with twelve adult daughters who identified having experienced a cut-off from their father post their parents divorce. These interviews contained 16 open-ended questions that asked the daughters to reflect on three major themes: (1) Their experience of the cut-off, (2) Their feelings about their fathers and (3) The perceived effects of the cut-off on their lives.

The major findings of the study provided information around the daughters understanding of the cut-off including the reasons, types, effects and the feelings they experienced. An additional finding that appeared in the study revealed what a daughter would need/want to reunite with her father. Although some of the information and stories shared in the findings did highlight the differences in the participants stories, much of the findings gathered, in conjunction with past research reviewed, further proves that there are overarching commonalities experienced by daughters who have been cut-off from their father post divorce.

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL LOST:
DAUGHTERS' REFLECT ON THE EFFECTS OF FATHER-DAUGHTER CUT-OFF

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Jana Rosenbaum

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2010

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The divorce rate in America shows that approximately 50% of marriages end in divorce and this has been the case for the past 30 years (Ahrons, 2004, p. ix). This translates into about one million children each year experiencing divorce (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2004, p. 106). In the last 30 years there has been much questioning and contemplation over the effects of divorce for all involved, especially the children. One thing that most of the literature seems to have in common is that a very important predicting factor in children's post-divorce adjustment is in how the parents respond to the needs of their children.

When the effects of divorce result in father absence, the question of how this loss impacts children is even greater. A nationwide study indicates that of the one thousand children of divorce tracked over an 11-year period, nearly half of these children had not seen their father the previous year (Hetherington and Stanley, 1997, p. 202). Hetherington goes on to suggest that if children are able to have relationships with their non-custodial father, there is evidence of better outcomes, including less internalizing and externalizing, less depression and deviance, and better psychosocial adjustment in adulthood (p. 198). These outcomes show the positive effects a relationship between a non-custodial father and children can have, and inversely, how a cut-off of that relationship can cause large amounts of distress and struggle for both the father and children involved.

In addition, the literature suggests that there is a difference between a father's relationship with his son and his daughter. The father-daughter bond is considered by many to be complicated and often fragile to maintain. This idea is expressed eloquently in a participant's response describing the father-daughter relationship shared in the book, *Like Father, Like Daughter*, by Suzanne Field (1983). The participant describes this relationship by saying "Neither of us understands or knows who the other is. Our dance is born from our need to know each other in order to know ourselves" (p. 7). It is therefore not surprising then, that if a father-daughter cut-off does occur, it has the potential to cause disruptions in a daughter's development (Scheffler & Naus, 1999, p. 39).

And so, we are left with many unanswered questions. First, how do we understand women in our society? What is involved in their development and what, if any, specific needs do they have throughout their life? Next, how do we understand the father-daughter relationship and what makes it distinct to both, parent child bonds and interpersonal relationships in general? Lastly, how does a father-daughter cut-off effect the development of women and how their lives unfold? Much of the current literature reviewed provides information on the father-daughter relationship and how children are affected by divorce, but does not specifically look at the father-daughter cut-off and also the ways adult daughters reflect on this lost relationship.

With these questions in mind, this project uses an exploratory, qualitative approach to interview and learn from 12 adult women who experienced of cut-off with their father post divorce. These interviews touch on topics such as: daughter's thoughts about their father's; life growing up; before and after the divorce; the experience of cut-

off; daughter's and father's current relationship; the experience of cut-off; and how daughter's are doing now.

By talking with these women and combining the findings with the literature reviewed in the following chapter, this study hopes to increase society's knowledge of the uniqueness of the father-daughter relationship and how cut-off affects these women's lives. This study is potentially useful to a host of groups in the mental health field and beyond who are looking to support women of all ages, fathers of all ages, and the experience of divorce many people will go through in their life. Specifically, it may be useful to therapists and other clinical practitioners who are located in school settings and in mental health agencies specifically working with the issue of divorce, as well as those practitioners counseling in private practice settings. In understanding this experience, we will be more prepared and able to respond to the reality of divorce in our society and how to best support the daughters of these divorce. It is also hoped that this study will be a gateway into future research that continues to evolve our understanding of female development and provides support in helping all family members stay connected post divorce.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEWED

This chapter will provide a framework for this study by looking at and reviewing past research conducted in the field. There will be three major topics of literature reviewed: female identity development, the father-daughter relationship, and the experience of cut-off. In the first major section of this review, literature will be discussed that explains the process of female development and the evolution of developmental theory that may challenge previous beliefs around the process females undergo in our society. By understanding female development we will have a better sense of how they are affected by divorce and cut-off from their father. The next section of the review will look to better understand the father-daughter relationship and how different theorists and academics in the field explain it. By understanding the meaning and role of this unique dyad, the literature reviewed will help to provide stronger differentiation and a deeper clarity of the father-daughter relationship. The last section of the review will be focused on learning about the specific experience of father-daughter cut-off post divorce. This section provides a basis of knowledge by helping to explain both the causes and effects of the cut-off for the daughter's involved.

Female Identity Development

To understand how daughters are affected by their fathers, it is useful to first explore literature that looks to understand female identity development. A study conducted by Schwartz and Montgomery (2002) on the similarity and differences in

identity development across acculturation and gender processes helps explore the potential differences in female development (p. 359). This study was conducted at a diverse public university in Miami, with a total of 357 students participating. The study looked to understand two separate processes of identity development- gender and acculturation. My review of the literature will focus on the part of the study related to gender. The study used a variety of identity measures including the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS-III), the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), and the Identity interpersonal Style Inventory (ISI). The results first explored the different theoretical views to determine whether there is a universal identity development model. While the modernist tradition believes that there is a universal identity formation that is unaffected by factors such as gender and acculturation, the post-modern perspective holds the opposite view. This view states - "not only are the basic components of identity development affected by acculturation and gender related experiences, but the very nature of those components and how they operate is largely or primarily determined by experiences that are idiosyncratic, local, and particular (e.g., culture related, historical, gendered)" (p. 368). This study argues for a third perspective, one that hypothesizes that "the fundamental structure of identity is quite consistent across variations in gender and level of acculturation, but that acculturation and gender do influence the degrees to which individuals draw upon specific processes and outcomes within this overarching structure" (p. 368). The results suggest that there is a fundamental similarity in structure of identity processes and outcomes in modern societies. However, the actual identity processes and outcomes in this study yielded a more complicated and non-epigenetic understanding of identity development. Findings

indicated that females were significantly higher on the normative style, commitment, and interpersonal and ideological achievement. Males were significantly higher than females on the diffuse/avoidant style, ideological and interpersonal foreclosure, and interpersonal diffusion (p. 369). Some of the limitations of this study include a lack of focus on variation in gender and acculturation and that most of the diversity in participants represented the Latino population and not other ethnic groups. These included a positive loading for the informational style, interpersonal commitment and achievement in both domains and a negative loading for interpersonal diffusion.

Lytle, Bakken and Romig (1997) from Wichita State University conducted a study to better understand the differences of identity development for females and males in early and middle adolescents as defined by Erikson's stages of identity development. The study chose to look at the time of adolescence to explore gender differences because of Erickson's belief that this is a time when one is integrating "past partial identification into a cohesive self" (p. 175). In addition, the study acknowledged that Erickson's model primarily used male development to describe human development, which brings up the question of how females fit in (Archer, 1992). Erikson did suggest, however, different dimensions of development for males and females, with males being specifically intrapersonal and females specifically interpersonal. Additional research began to appear focusing on "psychological androgyny, indicating that individuals who possessed both feminine and masculine gender-role behaviors were more likely to display adaptive behavior, high self-esteem and identity achievement" (Bern & Lenney, 1976). The study administered the Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) to 703 students, with 590 completing it, over an eight year period from sixth through twelfth grades at schools

in two Midwestern cities, that represented similar racial/ethnic diversity. Two other self-report measures were used for purposes of validity, including the Inventory of Psychosocial Development (IPD) and the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ). The results from the study indicated that females scored higher on the Trust and Total Resolution scores and scored equally well on Industry and Initiative scores. These findings support the hypothesis that Erikson's model is not accurate for females, suggesting that while males develop their identity as intrapersonally, the females develop both inter and intrapersonally. This goes against Western culture's sex-typed expectations that assign behaviors of "aggressive and autonomy" to boys and "nurturant, emotional and passive" to girls (Archer, 1992, p. 45). This stereotyping is suggested to impede on a woman's ability to develop a balanced identity if they are not empowered to be aggressive and autonomous, and instead feeling insecure in competitive situations. Similarly, it may be useful for men to develop their skills in interpersonal relationships for highest levels of adaption in society. Ultimately, Lytle et al. suggest that a consistent balancing of opposites simultaneously may be most skillful for all people. Although this study was able to prove that females seem to develop both inter and intrapersonally, it is hard to make absolute generalizations. The main question in determining accuracy is around the use of the MPD to identify both male and female development. The questions may be too simple, only reflecting aspects of the different themes. For example, the literature suggested that interpersonal characteristics were reflected through control, however the article suggested that there are additional components not highlighted through questions in the MPD to best track interpersonal traits, like inclusion and affection (p. 183). Additionally, using Erikson's model may not even be useful in

measuring female development. Finally, the study was conducted exclusively within the Midwest and did not provide a broader base of participants.

Lastly, a study conducted by Gerstmann and Kramer entitled “Feminist Identity Development: Psychometric Analyses of Two Feminist Identity Scales” was used to explore the reliability and validity of two feminist identity development scales. The study had 198 female participants who were students at Rutgers and were either in a women’s study or psychology class. They administered the two scales to the students along with a measure of cognitive development at the beginning and end of the semester (p. 327). The article suggests that a “valued personal identity” and a “positive self regard” are necessary components of a “well developed person” and that it may be more difficult for women to obtain these attributes because of the oppression from society (p. 328).

Downing and Roush developed a feminist identity development model to explore the experience for women, and this model was based on William Cross’s black identity development model. This model has 5 stages: Passive Acceptance, Revelation, Embeddedness-Emanation, Synthesis and Active Commitment (p. 328). Rickard suggests, “the levels of feminist identity are affiliated with changes in social-cognitive development” (p. 328). In addition, Kramer, has developed an identity model that combines the cognitive development and feminist identity model, which suggests a process by which one moves through different levels of thought: Absolute, Relativistic and Dialectic (p. 328). By using Downing and Roush’s model, these cognitive shifts progressively relate to feminist identity development:

Absolute thinking, by definition, underlies the Passive Acceptance and Revelation levels, Relativism begins to emerge within and further fosters Embeddedness-Emanation, and Dialectical thinking allows for the dialectical synthesis necessary to achieve a synthesis in one's feminist identity, that the absolute thinking occurs during passive acceptance and revelation, then relativism develops during Embeddedness-Emanation, and Dialectical thinking allows for the dialectical synthesis necessary to achieve a synthesis in one's feminist identity (p. 330).

The results of this study did support and validate the measures, because they had “high internal consistency, high test-retest reliability and were free of social desirability influences” (p. 347). Additionally, the results indicated a correlation between feminist identity development and cognitive development. Also seen was high convergent validity between the two scales, with the FIS being the better measure of construct validity, better internal consistency and test-retest reliability. However, there was some unexpected correlation between absolute thinking and synthesis, which leads the researchers to suggest a more in-depth study in the future to be focused on the highest development levels of the FIDS, synthesis and active commitment (p. 348). One limitation of this study was an unequal amount of participants from the women studies course versus psychology course, which may have been caused by the incentive given to psychology students.

The Father-Daughter Relationship

In an effort to understand how the absence of fathers affects daughters, I will first explore literature on the nature of the father-daughter relationship. *Like Father, Like Daughter*, a book written by Suzanne Fields (1983), shares her findings from a national study she conducted about the father-daughter relationship. The study looked to understand this relationship by sending a questionnaire out to both fathers and daughters alike, and getting responses from hundreds of people. Fields suggests that for daughters,

fathers are their first perception of the opposite sex, one's expectations of male behavior (p. 6). There is a suggestion that daughters have a yearning to be closer to their father, and this yearning develops in one "a sadness, an emptiness or an anger" (p. 8). The anger Fields speaks of is thought of as a result of fathers' not allowing their daughters to show love and affection with their fathers. There is an image of a father "hiding": hiding behind "newspapers", a "wife", a "public image", "authority", and of greatest significance, a "fear of intimacy" (p. 9). Another unique piece of the father-daughter relationship is how father's show love. Unlike the mother's unconditional love, Fields suggests that "fathers [love is] often is given as a reward of performance" (p. 11). Research indicates that a father is different with his daughter in the way he holds her as an infant, speaks to and plays with her. "There are many biological, developmental and maturational explanations for the difference in fathers' behavior with their sons versus daughters, for instance, the aggressive play that is seen earlier in sons" (p. 14). Another component of this relationship can be understood through Freud's idea of the Oedipal phase. The central developmental task of this phase is for the daughter to both understand that a father loves her while not developing a sexual relationship with her. Therefore, if a father either rejects his daughter, or crosses sexual boundaries, there exists severe consequences for the daughter. However, because of Freud's time, it is suggested that he avoided many of the useful elements of these concepts, not exploring the strengths that flow from love, respect, trust and admiration nor how the exploitation of love can move people in opposite directions (p. 17). Clearly this literature is older in nature and therefore, many of the concepts may be outdated due to historical changes. However, this literature does seem to provide a context for the father-daughter relationship and how

challenging it can be to develop intimacy between the two parties involved. One advantage of this literature is that it studies both fathers and daughters, looking to understand both perspectives of the relationship and how one affects the other.

How can we understand the father-daughter relationship theoretically and how do these theories inform us today? Mary Williamson (2004) provides a psychodynamic theoretical examination of the father-daughter relationship and how it effects the psychosexual development of daughters. She looks at the spectrum of psychodynamically oriented theories beginning with Freud (p. 3). Through Freudian theory, the notion is that babies are born bisexual, and once a girl realizes she has no penis, she is able to develop a sense of superiority while also developing a fear of castration. At around age three, the daughter realizes she is like her mother and therefore comes to envy the male penis. This therefore displaces her attachment from her mother onto her father which ultimately manifests sexual longings described as the Oedipal Complex. This is a difficult process because the father /daughter relationship is not close at this time if the mother has played the traditional role of caretaking, making it difficult to relinquish attraction to the same sex. Therefore, in order to enter this phase, “the girl has to salvage what is left of her sexual drive and devote it most actively to the passive aim of being loved,” which can be seen as a narcissistic act, making her an object (p. 4). This “being loved” by the father, along with a girl’s identification of an affectionate attachment with her mother is said to bring about her attractiveness to men. She will thus learn through her father how to relate to male expectations.

Looking through an object relations lens of the father-daughter relationship, theorists believe that the daughter looked to her father much earlier in infancy caused by

the “deprivation of the breast” (p. 211). Object relations theorists did not see gender differences as being caused by having or not having a penis, but rather on the “innate sexual differences” and “unconscious genital awareness” of men and women. This theory did not put women in a subservient role, thus, allowing a women’s sexual expression to exist in its own right and separate from pro-creativity. Williams next presents Winnicott’s understanding of this relationship, with this theory believing that the ideal beginning of this relationship would start while the mother is pregnant (p. 212). As the mother begins to wholly focus on the baby, the father enables this consumption by providing protection from the outside world, including financial security. This develops a “protective framework” for the mother and infant relationship. Winnicott further goes onto suggest that the father has a role of “weaning the infant from the child” and developing a relationship with the infant that is close but not merged. He is both able to “break into the mother-child relationship” while also being the mediator between the family and the outside world, ultimately representing authority. Jessica Benjamin follows a more contemporary object relations perspective by suggesting, “a girl does not terminate her attachment to her mother when she takes her father as a love object. She will see her mother as a loved figure of identification as well as a rival, but develops a sense of being both like her and like other women too” (Benjamin, 1998, 45, p. 7). Williamson next describes Kohut’s self-psychology lens, suggesting that a healthy child needs to have three needs met: To be mirrored by the parents as unique and special (mother), to be able to idealize a parent (father) who can provide a strong calming and confident image that is also trustworthy and lastly, the child needs twinship that allows them to feel like they are like others and not alone (p. 213). Williamson then goes onto

describes other theorist's understandings of the father-daughter relationship. She shares that some theorists suggest that the father/daughter relationship is completely separate from the mother/daughter relationship. Etchegoyen (2002) suggests that the “child perceives the father directly but also through the eyes of the mother. The mother’s conscious and unconscious expectations and fantasies about the role of the father will shape the father’s representation. These in turn will have been created in part by the mother’s present relationship with her partner” (p. 34). This ability to see her mother’s relationship with the father, frees up the daughter’s ability to have both “sexual feelings towards her father and her hostile feelings towards her mother” (p. 216). Andrew Samuels (1989) examines the important role of fathers in their daughter’s gender identity. He suggests that both gender certainty and uncertainty are unhelpful for a daughter’s development, and that there is a need for women to have a balance in her gender and sexual identity. It is in the unconditional relationship with the father, one that allows for “erotic playback” that allows the daughter to live subjectively (p. 214). Williamson concludes with sharing her own perspective, following most inline with Etchegoyen’s view, but further recognizes how difficult it is to categorize the relationship with the knowledge of the many diverse ways family patterns exist. This theoretical examination is a very useful and thorough knowledge base that helps to explain the father-daughter relationship. It provides, in detail, a host of psychodynamically oriented theories that address both an array of perspectives and a historical context that seem to play in role in and shape the understanding of this relationship.

An article by Christine C. Kieffer further examines the nature of the father-daughter relationship and the impact this relationship has for both involved through a

psychoanalytic perspective. She first shares that this theoretical base is limited, and hopes to provide information on how this knowledge may better help us understand the concepts of desire and sexuality (p. 76). Kieffer suggests that an optimal experience with one's father includes "the capacity for intimacy with otherness, and, in turn, permits the father a new opportunity in midlife to further develop this capacity in himself (p. 76).

Kieffer begins her discussion with Freud, sharing that he did not really believe fathers played a very significant role in their daughter's development. She explains that later theorists began to draw a connection between the mother/child developmental task of separation individuation to be in part due to the influence of the "pre-oedipal father". (p. 76). Freud's notion was that a daughter's penis envy allows her to have a "positive Oedipal complex" and during this process, the child is able to replace her wish for the penis with a relationship and identification with the mother and femininity. Later female theorists did not agree with this and challenged the belief that penis envy is inevitable and instead argued that this envy only occurred if there was no resolve of the Oedipal complex and the "daughter flees from the libidinal investment in the father, fears competition with the mother and defensively identifies with the father" (p. 77). This newer conceptual understanding further suggests that penis envy is created because of the privilege in Western culture of men. Other theorists believe that penis envy is about the father helping the girl to separate from her "anally controlling, sexually repressive mother" (p. 77). In addition, other theorists, like Chodorow, Dinnerstein and Fast (citations) see the father as an "exciting" other and symbolizes a "power independent of the mother, an independence from "an omnipotent, pregenital mother) (p. 77). Benjamin further goes onto suggest that daughters' "identification with the father...is not merely an

internal structure, it is a relationship in which the subject recognizes herself in the other (Benjamin, p. 277). She also points out that in a society with father absence frustrates the daughter's ability to gain this love and this is what can be considered penis envy.

Benjamin suggests a term called "mutual recognition" "when a daughter admires and expresses a wish to be like the father, and the father confirms this with reciprocal recognition-that is, the father endorses the identification and empathically conveys and understanding of the daughter's experience" (p. 77).

Tessman believes that the father has a role of helping the daughter to gain endeavor excitement and erotic excitement, both giving her mastery over her feminine identity and vocational achievement. In the psychoanalytic literature, if the daughter is the "favored" child, there is a likelihood that she must maintain an ongoing dependence on him for self-esteem. Social and feminist literature consider this concept to exist because of the different ways girls and boys are reared, with girls not being encouraged to be "conquerors," with this winning stance implying that there must also be a loser, and this may lead her to experience guilt and believe "that her success has been at another's expense" (p. 78). Research by social psychologists looking at "locus of control" or "ownership" support this literature, sharing women would rather share success so as not to lose the isolation they may experience at the cost success, however, constricting her "agency and entitlement" (p.78).

This reflects the challenges of the "oedipal victory" for a girl in that this success also brings about "isolation that she is not conditioned to tolerate and-it causes another's (especially mother's) unhappiness, she may fear external punishment and experience internal guilt" (p. 78). All of these potential outcomes may move girl to unconsciously

punish herself, and the literature suggests that she may do this in areas of love vs. work so that she may continue to identify with the mother who is also playing her own culturally established societal role in family. One specific challenge may be to the daughter's femininity, whether making her hyperfeminine or repressed. It may also cause the mother to hold her own resentment towards the daughter for any success she may experience in her life, whether it be through her vocation or special relationship with her father (p. 78).

Victoria Secunda's (1992) book, *Woman and their Fathers*, is widely cited in literature and helps to understand the unique relationship of father and daughter. Secunda interviewed 150 daughters and 75 fathers, who represented a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The daughters ranged in age from 18-70 yrs old and fathers from 38-72 yrs old. In the chapter entitled, "What are fathers for?" Secunda suggests that fathers, "are first, heroes to their daughters... if mothers are to their children the domestic world, the hum drum, the predictable, the familiar and routine, fathers are the *other*- periodic, bigger, stronger, strange, different. Mothers represent the day, father the night-and the weekend, the holiday, the special dinner out" (p. 4). Secunda further goes onto say that although the mother is the first love, one of the most important values of a father is that he is a "costar in the parenting process" and helps keep the mother daughter relationship from becoming too enmeshed (p. 7). The father is the otherness, and this is crucial in the developmental process of separation-individuation.

In the book, *Fatherless Daughters*, Pamela Thomas (2009) interviewed over 100 women who lost their father ranging in age from 19 to 94, and from all over the world.

Within the 100 women interviewed, 66 of them lost their fathers to death and 40 to divorce. This presents one of the first limitations of the study, in that the information presented lumped together these two experiences. Thomas however, did share that, “the initial most compelling factor that affects how a woman experiences her father’s loss is whether her father dies or whether he abandons the family by choice (p. 39). She further goes onto say that although she recognizes the differences, she found that there were many useful similarities and she tried to acknowledge differences when they existed throughout the themes of the book. The study does provide an in-depth look into the historical, cultural and developmental understanding of this father-daughter relationship, providing useful insight to the field.

In the chapter entitled, “So, What’s a Father?” Thomas explores the role of fatherhood, and identifies six areas of responsibilities fathers have traditionally held including “protector,” “guide to the world at large,” “breadwinner,” “alternative parent,” “second opinion,” and “male role model” (p. 32). Thomas further goes on to suggest that some of these roles are becoming less father specific, while others still seem relevant. She discusses the father as an alternative parent, and additionally, different from the role of the mother in how they connect with their children. The father is described as being “less emotional and more results oriented, disciplined, and demanding,” stressing “competition, challenge, initiative, risk-taking and independence,” while mothers emphasize “emotional security and personal safety” (p. 34). The final role a father provides for their children is a male role model that Thomas suggests cannot be replaced by a mother. Daughter’s learn “how to relate to men,” “about heterosexual trust and intimacy,” to appreciate their own femininity” and “that they are love-worthy” from a

father (Popenoe, 1996, p. 35). The chapter concludes with the positive attributes children often exhibit when a healthy father is in their life, including “self confidence-intellectually, emotionally, psychologically and sexually” (36).

In the *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, Scheffler and Naus (1999) present a study conducted at the University of Western Ontario with female college students to better understand how the father-daughter relationship affects their lives. The study measured specific areas of daughter’s development against the level of fatherly affirmation these woman identified their father’s having towards them. The main areas of woman’s development that were measured in the study were the daughter’s self-esteem, fear of intimacy, comfort with womanhood, and construction of sexuality and fatherly affirmation (of both daughter and mother) (p. 40). The study’s findings showed significant correlation between perceived fatherly affirmation and self-esteem, fear of intimacy, comfort with sexuality, and perception of father’s feeling toward mother, but not with womanhood (p. 42). However, the connection could not be made that higher self-esteem caused by fatherly affirmation resulted in less fear of intimacy and higher comfort with sexuality. Although this study chose to use scales to conduct the research, which automatically generalizes much of the information received, there were many useful strategies initiated to provide more flexibility in identifying patterns. For example, the scale used to determine levels of womanhood by daughters allowed participants to write down the concepts they believed were encompassed in this area, instead of providing culturally bound descriptors. In addition, the intimacy scale allowed for different types of relationships to be explored, not just those that are considered heterosexual. However, the study took place in Canada, with a female population of

students in Psychology courses at a university, which, in many ways, does not automatically allow for any conclusions of a more universal understanding of father-daughter relationships to be drawn.

The Experience of Cut-Off

“If science has shown us that father absence adds such a burden of risk factors, what on earth does father presence do? (Pruett, 2000, p. 6). In understanding the effects of father absence, it may be helpful to explore what father presence provides. The literature around the role of fatherhood has offered up different ways of understanding the relationship between father and child. In the book entitled *Fatherhood*, Kyle Pruett (2000) shares his study of men in intact families who stayed home in the early months and years of their children’s lives (p. 3). Pruett conducted this study with 18 families in the early 80’s, and continues through the present day, to get their thoughts on what the effect of men and fathers is on a child’s development (p. 3). The study is identified as longitudinal, however no information is shared as to whether it is solely qualitative or quantitative in nature. It does seem safe to assume that the study is at least qualitative because Pruett shares vignettes throughout his book of the family participants. The chapters of the book weave together past research on father related topics with stories of the families he interviewed. In the chapter in his book, entitled “The Dad Difference in Child Development,” Pruett suggests that there is such a thing as a “good enough father” (p. 38). This defines a father's care as involving “day to day emotional dialogue between father and child, allowing a back-and-forth shared attention-sometimes positive, sometimes negative-to resonate in their relationship (p. 38). Pruett goes on to suggest that this good enough father provides children with specific skills in their development.

These skills include physical development, moral sensitivity, self-control, capacity for attachment, problem solving skills, and cognitive capacities (p. 40).

A study conducted by East, Jackson and O'Brien (2007) explored the experience of daughters who grew up in a home with father absence caused by "relationship breakdown" using Van Manen's phenomenological research approach. This approach relies on "retrospective reflection and describing and interpreting these experiences through the exploration of emerging themes (Van Manen, 2006). The study had nine women participants aged 22-46 who had lived in a father absent environment for a minimum of four years in childhood/adolescence, with a biological mother raising them. All of these women identified as not being socially disadvantaged, with many having attended college, employed, etc. The results of this qualitative study suggested that all of the women experienced this father absence as a traumatic/sad aspect of life that affected their interpersonal relationships. Four main themes were identified that are: He always let me down: a constant source of hurt; I have no feelings of closeness for my father: father as a stranger; All men are bastards: negotiating relationships with men; I don't want to hate him forever: reconstructing the relationship (p. 14). These findings suggest that, "having loving, nurturing and supportive relationships with others does not fill the void associated with the feelings of abandonment, loss, grief and unworthiness felt by children who experience the absence of a parent" (p. 4). This study used a simple qualitative approach to understand the women's experience. There was a huge age range of participants and there is no information about the demographic breakdowns, so it is hard to truly understand and analyze the information presented.

Daughters without Dads, written by Lois Mowday Rabey (1995), explores the challenges daughters face when they grow up without father. Lois Rabey interviewed 100 women who had lost their fathers or were raised without a father present (p. 3). In addition, she spoke with counselors, pastors, and friends of families to better understand these women's lives. Some limitations of the interviews in terms of generalizability were that they were only single-family homes, and there was a major focus on the role of the church and God in the process.

Rabey begins her discussion around father loss by categorizing loss into three types. (1) Losses that are part of the natural order of things, replacing the lost thing with something newer or better or more appropriate, and an understanding that these losses are accepted as part of life. (2) Controllable losses that are a necessary part of life and are often seen as "impetuses" for change. (3) Tragic losses that the body recognizes as not being part of the natural order, seem to have no redeeming purpose, we have no control over them and are seen as the "absence of something that is supposed to be present" (p. 61). It is this third category of tragic losses that shapes her discussion of father absence. Rabey suggests that this tragic loss of a father "destroys what was –or should have been– an intimate bond" and that this loss is one that threatens our being, develops in us a "frantic search for survival" and has a "significant" and "lasting" impact (p. 62). Rabey goes on to share what is lost from father absence and identifies these main areas of loss a daughter is affected by. The first one she identifies is security in a father's love that allows the daughter to be "silly, giggly, pouty, tearful, unreasonable and more-and still feel precious" (p. 67). Therefore, if a daughter was not provided this security, there is a sense of danger she feels in her world. She is not able to protect the "inner girl" that lives

in all women and this lack of safety most likely affects her heart (p. 67). Furthermore, as suggested in much of the literature reviewed, a father's love is likely to be provided with a little more "gleeful abandon", than the love she receives by her mother. (p. 67). Rabey looks to Elizabeth Fishel to explain the impact of the father-daughter relationship and how it affects the daughter's patterns for the future. Fishel suggests that the daughters age of 3-5 yrs old is a significant time for the father/daughter relationship, the years that coincide with the "daddy's little girl" age. Fishel shares, "the daughter makes a blueprint of attitudes that affect later choices in love, later decisions about work. In the untangling life clues to the daughter's future. Will the daughter of an absent father try to resolve her unrequited love by seeking a man in her father's image? Or will she hold herself aloof from men, making sure she is not abandoned the way her mother was?" (p.71). Another issue is around her identity of "uniqueness or specialness" experienced in the father/daughter relationship, in comparison to an identity of sameness a daughter may experience with her mother. She suggests that self-esteem is often tied up with a father's love, and if that is interrupted, it is possible that the development of a healthy self-regard may be fragile (p. 71). Rabey shares that the loss may "produce the appearance of a little girl gone, but she's there". She further goes onto explain, "appearances can be deceiving, the most professional looking and self assured exterior may conceal a deep wound. True feelings may be stuffed, denied, ignored, or they may be handled inappropriately in unhealthy relationships with others, particularly men. Only through subterranean explorations of her pain and sense of loss can real health develop (p. 73).

Another potential effect of father loss is a daughter's future belief in self-reliance, not wanting to depend on another for money and focusing her attention on building

financial security likely caused by vocational success. In addition, Rabey suggests that daughters are giving up on romantic dreams about men and lasting passion, and instead “making plans”. What may be lost, Rabey explores, is a women’s lack of belief in men, not being able to trust that good ones exist, and that masculine care is realistic. Rabey also suggests that women have become more hypervigilant and guarded “in armor” to protect themselves in life. These guards of armor are meant to protect them from painful emotions and may take the form of sarcasm, an “All is well” attitude that conceals their true personality from being revealed. These women may also live in fear. In comparison to dangerous communities where people have to sleep “with one eye open” father loss may be a symbol of danger over their houses and lives, and face insecurities “of living alone and helpless on a daily basis” (p. 85).

In continuing to look at the literature provided by Secunda, the chapter entitled, “Absent Fathers”, explores the specific affects of father loss. The opening section of the chapter highlights the emotional experience of a father leaving as it states, “afterward nothing is ever the same. From that moment on, much of life becomes a matter of avoiding another good-bye” (p. 195). Secunda suggests that a daughter’s loss of a father “forever changes the shape of a daughter’s identity-how she views the world and herself” (p. 195). She then shares that although much of the effects are similar for daughters, some of the more specific ways a daughter copes are affected by the reason of the father leaving.

For purposes of this study, I will explore the section that focuses on father’s leaving due to divorce. Secunda, like other researches, describes father absence due to divorce, a very difficult type of loss, in that there was choice involved. This loss for the

child, whether explained or not, is often felt to a child as personal; that their father is not only leaving his partner, but also her, too.

Secunda offers more specific variables that are relevant to understanding the affects on the daughter. These are age and gender of the child. In discussing age, she suggests that the most vulnerable age for divorce is in a child's younger years, because it is "embedded in their identities so early" (p. 196). During this time, the Oedipal developmental experience is curtailed. In addition, it is believed that younger children process the divorce in a more "primitive" manner, "accustomed to having every need met in infancy...this primitive "narcissism, is the means by which children begin to form a sense of their own separate identities" (p. 196). This narcissism may mean that a child sees the divorce as their fault, and if they have the power to force them away, it can be possible that they believe they have the power to bring him back. Secunda suggests that "self-blame" is a way for the child to have some control over uncontrollable events (p. 197). Although it can be considered easier for the older child, because they have developed more of a personal identity and may have more of an understanding that their parent's relationship needed to end, they still often suffer consequences. One of the main ones is that if a divorce happens during the teenage years, a child may totally disconnect from the parents and rely solely on outside relationships to form community. This makes the separation-individuation process difficult, not providing the child with a place to come back to in times of need.

In relation to gender, Secunda suggests that sons may suffer more from the custodial arrangements after divorce. However, research suggests "divorce is more harmful to girls because boys are raised to be less emotionally invested in relationships.

Thus there is for the daughters the “sleeper effect” of father absence” which doesn’t show up until later in their development (p. 198). In addition, once the divorce happens, the continuing of the relationship between daughter and father often becomes more difficult because of their own differences, making connection harder for them to establish and nurture.

Secunda further explores why fathers desert their daughters. She believes that the two main reasons are often due to the father’s “inertia” and “indifference” (p. 202). If there is a reconnection, it is suggested by Secunda, that it is the daughters that do the work. This chapter looks to understand why that is, acknowledging that most fathers would not want to lose touch with their children. It is therefore thought that the cause of the desertion may mostly come from the father’s “frail psychological underpinnings” (p. 206). In addition, Secunda finds in the men that she interviewed one commonality- these father’s lack a paternal identity and that “their sense of self is wrapped up almost entirely in their work and/or their masculinity” (p. 206). She further suggests that these fathers are “essentially immature, stuck in the primary narcissism of early childhood, unable to feel anyone’s pain or joy but their own” (p. 207).

In returning to the book, *Fatherless Daughters*, Thomas’s (2009) chapter entitled “Death, Divorce or Simply Fading Away,” describes children of divorce going through processes of grief and mourning that are comparable to children who lose a parent to death. However, as Beverly Raphael discusses in *The Anatomy of Bereavement* (1983), the children not only experience mourning caused by the breakup of their family, “they are burdened with emotional complexities of another kind because the parent who has left is alone and may potentially be a part of that child’s life. The child, thus, “has to resolve

the complex issues of this different relationship and the role it may play in the ongoing life of his family” (p. 59). This chapter further goes onto suggest that daughters who lose their fathers to abandonment, takes on a “special color.” As sociologist Judith Wallerstein adds, these girls “have a powerful need to create a protective, loving father, one who would never intentionally let them down. Without any sense of contradiction, they are able to maintain a benign image of the loving father side by side with a history of repeated rejections and failures” (p. 59).

Another chapter in *Fatherless Daughters*, “The Emotional Legacy of Loss,” suggests a cluster of emotional characteristics identified for woman who were raised without her father. They are fear of abandonment, anger, shame, low self-esteem/feelings of worthlessness, problems with trust, a tendency to romanticize men/view men unrealistically, fear of intimacy, problems with sex, difficulties with assertiveness, issues with goals and personal boundaries, conflicting feelings of dependence and independence, resistance to commitment and fear of separation (2009, p. 124). In *Women and Their Fathers* (1992), Victoria Secunda describes the fear of abandonment to permeate a daughter spending much of her life, whether consciously or unconsciously “avoiding another goodbye.” The potential low self-esteem that evolves in a daughter due to father loss may create a viscous cycle, one involving craving and distancing in male relationships. She may yearn for the acknowledgment that she is lovable while at the same time choosing men that are not emotionally available. This is suggested to come from a deeply held belief that she was not important enough for her father to stay around (p. 131). Fear of intimacy and problems with sex are suggested to go hand in hand with a fear of abandonment. Because sexuality is the ultimate intimate experience, it is

hard for a woman to not be inhibited, for fear of abandonment and feelings of worthlessness. The opposite extreme is also acknowledged, where woman appear to be “sexually free” and often behaving in that way (p. 143). Another potential effect of fatherlessness is in a daughter’s ability to manage a male dominated culture, struggling to find her aggressiveness and drive in a natural way. As Elyce Wakerman suggests in her book, *Father Loss*, the daughter that is “deprived of the ongoing encouragement of father is also characteristically anxious about her femininity. Ambition and its cohort aggressiveness, pose a threat to her already shaky sense of appropriate female behavior” (p. 144). A conflict between dependence and independence is often at play in these fatherless women, often giving the impression of being independent, often with “intense fears of dependency” living right beneath the surface, often unconsciously. This dependency is suggested to affect all of their interpersonal relationships, with all of the factors shared above coming into play: “The fears of abandonment and of intimacy, anger, the over-romanticizing of men, and the inability to assert herself” (p. 147). The last two identified effects of being fatherless is a resistance to commitment and a fear of separation. For the former, one is unsure that they are capable, deserving, or guaranteed commitment, while the latter focuses around the again dreaded fears of abandonment (p. 148).

With these three main areas of literature in mind, female identity development, the father-daughter relationship and the experience of cut-off, this study will explore with adult daughters who lost touch with their fathers post divorce, their experience of and effects caused by this cut-off. The contributions of this study will be beneficial to many communities in the mental health field and beyond by looking to evolve our

understanding of female development, continue to explore the uniqueness of the father-daughter relationship and, lastly, better comprehend the effects a cut-off causes to the daughters involved. By increasing our knowledge about these issues, the field will be more prepared to help women of all ages, and especially those going through struggles with their fathers'. In addition, this study will hopefully be a springboard for more research that studies female development, the father-daughter relationship, and how to support all family members when a divorce occurs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study used an exploratory, qualitative approach to explore the experiences of adult daughters who lost touch with their fathers post divorce. Twelve women participated in the study. Each participant was required to be 18 years of age or older, needed to have parents who divorced, and had to experience a significant shift in their relationship with their father post divorce that either was defined by lost touch or an emotional shift in their relationship.

Sample

To recruit participants for the study, non-probability sampling was used. The major recruitment technique was an email (Appendix C) sent out to an extensive list of sources from the Smith community, social work peers, friends, and family. The researcher was also given permission from two organizations to be used as participant feeders. These feeders were the Denver Family Institute and City Year Boston, AmeriCorps program and both agencies sent out emails through their list servs. Although it would have been ideal to have a more complex recruiting approach, this was not possible because of the limited time given to complete the recruitment process. Because the research is limited on understanding the father-daughter cut off, it still can be considered useful to rely on these available subjects as they express a viewpoint that is, for the most part, not presently represented in the literature.

Data Collection

Once participants were identified, a 10-minute phone-screening interview (Appendix D) was conducted to make sure a person fit criteria. If a person fit criteria and was willing to participate, they were sent an informed consent (Appendix B) to review, sign and return and, at this time, were also scheduled for a 1.5-hour phone call to complete the qualitative interview (Appendix E and F). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher upon completion of the interview. Because the nature of the subject to be researched was personal, the information provided by participants was kept confidential. Although participation was confidential, it was not possible to guarantee anonymity and so the researcher did not identify participants by name anywhere in the data, and any quotes or other potentially identifying information was disguised. It was also shared with participants that the interview may be a challenging and emotional experience. Therefore, in addition to the researcher remaining sensitive and aware to the personal nature of the interview questions, a list of referral resources (Appendix G) was available and offered to all participants. It was also possible that while this subject may have caused discomfort to participants, the benefits of participating in this project will far outweigh the risks by giving them a chance to reflect on, acquire insight into and heal these past wounds.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was used to analyze the data obtained. The grounded theory method is described as being mostly inductive and provides little preconceived ideas or expectations, instead allowing "greater latitude for the discovery of some unexpected regularity" (Rubin & Babbie, 2007, p. 244). This method was chosen because of the

limited research on this subject prior to this study. Grounded theory allowed for an exploratory approach that developed findings through identifying common themes and patterns across individual participant stories.

The major limitations of this study included the limited time to recruit participants, which affected both diversity and criteria selection. The limited recruitment time affected the diversity of the participant base and also forced less exclusions to be used in the criteria used to recruit participants. If there had been more time, it would have been ideal to exclude participation of daughters coming from families with other significant family struggles such as major mental illness, abuse, addiction, and illness. It might have also been useful to define cut-off more rigidly, recruiting participants that experienced a complete cut-off from their father for a significant period of time. If more restrictive criteria could have been used, there would have been likely more unique patterns and themes represented in the findings. Another potential limitation of the study was the researcher's own personal bias and experience in having a cut-off from her own father. The researcher did work to remain unbiased throughout the study considering her own similar personal life experience of father-daughter cut of. Ultimately, in talking with these woman and identifying findings based on the interviews conducted, both the field and the participants could potentially get a better understanding of the post-divorce dynamics between fathers and daughters, and how losing touch impacts these woman's lives.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study was an attempt to understand the following phenomena: The experience and effects of father-daughter cut-off post divorce. This chapter will present the findings collected from the 12 exploratory, qualitative interviews completed with adult daughters who retrospectively looked back and discussed their experiences of cut-off following their parent's divorce.

The interviews contained 16 open ended questions, three questions relating to the topic of reuniting and, therefore, only asked if applicable to the participant's specific circumstances. These questions were organized around the following five major themes: (1) daughter's feelings and thoughts about their fathers, (2) life before, during and after the divorce, (3) the experience of cut-off and in some cases reuniting, and (4) daughters overall life experience and well being. Upon completion of these audio-recorded 12 interviews, they were transcribed by the researcher and then coded into these four themes. In addition, basic demographic information was collected from each participant including age, race and ethnicity (both optional), age at parent's divorce, age at official cut-off from father, geographic distance from father after divorce, number of years of cut-off, age and gender of siblings, and if applicable; age at reuniting, and number of years reunited. Major themes emerged from the participant's interviews.

Additionally, during the interview process, one additional finding emerged that had not originally been a part of the interview questions but which came up with all

interview participants involved. The findings will be shared as follows: (1) demographic data (2) types of cut-off (3) reasons for cut-off (4) effects of cut-off (5) feelings about the cut-off and 6) what daughters' would need to reunite.

Demographic Data

The sample size for this study was twelve women. Ten of these women identified as Caucasian, one as Cuban American and one as Multi-racial. Of the six women that shared their ethnicity, they identified as follows: European American (3), German American (1), non-Hispanic (1), Multi-ethnic (1). Geographically the women reported currently living in the following locations: California (1), Colorado (2), Florida (3), Massachusetts (2), New Jersey (2) and Virginia (2). Lastly, although not specifically asked to any of the participants, one participant identified as lesbian in respect to her sexual orientation. Daughter's ages ranged from 23-44 with the median age being 29. Their age when the parents got divorced ranged from 3-18, with the median age being 8. The daughter's age when she experienced a cut-off from her father ranged in age from 3-33, with the median age of 11. It is important to note that 4 of the daughters expressed more than one cut-off with their father and 2 of them shared a subsequent official cut-off. The number of years of cut-off daughters shared having from her father also revealed more complicated answers. Of the 10 participants that responded, 3 shared having a sporadic relationship with their father. The range of years of cut-off went from 1-24 years with the median number of years of cut-off being 14. Geographically, of the 8 participants who answered this question, 5 answered that they lived in the same area as their father post divorce, 2 shared that they did not, 1 shared that the father lived there on and off, and 1 does not know where her father lived. Ten of the 12 shared having siblings

ranging from having one sibling to 9 siblings (including half/step siblings). The median number of siblings was 2.5. And lastly, of the 6 women that reported an experience of reuniting with their father, 5 out of the 6 were 18 years of age when the event took place and one participant was 31 years of age. The range of years reunited was from 1.4 years to 13 years, with 4 out of the 6 women having been reunited for 13 years.

Types of Cut-Off

Participants identified three major types of cut-off with their father causing a significant shift in their relationship after their parents divorce. Many of the father's in these stories did not give up entirely on the relationship, but it seems that they were not involved enough in their daughter's life for their daughters' to consider there to be a genuine connection. The three types of cut-off identified were (1) an emotional cut-off, (2) being close and then a cut-off happening after an event and (3) a total cut-off.

Emotional Cut-Off

The first type of cut-off that is expressed by 6 of the participants in the study was that of an emotional cut-off between the father and daughter, although the father stayed in their life post divorce. One participant shared having a 2-year period of not talking after finding out her father had stopped paying her insurance on her car, and when the participant finally reconnected with her father because she was getting married, she realized that their relationship would never be as it was when her parents were still married:

Well I knew that it wasn't working with my mom and it was like if they were both better people without each other in their lives and [his new wife] made him happy and I like to see him happy. But he wasn't himself like as my dad unless we were alone; he was different in front of her.

Cut-Off After a Significant Event

Two of the participants described a second type of cut-off that involved the dyad being close until an event occurred later in life causing a cut-off to occur. One participant shared staying in touch with her father after the divorce although there was an emotional cut-off when she found out her father was having an affair with his secretary.

After the incident in which she realized her father was having an affair, she describes the first cut-off to have occurred: “Basically after that point, I had very fitful and often awkward contact with him, and it was never, it was never anything that would be satisfying in anyway emotionally.” However, this participant stayed connected to father until she was 33 years old when she cut-off with her father officially after finding out that her father was suing her mother for money:

After about a week I was like, ya know what, I cannot live like this, this is horrible, this is costing me so much health and it was terrible. I’ve got to do something and so I wrote him a letter and I said, it was very short letter, I wish I’d kept a copy, I should have and I basically said, look, you’ve caused me a great deal of distress in my life and this latest thing is but one example... Basically, don’t call me, I’ll call you.

Another participant shared a very different type of cut-off in which she had been very close to her father until she was an adult and her mother revealed to her things her father had done during and after their marriage. This new information caused the participant to ultimately cut-off her relationship with her father. She describes this experience when she says, “my primary reaction of course was, it was devastating. It completely shifted the entire way I had viewed my life growing up.” She goes on to

share her feelings about this shift with her father when learning about his affair, which incidentally was the last time she has spoken with him:

Um I don't like it. Growing up I was always very close with my father and always had an incredible amount of respect for him, and aside from all of this thought that he was a very very good and decent human being and I'm sad that I don't feel that way about him anymore.

Total Cut-Off

And the final type of cut-off that was experienced by 4 of the participants was a total cut-off in which the relationship ended and there was no communication for an extended period of time. One participant shares that her father didn't want to be a father and so after the divorce he basically gave up all interest in being involved in their life, except to provide financial support. Another participant shared how this total cut-off occurred after a tough conversation with her stepmother following her father's cancer treatment:

Then the phone rang and I answered it and it was my dad and I couldn't even get a word in, and he was like I heard what you said to (step-mom), and I was like what are you talking about, and he was like shut up, I know what you said to her, our relationship is forever changed and he hung up on me. And that was the last time I ever spoke to him.

And yet another participant shares the memory of the day her father left after years and years of a rocky marriage to her mother who suffered from mental health struggles:

It was one day in January. They told us they were getting divorced in November and one day in January he moved out and it was kind of rainy and I just remember sitting in the laundry room and watching him and his friend move his stuff out into a U-Haul. And he just never, he never even said goodbye, he never, I was just watching him and he never looked back. So that was the last time I saw him until I was 31.

Reasons for Cut-Off

Another finding from the study was around the causes of the cut-off. For many participants there was a host of reasons that led to them and their father having a cut-off with some major themes presenting themselves. These are: (1) distance, (2) infidelity, (3) conscious decision by father not to be involved, (4) didn't/stopped supporting, and (5) didn't/stopped showing up.

Distance

The first cause of cut-off identified by 6 participants was of their father leaving town after the divorce causing an emotional cut-off to occur. Although the specifics of each woman's story differs, each shared that the relationship with their father became more and more detached with time and distance. One woman shares the experience of her father leaving town and his lack of responsibility as a parent when she says, "he basically went out-of-state and never helped out with anything, no money, no support, and just abandoned us..." She goes on to describe the difficulty of this disconnected relationship with her father in a visit to him one summer:

I would go visit him when I was old enough to travel and this and that. Then it was horrible. I remember one time I was out there, and we went out to dinner, and came home and I had food poisoning, and I was sick for three days, and there was nobody there and I was throwing up and I was sick and crawling to the toilet and he had his girlfriend follow me. Like he just doesn't get it, like sometimes I would look at him and say, "Do you realize I'm your daughter, your flesh and blood?" And so when you talk about a relationship, I mean, what kind of relationship can ever be developed 2000 miles away from each other, never even being there, never even being... nothing, ever?

Another participant who experienced this type of emotional cut-off with her father in part due to his moving to another city in describing the visits as surreal when she says:

Yeah, I mean, it was fun, it was kind of almost like when you went to see your grandparents when you were younger, like once a week or once a year so they like spoil you. So it was kind of like this weird surreal experience. But then as we aged we really saw him less and less.

Two of the participants that lost touch because of distance, had an even more challenging feat because their father's moved internationally. One participant described the experience of her father not being around when she was graduating high school in this following excerpt:

I remember it was my senior year and it was my high school graduation and I was like, "I wonder if he is going to come to my graduation, like doubtful but I wonder" and I ended up, maybe in March or something, sending him an email, being like, "Hey I'm graduating. Do you want to come?" and he's like, "no", or he's like, "Well I could come but its gonna be really expensive and I'd only be there for a day cause I'm in (foreign country), the semesters are different and not on the same schedule.

Another participant describes this experience of her father living internationally in sharing the difficulty she experienced when trying to reconnect with her father after he'd been out of the country:

It was weird, and then like my freshman year, he took some job internationally, and moved there, and we never talked. We did not talk for three years that he was there, and then he came back and tried to make amends, and had to find jobs, and he tried to find jobs in my hometown and he was not successful. My freshman year of college, it was really like, we didn't talk a lot because I was like I don't know how to do this; I don't know how to fill you in on this life that you left.

Father's Infidelity

A second major theme that was identified as a cause of the father-daughter cut-off was the father's infidelity. Six of the fathers had affairs before divorcing their wives and this played a role in the cut-off experienced with the daughter.

One daughter shares the difficult experience of her father leaving the family and using her as a reason for his leaving, to find out soon after that her father was actually

having an affair. Here she shares the night she decided to stop by her father's apartment to say hello and found his secretary there:

I immediately put two and two together. I got really upset in his place and I started to cry because I just felt betrayed, like it was, like I was confronted by the lie.... But I was clearly upset and then I left and my dad didn't do anything to comfort me, to explain himself. It was almost like he was daring me to be upset, like daring me to prove what he was doing, and I, it was such an awful experience and I was, ugh, so that was awful. And that was, I would say, the start of the cut-off.

Conscious Decision by Father

Four of the daughters shared that their father made a decision to cut-off with them. These women believe their father's were not willing or able to have a relationship with them and so a cut-off occurred. One women describes the day her father left and the experience of finding out that her father was moving out and no longer wanted contact with her and her siblings:

My dad just decided that he didn't want to have kids. That he didn't want to have that kind of life and he left my mom. He came home from work one day and said that he was moving out... he had another apartment. He would pay child support and he paid for our college, he just didn't want to have that kind of personal contact.... He has told me dozens of times that he's a professional person, not a personal person.

Didn't/Stopped Providing Financial Support

Another cause of cut-off that was shared by five of the participants was that of the father not wanting to or stopping providing financial support to the daughters. One daughter shares a story about how this lack of financial support turned into a major cause of cut-off with her father:

I got into an accident and it turned out he wasn't paying for my insurance so it was going to be a misdemeanor riding without insurance. I don't know what he did but I didn't get charged with anything and he stopped talking to me and I

stopped talking to him. We both kind of stopped talking to each other for almost two years.

Another woman shares a similar story of her father not paying for her insurance. She describes the experience of confronting her father when he stopped paying her health insurance and how that led to one of many both emotional and physical cut-offs between herself and her father:

I sent him this email, "So, I guess I'm not gonna have health insurance anymore? What's the deal? That's kind of bad." He was like, "Oh whatever, have your mom get it for you, you'll be fine," and we ended up exchanging a series of emails that were pretty mean.... It was really hurtful and we didn't talk for a year after that at all, like not on the phone, not through email, nothing.

Didn't/Stopped Showing Up

The most common cause of cut off expressed by 9 of the 12 participants was that their father stopped showing up in their life, whether to events, or because of distance, they missed out on key moments that had a large effect on the relationship between the father and daughter.

Effects of Cut-Off

A specific question was asked to all participants regarding what they thought the specific effects were around the cut-off with their father. The major themes in regards to the effects on their life can be placed into these six categories: (1) Acting out as teenagers, (2) trust issues, (3) issues with men, (4) question marriage/commitment, (5) an unhealthy romantic attraction to men like their father, and (6) criticalness. Many of the participants identified being effected by the cut-off in more than one of these areas.

Acting Out

The first effect identified by 4 participants was that they recognized that they acted out as teenagers. Whether it was excess drug and alcohol use, anger directed at their mother or a general rebellion during these years, these women believe that this behavior was a result of their lost touch with their father. One participant shares this clearly as she describes trying to fill a void in her teenage years related to her lost touch with her father:

I was pretty much drunk and didn't care about anything. You know what I mean? I was so self sabotaging at every corner of every road...Just trying to fill the void as best as I could. But there is always this deep... like I was always super depressed. I was one of those kids that thought about suicide and thought it was really cool. I would write quotes on the back of my door about death, stuff like that. I was clearly acting out. So thinking back to that time is all such a mish-mosh of me just trying to hurt myself as much as I could.

Issues with Trust

Four participants also shared struggling with trust issues and believed this was likely an effect of the cut-off with their father. This often occurred in their difficulty in leaning on friends or expressing need, and also was visible in their struggles in being romantically involved with a partner. One described how this affects her ability to trust her friends and that when she feels the danger of abandonment she begins to hate them to manage these intense feelings:

I have this huge anxiety about people leaving me. I have a huge anxiety, also, like there are a lot of things that people will do that's not rejection, and I will totally over-react to it, with my mom or around women, and my defense is to totally hate them.

Another participant shares similar struggles with trust in friendships:

Well, in my two relationships and also friendships, if there's ever a riff or an argument, I'm always the person who stops it. I won't argue about it. I'll just

decide that we are not friends instead of trying to work through it because I would never want someone to decide that they didn't want to be my friend.

Issues with Men

Five participants described an effect of this cut-off being that they had issues with men. These issues ranged from difficulty with male supervisors, to having a strong reaction to working with men, to feeling like they had a lack of male role models in their life and therefore are overcompensating in having men in their life. One participant describes a bitterness towards men that she thinks may have started with her father and been reinforced by other negative experiences in her life with men:

Through a series of events with men, it completely reinforces it. Like, ok, there's no good father figure. My sister was raped; I was stalked and then sexually approached by a male authority figure in a professional setting. And I am like, "are there any good men out there?" So I feel like his absence and then reinforced through negative experiences with other men, it really made me, I don't know, bitter maybe is the word... It's really difficult for me to not think that guys have ulterior motives or that they're only out for one thing, or when are they gonna leave me? And I'm pretty sure a lot of that goes back to my father, so...

Questioning of Marriage/Commitment

The questioning of marriage and commitment was another theme that 4 women identified as an effect of the cut-off with their father. Although some of these women shared being happily married to their husbands, they revealed a deeper fear that he would one day leave them for another women. One participant who shares being happily married for over a decade describes a fear of her husband being unfaithful that she can't shake. She acknowledges:

I feel like in the back of my mind I have this mistrust towards men. I mean, I trust him, I think I can, I wouldn't trade my husband for anything in the world, I love him to death. But in the back of my mind, I wonder, "what if he's cheating, what if this, what if that, what if someday I found out and my whole life is a lie." I don't really trust men at all, to be honest. I think they are all sort of liars to be

honest, there you go, I said it. And I think, not all, but a lot of men cheat. That's stuck in my head.

Another participant, younger in age, shares feeling a strong desire to develop a community of people to lean on, thinking that it's dangerous and unrealistic to put all your support into one person. She also expresses her questioning of marriage and if she has a desire to commit to a partner in that way:

Cause even if I do ever get married which isn't something I am even planning on, like maybe it will happen, but that's not something I am looking for or feeling at all. And I don't want just one person to be in my primary support, I don't see that as a really healthy thing to do, people change and I wouldn't want the, I would want more than one person... I haven't been in many relationships but I've had a few and I feel wary about who I'm gonna put a lot of trust in as far as romantic relationships go.

Unhealthy Romantic Attraction to Men Similar to Their Fathers

Another effect identified by 3 of the participants was that they shared feeling like they have an unhealthy romantic attraction to men who are like their fathers. These women all share going after men who don't seem to be emotionally available and although recognizing the pattern, can't seem to change it. This participant expresses her frustration in seeing herself get into this pattern repeatedly, aware of the negative outcome and yet unable to do things different.

But I'm definitely, I am attracted to men that aren't, that don't care for me, and I'm that girl who's like, "Oh, let's be together, oh I'll do this for you and that for you," and it's so twisted. And it disgusts me, yet I still do it. Like right now I'm brooding over this guy who's been so rude to me. And I know it. But I'm still so attracted to him, and it's like why? Why am I wasting my time? And it's weird because he lives in the same apartment building that my dad lived in when my parents got divorced. It creates this whole awkward dynamic.

Criticalness of Self and/or Other

And lastly, 3 of the women shared feeling that their criticalness was an effect of their cut-off with their father. Some women expressed this as an inner critic while others

expressed noticing both an internal and external critic. One woman shares a conflict over this self-critical piece as being in one sense a part of her identity she can't imagine losing while also recognizing the stress it adds to her life. She describes this experience when she says, "Both the ambition is part of my identity but also the self pressure about it. Like I don't know who I would be if I wasn't pressuring myself, if I wasn't pushing myself constantly and never being satisfied."

Another participant describes this inner critic when she describes the experience of feeling like she is "sliding by" as she gets older, and also feeling like she is not as "complex" as others she has met:

There's a common theme in my life and I feel like I'm just sliding by. I feel, and this has happened a lot, that I give enough just to get a passing grade. I give enough just to make it through the workday. I feel like I don't challenge myself enough. Like even something as little as my vocabulary, I notice I don't have a very wide vocabulary and my thinking is very simple. My way of life is very simple and when I went to this program, I saw how complex people can be and how I don't reach for very new experiences. I've never traveled abroad, I've never studied another language. So there are all these things that if I would have done, like if I had a bigger vocabulary and could sound more intelligent, I'd probably be happier with myself.

And finally, another participant shows the overlap of different effects of cut-off when she expresses how difficult it would be for her to imagine being in a committed relationship and the partner accepting her for who she is. This brings up the interface of her trust issues, her lack of faith in relationships, and her struggles with self-criticism:

Yeah, I don't really understand another way of being in a long-term relationship, except auditioning all the time to stay in the role. . . . I don't feel like any one would actually want to be with me if I were myself all the time. Kind of like, I don't feel my father would want to be with me if I were myself.

Feelings about the Cut-Off

Anger and Sadness

Eight of the participants identified experiencing anger about the cut-off and six participants identified feeling sadness. Many described first experiencing one of these emotions and that emotion turning into the other one with time, whether it started as anger and turned into sadness or vice versa. One woman shares these shifts in feelings:

It's not as bad now. It's a pain, but it's not as sharp as it used to be. It was a deep well in my soul, that would just open up. I've felt oddly every realm, such deep sadness, and usually my sadness would turn into anger. So I would usually be angry at him. I got his temper so I get as angry as he can get without being abusive.

Another participant shares her experience of going from sadness to anger describing how she used to care so much and want to try and now that feeling has gone and she is left with anger:

I've definitely had more anger towards him just for the fact that I don't feel like he's still trying to... Actually he's given up in a sense, and it makes me angry because for so long, I've been the one who's like, "Come on, I need you there, let's work on this," and he's never been there. And now he wants to be there, but he's just half-assing it, and it's as if he doesn't care anymore.

Glad Father Wasn't Around

Other themes expressed when participants reflected on their feelings about their father and the cut-off were more varied. Two participants shared being glad their fathers weren't around because they had problems that would have affected them and their families. This woman expresses this feeling as potentially a defense to manage this loss and other hardships in her life:

I think if this is nothing more than a defense, I have learned to think in terms of everything happens for a reason. But there's a sense of pride to see where we were to where we came and I think in knowing his personality, I don't think he would have been of any benefit in our lives. I think he would have just made it harder. I think that we had trust among each other and if he was there, it would have like, I look at us as good and I look at him as bad, and we don't want a part of the bad.

Another woman describes her father moving away as a "blessing" for the family:

His moving 2000 miles away was probably the greatest blessing we could have had because he could have made our lives miserable. And when I see people now, they might have this or might have that, but they can't free themselves from this person. It's better to just say goodbye, go, and not have anything and start all over again and at least have your life.

Wanting to Let Go

Three participants described that they worked hard to let go of the pain of the cut-off and move on with their life. One participant shares how difficult it was for her growing up and how eventually she had to let go of the pain and accept what had happened so it didn't have such a strong hold on her life:

I think it used to really upset me. Like every Easter I would be really upset about it. I would lie about it and tell people I did see him, and even when I did actually see him, I'd cover up all of the nonsense by saying, "Oh this is so great, ya know he bought us this car, he took us here, we were on vacation," all that sort of stuff and looking back that's so embarrassing to think that I thought that was ok. I've been in therapy. I've gotten over it. I can't be angry about it for the rest of my life. But I can't let it, it doesn't affect his life, so I can't keep letting it affect mine.

Feelings of Conflict

Two participants described being conflicted over whether or not they want to try to have a better relationship with their father, as they and their father are getting older. One participant shares having the difficult decision around making contact after recently finding out that her father has been diagnosed with cancer. She feels like, either way, she will be making compromises that will be difficult to handle:

So, I feel like I'm at this point where I need to figure out how I'm gonna respond and If I'm gonna respond because I don't know how long he has. I don't know what stage its' at...So I kind of feel like if he dies and I don't talk to him, I'm not gonna forgive myself if he was the last one to call me. But equally, if I call him, he'll act like he's superficially interested in my life and ask me for something. I'm sure of it.

Emotional Disconnect

Two others express having an intellectual understanding of why their father couldn't be around, but emotionally can't feel or accept what he did:

Even though I can look at other people with complexity, it's very difficult for me to view him not intellectually. Intellectually I can tell you a million different things about him, but emotionally, it's extremely difficult for me to look at him, or to feel towards him anything that's not black and white.

What Daughters' Would Need To Reunite

An interesting, and unplanned question organically came up during the first few interviews that became an insightful thought to consider. The question asked by the researcher was, "What would you (the daughter) need to reunite with your father in a way that feels meaningful to you?" The answers fall into these four categories: (1) take responsibility, (2) put in effort, (3) feel regret, and (4) nothing could be done.

Taking Responsibility

Six of the participants shared that they would need their father to take responsibility for the past. For many participants, their fathers are in their life in a distant way and they feel that their fathers do not feel any responsibility for the past and their lack of connection to them. It came up in many of the interviews that the father said that it needed to be this way, which daughters pretty much unanimously felt was a cop out.

One participant shares a story of trying to have a genuine conversation with her father in which she expressed being hurt by his leaving and wanting him to acknowledge some

sense of responsibility for what happened. She describes being left with more disappointment than in coming into the conversation, in not only his lack of taking responsibility taking but the additional responsibility he placed on her, suggesting that their relationship was unhealthy and so therefore it was best that he left. This excerpt speaks to her need for him to take partial responsibility for the cut-off:

I remember the whole tone of the conversation was me being like, "It wasn't really fair that you did these things," and, "Obviously, we can't change the past but you have to agree with me that this wasn't really, or you have to at least, hear my perspective and understand that it was hurtful from my perspective even if it was what you felt like you needed to do from your perspective." And he just wasn't really into that.

She goes onto describe her frustration by his both lack of responsibility taking and blame on their relationship being unhealthy as the cause of the cut-off:

I just feel really sort of disgusted at that response. You can't, you can't tell me that our relationship was unhealthy, which was what he was sort of trying to say... And I was like, "what are you even talking about?" I don't know, like... I feel like that's his own justification for having done what he did and not feeling like a jerk about it.

Follow Through

The second theme that arose for 6 of the daughters in identifying what they would need from their father was in the context of wanting their father to try more and put in more effort. Daughter's shared that father's would say they want to be involved but when asked to do something, didn't follow through which made it hard for the daughters to trust them.

And there is this, because of whatever reason, there is a very materialistic part. Yes, I would need him to help me because my parents (mom and step-dad), like my parents pay, my parents pay. They can't help me with school, they can't help me with tuition, but they help how they can. And then I see my biological father roll up in his brand new fancy car and it pisses me off. And so there's a part of it where it's like, he needs to help me financially.

Express Genuine Regret

The third theme that came up for 5 participants was that they would need to see their father express genuine regret to be able to have a relationship with him again. One participant describes both a strong emotional and intellectual reaction to answering this question when she imagines her father saying sorry to her for the past.

My first response is emotional, so let me describe my emotion as I was imagining that.... The vision I got almost was like an ocean. Something's been dammed up, like it dammed up the whole ocean and then you lift the damn and everything settles in the way it's supposed to. Like not in a threatening way, like it would be great. The situation with my dad did force me to shove me into my thinking part of my head and not into the emotions. It's too painful, it's too unresolvable, its too maddening to keep it at the feeling level all the time. And so, if it were to be lifted it would be.... such an emotional relief and I think it would be quite lovely.

This participant goes on to describe how this experience would likely provide her with a needed integration that would allow her anger to lift:

It would be an integration. There would be a period of disequilibrium.... I would really want to integrate him. I'm pretty sure that's what would happen.... Initially, I think, it would be hard for me to trust. It would really have to seem genuine, but assuming it did, it would feel like a heavy anger had been lifted.

Nothing Can Be Done

Two of the participants shared a fourth theme which was that they don't think there is anything their father could do that would make them able to have a relationship with him again. One women expresses the pain of this loss when she says, "I don't think I could ever let myself try to see the way that I wanted him to be because he's just, he's just, I'm just not able to. Cause it would take too long and I just can't go through it again." Another shares a more conflicted feeling about her and her father's future relationship, recognizing that it would be nice to have her father around but cant imagine allowing him back into her life after all these years of cut-off.

I'm 25 now. I've been without him for 10 years. I don't really think it would change anything in my life at this point. He's missed all the crucial moments to be there for-my graduating high school, graduating college, the only thing coming up that he would miss is my wedding which is a big thing. But honestly, I wouldn't want him there. He doesn't deserve the right to even be there because he hasn't been there for my life. It's a conflict and so confusing.

The findings presented above that were identified in this study were organized into six major themes. The next chapter will provide a discussion of how the above themes tie into the findings found and shared in the literature reviewed previous to the implementation of this study. This next chapter will also provide future recommendations for the field of social work practice and policy.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was an attempt to understand the following phenomena: The experience and effects of father-daughter cut-off post divorce. Some of the findings of the study were organized into these major themes (1) types of cut-off (2) reasons for cut-off (3) effects of cut-off (4) feelings about the cut-off and (5) what daughters' would need to reunite. This chapter will relate key findings to prior studies and theoretical frameworks presented in the literature review. Most all of the key findings were supported in the previous literature. Some of the findings were not specifically discussed in the past literature, and in rare cases, there was some discrepancy in what was shared in the literature reviewed verses the findings of this study.

Types of Cut-Off

As shared in the findings section, there were three identified types of cut-off that father's and daughters experienced. These were an emotional cut-off, a cut-off after the experience of an event, and a total cut-off in which there was no communication between both father and daughter. Although there was no literature reviewed on the types of cut-off that occurred between father and daughter, the previous literature did speak to both the delicacy of the father-daughter relationship and the many ways in which the relationship can become strained.

As shared in the book *Like Father, Like Daughter*, by Suzanne Fields (1983) this concept is highlighted when Fields says, "Neither of us understands or knows who the

other is. Our dance is born from our need to know each other in order to know ourselves” (p. 7). Whether the dyad experiences a complete cut-off under which there is no contact and the loss is clearly defined or in the circumstances when the relationship continues on but does not feel emotionally satisfying to at least the daughter, this father daughter bond proves to be placed in a vulnerable situation when divorce is in the picture. Much of the literature in the review spoke to this complicated relationship and how this is affected by such factors as the contrasting sex/biology of the two parties involved, the cultural expectations of our society, and the complicated reality of divorce especially relating to the father’s relationship with his children, post-divorce. This idea is also discussed in the literature by Fields. Fields shares that research does indicate that a father is different with his daughter in the way he holds her as an infant, speaks to and plays with her. She reports that “there are many biological, developmental and maturational explanations for the difference in fathers’ behavior with their sons versus daughters, for instance, the aggressive play that is seen earlier in sons (p. 14).

Reasons for Cut-Off

The second major theme that was introduced in the findings chapter was around the reasons for the cut-off. Participants provided a host of reasons that they believe led to the cut-off including 1) distance 2) infidelity 3) mental health issues 4) decision not to be involved 5) didn’t/stopped supporting and 6) didn’t/stopped showing up. Two of the six themes identified can be found in the previous literature reviewed shared below. This does not mean that the other findings aren’t available in past literature but rather that this theme was not the focus of the study and therefore there was not as much literature reviewed on this specific subject.

The first one is around the father's decision to not be involved which four of the participants believed was a reason for the cut-off. This extended for many of the participants into a belief that the father was not capable of being a father and therefore could not be in their lives in a meaningful way. In the book, *Women and Their Fathers*, by Victoria Secunda (1992), she also found this commonality in lack of paternal identity in her study with fathers and daughters. She describes these absent fathers by saying, "their sense of self is wrapped up almost entirely in their work and/or their masculinity" (p. 206). She further suggests that these fathers are "essentially immature, stuck in the primary narcissism of early childhood, unable to feel anyone's pain or joy but their own" (p. 207).

The second reason for cut-off found in the study that is backed by the literature is around the importance of the father as financial provider. In the article by Williamson (2004), which explores psychodynamic theory to understand the father-daughter relationship, she explains how object relations makes sense of this dyad from birth. This theory believes that as the mother begins to wholly focus on the baby, the father enables this consumption by providing protection from the outside world, including financial security. This develops a "protective framework" for the mother and infant relationship. Therefore, it makes sense that five of the daughters felt affected by the lack of financial security their father provided and the potential role it played in their losing touch. In the study this financial security seemed to symbolize for a daughter that her father cared and was doing work to be part of her life, and therefore the absence seemed to reflect a lack of love on the father's part.

Effects of Cut-Off

One of the most important findings discussed in the previous chapter is the effects daughter's identified from being cut-off with their fathers. The major themes the participants shared were: (1) Acting out as teenagers (2) trust issues (3) issues with men (4) feeling lost in life (5) question marriage/commitment (6) an unhealthy romantic attraction to men like their father and (7) criticalness. It seems likely that all of the themes that were identified in the findings were also expressed in the previous literature reviewed on the father-daughter cut-off. Speaking to all of these experiences in addition to a few others, Thomas suggests a cluster of emotional characteristics experienced by women raised without their father including fear of abandonment, anger, shame, low self-esteem/feelings of worthlessness, problems with trust, a tendency to romanticize men/view men unrealistically, fear of intimacy, problems with sex, difficulties with assertiveness, issues with goals and personal boundaries, conflicting feelings of dependence and independence, resistance to commitment and fear of separation (p. 124). The main characteristics that were not identified in the findings that Thomas shared were around problems with sex and difficulties with assertiveness. The only finding not shared by Thomas that was in the findings was acting out as teenager. Although it is likely that there has been literature that does express the concept of acting out as an effect of father loss, there was none in the review section of this thesis and therefore it will not be shared in the discussion below.

The second theme, lack of trust, which was expressed in the findings as a struggle many of the women faced, is clearly found in the literature on father loss. The lack of trust is presented by Lois Rabey (1995) in the book, *Daughters without Dad's*, which

discusses the challenges daughters face when they grow up without a father. She speaks to the fear many of these women live in when they lose their father, comparing it to living in dangerous communities where people have to sleep “with one eye open.” This loss could be seen as a symbol of danger they feel over their houses and lives, and face insecurities “of living alone and helpless on a daily basis” (p. 85). Rabey also shares daughter’s experiencing a loss of security in a father’s love which keeps her from being “silly, giggly, pouty, tearful, unreasonable and more-and still feel precious” (p. 67). Rabey goes onto suggest that having this loss makes the daughter feel there is a danger in the world and she cannot protect the “inner girl” which in turn most likely affects her heart (p. 67).

These concepts expressed by Rabey are also relevant in looking at two other themes in the findings of this study. These are around the effects daughters’ experience that causes them to have issues with men and/or find themselves developing unhealthy romantic attraction to men like their father. As Thomas shares in her book, a major role a father provides for their child is to be a male role model and that this is one thing that cannot be replaced by a mother. David Popenoe (1996), in his book, *Life Without a Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society*, also describes this when he says that daughter’s learn “how to relate to men,” “about heterosexual trust and intimacy,” “to appreciate their own femininity” and “that they are love-worthy” from a father (p. 35). Field’s shares a similar sentiment when she says that for daughters, fathers are their first perception of the opposite sex, one’s expectations of male behavior (1983, p. 6). Rabey also concludes that “the daughter makes a blueprint of attitudes that affect later choices in love, later

decisions about work. In the untangling life clues to the daughter's future. Will the daughter of an absent father try to resolve her unrequited love by seeking a man in her father's image? Or will she hold herself aloof from men, making sure she is not abandoned the way her mother was?" (p.71).

The finding that daughters are affected by father loss in their questioning of marriage/commitment is also expressed in the literature. As returning to Secunda's book, she describes daughters having a fear of abandonment that permeates her life, whether consciously or unconsciously, in which she is always "avoiding another goodbye." Secunda goes onto speak about the previous finding that states that daughters may be unable to be with men or may, also, choose men that are not available as shared by some of the participants in this study. She believes this fear of abandonment could involve both a craving and a distancing in male relationships, yearning for acknowledgement that she is lovable while also choosing men that are not available and ultimately, that this may come from a belief that she was not good enough for her father to stay around (p. 131). It is also suggested by Secunda that these women have a conflict between dependency and independency. She states that women may give the impression of being independent, but often have "intense fears of dependency" that are unconscious. Secunda suggests that this conflict plays out in all areas of these women's interpersonal relationships (p. 147). This last characteristic described by Secunda of having a difficult time in all interpersonal relationships is one that may not be consistent with the findings of this study. Although many of the women did speak to the struggle of having difficulty trusting in friendship and other relationships, however, some of the women expressed having healthy trusting friendships and relationships in general, outside their romantic relationship. Ultimately,

it is not clear at this time how much the father cut-off effects women's ability to have interpersonal relationships that don't involve the conflict expressed by Secunda.

The theme of criticalness of oneself and/or others was another theme that was presented in the findings and also found in the literature. In the study conducted by Scheffler and Naus (1999) in which they looked to understand the father-daughter relationship, they explored how fatherly affirmation affected specific developmental tasks for daughters, one of them being self esteem. The study did find a high correlation between fatherly affirmation and self esteem which speaks to this finding in the study. This finding is also reflected in the article by Keiffer (2009), which examines the father-daughter relationship through a psychoanalytic lens. She also speaks to this self-esteem struggle found in women who lost their fathers by suggesting that fathers help their daughters gain "endeavor excitement" and "erotic excitement", which give her mastery in both her feminine identity and vocational achievement. Not having the father around, may affect her ability to master skills that may likely affect her self-esteem (p. 78). The psychoanalytic review by Williamson also speaks to the role of the father in helping a daughter experience positive self-regard when she uses Kohut's self-psychology lens to understand the relationship. As is expressed by this theory, a healthy child needs to have three needs met: To be mirrored by the parents as unique and special (mother), to be able to idealize a parent (father) who can provide a strong calming and confident image that is also trustworthy and lastly, the child needs twinship that allows them to feel like they are like others and not alone (p. 213). It is possible than to consider that in this idealizing of a father, a daughter is able to internalize that object and therefore be idealized herself which would translate into a healthy self-esteem.

Feelings About the Cut-Off

A third set of findings that was identified in the study was around how the participants feel about their father and the cut-off. This was one of the sets of findings where there were high numbers of women who shared experiencing two specific emotions, that of being sad and angry. These two emotions were also spoken about in the literature.

Fields suggests that daughters have a “yearning” to be close to their father and that this develops in one “a sadness, an emptiness or an anger” (p. 8). As described in the findings section, daughters often shared first experiencing one of the emotions and then with time and understanding evolving into the other, usually going from sadness to anger. This process is explained by Pamela Thomas (2009) in her book, *Fatherless Daughters*, when she describes children of divorce as going through a grief process similar to losing a parent to death. Thomas goes onto further suggest that when daughters lose their fathers to abandonment, this takes on a “special color” in that they “have a powerful need to create a protective, loving father, one who would never intentionally let them down. Without any sense of contradiction, they are able to maintain a benign image of the loving father side by side with a history of repeated rejections and failures” (p. 59). Therefore, as shared by the women in the study, when they finally realize what their father has done, not placing as much of the responsibility on themselves, they often experience an anger and/or sadness as the reality of the situation becomes clearer.

The study presented in the literature review that was conducted by East, Jackson and O’Brien (2007), which explored the relationship breakdown between the father and daughter post divorce, shares a similar finding in their results. They found that “having

loving, nurturing and supportive relationships with others does not fill the void associated with the feelings of abandonment, loss, grief and unworthiness felt by children who experience the absence of a parent” (p. 4). It seems clear that both the literature and the findings in this study seem to point to the same belief which is that the loss of a father effects daughters in a deeply emotional way.

Another interesting connection between this finding and the past literature is around daughter’s feelings of cut-off and specifically of anger. The findings from the study conducted at Wichita State University around the accuracy of Erikson’s model of development for the female population speaks to the role of aggression in women’s lives. These findings support the hypothesis that Erikson’s model is not accurate in describing the female development process. It instead theorizes that females actually develop their identity both intra and interpersonally, instead of just interpersonally therefore going against the prescribed social expectations of female behavior as “nurturant, emotional and passive” (Archer, 1992, p. 45). The literature goes on to suggest that females have a need to be aggressive and if not given the opportunity to have an outlet for their anger, they will struggle with insecurity. In relating this alternative understanding of female development to the findings of this study, it is understandable that women experience such anger towards their father, and also likely that they have not been provided the outlets to express this anger in a productive and healthy manner potentially leading to internalization and insecurity.

What Daughters' Would Need to Reunite

The last finding discussed in the previous chapter was around the question of what daughters would need from their father’s to be able to reunite. This question was

asked in a rhetorical way, with surprising consistency in respect to participant responses. The responses of what daughters would need to be able to reunite were broken down into four major categories: (1) take responsibility (2) put in effort (3) feel regret and (4) there's nothing he could do at this point. Ultimately, it seems accurate to say that these findings suggest that daughters have a need for an emotional shift to take place in order to heal the pain of their father loss and that their fathers have, in a sense, a symbolic key, to providing this experience for them. As was shared in the findings section, 1 participant had an emotional experience when being asked this question. She described a damn being lifted and after a period of disequilibrium, things would settle in a way that would provide an integration in herself that she shared would be much desired. This deeper wound that needs to be healed is also reflected in Rabey's in describing how a daughter experiences father absence. Rabey suggests that people's bodies recognize this tragic loss as not being part of the natural order, that it has no redeeming purpose, that one has no control over it and is therefore seen as the "absence of something that is supposed to be present" (p. 61). Rabey believes that this "destroys what was –or should have been-an intimate bond" and that this loss is one that threatens our being, develops in us a "frantic search for survival" and has a "significant" and "lasting" impact (p. 62). This process of destroying seems to help explain why two of the participants could not imagine having a relationship with their father as they shared that even imagining it was too hard and painful a process. Rabey goes on to share that the loss may "produce the appearance of a little girl gone, but she's there." She further goes on to explain, "appearances can be deceiving, the most professional looking and self assured exterior may conceal a deep wound. True feelings may be stuffed, denied, ignored, or they may

be handled inappropriately in unhealthy relationships with others, particularly men. Only through subterranean explorations of her pain and sense of loss can real health develop” (p. 73). All of these excerpts speak to this deep pain that daughters experience when there is a cut-off with their father and the complicated process of figuring out how to heal from this pain.

Summary

As shared in this discussion section, the literature previous to this study is consistent with the findings identified in this study. It does seem, however, that most of the work that has been done in the past looks to understand what went wrong for these daughters and it would be useful to also learn about what benefits come from the cut-off or how daughter’s develop the skills they need if/when a father is missing in their lives. Many of the women interviewed shared experiencing both heartache and success in life and so learning about both would be valuable for the field. It would also be useful to do more work around what happens when fathers and daughters do reunite. In the interviews completed, many daughters reported a disappointing reuniting experience with their father that often times led to another cut-off. It would be useful to learn more about what both the fathers and daughters needs are in rebuilding a relationship and how to help them work together to build a mutually beneficial relationship. Learning about how to best support daughters and fathers after a divorce occurs is an important part of the work needed to be done. By continuing to understand the complexity of the father-daughter relationship and also how to support the father and daughter when a divorce does occur, it is hoped that father daughter cut-off will not be as rampant in our society. And lastly, our world is ever changing. The more we can understand sex and gender, what’s needed for

children and what is similar and different across the many types of families in our world, especially those going through divorce, the more we can continue to deal with the reality of divorce and how to support all members of the family going through it.

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Appendix A
Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter



Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950
F (413) 585-7994

March 8, 2010

Jana Rosenbaum

Dear Jana,

I am delighted to say that your materials are now complete. You have made all of the suggested revisions and we are able to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marsha K. Pruett' followed by a stylized flourish.

Marsha Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Cara Segal, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participants:

My name is Jana Rosenbaum and I am a graduate student at Smith College's School for Social Work. This year, I am excited to be working on my Master's thesis, which will involve doing research with you and women like you, who have lost touch with your father's due to divorce. In doing this research, I am looking to learn more about how this lost touch has affected your life and how we can provide this data to the field, so that we better understand the complexity of this lost touch and the affects on women like yourselves. The findings of my study may also be used for presentations and publications.

In the spring of 2010, I hope to conduct a one-time interview with you over the phone or ideally, in person. The interview will take approximately 1.5 hours in length and will consist of only you and myself. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by me upon completion of the interview. If an additional transcriber is used, this person will sign a confidentiality pledge.

Because these interviews will be personal, it may be an emotional experience for you. Should you wish to seek support or counseling, there will be list of referral resources provided to all participants. I hope that telling your story and reflecting on your relationship with your father will be helpful to you and that you may even gain further insight into the meaning of this in your life.

Your identity will be known only to me. Any identifying information will be deleted from the transcriptions and in and any presentation, any vignettes or quotes will be carefully disguised. My advisor will have access to the transcriptions only after all identifying information has been removed. Also know that this data will be kept in a secure location for a period of three years as required by Federal guidelines and that data stored electronically will be protected. If the materials should be needed beyond the three year period, they will continue to be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when no longer needed. There will be no compensation provided for participation in this study.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study by April 1, 2010, the point at which I will begin analyzing data. Additionally, you may refuse to answer any question during the interview. If you decide to withdraw, all

materials pertaining to you will be immediately destroyed. Please contact myself, Jana Rosenbaum, ([author's email address](#)), with additional questions or wishes to withdraw. Should you have any other concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, you are welcome and encouraged to call either Jana Rosenbaum (contact information above) or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at 413-585-7974.

Thanks for your participation in this study and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, your participation, your rights and that you agree to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

(Participants should keep a copy of this form for their records)

Appendix C
Recruitment E-mail

Hello,

My name is Jana Rosenbaum and I am hoping for your help around getting participants for my Master's thesis project (for my MSW from Smith College). My project aims to explore the effects of father-daughter cut-off after divorce on daughters and how this cut-off has specifically shaped these women's lives. Participation in this study will involve a 10 minute screening interview over the phone and then completing a 1.5 hour interview with myself either over the phone or in person.

Participants need to fit below criteria:

1. 18 yrs of age or older
2. Since their parents divorce, the person would need to have had some form of cut-off with their father -- either a complete cut-off of communication, a change in time spent together or a change in quality of relationship
3. Participants must be English speaking and able to participate in the interview either by phone or in person

With that said, if you are anyone you know fits the criteria shared above and is interested in participating, please either send them this e-mail, or, if they allow, email me their contact info and I will connect with them myself.

I believe that participants may well gain further understanding from telling their story and reflecting on their experience.

If you have any questions or are interested, you can reach me by either (email) (Researcher's [email](#)) or (cell) (Researcher's cell phone).

Thanks so much for your time!
Jana

Appendix D
Screening Interview

Screening Interview

A. Briefly explain research study.

B. Criteria Questions:

1. Are you 18 yrs of age or older?
2. Did your parents divorce?
3. At some point after the divorce, was there a significant shift in your relationship with your father that caused a cut-off in your relationship? This may be from:
 - a. Was their a period of not communicating that was unusual to your regular contact?
 - b. Was their a significant shift in your communication pattern (from weekly to monthly)
 - c. Was their a significant change in the way you and your father related to one another? (friends to fighting, disciplinarian to distant)
4. Although it is possible that there may have been other struggles in the home, was the cut-off primarily due to divorce and not the result of a clearly identified physical/sexual assault, addiction, death of family of origin member or extensive history of family major mental illness.
5. Are you able to do a one-time, 1.5 hour interview either over the phone or in-person?

Appendix E
Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions

Age:

Race (Optional):

Ethnicity (Optional):

Did you live in the same geographic area as your father growing up?

Age at parent's divorce:

Age at official cut-off:

Number of years of cut-off:

Age and gender of siblings including yourself (please clarify relationship to you-
biological, step, half, etc):

If reunited:

Age at reuniting:

Current number of years reunited:

Appendix F
Interview Guide

Qualitative Interview Questions

4. What are your memories of your father?
5. What feelings do you have about your father?
6. What do you like about your father?
7. What do you dislike about your father?
8. Tell me about the cut-off, what happened and what was the experience like?
9. What led to the decision, how was it made?
10. How do you feel about you and he not talking?
11. How do you think your father feels about you and he not talking?
12. In what ways do you think your father's absence has affected your life? (Look for themes relating to attachment, identity and intimacy)?

If reunited:

13. How has reuniting affected your life?
14. What in your thinking has changed about the cut-off and your life?
15. How does it help you understand the effects of the cut-off?

Questions Continued:

16. What areas of your life do you find most difficult?
17. What areas of your life do you feel most successful?
18. What are the major struggles you feel you have faced in your life so far?
19. Why do you think you have had these struggles?

Appendix G

Referral Sources

Referral Sources

Below is a list of referral sources if you feel it may be useful to talk with a trained clinician about the experiences that we discussed today, or possibly, any other areas of support you may need. Because participants in my study, are coming from a variety of different cities, it was not possible to identify specific referral sources by city. Therefore, I have listed below a few national organizations that can provide you with a variety of resources in your area. If you have any questions or need guidance, please contact me and I can help you navigate through the process (Researcher's email here).

National Association of Social Workers (NASW): www.socialworkers.org

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with [150,000 members](#). NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.

American Psychological Association (APA): www.apa.org

Based in Washington, DC, the American Psychological Association (APA) is a scientific and professional organization that represents psychology in the United States. With 150,000 members, APA is the largest association of psychologists worldwide. The mission of the APA is to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.

National Organization for Women (NOW): www.now.org

The National Organization for Women (NOW) is the largest organization of feminist activists in the United States. NOW has 500,000 contributing members and 550 chapters in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Since its founding in 1966, NOW's goal has been to take action to bring about equality for all women. NOW works to eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, schools, the justice system, and all other sectors of society; secure abortion, birth control and reproductive rights for all women; end all forms of violence against women; eradicate racism, sexism and homophobia; and promote equality and justice in our society.