

# Self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers

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## **SUMMARY**

Young men who grew up with emotionally absent fathers seem to find it difficult to attain equilibrium through dedication to both personal and relational concerns, probably because they tend to have low self-esteem, struggle to establish intimate relationships and may be at greater risk of engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour. The aim of this study was to explore the self-regulation strategies that white young adult male students employ to deal with the emotions and cognitions related to the experience of having emotionally absent fathers. Interactive Qualitative Analysis was applied to facilitate a discussion group process through which a hypothetical model for a purposive sample of nine participants' self-regulation strategies was systematically constructed.

Ten themes were identified, and judging from the model participants' attempts at self-regulation seem to be unproductive in the long run, hence the presence of three feedback loops from which they are unable to produce constructive behavioural outcomes. Disappointment over emotionally absent fathers has introduced a number of inhibiting factors that hinder the participants' growth towards self-actualisation. Results support the literature on the complex nature of self-regulation within conflicting relationships.

Although the study was explorative and findings cannot be generalised, it does provide valuable cues for counsellors, psychologists and further research.

## **Keywords**

Self-regulation, emotionally absent fathers, young adulthood, male

## **OPSOMMING**

Jong mans wat grootgeword het met emosioneel afwesige vaders blyk dit veral moeilik te vind om balans tussen persoonlike en verhoudingsbehoefte te verkry (waarskynlik omdat hulle oor 'n laer selfbeeld beskik), sukkel om intieme verhoudings te vestig en omdat hulle 'n groter risiko is om antisosiaal of gewelddadig op te tree. Die doel van hierdie studie was om die selfreguleringsstrategieë wat wit jongvolwasse mansstudente gebruik om by die emosies en denke in verhouding tot hul emosioneel afwesige vaders aan te pas, te verken. Interaktiewe Kwalitatiewe Analise is toegepas om 'n besprekingsgroep-proses te fasiliteer waarna 'n hipotetiese model van 'n doelgerigte steekproef van nege deelnemers se selfreguleringsstrategieë sistematies gekonstrueer is.

Tien temas is geïdentifiseer, en uit die model blyk dit dat deelnemers se pogings tot selfregulering onproduktief oor die langer termyn is. Dit word veral aangedui deur drie terugvoerlusse waaruit hulle dit moeilik vind om konstruktiewe gedraguitsomste te skep. Teleurstelling oor hul emosioneel afwesige vaders het 'n aantal inhiberende faktore tot gevolg wat deelnemers se groei na selfaktualisering beperk. Die resultate ondersteun die literatuur met betrekking tot die komplekse aard van selfregulering binne konflikterende verhoudinge. Alhoewel die studie verkennend is en die bevindinge nie veralgemeen kan word nie, verskaf die studie waardevolle inligting aan beraders, sielkundiges en verdere navorsing.

### **Sleutelwoorde**

Selfregulering, emosioneel afwesige vaders, jongvolwassenheid, manlik

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I dedicate this study to (1) my two best friends, Dr Gérard Möller and Philip van Vuuren, who always have my back, and (2) all men who grew up with emotionally absent fathers.

## **FOREWORD**

### **Article format**

The thesis meets the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University and was prepared in article format according to university regulations.

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I, the promoter of this study, hereby declare that the article entitled “Self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers”, written by DWJ Ackermann, does reflect the research regarding the subject matter. I hereby grant permission that he may submit the article for examination purposes and I confirm that the dissertation submitted is in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. The article may also be sent to the journal South African Journal of Psychology for publication purposes.

---

Prof Karel Botha

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## LITERATURE ORIENTATION

### Introduction

An extensive search of both popular and scientific literature reveals that masculinity and fathering remain grossly neglected research topics in a South African context. Local scholars Shefer *et al.* (2007) confirm that masculinity has not been scrutinised with the same vigour and intensity as femininity in this country. Whenever men and boys were studied, according to Shefer *et al.* (2007), they were mostly explored as perpetrators and aggressors. Indeed few studies have allowed for a more in-depth understanding of men and the ways they conduct and negotiate their relationships. Despite the existence of critical men's studies, most of which have been conducted abroad, Shefer *et al.* (2007, p. 3) point out that a critical lack of data still remains, especially as it pertains to the 'stories and narratives of boys and men' and their particular 'vulnerabilities'. These susceptibilities, the authors claim, have been ignored by academia for too long.

The father-son relationship is one such an area of interest. Although numerous studies have been piloted on various aspects of the father-son relationship, especially in an American context, it would appear that hardly any study has focused specifically on the development of self-regulation strategies of young adult males in a South African context.

## **Fathering then**

One hundred years ago, when Sigmund Freud started to hypothesise about the father's role in family structures and parenting practices, patriarchy was still firmly embedded in society and the construct had been left largely uncontested by scholars of human sciences. At the start of the previous century, the father was master, provider and law-maker of the household and demanded nothing less than absolute obedience and steadfast submission to his authority. Few describe the father figure of the early 1900's better than Mander (2001, p. 142):

The bearded faces in family photographs of the earlier part of the [previous] century inspired respect and fear, bestowing rights and duties on their wearers which were considered unshakeable. The image of God the Father was their prototype, and his supreme authority was universally acknowledged.

## **Fathering now**

Today scientific literature argues that 'the culture of the detached authoritarian father' of yesteryear, the staunch patriarch who experienced so much difficulty in his emotional connectedness with his son, is giving way to that of a much more involved and nurturing father' (Morman & Floyd, as cited in Miller, 2013, p. 199). And this shift has impacted on mothers as well. Indeed, the traditional instrumental roles of the father (as provider for and protector of his children) and the traditional expressive roles of the mother (as emotional and psychological supporter of her children) have become increasingly blurred as new societal norms, economic pressures on the family, and women's

expanded involvement in the so-called instrumental tasks have come to the fore (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2008).

Owena *et al.* (2013) concur that social and demographic shifts in western societies have indeed resulted in a dramatic increase of women entering the labour force and subsequent greater paternal involvement in childrearing, as well as greater involvement of non-residential fathers. While traditional differentiation of male-female roles has become less pronounced, and total androgyny (a condition of no gender-role differentiation) has not been achieved, and probably never will, pressures to move in that direction do exist. Eshleman (2000, p. 245-246) agrees:

While the labels may vary – androgyny, unisex, gender justice, sexual equality – the message is similar: men and women increasingly are pursuing their similarities, experiencing the thrill of escaping from traditional gender-role stereotypes and choosing to behave as equal partners. Both sexes are behaving in ways that are instrumental as well as expressive, assertive as well as yielding, and masculine as well as feminine.

### **Are fathers more than just a procreative necessity?**

If gender and parental roles are indeed becoming more and more indistinct, several questions beckon: Developmentally speaking, just how essential are fathers to their off-spring? Do children need fathers at all? What does research have to say about the absence or presence of fatherly love? And does conclusive evidence exist to support the notion of an independent father-to-child affiliative bond?

*“Fathers are not essential”*

While popular (unscientific) discourse is quick to respond affirmatively when asked whether fathers are in fact necessary in the lives of their offspring, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999, p. 397-399) say ‘probably not’. For the last two decades it has been their contention that

neither a mother nor a father is essential . . . children need at least one responsible, caretaking adult who has a positive emotional connection to them and with whom they have a consistent relationship . . . the stability of the emotional connection and the predictability of the caretaking relationship are the significant variables that predict positive child adjustment.

Flood (as cited in Silverstein & Auerbach, 2003) agrees by arguing that ‘some boys and young men suffer not [so much] from an absence of male role models, but [rather] from an excess of destructive male role models’. Studies by Howard (as cited in Silverstein & Auerbach, 2003) reveal that boys that grow up without fathers are not necessarily at a disadvantage. While single mothers do experience greater challenges in parenting teenage boys in a male dominated world, other aspects of single mothering contribute to their sons assuming less stereotyped gender roles, which in turn assist them to increase their capacity to nurture and get in touch with and express their feelings (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994, as cited in Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999).

Popular developmental discourse also holds that boys need a heterosexual male parent to establish a male gender identity and a heterosexual sexual orientation. However, empirical research among both heterosexual and homosexual families refutes this myth. A host of researchers (Benson *et al.*,

2005; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Bos *et al.*, 2012; Dufure *et al.*, 2010; Jones, 2008; Lamb, 2012; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005) have found evidence that the parents' sexual orientation is of little or no predictive importance for their children's gender or sexual identity. It confirms what Patterson (as cited in Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) hypothesised 15 years ago – that boys raised by lesbian parents are just as likely to present with a heterosexual orientation and gender identity as boys raised by heterosexual parents. Similarly, boys raised in heterosexual households may assume homosexual identities.

Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically so, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999, pp. 398-405), upon concluding that no empirical evidence exists to prove that fathers 'make a unique and essential contribution to child development', have always conceded that

it is preferable for responsible fathers to be actively involved with their children . . . many men do not have a feeling of emotional connection or sense of responsibility toward their children . . . and social policy should be directed towards achieving the goal of reconnecting fathers with children.

*"Fathers are essential"*

When considering the indispensability of a father's love for his children, Rohner and Veneziano (2001, p. 382) found that fatherly love indeed yields significant influence on children's and young adults' social, emotional and cognitive development and functioning. Moreover, their research suggests that

the influence of father love on offspring development is as great as and occasionally greater than the influence of mother love . . . Over all, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in off-springs' psychological well-being and health, as well as in an array of psychological and behavioural problems.

Mackey (2001, p. 51) reports on the undeniable existence of an independent father-to-child affiliative bond. A survey of 55,000 adult-child dyads from 23 cultures and subcultures revealed that 'fathers possess a unique, predictable, and nontrivial affiliative bond with their children that are separate from any man-woman bond or any woman-child bond'.

Furthermore, Benokraitis (1999, p. 301) argues that good fathering also demands extensive participation in the daily tasks of childrearing and nurturing:

Although these fathers don't necessarily have equally shared or primary responsibility for their children's care, they [do] forge satisfying relationships with their children. Even in their more traditional roles as economic providers and disciplinarians, fathers have a stronger influence on adolescent self-esteem than mothers.

Amato (1994) adds that closeness of children to their fathers has been found to make a significant contribution to offspring happiness, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, intellectual development, as well as educational and occupational mobility.

#### *The effect of physically absent fathers*

Remove the father from the household altogether, and research also reveals startling findings. In the United States, children (sons and daughters alike)

with an absentee father (compared to children living with both biological parents) are twice as likely to drop out of high school, more likely to spend time in juvenile prison, 20 to 42 percent more likely to suffer health problems, and more likely to have lower earnings in young adulthood. They are also more likely to be poor, to have marital problems later on in life, and to give premarital birth, thereby repeating the cycle of single parenthood (Goulter & Minninger, as cited in Benokraitis, 1999).

The negative effects of absent fathers on sons in particular are clear. Dishion, Owen and Bullock (2004) say that these young adult males tend to have low self-esteem, struggle to establish intimate relationships and may be at greater risk of engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour. 'For boys and men alike,' according to Blundell (as cited in Miller, 2013, p. 196), 'the theme of understanding one's masculine identity is often most prominent when trying to understand the consequences of a father's literal or symbolic absence.'

#### *The effect of emotionally absent fathers on their sons*

Miller (2013) reports that many adult men describe themselves as wounded when they reflect on the effects of their (more traditional) relationship with their fathers – relationships that were marked, more often than not, by an emotional disconnectedness. While some men replicate the fathering practices of their own fathers, which may have the potential to trigger psychopathological responses in their sons, according to Flouri (2010), other men choose to adopt the role of a more involved father that is much more accepting of emotional expression and involvement in his son's life. Moreover, this new role has not only allowed men to connect better with their sons, it has

also helped the fathers to come to terms with problematic aspects in their own relationship with their fathers. According to Miller (2013) fathering a son has afforded many men the opportunity to address and improve core issues within themselves. To deal with the impact of an emotionally absent father, young men resort to all kinds of responses on an emotional and cognitive level. This study explores the self-regulation strategies that young adult males who grew up with emotionally absent fathers engage in. Skills and abilities such as self-control, autonomy, expression, resisting peer pressure, communication styles, decision-making, establishing intimate relationships, engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour are among many that are associated with self-regulation or, put differently, one's ability to regulate one's behaviour (in terms of emotional affect, cognition and motor activity).

### **Self-regulation**

Integrating the definitions of 25 different researchers, self-regulation can be summarised as a response system where the individual purposefully steers his behaviour and directs his actions flexibly in the face of contextual challenges and changing circumstances to reach his goals while self-reflectively guarding over his emotions and cognitions (Aldoa, 2013; Baumeister & Vohs, 2003; Boekaerts, Maes, & Karoly, 2005; Carver, 2004; De Ridder & De Wit, 2006:3, as cited in Cameron & Leventhal, 2003; Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Diaz & Fruhauf, 1991; Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Gross, 2013; Maes & Karoly, 2005; Nolen-Hoeksema & Corte, 2004; Segerstrom, Smith, & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2011; Wehmeyer, Little, & Sergeant, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000).

### *Components of self-regulation*

*Emotion regulation.* Effective emotion regulation is of utmost importance in order to self-regulate (Gross, 2013). Emotion regulation is concerned with the cultivation of helpful emotions and the management of harmful emotions, but it also demands the activation of a goal to either up-regulate (intrinsic emotion regulation that fosters helpful emotions) or down-regulate (extrinsic emotion regulation that curbs harmful emotion) (Aldoa, 2013). The goal of emotion regulation is not to wage war on maladaptive emotions and to substitute them with adaptive emotions. Instead, emotion regulation strives to influence the dynamics of each emotion to bring about adaptive responses to an environmental context. However, in the absence of contextual information, very little can be deduced about a person's ability to regulate emotions effectively (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

Diamond and Aspinwall (2003, p. 125) confirm that the main goal of emotion regulation is not homeostasis as such, but rather functional flexibility in the experience of emotion, the ability to pursue goals consciously and unconsciously, and the capacity to harness emotions and cognitions 'in service of context-specific and developmentally specific goals'.

According to Gross (as cited in Aldoa, 2013, p. 155) emotions are essentially input-output processes that

begin with the cultivation of external or internal emotion cues. Certain emotions trigger a coordinated set of behavioural, experiential, and physiological emotional response tendencies that together facilitate adaptive responding to perceived challenges and opportunities. However, these

response tendencies might be modulated, and it is this modulation that gives final shape to manifest emotional responses.

In terms of gender differences, it is interesting to note that Nolen-Hoeksema and Corte (2004, p. 411) found that (1) men are less likely than women to believe that negative emotions are difficult to control and (2) difficulty in controlling negative emotions was related to a greater tendency to ruminate. These authors define rumination as 'a passive, self-focused response to negative mood'.

*The integrated nature of emotion and cognitive regulation.* In the final analysis, neither emotion nor cognition can be observed and investigated in isolation. Related self-regulatory processes and strategies have to be considered. Any attempt to isolate any one of the three components of behaviour (cognition, emotional affect and motor activity) from the overarching and integrative process of self-regulation would result in a distorted image of any behavioural act (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003). According to Damasio (1994, as cited in Van Steenbergen, Band, & Hommel, 2009, p. 1473), there is 'increasing evidence that emotion and cognition cooperate in shaping adaptive behaviour and that a dysfunction of emotional processing impairs rational reasoning and action control'.

#### *The effect of fathering on emerging self-regulation*

Not only do fathers play a significant role in the cognitive and social-emotional development of their children (Cabrera *et al.*, 2000; Flouri, 2005; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Parke, 2002; Pleck, 1997), the quality of their fathering efforts also makes unique contributions to their children's development after the

effects of mothering are taken into consideration (Isley, O'Neil, & Parke, 1996; Mosley & Thompson, 1995; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004, 2008; Rohner, 1998). Positive involvement by fathers (who provide affection, attentiveness and stimulation) supports the healthy development of young children's cognitive abilities in infancy (Nugent *et al.*, 1988), intelligence, academic achievement and social maturity of pre-schoolers (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; NICHD, 2004, 2008).

There are, however, a few exceptions. Data from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation study of low-income fathers indicate that children living with a resident biological father or with a stable relationship with a non-resident father scored higher on measures of self-regulation and cognitive function (Vogel, Bradley, Raikes, Boller, & Shears, 2006) and that having a supportive father can help protect a child against the harmful effects of having a non-supportive mother for cognitive outcomes (Ryan, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006).

The traditional father's role as a developer of self-control and autonomy in his children is well-documented. While mothers tend to apply similar standards to both sons and daughters, fathers are more closely involved with their sons than with their daughters (Morgan, Lye, & Condran, as cited in Strong *et al.*, 2008). However, this involvement revolves more around 'sharing activities rather than sharing feelings or confidences' and may well be a disadvantage to a son, because it may limit and impair the development of his expressive abilities (Cancian, as cited in Strong *et al.*, 2008, p. 393). Nolen-Hoeksema and Corte (2004, p. 414) found that men (and fathers, by implication) were

less likely than women to 'report feeling responsible for the emotional tone of their relationships; and for maintaining positive relationships with others at all costs'.

### *The role of parenting in the development of self-regulation*

Not only does self-regulation develop as a function of biological and genetic predisposition, the influences of the person's psychosocial context also plays a huge role. Infant temperament and quality of parental care in particular interact in profoundly meaningful ways in the development of an individual's self-regulatory mechanisms (Mischel & Ayduk, 2004).

Building on the hedonic principle that people pursue pleasure and avoid pain, self-regulation can also be construed as a construct that is guided by either a promotion focus or a prevention focus: Keller (2008) refers to self-regulation with a promotion focus as the motivation to attain growth and to bring one's actual self into alignment with one's ideal self. In contrast, self-regulation with a prevention focus entails the motivation to attain security and to bring one's actual self into alignment with a self that one should or ought to be.

In terms of caretaker-child interaction and the development of regulatory orientations in children, Keller (2008) indicates that caretakers who appraise and encourage a child are likely to orient the child towards the presence of positive outcomes, therefore resulting in a predominantly promotion-focused self-regulation. Dissimilarly, Keller states, caretakers who appraise a child in terms of their convictions about the child's duties and obligations are more likely to orient the child towards the presence of negative outcomes, therefore resulting in predominantly prevention-focused self-regulation patterns.

Consequently, children whose socialisation primarily involved encouragement (Higgins & Silberman, as cited in Keller, 2008), as reflected in hugging and kissing the child when he or she behaves in a desired manner and providing opportunities for the child to engage in rewarding activities, are predominantly promotion-focused. In contrast, children whose socialisation primarily involved criticism (as reflected in being criticised for making a mistake or being yelled at for not listening), are predominantly prevention-focused. Keller (2008) therefore concludes that parenting styles are directly linked to their children's promotion- or prevention-focused self-regulatory orientation.

### **Relevance to this study**

Studies of fathers in the United States indicate that fathers are important figures in the lives of children and young adults. Chapman (2013), in conclusion of a study in which he researched the manner in which boys develop and become men (specifically with regard to their relationship with their fathers and other male authority figures), argues that all men bear the imprint of their fathers, whether the latter had been exemplary or negligent. Fathers, even as passive bystanders, says Chapman (2013, p. 262), have an impact 'whether via acts of commission or omission'.

It is the effect of these *acts of omission* perpetrated by emotionally absent fathers that this study wants to explore from a self-regulatory point of view. What self-regulation strategies do white young adult male students employ to cope or deal with their perceived loss? Are they lagging behind from a developmental point of view? Or have they found ways to compensate for the loss of emotional connectedness with their fathers? In essence, this study

wants to get a glimpse of their resilience in the face of paternal disconnectedness.

## **TITLE OF THESIS, AUTHORS AND CONTACT DETAILS**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who perceive their fathers as emotionally absent from their lives. Nine students between the ages 18 to 30 participated in a discussion group to generate data on their experience and self-regulation strategies in relation to their emotionally absent fathers. Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) was applied to identify ten themes and to develop a hypothetical model that illustrates participants' perceived cause-effect relations between the themes. From a total of 90 possible cause-effect relations between these themes, 42 relations (explaining 80,82% of the variance) were used to develop the model. The results of the study show that the participants are presently unable to adequately resolve their issues with their emotionally absent fathers, and as such all their self-regulation strategies are unproductive – hence the presence of three feedback loops in the hypothetical model. Finally, limitations and recommendations regarding further research opportunities are discussed.

## **Keywords**

Self-regulation, emotionally absent fathers, young adulthood, male

# **Self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers**

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## **Introduction**

Since the advent of the Industrial Age, constructs such as the father figure and the father-son relationship have been under increasing scrutiny from both the popular and scientific press.

### *Popular press*

Social commentator Bly (1990) raised his concerns in his ground-breaking book *Iron John* – a manuscript regarded by Miller (2013, p. 195) as a ‘critical guide to the men’s movement that elaborates on how American culture has encouraged a sense of detachment between fathers and sons’. While many men did engage in effective fathering at the time, Bly (1990) conceded, a rising number of fathers were becoming emotionally detached from their children, leaving the role of active parenting almost exclusively to their wives. Indeed, a large number of young men were no longer given a rite of passage into manhood by men. Instead they had to draw their emotional strength from strong and over-compensating mothers and other women in positions of authority (Bly, 1990; Dalbey, 1988).

Faludi (1999), an outspoken feminist, journalist and author, also expressed her concerns as she hypothesised that the emancipation of women at the turn of the millennium had already contributed to a sizeable segment of young men actively rejecting their childhood macho image of manhood, which, to them, seemed to be the cornerstone of racism, sexism, and militarism. Satisfied with shallow definitions of their masculinity, Catholic priest and author Dobson (as cited in Dalbey, 1988), believed that many fathers lost the trust and respect of their sons because they had relinquished their masculinity as a nurturing developmental force. As a result, the repercussions of father-son neglect remain a much publicised topic in popular literature.

#### *Scientific literature*

Scientific literature responds to the observations and concerns of the popular press by arguing that the culture of 'the detached authoritarian father', who historically experienced great difficulty with his emotional connectedness to his son, 'is [gradually] giving way to the role of an involved, nurturing father' (Morman & Floyd, as cited in Miller, 2013, p. 199). Research studies conducted in recent years suggest that the traditional instrumental roles of the father (as provider for and protector of his children) and the traditional expressive roles of the mother (as emotional and psychological supporter of her children) are indeed becoming increasingly blurred as new societal norms, economic pressures on the family, and women's expanded involvement in the so-called instrumental tasks come to the fore (Strong, DeVault & Cohen, 2008).

Traditional differentiation of male-female roles seem to have blurred, and while total androgyny (a condition of no gender-role differentiation) has not been achieved, and probably never will, pressures to move in that direction do exist. The traditional father plays an important role as a developer of self-control and autonomy in his children. While mothers tend to be equally close in their emotional connectedness with their sons and daughters, fathers are more closely involved with their sons (Eshleman, 2000; Morgan, Lye, & Condran, as cited in Strong *et al.*, 2008). It is, however, important to note that this father-son involvement revolves more around the sharing of activities and less so around the sharing of feelings and emotions – which may be of a disadvantage to the son, because it may limit and impair the development of his expressive abilities (Cancian, as cited in Strong *et al.*, 2008). Nolen-Hoeksema and Corte (2004, p. 414) found that men (and fathers, by implication) were less likely than women to feel responsible for the emotional nature of their relationships or, to maintain at all costs, positive relations with others.

Studies of fathers in the United States indicate that they are important figures in the lives of children and young adults. Chapman (2013), in conclusion of a study in which he researched the manner in which boys develop and become men (specifically with regard to their relationship with their fathers and other male authority figures), argues that all men bear the imprint of their fathers, whether the latter had been exemplary or negligent. Fathers, even as passive bystanders, says Chapman (2013, p. 262), have an undeniable impact – ‘whether via acts of commission or omission’. Even in their more traditional roles as economic providers and disciplinarians, fathers have a stronger

influence on adolescent self-esteem than mothers (Benokraitis, 1999).

Closeness of children to fathers has also been found to make a significant contribution to offspring happiness, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, intellectual development, and educational and occupational mobility (Amato, 1994).

The negative effects of absent fathers on sons, even on an emotional level only, are equally clear. These young adult males tend to have low self-esteem, struggle to establish intimate relationships and may be at greater risk of engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour (Dishion, Owen, & Bullock, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that, according to Blundell (Miller, 2013), understanding one's masculine identity becomes specifically significant in the context of having an absent father.

This study focuses on how cognitions and emotions related to the experience of having an emotionally absent father, both positive and negative, are self-regulated by white young adult men. There is growing evidence in the literature that self-regulation plays a fundamental role in one's adaptation to interpersonal conflict and loss (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Leary, 2004). Kumashiro, Rusbult and Finkel (2008, p. 94) point out that people tend to seek equilibrium through their dedication to personal and relational concerns, but sometimes, as may well be the case of those who have an emotionally absent father, these two important concerns or needs cannot be gratified simultaneously. The individual then has to adjust (regulate) his behaviour to obtain a satisfactory level of need satisfaction.

Self-regulation is a response system where the individual purposefully steers behaviour and directs actions flexibly in the face of contextual challenges and changing circumstances in order to reach goals while self-reflectively guarding over emotions and cognitions (Aldoa, 2013; Baumeister & Vohs, 2003; Boekaerts, Maes, & Karoly, 2005; Carver, 2004; Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Diaz & Fruhauf, 1991; Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Gross, 2013; Maes & Karoly, 2005; Nolen-Hoeksema & Corte, 2004; Segerstrom, Smith, & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2011; Wehmeyer, Little, & Sergeant, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). Typical issues related to young men's ability to regulate their own behaviour include, among other things, poor self-control, an inability to resist peer pressure, difficulty to establish intimate relationships, and engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour (Dishion *et al.*, 2004).

Emotion and cognition cannot be observed and investigated without considering related self-regulatory processes and strategies. Any attempt to isolate any one of the three components of behaviour (cognition, emotional affect and motor activity) from the over-arching and integrative process of self-regulation would result in a distorted image of any behavioural act (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003). According to Damasio (1994, as cited in Van Steenbergen, Band, & Hommel, 2009, p. 1473), there is mounting evidence that 'emotion and cognition cooperate in shaping adaptive behaviour and that a dysfunction of emotional processing impairs rational reasoning and action control'.

## **Goal**

Although numerous studies have been conducted on various aspects of the father-son relationship, especially in an American context, studies that allow for a more complex understanding of men and the ways they negotiate their emotions and cognitions in a South African context are in short supply. More specifically, there seems to be a gap in literature regarding the self-regulatory strategies as potential strength or weakness in young adult males who grew up with emotionally absent fathers.

The aim of this study was therefore to: (1) identify the typical emotions and cognitions of white young adult males who grew up with emotionally absent fathers; (2) identify the self-regulation strategies they employ to deal with these emotions and cognitions; (3) explore the participants' perceived cause-and-effect relationships between these emotions, cognitions and their self-regulation strategies; and (4) develop a hypothetical model for self-regulation based on this relationship.

## **Methodology**

### *Design*

An exploratory, qualitative design was followed by applying Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). This is a systemic approach to research with the primary purpose of representing the meaning of a phenomenon in terms of themes and the cause-and-effect relationships among these themes. Although IQA is mainly qualitative in nature, quantitative frequency analyses are also employed to interpret the data.

Therefore both deduction and induction were used to systematically facilitate a discussion group process through which a hypothetical model of young adult males' self-regulation strategies in the context of their emotionally absent fathers could be constructed.

### *Participants*

A purposive, convenient sample of nine participants took part in the study. They were recruited on the campus of a tertiary South African institute by sending out electronic and printed invitations to individual information sessions to the entire student body. The nine participants consisted of white young adult male students aged between 18 and 30 (people of colour and non-students were excluded from the study to avoid diluting the homogeneity of the sample). An important prerequisite for participation in the study was that prospective participants had to perceive their fathers as emotionally absent during a critical time in their development, and they needed to have no prior relationship with the researcher.

### *Data generation and data analysis procedures*

*Individual exercise.* After the research topic was introduced, the individual participants were requested to silently reflect and make private notes in response to the following questions: 1) What are the typical *emotions* that you experience in your relationship with your emotionally absent father? (2) What are the typical *thoughts* you have in your relationship with your emotionally absent father? (3) What do you typically *do* with these emotions and thoughts? In other words, what *response behaviour* do you resort to?

*Inductive coding.* The 9 participants were then randomly divided into 4 small groups (3 groups of 2 and 1 group of 3) that proceeded to negotiate shared themes. Each individual theme, as well as the small group's brief explanation or working definition for each theme, was written on a separate card. A representative of each small group then introduced their themes to the rest of the participants by attaching the cards to a whiteboard. In this way, a total number of 21 themes were initially identified.

*Axial coding.* During the subsequent group discussion, facilitated by the researcher, participants sorted the 21 cards into preliminary but logical groupings or clusters of meaning based on a shared understanding of the themes (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). The participants then discussed each grouping of cards extensively by brainstorming their interpretation of its collective meaning and providing reasons why certain cards belonged together. During this refining stage cards were moved around from one set of meanings to another until all participants were satisfied that all the cards were in its right location. This process resulted in condensing the initial 21 separate themes to 10 core themes.

*Theoretical coding.* To identify the cause-and-effect relationships between all 10 themes, the researcher compiled a questionnaire that the participants completed individually. If, for example, themes A, B and C were identified, the questionnaire would pose the following question:

*In your opinion, which of the following is the most characteristic of your experience of your emotionally absent father? Choose only one option in each scenario.*

1. (a) *A causes B*  
(b) *B causes A*  
(c) *A and B do not influence each other*
2. (a) *A causes C*  
(b) *C causes A*  
(c) *A and C do not influence each other*
3. (a) *B causes C*  
(b) *C causes B*  
(c) *B and C do not influence each other*

*Constructing a frequency table.* The researcher then scored the questionnaires by counting the number of votes for each possible relationship to determine a frequency analysis, consisting of a cumulative frequency (CF); cumulative percentage of relations (CPR); cumulative percentage of frequencies (CPF); and finally power, which is 'an index of the degree of optimization of the system and is simply the difference between CPF and CPR' (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 160). Optimisation, according to the Pareto Principle, is also referred to as the 80/20 rule, which states that 80% of the consequences (or results) are produced by 20% of the causes (or known variables) (Craft & Leake, 2002).

*Constructing an Interrelational Diagram (IRD).* The values from the frequency table were then entered into a relational diagram (which indicates the strength and direction of relations), after which a delta value, which reflects the difference between incoming and outgoing causes (indicated by arrows), was calculated (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). Based on the delta value, each theme

was then identified as primary drivers, secondary drivers, pivots, secondary outcomes or primary outcomes in the hypothetical model.

Northcutt and McCoy (2004) define primary drivers as the 'fundamental causes or significant sources of influence in a system' (p. 32) 'that affect many other affinities' or themes, 'but is not affected by others' (p. 173). A primary driver is a theme with a high positive delta that arises from many out-arrows, but no in-arrow. Secondary drivers, although influenced by the primary drivers, are relative causes or agents of influence on themes in a system and have more in-arrows than out-arrows. Pivots are themes with a delta count of zero (they have an equal number of incoming and outgoing arrows), indicating a position in the middle of the system where, presumably, constructive self-regulation may occur and from where a primary outcome can flow. Secondary outcomes have more in-arrows than out-arrows, and could therefore be seen as outcomes, though secondary because they still have a relative effect on the primary outcomes. Finally, primary outcomes are themes that cause no other themes within the system. They have high negative deltas that arise from only in-arrows and no out-arrows.

*Constructing a Systems Influence Diagram (SID).* The researcher then created a mind map or hypothetical model of the group's analysis to visually represent their group reality. The hypothetical model can be described as a system of response tendencies that the participants revert to in their efforts to deal with the impact of their emotionally absent fathers. The SID is construed according to a systematic process described by Northcutt and McCoy (2004, p. 173-184) that provides precise steps and rules for developing a hypothetical model, thus enabling other researchers to replicate it as well. The

steps involve the following: (1) themes are plotted circularly from left to right according to their deltas (from high to low); (2) arrows representing all the links between themes are added to form the so-called Cluttered SID; before (3) the principle of redundancy is used to remove obsolete arrows. Redundant links, according to Northcutt and McCoy (2004, p. 178), are those links between two themes 'in which, even if removed, a path from the driver to the outcome can be achieved through an intermediary affinity'. Redundant links are therefore aptly referred to as the 'paths of least resistance'. The so-called Clean SID is the final version of the SID and shows 'only the minimum number of links required to completely represent the underlying logic of the IRD' (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 180).

### *Trustworthiness*

The IQA process enhances trustworthiness because the meticulous use of discussion groups and the systematic way of analysing the data decentres the role of the researcher primarily to that of facilitator. To further ensure trustworthiness, the researcher adhered to the following criteria:

*Rigour.* The researcher made a concerted effort to thoroughly explore the topic and themes, to spend an appropriate amount of time with participants to extract useable data, and to take meticulous care of the data and its reporting to ensure face validity. The researcher ensured that the meaning of each theme was thoroughly explored by the participants so that no disagreement remained regarding the group's perception of each theme.

*Sincerity.* The researcher reflected on his own subjective values, biases and inclinations regarding the research topic, and strived to conduct the research free from any personal opinion or persuasion.

*Credibility.* To ensure internal validity, participants were given ample time to reflect on the research topic. To ensure external validity, the IQA protocol for constructing the mental maps was independently applied by two different researchers (according to the guidelines of Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 170-184). After following the IQA protocol meticulously, two researchers produced two identical mental maps. Lastly, the IQA is inherently a form of triangulation, because it systematically and appropriately integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods.

*Transferability.* In this study transferability was not deemed essential, because the aim of the study was primarily to explore and develop a hypothetical model that could be further investigated by other researchers. Therefore a clear and thorough description of the methodological process is provided to enable other researchers to repeat the study within other groups.

*Dependability.* In terms of dependability or reliability, IQA ensures that two different analysts working with the same discussion group and data, would extract parallel results (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004).

*Confirmability* (referring to objectivity), on the other hand, relates to the participants independently selecting themes (affinities) and analysing the data – free from any biased influence on the part of the researcher, who knows the ethical boundaries of his strictly facilitative role as a mere moderator of a group discussion.

## **Ethical considerations**

This study forms part of a research project entitled 'The nature and dynamics of self-regulation as psychological strength in diverse South African health and clinical contexts', which has ethical approval from the Human Research Ethical Committee in the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU 00103-11-S1).

The researcher strictly adhered to the following ethical principles:

*Anonymity.* No background or personal information was divulged that could identify any participant. To decrease the risk of inflicting harm, controversial and highly personal issues were not discussed in the discussion group.

Literature confirms that discussion groups are better suited for the identification and discussion of major themes and less so for the micro-analysis of subtle and sensitive differences. The researcher also ensured that the participants in the discussion group (although sharing similar experiential backgrounds) were strangers to one another (no prior established relationships), thus contributing to a high level of anonymity (Kamberelis & Dimitriades, 2011; Kaplowitz, as cited in Patton, 2002; Krueger, as cited in Patton, 2002; Patton, 2002).

*Dual relationships.* The researcher did not include any of his own clients, friends, acquaintances or family members in the research, thereby acknowledging that the research relationship is a 'collaboration and partnership rather than a friendship and enduring relationship' (Waldrop, 2004, pp. 249-250) where 'too much self-disclosure can cause

misunderstandings and blurred relationships once the research relationship is terminated’.

*Confidentiality.* To ensure the confidentiality of information supplied by participants, the researcher took all necessary steps to ensure that data and its sources remain confidential. The only document linking the participant to the research is the signed consent form.

*Informed consent.* The researcher secured informed consent from each participant and treated this undertaking as the individual’s explicit and expressed willingness to participate in the research project – a willingness that was based on a clear understanding of the nature of the research (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2009; Silverman, 2013). Also communicated clearly on the informed consent were the participants’ right to withdraw from the research project at any time. Participants were also informed that the data retrieved from the research project would be used anonymously for a Master’s degree dissertation and be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

*Minimal risk.* Although the commitment to *do no harm* is paramount in research, potential risks in psychological studies, according to Shaughnessy *et al.* (2009), do unfortunately (and perhaps unavoidably so) include risk of social discomfort or even emotional stress. A call for research without any risk whatsoever, Shaughnessy *et al.* (2009, p. 63) argue, ‘would bring all research to a halt’. Therefore, these authors propose *minimal risk*, which means that ‘the harm or discomfort participants may experience in the research is not greater than what they might experience in their daily lives or during routine

physical or psychological tests' (p. 64). In his facilitation of the discussions, the researcher endeavoured to protect those individuals who were prone to too much self-disclosure. A registered clinical psychologist was present at all time during the group discussion to monitor and preside over the psychological well-being of the participants, specifically to attend to any psychological need that might have arisen as a result of potentially distressing disclosure or content.

*Reciprocity.* No incentives were offered for participation in the research. Barbour (2007, as cited in Silverman, 2013, p. 178) is of the opinion that both options (to pay or not to pay) 'can raise ethical issues if the reward offered tempts people to participate against their initial judgment'.

*Feedback.* At the time of publication of the study, a time had been set for a feedback session where the outcomes of the study were to be discussed with the participants – giving the participants additional insight into their current self-regulation strategies and challenging them to consider more productive ways of dealing with their emotions, cognitions and actions.

## **Results**

*The themes generated by the participants as a group*

*Theme 1 – Self-doubt.* The participants, mindful of their emotionally absent fathers, report a lack of faith in their own opinions and mistrust their ability to hold their own in relationships. Co-inhabiting with self-doubt is described by one participant as 'an inherent discontentment and dissatisfaction with life'.

*Theme 2 – Self-denegation.* The participants are quick to break themselves down and depreciate their value. In their minds, their fathers were emotionally absent because they were ‘obviously not worthy’ of their fathers’ affection. They are therefore quick to pinpoint their own shortcomings in a derogatory way and tend to also exaggerate these unrealistic perceptions of themselves.

*Theme 3 – Overly caring and empathetic (attract broken people).* Constantly aware of the huge vacuum left by their emotionally absent fathers, the participants fill this gap by being ‘more emotionally attentive, nurturing and caring than the average man’, but they are concerned that this is more often than not to their own detriment. Some participants concede that by being caring and empathic, they tend to attract emotionally broken/needy people. Some participants explain this by likening this nurturing behaviour to ‘typical feminine behaviour’.

*Theme 4 – Striving to move towards emotional self-reliance.* The emotional absence of their fathers forced the participants from an early age to try and stand on their own feet, to make important decisions on their own and to go through life experiences by themselves. As a result, one participant referred to himself as ‘emotionally isolated’.

*Theme 5 – Fear and anxiety.* If a primary caregiver like a father could let them down, the participants feel that ‘other bad things can also happen’. Constantly anticipating that ‘things will inevitably go wrong’, the participants report that they engage in ‘unrelenting pro-active thought and strategic planning’. Fear that ‘simple decisions may lead to bad outcomes’ result in an ever-present sense of uncertainty in themselves and their abilities.

*Theme 6 – Avoidance (suppress anger and mask true emotions).* By ‘bottling up’ their true emotions and suppressing the ‘built-in anger’ that they harbour towards their emotionally absent fathers, the participants opt for so-called ‘acceptable emotions and behaviour’, so that they misrepresent their true emotions and thinking patterns.

*Theme 7 – Disappointment over lack of a relationship with father.* Since they perceive their emotionally absent fathers never to have reached out to establish a meaningful relationship, the participants experience ‘a never-ending sense of disappointment’. They ‘remain saddened’ by this emotional absence and as a result some of them have lost contact with their fathers’ side of the family. Some of the participants describe their emotional connection with their fathers as ‘a love-hate relationship’, while others feel this description gives fathers too much credit.

*Theme 8 – Living with a constant longing that remains undefined.* Not knowing what exactly they missed out on is frustrating to the participants. From early on they had to face life’s challenges without ‘fatherly guidance and advice’ and as a result they ‘feel unstable’.

*Theme 9 – Need for appreciation and verification.* The participants want to feel that they mean something to other people. One participant put it eloquently: ‘Because my dad did not acknowledge me, my need for validation, affirmation and verification is exaggerated.’

*Theme 10 – Manipulate relationships.* The participants unapologetically agree that they all manipulate relationships to get what they want from other people. Interestingly, they are adamant that this is a direct result of growing

up with their emotionally absent fathers. Some participants proudly proclaim themselves as ‘master manipulators’ who, they believe, ‘can even fool healthcare professionals like psychologists’.

*Apparent incongruence between individual themes and group themes.* In the participants’ individual and private notes, it is noteworthy that they claim to employ productive self-regulation strategies. However, those themes did not present as key themes in the group discussion that followed and are therefore not included in the hypothetical model. One possible explanation for this is that meaning is construed differently in a group. What seemed like themes and sub-themes individually became less pronounced in the group discussion. One may even hypothesise that their private notes regarding their self-regulation strategies hinted more at their *attempts* at self-regulation, because the group consensus as contained in the hypothetical model clearly suggests that these attempts are in fact unproductive.

#### *The frequency table*

Power in the frequency table (see Table 1) increases steadily until it reaches its peak at 34.15 (belonging to the 42<sup>nd</sup> theme pair 7←8). All the relationships that follow the power’s turning point of 34.15 (from 43 to 90) were excluded from the group IRD. From a total of 90 possible cause-effect relations between the 10 themes, 42 relations (46.67%) explain 80.82% of the variance. Since the study is explorative in nature, it was decided not to make any adjustments to achieve the Pareto ideal of an 80/20 relationship.

**Table 1.** The frequency table

Affinity pair	Frequency	Cumulative frequency (CF)	Cumulative percent (CP)	Cumulative percent frequency (CPF)	Power
3←9	8	8	1,11	3,27	2,15
4←7	8	16	2,22	6,53	4,31
5→6	7	23	3,33	9,39	6,05
8→9	7	30	4,44	12,24	7,80
2←7	7	37	5,56	15,10	9,55
1→5 <sup>a</sup>	6	43	6,67	17,55	10,88
7→8	6	49	7,78	20,00	12,22
7→9	6	55	8,89	22,45	13,56
9→10	6	61	10,00	24,90	14,90
1←8	6	67	11,11	27,35	16,24
3←7	6	73	12,22	29,80	17,57
4←8	6	79	13,33	32,24	18,91
5←8	6	85	14,44	34,69	20,25
6←8	6	91	15,56	37,14	21,59
1→6	5	96	16,67	39,18	22,52
3→6	5	101	17,78	41,22	23,45
5→10	5	106	18,89	43,27	24,38
1←7	5	111	20,00	45,31	25,31
2←6	5	116	21,11	47,35	26,24
2←8	5	121	22,22	49,39	27,17
3←8	5	126	23,33	51,43	28,10
1→9	4	130	24,44	53,06	28,62
2→5 <sup>b</sup>	4	134	25,56	54,69	29,14

2→9	4	138	26,67	56,33	29,66
6→10 <sup>b</sup>	4	142	27,78	57,96	30,18
2←5 <sup>b</sup>	4	146	28,89	59,59	30,70
3←4	4	150	30,00	61,22	31,22
5←7	4	154	31,11	62,86	31,75
6←7	4	158	32,22	64,49	32,27
6←10 <sup>b</sup>	4	162	33,33	66,12	32,79
1→2	3	165	34,44	67,35	32,90
1→10	3	168	35,56	68,57	33,02
3→5	3	171	36,67	69,80	33,13
3→10	3	174	37,78	71,02	33,24
6→9 <sup>b</sup>	3	177	38,89	72,24	33,36
7→10	3	180	40,00	73,47	33,47
1←3	3	183	41,11	74,69	33,58
1←5 <sup>c</sup>	3	186	42,22	75,92	33,70
4←5	3	189	43,33	77,14	33,81
4←6	3	192	44,44	78,37	33,92
6←9	3	195	45,56	79,59	34,04
7←8 <sup>c</sup>	3	198	46,67	80,82	34,15 <sup>d</sup>
2→6 <sup>e</sup>	2	200	47,78	81,63	33,85
2→10	2	202	48,89	82,45	33,56
3→4	2	204	50,00	83,27	33,27
4→6	2	206	51,11	84,08	32,97
4→10	2	208	52,22	84,90	32,68
5→9	2	210	53,33	85,71	32,38
6→8	2	212	54,44	86,53	32,09
8→10	2	214	55,56	87,35	31,79
1←2	2	216	56,67	88,16	31,50

1←9	2	218	57,78	88,98	31,20
2←3	2	220	58,89	89,80	30,91
2←9	2	222	60,00	90,61	30,61
4←9	2	224	61,11	91,43	30,32
5←9	2	226	62,22	92,24	30,02
7←9	2	228	63,33	93,06	29,73
8←10	2	230	64,44	93,88	29,43
1→3	1	231	65,56	94,29	28,73
1→4	1	232	66,67	94,69	28,03
1→8	1	233	67,78	95,10	27,32
2→4	1	234	68,89	95,51	26,62
4→8	1	235	70,00	95,92	25,92
4→9	1	236	71,11	96,33	25,22
5→7	1	237	72,22	96,73	24,51
5→8	1	238	73,33	97,14	23,81
6→7	1	239	74,44	97,55	23,11
1←4	1	240	75,56	97,96	22,40
1←6	1	241	76,67	98,37	21,70
3←6	1	242	77,78	98,78	21,00
4←10	1	243	78,89	99,18	20,29
5←6	1	244	80,00	99,59	19,59
9←10	1	245	81,11	100,00	18,89
1→7	0	245	82,22	100,00	17,78
2→3	0	245	83,33	100,00	16,67
2→7	0	245	84,44	100,00	15,56
2→8	0	245	85,56	100,00	14,44
3→7	0	245	86,67	100,00	13,33
3→8	0	245	87,78	100,00	12,22

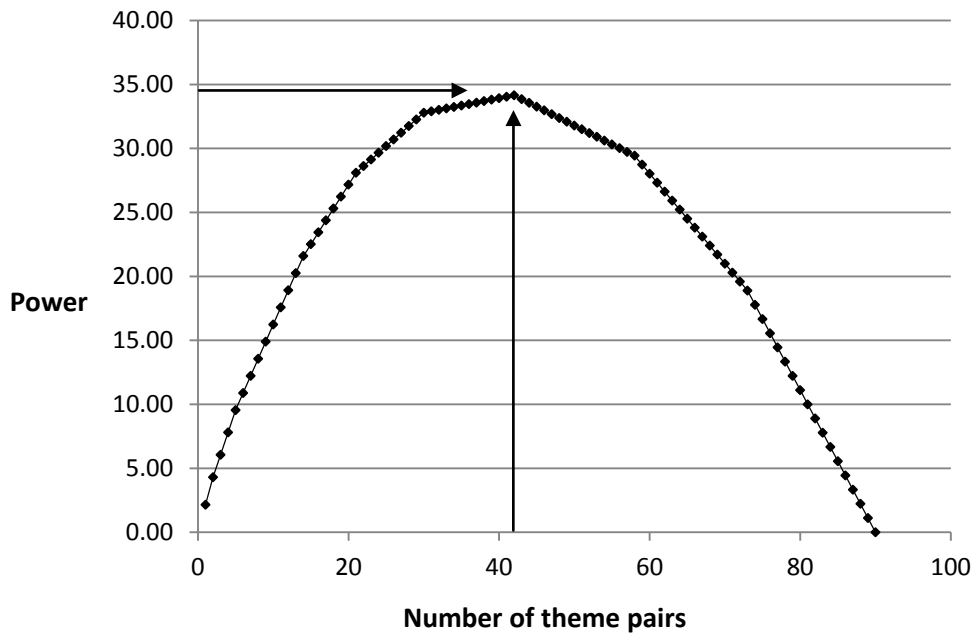
3→9	0	245	88,89	100,00	11,11
4→5	0	245	90,00	100,00	10,00
4→7	0	245	91,11	100,00	8,89
1←10	0	245	92,22	100,00	7,78
2←4	0	245	93,33	100,00	6,67
2←10	0	245	94,44	100,00	5,56
3←5	0	245	95,56	100,00	4,44
3←10	0	245	96,67	100,00	3,33
5←10	0	245	97,78	100,00	2,22
7←10	0	245	98,89	100,00	1,11
8←9	0	245	100,00	100,00	0,00

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Note: <sup>a</sup> Pairing 1→5 to be used in IRD (higher frequency); <sup>b</sup> Double pairing; <sup>c</sup> Pairing 1←5 not to be used in IRD (lower frequency); <sup>d</sup> Power turning point; <sup>e</sup> Exclude from here to end of table

### *The power graph*

The power trends as contained in the frequency table are visually represented in the power graph (see Figure 1). This shows that the maximum power of 34.15 was reached with the 42<sup>nd</sup> theme pair.



**Figure 1.** The power graph

### *The Interrelational Diagram (IRD)*

The IRD shows that only one primary driver ('Disappointment over lack of relationship with father') and two secondary drivers ('Living with a constant longing that remains undefined' and 'Self-doubt') emerged from the power analysis. No pivots emerged, while the remaining seven themes all emerged as secondary outcomes.

Note that in the case of double relations two arrows pointing left and up are indicated. Double relations exist when both pairings appear before the power

turning point of 34.15 in the frequency table. In this case, both are included in the IRD (For example: 6←10 and 6→10 both had a frequency of 4, therefore this double relation is illustrated in the IRD as ←↑). Should one of the pairings in a double relation appear after the power turning point in the frequency table, that particular pairing was not included in the IRD.

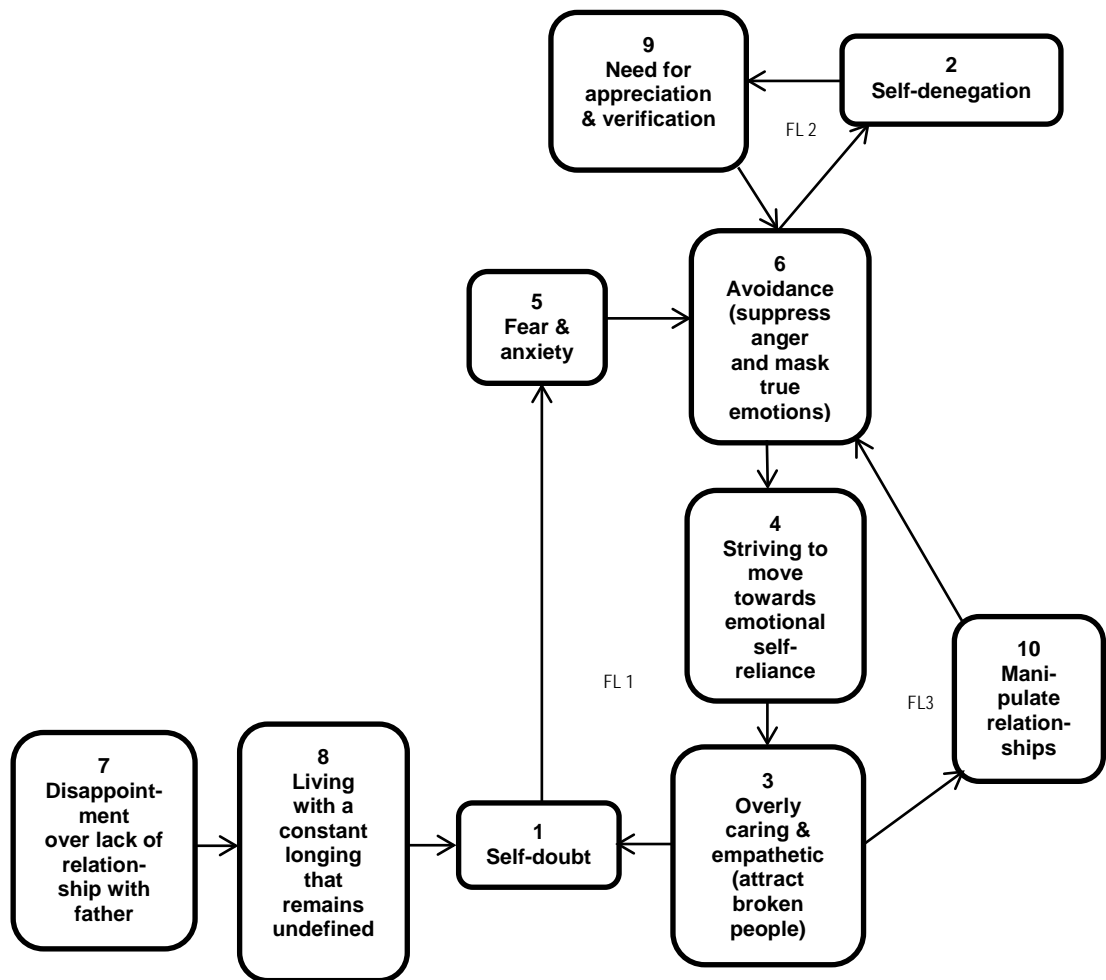
**Table 2.** The Interrelational Diagram (IRD)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Out	In	Δ	Status
1		↑	←		↑	↑	←	←	↑	↑	5	3	2	SD
2	←				↑ <sub>a</sub> ←	←	←	←	↑		2	5	-3	SO
3	↑			←	↑	←	←	←	←	↑	3	5	-2	SO
4			↑		←	←	←	←			1	4	-3	SO
5	←	← <sub>a</sub> ↑	←	↑		↑	←	←		↑	4	5	-1	SO
6	←	↑	↑	↑	←		←	←	← <sub>a</sub> ↑	← <sub>a</sub> ↑	5	6	-1	SO
7	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		↑	↑	↑	9	0	9	PD
8	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	←		↑		7	1	6	SD
9	←	←	↑			← <sub>a</sub> ↑	←	←		↑	3	5	-2	SO
10	←		←		←	← <sub>a</sub> ↑	←		←		1	6	-5	SO

Note: <sup>a</sup> denotes double relations included to develop model  
 Δ = Delta value; PD = Primary Driver; SD = Secondary Driver; SO = Secondary Outcome

### *The Systems Influence Diagram (SID)*

According to the model (see Figure 5), the participants' first experience is that of disappointment, which is then followed by firstly living with constant longing that remains undefined and secondly self-doubt. Self-doubt in turn is the starting point for one of three different feedback loops:



**Figure 5.** The Systems Influence Diagram (SID)

*Feedback Loop 1 (FL 1).* FL 1 takes the following causal route: Self-doubt leads to fear and anxiety, which leads to avoidance (suppress anger and mask true emotions), which leads to striving to move towards emotional self-reliance, which then leads to being overly caring and empathetic, before feeding back to self-doubt.

*Feedback Loop 2 (FL 2).* FL 2 leaves FL 1 at avoidance and follows its causal path first through self-denegation and then through the need for appreciation and verification, before feeding back into FL 1 at avoidance.

*Feedback Loop 3 (FL 3).* FL 3 leaves FL 1 at being overly caring and empathetic, which then leads to the manipulation of relationships before returning FL 1 at avoidance. From avoidance, participants continue in either FL 1 or FL 2.

## **Discussion**

Systematically following the different self-regulatory routes available to the participants in the hypothetical model (Figure 5), all ten themes are briefly explored as independent constructs and then linked to self-regulation literature.

### *Theme 7 – Disappointment over lack of relationship with father*

It makes perfect sense that disappointment would be the first emotion experienced by the participants in this study and that it would subsequently trigger the rest of the process. The construct disappointment can be described as a non-realisation of an anticipated outcome (Frijda, 1986), or as a psychological response to an outcome that falls short of expectations (Bell, 1985). The mulling over of the disappointment of an emotionally absent father by the participants in this study (one of their self-regulation strategies) echoes the sentiments of Zimmerman (2000, p. 14) who defines self-regulation as 'self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals', only here, these goals were

frustrated (never met) and the participants are left with feelings of intense disappointment.

*Theme 8 – Living with a constant longing that remains undefined*

The fact that the participants' disappointment creates a constant longing for a more present father figure is supported by the literature. Scheibe (2005, p. 123, 158) describes life-longings as 'reoccurring mental representations of desired alternative realities of life that are unattainable'. Longing also feeds off 'life's incompleteness and imperfection and involves reflections on evaluations of the personal past, present, and future in relation to the personal utopias in life'. The self-regulation definition of Boekaert, Maes and Karoly (2005, p. 150) rings true in the face of the participants' longing for an emotionally present father figure when these authors refer to self-regulation as

a multi-component, multi-level, iterative, self-steering process that targets one's own cognitions, affects, and actions as well as features of the environment for modulation in the service of one's goals.

Indeed the void left by the participants' emotionally absent fathers is complex in its frustratingly undefined state, making any self-regulatory attempt to deal with their longing very difficult.

*Theme 1 – Self-doubt (the starting point of FL 1)*

Disappointment and subsequent longing then create self-doubt in the minds of the participants. Braslow (2010) argues that individuals who are uncertain about their level of competence battle with feelings of self-doubt. In order to appear competent, the self-doubtful person reverts to many self-regulatory strategies, one of which is overachievement, which involves employing huge

amounts of effort to either avoid failure or achieve (visible) success. The main goal of self-regulation, according to Diamond and Aspinwall (2003), is not homeostasis as such, but rather a *functional* flexibility in (1) the experience of emotion, (2) the ability to pursue goals consciously and unconsciously, and (3) the capacity to harness emotions and cognitions 'in service of context-specific and developmentally specific goals' (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003, p.125). The self-doubtful participants in this study (despite their internal struggles to deal with the impact of their emotionally absent fathers) are all students who are, by all accounts, successful in their academic endeavours. Notwithstanding some still unresolved inhibiting factors, the participants do manage to bridle their somewhat disorganised emotions and confused cognitions to achieve their educational goals – which bear testimony to their basic resilience.

Self-regulation, therefore, also rightfully refers to the individual's *control* over emotions, thoughts and behaviour (Segerstrom, Smith, & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2011). In the case of the participants, this control is lacking and therefore they are prone to self-doubt. Interestingly, difficulty in controlling negative emotions is indeed related to a greater tendency for rumination – a 'passive, self-focused response to negative mood' (Nolen-Hoeksema & Corte, 2004, p. 411), which is a trademark characteristic in feedback loops.

### *Theme 5 – Fear and anxiety*

Driven by strong causal emotions like disappointment, constant longing and self-doubt, it is inevitable that the participants would eventually experience fear and anxiety. Öhman (2008, p. 710) argues that fear and anxiety are 'overlapping, aversive, activated states centred on threat', which manifest as intense negative feelings and strong bodily manifestations. Differentiating between the two constructs, Lader and Marks (as cited by Öhman, 2008) refer to fear as 'dread of impending disaster and an intense urge to defend oneself' (with an inclination to flee from the threat), while anxiety stems from 'an ineffable and unpleasant feeling of foreboding'. According to Epstein (1972, p. 311), fear is related to coping behaviour, particularly escape and avoidance, but when coping efforts fail, fear turns to anxiety. Therefore, Epstein argues that fear has an avoidance motive. Anxiety, however, refers to unresolved fear or 'a state of undirected arousal following the perception of threat'. Glotzbach *et al.* (2012, p. 1256) agree and add that avoidance behaviour is a key component of fear and therefore plays an important role in the maintenance of anxiety disorders. The functions of fear and anxiety tie in perfectly with Carver's definition (2004, p. 13) of self-regulation, which refer to processes that are purposeful and self-corrective, adjustments originating within the person, that are needed for whatever goal is being pursued. The fact that the participants' unresolved fear and anxiety lead to avoidance behaviour therefore comes as no surprise.

## *Theme 6 – Avoidance (the starting point of FL 2)*

It stands to reason that most people would revert to avoidance strategies in order to conceal their fear and anxiety. The participants in this study are no different. In their deliberation of the type of avoidance behaviour that they engage in, the participants (in their quest to be socially acceptable) expound a great deal on their never-ending effort to suppress anger and mask their true emotions. Serving an array of adaptive functions, anger not only organises and regulates physiological and psychological processes that are related to self-defence and mastery, but also regulates social and interpersonal behaviours (Izard & Kobak, 1991; Lewis *et al.*, 1992; Saarni *et al.*, 2006). However, when the expression of anger clashes with cultural norms and generally accepted display rules are broken, it drives other people away (Marsh, Ambady & Kleck, 2005), rendering the appropriate regulation and suitable expression of anger extremely important for productive social functioning of the individual (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1994; Murphy *et al.*, 2004).

Anger, considered by Sharkin (1993) as the primary male emotion, together with rage, is the outlet of choice for men whenever they are confronted with negative or painful emotions (Long, 1987). Boys and young adult men are inclined to mask their emotions and vulnerabilities – with the exception of anger, which is viewed as ‘the more masculine emotion’ because of its strong appearance (Pasick, Gordon & Meth, 1990, p. 159). This assumption, however, does not sit well with Eichenfield and Stevens (1987, pp.126-127):

From our perspective it is not that men are comfortable with anger but rather [that] they are highly uncomfortable with the flipside of anger – that of being hurt and vulnerable (since these are not ‘manly emotions’).

Interestingly, the participants in this study report that they do engage in active efforts to suppress their anger, but they are also (and perhaps paradoxically so in the face of the literature) not afraid to acknowledge their vulnerabilities in the research setting – perhaps because their avoidance behaviour (an unproductive self-regulation strategy) is first fuelled by self-doubt and then accelerated by fear and anxiety. When avoidance is tested against self-regulation theory, it is clear that the participants fall short in their efforts to productively control, direct and correct their actions in pursuit of their goals (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003).

#### *Theme 4 – Striving to move towards emotional self-reliance*

With their anger suppressed and their true emotions concealed, the participants' efforts to attain emotional self-reliance become a tedious endeavour – a never-ending striving for (emotional) competency that should ideally be self-integrated. Many theorists agree that applying one's competencies in aid of goal attainment leads to improved well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). With no primary outcomes to suggest the presence of productive self-regulation strategies in the hypothetical model, the participants' well-being seems to be restricted. The participants in this study, are, by all accounts, successful students (they achieve their academic goals), but in terms of well-being (as it relate to their emotionally absent fathers) they struggle emotionally. Their predicament is confirmed by Sheldon and Kasser (1998), who argue that non-concordant goals (e.g. academic goals), even when attained, fail to satisfy key psychological needs. Conversely, individuals who achieve their self-concordant goals (goals that are driven by strong

interest or self-identified personal convictions) benefit significantly from this attainment, while individuals who fail to meet self-concordant goals (e.g. to reconnect with an absent father figure) experience a decline in well-being. Sheldon and Kasser (1998) explain this by stating that goal setbacks are particularly frustrating or disappointing when the goals represent efforts toward growth and self-expansion.

It is important to note that the participants' apparent noble quest of striving to move towards emotional self-reliance is fed and fuelled by most of the seven secondary outcomes (unproductive self-regulation strategies) contained within the three feedback loops of the system. The context or placement of striving to move towards emotional self-reliance in the model should be considered to reveal its unproductive or unsuccessful nature. Preceded (driven on) by avoidance, striving to move towards emotional self-reliance leads to being overly caring and empathetic (soon to be established as 'false'), because it's self-serving ploy is immediately revealed and confirmed by the next station in FL 3 which is to manipulate relationships. It is therefore clear that the participants' goals are not (yet) self-integrated and therefore non-concordant in nature, hence their inability to have their psychological needs met.

### *Theme 3 – Overly caring and empathetic (the starting point of FL 3)*

In the context of this study, individuals who fall short of attaining emotional self-reliance may very well turn their attention outwardly (away from themselves) to appear emotionally reliant and competent to meet the emotional needs of others. Projecting a caring and empathetic demeanour

(albeit 'false' to an extent), they inadvertently attract broken and needy people, which makes them feel needed and valuable (for a while, at least).

Against the backdrop of pro-social behaviour, Hoffman (2008) defines empathy as an emotional state that is activated by another person's emotional state or situation where one person feels what the other person is feeling.

Waddell (1989), however, distinguishes between the philanthropic and 'frenzied' servicing of other people's needs and 'false' care that is essentially self-serving and used to manipulate social contexts. The hypothetical model confirms the latter and illustrates how participants in this study do in fact move from a place of apparent care and empathy to where they tend to manipulate relationships. Wehmeyer, Little and Sergeant (2009, p. 361) are correct when they testify to the intricate nature of self-regulation as

a complex response system that enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses for coping with those environments to make decisions about how to act, to evaluate the desirability of the outcomes of the action, and to revise their plans as necessary.

As is the case with the participants in this study, self-regulation strategies are often misdirected, unproductive and detrimental to their cause. In their quest to meet the challenges of their psychosocial contexts, people rely on response repertoires that are often flawed and therefore they get stuck in recurring feedback loops of behaviour and seem unable to find the proverbial escape route – which is why the hypothetical model in this study produced no primary outcomes. One could also argue that not even the secondary outcomes in this model are true outcomes because they keep feeding back into the system.

### *Theme 10 – Manipulate relationships*

With their motives for projecting a caring and empathetic disposition already in question, the course that FL 3 takes in the model confirms the participants' manipulative intent. In fact, in the discussion group participants proclaimed their manipulative nature unashamedly ('We are master manipulators, are we not, guys?' one participant asked, to which most of the group loudly replied, 'Yes, we are!').

In their exploration of manipulation, Nagler *et al.* (2014, pp. 47-48) considered certain negative aspects of socio-emotional intelligence, for example a propensity for excessive self-love, selfishness, a disregard of others and a lack of empathy (Raskin & Terry, 1988); the cold, calculated and strategic exploitation of others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Rauthmann, 2012b); and (3) anti-social behavioural styles, cold affect devoid of guilt or empathy, and deliberate abuse of interpersonal relationships (Hare, 2003; Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003). Their research confirmed the hypothesis that people who score high on these negative aspects of socio-emotional intelligence may indeed be prone to the manipulation of other people's emotions to further their own self-serving agendas (Nagler *et al.*, 2014). In the current study self-regulation also seems to take on a manipulative character because the participants' executive or non-automatic capacity to plan, guide and monitor behaviour is flexibly, but cunningly directed at aiding their own apparent egocentric itinerary (Diaz & Fruhauf, 1991).

## *Theme 2 – Self-denegation*

The participants in this study, despite their vulnerabilities, are clever and socially attuned individuals. While they may tend to manipulate others, they know very well that it is not acceptable behaviour – which is probably why manipulation feeds back to avoidance in the model. Frustrated by their unproductive self-regulation, they then turn on themselves in the form of self-denegation.

According to Aisenstein (1989), self-denegation is contained within the so-called death instinct. Difficult to identify as a rule, the death instinct is made public in self-destructive behaviour (for instance, suicide and self-mutilation) and is silently at work in processes like disavowal, forswearing, renunciation, denegation and ego-splitting, thus becoming more readily detectable.

Against the backdrop of self-denegation, self-regulation literature shares striking insights. Self-regulation theorists and researchers (Aldoa, 2013; Gross, 2013; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) agree that in order to self-regulate, effective emotion regulation is of utmost importance. Emotion regulation is concerned with the cultivation of helpful emotions and the management of harmful emotions, but it also demands the activation of a goal to either up-regulate (intrinsic emotion regulation that fosters helpful emotions) or down-regulate (extrinsic emotion regulation that curbs harmful emotion). Emotion regulation strives to influence the dynamics of each emotion to bring about adaptive responses to the environmental context. However, in the absence of contextual information, very little can be deduced about a person's ability to regulate emotions effectively. Clearly the participants in this study fail to

substitute their self-denegation (a maladaptive and harmful self-regulation strategy) with an adaptive (helpful) strategy and therefore they remain caught up in FL 2.

Baumeister and Vohs (2003, p. 199) elaborate on self-regulation by saying it involves 'the self acting on itself to alter its own responses' with the (conscious or unconscious) goal of producing a desired outcome. They add that

self-regulation involves overriding a natural, habitual, or learned response by altering behaviour, thoughts, or emotions. It includes interrupting a response by changing or modifying it, substituting another response in its place, or blocking an additional response from occurring.

While the participants in this study may long for a meaningful relationship with their fathers (desired outcome), they do not override their faulty learned responses (they do not change or modify it) and therefore remain stuck in unproductive feedback loops of behaviour.

#### *Theme 9 – Need for appreciation and verification*

Instead of altering their reactions to their psychosocial environment, the participants in this study do not override their learned responses. They rather seem to break themselves down, which, over time, makes them feel vulnerable, and with this realisation comes an amplified need for affirmation of their worth.

A sizeable body of research confirms that people have an intrinsic need to have their self-concepts confirmed and verified to preserve intra-psychic and

interpersonal equilibrium (Constantino, 2002). Articulating self-verification theory three decades ago, Swann (1983, p. 33) declared that

people are motivationally predisposed to prefer expectancy-consistent information, and will thus favor and solicit evaluations that confirm firmly held self-beliefs (even if those self-perceptions are negative in nature). According to this perspective, self-verifying feedback provides an individual with feelings of authenticity and psychological control and coherence, while reducing feelings of anxiety that are purported to accompany non-verifying information.

Maes and Karoly (2005, p. 269) indicate that self-regulation 'requires the self-reflective implementation of various change and maintenance mechanisms' to achieve task- and time-specific outcomes. It would appear that the participants in this study lack productive self-reflective ability, which is why they are dependent on others to confirm their self-concepts. With so many unproductive self-regulation strategies already at work in the hypothetical model, this need for appreciation and verification is frustrated and feeds right back into avoidance behaviour which, to make matter worse, is fuelled by fear and anxiety as well.

## **Conclusion**

Self-regulation is a complex response system where the individual purposefully steers his behaviour and directs his actions flexibly in the face of contextual challenges and changing circumstances to reach his goals while self-reflectively guarding over his emotions and cognitions. The aim of this study was to explore the self-regulation strategies of young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers.

Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) was applied to identify ten themes and to systematically construct a hypothetical model that shows the cause-effect relationships between the themes. From the model participants' attempts at self-regulation seem to be unproductive in the long run, hence the three feedback loops from which they are unable to produce constructive outcomes.

The findings of this study is supported by the literature that states that although self-serving self-regulation strategies may be semi-productive over the short term, they are not effective in realising one's goals, dreams and ideals – which is why the participants in this study fail to escape from the three feedback loops. Their self-regulation efforts are inadequate and even dysfunctional (for example, manipulating relationships) and therefore their life goals are frustrated and they repeatedly fall back into recurring behavioural cycles and patterns.

Self-regulation remains a complex psychological process where individuals can alter and/or control their emotions and cognitions to ensure preferred outcomes. In this study, disappointment over emotionally absent fathers has introduced inhibiting factors that hinder the participants' growth towards self-actualisation. The negative outcomes of the hypothetical model not only illuminate flawed self-regulatory strategies on the part of the participants, it also provides valuable cues for changing their behaviour to enhance personal growth en route to life goal attainment.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

The study has certain limitations that have be considered. Individual interviews with the members of the discussion group, as recommended by

Northcutt and McCoy (2004), were not conducted because of practical considerations. As a result, the hypothetical model could not be confirmed by and further explored with the participants on an individual basis.

The results come from a fairly homogeneous group, notably white young adult males at a tertiary institution, and can therefore not be generalised to include all young adults. The study can, however, be viewed as explorative in nature and therefore it does add value for future research on self-regulation strategies among young adults. It would be of particular interest to see whether the results from this small discussion group consisting of 9 participants will stand up to findings from larger samples in future statistical research.

Of particular interest for future research is the fact that certain dormant variables in this study surfaced only when the discussion group members made individual (private) notes before the group discussion ensued (which may be a flickering of presumably productive self-regulation strategies), but, interestingly, many of these individual themes did not feature as key themes in the group setting and are therefore not included in the hypothetical model. One possible explanation for this is that meaning is construed differently in a group. What seemed like themes and sub-themes individually (perhaps pointing at a longing for the *ideal self*) became less pronounced in the group discussion where the state of the *true self* was illuminated and laid bare. One may therefore deduce that their private notes regarding their self-regulation strategies hinted more at their idealised *attempts* at self-regulation, because the group consensus as contained in the hypothetical model clearly suggests that these attempts are in fact unproductive.

Further research among other demographical and ethnic groupings of young adults is recommended to explore the generalisability of this study in a South African (or any other) context. Indeed, more self-regulation research is needed to equip and empower healthcare professionals like psychologists and counsellors so that their clients may not only understand the function of negative emotions and cognitions better, but also discover the powerful impetus of employing productive self-regulation strategies in search of the highest of all personal endeavours, namely self-actualisation.

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## ADDENDUM A



### INVITATION TO AN INFORMATION SESSION: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I would like to invite you to an information session about possible participation in a research project (Ethical Approval nr NWU 00103-11-A1). You will be eligible for participation in the study if you:

- are a white young adult male student
- are between the ages of 18 and 28
- perceive your father to be emotionally absent in your life
- are able to express yourself in Afrikaans and English

If you are interested, please attend one of two information sessions where the research process will be explained in detail. A consent form will then be signed if you want to participate.

The dates are:

Monday Sep 22 at 13h15-13h45 (during lunch)

Tuesday Sep 23 at 13h15-13h45 (during lunch)

(in room G41 in building E8 JC Coetzee building, which is the first building to your left after entering the main entrance to the campus)

Regards,

Cobus Ackermann ([22330135@nwu.ac.za](mailto:22330135@nwu.ac.za))

Researcher

Prof. Karel Botha ([karel.botha@nwu.ac.za](mailto:karel.botha@nwu.ac.za))

Project supervisor

## **ADDENDUM B**



### **Self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers**

#### **INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I am Cobus Ackermann, a MA Research Psychology student from the North-West University (South Africa) working on a study that explores the self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers. The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the NWU (Approval nr NWU 00103-11-S1) for the period August 1, 2014 to November 30, 2015. I would like to invite you to consider participation in my study. Please read the following carefully so that you can make an informed decision.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the self-regulation strategies of white young adult male students who grew up with emotionally absent fathers.

## **2. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decline participation, or to withdraw from the study at any point, without any consequences.

## **3. ELIGIBILITY**

You will be eligible for participation in the study if you:

- are a white young adult male
- are between the ages of 18 and 28
- are a student at any South African tertiary institution
- perceive your father to be emotionally absent during a critical time in your development / life
- are from an intact family (not affected by divorce or death of any biological parent);
- are fluent in Afrikaans and English

## **4. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to do all of the following:

- Take part in a two hour long discussion group with 15 or so other young male students. The group will be scheduled at a time suited to your convenience and in a private venue on campus to gather your perceptions regarding your own self-regulation strategies if you perceive your father to have been emotionally absent in your life.

- Complete a questionnaire directly after the discussion on your perception regarding the cause-effect relationship between your thoughts, emotions and emotion regulation strategies that emerged from the discussion. The questionnaire will take no longer than 15-20 minutes to complete and will be filled out confidentially.

## **5. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

The study should pose no foreseeable risk to you. None of the participants' names will be divulged. Although there is a possibility that you may know some of the other participants in the group, and only partial confidentiality can thus be ensured, the process is structured in such a way that personal information or sensitive issues would not be disclosed. All data will be kept securely on a password protected computer by the researcher.

## **6. BENEFITS**

Benefits of participation always outweigh possible risks in studies like this. In this study you may expect the following direct benefits: You will get a more in-depth picture of your own individual self-regulation strategies, and will learn more about the way you cope with your emotionally absent father. Further, you will receive an e-mailed copy of all publications resulting from the data gathered. An indirect benefit is that the data will be used to develop a hypothetical model of self-

regulation in relation to emotionally absent fathers, which could be used in further research in this field.

## **7. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study.

## **8. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation. Light refreshments will be available during a break between the discussion and completion of the questionnaires.

## **9. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to contact professor Karel Botha (study leader) at 018-299 1726 or 073 0660 176 or the secretary of the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Potchefstroom Campus, NWU, Mrs. Carolien van Zyl, at 018 – 299 2094 if you have any further questions concerning your consent.

Regards,

Cobus Ackermann

Researcher



## CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate you are requested to sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the person obtaining consent