Representations of adult women who have experienced 'absent' fathers: A Thematic Analysis of *True Love* magazine

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how adult women who have experienced father 'absence' are represented in *True Love* magazine, a popular South African women's magazine targeting black women readers. The study examined nineteen articles published between 2016 and 2021 in *True Love,* featuring black women's stories and clinical psychologists, which mentioned 'absent' fathers. Through the lenses of psychoanalytic, traditional African cultural, and feminist theoretical frameworks and their key concepts, the articles were examined in relation to how the effects on the adult women of complicated relationships with their fathers while they were growing up, were represented. The selected articles were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, and representational themes were identified guided by theoretical frameworks and familiarity with the scholarly literature on father 'absence' in South Africa. A wide range of childhood and young adult experiences of father-daughter relationships, and household circumstances, appeared alongside the strong maternal networks which supported these girls and women. Representations and themes of clinical psychologists involved Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks to describe the damaging psychological implications of 'absent' fathers, particularly affecting adult women's capacities to form trusting intimate relationships with men. The adult women's stories – largely successful businesswomen and/or celebrities in the arts, as represented by *True Love* feature writers and editors – presented themes of what the women had learnt from their mothers, and how they had overcome difficulties and obstacles. These themes included representations of resilience, and of being 'survivors', informed by empowerments from a feminist theoretical framework. These themes also represented the women as working psychotherapeutically to manage their past experiences and psychological distress, to transform their retriggering in adult heterosexual relationships, and to pursue healing and self-actualisation. These representations and themes are argued to have inspirational and motivating implications for girls and women in contemporary South Africa. They generate alternate stories about the longer-term effects and outcomes of father 'absence', rather than the prominent 'victim' stories in media and scholarly literature of young women doomed to suffer poor relationships and depression forever.

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CHAPTER ONE- INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal account

“Will you tell me about your childhood?” is a frequently requested question in psychodynamic psychotherapy (Lemma, 2003). It seems that this experience might also be relevant as I begin this thesis report on father-daughter relationships. I grew up with my mother and extended maternal family. It felt natural to me to live in a crowded house of eleven people, two male figures (grandfather and uncle), and eight strong women – but no biological father. The only time I had questions about my father's whereabouts and identity was when visiting friends' homes and seeing their nuclear family arrangements, and when my friends questioned me about it. I immediately said that he was deceased or resided in another province due to my embarrassment and shame. I was continuously thinking about these concerns but lacked the courage to ask my mother or anybody else in the family, and as a result, no discussion about his identity occurred. I spent most of my childhood in this fearful silence, my self-image deteriorated, and I felt lost, even though I had an incredible mother who cared for me and was supportive. How she coped as a single mother continues to inspire me. At the age of 21 years, I met my father. He contacted me through my mother, who evidently, during my childhood, believed she was 'protecting' me with the nondisclosure. His involvement in my life was intermittent, inconsistent and unpredictable, until I eventually withdrew from the recurring cycle of rejection. As the relationship went from 'absence' to inconsistency, one can only imagine the psychological manifestations of the belief patterns of rejection and ideas of self-worth. As I battled to make sense of my circumstances, I began reading self-help books and developed an interest in psychotherapy. These have led to my academic and professional career psychology and research interest in father 'absence'. I am a clinical psychologist in training and I am keen to pass on some of the scholarly and therapeutic insight and support I have received.

1.2 Context

Recently, the concept of fatherhood has received more attention in South Africa as a result of what are perceived to be the 'detrimental effects' of father 'absence'[1] on family systems and children (Rabe, 2018), as well as the apparently armouring effects *against* father 'absence' provided by certain academic and governmental sources adhering to Western psychological theories of development that argue that non-nuclear and female-headed households are damaging (Ratele, Shefer&Clowes, 2012). The headline of *News24* states, "Too many black children don't have fathers at home, report reveals" (Mndende, 2021). The article continues by quoting statistics from the *Sonke Gender Justice and Human Sciences Research Council's 2018* report, which indicates that the majority of black[2]families had twice the number of children living with their mothers as those living with their mothers and biological fathers (76% and 36,4%, respectively) (Mndende, 2021). These prevalence statistics within a public health framework take the viewpoint advocated by the mainstream psychological perspective, which frames father 'absence' as a "problem" for children and families in particular ways; and believes it would be preferable if biological or genetic fathers were not 'absent'. This perspective is frequently foregrounded prior to an intervention directed at 'problematic' black fathers (Ratele et al., 2012), because black children in South Africa are more likely to have so-called 'absent' or 'irresponsible' fathers. This study acknowledges the historical context in which modern economic and social determinants of father 'absence' in black households exist.

[1] The terms 'father-presence' and 'father-absence' are parenthesized in the thesis to problematize and highlight the binary and biological nature of these terms in research literature, either a biological father is 'there' or is 'not-there', when their meanings (and definitions of who and what fathers are) are extremely variable and contingent on particular circumstances and contexts (cf. Morison & Macleod, 2015). These complicated meanings of father 'presence' and 'absence' will be explored in the literature review chapters that follow.

[2] Racial terminology – following offensive apartheid categorization: black/African, white, coloured – is used in this thesis to demarcate lingering socioeconomic impacts and separations that continue to negatively impact on particular groups of disadvantaged South African citizens with unequal access to resources. These racial differences are socially and politically constructed, often with real and harmful consequences for people in their daily lives, and do not refer to biology at all.

Most studies record that children and/or adults who have experienced ‘absent’ fathers are more likely to struggle economically, intellectually, and mentally than those who have ‘present’ fathers (Eddy, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015).

The results of these studies assist in “idealising’’ fathers and fathering while simultaneously “victimising” childrenand young adults as susceptible to a variety of adversities and difficulties associated with their identities and relationships, and mental, behavioural and scholastic outcomes in the short and long term (Zulu, 2018). One of the most frequently documented effects of father ‘absence’ on young women is the psychological impact on the father-daughter relationship and the increased likelihood of unsuccessful intimate relationships and risky sexual behaviours (Eddy, et al., 2013; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015). When it comes to long-standing scholarly literature and media representations of the impact of ‘absent’ fathers on women, the Freudian psychoanalytic theoretical approach is prominent, according to Larcher (2007). In comparison to young women raised in nuclear families, those raised in non-nuclear families are portrayed as "victims," "broken," and eventually “suffer” from inadequate adult relationships and life's obstacles (Larcher, 2007). According to Lang and Zagorsky (2001), this kind of research often focuses on the various "damaging" psychological implications father ‘absence’ has on children and adults while excluding the greater context and the resilience and agency children and adults display and may develop.

1.3 Theoretical frameworks

Three different theoretical frameworks dominate in this study and will be briefly reviewed in chapter two with South African empirical literature used to illustrate the three theories. These theoretical frameworks seem to underpin and explain these "damage" and "resilience" perspectives in scholarly empirical studies on the psychological effects of ‘absent’ fathers on children's and young adults' development. These frameworks include: (1) Psychoanalytic theories – including Freudian and attachment and mentalization (Object Relations) approaches; (2) Traditional African cultural approaches to fathering and (3) Feminist theories. This study focuses on the effects of poor father-daughter relationships on girls and women; and the reviews

that follow compare research studies that used qualitative research interviewing, media textual/representational analysis, and clinical measurements.

1.4 Motivation for the study

Leopeng and Langa's (2017) study engaged with media representations of fathers within *Destiny-Man*, a South African print magazine for professional black men. This study had aimed to use *Destiny* (a sister print magazine of *Destiny-Man*), to follow a similar approach in thematically analyzing media representations of fathering – but here, to investigate the representations of *adult women* who grew up without fathers or with negligent fathers. *Destiny* magazine disappeared from the marketplace during the extended Covid19 lockdown period in South Africa. Thus, *True Love* was settled on as an alternative; this is a print magazine targeting (middle classed) black, South African woman. This sampling was strategic and purposive, because it seemed to offer different kinds of representations of black women. This was responsive to Lesch and Scheffler's (2016) and Zulu's (2018) arguments that although scholarly research has increased on the psychological effects of adult women who grew up with 'absent' inevitable 'damaging' consequences of father 'absence' for girls/women. These feminist researchers call for other kinds of experiences, stories and representations (e.g., of resilience, and how this works for women); and they also advocate for more hopeful and positive research study outcomes (e.g., of empowering therapeutic processes, and resistances to dominant heteronormative and patriarchal narratives).

This qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis research examined how *True Love* magazine represents professional adult women who have personal experience of growing up without fathers. It examined themes and representations from nineteen selected feature articles from *True Love* between 2016 and 2021, and explored various experiences of complicated and negligent relationships with 'absent' fathers, and how difficulties and obstacles in women's lives were overcome. The themes of representations were informed by various theoretical frameworks found to be dominant in 'father absence' studies'; and these allowed commentary on representations of women as distressed 'victims' and/or resilient 'survivors'. This is not a critical study that

critically unpacks taken-for-granted theories (as discourses) about the ideological and psychological impacts of 'father-absence' on young women. It is a descriptive, theory-led thematic analysis explores how three "explanations" for the psychological effects of 'father-absence' on young women, appear in popular media for women. The study tracks these theories (traditional African, feminist, psychoanalytic) through themes in True Love interviews/articles about 'father-absence'. This study aims to apply a critical lens to the topic by examining how various theories (i.e. psychoanalytic, traditional African cultural approaches, and feminist theories) are used to generate diverse understandings of the psychological effects of 'father-absence', while maintaining the concept of individual distress (i.e. self-worth, depression, anxiety) and the ability of mental health practitioners to provide clinical assessments, corrective action, or specialised psychotherapy that can improve mental state and wellbeing of women who have experienced 'father -absence'.

1.5 Structure of arguments

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Following Chapter 1's Introduction, the literature review is divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 reviews father 'absence' literatures in terms of definitional confusion ('absence' versus 'presence') and psychological impacts on children and young adults. This chapter also includes an outline of three dominant theoretical frameworks emerging from the literature when trying to interpret psychological effects, including their associated concepts (e.g., 'daddy issues' and 'resilience'). Chapter 3 reviews how 'present' fathers, and their antithesis, 'absent' fathers, are represented in various forms of media; and outlines 'victim' and 'survivor' representations and how these might work, in terms of media effects on audiences. Chapter 4 presents the study's methodology, including the research paradigm and design, the media context, the sampling method and characteristics, reflexive thematic analysis (following Braun & Clarke, 2012), and issues related to validation and reflexivity. Chapter 5 reports descriptions of themes and representations supported by quoted extracts, and (again following Braun & Clarke, 2012) includes examination of how these themes and representations were found and informed by theoretical frameworks. Chapter 6 examines the themes and representations identified during the reflexive thematic analysis, by

linking “findings” back to reviewed scholarly literature to highlight similarities and differences. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the study's contributions, reflexivity, study limitations, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW OF FATHER ABSENCE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

Richter, Chikovore, and Makusha (2010) argue that the 'presence'[1] of a caring, responsible, and involved father can benefit children's development in South Africa for a variety of reasons: the household may benefit financially; the mother may feel supported in her caregiving role; healthcare and education may be prioritised; children may benefit from their father's protection and community standing. On the other hand, the reality is that the majority of children in South Africa lack 'present' or involved fathers; and South Africa has a high rate of 'absent' fathers (Eddy, Thomson-de Boor &Mphaka, 2013; Ratele, &Nduna, 2018; Richter et al., 2010). Richter et al. (2010) report that South Africa has the second-highest rate of 'absent' fathers on the African continent. According to Eddy et al. (2013), one biological father out of every two (50 per cent) is either absent from or entirely separated from his child's life (under the age of 15 years). Such statistics are frequently used in public health research literature to emphasize the psychological, social and financial damaging effects on children of father 'absence' (e.g. Richter et al., 2010); and this is reviewed in more detail below.

According to Ratele and Nduna (2018), the proportion of 'absent' fatherhood varies by race in South Africa – the majority of black children do not live with both parents. Thus, in recent estimates of over 6,780,000 children who were raised by their mothers in single-mother, three-generational or extended households (Ratele&Nduna, 2018), their father's 'absence' from children's everyday lives was determined by children's race, age, socioeconomic status, and whether they live in urban suburbs or townships which are still demarcated by race and socioeconomic status in South Africa, or in rural areas (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses & Seekings, 2010; Hunter, 2010; Ratele, &Nduna, 2018).

Various historical and contemporary economic and social vectors underlie the structure and dynamics of households, caregiving and custody of children, and father 'absence' in South Africa (Desmond & Desmond, 2006; Eddy & Holborn, 2011; Eddy et al., 2013; Hunter 2010).

These include, for black fathers and households in particular, patterns of male migration to find work as ‘providers’ for families, sometimes far away (Eddy & Holborn, 2011; Eddy et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2010); high rates of unemployment, default on maintenance payments for children and conflict with mothers and maternal kin about this (Eddy et al., 2013); declining rates of formal marriage in urban black communities, and multiple serial or overlapping partnerships (Hunter, 2010); and prior to antiretroviral treatment rollouts in 2005, high mortality of migrant fathers due to HIV/Aids (Desmond & Desmond, 2006). As is discussed in the following literature review chapters, the primary complexities appear to be (a) conceptual in nature, relating to how the ‘absent father’ phenomenon is defined, (b) the diverse experiences of short- and long-term effects on child functioning and young adults, and (c) the interpretation and representation of the short- and long-term effects in light of the theoretical frameworks that shape the available knowledge of ‘victims’ and ‘survivors’ regarding 'absent' fathers.

This review will begin with a chapter on father 'absence' and its effects on children. The first portion will define various meanings and assumptions about fathers and 'absent' fathers. The second section will delve into the reasons of 'absent' fathers. The third section will discuss the effects of 'absent' fathers: short-term effects on child functioning and longer-term effects on young *women*. This is to support this study on the psychological impacts on women, of having grown up without a father in the household, as represented in a women’s magazine (True Love). The fourth section will demonstrate three theoretical frameworks (psychoanalytic, traditional African cultural, and feminist perspectives) and their underlying principles that are frequently used in South African father 'absence' empirical literature. The fifth section will provide a brief review of empirical research studies conducted within each of the frameworks. Due to the study's focus on a media source for materials to analyze, the second chapter of the literature review will focus on media representations of ‘absent’ fathers. The themes in this literature review will be divided into three sections. The first section will define what representations are, how they work, and why they are necessary to analyse. The second section will explore how different media have varying emphasis on father ‘absence’. The third section mentions how the media portrays 'victims' and 'survivors' perspectives, including their definitions and how these perspectives might be utilised in the media.

2.2 Definitions of fathers, fathering and 'absent' fathers

2.2.1 Various definitions of ‘good fathers’

‘Absent’ fathers are almost always defined in negative terms relative to real and/or imagined (socially or psychically constructed) ‘good fathers’, who are ‘present’ and ‘engaged’ in children’s lives; usually also as partners to mothers who appear as primary caregivers (Morison & Macleod, 2015; Prinsloo, 2006). Traditionally, a male who impregnates a woman is regarded as the child's biological father and hence, a major contributor to the child's development (Morrell, 2006). There is some evidence that this biological construction of fatherhood influences men's parenting practices and decisions (Eddy et al., 2013; Lesejane, 2006; Makofane, 2015; Mkhize, 2006), despite consequences of contemporary feminist challenges of rigid, stereotypical gendered roles for men and women (Morison & Macleod, 2015), and global and local declines of the traditional nuclear family structure, which has occurred due to, for example, prevalence of divorce, single parenting, gay marriage, poverty and household division and household extendedness due to migrant labour (Davies & Eagle, 2015). In many South African contexts, a biological father's ability to fulfil traditional gendered roles as breadwinners, providers, protectors, and patriarchal heads of households is critical in the construction of (good) fatherhood, and a child's status, particularly within African communities, is determined by the father's 'name' and his community standing (Makofane, 2015).

The cultural expectations and practices of men as ‘providers’ and ‘protectors’ – even when women/mothers are also gainfully employed outside their homes to support their families – run deep in South African and African literatures on fathering. Hence, fatherhood is also a ‘collective’ as well as a biological phenomenon in some South African (or African) contexts, with adults proclaiming that "every child is my child" - an overt proclamation of the *ubuntu* notion that children must be nurtured and valued by everyone in a community (Morrell, 2006, p. 15). Similarly, another prevalent conception of good fatherhood in South Africa is 'social fathering' (Eddy et al., 2013; Makofane, 2015; Richter et al., 2010), which means that regardless

of a man's biological relationship to the child, he assumes the gendered status and responsibilities of a father when this is necessary and called for (Eddy et al., 2013; Makofane, 2015).

A ‘good father’ can also be defined solely in terms of his ability to provide materially for his children, whether he was a permanent resident in the household with them, or not (Eddy et al., 2013). Thus, Eddy et al. (2013) discovered that many fathers viewed fatherhood as ‘economic transactions’ – so-called 'ATM fathers' – and the majority of the fathers interviewed were either unable to provide for their children due to unemployment or ‘chose’ to be 'absent' or uninvolved in their children's lives on financial grounds following disputes over money with the children’s mothers.

2.2.2 Various definitions of ‘absent’ fathers

In the various empirical literature on father ‘absence’ in South Africa that was reviewed, ‘absent’ fathers were often *narrowly assumed* to be biological or genetic fathers, without specifying this explicitly (e.g. Magqamfana &Bazana, 2020; Mdletshe, 2018); and without exploring multiple meanings of and reasons for ‘absence’, or what alternate networks and household arrangements including other men (e.g. older brothers, male kin, step- and social fathers) surrounded children growing up (Bray & Brandt, 2007; Hunter, 2010). This is clearly not a simplistic binary between biological father present (good) versus biological father absent (bad) (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016). Fathers differ in their degree of ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ from their children's lives on a variety of physical, emotional, social, and financial dimensions (Eddy et al., 2013; Eddy & Holborn, 2011; Richter et al., 2013). Thus, the term ‘absent father’ encompasses a variety of conditions, including having a non-resident father who is 'absent' from home for four or more days per week due to separation, divorce, or fathers living away from their children for extended periods of time (Richter & Morrell, 2018). Contact between fathers and children may relate *variously* to ‘absence’ due to death, fathers who have never lived with their children, and fathers who are non-residential due to economic constraints or family disputes, such as the traditional African cultural demands of *lobola* (bride wealth payment to a woman’s family for marriage) and *intlawulo* (fines imposed by a woman’s family on a biological father when a child is born out of customary marriage) (Eddy et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2013). In contrast, father ‘absence’ can

also be associated with a father being physically ‘present’ but emotionally unavailable and/or problematic in a range of ways to the household, his woman-partner and/or to the children; or physically 'absent' yet emotionally supportive (Eddy et al., 2013). Father's 'absence' as a result of family-breakdown can occur due to children who are unaware of their biological father’s identity or whereabouts, or who have been estranged from their biological fathers due to particular or repeated events or experiences during their young lives (Padi, Nduna, Khunou, &Kholopane, 2014). Mothers’ or maternal kin’s nondisclosure of the father's identity or whereabouts can occur for a variety of reasons, including the following: the child is born outside of formal or customary marriage; the father tragically died; the father's whereabouts are unknown due to labour migrancy and losing communication contact with him; the relationship between the mother and father of the child ended, and this relationship was seen as dysfunctional, emotionally or sexually abusive, or violent; or family secrets and tensions exist in hostilities by maternal kin towards the father (Padi et., 2014). These circumstances are reported to be difficult topics for mothers to talk to/with children about in age-appropriate ways in South Africa – involving their own sexual experiences, relationship difficulties and betrayals, poor choices and mistakes – when mothers are trying to establish authoritative positions and firm boundaries in relation to their children in their households (Wilbraham, 2008).

2.3 Reasons for ‘absent’ fathers

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, ‘father absence’ is neither a new phenomenon historically, nor one that is limited to South Africa (or Africa) specifically, e.g., reasons and effects on children in the United States (Mather (2010), or reasons and effects on children in New Zealand (Torrie, 2011). There has been a great deal of research on the reasons for father ‘absence’ in South African contexts (e.g. Eddy et al., 2013; Hunter, 2010; Padi et al., 2014; Richter et al., 2013), and these reasons are useful to mention, because these may not necessarily be due to alienation, rejection, or irresponsibility of individual men/fathers (Eddy et al., 2013). Thus, understanding experiences of father ‘absence’ is a profoundly contextual experience (Eddy et al., 2013), where different settings, and macro-systems, would produce locally nuanced dynamics in households as micro-systems. In other words, it is strongly impacted by socio-economic status and

racial categorizations in where families live and households are set up (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings et al., 2010).

Therefore, for African or black families in South Africa, father ‘absence’ is a legacy of colonialism and apartheid, with living and working conditions based on family separation as men as 'breadwinners' sought employment far away from so-called “Bantustan homelands”, and families were not permitted to live with them in some urban townships or migrant labour hostels due to Pass Laws (Eddy et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2013). When women /mothers and children eventually joined fathers in townships, they faced living in impoverished crowded informal settlements, with fathers frequently 'absent' due to involvement in shift-work or manual labour on distant sites; and often the mother having to take on full-time employment to meet the household’s daily needs (Hunter, 2010). Male unemployment, illness (such as HIV/Aids, prior to 2005), early death by violence or accident (which appears to be more prevalent in adult men than women), and conflictual or abusive interpersonal relationships, all influence fathers' 'presence' and involvement in their children's upbringing (Desmond & Desmond, 2006; Eddy et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2013).

Bray et al.’s (2010) ethnographic study, known as The Valley Project, examines this by examining household forms and functions in three socio-economically (and racially divided) communities in Cape Town. In Fishhoek, a predominantly white, middle-class suburb, households were mostly ‘nuclear-patterned’ – that is, either traditionally biologically nuclear (mom, dad and their offspring), or ‘blended’ in that if a mother divorced the children’s biological father, she likely remarried another man at some stage with children from a previous partnership, and they lived together with her children, and intermittently, his children too (Bray et al., 2010). Father ‘absence’ statistics were significantly less in this suburb than in Oceanview or Masiphumelele, ‘coloured’ or ‘black’ lower socio-economic status households/communities respectively (Masiphumelele being an informal settlement), with largely ‘extended’ family arrangements (Bray et al., 2010). These extended households consisted of multi-generational or maternal kinship systems, with intermittent transitional presence of men/fathers as employment or unemployment permitted, or without biological fathers entirely. Bray et al. (2010), and Bray

and Brandt (2007), deliberately explore resilience frameworks in not pathologizing single-mother or extended households that did not include biological fathers; and acknowledged the agency of children and young adults in adapting to various supportive networks around them, in order to resist 'damage' perspectives.

This raises the critical question of *which* children are portrayed as 'victims' of father 'absence' – i.e. somehow damaged and distressed by the experience of growing up without a biological father in their household - in empirical research literature and analyses or media representations; and *why these* portrayals. Due to apartheid-legacies of inequities in house provision, employment, education and health services provision to support children's healthy development, 'public health research' is a dominant contextual perspective adopted in South Africa (Macleod, 2009). This South African public health research focuses specifically on risk-prevention – responsive to several identified 'epidemics' or contextualized social or psychological problems - to ward off probable harm later on, and is intervention- and advocacy-oriented to improve conditions and circumstances to enable children's developmental thriving and resilience (Macleod, 2009).

Much empirical research literature on father 'absence' in South Africa is conducted within this broad approach – viz. in a problem-based way, it concentrates on lower socioeconomic status families where biological father 'absence' has been identified as impacting on children (e.g. Eddy et al., 2013; Richter, & Morrell, 2018), or on so-called 'toxic masculinities' where men appear to be sexually, parentally and financially irresponsible (e.g. Chauke, & Khunou, 2014). There are a number of intervention projects in South Africa that have targeted men/fathers, either individually or within their relationships with women and children, to facilitate and promote more gender-flexible, egalitarian and caregiving roles (e.g.Ratele, 2013; Ratele& Hellman, 2016; Morrell & Richter, 2004). Of interest here is that this is done both to reduce gender-based violence by men/fathers towards women and children (Ratele& Hellman, 2016), and because children *living with 'present' fathers* are reported to have better developmental outcomes than those growing up *'without fathers'* (e.g. Richter et al., 2010) – this is explored in the sections that follow.

Analyses of media representations of 'absent' fathers reflect some of the above critical themes, in problematization of the harmful effects (on children) of father 'absence' (e.g. Prinsloo, 2006), or criticising the implicit or explicit 'idealizing' of father 'presence' inherent in such heteronormative representations of nuclear parenting (e.g. Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Morison & Macleod, 2015). Prinsloo (2006) finds media representations of fathers across various print-media sources in South Africa polarized between extreme cases of 'rogue fathers' ('absent', 'non-maintenance-paying', 'bad' fathers) and 'ideal-daddies' ('present', 'committed', 'good' fathers), which reinforces the binary between these poles. Thus, we seldom see represented in the public domain fathers who are mostly getting things right, in between these two extremes, despite their own experiences of fatherlessness, when they were growing up (Ratele& Hellman, 2016; Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012). Fathers who appear to have better resources and opportunities for quality time with growing children are those in more middle-classed household arrangements and communities (Bray et al. 2010), or are represented in media products targeting middle-classed black audiences (e.g. Destiny Man magazine: Leopeng, & Langa, 2017; or True Love magazine: Mabada, 2013). These issues are returned to in Chapter 3.

2. 4 Psychological effects of 'absent' fathers

There is growing interest in the topic of the effects and impacts of father 'absence' on developing children and young adults (e.g. Eddy et al., 2013; Makofane, 2015; Ritcher, & Morrell, 2018; Quinlan, 2003); and a substantial body of South African 'psychology-disciplinary' literature has been compiled on the subject (e.g. Davies & Eagle, 2015; Lesch, & Scheffler, 2016; Makofane, 2015; Mdletshe, 2016; Molongoana, 2015). This 'psychology-disciplinary' literature seems to be divided into several key strands or themes, linked to divergent methodological approaches, viz. (a) assessment related research with school-aged children, focusing on their current psychological functioning within 'fatherless' families in a shorter-term perspective; and (b) qualitative, self-report and reflective explorations of longer-term effects on late-adolescents and young adults, young men and women, of having grown up without a biological father. These themes are reviewed below.

Within these themes are further degrees of difference and specialization which introduce choices made in which literature is relevant and is reviewed for this study. Firstly, from a masculinity study perspective, many of the studies have focused exclusively on boys and men (e.g. Eddy et al., 2013; Langa, 2010), while others have examined fathers' experiences (e.g. Ratele, et al., 2012; Richter & Morrell, 2018). There is a growing interest in investigating *girls' and young women's* experiences of 'absent' fathers as a result of more feminist studies (e.g. Lesch, & Scheffer, 2016; Zulu, 2018; Zulu, & Munro, 2017); this study follows this line of inquiry. This section will first discuss the short-term effects on child functioning, particularly on girls; and then the longer-term effects on young women who have directly experienced father 'absence' – in order to contribute to the body of knowledge about women's experiences. Secondly, one of the key documented impacts on 'fatherless' children living in poorly resourced households and communities is financial deprivation and negative effects on their quality of life and opportunities due to economic stressors (Eddy et al., 2013; Magqamfana, &Bazana, 2020; Mdletshe, 2018; Richter, 2006). Some comments on femininized poverty in South African contexts, and how this is entangled with psychological effects, especially for girls and young women, are offered in the review below.

2.4.1 Shorter-term effects on child functioning and developmental outcomes

Children who live without their fathers are statistically reported to be more likely to struggle academically (Eddy et al., 2013; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Richter & Morrell, 2018). For example, Mboya and Nesengani's (1999) research examined the educational outcomes of children with and without fathers in South Africa's migrant labour population. The *HSRC Scholastic Achievement Test* was administered to 276 South African high school pupils and covered Biology, English (2nd language), and Mathematics. Students who had their fathers 'present' in their households scored significantly higher than those who did not. The statistics indicate that a father's 'absence' due to work has a detrimental effect on his children's scholastic progress. Additionally, Eddy et al. (2013) discovered that international research and some South African studies indicate that children who have their fathers 'present' at home perform better in school. However, critical and public health researchers have warned us against research studies/designs that simplistically compare children's scholastic or cognitive assessments from 'father-present' versus 'father-

absent' households without carefully matching the samples for socio-economic status (e.g. Bray et al., 2010; Eddy et al., 2013; Richter, 2006; Richter & Morrell, 2018). Without careful matching, these comparative assessments might thus be measuring the limitations of, for example, lower household income, femininized poverty in caring for children on a shoestring budget, fewer educational resources, less time for parental monitoring or encouraging of homework, unstable electricity supply, food insecurity etc. in African or black households where 'absent' fathers are more prevalent within extended, and/or single-mother, households (Bray et al., 2010; Ratele & Nduna, 2018).

Furthermore, children who live without their fathers, are, on average, more likely to experience emotional and behaviour problems at school and in after-school leisure activities (Holborn, & Eddy, 2011; Eddy et al., 2013). For example, in a study on 'absent' fathers in Alexandra, Doornkop, Thembisa, and Devland townships in Gauteng (Eddy et al, 2013), fathers discussed the effects of father 'absence' on their children, reporting that children without fathers were stigmatised, and emotionally and physically bullied at school. As a result, they are more likely to leave school before they matriculated, affecting their chances of studying further at tertiary level, or finding employment (Eddy et al., 2013). Thus, several researchers comment on the powerful effects that fathers' financial support has on children's development, educational opportunities and resources, health/nutrition, and safety (Eddy, & Holborn, 2011; Eddy et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2010). Eddy et al. (2013) found that 'absent' fathers' lack of financial involvement in their children's lives was associated with a decrease in their children's standard of living, and an increased risk of their children's involvement in crime (especially boys, see more below). In cases where fathers pay maintenance towards a child's (or children's) expenses, 'absent' fathers were suspicious that mothers used the money for purposes other than caring for and providing for the child (Eddy et al., 2013). This might cause longstanding discord and conflict between the 'absent' father and the mother of the child, effecting the amount of custodial contact that was permitted between a father and his child/ren.

In interpreting the findings of various studies on the differently gendered effects of an 'absent' father on girl- and boy-children, the strong influence of a psychoanalytic theoretical framework is

evident in two international studies on the effects of father ‘absence’ on adolescents. The assumptions of such a framework are returned to in a later section in this chapter. According to

Reneflot and Mamelund (2015), father 'absence' has a psychological effect on both girls and boys, but the repercussions are different. For example, boys lack a same-sex role model in the form of a strong patriarchal father-figure and are thus, more prone to engage in 'delinquent', ‘impulsive’ or ‘risk-taking’ behaviour as a result of there being no disciplinary consequences for breaking the rules or boundary-testing (Reneflot&Mamelund, 2015; Richter, 2006). On the other hand, Terwogt, Terwogt-Reijnders and Van Hekken (2002) argue that girls who have grown up without fathers typically manifest ‘problems’ later on, during late adolescence and adulthood, because they are more likely to have been exposed to the same gender model as them (their mothers) and can thus seek advice and emotional support from their mothers. However, a father-daughter relationship is associated with a male/ masculinity role model who serves as the first ‘love object’ for girls and teaches them how to have romantic attachments with men (Terwogt et al., 2002). This sets the psychoanalytic scene for the heteronormative prediction that growing up with an ‘absent’ father is associated with difficulties in forming trusting intimate relationships with men, later on, for girls and women (cf. Lesch & Scheffler, 2016). It is also unclear how this supportive mother-daughter communication about sexuality and relationships problems might work in lower-income South African settings where intergenerational silences and secrets have been widely reported in communications about sex and relationships between mothers and their adolescent daughters (Lesch & Kruger, 2005; Wilbraham, 2009).

2.4.2 Longer-term psychological effects on young adult women

One of the most extensively explored aspects of the psychological effects of father ‘absence' on young women is the daughter's sexuality and later romantic relationships with men (Belsky, Steinberg & Draper, 1991; Ellis, et al., 2003; Quinlan, 2003). There is an interest in how the ‘paternal function’ works (consciously and unconsciously) in relationships between fathers and sons/daughters, in the formation of identities, sexualities and intimacy (Davies & Eagle, 2015) – this was mentioned in the preceding section and will be covered in greater detail below, relating to the psychoanalytical theoretical framework. Fathers are considered to have a significant role in the

sexual development of their daughters; and thus, in comparison to women living in nuclear family households, father ‘absence' has been associated with an earlier commencement of menstruation, early sexual intercourse, and early unplanned pregnancies in adolescent girls (Quinlan, 2003). Fathers also contribute to their daughters' ability to develop and maintain intimate connections with men, negotiating appropriate boundaries and culturally gendered (heteronormative) practices, with solid father-daughter and father-mother relationships as a ‘model’ for how healthy intimate romantic relationships should work (Ellis, et al., 2003; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015; Quinlan, 2003). There also appears to be an association between 'absent' fathers and low self-esteem in adolescent daughters; hence, researchers assert that it is the father's emotional responsiveness towards and encouragement and reassurance of girl-children that fosters their self-esteem and self-worth, particularly related to their school achievements, their appearance, and their participation in femininized activities and chores in households (Ellis et al., 2003; Molongoana; 2015; Quinlan 2003). Additionally, Makofane (2015) believes that a mother's influence on a daughter's romantic relationship choices is significant. His research found that a mother's perception of men, as well as daughters' increased exposure to their mother's dating and/or sexual behaviours (*before*, *during* or *after* a biological father became ‘absent’), influenced daughters' perceptions and choices about men as partners (Mafokane, 2015).

Overall, the dominant research literature on the effects on father' ‘absence' demonstrates that ‘having’ an 'absent' biological father – presumed to be permanently and effectively ‘absent’ from a child’s life for many years - has a detrimental influence on a variety of child development outcomes, including cognitive, psychosocial, emotional development, and behaviour-regulation (e.g. Boothroyd, & Perrett, 2008; Eddy et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2003; Holborn, & Eddy, 2011;Quinlan, 2003). Additionally, research suggests that father ‘absence’ negatively affects the psychosocial development of young women, in the short- and longer-term development of healthy identities and relationships with boyfriends/men partners (e.g. Boothroyd, & Perrett, 2008; Ellis et al., 2003; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015; Quinlan, 2003).

2.5 Theoretical frameworks that 'explain' the effects of father 'absence'

Three dominant theoretical perspectives were identified during the review of father 'absence' literature. These particularly tried to explain the significance (or not) of 'paternal function' (Davies & Eagle, 2015) in developing children's understandings of themselves and others. The literature review that follows explores father-daughter relationships – how they work in ideal terms, and thus how father 'absence' impacts on daughters. This particularly tries to show how different theoretical frameworks *shape* knowledge and interpretation regarding the psychological, social and political effects of father 'absence' for girls and women. After the theoretical frameworks are outlined, three empirical research studies using these approaches will be examined.

2.5.1 Psychoanalytical perspectives on fathers' 'presence' and 'absence'

Psychodynamic perspectives, based on and elaborated from traditional psychoanalytic theory formulated by Sigmund Freud and others towards the end of the 19th century, quickly took hold in clinical, academic and literary circles; and proliferated into complex multiple schools with distinctive ideas and methods (Frosh, 2012). What this historical development brought was an understanding of the self (and psychological life) that was, for example, layered below the surface of conscious experience and motivation; and that early childhood experience was influential for the subsequent development of a self or 'personality' (Watts & Hook, 2009). This brief section on psychoanalytical theories cannot do justice to the complexity and difference of the different strands of thought. Guided by familiarity with the literature on father 'absence', particular psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives seem to arise more frequently than others. Thus, some basic original Freudian notions related to father-daughter psychic processes will be explored, before turning to attachment and mentalization perspectives (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist & Target, 2002).

Among the core principles of the traditional Freudian psychoanalytic perspective is that mental life begins in the unconscious and that this unconscious life influences and shapes human experiences (Sadock, & Sadock, 2000; Lemma, 2003). According to Freud (n.d., as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2000), while the unconscious is strongly connected to innate urges, its content is limited to desires for fulfilment on the part of the individual experiencing them - desires that are

the driving force behind the development of compulsive behaviours, fantasies and dreams, and also 'neurotic' symptoms that appear defensively to protect the ego as the consciousness-manager (e.g. anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem). Thus, Lemma (2003) asserts that the appearance of 'neurotic' symptoms might push individuals to seek assistance with experienced distress, especially when confronted with an internal conflict between their desires (processes of the id) and constraints (processes of the superego) - typically when these are "Oedipal" in nature, viz. desires related to mother- and father-figures.

From a traditional Freudian perspective, then, ideally, a child is inserted into a heteronormative, nuclear family – a 'primal scene' involving/requiring a biological mother and father and different relational identifications with each of them (Watts & Hook, 2009). The girl-child begins by erotically desiring her mother; and then has to shift towards identification with her mother as similarly gendered/feminine (she internalises this femininity), and at around four or five years of age, transfers her libidinal interest towards her differently gendered father, whom she will share vicariously with her mother (Watts & Hook, 2009). Effectively, her father becomes her first "love object" – but she cannot "have" him, his masculinity, or his penis, due to societal incest-taboo (enacted through the super-ego's Electra Complex), and so these desires (and her 'penis-envy') are safely transferred to future sexual relationships with boys/men (Jones, 2007). Freud argued that 'penis envy' remained a strong unconscious motivational force throughout the lives of women; and interpreted women's desires to have a (boy) baby in these terms (Watts & Hook, 2009).

Therefore, intermittent, frequent or permanent father 'absence' would be experienced by girl-children as a rejection and betrayal of her mother's and her own femininity, which would impact on her psychosexual development, identity, confidence and self-esteem, and her adaptive functioning as a "woman" who is worthy of getting, holding and enjoying men's attention and love (Jones, 2007; Larcher, 2007). Thus, real experience of/with a resident father-figure sets up influential unconscious psychic fantasies or imaginaries of men/fathers – either in fiercely idealised ways (always 'secure', 'constant', 'loving'), or as "untrustworthy" (sometimes

'neglectful', 'cruel', 'manipulative') – and these "fathers in the mind" tend to unconsciously influence women's later partner choice (Lindegger, 2006).

Bowlby (n.d., as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2000) made further significant psychoanalytic contributions to understanding the value of children's early attachments to caregivers and theorised how these early 'relationship-patterns' remained fairly stable throughout the lifespan. Bowlby (n.d., as cited in Sadock & Sadock, 2000) asserted that babies are born with an instinctive desire to connect, rely on and love that grows over time and familiarity with a caregiver; initially with a mother as the primary caregiver, and then with a hierarchy of proximal family members (father, siblings) and others as a child's sociality and attachment network increased. Bowlby initially saw the father's role within an attachment system as emotionally and financially supportive of the mother, primarily, rather than as significant for a baby/infant (Senior, 2009). Within this attachment framework, Ainsworth developed the concept of attachment security, referring to how an infant was able to trust a familiar caregiver to be a 'secure base' for them – encouraging their exploration of the environment, but always reliably available to provide comfort for distress or overwhelm – and also, how 'insecure' attachment styles (e.g. clingy versus avoidant) worked in the short-term during childhood, and in later relationship patterns (Senior, 2009). Fonagy et al. (2002) extended this attachment framework into an Object Relations (psychoanalytic) approach, speaking to the internal object connections that entail the internalisation of interpersonal relationships - meaning that children absorb an experience of self in connection to another, i.e. a mother or a father (Sadock, & Sadock, 2000).

Two crucial processes are evident here, which differ from Freudian psychic 'fantasy' around father-daughter relations. First is that the child's *direct experiences* of "relationship" (with caregivers, initially) mould their internal structures in terms of an interpretive function of what they can expect from intimate, caring relationships; and second, the object relations include identification - a process by which the child's 'self' internalises significant external caregiving figures serving as models (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000; Lemma, 2003). However, Fonagy (2002) explains that children internalise the *learning* about relationships through the developing capacity

for perceiving and understanding their own mental states and those of others, through the mentalization process with them by their parents and caregivers. This ‘mentalization’ entails

mirroring and talking through emotions, motives and intentions, as they crop up (Fonagy et al., 2002); and significantly, this would include talking about and understanding – *with* a child – a father’s ‘absence’. Following from the above two psychoanalytic perspectives, a traditional Freudian psychoanalytic approach would characterise the 'absence' of fathers in girl-children's lives as "detrimental" for their development in the shorter- and longer-term (Larcher, 2007; Jones, 2007). An Object Relations approach would assert that those faced with the permanent loss or temporary/intermittent separations from attachment-figures are more prone to experience psychological distress (e.g. depression, less resilience to everyday difficulties, insecurity); but that negative psychological impacts of such losses/separations would be dependent on mentalization competence of those around the child, e.g. explaining intentions, acknowledging and regulating emotions, asking for help, etc. (Fonagy et al., 2002). This perspective sees processing loss and psychological repair as possible through various psychotherapeutic modalities.

These psychological effects on particularly girls and women of father ‘absence’ and/or ‘poor’ or ‘insecure’ relationships with their biological fathers, and how these ‘attachment issues’ play out in later relationships with men, are commonly referred to as 'Daddy Issues' within popular media. This popular concept is a broadly and vaguely defined category of distressing experiences – not defined as a formal DSM-5 category/diagnosis – including popular psychoanalytic interpretations of, for example, women seeking sexual relationships with older men (as replacement father-figures), women not trusting men and being insecure and clingy in heterosexual relationships (as in expecting abandonment, as their father did), or women’s ‘promiscuous’ sexual practices (as a rebellious compulsive form of ‘penis envy’, proving their self-worth through sexually attracting multiple men) (Vinney, 2021). Such popular terminology is frequently flippantly used in a pejorative way towards women’s sexualities and sexual behaviour, which is not used in the same way to interpret men’s sexual behaviours, e.g. men’s commitment issues (Vinney, 2021). In more formal psychological and clinical terminology, 'Daddy Issues' might best be described as a form of ‘abandonment trauma’, resulting from early childhood experiences of father-loss or fatherlessness,

where early unresolved or insufficiently mentalized traumas are re-triggered at various periods of young adult women's lives, particularly in coping with intimate sexual relationships (Lemma, 2003). While other theoretical frameworks (such as feminist – see below) might see 'father absence' as a patriarchal socially constructed concept, a psychoanalytic theoretical (and therapeutic) framework recognises the painful and threatening emotions, distress, depression and confusion that such traumatic relationship loss/difficulties with their biological fathers might cause children, young adults and adults in the short- and longer-term (Molongoana, 2015). A process of psychotherapy (in whatever modality/form) is recommended to process this distress to build healthy coping skills.

2.5.2 Traditional African cultural perspectives on fathers and the effects of father 'absence'

Culture is a complex phenomenon that serves as the principal route for communicating and transferring historically intersubjective concepts, experiences, shared meaning, and behaviours within human relationships (Lebrón, 2013). Thus, these actions are accepted as the 'natural' and advantageous way of things within the societal context in which they are developed (Lesejane, 2006; Mkhize, 2006). Importantly, there is not one overarching traditional African "culture" (singular, one set of similar cultural values and practices) that is shared across different communities or countries (Macleod, 2009). For this reason, we must be sensitive to the negative effects of stereotyping and 'exoticising' African cultures, or assuming all African/black people follow such cultural values and practices with similar amounts of belief (Macleod, 2009).

Traditional African cultural thought has had a significant impact on understanding 'fatherhood' in various African contexts (Lesejane, 2006; Makofane, 2015; Mkhize, 2006). Biologically fathering a child (or children) is taken as an important rite of passage into adult manhood and masculinity in traditional African cultural ontology; as is the next developmental phase of patriarchal manhood in establishing a secure homestead for one's customary 'wife' and mother of one's children, and the children (Nsamenang, 2006). The history of colonial and apartheid oppression in South Africa has produced poverty and unemployment for black men, such that they are prevented from moving towards the second developmental phase for mature-manhood, settled householder-status and provision for a 'family' (Hunter, 2010).

Hunter (2010) takes a feminist perspective in understanding biological father ‘absence’ from many extended, multigenerational maternal kin-based and/or single-mother headed households in informal settlements around Durban in KwaZulu-Natal as evidence of women’s empowerment, resilience and resistance towards patriarchal cultural norms. However, biological fatherhood, and the presence of a biological father as ‘head-of-the-household’, establishes cultural status that benefits the father’s manhood/masculinity, and benefits the woman/mother and children, e.g. his protection in the form of his community-standing, financial contributions as a breadwinner, and in providing a sense of ‘belonging’ for children through his surname on formal birth certificates (Makofane, 2015).

However, the increasing literature on ‘African fatherhood’ rejects the idea that only *biological*-father ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ influences children's development since children's upbringing in African contexts is seen as a shared responsibility of the extended family members and kin, and community networks of neighbours and friends, instead of exclusively the biological parents' responsibility (Makofane, 2015; Mkhize, 2006; Morrell, 2006). Thus, the idea of 'collective fatherhood' contests the claim that biological fathers are solely accountable for child development and advancement; and that father ‘absence’ means that children will suffer (Mkhize, 2006). To some extent, Mkhize (2006) sees the psychological damages following biological father ‘absence’ as strongly influenced by Western-based psychoanalytic theory, and a misunderstanding of the term ‘absence’ as a vacuum or void.

Mkhize (2006) explains that historically, biological fathers have traditionally held the ‘most control’ over the family within established households in African societies; and in most cases, if the father is ‘absent’ (deceased), his oldest son or his oldest brother would assume the role of the family-head, provider, moral authority and disciplinarian, to ensure cohesion. Thus, a man can be assigned the role of a father in African cultures and does not need biological offspring to be considered a 'social father' (Lesejane, 2006). However, Nduna and Sikweyiya (2015) have shown that children who grow up without their biological fathers experience anger, frustration, grief, and uncertainty regardless of whether they have a 'social father' or stepfather. Mkhize (2006) and Lesejane (2006) have argued that African cultural conceptions and practices of fatherhood have

established a patriarchal structure, mediated by fathers' control, social, moral, and financial responsibilities; when these 'responsibilities' are removed by ‘absence’ or unemployment, there is stigma for fathers, households, and children who bear the brunt of ‘fatherlessness’ stigma.

Thus, this speaks again to the binary in both academic and popular literature between a 'good' father, who is 'present' and fulfils his cultural and gendered obligations; and a 'bad' father, who is 'absent' and either does not fulfil expected responsibilities or does so 'badly'. In this section, a traditional African cultural approach permits for the ‘bad biological father’ to be sanctioned by exclusion from the child's upbringing (Eddy et al., 2013; Lesejane, 2006; Ratele et al., 2012).

2.5.3 Feminist theoretical perspectives on fathers and effects of father ‘absence’

Similarly, to theoretical frameworks (psychoanalytic and traditional African cultural) reviewed above, the concept of fatherhood and of ‘patriarchy’ is very influential in feminist thought – but here in a *critical* way (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016). Feminist theories are complex and multiple historically, and contextually, and by no means agreed on by all feminists (Macleod, 2009). Taken in the broadest way, feminist perspectives try to show that it is essential to recognise fathers' patriarchy-privileged gendered status and to consider patriarchy as an oppressive construct to the family's welfare and girls’ socialisation and development (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016). This position rejects narrow biological and nuclear family understandings of fatherhood/fathering; and it explores contexts and different caregiving arrangements (including social fathers) that strongly mediate against 'psychological damage' caused by ‘absent’ fathers (e.g. Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Morison & Macleod, 2015; Perlesz, 2005). Feminist theoretical perspectives – and methodologies - adopt a critical approach and therefore, defend women's right to self-determination and autonomy in mothering; place greater focus on the quality-of-care relationships and the experiences of children; and oppose placing blame on mothers for father ‘absence’ and its effects (Doucet, & Lee, 2014; Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Morison, & Macleod, 2015; Perlesz, 2005).

In South African contexts, feminist theorists highlight that the father-daughter relationship is often conditionally based on the daughter’s obedience to the authoritarian father to avoid conflict and punishment, and this increases young women’s vulnerability as they learn to be controlled by men

and are unable to refuse sexual advances (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016). Thus, Green (1976, as cited in Lesch & Scheffler, 2016) highlights that "the decline of fathers may well be the best thing that has ever happened to girls" (p.209), in that it encourages their independence and resilience.

2.5.3.1 Definitions of resilience

Resilience is complex and contentious, and there are numerous fragmented approaches that have been developed using various psychosocial theories, alongside many sensationalised popular media usages (Liu, Reed & Girard, 2017). These fragmented psychosocial approaches include, according to Alvord and Grados (2005), for example, that resilience (a) is an inherent trait within some individuals and not others; (b) develops like a muscle (problem-solving skill) as a result of living through adversity; (c) develops through strong relationships to shield/buffer the effects of future trauma; and (d) is intrinsically linked to supportive networks and community resources. Thus, linked to (c) above, and the earlier section on psychoanalytic/mentalization based Object Relations theory, Stein, Fonagy, Ferguson and Wiseman (2000) argue that psychological resilience emphasises the capacity to *mentalise* difficult experiences. This is learnt in how early caregivers talk about difficulties and feelings, help children regulate and understand emotions, and focus constructively on problem-solving (Stein et al., 2000). Thus, when confronted with traumatic experiences or any other obstacle later in life, attachment security and mentalization in early caregiving relationships produce a psychological 'reflexive functioning' capacity which acts as a protective factor to prevent the predisposition of a disorder (e.g. anxiety, depression), and the capacity to ask for help, and receive support and comfort for difficult feelings or experiences (Stein et al., 2000). This approach is emphasized here, because it assumes that psychotherapeutic support – at any stage of life – can assist with processing emotional distress and facilitating repair.

There are various integrative models of psychological resilience that have tried to address the fragmentation of different approaches which leave some aspects out. This study will focus on Liu et al.'s (2017) Multi-System Model of Resilience (MSMR), that draws core traits, internal, and external systems together. The MSMR model suggested by Liu et al. (2017) is composed of (1) intra-individual components as *core traits*, such as genetic and biological factors that might influence people's responses to stressful and traumatic events over the course of their lives. There

are two additional levels of resilience: (2) *internal (or interpersonal) factors*, which are characteristics that are learned, acquired, and formed through time as a result of interpersonal interactions; and (3) *external (or socio-ecological) factors*, which provide social networks and resources to produce protective outcomes. These include but are not restricted to socioeconomic status, political frameworks, geographic location, and accessibility to services (Liu et al., 2017). This MSMR model is especially useful in applying a feminist theoretical understanding to how 'supportive factors' in and around children growing up without biological fathers might mediate against easy assumptions that children are 'damaged' by these experiences.

2.6. Brief reviews of empirical studies within each of the theoretical frameworks

Numerous studies have examined father 'absence' and its psychological effects from various theoretical perspectives (e.g. Belsky et al., 1991; Boothroyd and Perrett, 2008; Ellis, et al., 2003; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015; Quinlan; 2003; Zulu, 2018). This review will now examine four studies and will focus on the dominant theoretical perspective in each. As mentioned previously, this is done to show how the theoretical framework shapes the understandings of the effects of father 'absence' on children and young adults; and also, shapes what interventions might be required to remedy distress and/or social problems.

2.6.1 A Psychoanalytical Study

Molongoana (2015) did a thematic analysis study with seven young women (participants included four Africans, two Indians, and one White) from the University of Witwatersrand, aged 19-23 years, who had grown up as children without their biological fathers. The various circumstances of their different experiences of father 'absence' were briefly mentioned. The study predominantly took a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective, largely "Freudian", with the notions of 'daddy issues' that stood out as participants reflected on these ideas. These young women displayed 'abandonment trauma' (cf. 'daddy issues'), displaying insecure attachment styles – mostly ambivalent styles due to inconsistent and unreliable 'presence' of their fathers, and a childhood experience of not being good enough to hold a father's attention or love. This resulted in a "longing" for an idealized father figure in partner choices, frequent conflict with partners based on

their (the young women's) 'insecurity' and 'jealousy', and the likelihood to view abusive or emotionally manipulative relationships as 'normal' and 'satisfying' (Molongoana, 2015). Molongoana (2015) interpreted that the symptoms described by participants were defensively 'neurotic' in nature (i.e., low self-worth, self-esteem), and were compulsively triggered/retriggered within their romantic relationships.

Molongoana (2015) provides a psychoanalytic explanation for this 'trauma' by stating that when the father is 'absent,' the child's internal psychic structure (unconscious) may exhibit distortions such as an idealized/fantasized or devalued/destructive image of the father, resulting in a relationship 'void' with him, and unaddressed worries and contradictory feelings, as well as a persistent need for reassurance from others, particularly men (Molongoana, 2015). As a "research" study, this study did not include considerations of how such experiences and emotions might be worked through, psychotherapeutically. We are thus left with the sense that father 'absence' is "bad" (or "damaging" for girls), and that men should stop behaving like this towards their children as the only possible long-term solution for young women's distress.

2.6.2 A Traditional African Cultural Study

Makofane (2015) interviewed African women, aged 24-41 years, in his thematic content analysis study of young women who had experienced father 'absence'. The study took a primarily traditional African cultural approach, carefully exploring the African cultural impacts - namely social, cultural, and economic implications - of father 'absence'. Makofane (2015) found that, in his participants' understandings, fatherhood was about the 'status' of having a biological father as head of a family or household, and the community respect and standing that this holds for him as a man, householder and provider, for his wife/partner and mother of his children; and for his children who formally take his name. Thus, children know where they belong in a secure home, with a breadwinner and head, within a settled community-network.

On the other hand, Makofane (2015) discusses how some African societies believe that if children are not introduced to their biological father's family and kin 'properly', they are more likely to experience misfortune throughout their lives. He also reported that all of his women participants

had 'social fathers' during their childhood, notably their maternal uncles and grandfathers; and thus, his findings show that the participants' relationships with their 'social' fathers benefited their development of a favourable attitude towards men (Makofane, 2015). Curiously similar to psychoanalytical thinking, Makofane (2015) discusses a cultural belief among African societies that when girl-children grow up with 'absent' biological fathers in their households, they are incapable later on, as young adult women, of having satisfactory long-term relationships with men. As a result, several African parents forbid their sons from formally marrying women from these fatherless households. Parents' fear was based on the premise that such ‘fatherless’ women may have lacked role models to see and learn how a man/husband and woman/wife should converse and interact in traditional culturally and gender appropriate ways (Makofane, 2015). Such ‘fatherless’ women might cause trouble for men, by not following cultural or gender scripts.

2.6.3 Feminist Studies

Zulu and Munro (2017) conducted a qualitative conversation analysis of interviews with two university-aged (23 and 25 years), African women who had grown up with 'absent' fathers, followed by a thematic analysis study with five university-aged (19-24 years), African women who had grown up with an 'absent' father (Zulu, 2018). The study was predominantly feminist in nature, with the goal of advocating for positive, resilient depictions of black women in scholarly literature of father' absence', which frequently portrays black women as 'distressed' by and as 'victims' of irresponsible biological fathers (Zulu, & Munro, 2017; Zulu, 2018).

These young women participants displayed psychological resilience, as interpreted by Liu et al.’s (2017) MSMR. Thus, women’s resilience was influenced by the following elements, which served as protective factors in the mediation of psychological distress. For example: *core traits* (intra-individual factors) demonstrated their independence, empowerment, problem-solving ability, autonomy, and sense of identity (Zulu, & Munro, 2017; Zulu, 2018). *Internal resilience* (interpersonal factors) validated and supported maternal home environments, particularly in mothers who were described as "pillars of strength" and taught their daughters adaptive coping strategies. *External resilience* (socio-ecological factors), while some participants indicated concern about the financial obstacles encountered by single-mother households, the majority rejected the

'victim' label associated with father-'absent' children and preferred to identify as strong and powerful rather than disadvantaged (Zulu, & Munro, 2017; Zulu, 2018). These findings confer with Mdletshe (2016), whose feminist study also employed a resilience framework to understand coping strategies and protective factors in young women's autonomy and relationships.

2.7 Conclusion

Father 'absence' is prevalent in South Africa, particularly among low-income black households, as a result of the country's historical and socioeconomic context (Eddy et al., 2013; Eddy & Holborn, 2011; Rabe, 2018). Given this study's primary focus on young women, psychoanalytic and traditional African cultural perspectives have established the critical nature of biological father's or social fathers' 'presence' for healthy psychological development and functioning, both as a 'woman' (biologically) and as 'feminine' (gendered) (Ellis et al., 2003; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana2015; Quinlan, 2003). While the psychological consequences of father 'absence' might be significant and painful, traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theory and traditional African cultural approaches dominantly portray children and young women who have experienced biological father 'absence' as 'victims' of either psychic/unconscious structures or sociocultural stigma, respectively (Ellis et al., 2003; Molongoana 2015; Makofane, 2015; Quinlan, 2003). However, Object Relations (mentalization-based) and feminist approach demonstrates 'resilience' and hope for healing using internal and external resources, and are open to considering psychotherapeutic processes of repair (Fonagy, et al., 2002; Zulu, & Munro, 2017; Zulu, 2018).

CHAPTER THREE - LITERATURE REVIEW OF ABSENT FATHERS AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

3.1 Introduction

While the public view, and some more realistic or ‘naïve’ media studies perspectives, of newspapers, magazines and television news sees these media as providing an ‘objective’ or sometimes ‘balanced’ portrayal of reality, reflecting many sides or perspectives - this is not always the case (Holborn, Burrage, & Langley, 2009). The control over the selection and presentation of materials in media (e.g. words, titles, pictures, where it might be placed in a media-product) is 'ideological' in nature (Albertazzi, & Cobley, 2013; Holborn, et al., 2009). This implies that the substance of the media and how it is conveyed, the language and visuals employed, are manipulated to convey a particular point of view, a point of view that reflects the interest of the institution (Albertazzi, & Cobley, 2013;Briggs, & Cobley, 2002; Holborn, et al., 2009). This is often claimed by media institutions to faithfully reflect the views and experiences of their audiences, which they faithfully serve with ‘correct information’ (Holborn, et al., 2009). Thus, Hall (1997) argues that media presuppose a fundamental consensus about how the world works and that many individuals take the dominant view for granted. For example, gender representation in the media (e.g. magazines) continue to portray fathers in identity-categories that support heteronormative sexuality and hegemonic masculinity, emphasising men's 'breadwinning' roles over their parental, caregiving or nurturant roles, even though gender representation is evolving and offering a diverse range of representations of men and women (Albertazzi, & Cobley, 2013; Leopeng, &Malose, 2017; Prinsloo, 2006; Schmiz, 2016).

This chapter will focus on 'absent' fathers and media representations in light of this study's focus on a media source, viz. *True Love* magazine for women. First, the chapter explains what representations are how they work and why they are essential to analyse. Second, reviews how different media emphasise the 'absence' of a father in different ways.

3.2 Definition of media representation

Hall (1997) states that 'representation' is a way of giving meaning to people and things in the form of language and predictable narratives or stories to communicate complex psychological processes about people in ways that could be understood and internalised. In other words, certain 'realities' are *re-presented* to particular audiences in ways that are easy to digest and take on board. Similarly, Briggs and Cobley (2002) state that popular media portray groups of people (e.g. fathers) in certain ways to develop their identities along conventional lines. Here we can understand that the constant media representation of 'absent fathers' as 'damaging' to children reinforces the conventional, gendered, normative expectations of what a *'good father'* should be and do, to avoid such harm to children (Morison & Macleod, 2015; Wilbraham, 2009). Albertazzi and Cobley (2013) draw attention to the transformative potential of media in creating representations that produce new ideas/identities, based on shifting intersectional understandings of identities (e.g. representations of fathers in terms of race, gender, class, sexualities, health status, age and capacity to care *and* to work). However, unfortunately, stereotypes or binary poles regarding what is 'acceptable' and what is 'not acceptable' in terms of (fathers') identities are reproduced in media, and these understandings become conventionally accepted and more pervasive (Albertazzi & Cobley, 2013).

3.3 How Representations Works

Specific individuals, communities, and institutions in various historical and social contexts can (and do) benefit from representations tailored to their own needs; to put it another way, depictions are ideological in nature (Albertazzi& Cobley, 2013). Generally, the concept of 'ideology' refers to the 'thoughts', 'values' and 'interests' that lie behind every media portrayal or representation (Albertazzi& Cobley, 2013; Holborn, et al., 2009). For example: a heteronormative, patriarchal ideology infuses representations of 'nuclear families' as including biological mothers and fathers, and their offspring; where the father works to support his family and the mother cares for children; and where the children 'need' such a set-up to thrive. Such representations of 'nuclear families are also underpinned by Western/ Global North 'attachment theory' (as an ideology) that reproduces these taken-for-granted, gendered caregiving roles (Morison & Macleod, 2015; Wilbraham, 2009). Thus, on the one hand, debating, writing, and

portraying topics in the media contributes to the formation of 'discourse' about them, and various experts are drawn in to 'explain' concepts and needs (Albertazzi& Cobley, 2013). Within audiences consuming these media representations, this sets up boundaries that permit discussion and different opinions on some subjects and not others (Albertazzi, & Cobley, 2013; Holborn, et al., 2009); and it is noted how hard it would be for parents (either mothers or fathers) to 'resist' the expert counsel of psychologists on optimal childrearing to raise healthy and happy children (Wilbraham, 2009).

On the other hand, the ideological work of representations works at a journalistic level. Thus, organisational and regulatory media-targeting and media-editing processes affect the journalist's *re-presentation* function – such as particular kinds of content or stories are required, and there is an editorial demand for 'objective' and/or 'balanced' coverage, or 'shocking' circumstances that sell media products (Holborn, et al., 2009). There will be several rival representations and points of view in an age of numerous media platforms, and some of these platforms will rely on reputable sources of information and will adhere to a widely distributed global consensus more than other platforms (Albertazzi, &Cobley, 2013; Holborn, et al., 2009). This will become clearer in the investigation of representations of the psychological effects of father 'absence' on women, in *True Love* magazine for black women, which is the focus of this study. For example, this magazine is found to favour feminist representations of resilient black women who have coped with ('survived') fairly extraordinary experiences of father 'absence'. These women's stories are *re-presented* through journalistic writing up of the interviews; not in women's own 'voices' (cf. Hermes, 1996).

3.4 Why is it important to study the media?

Given the media's considerable power and influence, it is critical to investigate how they contribute to the definition of what constitutes a public issue, shapes subjective perceptions of individual experience, generates consensus *and* suspicions and opinions, and even serves as a resource for personal memories and conversations (Albertazzi, & Cobley, 2013; Briggs, & Cobley 2002; Holborn, et al., 2009).

3.5 Representations of fathers and father ‘absence’ in the media

Different media outlets (magazines, newspapers, online ‘mommy blogs’, television sitcoms, etc.) focus on various elements of fatherhood and father 'absence' (Prinsloo, 2006). However, fathers are generally represented in the media as ‘incompetent’ and in need of guidance on the route to parenting and hands-on childcare (Morison & Macleod, 2015; Prinsloo, 2006; Schmiz, 2006). Popular media outlets, including print and online magazines and newspapers, and social media sites, play a significant role in moulding public perceptions and attitudes toward fatherhood, and in circulating particular ‘normative’ representations of fathers (e.g. Chauke and Khunou, 2014; Leopeng & Langa, 2017; Mabada, 2013; Schmiz, 2006; Wilbraham, 2009). Fathers are widely stereotyped in media representations, frequently reproducing men’s *and* women’s associations of men’s parenting responsibilities with their 'breadwinner' status in providing money for the support of women/mothers and their children (Koenig-Visagie and Van Eeden, 2013; Leopeng, &Langa, 2017; Prinsloo, 2006); and media portraying men/fathers as secondary parents alongside mothers (Koenig-Visagie and Van Eeden; 2013; Prinsloo, 2006). This idea of a hierarchy of attachment figures with women/mothers as primary caregivers at the top, and men/fathers supporting her (rather than in a significant, emotional relationship with his children) was introduced above in reviewing Bowlby’s attachment theoretical contributions – formulated in post-World War 2, Britain (Senior, 2009). According to Prinsloo (2006), the hegemonic masculinity ideological frame portrays the ideal father as a 'breadwinner' and ‘protector’ in the domestic domain and as a man who loses his masculine identity if he fails to perform in the public sphere (i.e. unemployment). This representation is prevalent in Christian media (e.g. Koenig-Visagie and Van Eeden, 2013), newspaper stories (e.g. Chauke&Khunou, 2014), magazines (e.g. Leopeng&Langa, 2017), and television sitcoms (e.g. Prinsloo, 2006).

Thus, fathers in South Africa's poorer communities are commonly portrayed in the media - particularly in newspapers - as 'bad', 'irresponsible', 'angry', ‘resentful’ towards women’s empowerment, and 'violent'; and this undermines their role as caring fathers (Prinsloo, 2006). For instance, Chauke and Khunou, (2014) employed content analysis to examine the representation of fatherhood in six newspaper stories in *Sowetan City Press*, *The Daily Sun*, and *The Pretoria New*s. These newspaper articles demonstrate how 'shaming' of biological fathers is employed in South

African newspapers to negatively represent irresponsible fatherhood and lack of child-maintenance support in physical ‘absent’ and non-residential fathers. These representations present women/mothers as helplessly dependent on men/fathers, without agency, autonomy or resources; and children as ‘innocent victims’ of the household poverty and hunger than inevitably ensues. Chauke and Khunou (2014) contend that these representations are restrictive and potentially damaging because they highlight fewer good aspects of fathers’ parenting and do not consider the socioeconomic obstacles associated with fatherhood within a South African context. Hence, fatherhood can be severely constricted by the hegemonic masculinity model if the gold standard for men's childrearing roles is limited to 'breadwinner', and does not place a focus on fathers as caregivers who are emotionally attached to their children and as emotionally competent nurturers of respectful relationships with women and caring relationships with children (Chauke, & Khunou, 2014; Leopeng, & Langa, 2017; Prinsloo, Schmiz, 2006). This is particularly needed in media contexts that prioritise binary gendered and conventional/traditional cultural parenting values.

Leopeng and Langa (2017) conducted a thematic analysis of eight issues of Destiny Man magazine articles on ‘fatherhood’ representation. This is a South African print magazine targeting professional, middle classed, black men. Among the themes that emerged from this study was the theme of 'negligent fatherhood', which was influenced by apartheid's migrant labour system. An extract from the analysis also revealed the psychological effects of having a physically 'present' father who is also emotionally 'absent' (viz. a typical professional businessman, who works long hours, and does not have much leisure time to spend with young children), and how this contributes to the breakdown of family systems and creates distress. This manifestation of hegemonic masculinity includes societal portrayals of the ‘ideal worker’ as emotionally distant from his family, which is particularly problematic for fathers who struggle to combine and balance work and family life (Leopeng, & Langa, 2017; Schmiz, 2006). As Prinsloo (2006) argues: this is not the 1950s! There have been new developments and agreements within families over financial contributions and childcare, due to the trend toward greater economic contributions by women as single parents or dual earners in nuclear households (Prinsloo, 2006). Thus, traditional patriarchal roles of fathers are gradually being replaced by emotional attachment and nurturer representations

in the media, most notably in women's magazines for middle-classed target audiences (Leopeng, & Langa, 2017; Prinsloo, 2006; Schmiz, 2006).

3.6 How media take on representation of 'victims' and 'survivors'

Emerging from this chapter (in above sections) has been an argument about how different media sources/products might represent (or 'mobilise') the psychological effects on girls and women of an 'absent' father in very particular ways. For example: *True Love* (women's magazine for black women, the focus of this study) will be shown to favour feature stories about resilient and successful women – in various fields – who have coped along the way with an 'absent' father. Their coping, or surviving and thriving, is represented in a particular way to 'inspire' women-readers. On the other hand, Chauke and Khunou (2014) found the newspaper representations of reckless and irresponsible 'absent' fathers positioned women/ mothers, and their children, as helpless victims of such men. This might generate guilt or anger in newspaper readers consuming such accounts and possible spur them into some remedial action. This last section of this Chapter explores these representations of 'victims' and 'survivors', and the media effects they might serve.

3.7 Definitions of 'victims' and 'survivors'

There is a continuing dispute regarding how to conceptualise 'psychological trauma' in both clinical psychological and feminist communities. The term 'victim' has a lengthy legal history, and also in various psychological literatures, yet recent feminist debates demonstrate how problematic the labels of 'victim' and 'survivor' are (Schwark&Bohner, 2019). Dunn (2005) explored the victim/survivor dichotomy about women who continue to be in violent relationships. Here she defines/explains the 'victim' as reflecting on the traumatic experience; being trapped in the psychological effects of the trauma; feeling shame and guilt about not-leaving the relationship, and being unable to talk about it; blaming the trauma for everything that follows; being vulnerable, distressed, helpless and in need of assistance/support (Dunn,

2005). On the other hand, the 'survivor' displays agency in adopting coping methods and overcoming trauma's effects through healing and moving forward; developing resilience; talking

about the journey towards repair; establishing supporting networks and working together diligently to overcome traumatic effects (Dunn, 2005; Schwark&Bohner, 2019).

In simple terms, for example, a young woman who has grown up with an 'absent' father may present herself (or think about herself) as a 'victim', in which all setbacks and unfavourable circumstances are attributed to, and controlled and retriggered by, her experience of father 'absence', throughout her life. In contrast, a young woman who presents (or thinks about) herself as a ‘survivor’ acknowledges and processes her adverse circumstances, does not attribute or allow her father's 'absence' to dominate her options moving forward, but instead processes emotions and works to find compensatory strategies and resourceful alternative opportunities to embrace repair (Zulu, & Munro, 2017). This is presented here as a simple clear-cut, binary choice (between ‘victim’ is ‘bad’, and ‘survivor’ is ‘good’); and this is not so because this blames individuals for their lack of psychological resources, in inequitable and often impoverished contexts, and also the labels of ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ allow certain advantageous interpretations, e.g. acknowledging that victims require assistance.

3.8 ‘Victims’ and ‘survivors’ in media representations

A 'victim' representation might be advantageous in the media, because it demonstrates the innocence, vulnerability, and psychological distress of someone who helpless, and needs assistance (Dunn, 2005; Orgad, 2009; Schwark, & Bohner, 2019). Consumers of media might feel sympathy for distressed victims, and be careful not to blame them; this could serve as a 'shock tactic’ or ‘wake-up call’ - used as an extreme case to elicit outrage to provoke a response from the public reading/seeing the story (Wilbraham, 2009). Thus, media might leverage this victim-representation to elicit a response from the public, in desperate need of assistance and advocacy (Orgad, 2009). According to Larcher (2007), the psychoanalytic theoretical approach – particularly the traditional “Freudian” perspective - is prominent in establishing long-standing interpretations regarding the psychological and sexual effects of ‘absent’ fathers on women, in scholarly literature, media representations, and in various popular cultural forums (e.g. novels, television shows, films, art, etc.). Thus, fatherless girls/women are represented as distressed 'victims' who are doomed to suffer from poor relationships with men partners, anxiety and depression, poor self-esteem, and be compulsively retriggered by life's adversities (Larcher, 2007).

According to Larcher (2007), such portrayals are restrictive and contribute to women's disempowerment; even though they raise awareness and psychological literacy about women's potential psychological distress, in public forums, which might lead to less shame in seeking psychotherapeutic assistance and support.

On the other hand, like in the feminist research literature reviewed above (e.g. Zulu & Munro, 2017), 'survivor' representations in the media shape understandings about strong and resilient women (Orgad, 2009). Thus, women who've experienced 'absent' fathers are not 'victims' but 'survivors' - the shift in language represents an ideological shift toward understanding resilient people who have overcome adversity and utilised protective factors (Dunn, 2005; Orgad, 2009). Media such as *True Love* uses this representation to inspire women readers of the magazine to feel empowered, and to approach their experiences critically.

For narrative and didactic media – sharing authentic stories and utilising these 'victim' and 'survivor' stories, alongside reliable expert accounts from clinical psychologists – these representations are extremely effective health communication strategies. For example: victim representations create powerful, relatable pathos of victims; they generate empathy for and awareness of traumatic experiences; and the 'shock tactics' in the representation of very extreme, tragic cases generates outrage (Orgad, 2009; Wilbraham, 2009).

However, there is a need for more nuanced representations that show the complex relationship between victim/survivor poles (Dunn, 2005 Orgad, 2009). Feminist debates argue this by saying that both 'victim' and 'survivor' representations have pros and cons (Dunn, 2005). For example: being a 'survivor' locks one into a 'strength' and 'solution focus' identity, which is never vulnerable and cannot ask for help (Dunn, 2005). Thus, there is a need for both representations and ways to show the many processes and positions in between them (Orgad, 2009). According to Orgad (2009), psychotherapy is a critical component of 'survivor' identity development, as it leads to repair, self-actualisation and growth. Typically, a psychotherapeutic process (there are many modalities of this process) entails the active remembering of traumatic memories, the regulation of emotions associated with them, and managing a reflective way forward (Orgad, 2009). Thus, the popularization of trauma and recovery, through media representations, encourages people who have experienced traumatic events to engage in a therapeutic process, to

communicate, recognise, and transform their experience towards a continuum of healing (Orgad, 2009). This study explores this through a thematic analysis of *True Love* articles about the psychological effects on women of father 'absence', in exploring how they are represented as 'resilient'. Most of the women represented in selected *True Love* articles reported a psychotherapy process to support healing.

3.9 Conclusion

It is difficult to assess the significance of the ideological aspects in the media without understanding all its production and reception elements (Holborn, et al., 2009). These elements of the media include the media institution (editorial policy, journalists as writers), experts and ordinary people who provide content/information, how the *content* of material is shaped by editorial policy to fit a particular target-audience of media-consumers, how these messages are received by media-consumers, and in some cases, the scholarly opinions and the decisionmakers to the institution, which can either sensationalise 'victims' in spectacular cases as 'click-bait'; or they can publicise and distribute 'survivor' stories, to inspire others (Albertazzi& Cobley, 2013; Holborn, et al., 2009). A lot of these critical media production aspects are beyond the scope of this small study, which will focus on various theoretical frameworks and associated 'victim' and 'survivor' representations that come through a thematic analysis of *True Love* articles; but this is provided here as a vital context for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR- METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research paradigm and design

This is a qualitative study which follows an interpretivist paradigm, which maintains that humans gain knowledge by their continual interpretation of events in their social world (Bryman, 2012). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research focuses on how people make sense of their lived experiences; and in an interpretive approach, the researcher "interprets" others' meanings. This research is concerned with the interpretation via thematic organisation of representations in various feature articles drawn from *True Love* magazine. Thus, the study employs a qualitative interpretivist research approach applied to media representations of women's experiences in the nineteen selected *True Love* magazine articles, published between 2016-2021. These women's stories (written by *True Love* writers, based on interviews with the women) reveal that they grew up without biological fathers when they were children, or they had 'lost' their fathers in various circumstances. The study focuses on three theoretical frameworks, which emerged from Chapter 2's literature review as dominant explanatory approaches when authors and researchers attempt to 'explain' or 'interpret' the effects of father 'absence' on girls and women. These theoretical frameworks are:

- Psychoanalytic theories, including Freudian and attachment/mentalization (Object Relations) perspectives, with an accompanying concept of 'Daddy Issues' (or 'abandonment trauma');
- Traditional African cultural approaches, with accompanying concepts of 'social fathering' and kin-based sharing of childrearing; and
- Feminist theories, including emphasis of challenges to patriarchal and heteronormative prescriptions for girls/women, and an accompanying concept of 'resilience'

These frameworks and the representations of distressed 'victims' and resilient 'survivors' that they hold, drive the reflexive thematic analysis that follows (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This descriptive thematic analysis study took the True Love media articles at face-value, even though many of the interviews were with well-known South African businesswomen and celebrities in the

music and film industries. Thus, the analysis does not corroborate media articles' representations with fact-checking and investigating interviewed women's real lives or contexts beyond what is presented in the media articles.

4.2 Research questions

This research study is guided by three central questions:

1. How are adult women who grew up with 'absent' fathers represented in *True Love* magazine?
2. How are psychological impacts on and processes of repair for these women represented in True Love magazine?
3. What generalisations associated with adult women who grew up with 'absent' fathers are reinforced or challenged in True Love magazine?

4.3 The media context

Initially, the study intended to use *Destiny* magazine as a sample to build onto Leopeng and Langa's (2017) analysis of representations of fathers and fathering in *Destiny-Man* magazine. However, *Destiny* magazine has discontinued monthly publications both online and in retail locations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and as a result, *True Love* magazine was chosen as a purposive secondary choice with a similar audience demographic. *Destiny* and *True Love* are South African women's magazines that cater to a predominantly black female readership. Mofekeng (2017) conducts a semiotic analysis of the front covers of *Destiny* and *True Love* magazines to determine how black women's empowerment is portrayed in contemporary South Africa. Thus, Mofekeng (2017) reports that both print publications were published monthly and aimed towards a similar demographic. They had a combined circulation of 72,990 in the fourth quarter of 2016 (*Audit Bureau of Circulations South Africa* 2016, as cited in Mofokeng, 2017). Therefore, the similarities between *Destiny* and *True Love* magazines in terms of target audience, circulation, and readership justified the decision to choose True Love magazine as a substitute for this study.

It is noted that attempts were made to obtain current demographic information from *True Love* editorial staff and *Media24*, the media-production company that published True Love; but the editor and commercial manager did not respond. It appeared that circulation statistics and consumer surveys were outsourced to another media research company, which also did not respond. This brand-competitive data is not readily available online. Thus, the next option was to use secondary demographic information from a thesis. The Mofekeng (2017) thesis is nearly five years old (a bit outdated), but it provided useful background context for the similarities between *Destiny* and *True Love* as media sources/products.

True Love magazine is part of a well-established media platform, Media24. Media24 is South Africa's leading media company with interests in digital media and services, newspapers, magazines, ecommerce, book publishing, print and distribution. It is part of Naspers, a multinational group of media and ecommerce platforms (Media24, n.d.). The brand, pitch and profile of the magazine on the Media24 (n.d.) website states:

> TRUE LOVE is the iconic South African fashion, beauty and lifestyle magazine for black women. It is an indispensable accessory that inspires, entertains and advises modern African women.

Given this psychographic profile of the target audience, *True Love* shows stories of women who have the educational and psychological resources necessary to dwell on the psychological impacts of growing up with 'absent' fathers in both limiting and resilient ways. Additionally, *True Love* features the stories of adult women who have dealt with 'absent' fathers and women as mothers who are raising children as single mothers (i.e., children whose fathers are 'absent').

4.4 The sampling method

A sample assists a researcher to explore a phenomenon by analysing a subset of the population being studied (Bryman, 2012). According to Bryman (2012), it is a critical component of the research strategy because it is frequently impossible to analyse every aspect of the population. In this small study, it would be difficult to analyse all articles and covers published in *True Love* issues since the magazine's inception in 1975. Thus, it is necessary to choose a sample that is

practicable for in-depth exploration, as an interpretative approach necessitates (Bryman, 2012). Leopeng and Langa (2017) used eight issues from Destiny-Man for their thematic analysis of media texts. The sample was chosen using a purposive sampling strategy, which allowed for the deliberate and purposeful selection of texts for close examination (Bryman, 2012). Thus, twenty articles were purposefully selected from a population of all *True Love* magazine monthly issues released since 1975 using the search engine of PressReader.com. However, only nineteen articles explicitly met the following criteria. (1) An article should mention direct, first-hand experiences of South African women who grew up without fathers, or who are parenting children without their biological fathers in their households. And (2) An article should "discuss" contemporary understandings of the psychological effects on and resilience of adult women who have grown up without their fathers. These criteria were directly in line with Research Questions 1 and 2, outlined earlier. As far as could be established, these were South African authored and researched stories, featuring (often) South African celebrities, rather than internationally syndicated material in the magazine.

4.5 Sample description and media production of 'authentic experience'

The table below summaries the nineteen articles chosen for the reflexive thematic analysis. The table includes the articles' title, the author, the interviewee, the interviewees' ages, and the publication date, issue, and page numbers of *True Love*. The women's ages ranged from 29 to 47 years old, i.e. adult women.

With respect to the formal production of media representations of 'authentic experiences' in women's magazines, two caveats are noteworthy about this particular sample. Firstly, these sampled articles are based on interviews with the women who had experienced various forms of 'father-absence', and their "stories" are written (or represented) by *True Love*'s feature-writers (staff). In line with media production, the content of these stories/ representations would have been edited to conform with *True Love* editorial prerogatives and priorities, which would be in line with the particular way their targeted audience's profile and interests are understood (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, following on from Chapter 3's discussion of representations, it is understood that these women's stories are *mediated representation*s of their experiences – not their *own* unstructured or unfiltered authentic experiences – but are used in this study to describe

general themes of representations that emerge about father 'absence' in this particular media context.

Secondly, women's magazines are made up of numerous different sections and categories of writing within them (Hermes, 1995). This means there may be tailored advertisements, interactive advice columns, knitting patterns, instructive features on pertinent social issues, experiential accounts of parenting or illness, celebrity gossip, an editorial, mothering advice from experts, and so on. These component articles are designed to be quick-reads (1-3 pages), that can be picked up and put down, rather than sustained, immersive arguments (Hermes, 1995); and feminist media critics frequently comment on the internal inconsistencies that occur between these different categories (e.g. Winship, 1987). Thus, the sampled articles from *True Love* in this study fell into two main categories – three feature articles about 'father absence' and 'daddy issues' written by "experts" (clinical psychologists, sourced by the magazine), and 16 "women" (celebrities, actors, musicians, businesswomen and so on) whose personal and experiential "stories" incorporating aspects of father absence were told to/by *True Love* feature-writers. These fell into a personal experience category in the magazine. Different themes appear from these expert/lay categories, and they are analyzed separately in the following chapter.

Table 1: Sample Description

Title	Author	Interviewee	Age	Date	Issue	Page No.
ETHEREAL FIERECE and BEAUTIFUL ENHLE.	MakhosazanaZwane-Siguqa	EnhleMbali	33	1June 2021	No. 504	45-54
Noma Mngoma-reinventing herself	Nonzwakazi Cekete	Noma Mngoma	N/A	1April 2021	No. 503	88-91
IN A LEAGUE of HER OWN	Nonzwakazi Cekete	Ayanda Ncwane	36	1April 2021	No. 503	110-115
LESSONS LEARNT	Mbali Soga	Thando Thabete	30	1August 2020	No. 498	33-37
ATMY OWN PACE	Sisonke Labase	Khutso Theledi	29	1June 2020	No. 496	42-43

STILL BLAZING A TRAIL	Kemong Mopedi	Rita Zwane	N/A	1May 2020	No. 495	68-69
CHASING INNER PEACE	Bonga Percy Vilakazi	Masasa Mbangeni	33	1March 2020	No. 493.	36-41
BOUNCING BACK	Zizipho Mqingwana	Tumi Voster	29	1October 2019	N. 488	42-43
TAKE A LOOK AT ME NOW	Kemong Mopedi	Jo- Anne Reyneke	31	1July 2019	No. 485	36-40
NEW SCHOOL OF COOL	Sisonke Labase	Lamiez Holworthy	26	1April 2019	No. 482	38-39
SOARING OVER A DARK PAST	Sisonke Labase	Grizelda Grootboom	38	1March 2019	No. 481	98-99
Khanya Mkangisa STRIPPED DOWN	Kemong Mopedi	Khanya Mkangisa	30	1December 2018	No. 478	36-40
TRYING TO DATE YOUR DAD?	Kgomotso Moncho	Relationship column	N/A	1 November 2018	No. 477	84-85
'MY MARRIAGE LASTED, 6 WEEKS'	Sisonke Labase	Tshepo Mabe	28	1 October 2017	No. 4 6 4	42-43
QUEENING the traditional way	Phila Tyekana	Candy Mokwena	47	1 August 2017	No. 462	42-43
STRONG REMARKABLE & TALENTED THEMBI	Dudu Mvimbi Leshabane	Thembi Seete	39	1 August 2016	No. 450	44-50
TRIUMPHANT OVER DEATH	Dimakatso Motau & Phila Tyekana	Thuso Nokwanda Mbedu	24	1 June 2016	No. 448	66-67
ABSENT FATHERS	Lisa Thabethe & PhilaTyekana	In depth Column	N/A	1 June 2016	No. 448	116-117

Daddy Issues	Nonhlanhla Khumalo	Top Stories Section	N/A	True Love website 06 May 2016	True Love website	True Love website

4.6 Thematic analysis

The magazine articles were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis in the manner of Braun and Clarke's (2012) principles. It is noted that in Braun and Clarke's (2012) later models of reflexive thematic analysis, there is a distinction between inductive and theory-led deductive approaches to thematic analysis. An inductive approach involves a 'bottom up' (emic) approach to data analysis, and coding to use an inductive approach is directed by the data itself. This means that the codes and themes are created from the data itself, and what researchers map in the analysis closely resembles the data content (Braun, & Clark, 2012). On the other hand, the deductive method is a 'top-down' (etic) approach in which a researcher begins with a collection of concepts and theoretical frameworks. In other words, the codes and themes developed by researchers are based more on the concepts and ideas they bring to the data than on the data itself (Braun, & Clark, 2012). This study will adopt a more theory-led, deductive approach to thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (20012) advocate for a loosely sequential process comprised of the following six stages:

Stage 1: Familiarisation is a technique that is used in a variety of qualitative analytic methodologies and serves as the foundation for conducting a practical thematic analysis (TA). According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a method for interacting with and gaining insight into what may appear to be an overwhelming amount of material. Thus, familiarisation enables the researcher to enter the analysis process in an active reading mode, engaging with the data.

Familiarisation with the magazine articles in this study was done by carefully reading and re-reading the content of the articles that were sampled and chosen, and by making notes in a first draft with a list of all the extracts organised according to theoretically driven themes.

Stage 2: Generating Codes. Whereas familiarisation entailed making casual observations, coding includes the careful and exhaustive creation of relevant labels for specific portions of the dataset that bear significance to the research question.

This stage was guided by the previously reviewed literature, which included literature on father absence and literature explaining the distinction between psychoanalytic theory, traditional African cultural approaches, and feminist theories of father absence. Thus, rather than constructing codes from the 'bottom up' (inductively), this study explicitly approached the magazine articles seeking experiences/representations of psychological distress, gender development, and resilience.

Stage 3: Searching for Themes. By familiarising and coding the dataset, the researcher can develop themes from pre-existing patterns. The formation of themes begins with the evaluation of codes and their accompanying data, after which they are combined, grouped or collapsed into more extensive or more significant patterns.

This step entailed categorising codes into themes and clustering themes into sub-themes using the reviewed literature and theoretical frameworks as a guide.

Stage 4 & 5: Reviewing Potential Themes & Defining and Naming Themes- the reviewing process functions similarly to a quality control activity, ensuring that the themes fit the coded data, the dataset, and the research topic (Braun, & Clark, 2012). The initial stage of review is to determine whether proposed themes adequately convey the meaning of the gathered, coded data segment. Additionally, during this evaluating process, the researcher must ensure that their proposed themes are consistent across the entire dataset. Thus, the researcher's perspective on these themes as groupings of codes and acquired data has shifted from summative to interpretive (Braun, & Clark, 2012).

This stage involved refining and clarifying significant ideas directed by the literature and supervisor, editing and adding, and transitioning to a more interpretive perspective in the third draft. Additionally, it used an "interpretive" stance in the thematic analysis (Chapter 5), connecting the themes to previously theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the

literature review. The discussion chapter (Chapter 6) then explains how the themes and theoretical frameworks discussed in chapters 2 and 3 fit together; and it delves further into each theme, revisiting previously reviewed studies to bolster the concepts.

Stage 6: Producing the Report. This involved the writing process from an analytical standpoint, returning to the larger picture of the complete analysis. Each theme should be supported with illustrative extracts as "quotes" from the articles. For a theory-led thematic analysis, these themes (and extracts) might be theoretically interpreted in the thematic analysis chapter; and then "discussed" further in the discussion. This is done to deliberately, according to Braun and Clarke (2012), to resist 'theory-free' lists of descriptive themes and extracts in an analysis chapter.

This stage in this study entailed a final draft of signpost sentences and definitions for the themes; and the extracts were interpreted in the thematic analysis chapter (Chapter 5) using the three theoretical frameworks and their accompanying concepts. These were then discussed further in the discussion (Chapter 6), linking back to literatures reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. This gives the analysis and the discussion chapters the appearance of an interpretivist thesis chapter rather than a descriptive list of themes – as per Braun and Clarke's (2012) guidelines.

This is not a critical study which produces critical deconstruction of theoretical viewpoints. The thematic analysis is focused in two sections to describe/show different ways of approaching experiences of father absence. Section A focuses on EXPERTS' clinical formulations, using largely psychoanalytic theory; and Section B focuses on WOMEN'S experiences, using various theoretical theories.

4.7 Validation

Three theoretical frameworks underpin investigations and interpretations of psychological effects of father 'absence' on adult women. Thus, the criteria for quality-control (validation) in this study are guided by an interpretivist qualitative research paradigm, following Saville Young's (2016) dimensions of coherence, reflexivity, rigour and richness:

Coherence: According to Saville Young (2016), it is critical to determine whether the qualitative technique used is capable of addressing the research questions and research objectives of the

study. Thus, selecting a study approach ensures the stability of your findings. According to the researcher states in their theoretical approach and what is eventually provided as analysis. Braun and Clarke (2012) assert that an analysis is questionable if the themes contradict the theoretical perspective, and that a lack of evidence impairs the analysis's validity if the themes contradict the theoretical viewpoint.

The analysis in this study is written in a way that is intended to make sense to an academic reader. Because this is a psychological thesis, there is an assume that readers are familiar with qualitative research design and concepts. Three distinct frameworks are employed: (1) Western psychoanalytical theories about the role of fathers in children's development, (2) traditional African cultural approaches, and (3) feminist perspectives. As a result, we are looking for those types of themes in both the literature and analysis in order to ensure the overall study's coherence and to generate powerful arguments for an academic reader.

Reflexivity: Saville Young (2016) believes that because qualitative research places an emphasis on meaning-making, the necessity of reflexivity is critical, as every qualitative paradigm recognises that reality or experiences cannot be accessed directly, but must be mediated and subjective. Saville Young (2016) describes how subjectivity is a component of how we learn about phenomena. She adds that, while methodologies differ in their acceptance of subjectivity as a good resource, qualitative interpretivist scholars recognise it as a valuable component. Terry et al. (2017) explain that an 'unreflective' approach can be detrimental to analysis; and they argue that the first stage of thematic analysis research (named familiarisation) should demonstrate how the investigators' subjective experiences and/or personal interests may influence their analytic process.

My own subjective experience and reflexivity has been an important part of this research study. I started this thesis with a personal account of my own experiences of a physically 'absent' and undisclosed father; which developed into intermittent and inconsistent interactions with him when I was 21 years old – following his requests (to my mother) for contact with me – and then, again, estrangement. This was hurtful and difficult to process emotionally; and the process occurred at a time when I was trying to decide on postgraduate studies in Psychology – perhaps drawn to this path to 'make sense of' my father-daughter relationship experiences. I believe my journey towards

healing began when I began my first academic project in Psychology Honours at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under the supervision of Thandeka Prudence Mdletshe. Without hesitation, I was drawn to the topic of ‘father absence’, and through working with peers who had similar stories and the scholarly empirical and theoretical literature, I began opening up my bandaged wounds. In my first year of my MA in Clinical Psychology at Rhodes University in 2019, I began my own personal psychotherapy at the University’s Counselling Centre, as psychotherapy is a requirement in the professional training of clinical psychologists. During the first session with a young black woman counselling psychologist, she was emphatic and warm, and I felt at ease and safe enough to experience for the first time, the full extent of the pain, distress and shame I was carrying from my 'abandonment trauma.’

Thus, I was especially interested and invested in exploring what types of stories about father ‘absence’ and ‘negligence’ existed from the women represented in *True Love*; and how these women got through this. This meant that I was obviously ‘triggered’ by certain aspects of their stories; but as a clinical psychologist intern myself, I found these accounts both interesting and insightful to work with in my own personal and professional practice. I discovered myself to be profoundly sensitised to the experiences of the women featured in *True Love*, and to those young women feeling stuck with depression and doomed to unsatisfactory relationships as a consequence of difficult father-daughter experiences. I wanted to help. I wanted to make a difference, even if this was small. I wanted women to see hope in moving forward. These feelings lay behind decisions (with my supervisor) to explore women’s stories, psychological effects and bringing in some aspects of therapeutic repair.

Rigour: Saville Young (2016) states that transparency, or what is sometimes referred to as "thick descriptions" of one's research approach, is needed to bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of one's research, which should be based on sound principles and methods. Thus, she adds that rigorous inquiry is also connected to coherence and reflection (Saville Young, 2016). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), any thematic analysis must be explicit and consistent with the assertions and methods used; additionally, the research findings report must be consistent with the author's epistemological perspective process.

This report has been careful to document the stages of thematic analysis, addressing what the analysis was looking for in the media articles. An accurate account of the sample was provided and how the sample was selected. The study also carefully backed up claims about themes with empirical extracts, and strong theoretical evidence. This can be seen in the interpretation of the thematic analysis chapter using theoretical explanations under each extract (Chapter 5) and continued thematically in the discussion (Chapter 6).

Richness: According to Saville Young (2016), substantiating your findings by providing examples of a specific theme discovered in your research assists the reader in comprehending how the data offers significance to that theme. Braun and Clarke (2012) state that from a deductive, or theory-led thematic analysis, it is crucially important that "data" should be analysed from the theoretical perspectives deployed, rather than just quoted or described, because the analysis helps to interpret the material coherently and to better motivate, explain and defend the way theory has been used to readers. It should convey a convincing narrative about the data and research topic that is effectively organised (Braun and Clarke (2012).

It was for this reason that the "thematic analysis" that follows is not simply a descriptively inductive thematic analysis; it looks and works differently – and begins to interpret themes from the various theoretical perspectives. It sought to generate material that was interesting and could be expanded on extensively by others; it is useful because it was substantiated by a rich diversity of experiences that questioned conventional definitions of father 'absence' and the lived experiences of young women/girls who have experienced 'absent' fathers from a critical perspective. In this way, this was answering Research Question 3.

4.8 Ethics

This research study has no ethical issues involved because media articles were sampled from the public domain for analysis (*True Love* magazine), and no human subjects were sampled or interacted with. The focus was on media representations of experience, rather than direct or authentic experience itself.

CHAPTER FIVE-THEORY-LED THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TRUE LOVE ARTICLES

The themes that were uncovered from the analysis are grouped into two categories, reflective of the kinds of media stories/articles they were in *True Love* (see Methodology Chapter 4 for more on this). A. Experts speak directly about father 'absence' in theoretical terms and B. Women's experiences of father 'absence', represented by *True Love* feature writers.

5.1 Section A: Experts speak directly and clinically about 'father absence'

Three *True Love* magazine articles published over five years (2016-2021) were discovered that dealt theoretically and psychologically with the effects of father 'absence' in the magazine. These articles were either written by psychologists, as short information pieces/columns, or they directly quoted psychologists to give formal psychology-discipline on how father 'absence' derails healthy development; the clinical signs and symptoms to look out for; and how to seek help through psychotherapy. These are the themes of representations that were found:

Theme A1: Specific study mentioned

The first theme demonstrates how experts employed specific research studies to substantiate their claims and even used statistics, not only to establish a sense of their professional competence but also to startle readers, as demonstrated in the extract below:

> Extract 1: "Here's a shocking statistic about the state of families in South Africa: according to the 2011 Census, 48% of children in the country live with only one parent. And more than 90% of parents who don't pay maintenance are men" [Journalists Thabethe, & Tyekana] (True Love, Jun Issue, 2016).

A psychoanalytic perspective seems to be represented here in the importance of both biological parents being 'present', as stressed by traditional Freudian, Object Relations, and Attachment perspectives, that parents' binary-gendered and complementary roles are critical in managing their children's emotional experiences and healthy psychological development (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000; Lemma, 2003). Thus, it is stressed that an interactive and intersubjective environment must exist for a child's development potential to be fully actualised (Lemma, 2003).

Theme A2: Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic approaches

This theme demonstrates that psychoanalytic theoretical frameworks have a significant influence on *True Love*'s professional psychological input about father-daughter relationships, father 'absence' and its impact on the future of relationships and intimacy with men:

> Extract 2: "We marry our parents", the old saying goes. While this expression considers the theories of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's respective Oedipus and Electra complexes, which try to explain the sexual attraction to a partner who resembles our mother or father, sexual imprinting provides a deeper analysis of this phenomenon in our relationships" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 3: "Clinical psychologist SiphokaziQotyana–Mjoli says the Oedipus complex, which is a psychosexual stage of development where a child develops feelings towards his or her opposite-sex parent, and the Electra complex, which is when a girl child competes with her mother for her father's attention, lay a foundation for future relationships"[Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 4: "Dr Maboea asserts. Our parental relationships and the quality of those relationships are then very important. However, Nhlapo stresses that, "a father-daughter relationship is as important, if not more important, than a father-son relationship, especially given the fact that the world we live in favours men over women." He says, "A father can instil a sense of self-worth, confidence and self-assurance in his daughter that can help her make better life choices"[Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).

These findings corroborate Lesch and Scheffler (2016) arguments, which contend that psychoanalytic theory, particularly the Freudian perspective, has affected academic, clinical and widespread popular psychology knowledge of the father-daughter relationship. This psychoanalytic-Freudian perspective states that children's early experience with their parents and all subsequent significant relationships are determined by the mental and affective structures of the id and superego by the ages of 4-5 years old (Lemma, 2003). Thus, within the father-daughter dyad, where the daughter's experiences with her father lay the groundwork for her view of men (during the Pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phases), the daughter's inability to adequately resolve the Oedipal conflict leads her to carry an idealised or devalued image of her father into her adult interactions with men (Liebman, &Abell, 2000, as cited in Lesch&Scheffler, 2016).

Theme A3: "Daddy issues"

Mental health professionals are interpreting complex psychological processes based on their expert knowledge and experiences and are translating them into popular terminology for magazinereaders, such as the concept of "daddy issues" as a negative consequence of not having a father's ideal presence:

> Extract 5: "Clinical psychologist Dr DimakatsoMaboea says the choices we make, including that of a life partner, are both conscious and subconscious. "We either gravitate to what we know from our childhood or the opposite, based on our conscious and subconscious choices. You may want a guy with a six-pack, but your subconscious will also make its choice for you. If you were raised by a raging alcoholic dad, you may choose to marry a pastor, someone who doesn't touch alcohol. That's an unprocessed trauma that is making a subconscious choice," Dr Maboea explains" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 6*:* "Elaborating more on this, clinical psychologist SibusisoNhlapo, of Nhlapo Psych Consulting, says it's not uncommon for women with histories of a difficult childhood, be it emotional deprivation, physical or emotional trauma or persistent adverse experiences, to become needy and emotionally vulnerable in romantic relationships" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 7: "Some of these women will struggle to quit the relationship as they continue to hold onto false hope that the men will change. They'll believe that the negative experiences they have with such men will pass, and they'll return back to their 'honeymoon phase'. This will continue until such time that the woman recognises that the man is in fact like her father and will never change" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 8*:* "Your issues of abandonment may manifest as fear of commitment because you're subconsciously afraid that your partner will leave you. THE ATTENTION SEEKER In the past, emotionally absent fathers were common because men were the main or sole providers. Because of this, many young women grew up feeling like they were of no interest to their fathers, and sought validation from other men" [Psychotherapist] (True Love, May Issue, 2016).

This is a psychoanalytic theoretical viewpoint that understands distress is due to an individual's attempt to make sense of their contradictory lived and psychic experience. The individuals suffer from actual trauma, exhibiting symptoms consistent with trauma presentation, i.e., intrusive, disturbing memories, emotional distress, and the triggering/retriggering of external reminders

(Lemma, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter 2's problematization of the widely used popular label 'daddy issues,' the representations here can be interpreted as 'abandonment trauma,' resulting from unconscious childhood experiences, and unconscious retriggering of these. For the possible purpose of sensationalising the psychological effects of father 'absence', this clinical psychology representation takes a strong 'victim' perspective, expressing vulnerability, distress and the seriousness of trauma-symptoms, requiring help and support. This representation can counter glib or flippant popular usages of the term "daddy issues".

Theme A4: Seeking help

Mental health professionals emphasised the importance of seeking individual psychological assistance for "daddy issues" which arise in early childhood attachment experiences in order to foster self-awareness, processing unconscious feelings and healing in order to move towards more healthy ways of relating to others:

> Extract 9*:* "This is why therapy is so important, as it makes you aware of such issues, Dr Maboea says, adding that the trick with counselling is not to wait until there's a crisis. "Go to therapy to assess how your childhood has shaped you, how your traumatic history influences your behaviour and the choices you make. When your trauma is treated, or when you know which emotional needs were not met from your childhood, you choose differently. You choose consciously because you know what choice your conscious mind is making, and you're conscious about the choice that your subconscious mind is making" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).

> Extract 10: "This is why it's important to explore the emotional effects of our fathering and mothering experiences, says Dr Maboea. This is so that when you choose your partner, you are aware of what the parental experience has left you with – looking at how it has empowered you and how it has limited or wounded you" [Clinical Psychologist] (True Love, Nov Issue, 2018).

A mentalization-based therapeutic process – talking through experiences with a trusted and responsive counsellor in order to understand feelings, reformulate self-other relations – is formulated with an Object Relations perspective that emphasises repair (Fonagy et al., 2002).

This representation is also infused with a feminist perspective that incorporates a 'survivor's' story; it entails advocating for moving forward on a continuum toward healing rather than being trapped in 'victimhood'. Thus, psychotherapy and various treatment techniques are represented to

create awareness, talk about, and work through psychological distress with the goal of changing mental structures and behaviours (Orgad, 2009).

5.2 Section B: Women's experiences of father 'absence', represented by True Love feature writers

Theme B1: Career/business and educational success:

In line with *True Love* readership profile and magazine content, almost every issue featured profiles of notable black women and their professional journeys. From the feature article titles in the methodology section, one can see that these stories did not explicitly mention father absence; yet, when reading the narratives, father 'absence' became apparent in some way. Thus, these were not 'victim' stories, nor were they represented as women who were inherently 'damaged' or struggling with 'daddy issues' or 'abandonment trauma'. This demonstrated the main difference in the ways that 'victims' and 'survivors' of father 'absence' were represented in *True Love* by expects (clinical psychologists) and by journalists and feature-writers writing the women's stories. Rather, these were women who were represented as 'survivors' who had attained career, academic, and business success as demonstrated below:

> Extract 11: "The growth in her career and brand has been peaking", We're working with a professional, who at 33, with multiple international entertainment and fashion awards" [Celebrity Enhle Mbali] (True Love, June Issue, 2021).
>
> Extract 12: "The businesswoman, who co-authored her first biography Conquering The
>
> Poverty of the Mind — MaZwane's Story" [Businesswomen Rita Zwane] (True Love, May Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 13: "I'VE BEEN SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES MY ENTIRE LIFE."In 2010, I completed my BA Honours Degree in Dramatic Arts at Wits University" [Celebrity Masasa Mbangeni] (True Love, March Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 14: "During varsity I was a mentor and logistics co-ordinator for an organisation, called WomEng, that encourages high school girls to study engineering. Since then, every year I take four young ladies under my wings. I mentor them through high school and in preparation for tertiary. I also tutor maths and physics to high school learners". "I also did a postgraduate study in Risk Management because my strong skills lie in empowerment,

> development, project and policy planning and implementation" [Celebrity Tshepo Mabe] (True Love, Oct Issue, 2017).

These findings are consistent with feminist theory, and powerfully embrace ‘survivor’ representations – particularly in South African contexts where access to tertiary education had been denied to many black women. The extracts demonstrate that women are assuming authoritative leadership roles, obtaining education, and achieving independence, in contrast to traditional gender-binary ideologies, which primarily positioned women in domesticated positions and men outside the home working and pursuing careers (Lamb, 2006, as cited in Lesch, &Scheffler, 2016). In addition, these women are represented outside of their defining spousal relationships with men (as dutiful wives/partners), which further breaks down the gender-binary.

Theme B2: Different types of ‘absent’ fathers and father-child relationships

There appear to be a variety of lived experiences associated with father ‘absence’ and the father-child relationship. Three sub-themes were found here, and these were (1) Amicable relationship, (2) Idealisation and (3) complicated relationship with father. These representations really deepen and engage with more complex emotions associated with father ‘loss’ or ‘absence’.

B2 Sub-theme 1: Amicable Relationship

In this sub-theme, the mother/woman is represented as attempting to keep the biological father present for her children by cohabiting with him, despite their divorce. This demonstrates that she was following the example of her divorced parents who maintained a respectful relationship, in order to protect the children from any possible 'damaging' effects of ‘absent’ fathers:

> Extract 15: "I can't leave my kids just because I can't stand their dad. It's a toxic environment at times, but I am going to stay for the sake of my kids. I was raised by divorced parents, but they still respected each other"[Celebrity Noma Mngoma] (True Love, April Issue, 2021).

This representation is consistent with psychoanalytic theoretical traditions such as Freudian, Attachment, and Object Relation theories, which emphasise the importance of parents' binary-gendered and complementary (relational) roles in children's healthy psychological development,

including their capacities for relationships with both parents, and appropriately gendered role models (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000; Lemma, 2003). This representation indicates, perhaps, how pervasive psychoanalytic theoretical understandings are of the 'harmful' effects on children of divorce and father 'absence'. This women/mother is depicted as going to extraordinary lengths to prevent those damages for her children.

B2 Sub-theme 2: Idealisation following tragic losses of fathers

Although fathers were no longer physically present, they are maintained alive in the minds of growing children and adolescents through a variety of recollections: (1) idealised as a result of his tragic death and abusive relationship with mother; and (2) kept present through photographic memories:

> Extract 16: "On numerous occasions, Thando has shared her life story about how she grew up in an abusive home at the hands of her father, who later went on to commit suicide. "A lot of people think all men who abuse women are monsters – like demons that crawl through the night. But no, they are not monsters. They are our fathers, brothers and uncles. My father was an incredible dad – I can't take that away from him simply because of the horrible husband he was. He committed those crimes and did those wrongs"[Celebrity Thando Thabete] (True Love, Aug Issue, 2020).

> Extract 17*:* "My dad died when I was two years old, I love my dad so much, even though I didn't know him. I do all my shows with his picture in the studio. He is always with me, even in my car. This is weird to explain, especially in my relationships" [Celebrity Khutso Theledi] (True Love, Jun Issue, 2020).

This theme/representation was informed by psychoanalytic, particularly attachment-based, theoretical perspectives; the loss of significant attachments results in distress and the lack of resources needed to handle and regulate the emotional experience (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000). Thus, in an attempt to simplify and/or defend oneself against the overwhelming emotional experience of sudden loss, there are idealisations and fantasies associated with the father's loss (i.e., Extract 17, carrying the father's photo and keeping the father in mind) or a splitting defence (Extract 16), in which the father's description/memory is two-dimensional, that is, as an "incredible dad" and as a "horrible husband", revealing conflicting feelings (Lemma, 2003).

B2 Sub-theme 3: Complicated Relationships with Father:

In this sub-theme, women described the various types of complicated ambivalent relationships with their fathers for several reasons. Extract 18 describes her complicated relationship psychologically; the woman felt her father judged her and did not find her worthy of attention. The Extract 19 describes her complicated relationship much more physically; both father and daughter were homeless for a time, and the father physically abandoned her. In the Extract 20, the father's character is held accountable for his ‘absence’ rather than blaming herself for not being worthy of his attention:

> Extract 18: "From a young age, I had gotten into co-dependent relationships where I felt I had to prove myself, and prove that I was good enough to be loved. I think that stems from my childhood, and the very difficult and complicated relationship I had with my dad, who for most girls, is the first love of their lives" [Celebrity Masasa Mbangeni] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 19: "My dad and I were evicted from our house in the late '80s. At some point, my dad and I were homeless. So, we lived on the streets, or moved from shelter to shelter. Sometimes, he'd leave me alone for weeks on end, and then we'd reconnect again somewhere on the streets. For the longest time, that was the only life I knew. My dad was killed on the streets when I was about 17" [Author Grizelda Grootboom] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2019).
>
> Extract 20: "I've never had a relationship with my father but at 21, he reached out and asked that we meet. I honoured his request but chose not to tell my mom until much later. When I eventually told her, she was happy that she didn't influence whether I went or not, and how I opted to treat him afterwards was totally on me. I don't harbour any negative feelings towards him, but his absence speaks volumes about his character"[CelebrityKhanya Mkangisa] (True Love, Dec Issue, 2018).

These extracts were selected to illustrate psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives, drawing on Freudian, Attachment, and Object Relations approaches. In Extract 18, the internal conflict is more Oedipal in nature, expressed as a fragmented image of the father within the context of an ambivalent attachment to the father, anchored in powerful feelings and the internalisation of the interpersonal relationship (i.e., as a poor sense of self-worth) (Lemma, 2003). In Extract 19 we see object loss resulting from recurrent painful separation from a significant attachment object. The impact of separation is based on the symbolic meaning internalised from the early breakdowns of the attachment, as a kind of despair (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000). In Extract 20, we

see a long period of separation between the young woman and her father. As noted in Object Relations theory, this separation does not take place in isolation; the young woman's experience of her 'absent' father has laid a template of internal interpretations of self in in relation to others

(Sadock, &Sadock, 2000), i.e., she expects him to leave, and understands his ‘character’ and intentions (as mental states). Additionally, the extract indicates the mother's ability to mentalise, as she did not prohibit her daughter from meeting her father, but rather transformed the encounter into one of openness and empathy (Fonagy et al., 2002; Lemma, 2003). These extracts powerfully represent the complexity of feelings associated with fathers’ ‘presence’, rather than simply as a ‘first love object’.

Theme B3: Strong maternal network

Two distinct types of reliance on maternal figures have been identified: the first is based on a strong internalisation of the value framework learnt from mothers and maternal networks. The second is based on external resources and support systems, which refers to sacrifices made by the maternal figures and children's exposure to a broader range of resources. The households represented here were not disadvantaged households; these were either middle-classed mothers or maternal figures who had struggled and worked hard to provide the best for their children:

B3 Sub-theme 1: Strong value framework

In this sub-theme, these value frameworks are teachings which are psychological lessons and values that have been learnt from mothers and other maternal networks, such as resilience, hopefulness, goal-orientations, hard work, persistence, empathy, and attempts to make interactions meaningful:

> Extract 21: "My mom, who has always been my biggest cheerleader, actively instilled a sense of resilience in all her children. She's largely responsible for the person I am because she encouraged us to do exactly what we want to do and to chase after our dreams"[Celebrity Masasa Mbangeni] (True Love, March Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 22: "Being raised by a single mother has definitely shaped who I am. My mom has taught me to work hard and strive for the best. She's been my inspiration since day one. Watching her raise me allowed me to recognise the strength within myself as a woman,

> and her support towards my goals has propelled me to where I am now — which is something I'll always be grateful for" [Celebrity Tumi Voster] (True Love, Oct Issue, 2019).
>
> Extract 23: "I was also raised by strong women, who valued the importance of family, good principles and support. I'm thankful that she instilled in me the ambition to succeed, which made me study metallurgy after matric" [Celebrity Tshepo Mabe] (True Love, Oct Issue, 2017).

These representations are infused with feminist theoretical viewpoints of 'survivor' perspectives, indicating a transition away from old gender-binary expectations of black women toward strong, resilient, leadership roles and mentoring, that daughters gradually learn (Lamb, 2006, as cited in Lesch, & Scheffler, 2016).

B3 Sub-theme 2: External network of resources

This sub-theme drew on the extrinsic resources that mothers and their maternal networks establish for the benefit of their children based on their access to money, education, career and opportunities:

> Extract 24: "My mother is a middle-class woman who was able to hustle and get me to varsity" [Celebrity Masasa Mbangeni] (True Love, March Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 25: "My mom — a professional midwife — has worked so hard to give me the best of everything; it just wouldn't be fair of me to throw all of that back in her face" [Celebrity Khanya Mkangisa] (True Love, Dec 2018).
>
> Extract 26: "My mother was a strong believer that travel broadens one's horizons, which is why we ended up visiting almost all of our nine provinces, as well as Lesotho and Swaziland, as kids" [Celebrity, Tshepo Mabe] (True Love, Oct Issue, 2017).
>
> Extract 27: "My sister, Nomalungelo, and I, were raised by our maternal grandmother, who raised us as her own after my mom's passing in 1995. We grew up like any other kids, fed and loved. She worked as a school principal before retiring in 1996, and we lived off her pension" [Celebrity Thuso Nokwanda Mbedu] (True Love, June Issue, 2016).

These extracts demonstrate feminist concepts of empowerment, agency, and independence by portraying maternal networks as educated professionals with access to economic opportunities and resources (Morison, & Macleod, 2015). This approach is consistent with Liu et al.'s (2017) integrative resilience model (MSMR, see Chapter 2) of external networks of resources and

mentors supporting resilience development. These external resources enable young women to assume the role of 'survivor' inside supporting networks (cf., Mdletshe, 2016). Such representations powerfully shift identities and aspirations for black girls, women and mothers, and do not ‘trap’ them in risk-saturated and resource-poor representations, dependent on maintenance payments from biological fathers.

Theme B4: Replacement Father Figures

Despite intermittent or unreliable contact with their biological fathers, women were represented as surrounded by substitute father figures, as they grew up, or they took on the traditional breadwinner father-figure roles themselves when they were able to do so. The substitute father figures were (1) good replacement father figures, whom women loved when they were children and adolescents and valued for their supportive and caring presence; or (2) not ideal replacement father figures, who were hypermasculine, patriarchal individuals; or (3) adolescent children, who became a ‘parental child’, performing parental responsibilities:

B4 Sub-theme 1: Good replacement father figure

In this sub-theme, the stepfather serves as an 'ideal' substitute father figure, as illustrated below:

> Extract 28: "My mom is my everything. For the longest time, she raised my two siblings and I alone until my amazing stepdad came into the picture when I started high school" [Celebrity LamiezHolworthy] (True Love, Apr Issue, 2019).

This sub-theme exemplifies a feminist theory approach, emphasising the positive characteristics and care associated with female-headed homes (Morison, & Macleod, 2015), from a 'survivor' perspective, e.g., a supporting and involved mother. Additionally, it demonstrates an alternative family structure that does not depend on the presence of a biological father, but instead demonstrates a 'nuclear patterned' (blended) family structure that provides connection, safety and good role models (Lesch, &Scheffler, 2016).

B4 Sub-theme 2: A less than an ideal replacement father figure

In this sub-theme, an older brother is represented as a less-than-ideal substitute father figure, which is presented as authoritarian, punitive and patriarchal:

> Extract 29: "I have a scar on my nose. My brother beat me up when he found out I was pregnant and had to leave school" [Celebrity Candy Mokwena] (True Love, Aug Issue, 2017).

This sub-theme highlights traditional African cultural perspectives, which socialise the oldest son into a hegemonic masculine role in the family (i.e., head of the household, authority, discipliner) in the 'absence' of biological fathers (Mkhize, 2006). The brother's stance is threatening, and describes a vulnerable, pregnant 'victimised' sister/girl.

B4 Sub-theme 3: The parental child

In this sub-theme, a resourceful adolescent girl takes on the role of a father figure and is expected to fulfil the position of 'breadwinner' when her biological father deserts the family, as described below:

> Extract 30: "During that time, I was the breadwinner at home and took care of my mom and younger brother. I lost all attachment to the things I owned, even though it meant losing the only items that reminded me of Lebo [Mathosa]. But, I had to make ends meet. I thought about the chicken I would buy for my family, or the money my brother needed to buy lunch at school" [Celebrity Thembi Seete] (True Love, Aug Issue, 2016).

This sub-theme bolsters the feminist claim that while their biological fathers are ‘absent’, young women develop independence and find their voices (Green, 1976, as cited in Lesch, &Scheffler, 2016). Thus, here we see a parental child temporarily adopting a 'survivor' role, conquering barriers, accepting responsibility for tough situations, and working diligently to find solutions, rather than being 'trapped' by ‘victimhood’, shame, and blame directed at the 'absent' father and the 'present' mother (who was currently unable to work).

Theme B5: Religious support

There were representations of two types of faith-based support systems that contribute to resilience. The first type provides a (1) internal system of meaning that enabled individuals to understand what happened, process the experience, make meaning, and have faith. The system becomes coherent internally, allowing individuals to interpret their subject experiences according to the system. The second is that it provides a (2) external system of support—a social network of like-minded individuals who share a common belief system and support one another. This support can form a supportive network of individuals, such as mentors, pastors, childminders, financial advisors or trustworthy individuals who might arrange bank loans:

B5 Sub-theme 1: Internal system of meaning

This sub-theme of religious support was mostly defined in terms of internal values for establishing a sense of purpose, meaning, and faith:

> Extract 31: "Being God-fearing helps me understand my purpose, I can only credit God for showing up each day, whether I'm going through heartache or family problems" [Celebrity Khutso Theledi] (True Love, June Issue, 2020).
>
> Extract 32: "I believe I'm going to be okay so wholeheartedly that there's no space for it not to happen. I have blind faith in God's plans, but I also know that blind faith met with no hard work is stupid" [Celebrity Jo- Anne Reyneke] (True Love, Jul Issue, 2019).
>
> Extract 33: "G is for God. I treat my relationship with God like I would a sacred and priceless possession. I definitely am aware of where all my blessings come from, and I've seen the grace and favour that He has shown me, personally and career-wise" [Celebrity Khanya Mkangisa] (True Love, Dec Issue, 2018).

This is an example of a 'survivor' representation, utilising an internal coping mechanism to assist with life's hardships (Orgad, 2009), to develop a sense of awareness, meaning, purpose, and healing from a faith-based perspective.

B5 Sub-theme 2: External system of support

This sub-theme represents a supportive social network of people, specifically a woman who aided a sex worker (who had been exploited and abused by her biological father) in developing

her internal system of meaning, without judgement; and by recommending rehab and career opportunities:

> Extract 34:"There was a lady who would go around the hospital, praying for the sick. She wrote me a recommendation to go to rehab, which became yet another challenge – I was 27, with no ID. I became an active member at a very famous church in Randburg, and even joined their call centre" [Author Grizelda Grootboom] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2019).

This illustrates a supportive community network by Liu et al. (2017), via external networks and resources that promote and enable a 'survivor' perspective. This is a representation of a woman aiding another woman in violence prevention and substance abuse by taking an interest in her, listening to and trusting her, providing her with an opportunity to transition from 'victim' to 'survivor' through external resources to transform her life along the continuum of healing.

Theme B6: Raising Children Whose Fathers are 'Absent'

Women who have dealt with father 'absence' themselves also expressed their feelings about parenting children without a biological father. Different parenting trends existed, related to the different circumstances of the biological father's departure. The first involves the adaptation of mothers following the father's death (Extract 35). The second involves adaptation after the 'absence' of fathers who are non-residential and uninvolved in their children's upbringing (Extract 36). The third involves co-parenting with a non-residential father following separation (Extract 37). Again, this represented complexity in how emotions were regulated in different circumstances of loss and absence.

B6 Sub-theme 1: Adaptation

The women in this sub-theme discuss adjusting to single motherhood as a powerful position in which they can provide for and raise their children based on their own experiences growing up with strong maternal figures who raised children in the 'absence' of biological fathers:

> Extract 35: "Single mothers are powerful. I was raised by a single mom and grandmother, so becoming a single mom at a young age wasn't a train smash. I adapted easily" [Celebrity Ayanda Ncwane] (True Love, Apr Issue, 2021).

> Extract 36*:* "I didn't know for six months, so, I had two children by different fathers. I made huge mistakes, but I don't regret having my kids. That's how I ended up at the tea farm in Tzaneen - to earn a living to provide for my boys"[Celebrity Candy Mokwena (True Love, Aug Issue, 2017).

These representations establish feminist 'survivor' perspectives following the mothers' traumatic life experiences. These women demonstrate psychological resilience that has evolved due to supportive networks (interpersonal) and external (employment) (cf. Liu et al., 2017). Additionally, it demonstrates women stepping up and striving to be the best they can be for themselves and their children.

B6 Sub-theme 2: Co-parenting

The woman in Extract 37 recalls opting for a ‘non-conflictual’ split with her partner (the biological father of her children) over a dysfunctional one. She believes that choosing a contentious divorce would have destroyed the co-parenting relationship and resulted in 'damage' to the children:

> Extract 37: "Their amicable breakup has made co-parenting a breeze, with Jo-Anne admitting that a harsh split would have messed her up."Bekumnandi that we both weren't leaving each other to be with other people ngoba that sh*t hurts. Co-parenting with a good guy, who loves his kids, has been very easy. He calls his children every day" [Celebrity Jo-Anne Reyneke] True Love, Jul Issue, 2019).

This sub-theme was informed by psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives, most notably an Object Relations approach and the concept of mentalisation. The parents appeared to understand the importance of mature, healthy interaction, as children learn about relationships by observing their parents' interactions, their ways of expressing their emotions, and resolving conflict (Fonagy et al., 2002; Lemma, 2003). The process enables children to internalise and integrate their emotional experiences to build psychological understanding for themselves and others (Fonagy, et al., 2002).

Theme B7: Diverse psychological impacts

The representations of ‘psychological difficulties’ in the women’s stories in *True Love* powerfully avoid attributing these psychological difficulties solely to the troubled relationships

with their biological fathers – as if this pivotal experience of loss/rejection defined everything else that followed. Thus, the ‘absence’ of fathers was not the primary cause for these women enduring psychological difficulties, and these representations drew in other complicated life experiences or events that occurred over time, such as an identity difficulty, difficulties processing and dealing with loss, and talking about sex:

B7 Sub-theme 1: Identity difficulties

The experience of a black woman who was adopted by a ‘Coloured’ and Indian family is represented in Extract 38. As a result, this woman experienced the 'absence' and ‘abandonment’ of *both* biological parents, resulting in poor self-esteem and identity issues, as well as the experience of being adopted into a racially diverse home, resulting in identification challenges, self-esteem, and self-worth concerns. Extract 39 represents the experience being a member of a music group from a young age and the psychological influence it had on her following the group's breakup:

> Extract 38: "Finding myself was my biggest blessing because there was a period when I suffered from dire self-esteem issues. I come from a cross-cultural family that's predominately Coloured and Indian, and I'm the only black child. Now, I'm so comfortable with who I am — my dark skin, curly hair, flaws and all" [Celebrity Lamiez Holworthy] (True Love, Apr Issue, 2019).
>
> Extract 39: "I was such a negative person. I lost belief in myself – I hated the braids, I hated the nails. I hated everything. I began to blame Boom Shaka for being broke. My hair was falling off; I developed a rash"[Celebrity Thembi Seete] (True Love, Aug Issue, 2016).

Extract 38 is consistent with Freudian psychoanalytic theory regarding the young women's difficulties processing emotional experiences as a result of her biological parents' ‘abandonment’ and further separation as a result of being in an environment in which identification of significant external figures was difficult due to the young women's racial difference with her adopted family (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000). This demonstrated a sense of disconnection from the adopted family, and her inability to identify with significant external figures made it impossible for her to internalise their characteristics as part of herself; rather, they were perceived as distinct and separate. Hence, her failure to develop a sense of identity and belonging, as well as her poor self-worth and esteem (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000). Extract 39 also draws on a psychoanalytic Object

Relations theoretical explanation, demonstrating an internal conflict between distinct self-object emotions that surface as challenges to self-image and operate as precursors to psychological distress. Additionally, this representation displays a desperate attempt to place responsibility on other figures (‘victim’ perspective), the concept of being separate from others, but fragile, resulting in the identity difficulty (Lemma, 2003).

B7 Sub-theme 2: Problems with processing and dealing with losses

In this sub-theme, the woman discusses the influence the losses have had on her. On the one hand, it appears as though she has a problem dealing with losses; on the other hand, it appears as though losses have shaped her into an independent individual adept at concealing emotions:

> Extract 40: "I sometimes cry about my life and the losses I've had, but I try not to lose myself in that sadness and have to motivate myself to stay positive. The losses I've suffered have shaped me into the independent person I am" [Celebrity ThusoNokwandaMbedu (True Love, June Issue, 2016).

This sub-theme accords with psychoanalytic theories regarding attachment and mentalization (Object Relations). The woman's represented experience demonstrates the concept of 'abandonment trauma' ('daddy issues') as a result of the loss of essential attachments/objects (i.e., negative affect, unwanted, painful memories) (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000). Experiencing numerous deaths in her life can be interpreted as the departed abandoning her, reactivating her early childhood memory of her father's abandonment. Due to a lack of resources to manage her affect and process the 'trauma,' she develops an ambivalent response to it (Lemma, 2003), distressed by the losses intermingled with independence. While she may express her independence, she is frequently distracted by an internal experience of abandonment.

B7 Sub-theme 3: Talking about coercive sex

In this sub-theme, the represented woman discusses coercive sex as a result of her employment as a sex worker, following her desertion by her biological father and his subsequent violent death; as well as the 'shocking' circumstances surrounding her profession, which include a forced pregnancy termination and a traumatic experience at the hands of her employer:

Extract 41: "While living in Berea, I had a pimp who'd take me to places around the country, or sell me to other pimps or madams. This was my life from when I was about 18 until I turned 26. Sometimes, I'd work as an in-house prostitute, or be cast in porn movies. When I was 26, I was moved to Port Elizabeth, where I worked for a new madam and later fell pregnant with my baby girl, Summer. I continued working, oblivious to the fact that I was carrying a baby inside me. When news of my pregnancy was confirmed, the madam wouldn't let me have an abortion because I had clients to service. At six months, though, I was forced to terminate the pregnancy. I was given sponges to stop the bleeding, and ordered back to work two hours after the operation. I refused. The madam's husband beat me up, and instead of taking me to a local hospital, they drove me to a Joburg one"[Author Grizelda Grootboom] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2019).

This representation bolsters the normative psychoanalytic and traditional African cultural view of men as protecting figures in father-daughter relationships (Larcher, 2007; Mkhize, 2006). This woman is represented as being failed or betrayed in expectations of protection from men.

Extreme and graphic representations of experiences like this (Extract 41) reinforce a ‘victim’ perspective, and the disastrous consequences of a young woman abandoned by her biological father. Such representations serve as sensationalized 'shock tactics' for readers (Wilbraham, 2009), that demonstrate vulnerability, a threatening and risky lack of agency and autonomy, and a young woman trapped in an unfavourable ‘damaging’ and ‘distressing' circumstances (Schwark, &Bohner, 2019).

Theme B8: Psychotherapy

Among the women’s stories represented in *True Love*, psychotherapy is sought for various reasons, not solely as a result of the father's ‘absence’. The precipitating issues to seek psychotherapeutic support were part of various life crises, apparently unrelated to their biological father's ‘absence’ per se. Extract 42 presents a woman seeking therapy for herself and both her sons during the divorce process from her sons’ biological father; Extract 43 presents romantic relationship difficulties, self-awareness, processing, and meaning; and Extract 44 presents seeking therapy following an identity crisis as a result of the breakup of her music band:

> Extract 42: "I am a sucker for love, and I will love again. That is why I have gone for therapy". Breaking the news of the divorce was hard, but she opted for therapy with her two boys, aged eight and nine, to help with the transition"[Celebrity Noma Mngoma] (True Love, April Issue, 2021).

This Extract 42 draws in psychoanalytic ideas on the significance of attachments to meaningful objects/people, including traditional Freudian, Attachment, and Object Relations views (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000; Lemma, 2003). Thus, the separation of from significant figures (in this case, a spouse for the young woman and a biological father for children) can cause psychological distress and the 'loss' of a male role model for boys. Thus, the mother opts for psychotherapy to aid with mentalizing the transition - which is unique to each individual's internal structures (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000) – and this highlights the representation of a therapeutic process where difficult emotions related to separation, loss and father 'absence' can be processed and regulated in constructive ways. In other words: there is support available.

> Extract 43: "For me, therapy is the breadcrumbs I've left for myself to be able to return to my normal self. Without therapy, I wouldn't even have realised that my character Thembeka *[on a television show she acted in]* is co-dependent on the people she's with. It was very telling of her to go back to the man that abused her for so long, lied, cheated on and triangulated her. That mirrored a relationship I was once in, but I only recognised it when I was out of it. I cannot stress enough how important therapy is, and I'm going to use my platform to talk about its importance. We all see flames, and there's nothing wrong with getting help"[Celebrity MasasaMbangeni] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2020).

Extract 43 powerfully represents a therapeutic process of developing awareness, insight and healing. The represented experience of this woman exemplifies a feminist perspective - a 'survivor' outlook that is focused on moving forward rather than being stuck in the battle of early childhood 'abandonment trauma' and 'daddy issues', and dependence on (abusive) men. This transformation is enabled by the woman's involvement in psychotherapy, which involves discussing and regulating her pain, self-worth, triggers, and romantic relationship choices, as well as learning how to overcome difficult experiences that stand in the way of self-actualising and self-fulfilment (Orgad, 2009). This demonstrates an important association between feminist empowerment and psychotherapeutic process.

> Extract 44: "It broke me. I felt rejected. But, that was my light bulb moment. I needed to carry on alone. I focused on putting together all the broken pieces. I sought therapy from a professional and attended church regularly" [Celebrity ThembiSeete] (True Love, Aug Issue, 2016).

Extract 44 also represents a 'shift' in perspective through a psychotherapeutic process – from broken/rejected to 'light bulb moment' and 'putting together pieces'. The representation begins

with experience that is consistent with psychoanalytic attachment theory, which asserts that the quality of the relationship and attachment between a father and daughter influences how this girl-child perceives loss in interpersonal relationships with father, romantic partners, and others (Larcher, 2007). However, the represented story does not end there. Thus, psychotherapy and a supportive external network were sought to assist with the development of consciousness, processing, and meaning (Larcher, 2007), which lead to empowerment and autonomy (e.g., 'I needed to carry on alone', moving towards 'I *could* carry on alone', or 'I *did* carry on alone').

Theme B9: Perspectives on romantic relationships

In this final theme, represented women are talking about the impacts on their adult romantic relationships of early relationships with their biological fathers, whether 'present' or 'absent'. These are popular understandings of the didactic psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives that the experts set out at the beginning of the chapter (see Section A). Extract 45 explores how her father's 'absence' has influenced her thoughts on marriage; the Extract 46 represents a woman's trust issues; and Extract 47 presents a complicated relationship with her father lying behind her attraction to 'narcissists':

> Extract 45: "I personally don't believe in marriage. I am, however, open to commitment. I don't see how marriage will keep someone from cheating and it definitely won't keep us together"[Celebrity Jo- Anne Reyneke] (True Love, Jul Issue, 2019).
>
> Extract 46: "One of my greatest fears is to marry or have a child by someone who'll show me a different side to them, should we separate. I want whoever fathers my child to be someone I can fully depend on even when we're not together anymore"[Celebrity KhanyaMkangisa] (True Love, Dec Issue, 2018).
>
> Extract 47*:* "My last relationship (before this one) was the Mount Kilimanjaro of all the bad relationships I'd ever been in. From a young age, I had gotten into co-dependent relationships where I felt I had to prove myself, and prove that I was good enough to be loved. I think that stems from my childhood, and the very difficult and complicated relationship I had with my dad, who for most girls, is the first love of their lives". That co-dependency translated into many areas of my life, and when I became aware of it, I sought therapy so I could heal myself. How I was going about living my life was unsustainable — I kept attracting narcissists" [Celebrity MasasaMbangeni] (True Love, Mar Issue, 2020).

This theme demonstrates the power of psychoanalytic perspectives in explanations of the psychological impacts (on adult relationships) of childhood experiences of 'absent' or

‘untrustworthy’ biological fathers. Extract 45 represents a young woman's internalised structures of mistrust in marriage due to the 'absence' of the father-mother model of interaction in the union of marriage. It is implied that there was some kind of sexual infidelity or betrayal in this women’s parental marriage-story. There could be identification with betrayed/rejected maternal figures as role models, from whom girl-children have learned similar views (Sadock, &Sadock, 2000).

Extract 46 represents internal conflict arising from fears and fantasies in light of the woman's 'absence' of a parental relationship-model for observing and learning about interactions with partners or as parents. Thus, there is a conflict between different affects, attempting to construct a fantasized/wishful family arrangement (Lemma, 2003), even after divorce or separation from a biological father of children, perhaps to avoid ‘damaging’ the children through exposures to relationship conflict.

Extract 47 exemplifies the traditional Freudian psychoanalytic view that biological fathers become their daughters' “first love object”, and whose masculinity models future romantic/sexual encounters with men (Jones, 2007). The father's ambivalent attachment to the daughter, and possibly, his commitment to the parental relationship with her mother, has influenced how the young woman will make sense of her self-worth (her mental state) and the intentions of her father (his mental state). Her fragmented image and understanding of her father is carried over into her romantic relationships with men (Liebman&Abell, 2000, as cited in Lesch, &Scheffler, 2016). The young woman seeks psychotherapy to break free from a 'victim' locked in a recurring cycle; she chooses psychotherapy to speak up and change her pain into healing to become a 'survivor' (Orgad, 2009). She might stop attracting narcissists – like her father.

CHAPTER SIX-DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the overarching themes that were uncovered from the analysis of nineteen articles in *True Love* magazine that examined various types of experts speaking about father 'absence' and successful women's stories regarding father 'absence' – in terms of various representations that drew on various theoretical frameworks. In True Love, the stories were represented for another purpose – to hold up and inspire 'successful' black women through accounts of resilience and grit, against all odds, in South Africa - not to deliberately explore or examine the circumstances and psychological effects of father 'absence' per se. The various details about 'absent' fathers (of many different types) were smaller parts of a much bigger life-story about transformation. In this discussion chapter, various cross-cutting issues in the scholarly literature on father 'absence' and media representations of father 'absence' will be examined to demonstrate where my study's findings were comparable to those of others and where they differed.

6.1 True Love as media product, context and discourse

A women's magazine is not "real life" as there is a branded representational aspect to "women's stories"; stories are recruited, selected, written by journalists, edited and represented in a particular way to serve a particular purpose (Hermes, 1995) – here, of course, fitting with the target market/audience of middle-classed black South African women of *True Love* (Molongoana, 2017). According to Hall (1997), media representation refers to developing representational content to convey meaning to a target population via language and predictable narratives or stories, and to communicate complicated psychological processes about individuals in understandable and relatable ways. *True Love*'s media content is thus centred on inspirational and empowering stories about black women who have overcome obstacles and created resilient forms of identities, and justifications for their father 'absence' as a result. Rather than dwelling on 'victim stories', *True Love*'s emphasis is on survival/thriving (resilience) and how obstacles have been overcome. Where 'victim stories' appear (e.g., Extract 41), the details of the narrative are very extreme, sensationalistic and shocking – as in the story of a young woman abandoned by her biological father on the streets, and subsequently trapped in traumatic sexual and labour exploitation as a substance-dependent sex worker. Such stories serve as powerful warnings to

readers of the dire consequences of father 'absence', his paternal protection and of a life derailed by psychological issues (cf. Wilbraham, 2009). However, *True Love* maintains the upbeat 'survivor' perspective in representations of women's stories in several ways, as follows.

6.1.1 Focus on celebrities and life-success content

There is a 'bias' in the focus of these sixteen *True Love* articles 'about' women's experiences – they focus on celebrities and professional career women who have successful and meaningful lives. This is emphasised in the magazine over so-called 'ordinary' black women's experiences and distress, problems and obstacles, which they struggle for resources to overcome. Perhaps 'successful' in the *True Love* context may be defined as hopeful stories of black women with troubled or difficult roots who have followed their dreams, worked hard, and succeeded to have professional careers. Many of the women represented were businesswomen, actresses, singers etc.; women who are in the public eye/realm, and whose success is taken to be inspiring (to others). The argument against using overwhelmingly successful content over 'ordinary' content – particularly in a South African context where discrepancies between rich, middle class and poor produce huge impacts on resources available - is because it idealises individual lifestyle-choices that many women simply cannot make in a path towards (self) empowerment.

Similarly, Mabada (2013) criticises *True Love* magazine's disproportionate emphasis on celebrities/successful women over 'ordinary' black South African women. He discovered that in the Father's Day issues of *True Love* magazine, celebrity/successful fathers were positioned in very specific ways (e.g., cutting back work-hours to spend more 'leisure time' with children, buying children and their mothers gifts or taking them on excursions or holidays, etc.) that equated to 'successful' and 'good' fatherhood practices. As a result, he asserts, such representations manifest in unrelatable concepts of "otherness" and produce negative and harmful preconceptions about ordinary black fathers who cannot afford such lifestyles and commodities (Mabada, 2013). Celebrities and successful individuals frequently have more resources than ordinary people; and what is selectively highlighted is their success rather than the ordinariness of their lives (Mabada, 2013). Additionally, *True Love* 'recycles' the same South African celebrities over time, implying that something about the success and familiarity of these stories resonates with the magazine's target demographic and message (Mabada, 2013). However, on the other hand, there is something

to be said for the how these *True Love* representations of middle classed and professional women's stories depart significantly the deficit narrative of the inevitable psychological and financial effects of father 'absence' on *poor*, risk-laden, black children, and young adult black women in the reviewed research literature (e.g., Makofane, 2015; Mdletshe, 2016; Molongoana, 2015).

True Love's representations are predominantly cloaked in a 'survivor' perspective, which, although this buys into various (Western) psychoanalytic theories about the psychological 'damage' done by 'absent' fathers in children's lives/development, allows representations of individualised psychotherapeutic healing and transformation to appear. This psychological healing transformation is made possible and probable by *True Love*'s adherence to their psychographic profile of professional, black, educated women in the mid-upper income bracket. These are not children or women or mothers who are dependent on scrambling for maintenance payments from 'absent' fathers; and that emotional growth representation (rather than the dominant 'poverty' representation of black women) is refreshing with new public health options and interventions to work towards.

6.1.2 Actual interviews vs media articles

Another way in which *True Love*'s feature articles maintains an upbeat focus on 'success' lies in the media production of feature articles that select particular aspects of particular women's stories to "represent". Thus, there are clear differences in the 'manufacture' of knowledge in the sixteen differently focused *True Love* feature articles on inspiring women (written by different *True Love* writers, based on different interviews with each) and the thematic questions used in a more or less standardised interview schedule with 'ordinary' research participants, who have been sampled on the basis of their experience father 'absence' in their childhoods. Two examples of scholarly empirical studies are mentioned to illustrate this; and then these are 'compared' to media representations in feature articles.

Firstly, Molongoana's (2015) study examined adult women's subjective perceptions of fathers' 'absence'. His interview questions were designed to analyse each participant's experiences growing up without a biological father, and then to compare and organise experiences into themes.

For example, participants were asked to recall personal childhood memories and identify the most significant themes from their childhood to establish rapport. This approach lays the stage for everything that occurs after the father departs to be explained and interpreted in light of his 'absence'. The second example is Makofane's (2015) study which focuses on young African/black women's diverse experiences growing up in fatherless households, and providing recommendations for social workers. The thematic questions in the interviews were framed in such a way that they imply that women suffer negative repercussions of father 'absence'; and they indeed recounted damaging experiences and distressing feelings. These participants appear then to be 'stuck' in this damage/victim perspective and cannot move beyond it – although perhaps the recommendations for social workers would suggest therapeutic ways forward.

In this study of *True Love* magazine, selected feature articles were telling more general and holistic stories of successful women's lives; and father 'absence' was uncovered as one aspect of their experience (among many others), which was worked through and resolved in particular ways. This approach was undoubtedly 'selective' filtering through life-details for relatable issues to represent and to leave out as too messy or irrelevant. Working with a pre-existing media article also meant that each one had an idiosyncratic focus/slant, and there was not the research opportunity (as in interviewing) to probe issues and experiences further. As a clinical psychologist intern, there were sometimes things that I wanted to know/ask, when the article glossed over important events, experiences and psychological processes.

6.2 Psychological distress and psychoanalytic theoretical dominance

The previous *empirical* literature on the psychological impacts of father 'absence' seems to be dominated by Freudian, attachment and Object Relations (mentalization) psychoanalytic theories – as Larcher (2007) has argued. Thus, biological father 'absence' – whatever form this takes - is taken to be psychologically damaging to identity/femininity, self-worth and trust in future romantic/sexual relationships (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Morison & Macleod, 2015). This latter social constructionist (and feminist) claim is frequently put forward to counter the Western psychology based lens deployed on African fathering experiences (e.g. Makofane, 2015), and the implicit heteronormative expectations and patriarchal gender-binary placed on men and women (e.g. Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Morison & Macleod, 2015; Ratele et al., 2012).This study did not

set out with an explicitly critical objective or discourse analytical methodology, but became more inclined this way through the writing of it. This was because of the extent to which psychoanalytic theoretical frameworks were used – even in fairly common-sense ways – in *True Love*'s representations of father-daughter relationships, which too easily pathologized women for 'bad' choices. According to this formulation: fathers were presented as the first heteronomative 'love objects' of daughters, and as 'socialisation agents' for daughters as a model of masculinity, against their own femininity (cf. Morison & Macleod, 2015).

The 'absence' of a biologically father and masculine model was framed in both the reviewed scholarly literature in Chapter 2 and this study's analysis of themes in media representations as producing women with 'daddy issues' (cf. Morison, & Macleod, 2015). These 'daddy issues' incorporated difficulties in establishing trust and respectful boundaries with men in future sexual relationships, as well as searching for protective masculine/father figures to take control and improve their situation. There were several examples of this within the media extracts analysed in Chapter 5, viz. women participating in unsafe sex work (Extract 41); women attracting toxic relationships with men who resembled their fathers (Extract 43); and women's complete dependence and reliance on a spouse (Extract, 42). This was very similar to Molongoana's (2015) study, who noted many black women participants' opinions of their mothers and fathers were consistent with Western psychoanalytic theoretical understandings of appropriate gender and sexuality development. He also found that his adult women participants believed they were less capable of having good romantic relationships with men because of the 'absence' of a biological father while they were growing up (Molongoana, 2015). Makofane (2015) extends this into considering the presence/lack of a parental relationship model for developing girl-children; so that a mother's heterosexual interactions with the father or other men had an effect on her daughter's perception, interaction, and capacity for successful interpersonal relationships. This was congruent with findings from this *True Love* study, where women's ideas/ understandings about men were based on their mother's relationships with men; as was processing and dealing with attachment losses.

Makofane (2015) deliberately set out to resist psychoanalytic theoretical interpretations through use of an explicit traditional African cultural approach with black South African young adult

women – using a seemingly more social systemic perspective (rather than focusing on 'psychological' explanations). He found quite similar (to psychoanalytic) impacts of biological father 'absence' though, although these originated in sociocultural systems. Thus, the 'absence' of biological father while growing up influences a young woman's sense of self. Although the majority of his participants looked to be successful and well-adjusted, some struggled with an 'identity crisis' and a loss of sense of belonging, feeling lost, isolated when calamities struck and rejected despite their achievements. Makofane (2015) related this to a sense of standing within a father's family network and community. These dynamics were different to the middle-classed and professional black women's experiences represented in *True Love*.

6.3 Psychological distress and the experience of poverty

Previous empirical research on father 'absence' has found that when a father is 'absent', the quality of life suffers as a result of the lack/loss of a second source of income for a household and the non-payment of maintenance (Chauke & Khunou, 2014; Eddy et al., 2013; Holborn et al., 2011; Magqamfana, &Bazana, 2020; Molongoana, 2015). This financial deprivation of black children growing up without basic necessities, and the femininised poverty of single-mother headed households, is widely mentioned in research studies on the effects of father 'absence' on black children/families who have to rely on a mother's meagre wages to support the household; and children experienced food insecurity, faced 'sacrifices' when other priorities came up, or were denied school uniforms/shoes or further education as a result of this (Eddy et al., 2013; Holborn, & Eddy, 2011; Molongoana, 2015). This analysis of True Love feature articles breaks from this representation of black children and families in several keyways. Firstly, it breaks down the father-breadwinner nuclear-family, gender-binary stereotype, because mothers were represented as financially autonomous and entrepreneurial, and inspired financial independence in their daughters. Secondly, it breaks down the idea that black people's emotional/attachment issues and complex feelings are reduced to money transactions between biological fathers and their children. The women represented in these True Love stories did not need their father's money/support or were "okay" without the support. This allowed forms of psychological distress and psychotherapeutic processes to come to the fore.

6.4 Psychotherapy

Representations of processes of psychotherapy and psychological repair/healing was another way in which this study distinguished itself from earlier research on the impacts of father 'absence'. The stories in *True Love* (representing successful women) included how psychotherapy assisted women in resolving psychological issues resulting from the father 'absence' and other troubling situations, clearly indicating that the issue was not 'solely' about the biological father. These women were portrayed as seeking psychotherapy because they possessed the financial means to do so and were educated/ literate on the psychological consequences and procedures of healing associated with talking therapies. Thus, *True Love* promotes psychotherapy as a means of healing and coping with challenging emotions. Only one of the studies reviewed, Mdletshe (2016), explored several types of artistic healing through creative expressions, such as participating with singing, poetry and art, keeping a journal of feelings, and interacting with support structures. Mdletshe (2016) discovered that these coping methods were critical in terms of resilience development, establishing personal and network-based support. Other research made no mention of these modes of healing or resilience-support, and this implies that conflicted and difficult emotions related early childhood experiences in father-daughter relationships are not 'repairable' or able to be processed/healed. Thus, psychotherapy was highlighted in this study's themes/ representations, demonstrating that girls and women do not have to remain a 'victim' or poor relationships with fathers/men, but can open up and seek help through individual and group support.

6.5 Different types of father 'absence' and father-daughter relationships

The themes and representations that was uncovered in this analysis of *True Love* demonstrated that it was definitely not a one size fits all regarding 'absent fathers' or father-daughter relationships. A common (mis)understanding in other/previous studies has been that there has been a sudden/complete disappearance of a biological father (e.g. Holborn, & Eddy, 2011; Magqamfana , &Bazana, 2020; Makofane, 2015; Molongoana, 2015; Zulu, 2018), and it was never clear if this was the disappearance of a resident biological father in the child's household,

or if this biological father was ‘non-resident’, had never cohabited with the child, of was undisclosed and unacknowledged by the family. Thus, the complicated and idiosyncratic circumstances of ‘father absence’ remain a bit hidden. An enormous variety of father ‘absence’ circumstances and father figures appeared in the stories of these women represented in *True Love* – for example, ‘absence’ related to tragic death by murder or suicide; transitional homelessness due to eviction, unemployment or alcoholism; parental divorce and remarriage, ‘complicated’ relationships between ex-partners, and between mothers and daughters, and fathers and daughters.

In empirical studies and media representational studies of fathers and fathering, a simple dichotomy or binary often appears between 'good fathers' (biological, present, residential fathers, and if ‘absent’ they do pay maintenance, etc.) and 'bad fathers' (biological, 'absent', emotionally or physically abusive, men who abandoned children and their mother, do not pay maintenance to support children etc.). Good fathers are thus "idealised", "romanticised" and "stereotyped" – seemingly following middle-classed standards of nuclear families from 'Global North' – as good providers, good people, kind, give time to children, etc. (Prinsloo, 2006). This study breaks down the dichotomy and biological-resident stereotypes by providing narrative details of many different kinds, degrees and arrangements of relationships with fathers. Three examples of representations which are subjective and complex will be briefly mentioned below, to support the contribution of this study in “complexifying” father-daughter relationships and feelings associated with these relationships in True Love.

Firstly, in Extract 15, the mother is represented as striving to retain the biological father's involvement in her children's lives by cohabiting with him despite their divorce; establishing anew form of family structure. Secondly, in Extract 16, father ‘presence’ is entirely idealised, and “split”, due to contradictory experiences of the children of a “good father” who tragically committed suicide, and a mother’s experiences of an abusive, ‘bullying’ spouse. Thirdly, in Extract 20, the biological father's presence/involvement in the daughter's life is inconsistent and unpredictable; he comes and goes, and no stable bond is apparent. Diversity and contingent

contextualizing is required to make sense of these experiences of father 'absence' that defy universal laws or effects.

Some biological fathers in *True Love* representations were indeed 'troubling' and girls, women and mothers rightly distance themselves from them and vow to have nothing to do with them, nor expose their children to men like this. As feminist researchers have strongly argued, these decisions should be respected as girls', women's and mothers' rights to choose what is best for them, under the particular circumstances; and not to be coerced into thinking these choices might be psychologically 'damaging' (e.g. Morison & Macleod, 2016). In any event, girls/women live in social systems and are exposed to many replacement father figures, step-fathers and social fathers through family kin networks or mothers' new partners (e.g., Morrell, 2006; Mkhize, 2006; Lesejane, 2006; Makofane, 2015) - and these attachments are strong, protective, and supportive for girls growing up and women. This exposure to multiple other father figures was supported in this study of *True Love*'s representations of black women's accounts of their experiences. Furthermore, diversity of family/household arrangements was also found – beyond traditionally biologized nuclear family set ups (cf. Morison, & Macleod, 2015). Blended and extended family arrangements, and multi-generational women-centred arrangements, were established, with various kinds of contacts between biological fathers and their children (some successful, some not). Despite some following of psychoanalytic theoretical ideas about the effects of father 'absence', this study's findings did demonstrate complexities in household arrangements and influential networks of supportive kin and faith-based groupings around developing girl children. There was no 'vacuum' where a biological father had (or had not) been.

6.6 Strong maternal networks and resilience

The thematic findings in this media study on *True Love*'s representations of successful women of strong maternal networks resonated with just about all the literature on father 'absence' on girl-children and young adult women, indicating that these older women provide a strong counterbalance to mediate the damaging effects of father 'absence' – or risks of psychological or financial 'damage' (e.g., Magqamfana, &Bazana, 2020; Molongoana, 2015; Makofane, 2015;

Mdletshe, 2016; Zulu, & Munro, 2017; Zulu, 2018). In other words, these networks provided the 'secure base' framework when a father left the household for whatever reason – temporarily or permanently. The mother was the anchor for resilience in these daughters' lives a very particular way. This study followed this strong feminist line of thought (cf. Mdletshe, 2016; Zulu, 2018), and in closing some elaboration is provided for how resilience might be established and supported for the women represented in *True Love*, through the application of Liu et al.'s (2017) MSMR, with its interrelationship between different component and processes of psychological resilience, viz. (1) core traits and features, (2) internal/relationship features, and (3) external features:

Core traits resilience and values*:* The women represented in *True Love* appeared to be physically strong and healthy, with good cognitive skills and a positive outlook on life. Through communicative support and observation, they learned lessons from their mothers and grandmothers about the importance of hard work, integrity, persistence, never giving up, and a growth mindset in overcoming problems. These successful women internalised these core values.

Internal resilience and relationship features: The women in *True Love* had good relationships and communication within their maternal networks, as seen by women seeking assistance in times of crisis, talking about concerns, trusting others to seek advice, and being comforted within these relationships when upset. These women appeared to not be afraid to show their vulnerability and complicated feelings about things; they had no fear of punishment by or conflict with maternal networks. They utilised the other person as a 'resource' following the concept of mentalising feelings and problems with others. Thus, they sought out psychotherapy and worked through problems with the therapist. The findings of this study demonstrated a strong maternal network, which served to support communication, encourage them, reward milestones, and provide guidance. The women could always turn to the network for support; and they could reconstruct themselves with the help of this network. As a source of meaning and protection in a higher power, faith-based affiliations of meaning-systems, sharing ideologies and practices with supportive networks were also a component of the resilience of women represented in *True Love*.

External networks and frameworks: In *True Love*, the maternal network (mothers/ grandmothers) were working/professional women, role modelling for their daughters, and for the audience of *True Love* readers. They did not need wider social networks as they were financially independent. These strong mothers embodied a resilience perspective to be articulated through a feminist approach – even resisting traditional African cultural norms and expectations to do so. The majority of women could advance their studies and careers, travel, and establish professional identities networks due to their careers.

6.7 Conclusion

Through the reflexive thematic analysis of the media stories in *True Love* (perhaps they are edited to be represented like this?), one gets a sense of how women's lives worked out – despite various troubled experiences, turning points, opportunities, losses and successes. It provides a hopeful scenario of positive outcomes and making the best of circumstances, in an inspirational and motivational way. These representations were interpreted as fitting within the *True Love*'s branded psychographic profile of their middle-classed black South African women audience.

CHAPTER SEVEN-CONCLUSION

Women were represented in *True Love* magazine concerning the effects of father's 'absence' primarily through the lens of a feminist resilient, 'survivor' perspective - even though expert clinical psychological knowledge and women's stories were predominantly based on psychoanalytic theories – most notably, the traditional Freudian, attachment, and Object Relations theoretical frameworks. There were very varied representations of father-daughter relationships and father 'absence' in the magazine. The role of biological fathers was mainly was idealised (via psychoanalysis), even when strong supporting maternal networks were present. The study examined and demonstrated how father 'absence' was portrayed or represented in *True Love* magazine, particularly for middle classed, professional, educated, and financially independent African/black women (cf. Mofokeng, 2017). Thus, it is clear that the magazine has a 'bias' in content selection/ representation, which mainly portrays women in encouraging and motivating roles for its intended readers.

A particular contribution of this study was an analysis – through themes and representations of adult women dealing with childhood father 'absence' – of *True Love*'s unusual focus on the psychological realm of emotional experience and of healing trauma for black women. Thus, the magazine's representations validate, recognise and take seriously the painful experience of the women, while also encouraging the engagement with the trauma and progressing toward healing through the use of supportive networks and psychotherapy (Orgad, 2009). *True Love* magazine views the psychological impacts of father 'absence,' and in particular the experience of 'abandonment trauma' or 'daddy issues' as a journey towards self-actualisation (Orgad, 2009).

The reflexivity process adopted in this qualitative interpretivist study required me to acknowledge that my personal and professional experiences with my father's 'absence' enabled me to interact with the material in a familiar manner (Saville Young, 2016). During the analysis of the material, I became triggered by the young woman in Extract 20 (theme B2 Sub-theme 3), who met her biological father at the age of 21 years, when he reached out. This resulted in a flashback moment for me, concerning my own father doing the same when I turned 21 years and effectively became

an adult. I became very aware that my triggers needed to be monitored. On the other hand, the inspiring success stories in Theme B1 and the engagements of psychotherapy in Theme B8 excited me to see stories of optimism and hopefulness. However, I recognised that I had to ‘manage’ these emotional responses to avoid too much subjectivity in the interpretation. Thus, the research journey provoked considerable self-reflection and a sense of connection with the women's stories.

The study's limitations included the following. Although this was a short qualitative study with a limited scope, other representations might have been uncovered had a different media sample been utlised, e.g., newspaper stories or another magazine. The study examined *True Love* magazine on which previous research had been conducted (Mabada, 2013) and hence, the study examined how the magazine ‘represented’ the psychological effects of father 'absence' in a particular way. Qualitative research does not make broad generalisations; it works with small samples that are context-specific (Creswell, 2007). In this sense, this sample was small yet relevant to the project's objectives, and it produced rich materials. The media sample was purposefully staged at a more upscale publication; the women were predominantly celebrity women with the educational, economic, and psychological resources necessary to dwell on the psychological effects of father 'absence' in various ways (cf. Mofekeng, 2017). Therefore, the use of non-celebrity women, from lower economic contexts would have provided stories that may have been slightly different due to resource constraints. One of the disadvantages of dealing with media discourse is that one must work with the stories as they appear in the media; one cannot prompt or request additional information and must work with the content provided. Another limitation of this thematic analysis study was its limited scope and space for developing a critical theoretical engagement with dominant discourses and narratives that perpetuate ideological positions for women/daughters and men/fathers. This excluded critical interrogation of conventional patriarchal/capitalist ideas about what a "family" is, what a biological father's role should be in this family, and also, in rank biologization of parenting, how 'social fathers' are problematically seen by experts as further evidence of 'absent fathers' in South Africa.

The study makes the following recommendations for future research. Firstly, to conduct a study of this nature (on psychological impacts of father ‘absence’) with real-life participants, either groups discussions or interviews with individuals from diverse contexts and socioeconomic status, not just middle-class black women celebrities. The study should include a set of questions and a range of women's understandings, allowing them to reflect critically on their experience. Secondly, this type of research might include men's perspectives on their own ‘absences’, as well as younger children’s impressions of their fathers in a sensitive and child-friendly manner, such as through the use of protective drawing and play (De Wit, 2016). Thirdly, future studies might examine alternate media representations that could provide new views and reasons for the psychological effects of father ‘absence’, as more understanding is required about how and why psychoanalytic theoretical approaches hold so much scholarly, clinical and popular appeal in interpreting the effects of father ‘absence’ within an African (and South African) context. Fourthly, as a clinical psychologist in training, I would like to see more clinical case studies focusing on psychotherapeutic therapy processes with individuals dealing with difficulties, such as 'abandonment trauma' or so-called ‘daddy issues’ – as well as different types of therapeutic modalities and treatment outcomes. The future of this line of case study research might aim to transcend the assumption that society is stuck with 'victims' of rampant father 'absence', blaming men for this epidemic (Ratele et al., 2012), and instead acknowledge the importance of individual transformation and psychological healing, as a place to start. The final future recommendation is for further research in critical discourse analysis of media articles to investigate these constructions, as well as how media representations work to 'position' women and others, and to obscure how they might represent/position themselves.

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