

# **EXPLORING BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN MEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BEING FATHERED**

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By

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that *Exploring Black South African Men's Lived Experiences Of Being Fathered* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

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Student Signature

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a lack of research studies in South Africa that explore young men's lived experiences of being fathered. The aim of this study focused on exploring how Black South African men construct and understand their own lived experiences of being fathered by their biological father. This research study is situated within a social constructionism methodology and theoretical framework. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with young men between the ages of 18-24. Data were analysed using thematic analysis as a way of analysing participants' stories. Three central themes with subthemes emerged. The main themes regarded the father behaviour, fatherly roles and participants' constructions of fatherhood. The study argues that fatherhood is a social construct based on participants' lived experiences. Participants in this research still view fatherhood from cultural discourses, such as the provider/protector and a moral guider/role to construct fatherhood.

Keywords: Fatherhood, Fathering, Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity Social constructionism, Culture. Discourses

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, there has been an increased interest in the study of fatherhood. This topic has produced an array of diverse insights into the meanings and understanding of fatherhood. Morrel (2006) argues that being a father is a matter of biological, social and cultural roles. Thus, men may take on childrearing roles, activities, duties and responsibilities that fathers are expected to perform and fulfil, regardless of their biological connection to a child (Mkhize, 2004). More recently, there has been a perceptible shift in various roles undertaken by fathers, ranging from patriarchal, disciplinarian, breadwinner to the modern involved co-parent (Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000).

Despite the effort to increase and expand the scholarly investigations of fatherhood, the topic remains complex and elusive. This is partly because fatherhood is not a fixed concept; it is not universal nor static but rather dynamic and interactive and needs to be understood in context and over time (Mkhize, 2004; Richter *et al.*, 2011). Just as norms and practices change, so do perceptions, experiences and expectations of fatherhood. Sociological and historical studies on fatherhood clearly state that beyond insemination, fathering is “fundamentally a social construction”, with each cohort shaping its own conception of fatherhood (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998, p. 278). As such, contextual and socio-cultural variables are of pre-eminence in understanding fathering and fatherhood in South Africa.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Van der Berg and Makusha (2018) note that in South Africa, there has been a perception that portrays fathers as uninvolved, disengaged and lacking the ability to care for their children. This has resulted in two issues concerning fathering in South Africa, as reflected in the literature that are worth noting. The first is the issue of absent fathers, while the other is the issue of

fathers' participation (Salami & Okeke, 2018). Most research studies on fatherhood in South Africa place more focus on absent fathers and men's experiences of being fathered by a social father, and little is known of men's experiences of having an involved biological father in their male children's lives. Essentially, the absent father narrative neglects important perspectives and experiences of fathers that are involved in their children's lives. Some reports show evidence that is contrary to how negatively fathers are perceived, as some fathers are in fact involved in caring for their children (Van Der Berg & Makusha, 2018).

As stated, the conversation around fathers in South Africa is hampered by the lack of research on the caring behaviour of fathers towards their children (Madhavan, Townsend & Garey, 2010). Thus, giving dominance to the narrative discourse that portrays fathers as uninvolved and distant. Dick (2004) further argues two things, namely that little is known about male adults' experiences of how their father carried out his parental role and that understanding the emotional responsiveness of fathers as perceived by a male adult is non-existent. Thus, Guzzo (2011) suggests that it is important to consider how men themselves view fatherhood.

An examination of the historical changes to the fathering role shows that the modern father is expected not only to provide financially but to have an emotional connection to his child and to take on caring responsibilities (Kaufmann, 2013; Ranson, 2012). However, as McKeown (2001) points out, "few contemporary fathers have experienced this type of fathering themselves" (p.4). Ranson's study (2012) of three generations states the developmental changes of men in the fathering role shows there has been a decline for some fathers of the "work-focused" sole "breadwinner" father model of previous generations. The description of fathers has moved to that of a "family man" and more recently has progressed to one of a "hands-on" father (Brannen et al., 2004; Ranson, 2012). Yoshida's (2011) study, which shows that fathers' caring practices of their children occurred more frequently in situations where they lived as children with their own biological fathers. Wilkes *et al.* (2011) claim that with cultural and

social changes being experienced by fathers at a different place and time, each generation responds to its own circumstances in different ways. This research study on fatherhood is framed by a process of exploring and understanding the social worlds inhabited and constructed by men, who had an active, biological father present in their lives.

Lastly, this study aims to explore fatherhood in the South African context. It is hoped that the findings of this study will add to the small body of current literature on the experience of being fathered in South Africa.

### **1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.3.1 Aim:**

This study aims to provide a theoretically informed and empirically rich understanding and analysis of men's lived experiences of being fathered by their biological fathers. A further aim is to explore the participants' perceptions of fatherhood.

#### **1.3.2 Objectives:**

- To explore participants own views and perceptions of what an ideal father is.
- To explore their current relationships with their fathers and how they relate with their fathers.
- To explore the fathering roles their fathers played in their upbringing and to understand how those varying roles may have influenced their ideas of fatherhood.

### **1.4 OUTLINE OF THESIS**

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to this research study, the background and motivation of this study. Chapter 2 provides a synthesis literature review of local and international studies on fatherhood. The research also provides a theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology followed in this study. In this chapter, the researcher advocates the choice of using a qualitative research method as well as the method

used to analyse data collected. Ethical considerations, Trustworthiness and reliability of qualitative research, and reflexivity are also discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents findings of information relating to the participants' experiences of being fathered and discusses the implications of the findings. Lastly, in Chapter 5, the researcher summarises key findings and discusses limitations of this study whilst making some recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW: FATHERHOOD**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the last few decades, there has been a surge in scholarly interest in the concept of fatherhood, which has resulted in a vast collection of rich, complex, and diverse insight into what it means to be a father in the ‘traditional’ heterosexual nuclear family (Morman & Floyd, 2006). When looking at the historical context of fatherhood and fathering, research notes that, traditionally, fatherhood was conceived of as a dominant role that was socially constructed by and through a society that favours males over females (Black, 2005). Murphy (2005) further argues that the functional meaning of fatherhood has significantly changed over time which has resulted in a few debates around the extent of change in the concept of paternal functions from exclusively economic terms. Most of these debates agree that men today are participating more in family life than did their fathers (Murphy, 2005). According to Plantin, Månsson, Kearney (2003), new perceptions have developed and much of the current research focuses on the men themselves and how fatherhood is constructed in everyday practice and relationships.

This literature review will look at how fatherhood is constructed, and how that has changed overtime. The literature will touch on the debate around absent and nurturing fathers. Fatherhood from a South African context will then be discussed based on research conducted in the West and in South Africa. Lastly, the theoretical framework will be discussed in order to make sense of fatherhood from a theoretical perspective.

### **2.2. CONSTRUCTION OF FATHERHOOD**

Fatherhood is a social construct; therefore, it is important to give a background understanding of what fatherhood is. Flood (2003) explains being a father as any man who is the biological father to a child and describes fatherhood as the state of being a father – the actual practice of parenting a child. Morrell (2005) states that the concepts of father and fatherhood are often used

interchangeably, however it is important to distinguish between a biological father and a social father. A social father can be understood as any male figure who is not a biological father of a child, who plays a significant and active role in a child's upbringing (Morrell, 2006). Richter and Morrel (2006) argue that being a father is not simply a matter of biology. Therefore, it is important to avoid having to assume that being a father or taking up a fathering role is solely a result of biological processes (Morrell, 2006). Based on American research, fathering can be understood as the actual practice of doing parenting, as well as the connection between a particular child and a particular male figure, whether biological or social (Dermott, 2008; Morrell, 2006). Baxter and Smart (2010) further defined fathering as spending time with children, developing relationships with them, and providing parental guidance, discipline and love. It involves co-parenting by sharing the parental role with the mother, through emotional support and practical sharing of tasks (Dowd, 2003).

Edwards, Doucet and Furstenberg (2009, p.6) state that "over the past few decades, scholarship and policy interest in fatherhood, as an institutional position with associated public meanings, and fathering, as sets of activities and emotions, has burgeoned". The rapid interest in fatherhood saw a shift in the concept of what it means to be a father in South Africa. According to Lamb (2000), fatherhood has always been a multifaceted concept, although over time the dominant or defining topic has shifted from moral guidance to breadwinning to sex-role modelling, marital support, and finally nurturance.

For example, In Western research, fatherhood in the colonial era consisted of fathers being perceived as teachers and moral guiders. However, there was a major shift during the industrial revolution and fathers were now perceived as the breadwinner (Forster, Bartkowski & Jackson, 2009). According to Forster, Bartkowski and Jackson, (2009), during the industrial revolution, men left the household economy for work outside agriculture, and were expected to provide for their families economically as breadwinners, whereas women's primary responsibility was the

care of children and the home. In recent decades, however, work and family roles have shifted toward a greater overlap of roles: women have entered the paid labour force in record numbers, while new norms of fatherhood emphasise men's involvement with their children in addition to their traditional role of financial provider (Gerson, 2010; Townsend, 2002). When looking at the social revolutions of how parenthood was constructed, the role expectations for women and mothers, and those for men and fathers, have been restructured (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). Gillis (2000, p. 257) argues that the marginalisation of fatherhood over time is structural: that we must look beyond the family, in particular to the "current restructuring of global capitalist economy to understand it". Fatherhood is socially constructed, and predominant conceptions of paternal involvement change over time. Thus, fatherhood has been influenced by complex social, historical, political, and economic processes (Makhusha & Richter, 2014).

### **2.2.1 Cultural constructions**

African studies of cultural artefacts provide information about what a culture holds as valued as well as insight into how the participants of culture make meaning. According to cultural theories, there are many sources of information with which participants in culture might engage to construct meanings associated with the role of the father (Quinn, 2012). These different cultural roles played by fathers can be translated into four specific periods on how fathering was constructed namely the moral teacher, breadwinner, sex-role model, and, most recently, the nurturing father, as mentioned earlier (Williams, 2008).

Fatherhood encompasses a variety of beliefs and practices in different cultures. Tiedje and Darling-Fisher (1996) suggest that cultural images in the Western studies provide a broad context for the scholarly examination of fatherhood in literature, as well as generating literature of their own. As a result, these powerful portrayals of fathers, which include cultural norms, values and beliefs, are shared by larger groups of people and are discussed widely by scholars and politicians. Cultural images include both stereotypes and ideal images of what a father

should think, feel, and do (Tiedje & Darling-Fisher, 1996). Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2002) note that the multi-layered fatherhood terrain is represented by a wide range of issues, including cultural representations of and discourses about fatherhood, conceptual and empirical analyses of the diverse forms of fatherhood and fathers' involvement, linkages between dimensions of the father-child relationship and children and fathers' well-being and development, and finally the social psychology of paternal identity and fathering.

Quinn (2012) argues that the social and cultural constructs of fatherhood in South Africa have changed significantly over time. The norm, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols are what defines the pertaining culture of fatherhood (Quinn, 2012). There has been a noticeable shift in images and ideas about fatherhood and the role of men in families. The images of fathers in culture are of particular interest because they may affect the social reality of fatherhood and possibly influence the expectations that participants in culture have for the role of a father (LaRossa, Jaret, Gadgil, Wynn, 2000; Quinn, 2012). The cultural context serves as a backdrop for understanding transitions within fatherhood. According to Quinn (2012, p.75) "changing culture of fatherhood studies have examined aspects of fatherhood imagery such as the presence of fathers in media, how often fathers are mocked or portrayed as incompetent, and how fathers are characterised as nurturing or providing for children".

### **2.2.2 Constructions of fatherly Roles**

Men assume different roles as fathers in the lives of their children and family has a significant influence on the style of parenting and how involved they become. Some fathers may not fit into the neatly established categorical roles suggested by some scholars; however, these roles establish parameters within which to conduct research, and organise research efforts to understand the complexities of contemporary fatherhood.

Western research on male parenting has recently shown a more diverse picture of how men perceive and carry out their fathering roles (Plantin *et al.* 2003). As a result, fatherhood has come to be considered a social construct that is shaped by several surrounding relations and structures in men's lives (Plantin *et al.* 2003). There has been a considerable change in social expectations associated with the role of fathers. Fathers in a rapid contemporary society are required to play multiple roles at the same time. Societies require men to simultaneously be providers, moral guiders, friends, playmates, carers and nurturers (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015). The demands of these multiple roles, and the tensions they sometimes produce, challenge men's identities, the relationships with their partners, the meaning and place of work in their lives and their sense of self as competent adults.

According to Crespi and Ruspini (2015), many men adopt the traditional position of a breadwinning identity and describe themselves as responsible for financial care. In a study conducted by Edwards, Borsten, Nene and Kunene (2001), it was found that in South Africa, African fathers typically adopt one or more of the following roles: either as a patriarchal figure- "controller", an economic provider- "breadwinner", or as a family man who provides emotional support as a father and a husband. According to Edwards *et al.* (2001), fathers who consider themselves as the 'family man' prioritise their responsibilities as a parent, husband, educator and emotional supporter more than their financial or disciplinary role. The provider role, instead, suggests that a father supply material goods and financial means to his family, and often, masculinity and fatherhood are primarily understood in terms of one's ability to provide (Mavungu, 2013).

### **2.2.3 Fatherhood and Masculinity**

According to Strasser (2012, p.24:

*Conceptualising masculinity becomes quite challenging when trying to consider the multiple paradigms of scholarship. Through research conducted over the past few decades and because of the myriad ways in which masculinity can be conceptualised and generalised, integrated explanations and definitions make it difficult to utilise one construct of what masculinity is; no all-encompassing definition exists.*

Connell (2005) argues that a single definition of masculinity is not practicable and that masculinities are constructed in relation to others in interaction, meaning that there is no single type of masculinity, but multiple masculinities engaged by individuals which also shift depending on context. These multiple masculinities operate within a power differential, where certain traits and types of men are privileged and dominant over other men (Connell, 2005). Morrell (2001) indicates that even though masculinity is produced and maintained at a social level, men experience their own masculinity at an individual level. Thus, it would be unrealistic to believe that there is only one type of masculinity (Omar, 2011).

The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” has been the driving force behind the expanding field of critical masculinity studies, and it established a long, distinguished, and continuing influence on the interdisciplinary understanding of masculinity. The theory was formulated by Connell (1987; 1995) more than three decades ago and remains one of the most influential and relevant discussions on men (Suwada & Platin, 2014). The notion of hegemonic masculinity has proven to be crucial to the conceptualisation of masculinities worldwide. In terms of defining the concept, hegemonic masculinity is understood as the most honoured or desired form of masculinity, and it drives understandings and expectations of what it means to be a man (Connell, 2003). Most simply, it is an interpretation and understanding of what masculinity should be, and thus dominates over and subordinates all other styles of not only masculine expression, but also expressions of womanhood (Connell, 1987).

Hegemonic masculinity informs all aspects of men's lives but is particularly relevant regarding fathering as it dictates understandings of what fathers are expected to be and what a good father should be (Finn & Henwood). Hegemonic forms of masculinity have traditionally informed understandings of fathers as overly authoritarian, disinterested, absent, and emotionally distant (Finn & Henwood; Johansson, 2011). Significantly, hegemonic masculinity has also informed the expectation that fathers should be the primary financial provider; they are expected to construct their identities as fathers through paid work (Haas & Hwang, 2008). It is important to note that whilst individual men approximate this 'traditional' father in varying ways, not all men conform to these attributes. However, there is a consensus that a 'good' father provides for their family financially, and this 'good provider' model remains the strongest core definition of fatherhood (Dowd, 2000; Lamb, 2000; Miller, 2011).

There has been a strong debate with regards to two dominant discourses around fatherhood. The first is on dominant traditional fatherhood, which is based on power and the provider/breadwinner discourse (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Fathers in this camp hold being a provider in high regard and depend on their partners for the day-to-day care of children (Marx, 2004; Shows & Gerstel, 2009). The second discourse is based on new, emerging fatherhood, namely being a nurturing father. This discourse is based on the ideology that fathers are more caring and share daily care responsibilities with their partners (Shows & Gerstel, 2009). Research conducted by Malherbe and Kaminer (2020) reported that there is no statistically significant variation in the importance of financial support by the measures of family structure and father involvement. This suggests that the majority of fathers in the research study place importance on both the provider discourse and the involved/nurturing discourse. The findings from the research also indicate that the vast majority of participants believe it is very important to be involved in their children's lives, whether through providing financial support or direct care and acting as an authority figure (Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020).

### **2.3. ABSENT VS NURTURING FATHERHOOD**

As fatherhood has become an increasing research point, two seemingly contradictory trends have received much attention (Freeman, 2008). There has been a panic over absent fathers and ‘deadbeat dads’ over the past years and research suggests that the phenomenon of absent fathers is at one of its period peaks - the sense of failure and loss that surrounds fatherhood is thus overwhelming (Gillis, 2000; Smit, 2008). However, it has been observed that men are becoming more intimately involved in childcare. In the last couple of decades, for example, there have been significant shifts in the understanding of fathers, with the nurturing father becoming a popular subject of magazines. Nurturing fathers are represented as hands-on, a man who looks after the kids, changes nappies and takes his share of domestic responsibilities in private and in public (Wall & Arnold, 2007). These two divergent trends have prompted researchers to investigate the advantages of the presence of fathers in the lives of their children as well as the disadvantages of paternal absence. This section, therefore, explores the debates arising from this research.

The absent father is a complex phenomenon and far from a contemporary one. As a result, the absent father phenomenon needs, not only a more consistent term, but also a more careful definition and further refinement. Fatherly absence can be defined in several dimensions. Dermott (2008) and Tiedje and Darling-Fisher (1996) explain ‘father absence’ as fathers’ lack of physical presence in the household; some physically absent fathers are participatory, nurturing, and financially supportive of their children and conversely, some fathers, though physically present in the household, are emotionally unavailable to their children (Smit, 2008). Smit (2008) further notes that the father absence of paternal deprivation does not only entail the actual physical absence of the father, for example as a result of being geographically separated from his family based on work-related responsibilities.

The attempt to identify the possible impact of father absence has initiated a heated debate among several researchers. Father absence may affect children's lives negatively and can cause a lot of social problems (Dermott, 2008). A father's absence can harm children in terms of their self-concepts, peer-group relationships, scholastic performance, psychosocial adjustment, and gender-role identity, among other things (Dermott, 2008). Cabrer *et al.* (2000) and Dermott (2008) also argue that an increase in father absence is usually associated with poor scholastic achievement, diminished involvement in the labour force, early childbearing and heightened levels of risk-taking behaviour amongst children.

According to Clowes (2006), the wide variety of ways in which fathers have been presented in different media and different times serves to remind us that the concept of fatherhood is contested rather than fixed. In the last couple of decades, for example, there have been significant shifts in the understanding of fathers, with the nurturing father becoming a popular subject for magazines. According to Engle and Breaux (1998), fathers' involvement commonly refers to the establishment of warm and close relationships with children. In the United States and Europe, studies have reported that fathers who were involved with their children contribute much to their children's intellectual, social, and emotional development. According to Wall and Arnold (2007), the new fathers of today are ideally more nurturing, develop closer emotional relationships with their children, and share the joys and work of caregiving with mothers. The concept of 'new father' refers to a man who has moved beyond the role of merely being a provider, to an actively involved father whose role is defined as being committed to addressing the physical, mental, and emotional needs of his children (Smit, 2008).

In closing, it is important to explore possible positive, as well as negative, consequences of having an absent father. Indeed, some research has suggested that growing up in a fatherless environment can often encourage children and adolescents to become better fathers themselves. For example, Swartz and Bhana (2009) found that the teenage fathers in their South African

study who grew up in fatherless families used their adversity as motivation for being present in their own children's lives.

#### **2.4. FATHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

The state of fathers' absenteeism and their low participation in the lives of their children is a societal malice currently confronting South Africa (Madhavan, Townsend & Garey 2008; Makusha & Richter 2015). In Africa, South Africa has the second-highest rate of absent fathers', low rates of paternal maintenance for children and high rate of abuse and neglect of children by men. Gould and Ward (2015) claim that 50% of children in South Africa grow up in families with fathers in absentia. It was also reported that only one-third of preschool children co-reside with their fathers in South Africa (Makusha & Richter 2015). The state of absent fathers in South Africa raises an alarm and shows how greatly children are affected by the lack of a fatherly presence. This research study was motivated by the limited research on present fathers, and it will go a long way in terms of sharing research on men's experiences of being fathered by an active biological father.

The historical context of fathers' experiences in South Africa is greatly influenced by colonial history. Research conducted in South Africa by Morrell and Richter (2006) indicate that labour migration contributed to fathers not being physically present in their children's lives. Fathers had to go migrate and look for employment further from their homes. This resulted in fathers having less contact with their children. Thus, fathering behaviour towards their children was influenced by labour migration and poverty (Morrell & Richter, 2006). Black fathers left rural areas on manual labour contracts to mines, factories or commercial farms and only returned home when their work was terminated or during Christmas holidays (Townsend, Madhavan & Garey 2006). This resulted in a low rate of co-residence between Black fathers and their children (Makusha & Richter, 2014). Based on labour migration, men took up the role of absent breadwinners, and women became primary caregivers and nurturers for children

(Makhusa & Richter, 2014; Townsend, Madhavan & Garey 2006). Black men were judged as good fathers based on their ability to provide financially. Thus, the association between being a father and being a breadwinner was created (Makhusa & Richter, 2014).

Guzzo (2011) explores how new fathers experienced fatherhood with their fathers and what their attitudes are surround fathering. In the study, Guzzo (2011) considers the different types of father roles, father presence and biological father involvement associated with new father's attitudes by testing the modelling and compensatory hypotheses. The findings suggest that the cultural ideal of involved fatherhood has been adopted by most new fathers, as they want to be involved and they expect to fulfil various responsibilities. However, if men's attitudes toward fatherhood are also modelled upon their experiences with their father, then changes in family structure and interactions over time may produce conflicting notions of fatherhood for today's fathers. While most men base their ideas about fathering on their experiences with their own fathers, some may have social fathers or father figures who stand in contrast to an uninvolved biological father and provide important alternative role models.

Clowes, Ratele and Shefer (2013) have examined men's experiences of being fathered in South Africa. Men were asked to reflect on the memories of their experiences of being fathered. The study focuses on how men who grew up in the apartheid era understand their experiences of being fathered and cared for as boy children and adolescents. The research findings indicate tensions between the presence and significance of biological versus social fathers in their childhood. Additionally, the debate around the provider and protector role of fathers, and the emotional and nurturing needs provided on a day-to-day basis by father figures such as uncles, grandfathers or neighbours are highlighted. Lastly, the study reveals alternative discourses that suggests a vast array of positive features of being a father, such as demonstrating care and support, compassion, showing consideration for others and openness, as opposed to narratives that evoke fear and violence (Clowes *et al.*, 2013).

Ratele *et al.* (2012) explored the way fatherhood was perceived by men in Cape Town, South Africa. The findings of the study reveal that the participants valued the caring presence of a father more than their physical presence. In the study, fatherhood was not exclusive only to biological fathers, but emphasis was also made on other male figures, known as social fathers. Social fathers played a significant role in the participants' lives, and they highlighted the importance of having a social father (Ratele *et al.*, 2012). In addition, many of the participants in the study foregrounded alternative, more nurturing and consultative versions of fatherhood in their experiences of being a father and/or being fathered (Ratele *et al.*, 2012).

The three studies mentioned above have a common thread on debates around social fathers. Their results investigate men's lived experiences of being fathered with a focus on other forms of fatherhood, which leaves space for research that focuses on biological fathers. Thus, this research will attempt to close the gap, by focusing on men's experiences with biological fathers. In closing, the above-mentioned research on men's lived experiences of being fathered together with the material context of fatherhood and families in contemporary South Africa need to be kept in mind in analysing and understanding the reported experiences and constructions of fatherhood.

## **2.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Charmaz (2006), the theoretical framework, together with the literature review, is the ideological site in which the researcher situates their research work. The theoretical framework provides a specific way of approaching and understanding the phenomenon being studied. There have been numerous changes that emerged, which focus on theoretical models of father involvement (Castilo, Welch & Sarver, 2011). According to Brown *et al.*, (2007) although fathering has been studied from a wide variety of perspectives, there is a lack of consensus, definitions and unifying theories within fatherhood research and it remains one of the greatest challenges in this area. This diversification in the cultural meanings of fatherhood

and the quotidian practices of fathers underscores the importance of examining how men perceive, construct and define themselves as fathers, as well as how they negotiate social expectations regarding fatherhood (Roy, 2006). Gergen (1985) states that there are different negotiated understandings that are of critical significance in social life, as these understandings associate with many other activities in which we engage. By looking at how fatherhood is constructed by men, one can have a better understanding of their lived experiences.

This study is analysed and interpreted through the lens of social constructionism. Gergen (1985) explains that social constructionism places knowledge within the process of social interchange and that this is an active collaborative initiative of persons in a relationship and not just an automatically driven process. Social constructionism focuses on human experience and perception and how it is transferred through history, culture, and language. Since social constructionism is principally concerned with clarifying the process of how people come to describe their world through language, in understanding how fatherhood is constructed, language will play an essential role (Gergen, 1985). Language is used to understand prevailing fatherhood themes men draw on to construct fatherhood. Language cannot simply be dismissed as a medium for relaying beliefs and feelings (Burr, 1995). Language itself is a medium that offers fathers a system for constructing their experiences.

The social constructionist perspective argues that “the self is constructed when people refer to themselves, speak about each other’s selves, and respect each other’s right to express themselves” (Soskolne, Stein, & Gibson, 2003, p. 3). These shared discourses help us in constructing the self. (Burr (1995) posits that identities (such as fatherhood) are constructed from discourses that are culturally available to individuals. Discourse refers to “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, and statements which when put together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 1995, p. 32). The discourses represented in

society help construct the way its members will think about and respond to fatherhood (Burr, 1995).

To help understand how South African men construct fatherhood, the social constructionist perspective advises that fatherhood is an identity rather than personality and is understood as a social concept. The social constructionist perspective is anchored on principles of diversity and split identities, fluidity, and its social dependence (Burr, 1995). This suggests that fatherhood is a social perception that is fluid, socially dependent and the identity of a 'father' is bestowed on a man who plays a role in his child's upbringing. Thus, how meanings are constructed may vary from one man to another. Social constructionism draws attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally, and linguistically. That is, what we perceive and experience is never a direct reflection of environmental conditions but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions. According to Andrews (2012), social constructionism originated as an attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality. Social constructionism accepts that there is a subjective reality. It is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and understood. Fatherhood is socially constructed and negotiated and played out concerning children in specific community circumstances and cultural milieus (Datta, 2007). It is important to recognise that fatherhood is socially constructed and hence negotiable. As such, fatherhood is not static, it is context-dependent and can change with time.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

Over the years, we have seen a change in how fatherhood was constructed by society and how those ideologies of what it means to be a father have also changed. Migrant labour played a huge role in how fatherhood was perceived and practiced. During that era, fathers were viewed as breadwinners. Such constructs changed as women entered the labour market, which resulted in a societal and cultural redefinition of what it means to be a father. The debate around absent and nurturing fathers has taken centre stage. Though there are fathers who are absent in their

children's lives, there are also men who play a prominent role in their child's upbringing. Today, fathers are perceived as involved and are more nurturing towards their children. Lastly, fatherhood is not a matter of biology and can be understood as any male figure who plays a role in a child's upbringing.

As this research is focused on exploring participants' lived experiences, utilising social constructionism as a form of making sense and analysing textual data is deemed appropriate. Social constructionism is concerned with making sense of individual participants' own construction of their stories. A social constructionism analysis hopes to highlight how participants understand their own experiences of being fathered by listening to their narratives.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

According to Khothari (2004), research methodology does not simply refer to research methods but also considers the logic behind the methods chosen in the context of a research study. Methodology also explains why researchers use a particular method or technique, namely so that research results can be evaluated either by the researcher themselves or by others at a later stage. This chapter will provide an overview of the research approach and procedures used to answer the research question regarding how men perceive their experiences of being fathered. This chapter will explain how participants were recruited, how data was collected and analysed. Thereafter, the chapter will discuss the reflexivity and ethical standards followed and adhered to.

### **3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH**

Qualitative research can be defined as a broader term for methodologies that seek to describe and explain a person's life experiences, behaviour, interactions, and social context without the need for statistical methods or quantification (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). One of the aims of qualitative research is to give a voice to the various perceptions of research participants and to illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and context of individuals being researched (Fossey *et al.*, 2002). Qualitative methods consider peoples subjective experiences and try to make sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to the stories told (Terre-Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Thus, the aim of this research project is to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences of being fathered by listening to individual stories and analysing them. A qualitative approach was useful because it facilitated the process of engagement and rigorous conversation with the participants. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) note that a qualitative approach takes different forms but a key feature is its ability to provide an undiluted focus on the individual by affording an opportunity for detailed investigation of

people's perspectives, which gives an in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located with very detailed subject coverage.

This study is situated within a social constructionism paradigm due to the exploratory nature of the study. The social constructionist paradigm, informed the need for a qualitative research design. Carcary (2009, p. 12) contends that a “qualitative design offers a deeper understanding of behaviour, meaning and context of complex phenomena and it allows the researcher to engage in dialogue with the participants”. This design supported the social constructionism framework and was, therefore, the most appropriate approach for exploring fatherhood. The social constructionist paradigm guided a research design that enabled the researcher to explore ways in which men used language to defend, argue and reason for positions they assume with regards to fatherhood. Burr (1995) views social constructionism as embedded in language and expands that language provides us with a way of structuring our experience of ourselves and the world, and that the beliefs humans use to make meaning of their experiences do not precede language, but they are made possible by it. Thus, a qualitative research approach and social constructionist paradigm

### **3.3 SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS**

Kuper, Lingard and Levinson (2008) suggest one of the critical decisions in a qualitative study is who or what to include in the sample and whom to interview. The participants in this study consisted of a purposive sample of six Black South African young men between the ages of 18 to 22 years, who reside in Johannesburg (South Africa). Purposive sampling is form of non-probability sampling, which enables a researcher to choose the participants according to the goals of the research (Morgan, 1998).

Once ethical clearance was received, the purposive sampling method was used to select participants to take part in the study. Purposive sampling is used when participants need to be

selected to meet a specific criterion (Neuman, 2000). Participants were accessed through a small company named Blurb which deals with assisting researchers in identifying and recruiting research participants. Blurb was used as they can identify the correct participants based on the inclusion criteria; they also made the recruitment process quick and easy. The inclusion criteria comprised:

- Young Black men who speak any South African language;
- residing in Johannesburg;
- had an active biological father present in their lives;
- at some point in their upbringing, they had a father who resided with them; and
- Had no children.

The researcher chose this age category because most research has either been on teenage boys or men who are fathers themselves. This category helped to gain new and different insight.

The following table contains the demographics of the five participants for the individual interviews

**Table 1: Individual interview participants' demographics**

<b>Pseudonym (*)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Year of study</b>	<b>Language</b>
Ole	Male	South African	19	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	isiZulu
Mo	Male	South African	20	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Sepedi
Lebo	Male	South African	20	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	isiZulu
Thabiso	Male	South African	21	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	IsiXhosa
Cebo	Male	South African	22	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	IsiZulu
Kitso	Male	South African	18	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	SiSwati

All participants who took part in the study were young, Black, South African men aged 18-22 year at the time of being interviewed. The participants were university students and did not have children when the interviews took place. The participants also had an active biological father's presence in their lives.

### **3.4. INTERVIEW MATERIALS**

Data were collected through individual interviews. Interviews are useful as they are well suited to exploring the experiences of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues; they also enable probing for more information and clarification of answers (Barribal & While, 1994). The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix D) to guide the interview. The semi-structured interviews were used to elicit responses during the interview. An audio digital recorder was used to record the interviews, with a cellular phone used as a backup.

According to Edin, Nelson and Paranal (2001), qualitative interviewers often develop a high degree of rapport with their research participants and are thus sometimes better able to gain an in-depth understanding of sensitive issues. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher, at a location in Braamfontein that was suitable for participants. Appendix D provides the list of semi-structured interview questions that were used.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Both contact and appointments with participants were made through Blurb. Thereafter, a participant information leaflet (Appendices B) was handed out to each participant. The information leaflet informed participants of the purpose of the study, as well as possible ethical, confidentiality and privacy considerations involved. This preliminary information allowed the participants to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the research study or not.

Each participant completed both a research consent form and an audio recording consent form before the interviews were conducted (Appendix B & C).

The interviews were conducted primarily in English and the home language of the participants. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The semi-structured interviews were useful because they allowed for more flexibility to ask follow-up questions regarding some of the issues highlighted by the participants. Two interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and were thus considered short. The two participants were closed off and felt uncomfortable when asked questions and needed more probing before they communicated more openly. The lack of openness created limitation in terms of collecting data. The other four interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Three interviews were conducted fully in English, and the other two participants used English and a bit of Zulu. The last interview was conducted in English as well and a bit of Setswana. All the sessions were audio-recorded. All the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English where necessary.

### **3.6. DATA ANALYSIS**

Fossey *et al.*, (2002) state that qualitative analysis is a process of reviewing, synthesising and interpreting data to describe and explain the phenomena or social worlds being studied. In accordance with the exploratory nature of this research, data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a considerably more flexible and user-friendly method of data analysis and can be applied across a range of theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, thematic analysis was useful for this social constructionist informed study because it enabled the researcher to investigate ways in which men draw on various discourses operating within their social contexts to discuss their experiences of being fathered.

The initial stage of the data analysis began when the researcher listened to the audio recordings repeatedly during the transcribing and translating phase. This process helped the researcher to

identify and familiarise himself with the content of the data. To analyse data, this study utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedural steps as a guideline and background for conducting the thematic analysis of the data in order to explore, represent and describe men's experiences of being fathered. There are many ways to analyse how participants talk about their experiences. Thematic analysis is advantageous for this study as it provides a thick description, summarises key features, highlights similarities and differences and generates unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis aimed to allow the data to discover and identify concepts and themes embedded throughout the six interviews conducted by the researcher.

The first step of analysis required the researcher to familiarise himself with the data collected by repeatedly reading the transcripts. This first step was repeated until the researcher felt confident that all relevant and important themes, both manifest and latent, were fully explored and understood in the context of the data generated by the participants. This occurred several times, for accuracy before making any interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process allowed the researcher to identify the important patterns in the data, which lead to him writing down ideas on how this data can be coded.

The second step involved producing a set of initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the researcher was familiar with each of the interviews, he re-read each transcript and began to highlight specific quotes that stood out from the data that would be of particular use for the analysis chapter of the research. The researcher used highlighters to demarcate and code portions of text and he wrote provisional comments in the margins alongside these highlighted extracts. Furthermore, an initial coding system was adopted to help organise the data and this was done manually.

The third step required the researcher to search for themes in the data collected. The researcher first drew up a rough mind map, which helped him to arrange the data into themes and sub-themes. A list of themes from the data was observed and quotes were used to represent the

themes that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). He continued this process until a list of nine core themes was compiled. This led to the next step of analysis; a list of core themes was reviewed then grouped into main themes. At the end of the process, the research consisted of three core themes.

These three themes then formed the focus of the finding and discussion chapter. To foreground the narratives of participants, the finding and discussion chapter explored the relationship of the data to theory and research.

### **3.7. REFLEXIVITY**

Reflexivity is very important within qualitative research. According to Kuper, Lingard and Levinson (2008), reflexivity refers to being aware of the influence a researcher brings to the research process. Willig (2008) also notes that reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Thus, reflexivity urges the researcher/us to explore how their involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research (Willig, 2008).

During the beginning phase of this research project the researcher considered his own personal lived experience of being fathered. During the interview process, the researcher could identify with some of the stories shared by the participants. That enabled him to connect more with participants and to build rapport with them. During the analysis process, the researcher constantly reflected on his view and opinions held, his experiences and values and was aware of how these aspects could prejudice or affect his judgement and the data analysis.

When the researcher reflected on the interviewing process, note was made of the feelings of angst and worry that plagued the researcher in terms of asking questions, connecting with participants and getting them to open up about their experiences with their fathers. This created

a barrier with some participants because some found it difficult to be more open with the researcher, who was already sceptical of whether participants would allow him into their world. In the interviews, the researcher found it instrumental to speak to participants in their home language, as it achieved the confidence and rapport this study required.

In order to remain unbiased, the researcher did not prompt or lead the participants towards a particular direction, neither did he use the research questions and aims of the study to influence responses. In retrospect, the researcher believes that if he were to interview the same participants again, it would be done differently. The researcher would not necessarily get a better story from the participants, but I would ask more follow up questions and use more interviewing skills, such as summarising, reflecting and paraphrasing.

Researcher reflexivity was used to ensure validity. The researcher reported on personal experiences that shaped the study inquiry. This theoretical sensitivity in approaching qualitative data collection, collation and analysis was a very important process. Not only did it encompass sensitivity to, and knowledge of the literature, but also an awareness and acceptance of the researcher's experience, which he brought to the subject.

### **3.8. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RELIABILITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a set of trustworthiness guidelines for researchers to follow when conducting qualitative research. Trustworthiness in a qualitative research is important because it addresses issues of validity, reliability and objectivity. Four evaluation criteria have been developed to address aspects of good qualitative practice and thus improving the trustworthiness and reliability of data analysis. The researcher employed Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness guidelines.

Four criteria are highlighted as trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. I ensured credibility by using the prolonged engagement with participants and

data triangulation. Participants were encouraged to support their statement through follow up questions. To achieve transferability, throughout the data collection process, the researcher kept a journal to document notes description of the interviews. These notes were combined with the transcripts to provide a complete. Dependability and confirmability was achieved by creating an audit trail. The audit trail is compilation of all documents and material generated throughout the research process. It allowed independent readers and subsequent researchers to authenticate the findings of the current study. I preserved all the audio files, transcripts and field notes to create this audit trail.

### **3.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations are paramount in all research, from its design to conclusion (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). Ethical clearance was sought from the Psychology Departments' Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee at Rhodes University (Appendix A).

Ethical standards of conducting research were observed, which included getting written informed consent from the participants (Appendix B). The study was conducted with young men who are above the age of 18 years, thus it was not required to seek parental consent. Participants were informed of the research, its purpose, the risks involved, the anonymity of their participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence to them. Permission and consent were requested from participants to audio-record the interviews (Appendix C). In this study, participants' anonymity was safeguarded using pseudonyms.

Lastly, the study was not expected to carry any psychological harm for the participants. The participants did not overtly experience any distressing reactions and instead expressed finding the experience an enjoyable and positive opportunity to share their stories and opinions. The

researcher encouraged each of them to take up a referral at their respective University Counselling Centre, should they experience any psychological issues.

### **3.10. CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted by utilising a qualitative approach to research. This chapter provided an overview of the methodology utilised and the reasons behind using this type of research approach. This chapter also highlighted the procedures and inclusion criteria regarding the selection of the participants. Reasons were offered for selecting thematic analysis for this study. Lastly, reflexivity and ethical considerations were discussed.

In the following chapter, the researcher will present the research findings and discussion.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an overview of the themes that emerged in the transcribed interviews. The participants' stories in the interviews appeared to centre around three core themes, with each core theme having sub-themes. The first theme that emerged was Father Behaviour. Participants shared their lived experiences of being fathered, through sharing stories and memories that captured how they were fathered, and how they related to their father.

The second theme that emerged focused on roles their fathers played in their lives, and how these varying roles were understood by the participants. These roles were constructed based on participants' own perceptions of how a father should act. One of the popular sub-themes that emerged among the participants was the role of their father as provider, protector, disciplinarian and figure of moral authority.

The last theme was focused on how participants constructed their views and perceptions of fatherhood. Specifically, how their own experiences of being fathered influenced their own perception of fathering.

### **4.2. FATHER BEHAVIOUR**

Participants were asked to reflect on what their relationship was like with their father during their formative years as well as currently (as adults). Some participants claimed to have had a father who was very involved; according to Engle and Breaux (1998), fathers' involvement commonly refers to the establishment of warm and close relationships with children. Wall and Arnold (2007) further describe an involved father as more nurturing, as a man who develops closer emotional relationships with their children, and shares the joys and work of caregiving with mothers. Contrary to some participants having an involved father, however, other participants experienced a distant relationship with their father. Lastly, even though some fathers may have been physically present, they were perceived as distant and emotionally unavailable (Smit, 2008). The perceptions of the participants regarding their fathers' presence in their lives are discussed below.

#### **4.2.1 Re-Remembering Childhood Memories**

Participants shared their earliest memories and stories, which captured their relationships with their fathers in various ways. Participants identified significant early memories with their

fathers by foregrounding the physical and emotional presence of their fathers in their daily lives. Thabiso (pseudonyms will be used for all participants) described his early childhood memories with his father as follows:

*I was very young, I mean I would work with him, like I would go with him to PMD - because he's self-employed, so he was allowed to just bring us along.*

Thabiso also reported another early memory with his father in the nursery. He remembered going with his father in his car “...taking me to nursery school. I remember I used to go into a van, he used to drive a van at the time, and I'd always want to sit at the back”. Even though Thabiso’s father was a working man, he tried to balance work and spending time with his son. Ole, another participant, shared a similar early memory. In his account, “an early memory would be hopping into his car on a Monday morning to school”. Ole also reported that:

*It was my father preparing me for pre-school, that's the earliest I can think of, pre-school, and yah, rinsing, bathing and then rinsing me with a towel and getting my clothes on.*

This extract suggests that Ole’s father was involved and was likely nurturing and shared caregiving responsibilities with his mother. Thabiso also reported that his father was always there for him:

*He was there, he was there in the sense that every accomplishment he would be there, err-hum, let's say soccer matches and whatever not, he was there, and he was like cheering me on. You know err-hum, and again, this title is very close to my heart when he called me 'my father's child' because it was accompanied by, what do you call this, he'd brush my head, and he'd say 'my father's child', so that was, it built my self-esteem in a way, it built that dependence on him, and the whole reliability, I could always rely on him, and even when I messed up, I'd know that I am his father's child regardless of whatever.*

Thabiso and Ole’s both have good memories of having an active father, who was nurturing and caring. Both participants’ memories of being fathered speak to the literature on nurturing fatherhood. The literature describes a good father as “loving, affectionate, involved, nurturing, and consistent in the raising of his children” (Morman & Floyd, 2006, p. 117). The extracts also depict the impact of having a nurturing father, and how fathers play a role in terms of building self-esteem towards their children.

#### **4.2.2. Distant father**

Kitso, Ole and Molebogeng described their relationship with their father as being distant. Below are their responses regarding the perception of their father's involvement in their childhood:

*Well it wasn't tight, I was tight I was tight with my mom, which is like every time I'd see him it's like 'oh hi', 'bye.' You know dad's you don't really need to talk too much you know, just when you see him 'hi' you know, 'sharp,' or see you later here's money for school'; 'here's money for what you need, here's money for transport - Kitso*

*I think it was a caring one, we didn't talk much but err, we understood each other. Yeah, and err, the respect I think would be a key point in that one. Respect; spoke when we needed to, I got the help whenever I needed it: financially - very much so - Ole*

*I'd say if he needed things done I'd do it, you know. If I needed to talk to him I'd talk to him, but it was... I wouldn't talk to him like err, you know how friends would talk you know. I had, really nothing much to say that entertained him, that entertained my father, I think, you know, and I think for his as well I don't think he enough to entertain me as a child. - Ole*

*To be quite honest, because he usually visited and there was a point when we were still young where we still moved my mother was still trying to find her feet when I tell people the story we moved about 3 provinces in less from 1 years to about 10 - 12 years so I saw him there and then but it has always been that thing of you know how in black families you put the father up high you know so even if I wanted to ask for something I was always told to follow protocol, whereby first I have to start with my mother then my mother takes it up then dad approves or he doesn't approve. - Molebogeng*

As can be seen in the extracts above, the participants did not have a nurturing relationship with their fathers. Their experiences of being fathered involved a distant father who simply played the role of a provider. Thus, there was a form of emotional distance and the participants felt they lacked the father-son connection.

#### **4.2.3 Relationship development into adulthood**

Participants indicated that their relationship with their fathers changed as they grew older. Most reported that currently, they have a close relationship with their fathers. Below are some of the narratives they shared regarding their current relationship with their fathers.

*Currently, we're at a good point like right now we're, he's my father but also we're friends at the same time so I can talk to him about girls, talk to him about school, uhm talk to him about like everything I'm going through and he actually helps me out while I'm working like he'll tell me, keep me motivated, call me to check on exams so yah - Cebo*

*...but then as time went by and I grew older it became much more easy to just you know pull up the phone talk about life talk about what my inspirations are in opening up and things like that yah - Molebogeng*

*...but now that I've grown and I'm also becoming my own man; now there, we now talk about things you know, now he opens up about love; troubles; and asks me about my challenges as well. So now our relationship is quite better than before, which I didn't yet come, yeah. - Kitso*

*Currently it's even stronger because now I study what he studied, err, he's err Director of Prosecutors, and I'm studying Law. He was a state Advocate so, whenever he comes back from - he doesn't work, he works out of town - so whenever he comes back we talk law.- Ole*

*It's quite good actually, it's still it's still decent, it's just now I'm a lot older so I understand a lot more of the situation so like maybe when I was 10, I'd ask him to do something and, he wouldn't be able to do it and I wouldn't know exactly why, but now that I'm older, I understand the finances of the family, and so on and so forth so I can see now. - Lebo*

Participants reported having a different kind of relationship with their fathers in their adult lives. For some participants, their relationship evolved from a distant to a close one. All of the participants have something in common, namely a sense of belonging and closeness with their fathers. The shared activity between father and child also appears to need an extra dimension to the time spent together.

#### **4.3 THE ROLE OF A FATHER**

Participants were asked to reflect on the roles their fathers played in their lives. The findings indicate that participants constructed the roles their fathers played based on traditional roles, and they produced socially expected and/or accepted descriptions of the provider, moral guide and role model roles. The dominant cultural discourses of fatherhood construct fathers as

providers, disciplinarians, figures of moral authority and emotionally detached. These versions of fatherhood have historical roots, as such, they seem to be popular and accepted because they are “closely tied to the structures and practices that are lived out in society from day to day” (Burr, 1995, p. 37). The current theme regarding the construction of fatherhood highlights the social constructionist perspective - that realities are constructed from discourses that are culturally available and these are specific to the social and historical contexts of fathers (Burr, 1995). These specific roles will be described in more detail, below.

#### **4.3.1 Provider**

Participants in the study reported ‘provider’ as the primary role of a father. They associate being a father with being able to provide financially. This speaks to the traditional gender roles associated with being a father. Kitso described his father as a provider: “*Of course a provider, and provider, a provider, a provider*”. Kitso’s repeated use of the term emphasises the importance of having a father who can provide for the family. Interestingly, Cebo also emphasised the importance of a father’s role as a provider but claimed it goes beyond just financial assistance. He mentioned:

*Provider would be obviously financial as well, he’s the man of the house but also just the family assistance with anything like if I’m struggling to get somewhere he’ll lend me his car or if it is test season then sometimes my mom will come with food and that sort of thing, so yeah - Cebo*

Having a sense of safety and being protected was viewed by Cebo as an important role a father should play. Similarly, Ole indicated that security is an important role his father played in his life. Unfortunately, when Ole was asked to elaborate, he was not open to sharing.

*Leader, security...I’ll describe it in words, not too much... Leader; security; err, example: A good example. Err, Straight forward you know, doesn’t talk much; gets to the point, yah. - Ole*

Most participants had similar expectations of their fathers, however, each experience was unique. As mentioned in previous chapters, how individual experiences and how lived experiences differ is based on an individuals’ experiences and how they construct meaning in their stories. Being a father encompasses playing different roles, and those varying roles are not the same for all participants. The responses above enforce the provider protector discourse as mentioned by Clowes *et al.* (2013) as an important way of constituting a fatherly identity. To

elucidate, Clowes *et al.* (2013, p. 259) describe the provider and protector discourse as the “father’s ability to provide financially and to undertake the labour involved in protecting family members from economic hardships”.

#### **4.3.2 The disciplinarian and figure of moral authority**

The participants reported the roles of moral guide, teacher and role model as key to their lived experiences with their fathers. Kitso states that his father played a role of

*...a psychologist, at some point, cause when he was going through like, difficulty he would just go to him for advice, and his father would slap him back to reality. He further explained as well that ‘Same with my mom, like every time I’m feeling a bit down they just show up out of nowhere and start giving me a lecture, you know’, so I – like... it’s needed.*

Thabiso had described the role of his father as that of a disciplinarian and figure of moral authority:

*He taught me responsibility, as I said again, I used to work with him from a very young age, and while people were going out having parties, whatever not, I knew that Saturday; Sunday morning I needed to be at work. He taught me how to manage my finances, when I do get paid, he’d pay me some money and whatever not. He taught me, reasoning as well because I know with him I never... I could never just say daddy I need this and that and that, and I’d just get it.*

Lebo described his relationship with his father as that of a role model. He saw himself when he spoke about his father:

*Err-hum I see a lot of similarities between us. Err-hum we are very... we are those people that start something and then we finish it. There’s a lot of similarities that like you see that ‘ok, I need to... fix up on my character because my character is similar to my dad in this way.*

Cebo reported that his father played several roles, including provider (financial and intellectual) as well as moral guide and motivator:

*I’m just thinking he played a role as to me he was like a protector being a provider obviously, not just financially but intellectually as well uhm, a lot of thing. He’s helped me with just keeping me motivated hmm, even he’s the person I gym with, like when I’m*

*back home we'd go to gym together, we'd train together and also a teacher, giving you, like you know with your parents you always forget that they were once young, when they give you advice like, avoid alcohol, avoid these things you don't, when you're young you don't listen, you realise this from experience.*

Importantly, Molebogeng emphasised that having a moral guide to teach him about culture and tradition was a key role in his relationship with his father:

*He played he a big role in terms of the things that I know about manhood were from him because you get to I feel like you get to a stage whereby some things cannot be translated or said by a mother you know, your mother cannot say talk to you about how you have to go circumcise your mother cannot talk to you because it somehow feels a bit awkward because I also have a sister so it was kind of a thing that my mother took care of my sister's side and my dad took care of this side although most of the time he's not actually open but as I've mentioned as you grow up you become more open as in like if you say how when are you bringing over a girl home you know things like that or as a friend although he doesn't condone but it those things are a thing and culturally as well he taught me, he taught me how to do things within the cultural aspect.*

From the excerpts above, it is clear that many of the participants felt their fathers played numerous roles in their lives. These roles all affect the manner in which men perceive and construct fatherhood. This point will thus be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.4 PARTICIPANTS OWN REFERENCE OF FATHERHOOD**

Participants in this study construct the fatherhood identity by drawing similarities and differences between themselves and their own fathers. For instance, participants in the study established that traditionally, fathering is strongly associated with being a good financial provider. Most of the participants believe that the father must support their families financially but also be emotionally present and caring.

Participants were asked to share their views and perceptions on fatherhood. As such, this study reveals that participants draw from *both* the traditional fatherhood constructs *and* new emerging fatherhood constructs, as is evident in the following participant responses.

*Err-hum, fatherhood is - is the pillar of the house, that's what I believe in. And, a provider, and a supporter - not only for the kids but for the mother the wife as well. The*

*person whom that when things are tough, he's always there to support and there as back up - Kitso*

*Fatherhood? Fatherhood for me is, being the pillar for your child, being an all-rounder for your child. Err-hum, it's instilling knowledge and imparting so much knowledge and wisdom, you know. But wisdom with love you know, not just general wisdom but like fatherhood for me, I think that if there was just one word to underline fatherhood it'd have to be love. Regardless of whatever, as long as whatever you are doing as a father you do it with love, then that is fatherhood. - Thabiso*

*A lot more responsibility and less self...less selfishness; more responsibility and less selfishness, and you can either be a good role model or a bad role model, I guess for your child so, it depends on you. It depends on how you have been fathered and how you'd like to father your children and err... I think fatherhood is, is not a biological gift. You can be a father in biological terms but it's more of action itself. So you, you're a father prior to a child being born, so how you act is before then, you're a father, that's how you'll be as a father. - Lebo*

*"Err-hum... I don't know... There was a time where we were living overseas, and then my mom was admitted to a hospital for a while, and then my brother, took the more father figure, and made sure I got dressed for school. He did a lot more of the things a father would do 'cause my dad was in South Africa at the time, and we were in England, so my dad has done that. And also, Thato's stepdad as well. Thato's stepdad was a father to me for a while. And also, err-hum, my uncle, Zwelakhe has been a very inspiring person, a very good role model, a very...father slash father figure, and has been able, to put me in place at times and also has been able to motivate me. - Cebo*

*it's also being present, being there in your child's life making sure you keep them motivated in whatever they're doing yeah. -Cebo*

*Actually being there as a father, someone who is there for them to talk to and, cause I've seen, I feel like a role of a father is an important element for people even though it's understated, like all these people make it seem like the mother is the big role but I feel like having, you could probably I don't know if there is a difference, but being a single raised child, having your father there probably plays a difference in your psyche, as a role model, cause possibly if you didn't have a father there you'll find role models*

*in other male figures and them with myself I as having my father then I didn't have to look for, he was my role model... Yah, he was a good role model so yah - Cebo*

*I think ah, an ideal father should be very paternalistic obviously, they must be stern but at the same time not so strict that you are not allowed to be free you know what I mean, like I've seen a lot of kids where the parents are very strict the whole time then as soon as they get to varsity they become wild because now they like I'm free from those constraints, now they go crazy, they drinking all the time, doing you know, I don't know if I'm allowed to say that but doing stupid things you know what I mean, not behaving well so, I think yeah it about, they should be stern but at the same time understand that you becoming an adult, that you're growing up as an adult, at the same time to let you be a different, loosen the reigns a little bit, yah. - Cebo*

The participants' ideologies on fatherhood are shaped by having an involved father, who is nurturing and shows care towards his children. For these participants, it speaks to the nurturance they received from their fathers (or father figures), thus they draw from their own relationship with their fathers to construct a narrative of fatherhood. The social constructionist perspective argues that “the self is constructed when people refer to themselves, speak about each other’s selves, and respect each other’s right to express themselves” (Soskolne, Stein, & Gibson, 2003, p. 3). These shared discourses help us in constructing the self. How participants viewed fatherhood is based on how they view themselves, and the express that through the narratives.

In contrast to what the above participants reported on fatherhood, Ole indicated that for him, first and foremost, a father must be a provider and a protector:

*Err, providing you know, support, err, to make them feel safe. Whatever needs that follow, to bring comfort...Financially for me number 1, I think that's number 1 for me. Yah, I think that's the only one actually for providing. Putting a family household together that's number one. Not much in time, he can sacrifice time you know to provide financially. So for me, if people are going to complain with time and whatnot, I don't think that should be bothered as long as the family is structured financially, yah. And someone there to talk to - Ole*

Five participants in this study define fatherhood by drawing similarities and differences between themselves and their own fathers who were crucial in their construction of fatherhood identities. For instance, Molebogeng also shares the same sentiments as Ole, and constructed fatherhood as follows:

*My understanding of fatherhood taken from what I've learned is that mainly you have to provide for your family, whether you are with them or you're not with them but one basically. something my father once said because he has a lot of kids because he has about twelve kids, so he always said that you must always walk, whenever you plant a seed you must take care, nurture the seed, so irrespective of I've got a kid with that woman, that woman and that woman but your kid must be looked after you must give each and every one of them the most equal amounts of love and you must care for their resources and you must give them the best... - Molebogeng*

*My ideal father would be that you are there let's say you have kids or even let me start before you have kids you are able to do the right thing the right thing as in you can respect a woman right you can respect your mother you can respect anybody who is elderly than you can respect and honour the relationship that you have engaged in then you tend to have a kid when you have a kid whether makes in wedlock or out of wedlock you must be able to go with whatever your culture is so if I impregnate a woman right now I must be able to take responsibility to say this is this is my kid and what's the way forward so being able to understand other people's culture and respect it then you must be there for your kid in terms of emotionally physically and mentally your kid shouldn't be scared to come to you and say I have a problem but at the same time there is the element of respect must be there you must you must also respect your kid and respect the family as a whole and keep it together and do whatever it is to provide for the family I feel like that's the best one or the biggest one is providing for your family and making them not live a life whereby you are there providing for somebody else yet you have a family. - Molebogeng*

Similarly, a study by McDowell (2003) found that many fathers relate manhood with their ability to be providers and protectors of their families. Studies suggest that breadwinning and protecting the family reproduces the logic of patriarchal power for men, which implies that the goal of a men is to be independent and to take care of and defend his family members (Clowes *et al.*, 2013).

The views and perceptions shared by the participants highlight various views and ideas about fatherhood. The discourses represented in society help construct the way its members will think about and respond to fatherhood (Burr, 1995). Participant's perceptions around fatherhood or how they understand fatherhood is largely influenced by their own lived experiences and as

well as the 'traditional father' roles which is largely influenced by society on how fathers should act and behave.

This study reveals that most participants view fatherhood as a set of roles; firstly, being the provider and protector, and thereafter, being a nurturer. This addition of nurturer over the traditional role of provider suggests that is a shifts in what it means to be a father. Fatherhood is not static, as can be seen through the participants and their stories. To help understand how South African men construct fatherhood, the social constructionist perspective advises that fatherhood is an identity rather than personality and is understood as a social concept. The social constructionist perspective is anchored on principles of diversity and split identities, fluidity, and its social dependence (Burr, 1995). This suggests that fatherhood is a social perception that is fluid, socially dependent and the identity of a 'father' is bestowed on a man who plays a role in his child's upbringing In as much as they see themselves as providers and disciplinarians, they do not come across as authoritarian and they almost all challenge their own experiences of harsh fathering. The fathers in this study are renegotiating wider historical discourses and incorporating them in new ways and thus being a good father extends beyond the role of provider and disciplinarian and includes emotional care, good communication and healthy bonds.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the three core themes were discussed, namely father involvement, the roles of fathers and the construction of fatherhood. These themes were explored via the stories shared by the participants. Although their stories had similarities, they were also different in their own respect, as dictated by social constructionism. However, what is clear is that fatherhood remains a social construct that is shaped by society and individual stories.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Not enough research has been conducted in South Africa to investigate men's lived experiences of being fathered and being fathers themselves. As such, very little is known about fatherhood from a Black, male perspective. Thus, the need for this study, which utilised semi-structured interviews to explore men's experiences of being fathered by a biological father and to understand how participants construct their own lived experiences. The aim was to understand how they perceive issues around fatherhood and the roles fathers play in their lives. Three core themes were identified and examined. This chapter begins with an overall summary of the study's findings, which is followed by a discussion on limitations and recommendations for future research.

### **5.2 MAIN FINDING**

This study found that some men had a father who was nurturing and involved and they experienced their father as someone who was available and with whom they had an emotional connection. For other participants, their father was physically there, however their experience was of a man who was distant and was only there as an authoritarian figure during their childhood. Throughout the study, it became clear that as men grew older, their relationships with their fathers changed, and we can see how age played a role in the father and son connection. These men eventually had a father whom they can do things with, engage with freely and could regard as someone who is a friend.

From the data the following findings can be deduced:

- Childhood experiences, with a father, create memories of knowledge from which young men perceive how they might carry out fatherhood in relation to their own children.
- On becoming fathers, men see participation in caring tasks, showing emotional support and caring behaviour as essential to contemporary father, however, they also identify strongly with the male traditional breadwinner role.
- On "becoming" fathers, men identify with the need for the caring of children as well as the provision of financial resources through their self-defined role as breadwinner. The experiences of relational closeness.
- In addition, these findings acknowledge how the influences on fathering are not just personal they are also impacted by other factors from their environment.

### **5.3. LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study had its limitations to consider before using the results to guide theory, practice, or future research. First, the single institution sample cautions us to assume widespread transferability of results. Despite the variation strategy to construct the sample, results ought to be viewed in its institutional, cultural, and regional contexts. The first limitation of this study is the small sample size that was collected for analysis and interpretation. The transferability of the interpretations made are limited and must be acknowledged. With that being said, the researcher felt that the data collected for this study was good enough to provide valuable understanding into the experience of fatherhood, and particularly to possible exceptions to existing research, despite the limited sample size.

As a means of partially addressing issues of reflexivity - a core methodological issue and an important assessment of validity in qualitative research - an attempt was made to build rapport with participants, which aimed to promote a relaxed and comfortable environment. However, that was not achieved with all participants, as some interviews only lasted a short period and there were participants who were closed off. Thus impacting on detailed experiences of participants narratives.

Future research on social fatherhood should be considered and a more integrated, coherent thesis around the topic should be undertaken. Future research on present fatherhood and social fatherhood is also recommended.

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## ANNEXTURES

### APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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#### RESEARCH PROJECTS AND ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

9 October 2013

Karabo Rasebitse  
Department of Psychology  
RHODES UNIVERSITY  
6140


Dear Elmeret

#### ETHICAL CLEARANCE OF PROJECT PSY2013/31

This letter confirms your research proposal with tracking number PSY2013/31 and title, 'Exploring men's experiences of being fathered', served at the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department of Rhodes University on 8 October 2013. The project has been given ethics clearance.

Please ensure that the RPERC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators.

Yours sincerely

  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE RPERC

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

*Grabamstown • 6140 • South Africa*

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Good day

My name is Karabo Rasebitse and I am a research student at Rhodes University, presently completing a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. I am currently doing research based on exploring men's experiences of being fathered.

Specifically, the aim of my research is to explore how men understand their experiences of being fathered. The study is concerned with the relationship between a man and his biological father growing up. Participants need to be between the ages of 18 to 24, who have an active biological father in their lives and at some point, resided with him. The interview will last approximately one hour and will take place at a suitable location and a time that is most convenient for you.

I invite you to participate in this research study and assure you complete anonymity, that is, your real name will not be included in the study unless you wish it to be included. I acknowledge that some of the things we are going to talk about may evoke unsettling feelings for you and so if at any time you decide to withdraw from the study, there will be no consequence whatsoever for you. Furthermore, there are minimal risks involved in this research. There is risk of distress and possible benefits in the process of telling your story.

Please note that any information that you divulge in this interview could be included in publication of my thesis database that will be accessible to the public, however, it will be under a pseudonym that will make it impossible for anyone to identify you. If you wish not to have anonymity in the research, then please state this so that the data you provide will be presented in the archives' project under your own name.

I and my supervisor will be the only two people to listen to this interview and will keep the record in a place that I alone will have access to; thereafter the audio recordings will be part of my research database. I would also like to inform you that the information from this interview will be transcribed and if you would like a summary of the research results then I am happy to send it to you. When the research concludes, I will write up a report that will be available at the library at Rhodes University and I may also publish my report in journal articles.

If you have any questions regarding the project or wish to discuss the research before you consent to participate, please feel free to contact either me or my supervisor at the telephone numbers or e-mail addresses provided below.

Thank you.

Student Researcher: Mr. Karabo Rasebitse, Tel: 0833333307/[Rasebitse.kay@gmail.com](mailto:Rasebitse.kay@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Mr. Elron Fouten, Tel: 0466038003/ [e.fouten@ru.ac.za](mailto:e.fouten@ru.ac.za)

Signed on (Date):

Participant:

Researcher

## APPENDIX C: AGREEMENT FORM



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

### AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I (participant's name) \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project of (Researcher's name) Karabo Rasebitse on Exploring Men's experiences of being fathered.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on 08333333307 or Karabo.r@webmail.co.za/Rasebitse.kay@gmail.com. The research project has been approved by the Research Project and Ethics Review Committee and is under the supervision of Mr Elron Fouten in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on e.fouten@ru.ac.za
2. The researcher is interested in exploring men's experiences of being fathered.
3. My participation will involve answering semi-structured questions which will take roughly an hour to complete.
4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.
5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. SADAG centre at 014 566 1722 may be contacted for further support should participants experience any form of distress during the research process or alternatively use a counselling centre at your University Institution.
6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):

Participant:

Researcher:

## APPENDIX D: AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Rhodes University

–

Department of Psychology

<p><b>USE OF TAPE RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES</b></p> <p>–</p> <p><b>PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM</b></p>
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<i>Participant name &amp; contacts (address, phone etc)</i>	
<i>Name of researcher &amp; level of research (Honours/Masters/PhD)</i>	
<i>Brief title of project</i>	
<i>Supervisor</i>	

<b>Declaration</b>		
<i>(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)</i>		
1. <i>The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me</i>	verbally	
	in writing	
2. <i>I agree to be interviewed and to allow tape-recordings to be made of the interviews</i>	audiotape	
	videotape	
3. <i>I agree to take part in and to allow tape-recordings to be made.</i>	audiotape	
	videotape	
4. <i>The tape recordings may be transcribed</i>	without conditions	
	only by the researcher	
	by one or more nominated third parties:	
5.1 <i>I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the study is complete and the report has been written.</i>		
5.2 <i>OR I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised for the following purposes and under the following conditions:</i>		

<b>Signatures</b>		
<i>Signature of participant</i>		<i>Date</i>
<i>Witnessed by researcher</i>		

## **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Father Relationship**

1. What can you tell me about your earliest memory of your father
2. Please tell me about how your relationship with your father was like when you were growing up? Primary school, Middle school, High school.
3. Currently how is your relationship with your father like?

### **Father role**

1. What role would you say your father has played in your life: While growing up, in high school, picking a university?

### **Fatherhood**

1. What is your understanding of fatherhood?

### **Summary**

1. Can you tell me a story that best captures your relationship with your father?
2. Is there anything about your relationship with your father that we did not discuss that you would feel is important for me to know?
3. What do you think an or the ideal father is like, what does he do?