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## A Comparative Study of Academic Achievement, Social Skills, Autonomy: College-Aged Males With or Without Their Biological Fathers

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SOCIAL SKILLS,  
AUTONOMY:  
COLLEGE-AGED MALES WITH OR WITHOUT THEIR BIOLOGICAL FATHERS

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

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*Abstract*

There is a growing problem in today's society of children growing up in fatherless households. One demographic at risk is young developing males who grow up without their biological father due to incarceration, divorce, separation, and death. This can affect the cognitive development of child which can lead to the decline of social, academic, and self regulation capacities. Once this young man enters college, he must exercise these capacities to the best of his abilities in order to succeed. This research study provided an overview of the issue of absent fathers on their sons and their long-term effect on their cognitive development. This research attempted to find a correlation between the absenteeism of one's biological father and the decline of one's ability to thrive in a highly stressful environment that requires one to live autonomously away from home. Sixty seven participants completed the survey. The data was then analyzed by comparing the results based on the comparison of the two populations of young males and the presence of their fathers. The results did not support the hypothesis but did reveal that more knowledge be done on the stress levels and professional help used by collegian males who grew up with an absent father.

### *Introduction*

According to Jackson (2009) research has shown that children who grow up without a stable father figure in the home leads to deprived cognitive ability, reduced verbal ability in school, and an increase in behavioral problems. Jackson (2009) has also stated that children who at least have a stable caregiver, such as their mother, with a male in the father figure role are able to develop more on track in comparison to their peers. In today's society there has been an increase in children who will be raised by one parent due to the increasing numbers of divorce, incarceration of fathers, and also the death of fathers due to disease and violence. This study will address the consequences of young adult males who have grown and developed with the absence of their biological father. The purpose of the study is to discover if a young male has increased difficulty in academics and forming healthy relationships than those who were raised by both parents. In addition, it will compare and contrast the abilities of academic achievement and social skill of these young men in comparison to those who have had their biological father present in their lives to the current day. This study will hypothesize that the absence of a father figure in a young man's life will negatively affect their development in areas such as verbal skills, an affinity towards math, and social skills involving both males and females. The study will also look into interventions that can help bring young males to a more developed state that would bring them to the same mental and emotional state along with their peers. David Popenoe (1996) states that near the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, already being past, close to fifty percent of American children will not have a stable father figure. This would risk the younger population in losing the stable development of children in becoming fully independent and cognitively active as they should be.

Popenoe's study has been and continues to be a main cause of behavioral and social problems within the development of children leading into adulthood. This is important to the profession of social work since there has been an increase of violence, poverty, and crime due to the economy, which would in turn influence those who did not have a strong and stable father figure going up which can lead to crime, premature sexuality, decrease in academic achievement, depression, substance abuse, and poverty (Popenoe, 1996). In a study by Gao, Garfinkel & Lewis, (2007) results showed that males who had been incarcerated were more likely to have come from a father-less home and dropped out of high school. Gao, Garfinkel & Lewis (2007) also states that this would also lead to poorer labor opportunities and wages which is one of the most prolific problems social workers face today. This would cause a trend and a disadvantage for a young male who must become independent and be self-sufficient in order to avoid the pitfalls of growing up without a father. There has also been research conducted that shows that the age of the child and the assistance of the father has a negative correlation (Robbers, 2008). This is a natural aspect of life in which a young man seeks to become self sufficient and the father stepping back. However when this occurs with the loss of a father at an early stage of development, this can negatively affect the male since he no longer has neither a stable home environment nor the loving support/parenting of two parents, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. This is an issue for the social work profession in regards to seeking interventions that could help young males who have had to grow up without a father figure which could lead to possible social problems such as attachment problems and poverty from living with only one parent.

### *Literature Review*

The study of children being affected by living in fatherless homes has grown especially due to the increase of single parent families being linked to such behaviors such as criminal activity and deteriorating abilities in interpersonal relationships along with cognitive activities. According to Popenoe (1996) the decline of fatherhood is one of the major causes or at least directly influenced with the inability of children to develop normally. Popenoe (1996) states that the lack of stability of a father figure in the home has been correlated to such problems as crime, lackluster academic performance, depression, substance abuse, and the increase of poverty of women and children. This shows that many children growing up without a father figure will have not as many disadvantages as those who grow up in a household with a mother and, at least, a father figure.

Between 1960 and 1990 the amount of children living in a fatherless house has more than doubled. The percentage has climbed drastically from 17% to 36% between these years and it was predicted that nearly half of American children will grow up with an absent father. Now this figure covers children in general, not just young males, which this study is focused on, yet the facts still hold true that children, male or female, will be negatively affected by the absenteeism of their biological father. Popenoe (1996) ends with three statistics that seem to affect sons rather than daughters. It is stated that over 60% of America's rapists, adolescent murderers, and long-term prison inmates grew up in a fatherless home. This clearly shows a correlation between negative development and the availability of a father at home. Popenoe's (1996) research supports the necessary research for this area of study since social work focuses its attention, along with other

aspects of the human condition and societal structure, on people who find themselves living in poverty or trying to return to society after being convicted of a crime. Popenoe's literature shows how living in a fatherless home can lead to detrimental consequences in which the children are greatly affected.

According to Wineburgh (2000), the absenteeism of a father has a severe effect on not only the livelihood of a child but also their cognitive abilities. Children who never meet or have had very little contact with their fathers at an early age are left wondering about why their father is not a part of their lives. They begin to think that they are the ones to blame or are always questioning the reasoning for their absence. Wineburgh (2000) brings up the term "father hunger" which can have various effects on a child such as behavioral problems, developmental deficits, and depression.

This focus of these two studies is to see whether or not boys with fathers or without have differences in academics and personal relationships. Those boys who show "father hunger" will have a more difficult time in academics and personal relationships than those who have been able to develop normally with a father present. Wineburgh (2000), reiterating what Popenoe (1996) discussed, states the increasing numbers of children growing up in a household without a father. Wineburgh (2000) also states that about one in three children in America will live without their biological father. Some of the prevalent reasons for this can be found in births from unmarried mothers, the divorce rate of about 50% in the United States, and the increase of the amount of women who choose to adopt or artificial inseminate without the involvement of a man to become a father figure. This can point out, not the main or only variable, that one of the researched-backed reasons for the increase in fatherless households. Wineburgh (2000) brings into



consideration that many researchers see fatherless homes as the most prominent problem in American society today. Popenoe (1996) links this ill of society to juvenile crime, teen suicide, and the decline of SAT scores.

Wineburgh (2000) also touches upon on the effect of an absent father on just boys. Going along with the theory of “father hunger,” boys tend to look for a father figure in the form of another prevalent, but not always available, male such as another family member, like an uncle or grandfather, or someone that has consistent interaction such as a teacher or coach. Those who have a periodic, inconsistent contact with their fathers have also shown difficulty in determining their father’s role and, therefore, their role as a man when they become older. The insecurity that comes along with the loss or infrequent visibility of a father brings about problems of self esteem which is connected to solely connecting with one’s biological mother and never experiencing the perceived value that a father expresses towards his son. Wineburgh’s (2000) gathered information is linked to poor performance in school and the development of personal relationships from which this study was based upon. The theory of “father hunger” seems to show the negative effects of a fatherless son in which relates to how he sees himself, peers, and his ability to facilitate mental processes with a distorted view of masculine autonomy and independence. In comparison those boys who have established a foundation of self identity, taken from the example of their fathers, and have positive self esteem by at least knowing how their fathers view them is negatively correlated than those boys who must form an identity without a father during their development.

Choi, Franke, and Jackson (2009) focused more on the relationship between single mothers in poverty and their children. There is some data referenced that looks

over the development of a child within this family dynamic. Children who experience unstable and conflicted family relations tend to fair poorly in their transition to school. Children in these particular situations must overcome deprived cognitive environments, behavioral problems, and reduced verbal ability. This can lead to lack of concentration and learning disabilities which will hinder their academic performance. Since there is a correlation between socioeconomic status and the presence of a father figure, as found by Choi, Franke, and Jackson (2009) there is also a link between the availability of a father figure and learning problems for a child in school. Choi, Franke, and Jackson (2009) also state that children develop at a more optimal level when there are two primary caregivers who establish an environment of security and consistency. This has been linked, by Jackson & Scheines (2005), to academic performance especially when there is at least a primary caregiver and another parental figure that supports the primary caregiver.

Robbers (2008) continues the trend of the effects of fathers in relation to their children by researching young minority fathers who have experienced some degree of poverty. The negative effects of a father's absence not only include the consequences mentioned beforehand but also the decreased ability to cope with trauma and the erosion of the respect for those in authoritative positions. The absence of a father, while the actual situation might not be a traumatic one (i.e. before birth), can be a very traumatic one on a child. When a child has less of an ability to cope with trauma this can only be magnified by the experience of growing up without a father. The presence of a father also brings about the example of how a man should properly interact with other adults. While having the sole parent, statistically being the mother, young boys don't have a stable masculine example to get a sense of how a man establishes a relationship with others,

especially those in authority. This is also amplified by how the mother views the absence of the father in which is directly, or indirectly, influencing the boy's view of men in general.

While the dynamic of the American family is adapting, Robbers (2008) states that research has shown a positive father involvement is positively correlated with emotional, social, and positive development within children. The rate of involvement can be based on many variables such as employment, a stable relationship or within good standing with the child's mother, substantial levels of empathy towards family members, and the association of peers who had children before they were married. Robbers (2008) establishes for this study the involvement of a father has an integral role in how well children view authority figures, which could affect the understanding of behaviors and their consequences, and the ability to cope with traumatic events. This would have great influence on a young male who is starting to establish themselves independently when the need for autonomy comes along with adulthood.

Jones (2004) conducted a similar research study in which the academic performance and the hindrance of psychological separation affecting adolescent boys were compared between those who had a resident-father and nonresident-fathers. When compared, adolescent males who lived in households with a resident-father were functioning more along the lines of normal development as opposed to those males who had a nonresident-father. However those adolescent males who still maintained the same values and attitudes as their fathers were likely to perform on par academically with their peers. During this time of development, the ages of the boys ranging from 14 to 17, the academic performance was more favorable when their father was available in order for

them to become dependent on the fathers for guidance. Jones (2004) found a positive correlation between the quality and consistency of contact and establishment of the father-son relationship with their academic performance.

Jones (2004) uses the findings of Freud to further establish the psychological consequences of an adolescent male who grows up without their biological father. According to Freud the loss of a father, in various forms, is considered to be one of the greatest losses a person can experience in their life. Especially within this age group, a young male's father is seen as almost "god-like" in which the son looks up to his father and idealizes him as what adulthood will be like for him. This is a time where a boy is starting to make the transition in becoming a man who is influenced by becoming independent of his mother and father. Seeing the differences between the two is vital to understand how men and women act towards each other, other people, and themselves. During this time is a period of transformation for the boy in which there must be the negotiation of the changing of relationship between himself and his parents. If this is skewed then the process of developing into an independent male may be hindered or developed inadequately.

The effect of a father's absence on a boy can bring about negative consequences such as becoming a delinquent, more likely to use drugs and/or alcohol, behavioral difficulties, and an increased chance of developing psychiatric problems. While a father's presence may influence the development of a daughter as well, there has been more conclusive evidence showing a more direct impact on their sons. A child tends to model themselves on the parent that shares the same gender in which they develop influenced views on their environment and cognitive abilities. This is shown in Blanchard and

Billler's (1971) study in which 44 boys were tested in regards to IQ, SAT scores, and overall academic grades. The results found that the group of boys who had an established home life with a present father did exceedingly well than the boys who did not.

Investigating more deeply into the results found that boys who spent a significant amount of time with their fathers, such as assistance in school work, leisure time, and shared meals had scored significantly higher than the boys who did not have such an active relationship with their own father. Jones' (2004) study found similar results in which boys in nonresident-father households under-functioning in academics while those who live in the same type of household but maintained the attitudes of their fathers did better in school.

Jones' (2004) study is very close to what this study hopes to address. The academic performance based on whether a father is a resident or nonresident will be configured to include different forms of absenteeism. This study will also use an older population of young adult males in order to see how the necessity for independence and self-reliance in the college environment affects those who have lived with an absent father. Since the period of transition occurred earlier in their lives, the males studied will have had to adapt to a life of forced change of relationship status with their parents if that healthy negotiation never occurred. This group will be compared to those who have made a healthy negotiation in terms of gaining independence from one's parents and a life of necessary dependence. With the absence of a father, which has shown negative consequences for academic performance and cognitive abilities, the study will see if this environment, which requires almost complete independence, further increases under-functioning as compared to those with a resident-father.

*Opposing Points*

Some literature suggests that the overall need of a young male's biological father in his life might not be so vital in terms of development. Freeman (2008) suggests that one can look to early development of a child to see how a father is slowly pushed away from the child in terms of their raising being mostly maternal-oriented. There is a visible pull towards the mother in early development that is slowly being met by the recent tide of change heralding the potentially positive impact of the father's involvement in early childcare. However the long standing theory and outlook on the primary of importance of early development shows a track record of the importance of male's presence being deemed as traditionally occluded. Freeman (2008) also states that trying to solve the "fatherlessness" problem in today's society is in a sense futile due to the vision of the paternal role being premised upon the male's ideological separation from the feminized sphere of childcare which in turn promotes men's alienation from their own children. It seems only natural for the father to be pushed away indirectly so that the mother can have full control and authority of raising the developing child.

However there has been some research conducted to show that children may in fact still be able to develop normally even without the presence of their biological father. Some researchers, such as Låftman (2008), even go as far to suggest that the father may not have that much of an influence in the child's development altogether. During Låftman's (2008) study analysis was conducted in order to test whether or not the effect of father's characteristics is weaker if he left the child at an earlier age, but no significant differences were found in the results. Låftman (2008) states, based on the findings, that parents are not required to be physically present in their children's lives in order for their

children to inherit similar characteristics or behavioral attributes, but they could also act as role models who aren't necessarily present. This would result in children being able to take the information they have about their absent father and use it in order to progress through life normally. When another father figure fills the role of the biological father, such as a stepfather, boys still tend to achieve positive grades academically. Låftman's (2008) study shows that there is a statistically significant correlation between the stepfathers' academic skills and boys' knowledge in math and natural science at the secondary school level. This in turn provides some indication that boys with a non-biological father figure can still attain academic achievement.

One contributing factor that has shown to positively affect young males and their academic and personal relationships is that of socioeconomic status. According to White & Gilbreth (2001), financial support, whether because status of mother, absent father support, or extended family support, is a consistent predictor for positive outcomes for children in terms of development. Subsequent findings from White & Gilbreth's (2001) study show that, in terms of whether a child developed better with a father figure, a child that was raised in a stepfather family had no advantage over a single mother family. However, although there is no advantage for a stepfather family, over fifty percent of the adolescents in the study stated that they would confide in a stepfather or father figure if they were experiencing problems, were depressed, or expressed admiration towards them. This shows that although the biological father is gone, a new father figure would be able to fill in the void for the child. The effect of a quality relationship with stepfathers, related to child outcomes, is not dependent on the quality of relationship between the child and absent father or child's rate of contact with him.

Battle & Scott's (2000) study, focusing on African American families, also found that family structure had no influence over adolescent behavioral, academic, or socio-emotional adjustment. Much like White & Gilbreth's (2001) statements, the contributing factor towards a child's success was economic resources available to the parents, not whether or not there was a father figure in the families. This was not only true in African American students, but Hispanic and Caucasian students as well in various household configurations. Battle & Scott (2000) relates these results to the role of the mother being more active and supportive of their child in the context of speaking with teachers and helping with homework that would positively affect their academic achievement. According to Battle & Scott (2000) the boys were studied again two years later and the results stayed the same in which socioeconomic status, and not parental configuration, matters most towards academic achievement.

Hofferth & Anderson (2001) agrees with Battle & Scott (2000) in regards to the financial security of families being the more vital part of the family structure. If both the single parent and two parent families had the same economic status then the child would be able to perform about the same in school. This doesn't even take into account however the availability of a new father figure, whether it be a stepfather, mentor, or family friend. According to Sinha (2002) many single mothers experienced having a "social" father to help her support her child. This "surrogate" father was deemed to be more like a real father to her children than the previous biological father ever was. While they may not take up as much responsibility as the mother, they do help somewhat with childcare responsibilities.



### *Hypothesis*

After reviewing the pertinent literature that was used for this study there is a strong relationship between the presence of a boy's biological father and how he develops his academic and personal relationship skills. This study hopes to find this relationship within the population of male college students and how the need to become autonomous while at a college institution has been affected by the absence of their father. This study will hope to prove that those males who have experienced growing up with an absent father will have a more difficult time with academic achievement and establishing personal relationships with peers than those who have had a consistently present father figure or those who have had a consistent father figure or coping skills in order to develop normally in comparison with those with a present father.

### *Methodology*

#### *Sample*

The study used a convenient sample and snowball sample method. The participants of this study were 74 male undergraduates who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the New England region of the United States. The economic status, race, religion, and other descriptive characteristic of the participants were varied and unknown to the researcher. The participants were given surveys based through personal interaction with the conductor or through the online version of the survey by SurveyMonkey.com. Each was given a participant informed consent form which indicated the study's focus on the comparison of academic, relational, and autonomous living capabilities of male students who have lived with or without their biological fathers (See Appendix I). The participants were informed that they were not required by their academic institutions or the researcher to fill out the survey if they wished to decline their involvement.

### *Data Gathering*

A comparative and quantitative study was used to survey both groups of young males. The progress of each participant's ability in a collegiate atmosphere was measured with an instrument developed purely for the use of this study by the researcher. The study included 13 likert scale questions, 12 multiple choice, 4 ratio raw score questions, and a rank level of college stressors question which focused on the participants experiences of academics, peer relationships, and autonomy while being in a college or university setting. The first part of the survey focused on the demographics of the participants in terms of age, year of graduation, and overall grade average. The second section of the survey asked a series of questions that focused on the college experiences of each of the participants touching upon the three main focuses of study for this thesis. The third section focused on the family history of each participant in terms of the presence of one's biological father. The participants who stated that their biological was in fact present in their lives were directed to the next section while all those who stated no were asked to answer 6 additional questions concerning the status of their biological father. The fourth and final section asked the participants to rank common collegiate stressors in order of which caused the most stress to their college experience. The survey was then passed in physically or electronically back to the researcher for analysis (See Appendix II for Survey).

### *Data Analysis*

The data was analyzed using an Independent samples T-test to show the statistics and comparable means of the data of questions that were quantitative. Each group's

results were placed into generated tables in order to compare the similarities and differences between the questions answered by the participants.

### *Results*

The research conducted for this study focused on three variables of the hypothesis of how males who grew up with or without the influence of their biological present in their lives affected their adjustment into collegiate life. These variables included: academic performance, peer relations, and the acquisition of necessary skills to live independently from their families.

There were a total of 74 participants who were surveyed via online through the use of SurveyMonkey.com and in paper form distributed by the researcher. Of those 74 completed surveys, 67 were used to analyze the data. The researcher only used fully completed surveys. The population consisted of males in college within the ages of 18 to 22. In terms of the participants' class year 47.5% percent were seniors, 25% juniors, 21.3% sophomores, 5% freshmen, and 1.3% had recently graduated. The comparison of participants who grew up with their biological father was greatly skewed consisting of 90.5% who had their fathers present while 9.5% of the participants did not. Of these populations, 38.3% of those with present fathers were closer to them than their mothers while 16.7% of those with absent fathers stated the same. The population of the 9.5% participants who grew up without a father was further analyzed. This population was asked about the current relationship with their absent father: current contact, frequency of physical contact, reason for absence, and if there was a father figure in their lives to replace the biological father's absence. The percentage of those still in contact with their father is 42.9%, yet of that group, one-third has weekly physical contact, while the other

two-thirds has close to no contact. Of the 57.1% of males who have no contact with their father, 75% stated that their father passed away, while 25% stated that their father has been incarcerated. The population was also asked about the presence of a father figure, and only 42.9% stated that there was another close male figure that had a positive influence on them.

### *Variables*

The first variable of the research conducted for the hypothesis was the relationship of the presence of a college male's father and their academic performance. The two populations were compared based on academic performance measured by the answers addressing the following items in the survey: Organized, Difficulty Concentrating, Current Grade in College, High School and College Grade Comparison, and High School versus College Stress Comparison. The first two and last one of these items were likert scales while the remaining items were multiple choice. The first four of these items were analyzed using the mean score and standard deviation to compare between the two sub-populations. The only results of any significance found in the comparison of academic achievement between the populations was that of ability to concentrate and high school versus college grade comparison. Those who had their biological father while growing up showed a mean score for concentration of 3.0500 with a standard deviation of 1.11119, while those without had a mean score of 2.5000 with a standard deviation of 1.04881. The item involving grade comparison was somewhat similar with those who had their biological father while growing up showed a mean score of 2.2667 with a standard deviation of .68561, while those without, had a mean score of 2.8333 with a standard deviation of .40825 (See Table 1, Appendix III). The participants

without their biological fathers stated they had a harder time concentrating and also had about the same grades as they did in high school, while those with their biological fathers had less trouble concentrating and had better grades in high school. However, in a comparison of current overall grades, there was little significance in the presence of one's biological father affecting one's grade due to the negative correlation ( $r = -.048$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (See Table 2, Appendix III).

The next variable in the study was peer relations. The two populations were compared based on interaction with peers addressing the following variables represented by items on the survey such as easy time making friends, consider self an extrovert, able to get along with friends, ability to approach attractive person, more comfortable with a certain gender, number of girlfriends since high school, and number of hook-ups since high school. The first three of these items were likert scales while the rest were multiple choice questions on the survey. The only results of any significance found in the comparison of success with peer relations between the populations was that of being comfortable with a certain gender and number of hook-ups since high school. In terms of being more comfortable with either gender, or both, those with a present father had a mean score of 2.1000 while those with an absent father had a mean score of 2.6667. Those with an absent father were more likely to be comfortable with both genders equally while those with present fathers felt more comfortable with females. For the number of hook-ups since high school the participants who grew up with their biological father in their home showed a mean score of 9.2167 while those without their biological fathers had a mean score of 12.5000. It should be noted however that the standard deviation for both populations was 8.15338 and 8.96103 respectively. The other items had, at the most,

a .4 difference in means, which occurred in two of the remaining items (See Table 3, Appendix III).

The third and final variable used to compare the groups was that of the ability to live independently from one's family. The two populations were compared based on the ability to live independently which was based on the following variables represented by the items on the survey to include parent learned most from to autonomous, ability to function on own, enjoy being independence of living away from home, procrastinate with simple tasks, frequency of feeling homesick, and feeling completely overwhelmed while at college. The results that showed any significant data were found in the items of procrastination, feeling overwhelmed, and being homesick. While in comparison, both populations' answers were relatively the same, however the standard deviation for procrastination and feeling overwhelmed for those with absent fathers was .000. Those with absent fathers received a mean score of 4.0 and 5.0 respectively but there was no deviation. This shows that all those with absent fathers strongly agree that they have been completely overwhelmed in college and have trouble with procrastination (See Table 4, Appendix III). These participants also stated that they have also never seen professional help while at college (See Table 5, Appendix III). There was a slight difference in the comparison of the populations with the frequency of being homesick. The mean score for those with present fathers was 3.1667 with a standard deviation of 1.27780, while those with absent fathers had a mean score of 3.6000 and a standard deviation of 1.14018. This shows that those with absent fathers are less likely to feel homesick than those who had a father while growing up (See Table 4, Appendix III).

### *Discussion*

This purpose of this study was to investigate whether the absenteeism of a male's biological father would negatively affect three aspects of college life to include academic achievement, peer relations, and the ability to live autonomously. This study attempted to support the hypothesis that those with an absent father growing up would decline in these areas while those who grew up with their present biological father would excel. This study sought to expand on Jones' (2004) study which focused on academic performance declining without the presence of the biological father. This study hoped to use Jones' (2004) study but also include the variables of peer relations and autonomous living as well to prove the effect a father has on a young male's development. However, this study found that there was little to no difference in comparison between the two populations. Like Låftman's (2008) findings, there didn't seem to be a significant difference between the two groups to prove the study's hypothesis. In terms of academics there was no significant difference in terms of grades between the two groups. However the absent father group was found to have a harder time concentrating and stated that their grades were about the same as they were in high school in comparison with those with present fathers who had higher grades in high school. However even these results were not as significant to support the hypothesis.

The second variable the thesis focused on was that of peer relations. In accordance with Robbers (2008) this study believed that the presence of a father would help the social development of a child in order to be able to function with his peers. However, this variable too was disproved by the results of the survey. There was no significant difference between the two populations in which one would be able to

function better than the other with peers. However there were significant findings included in this part of the study. The results revealed that males who grew up with their biological fathers in the home felt the most comfortable with females while those with absent fathers felt most comfortable with both genders. This section of the survey found that those with an absent father had more cases of “hooking up” with another person than those who had their biological father present.

The last variable of the study was that of the ability to live autonomously away from one’s family. While the groups’ results were pretty much identical, there was an interesting finding of 100% of those with absent fathers stating that they have been completely overwhelmed during their college career. When investigated further it was discovered that none of the participants received any counseling services of any kind. While the rest of the items’ results were close in comparison with the other population, this could be a serious finding within the study in terms of absent father males’ inability to address overwhelming stress. This is also found in Popenoe’s (1996) study where males growing up without their biological father were more likely to develop depression or alcoholism.

The findings of the study would suggest addressing and recommending the use of counseling services used by males who grew up without their father. Although the ratio of those with a present father in comparison to those without one was 11:1, the fact remains none of those males went to seek any type of professional help with their stress. A suggestion for future studies would be to investigate this matter further with a larger sample size. The number of males without a father was significantly skewed in comparison to those with a present father. This was a limitation in the study which could



have lead to the skewing of results. The study did reveal the need to implement a new practice or initiative of stressing the use of on campus counseling centers. While the numbers of the population may be small, hopefully further research in the area will be conducted with an adequate sample size to investigate and prevent this potential problem with college aged males who grew up with absent fathers.

The study revealed that attention is needed on the area of males in college who grew up without their biological father present. In working with this population a social worker must stress the importance of speaking with a therapist or counselor. There is a correlation between those who grow up without a parent to seeking attention in unhealthy ways, such as sex, drugs, or violence, which needs to be acknowledged by the social worker. In terms of policy the social worker or counseling center on a college campus would need to begin an initiative to target single parent males and coping with stress. The males may be embarrassed or ashamed to disclose their absent father in which confidentiality is needed during these sessions. However the knowledge of overwhelming stress linked to an absent father must be made public in the form of brochures, posters, and emails posted by the health center. Future research could benefit from this study by using the data gathered for a more extensive or similar study.

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*Appendix I***Participant Consent Form**

*March 9, 2010*

You are being invited to participate in a research study about male students' experience in college in relation to their family structure. This study will cover peer relations, academics, and autonomous living at college. This study is being conducted by Peter Baron, a senior Social Work major, at Providence College. This study is being conducted as an Undergraduate research project for the conductor's senior thesis.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The information you provide will be used to relate the different college experience for males along with their family history. The questionnaire will take about ten minutes to complete. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study should provide more general benefits in terms of future research and academic findings.

This survey is anonymous. Do not write your name on the survey. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. No personal information will be disclosed and the results of the study will be used only for the conductor's senior thesis.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing and returning the survey to the conductor/researcher, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

*If you have any questions comments about the study, please contact Peter Baron at [pbaron1@friars.providence.edu](mailto:pbaron1@friars.providence.edu).*

*Appendix II*

Age: \_\_\_\_

Class Year: \_\_\_\_

Overall Grade Average (i.e. A,B,C, etc): \_\_\_\_

If you had to choose one, who do you consider to be closer to?

Mother                  Father

Who would help you with school work before college? (select all that apply)

Mother    Father    Siblings    Teacher    Mentor    Other

If Other please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

You are organized in terms of school work

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

You find it hard to concentrate in school

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

How are your high school grades in comparison to your college grades?

Worse                          Better                          About the Same

College is much more stressful then high school

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

How often do you feel homesick?

Almost Always    Often    Sometimes    Rarely

You have felt completely overwhelmed while at college (school, work, relationships, etc wise)

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

Have you ever seen professional assistance while at college in terms of emotional/mental health?

Counselor                          Student Health Center                          Social Worker

Psychiatrist

Never Got Professional Help

Other (Please Specify)

How many intimate relationships (in terms of dating, boy/girlfriends) have you had since high school?

How many times have you "hooked up" with another person since high school?

Do you find it difficult to approach/talk to a person you are attracted to in a social situation?

Yes

No

You consider yourself an extrovert (able to socialize, don't consider self shy)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

You have an easy time making friends since entering college

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Who do you feel more comfortable with in terms of friends?

Males

Females

About the same

You get along with all your friends

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Who did you learn from the MOST in terms of taking care of yourself/living autonomously?

Mother

Father

Siblings

Other

If Other please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

You are completely able to function on your own (cook, clean, pay bills, etc)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

You enjoy the independence of living away from home

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Do you procrastinate with simple tasks? Yes No Other/Certain Tasks

If Other please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Which aspect of college do you worry/struggle about the most?

(please rank in order of stress level, 1 being most stressful and being least)

Making new friends\_\_\_\_\_

Boyfriend/Girlfriend Relationships\_\_\_\_\_

Living away from home\_\_\_\_\_

Financial Issues\_\_\_\_\_

Getting good grades\_\_\_\_\_

Working a job while at school\_\_\_\_\_

Is your biological father still a part of your household?    Yes    No  
 (if no please answer the following questions on the next page, if yes then survey is done)

Are you still in contact with your biological father?    Yes    No

To what extent do you have physical contact with him?

Almost daily      Weekly      Monthly      Yearly      Close to none      N/A

What was the nature of your dad's absence?

Divorce      Passed Away      Separation      Incarceration      Other

If Other please explain:\_\_\_\_\_

How old were you when your father's absence occurred? \_\_\_\_\_

If your Father's absence happened before age 17, did you have a father figure or male you looked up to in your life?      Yes      No

If yes, please explain, in a word or two, who this man was.

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## Appendix III

Table 1: Academics

| Biological Father in Home |                | Organized | Concentrate | Grade comparison | College vs High School stress |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| yes                       | Mean           | 3.5932    | 3.0500      | 2.2667           | 3.7288                        |
|                           | N              | 59        | 60          | 60               | 59                            |
|                           | Std. Deviation | 1.00204   | 1.11119     | .68561           | 1.08008                       |
| no                        | Mean           | 3.3333    | 2.5000      | 2.8333           | 3.6667                        |
|                           | N              | 6         | 6           | 6                | 6                             |
|                           | Std. Deviation | 1.03280   | 1.04881     | .40825           | 1.03280                       |
| Total                     | Mean           | 3.5692    | 3.0000      | 2.3182           | 3.7231                        |
|                           | N              | 65        | 66          | 66               | 65                            |
|                           | Std. Deviation | .99952    | 1.10940     | .68296           | 1.06811                       |

Table 2: Grade comparison

**Current Grade Comparison**

|                           |                     | grade | biofainhouse |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------|--------------|
| Grade                     | Pearson Correlation | 1     | -.048        |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)     |       | .687         |
|                           | N                   | 79    | 73           |
| Biological father in home | Pearson Correlation | -.048 | 1            |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .687  |              |
|                           | N                   | 73    | 74           |



Table 3: Peer Relations

|              |                | <b>Peer Relations</b> |          |                 |           |                  |                   |                     |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| biofainhouse |                | numberofgfbf          | hookedup | approachattract | extrovert | easyfriendmaking | morecomfortfriend | getalongwithfriends |
| yes          | Mean           | 1.3167                | 9.2167   | 1.6667          | 3.4333    | 4.0508           | 2.1000            | 4.0500              |
|              | N              | 60                    | 60       | 60              | 60        | 59               | 60                | 60                  |
|              | Std. Deviation | 1.15702               | 8.15338  | .47538          | 1.12546   | .87934           | .95136            | .76856              |
| no           | Mean           | 1.0000                | 12.5000  | 1.3333          | 3.0000    | 3.6667           | 2.6667            | 4.5000              |
|              | N              | 6                     | 6        | 6               | 6         | 6                | 6                 | 6                   |
|              | Std. Deviation | 1.54919               | 8.96103  | .51640          | 1.26491   | .81650           | .81650            | .54772              |
| Total        | Mean           | 1.2879                | 9.5152   | 1.6364          | 3.3939    | 4.0154           | 2.1515            | 4.0909              |
|              | N              | 66                    | 66       | 66              | 66        | 65               | 66                | 66                  |
|              | Std. Deviation | 1.18666               | 8.21114  | .48473          | 1.13516   | .87486           | .94856            | .75909              |

Table 4: Independent

**Independency**

| biofainhouse |                | learnmostfrom | functiononown | enjoyalone | Procrastinate* | Homesick<br>* | Overwhel<br>med* |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| yes          | Mean           | 1.8000        | 3.7333        | 4.3390     | 3.8000         | 3.1667        | 4.3684           |
|              | N              | 60            | 60            | 59         | 60             | 60            | 57               |
|              | Std. Deviation | .98806        | 1.10264       | .63273     | .40338         | 1.27780       | 1.29051          |
| no           | Mean           | 1.5000        | 4.0000        | 4.8333     | 4.0000         | 3.6000        | 5.0000           |
|              | N              | 6             | 6             | 6          | 5              | 5             | 6                |
|              | Std. Deviation | .54772        | 1.26491       | .40825     | .00000         | 1.14018       | .00000           |
| Total        | Mean           | 1.7727        | 3.7576        | 4.3846     | 3.8154         | 3.2000        | 4.4286           |
|              | N              | 66            | 66            | 65         | 65             | 65            | 63               |
|              | Std. Deviation | .95749        | 1.11024       | .62979     | .39100         | 1.26491       | 1.24063          |

Table 5: Professional Help

| Biological father in Home |         |                       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative<br>Percent |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|
| yes                       | Valid   | counselor             | 4         | 6.7     | 7.0           | 7.0                   |
|                           |         | student health center | 5         | 8.3     | 8.8           | 15.8                  |
|                           |         | social worker         | 1         | 1.7     | 1.8           | 17.5                  |
|                           |         | psychiatrist          | 3         | 5.0     | 5.3           | 22.8                  |
|                           |         | never got help        | 44        | 73.3    | 77.2          | 100.0                 |
|                           |         | Total                 | 57        | 95.0    | 100.0         |                       |
|                           | Missing | System                | 3         | 5.0     |               |                       |
|                           | Total   | 60                    | 100.0     |         |               |                       |
| no                        | Valid   | never got help        | 6         | 100.0   | 100.0         | 100.0                 |

