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Educational Attainment and Growth Among Individuals With Absent Fathers

Angelica Yolanda Barrera
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Angelica Yolanda Barrera

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Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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Angelica Yolanda Barrera

MA, University of Texas-Pan American, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

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Abstract

There are more than 20 million children who are growing up in a fatherless home. It is understood that this population is more likely to experience a variety of intrapersonal and interpersonal issues when compared to children who grow up in a home with both parents. These issues include being twice as likely to drop out of school. Although few of these individuals pursue a higher education, very little understanding of the underlying variables that contribute to such education-seeking behaviors is available for this population. Guided by the theory of positive disintegration and the posttraumatic growth conceptual model, the purpose of the present study was to understand whether posttraumatic growth and the five overexcitability personality domains were related to education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. After data collection concluded with a sample of 146 participants, a binary logistic regression was conducted to understand the relationship between the variables of interest. Results indicated that posttraumatic growth, psychomotor overexcitabilities, imaginational overexcitabilities, and emotional overexcitabilities were significantly related to education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. Conversely, there was not a significant relationship found between sensual overexcitabilities and intellectual overexcitabilities and education-seeking behaviors. Insights from this study may promote positive social change by broadening the understanding of variables that may impact educational pursuits in this population, thus informing practitioners and educators of potential interventions and support methods to promote educational and career success and lead to a potential decline in student dropout rates.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my husband, Ruben Barrera; my grandparents, Ruben and Angelica Alfaro; and my mother, Cynthia Alfaro. Without their unconditional love and support, I do not think I would have made it this far. They always picked me up and pushed me to be stronger and better, especially during my times of despair and lack of motivation. I love each of you with all of my heart and am so grateful for all that you each have done to help me succeed.

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I would also like to thank my family and friends for being so understanding and supportive of me during this strenuous time in my life. This includes my boss, Joaquin Munoz, who is more like family to me than my administrator. Thank you for always being so understanding and supportive of my educational endeavors. All of you have really helped me succeed in completing this milestone in my life, and I love each of you deeply for doing so.

Lastly, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength, drive, and knowledge to complete my dissertation. My mother and grandparents always tell me to never take Him and all that He gives us for granted. He has truly blessed me, and I am eternally grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The present study focused on the education-seeking behaviors of individuals who grew up with an absent father. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB, 2016), 20 million children under the age of 18 years reside in a fatherless home. There is an abundance of data that suggest that men and women who mature with an absent father are more likely to experience a wide range of behavioral, social, and interpersonal problems than individuals who grow up with a father (USCB, 2016). In the midst of these issues, diminished academic expectations and success persist as pressing matters (Dedonno & Fagan, 2013; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014; Radl et al., 2017).

In October 2016, about 532,000 individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years dropped out of school with less than a high school or equivalent education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The USCB (2016) indicated that children with absent fathers are twice as likely to fall into this category. Although a small portion of this population strives to pursue a higher education, with marked economic and career success (East et al., 2017; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Land et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017), insight into underlying elements that contribute to such education-seeking behaviors remains sparse. Researching and understanding these variables may promote social change by informing practitioners and educators of various interventions to encourage educational and career success and ultimately reduce student dropout rates.

The present chapter is divided into several sections to highlight the key topics of the current study. It includes a discussion of the study's background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, nature, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. The introductory chapter concludes with a summary of the aforementioned topics.

Background

Previous studies have examined how the lack of a father's presence affects a child's growth and development but have primarily focused on the negative repercussions that occur. Herbert and Princess (2017), Land et al. (2014), Peterson (2014), and Peyper et al. (2015) examined the experiences of females who grew up with absent fathers and the negative influence that a father's absence had on their emotional, social, and educational functioning. Additionally, males with absent fathers are more susceptible than those with present fathers to developing poorly managed aggressive features (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Kim & Glassgow, 2018) and identity issues (Land et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016). Regardless of the negative implications, there has been a shift toward learning about the positive variables that contribute to this population's ability to overcome life obstacles and achieve marked academic and career success (East et al., 2017; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Land et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017).

Emerging literature suggests that posttraumatic growth (PTG) may account for educational pursuits in this population (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016;

Land et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Makofane, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017). The concept of PTG involves the assumption that psychological growth can occur in response to trauma, dependent upon various positive predictors, including personal characteristics and cognitive processing abilities (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Kaye-Tzadok and Davidson-Arad (2016) determined that resilience and the cognitive strategies of hope and self-blame significantly account for variance in PTG for female survivors of child sexual abuse. East et al. (2017), Gillette and Gudmunson (2014), Herbert and Princess (2017), Land et al. (2014), Wilson et al. (2016), and Zulu and Munro (2017) offered different views of resilience factors that contribute to academic success. Arpawong et al. (2014) provided different views on cognitive and behavioral strategies to promote PTG. Kaye-Tzadok and Davidson-Arad, Li et al., and Mohr and Rosen (2017) examined the relationship between resiliency and PTG in victims with a history of childhood abuse, producing mixed results. Owens (2016) examined the relationship between personality characteristics, attachment, and meaning-making in PTG and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Additionally, there are a number of overlooked negative traits that exist in successful individuals with absent fathers (Gillette & Gugmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Makofane, 2015; Peterson, 2014; Rostad et al., 2014). In contrast to PTG theory, Kazimierz Dabrowski (as cited in Chang & Kuo, 2013) proposed that the development of negative personality traits after a crisis is necessary for an individual to grow after trauma. Dabrowski referred to these negative characteristics as overexcitabilities, or above-average responsiveness to

stimuli that can manifest as a psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational, or emotional (affective) personality traits (Chang & Kuo, 2013; Winkler & Voight, 2016).

Through this study, I aimed to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the positive and negative personality characteristics of individuals with absent fathers and their relationship to education-seeking behaviors. Because individuals who grew up with absent fathers are at risk of experiencing diminished academic expectations and success (Dedonno & Fagan, 2013; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014; Radl et al., 2017), it is essential to gain insight into the variables that are linked to growth and educational attainment for this population. Such findings could potentially advance mental health treatment by informing practitioners of potential interventions to promote education-seeking behaviors and support academic success for this population of individuals.

Problem Statement

As the number of children who are growing up in a single-mother home due to divorce or being born out of wedlock continues to escalate (Amato et al., 2015; USCB, 2016), the number of individuals who are likely to experience the negative implications associated with the lack of a present father during their development has also continued to increase. Because of this trend, fewer individuals are likely to complete education at the high school level or beyond, thus exacerbating the personal, interpersonal, economic, and social problems that they are already at risk of encountering (USCB, 2016). Although there is a small portion of this population that strives to pursue higher education and marked economic and career success, the variables that account for such individuals'

behavioral decisions are understudied (East et al., 2017; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Land et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017).

There is considerable evidence that suggests that PTG (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Makofane, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017) and overexcitabilities (Chang & Kuo, 2013; Harper et al., 2017; Karpinski et al., 2018; Winkler & Voight, 2016) may be related to academic achievement. Nevertheless, researchers have yet to examine the relationship between these variables and educational attainment within this population. Additionally, existing data are limited to primarily qualitative research, thus generating results that lack generalizability. Because the relationship between these variables remains unclear, the present study focused on filling this gap in current research literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine underlying variables that may influence education-seeking behaviors among men and women who grew up with an absent father. A quantitative approach was used to address this gap in the literature. Overexcitabilities and PTG were analyzed to observe whether they were related to education-seeking practices in this population. This study was unique because it explored positive and negative variables that were projected to be related to growth and success.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Is there a relationship between the five overexcitability personality domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

Alternative Hypothesis 1 ($H1_A$): There is a statistically significant relationship between the five overexcitability domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Null Hypothesis 1 ($H1_0$): There is no relationship between the five overexcitability domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Is there a relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

Alternative Hypothesis 2 ($H2_A$): There is a statistically significant relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Null Hypothesis 2 ($H2_0$): There is no relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study was based on Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD; Harper et al., 2017) and Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) PTG

conceptual model. Dabrowski's TPD is a theory of personality development that suggests that crisis and psychological suffering are essential for growth (Harper et al., 2017). Dabrowski believed that stressful psychological experiences exacerbate neuron sensitivity, thus resulting in above-average responsiveness to stimuli, or overexcitabilities (as cited in Harper et al., 2017). Overexcitabilities can manifest themselves as a combination of positive and negative characteristics through psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional, and intellectual domains (Harper et al., 2017). Dabrowski proposed that individuals who present with overexcitabilities have an enhanced potential for development and growth (Harper et al., 2017).

Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) PTG model addresses positive change that occurs after the experience of a traumatic life event. The model emphasizes the roles of individual characteristics and cognitive processes as central factors in attaining growth and can be applied to a range of trauma types and levels of growth. Because of this, Dabrowski's TPD and Tedeschi and Calhoun's model can offer guidance into underlying factors that may facilitate personal growth and success in individuals who grew up with absent fathers.

Nature of the Study

This study used a quantitative, nonexperimental design on a sample of men and women who reported a history of father absence. Data were collected electronically through an online survey host. Consistent with the TPD (Harper et al., 2017) and the PTG conceptual model (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), individual positive and negative characteristics identified in previous qualitative studies were used as growth factors that

were objectively measured in the present study. Objective ratings of each of these factors helped to delineate the amount of influence that each construct had on education-seeking behaviors.

Definitions

Defined below are key variables and terms that were significant in the present study.

Absent fathers: Fathers who are indifferent or completely uninvolved in a child's life in terms of parenting (East et al., 2017; Kim & Glassgow, 2018; Radl et al., 2017). This may be a result of parental divorce or separation, father incarceration, a child's birth out of wedlock, or a father's inconsistent presence in the child's life for other ambiguous reasons. Individuals with absent fathers due to death were excluded from the present study.

Posttraumatic growth (PTG): Positive change that occurs after the experience of a traumatic life event as a result of positive individual characteristics and cognitive processes (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Overexcitabilities: Above-average neuron responsiveness to stimuli that occurs in response to stressful psychological experiences in the form of positive and negative personality characteristics through psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional, and intellectual domains (Harper et al., 2017). These traits promote personal development and growth in response to stressful and traumatic experiences (Harper et al., 2017).

Education-seeking behaviors: The educational outcomes, or highest educational attainment, pursued by an individual (Land et al., 2014; Radl et al., 2017).

Assumptions

It was assumed that all research participants answered all survey questions honestly. Because the data collected were anonymous, it could not be ensured that the participants met criteria to participate in the study. Nevertheless, because the nature of the survey questions may have appeared sensitive to some participants, it is likely that the emphasis on survey anonymity and confidentiality enhanced participants' inclination to answer honestly.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the present study focused on measuring characteristics and traits related to education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up with an absent father. Individuals who had an absent father as a result of death were excluded from the current study because the perceptions of loss via death versus a conscious decision to be uninvolved in a child's life may have produced results that did not align with the focus of the research problem. Because of this, results may not be generalizable to individuals who developed with an absent father due to death.

Limitations

A potential barrier for collecting survey data was the ability to recruit a large sample. In addition to the potential for a low response rate, the reliability of survey data was questionable due to the potential that participants could misinterpret survey questions or answers and may have been unmotivated to answer items truthfully (Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, using electronic surveys limited the dispersion of testing measures to individuals with internet access. Using a single method of data collection that excluded

subjects who did not have internet access created the potential for response bias, which could essentially have altered the accuracy of the survey results (Creswell, 2014; Jones et al., 2013). Jones et al. (2013) asserted that using validated survey instruments can help to control for these potential limitations. Creswell (2014) added that using an online survey host could minimize bias due to the program's ability to post surveys on various internet platforms and send them to email addresses for participants to complete. Although this did not ensure that all potential subjects were accessed, it enhanced the opportunity to reach a more diverse group of participants, thus improving the reliability and generalizability of the study's results (Creswell, 2014).

Significance

The results of this study provide insight into factors that encourage education-seeking behaviors in men and women who grew up with absent fathers. Insights from this study may promote positive social change by broadening the understanding of variables that may impact educational pursuits in this population, thus informing practitioners and educators of potential interventions and support methods to promote educational and career success. It is my belief that implementing such strategies would allow for an increase in self-awareness and a potential decline in student dropout rates.

Summary

The present study focused on examining personal characteristics and traits associated with education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. This study used a quantitative, nonexperimental design on a sample of men and women who reported a history of father absence. The theoretical framework of the

study was consistent with the TPD (Harper et al., 2017) and the PTG conceptual model (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The results of this study may offer insight into factors that may encourage education-seeking behaviors in men and women who grew up with absent fathers.

The proceeding chapter will focus on existing literature related to the current research problem. It will offer in-depth information about the literature search strategy used to gather information about the research topic. It will continue by further explaining the theoretical foundation that was previously introduced, followed by a review of existing information related to PTG, overexcitabilities, and education-seeking behaviors in the selected population of interest. Chapter 2 will conclude with a summary of research gaps that informed the rationale of the present study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

More than one in four children in the United States resides in a home without a father (USCB, 2016). Past studies have indicated that the majority of individuals who grew up with an absent father were more inclined to experience diminished academic expectations and success (Dedonno & Fagan, 2013; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Qureshi & Ahmad, 2014; Radl et al., 2017) and were twice as likely to discontinue their educational pursuits prior to completing high school (USCB, 2016). With the number of children raised in single-parent households continuing to increase (Amato et al., 2015; USCB, 2016), educational endeavors among this population represent an area of growing concern.

The purpose of this study was to examine underlying variables that may influence education-seeking behaviors among men and women who grew up with an absent father. Although emerging literature suggests that PTG (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Makofane, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017) and overexcitabilities (Gillette & Gugmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Makofane, 2015; Peterson, 2014; Rostad et al., 2014) may account for the educational pursuits in this population, researchers have yet to examine either of these variables in relationship to educational attainment within this population. In this study, I aimed to fill a gap in the literature by

focusing on the positive and negative personality characteristics of individuals with absent fathers and their relationship to education-seeking behaviors.

The literature review begins with a brief discussion of the search strategies used to find existing literature related to the present study. A discussion of the theoretical foundation and how it applied to the current study follows, along with a thorough, exhaustive review of studies related to PTG, overexcitabilities, education-seeking behaviors, and fatherless individuals. The literature review concludes with a discussion of the identified gaps in the literature and how I aimed in the present study to fill those gaps.

Literature Search Strategy

Keywords searched included *absent fathers*, *effects on daughters and sons*, *educational success*, *father absence*, *higher education*, *PTG*, *career success*, *resilience*, *Dabrowski*, and *overexcitabilities*. I searched for relevant literature in the databases EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, SAGE Journals, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. The research that was reviewed consisted of publications from academic journals, technical and research reports, and books ranging from 1964 to 2018. In instances where literature on a specific variable was sparse, articles that examined similar variables or situations were reviewed and discussed accordingly in the present literature review.

Theoretical Foundation

The primary theories used to understand the differences in education-seeking behaviors among individuals who developed with an absent father included Dabrowski's TPD (1964) and Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) PTG model. Although both theories

maintained similar views on growth after trauma, distinct differences emerged regarding views of personality traits that were required to promote such growth among these individuals. These differences were explored in further depth and later applied to existing literature that was similar to the current study.

The TPD is a theory of personality development that focuses on the fragmentation of internal psychic structures, or emotional disintegration, that is caused by trauma and results in the evolutionary development of higher-level personality traits (Dabrowski, 1964). Dabrowski (1964) indicated that suffering is essential for growth and suggested that it is dependent upon an individual's developmental potential. Developmental potential is a function of an individual's genetic traits, including intelligence, special talents, and overexcitabilities; social influences; and autonomous processes derived from the aforementioned factors (Dabrowski, 1964). Dabrowski posited that the presence of developmental potential does not ensure growth but instead offers a predisposition for it to occur.

During the positive disintegration process, negative stressors initially become internalized and cause the individual to experience various inner conflicts and identity confusion (Dabrowski, 1964). At this point, the individual is forced into a state of self-reflection that sets the platform for growth to potentially occur (Dabrowski, 1964). According to Dabrowski (1964), the behavioral decisions made to address the presenting negative stressors are dependent upon the individual's self-perception and developmental potential. The author continued by explaining that if the individual can utilize these factors to positively channel the negative sensations that are being experienced into

adaptive behaviors, then psychological and personality growth can occur through such self-transformation. In other words, becoming aware of personal deficits enables the individual to utilize such attributes in a positive manner to be able to overcome any presenting stressors. Such adaptability creates a transformative effect and promotes individual growth.

Dabrowski's TPD has been applied to a range of populations to demonstrate how it is related to behavior and personality development. In a phenomenological, longitudinal case study, Peterson (2012) interviewed a 30-year-old female with a history of childhood trauma. The participant in the study exhibited a range of positive and negative personality traits and abilities that enabled her to successfully complete graduate school yet hindered her progress and functioning throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. The author explained that this struggle was attributed to an interplay between her personality characteristics, gifted abilities, and past traumatic experiences.

The TPD has also been applied to giftedness. Results have demonstrated that gifted individuals who displayed a heightened sense of self and achievement (Bailey, 2011; De Bondt & Van Petegem, 2017; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015) and gifted children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Rinn & Reynold, 2012) were better able to adjust and acquire higher levels of development. College students with a heightened sense of self demonstrated greater developmental potential traits that were linked with subjective well-being (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016). Qualitative research with drug addicts has also supported Dabrowski's TPD. The introduction of creative treatment activities to a group of addicts participating in psychotherapy activated

transformative existential experiences that promoted mental growth (Borgen, 2016). The TPD provides theoretical support for transformative growth due to the positive use of personality characteristics and personal traits that are associated with and individual's developmental potential.

Conversely, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) reported that although it is typical to respond to crisis with negative psychological reactions, this is not necessarily how transformative growth occurs. The authors indicated that individuals who present with positive personality characteristics, such as extraversion, resiliency, and openness, along with positive cognitive processing skills, are more capable of positivity during adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) suggested that these positive personality qualities are necessary for growth to occur and be maintained during episodes of trauma. This predisposition enables such individuals to cope with stress and achieve growth during times of extreme distress (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). If such characteristics are nonexistent, then the individual will be unable to manage distress to the extent that it becomes debilitating to the person's functioning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

PTG established the importance of using positive traits and skills during times of trauma to grow and transcend the experienced dysfunction. This is particularly evident in female survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016), individuals who lost a parent during childhood (Greene & McGovern, 2017), victims of motor vehicle accidents (Sehgal & Sethi, 2016), and alternative high school students (Arpawong et al., 2014). The potential for PTG is also evident in college students with a

history of childhood abuse (Brooks et al., 2016; Mohr & Rosén, 2017; Schaefer et al., 2018). PTG suggests that a history of trauma can be overcome to achieve growth and success in a range of populations.

The TPD and PTG theory each demonstrate that transformative growth is possible in response to negative stressors. Because the absence of a father could be perceived as a negative stressor during childhood, both theories help in assigning meaning to the growth experienced by this population and their education-seeking behaviors. Additionally, because TPD suggests that negative personality traits are essential for growth (Dabrowski, 1964) and PTG theory indicates that positive personality traits are key to transformative development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), using both theories covers the continuum of positive and negative personality characteristics that could account for growth and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up without a father.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Negative Outcomes of Father Absence

An array of research has examined the negative implications of growing up with an absent father. Much of the existing literature reflects that this population experiences adverse interpersonal, behavioral, educational, and psychological repercussions due to a father's absence. In the following sections, I further explore the impact of a father's absence in each of these areas.

Behavioral and Emotional Problems

A large sum of existing data reflects that an individual's emotional and behavioral functioning is adversely impacted when the person matures with an absent father. Flouri et al. (2015) examined the differences in behavioral responses between males and females using a longitudinal study of 15,293 families from the United Kingdom. The authors measured for emotional, conduct, hyperactive/inattentive, peer, and prosocial behavior problems when the participants were 9 months, 3 years, 5 years, and 7 years old to measure for changes in each area. After comparing results with a control group, Flouri et al. reported that child problem behavior in each of the five areas was significantly related to father absence beginning as early as 3 years of age. Findings at 3 years of age also predicted an increase in problem severity at 5 and 7 years of age (Flouri et al., 2015). The authors clarified that these findings were similar for male and female children.

Fitzsimons and Villadsen (2019) found comparable results through a similar longitudinal study that followed a sample of 6,245 children born between 2000 and 2002 in the United Kingdom who reportedly had an absent father. The authors examined how father absence impacted the children's mental health at ages 3, 5, 7, 11, and 14. Dimensions of mental health focused on internalizing behaviors, or emotional symptoms and peer problems, and externalizing behaviors, including conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention. The authors indicated that father absence had the greatest negative effect on a child's mental health via internalizing symptoms at any age, but more so when father absence occurred when the child was between the ages of 7 and 11.

Regarding externalizing behaviors, the authors reported that only males exhibited these issues in response to their father's absence.

Kalmijin (2017) added to these results after exploring the effect of father absence on the well-being of minority and native children attending secondary school in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Using multilevel regression models, the author reported that immigrant children from father-absent homes experienced higher rates of depression, more problem behaviors, and poorer self-esteem than children who grew up in traditional homes. Additionally, both father-absent minority and father-absent native children experienced diminished well-being in the areas of self-esteem and problem behavior when compared to children from intact homes (Kalmijin, 2017).

Simmons et al. (2018) performed a longitudinal study with males between the ages of 13 and 17 years. The population examined consisted of 1,216 first-time juvenile offenders who had initially been charged with various misdemeanor crimes. Upon reassessing the sample after 6 months, Simmons et al. found that father absence was highly related to an increase in delinquency and illicit substance use. Markowitz and Ryan (2016) also conducted a longitudinal study and had equivalent findings regarding an increase in delinquent behaviors for male and female individuals who experienced father absence beginning during the ages of 6 through 14 years. The authors clarified that father absence, although predicted, had no causal relationship with depressive symptoms experienced by this population. Kim and Glassgow (2018) generated supporting evidence that father absence was positively associated with male delinquency along with aggressive behaviors. Results were rendered after controlling for the mother-child

relationship, thus supporting that father absence adversely outweighs mother involvement (Kim & Glassgow, 2018; Simmons et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Land et al. (2014) and Wilson et al. (2016) each conducted qualitative studies on a small sample of African American males who grew up without a father. Although both studies reflected that a positive mother-son relationship promoted academic and career success, participants described identity issues and problems conforming to male gender roles due to not having guidance from a father or father figure who modeled positive male behavior.

Rostad et al. (2014) examined a sample of 203 college female students who grew up with an absent father. Although the authors did not measure for legal issues, results indicated that father absence contributed to an increase in sexual risk-taking behaviors, depression, impulsivity, and illicit drug use. Herbert and Princess (2017) added to these findings by interviewing a sample of 15 female college students from Zimbabwe who grew up without fathers. Participants reported common themes of anxiety, anger, sadness, and resentment that stemmed from their father's absence. Boothroyd and Cross (2017) reported contradictory findings regarding female sexual behaviors; however, results supported the relationship between father absence and elevated levels of aggression, delinquency, and impulsivity for males and females.

Interpersonal Relationships

Father absence could adversely affect an individual's interpersonal functioning beginning at an early age. Specific to females, there is evidence that links father absence to an earlier age at menarche and sexual promiscuity. Gillette and Gudmunson (2014) examined these variables by using structural equation modeling on a sample of 532

African American females. Results reflected that father absence during childhood was significantly related to girls reaching menarche prior to 12 years of age. Additionally, girls who experienced earlier menarche were more inclined to engage in sexual activity at a younger age, which was determined to significantly predict lower educational expectations and attainment (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014). Guardia et al. (2014) supported these findings by surveying a sample of 342 undergraduate female students, 96 of whom came from father-absent homes. Participants from father-absent homes reported experiencing menarche and intercourse at an earlier age than those who were raised with a present father. Webster et al. (2014) had similar results by conducting a meta-analysis on 33 qualitative studies that examined father absence and age of menarche. Findings suggested that there was a positive relationship between early menarche and father absence. Such results were also generated in a longitudinal cohort study of 5,295 adolescent females from the United Kingdom by Culpin et al. (2014). In a simulation-based modeling study, Barbaro et al. (2017) evaluated existing twin studies to research the association between father absence and age at menarche while controlling for genetic influences. The authors found a correlation between father absence and earlier age at menarche.

Schlomer and Cho (2017) added to these findings by exploring the genetic influence that father absence has on age of menarche according to variation in the LIN28B gene, the gene linked to pubertal timing. Using a molecular genetic approach on a sample of 300 women between the ages of 18 and 25, the authors found that father absence was linked to accelerated variations in the LIN28B gene and earlier age of

menarche. Conversely, Sheppard et al. (2014) generated opposing findings using a sample of Malaysian children with absent fathers between the ages of 8 and 15, along with Sohn (2017), who sampled 11,138 Indonesian women who reported onset of menarche occurring between the ages of 8 and 19.

Data from a national sample of 3,356 females between the seventh and twelfth grades during the year 1994 was collected in four waves over the span of 14 years to evaluate the effects of father absence on biological maturity (TenEyck et al., 2019). After conducting a multivariate regression analysis, results suggested that father absence was not significantly associated with biological development. The same study was replicated exactly but using a sample of 2681 non-Hispanic white females (Gaydosh et al., 2018). The results were commensurate with those of TenEyck et al. (2019).

Guardia et al. (2014) suggested that participants who engaged in sexual activity at a younger age were at greater risk of becoming pregnant prior to reaching adulthood. A longitudinal study of 799 individuals between the ages of 12 and 15 investigated the relationship between first sexual experience and family dynamics (Moilanen et al., 2018). Using mean comparisons and bivariate correlations, overall findings suggested that father absence, males, early maternal bearing, African American race, and higher levels of autonomous decision-making by children were indicative of sexual encounters occurring at a younger age. After using separate models for participants based on race, Moilanen et al. (2018) reported that father absence was associated with earlier sexual experiences in Hispanic and African American youth, but not European American participants. DelPriore and Hill (2013) and Rostad et al. (2014) each reported that father absence

contributed to an increase in sexual risk-taking behaviors in similar samples of undergraduate college female students who grew up with an absent father. Alleyne-Green et al. (2016) added to these results by using a cross-sectional design that consisted of 879 sexually-active, adolescent females. Participants who grew up without a father reported first engaging in sexual activity at an earlier age than women with present fathers, as well as engaging in more sexually risky behaviors. Furthermore, women with absent fathers similarly attributed their sexually-risky behaviors to a desire for closeness, which they indicated was not received from their fathers (Alleyne-Green et al., 2016; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Rostad et al., 2014). Peyper et al. (2015) supported these findings and noted that father absence also promotes trust issues and problems communicating with partners, which influences women to engage in greater attention-seeking and sexual behaviors. Surveys collected from a sample of 275 participants between the ages of 18 and 62 generated data that reflected father absence was associated with earlier sexual encounters and diminished satisfaction in future physical relationship (Kimberly & Linton, 2017).

Qualitative findings from a case-study with a 10-year-old Afro-Caribbean participant performed by Strauss (2013) reflected that father absence contributed to feelings of abandonment towards males, thus lending to poor social functioning. The author suggested that these feelings could manifest later in life by a tendency to marry at an earlier age. This notion is supported in a quantitative study using a sample of three, father-absent Bangladesh women (Shenk et al., 2013) and a Malaysian sample of young, father-absent females (Sheppard et al., 2014). Conversely, Johnson (2013) found from 79

thorough interviews with 40 college-educated African American women with absent fathers that participants reported shying away from matrimony and relationships due to discourse they would experience that stemmed from a poor understanding of how to navigate their relationships. The author continued by explaining that participants attributed this lack of understanding to their inexistent father-daughter relationship that failed to inform appropriate gender roles for their future relationships.

According to Flouri et al. (2015), father absence during childhood adversely affects interpersonal functioning similarly for males and females. The authors identified that children who experience father absence as early as age three are more likely to experience peer problems. These results were replicated by Fitzsimons and Villadsen (2019) during a longitudinal study that evaluated a sample of children from the United Kingdom. The authors found a relationship between father absence problems with peer relationships similarly for both female and male children.

Educational Problems

Father absence could adversely impact educational outcomes beginning in childhood. Qureshi and Ahmad (2014) studied differences in academic performance between children between the sixth and 10th grade who came from intact families or father absent families due to death and divorce. The authors noted that children from father absent homes, regardless of cause being death or divorce, showed poorer academic motivation and performance than children from intact, father-present households. Results were supported by Havermans et al. (2017) through a cross-sectional study that examined 357 children between the ages of 11 and 23 who were living in father absent homes, post-

divorce. Children with minimal to no contact with their fathers displayed the lowest levels of school engagement when compared to children who maintained a present and ongoing relationship with their fathers. A similar cross-sectional study by DeRose et al. (2018) examined the educational progress of children between the ages of nine and 14 that were living in 10 different Latin American and Caribbean countries. Data suggested that children that came from homes with absent fathers were 80% more likely to experience poorer educational progress or drop out of school when compared to children who lived in intact homes. Additionally, although the authors expected the educational progress to be hindered more for boys than girls of father-absent homes, they found that father absence compromised academic progress similarly for both genders.

In a study by Dedonno and Fagan (2013), the authors examined family structure in relationship to academic self-concept. Using a multiple regression model on a sample of 155 undergraduate students attending a private university in the United States, findings suggested that children who came from a single-parent household presented with a lower academic self-concept, lower school attendance, diminished academic motivation, and poorer academic success (Dedonno & Fagan, 2013). Gillette and Gudmunson (2014) supported these findings in their study over 532 African American females that grew up without a father. The authors reported that participants expressed having lower educational expectations, thus lower educational attainment. Wright and Levitt (2014) reported similar findings with a sample of 268 Latino immigrants between the third and ninth grades. While the authors reported that parental absence was related to diminished academic performance and expectations, they did not distinguish between mother and

father absence. Curtis et al. (2017) studied the effects of father absence on educational outcomes in a sample of 569 African American adolescents. After conducting a cross-sectional analysis, the authors found that children with absent fathers were less likely to graduate from high school and to experience diminished expectations to attend and complete a college program when compared to children with present fathers. Herbert and Princess (2017) utilized an explorative case study design to interview 15 female students attending a university in Zimbabwe. Although participants had advanced educationally at the time of the interview, they described experiencing poor academic performance and progress, along with disruptive thoughts of their fathers during class lectures (Herbert & Princess, 2017).

While there is considerable research that indicated that father absence adversely affects an individual's mental, interpersonal, and educational functioning beginning in early childhood, many of these studies were longitudinal or qualitative in nature. Furthermore, each of these studies indicated that father absence adversely affected the majority of individuals and failed to examine the small population of people who were not negatively impacted in these areas. Because of this, it was essential to focus on the small percentage of individuals with an absent father who were the anomaly to this situation. Studying this group informed practitioners and researchers as to what variables promoted positivity in the lives of individuals who were inclined to be negatively impacted by the absence of their fathers. This knowledge could potentially be taught to this susceptible population to enable the prospect of positive change.

Overexcitabilities

There was a modest amount of existing literature that examined the variable of overexcitabilities in relationship to education. According to Harper et al. (2017), Kazimierz Dabrowski believed that personal growth and development in response to stressful or traumatic events manifests as a combination of positive and negative personality characteristics. He described these traits as overexcitabilities and reported that they were observed via psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional, and intellectual domains (Harper et al., 2017). Mendaglio and Tillier (2006) suggested that the psychomotor excitability manifests in the form of excessive energy and nervousness, the sensual domain as a heightened inclination to sensory pleasures and outlets, and the intellectual overexcitability as quicker mind activity with the ability to analyze and synthesize information. The authors further described the imaginational domain as the ability to engage in creative thinking with frequent tendencies to daydream and the emotional domain as the inclination to be overly sensitive and respond to experiences in a highly emotional manner. Dabrowski believed that overexcitabilities promoted personality development and growth to overcome stressors and traumatic obstacles (Harper et al., 2017; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006).

In a study by De Bondt and Van Petegem (2017), the authors explored the relationship between overexcitabilities and learning patterns in a sample of 516 students from Flanders, Belgium who had completed a minimum of 2 consecutive years of studies beyond high school. After running a maximum likelihood analysis and Bayesian analysis, results reflected that the intellectual overexcitability was the only overexcitability that

was related to deep, meaning-directed learning for males and females. Additionally, female participants demonstrated a positive relationship between the sensual overexcitability and meaning-directed learning and a negative relationship between the imaginational overexcitability and meaning-directed learning. There was also a negative relationship discovered for psychomotor excitability and meaning-directed learning in males. Emotional overexcitability was negatively related to meaning-directed learning for both genders (De Bondt & Van Petegem, 2017). He and Wong (2014) reported conflicting results after studying 836, seventh through ninth grade students who were attending school in Hong Kong. They indicated that in term of learning, males displayed significant variability in the sensual, imaginational, and intellectual overexcitability domains, but superiority in psychomotor overexcitabilities. Females were noted to exhibit superiority in the emotional domain.

Beduna and Perrone-McGovern (2016) studied a sample of 144 undergraduate students who were attending a public university in the United States. Using a path analysis, the authors examine the relationship of intellectual and emotional overexcitabilities between emotional intelligence and subjective well-being. Results supported that there was a significant and positive relationship between both overexcitabilities and emotional intelligence and between emotional intelligence and subjective well-being. Findings confirmed that emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between overexcitabilities and subjective well-being. He et al. (2017) added to these findings by measuring the relationship between overexcitabilities and creativity in a sample of 1,055 students from eight secondary schools in Hong Kong between the

ages of 12 and 16. Using a multiple regression analysis, findings revealed that overexcitabilities accounted for 18.6% of the variance in creativity, where 17.8% came from the imaginational, intellectual, and emotional overexcitabilities and 0.8% from the sensual and psychomotor overexcitabilities. The authors clarified that the imaginational overexcitability was the most significant predictor of creativity, whereas the intellectual and emotional overexcitabilities were only moderate predictors. He et al. shared that these findings are essential because creativity, in addition to intelligence, is a predictor of giftedness in students.

Limont et al. (2014) began to examine this notion by studying the relationship between overexcitabilities, the personality traits from Robert McCrae and Paul Costa's Big Five model, and giftedness. Using a sample of 132 gifted students and 103 regular students who were attending secondary school, the authors found that giftedness acted as a moderator between overexcitabilities and the Big Five dimensions of openness and extraversion. The sample of gifted students also showed greater openness and intellectual and imaginational overexcitabilities, along with lower levels of neuroticism when compared to the control group. There was also a stronger relationship between the sensual overexcitability and openness and the psychomotor overexcitability and extraversion in the gifted group. The control group displayed a significant relationship between the sensual, imaginational, and intellectual overexcitabilities and extraversion. There was no group-related difference observed for the emotional overexcitability. Vuyk et al. (2016) conducted a similar study by researching the relationship between overexcitabilities and facets of openness from the five-factor model of personality. After

running a confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory structural equation modeling on data collected from a sample of 149 creative and intellectually gifted adolescents and adults and 312 average adults, intercorrelations were found between the fantasy facet and imaginational overexcitability, aesthetics and sensual overexcitability, feelings and emotional overexcitability, actions and psychomotor overexcitability, and ideas and intellectual overexcitability. There was no correlation between the values facet with any of the five overexcitabilities.

Gifted adolescents were too studied by Mofield and Parker Peters (2015) to further understand the relationship between overexcitabilities and perfectionism. The authors found the most significant relationship between emotional overexcitabilities and dimensions of perfectionism. Additionally, low levels of imaginational overexcitabilities and high levels of emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities were associated with healthy perfectionism. Conversely, high emotional and imaginational overexcitabilities were related to unhealthy perfectionism. These results suggested that higher levels of emotional overexcitabilities enabled an individual to envision greater personal goals and experience a heightened sense of self-awareness that directs goal achievement (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015). Perrone-McGovern et al. (2015) replicated these results and added that lower emotional overexcitabilities were linked to greater emotional regulation and subjective well-being.

After examining the lived experiences of five gifted adults, Szymanski and Wrenn (2019) found reoccurring themes of intellectual, emotional, and imaginational overexcitabilities that contributed to educational pursuits. Additionally, participants

expressed feeling deeply and intensely all their lives, being precepting, and being energetic, which caused them to appear different from their classmates growing up. Karpinski et al. (2018) further reported that giftedness and high intelligence are also shown to be related to affective disorders, autism, attention-deficit/hyperactive disorder, and immune dysregulation. The authors suggest that these findings can be explained by the hyper brain/hyper body phenomenon such as Dabrowski's overexcitabilities (1964).

As discussed, there is a limited amount of existing literature that measures the variable of overexcitabilities. Additionally, the majority of this current data measures overexcitabilities in relationship to intelligence or giftedness. To our current knowledge, there is yet to be a study the measures the role that overexcitabilities plays in educational pursuits, and much less in the population of individuals who were raised with an absent father. Understanding the relationship between these two variables for this population can offer insight into what characteristics potentially enable this at-risk population to be successful in achieving their academic endeavors.

Posttraumatic Growth

Unlike Dabrowski's belief that both positive and negative traits promote growth in response to trauma and stressors (1964), Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) reported that only positive personality characteristics allow an individual to overcome adverse experiences and achieve growth. The authors referred to this phenomenon as posttraumatic growth (PTG). Because of this, there have been numerous studies that have looked at what variables contribute to PTG in a range of populations and scenarios.

Student Populations

Traumatic History. Contributing variables to PTG have been heavily examined in students with a history of trauma. For example, in a study conducted by Arpawong et al. (2014), the authors evaluated 564 Hispanic students from 24 different alternative high schools that were enrolled in a 12-lesson substance abuse prevention program. During periods of stressful life events, the authors found that students with less frequent substance abuse behaviors tended to experience greater levels of PTG. In a different study utilizing 101 British university students who had survived a violent crime or were employed as a trauma worker, Brooks et al. (2016) reported that active coping, spiritual/religious coping strategies, and social support were the most prominent predictors of PTG. Thomas et al. (2020) added to these results by determining that emotional intelligence is also relevant to the potential for PTG. They noted that emotional intelligence mediated the relationship between PTG and positive refocusing and PTG and planning in a group of 225 undergraduate students with a history of at least one traumatic event.

Gender Roles. The variables of gender and gender roles as predictors of PTG in a sample of college students have too been examined. Barlow and Hetzel-Riggin (2018) ran hierarchal linear regressions with data collected from online surveys, and indicated that gender was not a predictor of PTG. The authors instead found that masculine and feminine role adherence, along with altruism coupled with healthy masculine norms positively predicted PTG.

Psychopathology. Several studies have identified factors of psychopathology and mental health that may be related to PTG. Data generated by Wamser-Nanney et al. (2018) reflected a positive relationship between event centrality and PTSD, depression, and PTG. Event centrality was also found to be negatively related to psychological well-being and unrelated to resiliency (Wamser-Nanney et al., 2018). Building upon these results, multiple studies suggested that resiliency may contribute to PTG (Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017). There are also indications that neuroticism is associated with PTG, specifically that extremely high levels of neuroticism significantly moderates the relationship between PTG and posttraumatic stress (Boerner et al., 2020).

Attachment Style. Attachment style is another variable that has been studied in relationship to PTG. Arikan et al. (2016) discussed that characteristics of attachment have been linked to PTG. They reported that attachment-avoidance, or the tendency to be independent and dismissive of others, was noted to be negatively related to PTG and positively related to posttraumatic stress. Owens (2016) shared that higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, along with lower levels of meaning-made and attachment avoidance, significantly predicted higher levels of PTG. The author clarified that meaning-made refers to the process that occurs when individuals attempt to understand and resolve issues they may experience post a traumatic experience. Mohr and Rosen (2017) elaborated on these findings by reporting that acceptance, emotional support, and positive reframing were significant predictors of PTG.

Childhood Trauma. Individuals with a history of childhood trauma have exhibited signs of PTG. Qualitative themes of PTG emerged during a study conducted by Hitter et al. (2017). The authors reported that they performed semi-structured interviews with eight women who were attending college, between the ages of 28 to 45, and had a history of childhood sexual abuse. Upon performing thematic analysis, the majority of the participants reported achieving a positive gain from their childhood abuse, which is indicative of PTG (Hitter et al., 2017). Furthermore, the authors observed that several of the participants initially developed maladaptive behaviors in response to the abuse; however, they eventually learned positive coping strategies that led to recovery. While these results are partially consistent with PTG theory, they better support the theory of positive disintegration.

General Populations

Trauma Related to Loss of a Family Member. Additionally, Greene and McGovern (2017) surveyed a sample of 350 adults who reportedly lost one or both of their parents, via death, prior to the age of 18. As the authors predicted, there was a positive correlation observed between gratitude and PTG, along with psychological well-being. Gratitude was also noted to be negatively correlated with depression. Interestingly, Taku et al.'s (2018) study generated contradictory findings regarding a history of trauma prior to the traumatic event being measured in the sense that there was no association with reports of growth or gratitude. Li et al. (2015) added that PTG was positively associated with resilience and greater emotional intelligence in 202 Chinese nursing students with a history of childhood trauma. Kaye-Tzadok and Davidson-Arad (2016)

generated similar findings regarding resilience, but also reported that perceived control, hope, and self-blame were positively correlated to PTG.

Trauma Related to Natural Disasters. Survivors of natural disasters have been examined and found to experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Jin et al., 2014). The authors continued by explaining that PTSD symptoms in this population can promote PTG (Jin et al., 2014). Taku et al. (2018) added that negative reactions, such as confusion, anger, and sadness, along with a history of past traumatic experiences promoted the greatest opportunities for natural disaster survivors to achieve PTG. This is interesting because such results support Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD, 1964) more accurately than Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) PTG model.

Summary and Conclusions

Although many of these studies strove to understand what contributing variables predicted PTG, many of them generated conflicting results. Additionally, much of the data generated were indicative of positive and negative variables that promoted growth, as discussed by Dabrowski (1964). Furthermore, studies examined samples with a history of trauma, but not necessarily the trauma of having an absent father. For these reasons, it was important to understand what variables promoted growth and potentially educational attainment in a sample of people who grew up with an absent father.

The proceeding chapter will offer an explanation of the research method in greater detail. It will contain an in-depth discussion about the research design and a rationale for such selection. Following this section, the methodology, including information about the

population, sampling procedures, and instrumentation, as well as a discussion of threats to validity and ethical procedures will be included. Chapter 3 will conclude with a summary of the design and methodology of the present study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the purpose of the present study was to examine how overexcitabilities and PTG influenced education-seeking behaviors in individuals who were raised with an absent father. This chapter offers insight into the research method selected for the present study. It begins with a thorough discussion of the research design and the rationale for its use. A description of the methodology follows, which includes information about the population being examined; sampling, recruitment, and data collection procedures; and instrumentation and operationalization of constructs. The chapter continues by addressing threats to validity and ethical procedures and concludes with a summary of the design and methodology before transitioning into Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

In the present study, I aimed to examine the five overexcitability domains, psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional, and intellectual (Harper et al., 2017), along with PTG in relationship to education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. In this study, the five overexcitabilities and PTG were identified as independent variables, and education-seeking behaviors were the dependent variable. To measure these variables, I used a quantitative, nonexperimental research design.

Using a survey method allowed me to collect important personal information and data from the participants in a quick and low-cost manner in order to answer my research questions (Burkholder et al., 2016). Additionally, data collection through a range of

commercial web-based survey hosts allowed for data to be exported directly into statistical programs such as SPSS, thus saving time that would have been spent on manual data entry (Burkholder et al., 2016). This design choice allowed for data to be collected from a large range of individuals in different geographic locations, permitting results to be more generalizable. This was essential because results from existing literature were limited to those gathered from populations other than the one being studied presently or from qualitative interviews. With its quantitative, nonexperimental research design, this study may advance knowledge in this discipline by generating more objective results and providing greater insight into the variables that promote education-seeking behaviors among those who grew up without a father. Such insights could inform practitioners and educators of possible interventions and support methods that could enable educational and career success for this population.

Methodology

Population

The target population for this study consisted of men and women who grew up with an absent father. This included individuals whose fathers were indifferent or completely uninvolved in their lives in terms of parenting (East et al., 2017; Kim & Glassgow, 2018; Radl et al., 2017). Examples of such individuals are children of divorce or parental separation, those born out of wedlock, those whose fathers were incarcerated, and those whose fathers were inconsistently present in their lives for other miscellaneous reasons. Individuals who experienced father absence due to death were not included in

this study. Additionally, participants needed to be at least 18 years of age to qualify for this study. The projected sample size was around 146 participants.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

For this study, a convenience sampling selection process was used because I studied members of a subgroup who were representative of a larger, well-defined population (Warner, 2013). As mentioned before, participants were at least 18 years of age and had a history of father absence throughout their lives. The study excluded individuals who experienced father absence as a result of death. Using G*Power software version 3.1.9.3 (Faul et al., 2009) to determine sample size, a power analysis for six predictors with a confidence interval of 95% and a 5% margin of error required an ideal sample size of 146 participants. Creswell (2013) explained that this number reduces the likelihood of outliers and anomalies, which would occur in a sample that was too small, and reduces time consumption, which would occur with too large a sample size, but still produces considerably accurate results. For these reasons, my estimated sample size was around 146 participants.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To recruit participants, I promoted my study to individuals using the social media platforms Facebook and Reddit. Additional recruitment occurred through the data collection platform Qualtrics. Information about the study along with a link to the survey was posted for the general public as well as in specific groups targeting individuals with absent fathers. Target groups included a public Facebook group titled “Healing Support for Adults With Absent Fathers” and the Reddit subgroups “nodad,” “behaviorism_aba,”

"research," "science," and "psychology." The Facebook group contained a total of 263 members as of July 2020. Also as of July 2020, the Reddit subgroup "nodad" had a total of 183 members, "behaviorism_aba" had 521 members, "research" had 7,900 members, "science" had 24.7 million members, and "psychology" had 665,000 members.

Demographic information that was collected from the participants included age, sex, highest level of education, socioeconomic status, and confirmation of father absence. This information is located in Appendix A. Data collection occured through the use of a self-administered online survey design through the platform Qualtrics. Informed consent documentation was provided at the beginning of the survey and contained my contact information, should participants have additional questions about the study and its goals. If consent was given, the participant was directed to the survey, which included questions addressing the previously discussed demographic information, as well as all questions from the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory—Expanded (PTGI-X) and the entire Overexcitability Questionnaire—Two (OEQII). Information from incomplete surveys was filtered out and not maintained or used in my research. Surveys were anonymous and did not require follow-up procedures upon completion.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

The OEQII was originally created and published in 1999 by Falk et al. to serve as a quantitative instrument for the measurement of Dabrowski's overexcitabilities (De Bondt & Van Petegem, 2015; Warne, 2011). Falk et al. indicated that this 50-item measure utilizes a 5-point Likert scale format to generate information about each participant's overexcitability levels for the psychomotor, sensual, imaginational,

intellectual, and emotional domains. The authors added that this measure was written for an eighth grade reading level and can be used with children who are gifted, adolescents, and adults. This was an appropriate measure to use for this study because I aimed to understand whether the five overexcitability personality domains were related to education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. Permission to use the OEQII was acquired via email and is presented in Appendix B.

Falk et al. (1999) measured the reliability and validity of the OEQII by utilizing a sample of 563 college students attending a large Midwestern university and 324 younger and older participants from Canada and the United States. The authors used Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal reliability of the measure. Results generated alpha coefficients of .86 for the psychomotor domain, .89 for the sensual domain, .85 for the imaginational domain, .89 for the intellectual domain, and .84 for the emotional domain. These scores reflect a high scale reliability because they each present with an alpha above .80 (Falk et al., 1999). Warne (2011) replicated these findings with a population of 561 students. Alpha coefficients yielded included .85 for the psychomotor domain, .87 for the sensual domain, .85 for the imaginational domain, .86 for the intellectual domain, and .82 for the emotional domain.

In terms of validity, Falk et al. (1999) indicated that the OEQII presented with good content validity for each of the five overexcitability domains. This was determined by the authors performing a factor analysis with varimax rotation statistical analysis with the first sample and then replicating the initial analysis with a second sample. Results generated minor item fluctuations along with an overall stable factor structure after

combing the results from the two samples (Falk et al., 1999). De Bondt and Van Petegem (2015) added to these psychometric properties by applying Bayesian structural equation modeling (BSEM) to the OEQII. Using a sample of 516 university students, the BSEM analysis yielded positive results regarding factorial validity in contrast to confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory factor analysis models that were unable to generate a satisfactory model fit.

The PTGI-X was developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun, and it was subsequently published in 2017 (Tedeschi et al., 2017). This measure was appropriate for the current study because it measures the level of PTG that each participant has undergone relevant to a specific traumatic experience (Tedeschi et al., 2017). The present study aimed to examine the level of PTG that participants experienced as a result of an absent father and how this growth was relevant to their educational pursuits. Permission to use the PTGI-X was acquired via email and is included in Appendix C.

The 25-item PTGI-X is an expanded version of the original 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi et al., 2017). The PTGI was based upon populations of adults with a physical disability, individuals who experienced the death of a spouse in late adulthood, and college students with a history of traumatic life events (Tedeschi et al., 2017). The authors explained that although the PTGI was psychometrically sound in measuring the factors of personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, and appreciation in life as variables that contribute to PTG, it lacked strength in measuring the factor of spiritual change. Because of this, the PTGI-X was altered to include

additional 5-point Likert scale questions to enhance the psychometric properties for measuring spiritual change (Tedeschi et al., 2017).

To broaden the assessment, the authors evaluated the reliability and validity of the PTGI-X with the new items with samples of undergraduate college students of different cultural backgrounds from the United States, Turkey, and Japan (Tedeschi et al., 2017). After running descriptive statistics and internal consistency for each of the five factors, Tedeschi et al. (2017) generated internal reliability total score values of .97 for the United States, .96 for Turkey, and .95 for Japan.

In terms of internal consistency for the various subscales, the United States produced the greatest alpha coefficients and Japan the lowest (Tedeschi et al., 2017). The subscale scores demonstrated for the United States included .83 for spiritual change, .85 for appreciation of life, .86 for personal strength, .88 for new possibilities, .90 for relating to others, and .91 for spiritual and existential change. Turkey's scores were .76 for spiritual change, .81 for appreciation of life, .85 for personal strength, .86 for new possibilities, .88 for relating to others, and .90 for spiritual and existential change. Japan yielded scores of .61 for spiritual change, .67 for appreciation of life, .82 for personal strength, 82 for spiritual and existential change, .84 for new possibilities, and .87 for relating to others. Apart from Japan's scores for the spiritual change and appreciation of life subscales, all other scales in each region presented with alpha coefficients about .80, thus indicating high scale reliability.

Additionally, to measure the concurrent validity of the scales, the scores from the PTGI-X were compared to those of the Event Related Rumination Inventory (ERRI) and

the Core Beliefs Inventory (CBI; Tedeschi et al., 2017). The authors reported that the PTGI-X was significantly associated with each measure, with the exception of the intrusive subscale of the ERRI. Khechuashvili (2018) evaluated the PTGI-X Georgian Version and found it to have good concurrent validity when compared to the original PTGI, the PTGI-Georgian Version, and the PTGI-X.

Justification of Methodology

The present study quantitively measured PTG and the five overexcitabilities and their relationship to education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up with an absent father. In this study, there were six independent variables that were each measured with a Likert scale, and there was one dependent variable. Because the independent variables were measured with a Likert scale, these variables were considered continuous variables (Warner, 2013). The dependent variable, education-seeking behaviors, was also considered a continuous variable (Warner, 2013). Because of the multiple independent variables and singular dependent variable, a multiple regression analysis was intended to be used to understand the relationship between the variables of interest (Cohen et al., 2003; Warner, 2013).

Threats to Validity

It was important to establish external validity in the present study in order to be able to generalize the results to a greater population (Torre & Picho, 2016; Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). One threat to external validity for the current study was the Hawthorne effect. The Hawthorne effect is a type of ecological validity threat that refers to participants performing differently because of their awareness that they are being

studied (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). This threat was reduced because Qualtrics assisted in filtering out faulty surveys that were incomplete and could have affected the validity of the results. Because all participants were anonymous, and due to the inability to determine whether all participants were answering truthfully, this threat to external validity remained a risk.

Location was another possible threat to external validity that must be addressed. Individuals who resided in a lower income location may not have had access to computers or the internet. This may have placed this population at a disadvantage relative to higher income individuals who did have access to online resources and could complete the online survey (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). It was important to gather data from both higher and lower income individuals because this would create a more representative sample that could yield more generalizable results (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). In an attempt to control for this threat, information about the participants' socioeconomic status was gathered at the start of the survey.

There were also threats to internal validity that must be considered. The first threat to consider is mortality, or the loss of subjects before they completed the survey (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Although the survey should not have taken more than 15 minutes to complete, it may have been too lengthy for some participants, who might have chosen to leave the survey before it was completed. To minimize this threat, Qualtrics assisted in filtering out incomplete surveys so that they were not included in the data analysis.

There is a possibility that the present study experienced threats to statistical conclusion validity. The primary threat for the present study was low statistical power. This affects the probability of rejecting a false null hypothesis (Parker, 1993). The determination of sample size with G*Power software version 3.1.9.3 (Faul et al., 2009) should have helped to reduce the likelihood of this threat occurring. As mentioned earlier, inputting a power analysis for six predictors with a confidence interval of 95% and a 5% margin of error into G*Power generated an ideal sample size of 146 participants.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to gaining access to participants or data, IRB approval was acquired from Walden University. Because the study utilized a survey method, there were several procedures that took place to minimize any ethical concerns. According to the American Psychological Association (APA; 2017), informed consent from participants is required prior to collecting data. The present study included an informed consent that needed to be completed prior to beginning data collection. The informed consent contained information regarding the purpose of the study, the right to participate in the study or withdraw from it once beginning the survey, and my contact information, should any of the participants have additional questions regarding the study or its results.

Additionally, to address the issue of confidentiality (APA, 2017), personal information was not obtained from any of the participants to ensure anonymity. Information from participants who chose to withdraw from the survey prior to completion was not kept or stored. Data collected from the participants were coded into SPSS for analysis and did not include any identifiable information for any of the participants. All

data were only accessible to me as the primary researcher and were stored securely in a password-protected file. No other ethical issues, such as conflicts of interest or use of incentives, were identified for the current study. The IRB approval number for this study that was assigned by Walden University is 01-07-21-0664557.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively evaluate how overexcitabilities and PTG were related to education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up with an absent father. A thorough discussion about the development, validity, reliability, and use of the OEQII and the PTGI-X was presented in this chapter. Additional information about the methodology, threats to validity, and ethical concerns were also addressed within this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate how overexcitabilities and PTG may contribute to education-seeking behaviors among men and women who grew up with an absent father. Through this study, I sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the five overexcitability personality domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

$H1_A$: There is a statistically significant relationship between the five overexcitability domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

$H1_0$: There is no relationship between the five overexcitability domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

RQ2: Is there a relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

$H2_A$: There is a statistically significant relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

$H2_0$: There is no relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

The current chapter begins by offering insight into the details of the data collection procedures. A discussion of the results of the study follows this section. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the answers to the research questions prior to transitioning into Chapter 5.

Data Collection

Data collection was initiated at the start of January 2021 and concluded after a 3-week period. Participant recruitment occurred through the use of the social media platforms Facebook and Reddit. During the time that the online survey was active, 177 responses were received. Of the 177 participants, 31 did not qualify due to incomplete survey responses or because they grew up with their father present in their lives. This resulted in a total of 146 qualifying participants. Data collection occurred as planned, and there were no discrepancies noted.

Upon completing analysis of the descriptive statistics of the sample, participants' ages ranged from 18 to 84 years, with a mean age of 41.25 (M = 41.25, SD = 12.178; see Table 1). Of the 146 participants, 94 reported that they were male (64.4%). The remaining 52 individuals reported that they were female (35.6%; see Table 2). Additionally, 2.7% of participants had less than a high school education, 17.1% had received a college education, 11.6% had completed some college, 16.4% were college graduates, 44.5% had a master's degree, and 7.5% had an advanced or doctorate degree (see Table 2). Finally, when asked about their annual household income, 11.6% reported a value of $0-19,999, 14.7% reported $20,000-44,999, 15.8% indicated $45,000-69,999,

12.3% reported $70,000-99,999, 25.3% stated $100,000-150,000, and 17.8% indicated earning $150,000 and above (see Table 2).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Age

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	146	18	84	41.25	12.78
Valid *N* (listwise)	146				

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Gender, Highest Level of Education, and Average Annual Household Income

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Gender				
Male	94	64.4	64.4	64.4
Female	52	35.6	35.6	100.0
Highest level of education				
Less than high school	4	2.7	2.7	2.7
High school graduate	25	17.1	17.1	19.9
Some college	17	11.6	11.6	31.5
College graduate	24	16.4	16.4	47.9
Master's degree	65	44.5	44.5	92.5
Advanced or doctoral degree (e.g., MD, PhD)	11	7.5	7.5	100.0
Average annual household income				
$0-19,999	17	11.6	11.6	11.6
$20,000-44,999	25	17.1	17.1	28.8
$45,000-69,999	23	15.8	15.8	44.5
$70,000-99,999	18	12.3	12.3	56.8
$100,000-150,000	37	25.3	25.3	82.2
$150,000 and above	26	17.8	17.8	100.00

Results

When I began the present study, I intended to use a multiple regression analysis to evaluate the data collected for the previously mentioned research questions and hypotheses. Upon closer review after data collection concluded, I noted that only four participants reported completing less than a high school education. Additionally, 11 participants indicated that they had received an advanced or doctoral degree. Considering that the dependent variable of study was educational attainment, the few individuals within these two groups would have made it difficult to run a multiple regression analysis. Furthermore, because the time frames needed to separate the levels of educational attainment were not truly equal or continuous in nature, it would not have been appropriate to use a multiple regression analysis. For these reasons, I felt that it would be more suitable to conduct a binary logistic regression for data analysis.

To conduct a binary logistic regression, I decided to divide educational attainment into two groups: “less than a college education” and “received a bachelor’s degree or beyond” (see Table 3). The participants in the first group included those who reported having less than a high school education, being a high school graduate, or having completed some college (n = 46). The latter group included participants who indicated that they were college graduates, had received a master’s degree, or had completed an advanced or doctoral degree (n = 100).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Educational Attainment Groups

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Less than a college education	46	31.5	31.5	31.5
Received a bachelor's degree or beyond	100	68.5	68.5	100.0

The purpose for this division was that the existing literature focused mainly on individuals who grew up with an absent father who did not pursue a college education, whereas the present study aimed to understand what variables contribute to higher educational pursuits in individuals who grew up without a father. Dividing the participants into these two groups permitted easier comparison of the results based on educational differences in the population of interest. Additionally, separating the groups into two ordinal categories allowed for a binary logistic regression analysis to be completed.

Warner (2013) asserted that logistic regression can be used in a study that is measuring a dichotomous outcome variable that targets membership in a specific group. Furthermore, Warner added that one or more predictor variables can be used; however, they must be of a quantitative or categorical (dummy coded) nature. The factor of incorporating predictions toward a specific target group is a distinguishing feature that separates logistic regression from multiple linear regression models (Warner, 2013).

The present study included six quantitative independent variables, PTG (*X1*), psychomotor overexcitability (POE; *X2*), sensual overexcitability (SOE; *X3*), imaginational overexcitability (IMOE; *X4*), intellectual overexcitability (INOE; *X5*), and

emotional overexcitability (EOE; *X6*). These variables were measured as predictors for the dichotomous outcome variable, educational attainment (*Y*). The data generated by using a binary logistic regression approach illustrated whether the independent variables predicted the outcome variable and the odds of it happening (Warner, 2013).

Table 4

Results of Binary Logistic Regression: Variable in the Equation

							95% CI for EXP (B)	
	B	*SE*	Wald	*df*	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
PTG	.329	.144	5.206	1	.023	1.390	1.047	1.844
POE	1.113	.462	5.802	1	.016	3.043	1.230	7.528
SOE	.047	.123	.149	1	.699	1.048	.825	1.333
IMOE	.921	.366	6.345	1	.012	2.513	1.227	5.144
INOE	-.121	.572	.045	1	.833	.886	.289	2.720
EOE	-1.221	.508	5.775	1	.016	.295	1.09	.798

Note. PTG = posttraumatic growth; POE = psychomotor overexcitability; SOE = sensual overexcitability; IMOE = imaginational overexcitability; INOE = intellectual overexcitability; EOE = emotional overexcitability.

The results shown in Table 4 indicate PTG (p = .023), POE (p = .016), IMOE (p = .012), and EOE (p = .016) as statistically significant predictors of educational attainment in individuals who grew up with an absent father because their significance values are all under .05. Conversely, SOE (p = .699) and INOE (p = .833) reflected significance values that exceeded a p-value of .05, thus indicating that this variable is not a significant predictor of the outcome variable. In terms of research questions and hypotheses of interest, there is a relationship between PTG, POE, IMOE, and EOE and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father, whereas there is

not a relationship between SOE and INOE and education-seeking behaviors within this population.

Additionally, Exp(B) in Table 4 represents the odds ratio for each variable. To solve for the change in odds ratio percentage, I used the formula (Exp(B) – 1.0)100 (Warner, 2013). When looking at the statistically significant predictor variables, in terms of PTG, for every 1-year increase in the mean score, there is a 39% increase in the likelihood of an individual engaging in education-seeking behaviors. Additionally, individuals with POE are 204% more likely to engage in education-seeking behaviors when controlling for other predictor variables. Individuals with IMOE or higher imaginational overexcitabilities are 151% more likely to engage in education-seeking behaviors when controlling for other predictor variables. Finally, for EOE, the B, or beta, is negative. Because EOE is giving a negative beta, for individuals with higher EOE, the odds of engaging in education-seeking behaviors are 71% lower for individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Summary

When looking at the results, I partially accepted the null hypothesis for the first hypothesis, as several of the variables were not significant. Specifically, there was a significant relationship between the predictor variables POE, IMOE, and EOE and the outcome variable, educational attainment. Therefore, for these variables, I rejected the null hypothesis. In terms of SOE and INOE, there was not a significant relationship between these variables and educational attainment, so the null hypothesis was accepted.

Regarding the second hypothesis, I rejected the null hypothesis, because there was a significant relationship between PTG and educational attainment.

In the upcoming chapter, I will reflect on my interpretations of the present study's findings. Following this will be a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research. Chapter 5 will then conclude with implications for positive social change gathered from this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to understand the relationship that overexcitabilities and PTG had with education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father. The study used a quantitative, nonexperimental design on a sample of men and women who reported a history of growing up without their father. Although the majority of existing literature on individuals that grew up without a father has focused on the negative implications of a father's absence, few studies examined the small population of individuals who pursued higher education (East et al., 2017; Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Land et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017). In these studies, it was suggested that PTG (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2014; Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015; Makofane, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017) and various negative traits, or overexcitabilities (Gillette & Gugmunson, 2014; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-Tzadok & Davidson, 2016; Land et al., 2014; Makofane, 2015; Peterson, 2014; Rostad et al., 2014), may have accounted for education-seeking behaviors in the population of interest. For these reasons, overexcitabilities and PTG were analyzed to understand if they were related to education-seeking practices in individuals who grew up without their father. This study was unique because it explored positive and negative variables that were projected to be related to personal growth and educational success**.**

Due to the existing literature, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors, as well as overexcitabilities and education-seeking behaviors, among individuals who grew up without a father's presence. After performing a binary logistic regression analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27, I found a significant relationship between predictor variables, PTG, POE, IMOE, and EOE and the outcome variable, education-seeking behaviors. Nevertheless, there was not a significant relationship between SOE and INOE and the predictor variable. Further details of the analyses performed were presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter**,** I discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interpretation of Hypothesis 1

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the five overexcitability personality domains and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

I interpreted the findings related to this question within the context of Dabrowski's (1964) TPD. The results of the analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between education-seeking behaviors and POE, IMOE, and EOE. There was also no relationship between the variables SOE and INOE and education-seeking behaviors. These results were somewhat contradictory to Dabrowksi's TPD and to the existing literature.

Dabrowski's (1964) TPD suggests that from trauma, growth can occur through the development and manifestation of overexcitabilities. This theory is inconsistent with some of the results rendered from the present study. POE and IMOE were the only two overexcitabilities that were noted to enable education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up without a father, as suggested by the TPD. Conversely, while there was a significant relationship between EOE and education-seeking behaviors, this relationship was negative. This implies that EOE would deter the population of interest from pursuing a higher education. Furthermore, SOE and INOE were not significantly related to education-seeking behaviors, as they should be according to the TPD.

Regarding the existing literature, De Bondt and Van Petegem (2017) reported a negative relationship between EOE and learning, similar to the results in the present study. He and Wong (2014) conversely found all five overexcitabilities to be related to learning. While giftedness has also been linked to learning and educational pursuits (Limont et al., 2014; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019; Vuyk et al., 2016), there are mixed results regarding which overexcitabilities were significant indicators. Limont et al. (2014) asserted that IMOE and INOE were predictors of giftedness; however, Mofield and Parker Peters (2015) and Perrone-McGovern et al. (2015) agreed that EOE was linked to giftedness and higher levels of personal growth. Szymanski and Wrenn (2019) found reoccurring themes of INOE, EOE, and IMOE to be related to educational pursuits. The findings from the present study appear to be inconsistent with the body of existing literature.

The misalignment of the results from the present study with previous research may be attributed to this study involving an effort to examine educational endeavors and not necessarily giftedness or learning. Additionally, the departure in results may also be due to the current study evaluating individuals who had a history of father absence without considering the variables of learning capabilities and giftedness, as in prior studies. Lastly, the inconsistent findings may also be attributed to several limitations that are listed below in more detail, such as truthfulness.

Interpretation of Hypothesis 2

RQ2: Is there a relationship between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father?

I sought to understand the findings related to Research Question 2 from the lens of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) PTG theory. According to this theory, from extreme distress and trauma, growth can occur within those who have a predisposition to positive personality characteristics (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The results in the present study supported this theory, given that there was a significant relationship found between PTG and education-seeking behaviors among individuals who grew up with an absent father.

Prior research has reflected that students with a history of trauma, such as survivors of substance abuse (Arpawong et al., 2014), violent crimes (Brooks et al., 2016), childhood abuse (Hitter et al., 2017), childhood trauma (Li et al., 2015), and other traumatic events (Thomas et al., 2020) were likely to experience PTG during times of stress and with the use of positive coping mechanisms. Resiliency was also reported to be a contributor to PTG (Greene & McGovern, 2017; Herbert & Princess, 2017; Kaye-

Tzadok & Davidson-Arad, 2016; Zulu & Munro, 2017). Adults who lost one or both of their parents due to death during childhood were observed to experience PTG related to gratitude and psychological well-being. In alignment with the literature, PTG can occur in response to trauma and promote personal growth, as seen in the present analysis.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that exist within the present study. For example, the survey that was distributed was completely confidential and relied on the truthfulness of the responses provided by each participant. Due to the confidential nature of the study, there was no way to validate that participants truly grew up without a father, aside from their "yes" or "no" response provided prior to completing the survey. Additionally, neither of the instruments used (the PTGI-X and the OEQII) contained questions that acted as attention checks to ensure that participants were not engaging in random answering. For these reasons, it is difficult to ensure that all answers provided in each of the completed surveys were entirely truthful.

Another limitation of the present study is that the population of interest was limited to adults who had a history of father absence. Because the sample was limited to individuals over the age of 18 years, it may be difficult to generalize the results to a child population. Additionally, the present study excluded individuals who lost their father as a result of death. Researchers conducting future studies might consider examining PTG and overexcitabilities and the effect that they have on educational performance in children who reside within a fatherless home, as well as individuals who lost their father because of death.

The present study was distributed using social media platforms, which poses another limitation. Individuals were required to have access to Facebook or Reddit to participate in the survey. Because of this, those who did not have access to these platforms were prevented from having an equal opportunity to participate. Researchers conducting future studies might consider using mailout surveys in combination with online surveys to address this limitation.

Finally, because the present study was of a quantitative nature, the results are limited to those generated from the instruments used. While multiple qualitative studies have examined PTG, they did not focus on the present population of interest. Additionally, few qualitative studies have examined overexcitabilities in any sense. It may be beneficial to conduct various qualitative studies with individuals who grew up with an absent father to understand how their lived experiences relate to PTG, overexcitabilities, and education-seeking behaviors.

Recommendations

The present study reflected a significant relationship between the predictor variables PTG, POE, IMOE, and EOE and the outcome variable, education-seeking behaviors, but not between SOE and INOE and the outcome variable in the population of interest. Because of this, future researchers should focus on performing qualitative studies with individuals with an absent father to understand how their lived experiences may impact PTG, overexcitabilities, and education-seeking behaviors. A focus on why EOE was the only variable to produce a negative relationship is also essential to

understand what about EOE may deter individuals with an absent father from pursuing a higher education.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to replicate the present study using children with absent fathers and individuals who grew up with an absent father because of death so that the results can be generalized to a younger and broader adult population. Doing this would also allow for comparison of results between child and adult populations to see how they differ from one another. It is also important to gather a more random sample that is not solely based upon social media recruitment. When doing so, alternative instruments may be considered for use to better ensure truthfulness and avoid random answering from participants. Lastly, it would be interesting to conduct several studies examining the specific components of PTG that contributed to education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up without a father. This would be helpful because an array of positive coping mechanisms and support methods influence PTG.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the underlying variables that may influence education-seeking behaviors among men and women who grew up with an absent father. The results of this study provide insight into several factors that encouraged education-seeking behaviors in the population of interest. Results from this study may promote positive social change by informing practitioners and educators of which variables contribute to education-seeking behaviors in individuals who grew up with an absent father. Knowing this may enable educators and practitioners to use interventions and support methods to encourage educational and career success with the population of

interest. Educators and practitioners should focus on teaching positive coping skills to promote PTG and help individuals with an absent father understand their overexcitabilities that can contribute to their educational and personal growth. Doing so will not only allow for an increase in self-awareness and confidence in these individuals, but also provide them with potential tools for growth and success. Providing such tools while fostering the development of with self-awareness and self-confidence can eventually lead to a decline in student dropout rates within this population.

Conclusion

According to the USCB (2016), 20 million children under the age of 18 reside within a fatherless home. Past studies have focused heavily on the negative effects of growing up in a fatherless home, showing that these individuals are more likely to experience an array of behavioral, social, and interpersonal issues (USCB, 2016). In contrast, this study focused on the positive potential that the population of interest possessed and found that personal growth and success can surface despite the trauma of not having a father present. The data from this project can promote positive social change by teaching individuals with an absent father to use their positive and negative traits to grow from the past and excel in the present for a more promising future. If growth occurs within more individuals, there will be an eventual decline in student dropout rates, an increase in student academic motivation, and overall improvement of the educational community.

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Appendix A: Demographic Information

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender:

   _____Male

   _____Female

   _____Prefer Not to Answer

2. Age: _____

3. Highest Level of Education:

   _____Less than High School

   _____High School Graduate

   _____Some College

   _____College Graduate

   _____Master's Degree

   _____Advanced or Doctoral Degree (ex: M.D., PhD)

4. On average, what is your annual household income?

   _____$0-19,999

   _____$20,000-44,999

   _____$45,000-69,999

   _____$70,000-99,999

   _____$100,000-150,000

   _____$150,000 and above

5. Did you grow up with an absent biological father? This means a father who was indifferent or completely uninvolved in your life in terms of parenting. This may be as a result of parental divorce or separation, father incarceration, being born out of wedlock, or a father's inconsistent presence in your life for other ambiguous reasons. This does not include a father's absence due to death.

   _____Yes

   _____No

Appendix B: Permission Letter for the Overexcitability Questionnaire—Two

Hello,

It is on the GDC website for sale ($25) so you access it there. www.gifteddevelopment.com

Please bear with us, we have just launched a new version of our website but I believe you can still order through this version. If it doesn't work, please let me know and we will try plan B.

Thank you for your interest and good luck with your dissertation,

Dana Clay
Gifted Development Center

Appendix C: Permission Letter for the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory—Expanded

Angelica,

Here is the measure you requested for your work. Please use and cite appropriately.

Richard G. Tedeschi, Ph.D.
Distinguished Chair
Boulder Crest Institute for Posttraumatic Growth